

Sports, a Potent Force towards Empowering Women of India

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Abstract: The women population of India is about 48.2% that is almost half of the population. Also, in terms of sex ratio ranks 191th out of 201 countries, hence it becomes even all the more important to empower women in India. Predominantly India has been a patriarch form of society with various social and cultural barriers. A nation cannot progress to its potential if half of the population is not empowered. Government of India has taken various initiatives towards empowering women and give them their rights. Women Sports is one such area where encouragement from government and other sections of society has shown their true capacity in the recent years if given adequate support. Sports not just enhance physical and mental fitness but are also a way of living. Recent achievements of women in various sports have not only proved their skills but also have encouraged other girls to break the gender stereotypes by taking up sports as a profession. We have taken sample size 50 where we will try to explore the reasons for the inadequate representation of women in sports and try to understand the perception of the people towards participation of women in sports. This paper is trying to evaluate necessity of sports and its role toward bridging the gender gap and empowering women towards leading a better life. For this purpose I have made a scale and have taken expert reviews of 3 experts.

Keywords: gender stereotypes, gender gap.

Introduction

In India women were treated with respect and enjoyed high esteem in the society during the Vedic period. But over the centuries the situations of women in India became

harrowing unfortunately. It is a paradox where on one hand we worship goddesses and on other hand female infanticide is rampant in many parts of our country

Even after independence, though situation has changed considerably but women community is still at the receiving end at large, may it be personal, economic or social. Sports can prove to be a game-changer in the life of women in terms of amour propre, self-ability, motivation, self-reliability, psychological and physical empowerment and economic independence.

The European Union of Gender equality defines **Women Empowerment** as a process by which women gain power and control over their own lives and acquire the ability to make strategic choices.

The endeavour for Women empowerment and Feminism has been going on from last few centuries in various parts of the world in form of movements, debates in the houses, agitation, and many other forms.

Women around the world have witnessed mediocre treatment at some stage of their life. It may be in the form of female infanticide, eve-teasing, rape, domestic violence and many more. Even in today's world so called 21st century the situation in many countries especially in African continent, Middle East the Indian sub continent has not changed much except in few pockets.

Post-independence, our constitution has conferred equal rights to men and women, but even after several decades' women endeavours to find its position in the society. The issue of women empowerment raises its head time and again by various organisations reflecting hapless situation of women in many sections of the society. A growth any nation is hampered if half of the population is not empowered. So, the larger picture is empowering women can bring about a social and economic change in the country.

This scenario in India and around the world needs to be changed. Many organisations from around the world like AKSHARA, GENDER AT WORK, COMMIT2CHANGE [3] and many more are striving to achieve the goals of gender equality and women empowerment. Nations like Nigeria, Ethiopia and Kenya are using sports to promote gender equality. The

women athletes and other sportswomen have achieved international fame in many sports. Women in Europe, Australia and America have achieved great heights in various sports showing the world a route to gender equality.

Myths Attached:

Social: Predominantly the role of women assumed by men is restricted to accouchement and house-hold chores. It has been one of the major hurdles in our efforts towards women empowerment.

Young girls are proselytized since girlhood in such a way that they are somewhat inferior to men and should never try to break from their shackles of the society.

Beauty in sense of attractive looks has mostly been the yardstick for selecting a bride in the Indian society over competence and ability of women. This has led to stereotype mindset where even older women in the society deter their younger female member of the society from participating in sports. It is believed that women participating sports become dark skinned due to the exposure to sun in case of outdoor sports which could be a stumbling block in getting a better groom.

Many parents, though the trend is changing, feel participation of girls in sports could lead to social boycott or become an object of social mockery. This kind of social and mental retardation was beautifully depicted in movie *Dangal*.

Physiological: Many sections of people believe that participating in sports can cause physiological damage to women physiology such as complications in conceiving, menarche low bone density, low haemoglobin count, imbalance hormones, damaging reproductive organs, irregular menstrual cycles etc. [1]

Strenuous training sessions could rupture the hymen which could raise doubts over their virginity.

Economical: People coming from middle or low income group find it misspend in investing for a girl child may it be in sports or education, than a male child. Girl child are hence married off at early ages thus ruining their future prospects and aspirations.

Also present sports events in India involving women draw less or no attention as compared to male compatriot, thus discouraging sponsors to invest enough in the women sports.

Facts:

Social: Humanity has given women equal right to live and live with dignity and respect. The Patriarch form of society has always prevented women to actively participating in sports with the apprehension of losing their importance and the dominant status in the house and so.

Now-a-days men are becoming more sensible while choosing a bride and vice-versa. Many Families in cities and even rural area prefer competence over enticing looks. So the conservative cogitation has changed to an extent.

