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Participation of Muslim Women in Sports : Constrains and Remedies

Dr. Mohammad Sharique*

Sport is universal in nature. It does not discriminate on the basis of caste, creed, colour or gender etc. For most of the Muslim women religious belief and value give meaning to the ways in which they shape their life and conduct. In general, Islam promotes good health and fitness and encourages both men and women to engage in physical activity to maintain healthy lifestyle. However, there