Physiological: Doctors strongly recommend expectant women to work out. This is a clear indication the physical and recreational activities during sports training in fact reduce possible complications during conceiving.

Sportswomen often experience delayed menarche and this could have both positive and negative consequences. Delayed menarche reduces the chances of getting breast cancer by 60%. [4]

Regular workouts helps in balancing hormone levels regularize periods.

Regular exercise also promotes better immunity and helps fight childhood obesity.

Many girl children are born without hymen and hymens can break without women knowing it. Strenuous activities, such as bicycle riding, driving, stretching, or dancing can also rupture the hymen. So it is a complete myth to associate virginity to hymen

Economical: Girls have the capacity of not just to emulate but even to excel in sports. The recent history has shown that women excelling in sports are given various perks and incentive like land, government jobs and conferred with honours by the State and the Central Government.

We see many women sports personalities in ad films on televisions thus improving their financial capacity. Sportswomen like Sania Mirza, Hima Das, Mithali Raj, Saina Nehwal, P.V. Sindhu are few names who are brand ambassadors or various commercial brands which is very encouraging for young aspirants.

Impact of Women in sports:

Women excelling in sports are a matter of pride. A sports woman is an asset to a family, society and the nation at large. She can inculcate leadership and discipline in the next generation of prospective sports person. Just like it is said *you educate a woman you educate a family (nation)* in the same manner if one has a sportswoman in a family it automatically inculcates the above qualities in the family.

Literature Review

Indian sports have been predominantly male dominated. Female representation has always on the lower side. It is quite evident that the representation of Women in Olympics, the world's largest gathering of various sports event has always be marginalised.

In 1948 and 1960 there were no women participants. In 1972 there was only 1 women out of 41 participants, in 1982 18 women out of 76, in 1996 only 4 women participated out of 48 representatives. Though the women participation has improved in last decade with women participation went up to 44.6% and 45.7% in the year 2008 and 2016, but representation and performance has still not been satisfactory. [5]

Indian women have achieved great heights in various individual sports like weightlifting, athletics, weightlifting, archery, badminton. But history shows there been a vacuum in many

sports after we produce a player of international fame. This could be largely due lack of encouragement to women to participate in sports or take up sports as a profession.

The situation is changing drastically in the urban areas with high literacy rate. But still the society at large especially in the rural part of our country women sports is not taken seriously or not given enough recognition as male sports. There are various myths attached for this age old mindset.

Women have managed break the stereotypes in many fields like education, economic and employment fields [7]. The status of the women in India has grown to an extent but it needs to reach heights where women feel respected and secured socially, financially.

Sports is one of the key tools which can bring about a sea change in the lives of the women Participation of women in sports is on the rise around the world but not up to mark. [6]. It is highlighted how sports and enriched lives of sportswomen and empowering them. The paper also gives a brief idea about the impact of sports of certain nations.

[1] Tries to study the various psychosocial and physiological factors that determine female sports enrolment in India. It concludes that the interest and awareness in sports should begin at the school level. And also mentions other various factors and facilities needed to yield greater results in the future.

Modern Olympics started in the year 1896 and in 2012, it was first time that women participated in each sport [8]. It has taken more than a century for the world to realise the potential of women in sports. Countries like US, UK, Canada has started association for women in wide range of sports where the entire focus is entirely on identifying budding talent and converting them into world class sports person [9]. No sport can survive on its own without the contribution from the government and society.

The recent past and the present have proved the capabilities of women as a sports person and the world has acknowledged its might. There are many living inspirations in the field of sports which stimulate the young girls to excel and achieve higher accolades at the world stage.

Implications of the Study:

Women empowerment is a vital aspect of social and economic development of a country. Women are achieving higher ranks in the field of academics, engineering, research and many more professions and the growth has been steady and even astonishing in certain areas. Sports form an important and key area where the potential of the women is always questioned. They have always been discouraged or even trampled upon when it comes to sports. So it is a high time we as society to rise together to empower women in sports and look beyond our typecast so that our country produces a perennial supply of world class players at the international stage.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To identify the Social, Physiological and Economic constrains leading to low participation of women in sports.
2. To identify facts and the myths leading to less participation in sports by women.
3. Socio-Economic benefits for women participating in sports.
4. Promote sports as medium towards healthy and wealthy life.

Variable

Independent variable– Women Empowerment, Gender Equality.

Dependent variable – Role of sports in Women Empowerment

Significance of the Study:

The nucleus of the study is to highlight the backward cerebration of many sections of the society and find solutions toward empowering women through sports to its optimum. Women have the right to live with prosperity and dignity like men.

Scope of the Study:

This research can be useful for comparative studies with other Nations. The analysis of the data can be used to understand the reasons and the solution for low participation of women sports and thus bridging the gender gap and empower women.

The Research Methodology:

Research Deigns – The research design is descriptive in nature. This paper describes the present scenario of woman sports and also the perception of people

Sampling method – For the purpose of the study a sample of various age groups was selected simple random sampling technique. Sample size: 60

Methods Data collection –A survey has been conducted by means of a questionnaire.

Tools – Questionnaire has been prepared consisting of 12 questions broadly classified in social, family, cultural and economic aspects questions with multiple choice options.

(Sample of question)

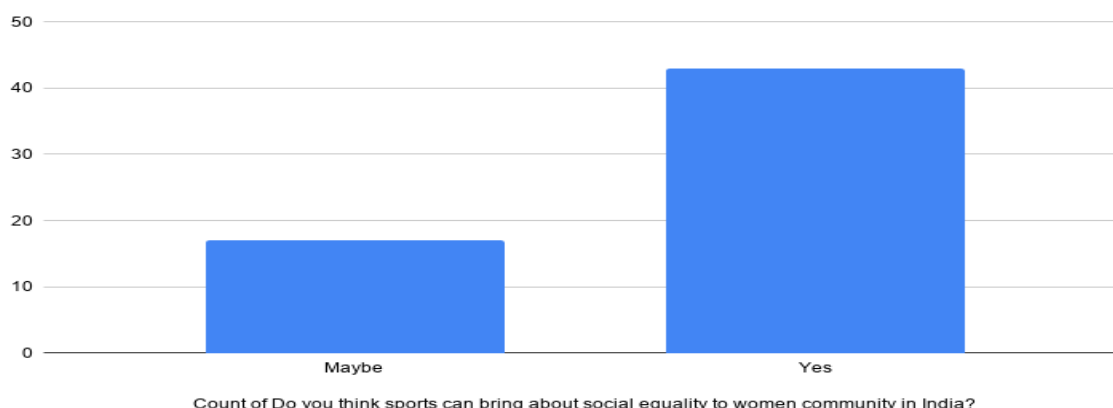
Data analysis – Qualitative methods – Coding.

Results and Discussion :

Most of the respondents are from the age group if 20-40 (about 80%) and around 10% from age group 40-60. Women were relatively more prompt forming 73.8% of the total respondents.

The population consist of around 20% professors from varied subjects, Psychologists, Engineers, IT professionals, Homemakers, students and a Doctor.

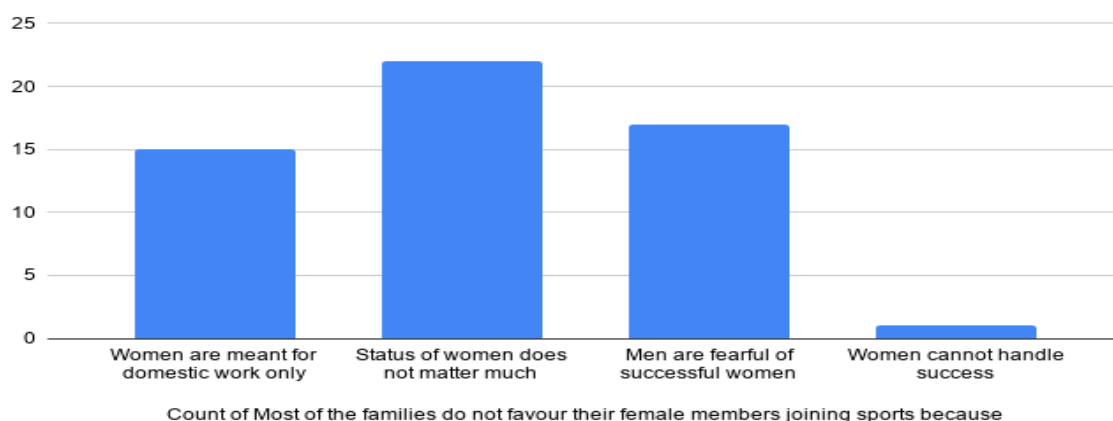
Count of Do you think sports can bring about social equality to women community in India?



70% of respondents believed that Sports can actually bring about social equality to women community in our country and around 30% are not sure about the same. This is a big motivation the women community where the society believes sports can play an important role in empowering women in India.

The government of any nation plays a pivotal role when it comes to upliftment of any section of the society and empowering them and India is no different. Policies framed by the government and implementation are of paramount importance. Indian government has taken various initiatives towards promoting men and women sports over the years. But 63.9% respondents feel that not enough opportunities to women sports whereas the 12% of the respondents feel the situation is pathetic for women sports. 54% of the respondents are of the opinion that the available facilities for women sports are good but needs improvement. Under these circumstances it is difficult for the people to instil their faith in the system where they can promote their family members to take up sports as a career or a profession.

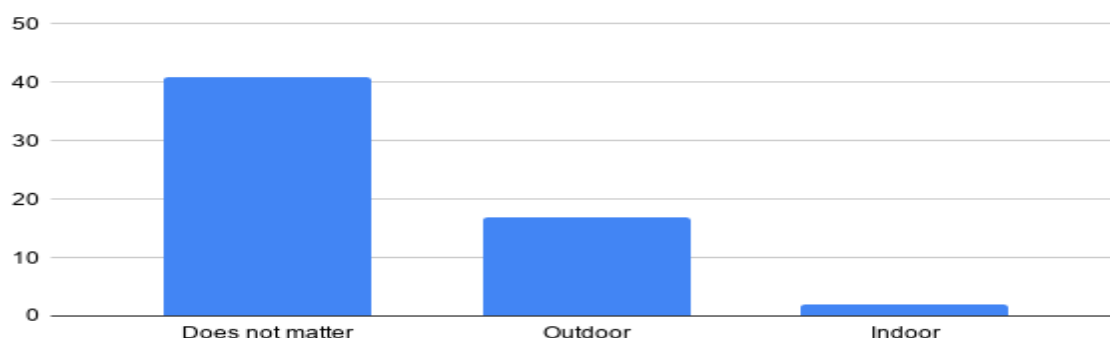
Count of Most of the families do not favour their female members joining sports because



Another major drawback in women participation is the patriarchal form of the society where men are considered to be in the driver seat in all aspects of society (46%). Also fear of the society and the old mindset of the people is another major deterring factor. Almost 40% respondents are very apprehensive about the society's attitude towards women participating in sports

Almost 30% of the respondents feel that men are more fearful of women achieving success. Hence there is constant obstructions from the male section of the families. 35% and 31% of testees are of the think that the society women have backseat in the society and meant for only household work and their dignity can be compromised for any reason. This gives an impression that major part of the respondents has witnessed mediocre treatment either to themselves or someone in their families or around.

Count of Which of the following sports would you prefer for your women members of your family?



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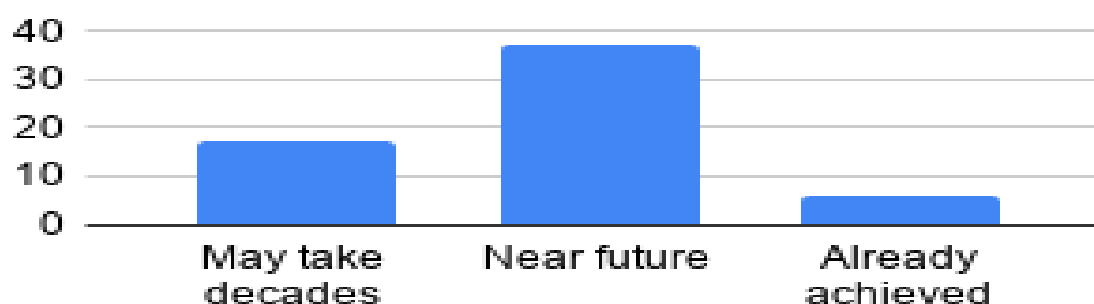
One of the positive aspect of the survey was a whopping 70% of the responders would give a free hand to their women family member to choose their sport may it be indoor or outdoor and 28% of respondents preferred outdoor sports against a measly 2% opting for indoor sports thus breaking the old stereotype outlook of the people. This is a very encouraging sign for the young girls who will surely look positively towards sports.

49% respondents are prepared to go to any extent for helping their girl members in the family to pursue the sport of their choice and almost 43% prefer the sport whose facilities are available nearby. This is responsibility of the government and various sports concerned authorities to provide enough facilities to the masses at convenience.

Almost 43% of answer think the representation of women is sports is deficient and 25% feel that it is satisfactory.

When it comes to economic role of sports in life of women, 95% answerer believe in equal pay for men and women in sports and 38% believe that When it comes to women sponsorship and investment in women sports Multinational companies are biased and 46% are not sure. Policies framed by the government should also look at this aspect where even women are given equal importance by the sponsors.

Count of According to you how



Count of According to you how long will it take for

64% of respondents are confident that women can achieve equal status in sports as men and 21% perceive that the quality has already been achieved. 63% feel that women sports will be taken equally seriously in the very near future but 30% are feel that it may take decades to achieve it.

Conclusion –

With years of suppression, maltreatment and deterrence from the society and family the dream of empowering women through sports could materialise in very near future. More efforts from the government and the society are needed so that we can make the women community at par and empower them to achieve and pursue their dreams without any fear and presentiment. This can be achieved through right training and education at the primary school levels. With the new generation parents giving equal treatment to kids irrespective of their sex, the elusive notion of Women Empowerment is realizing.

Acknowledgement -

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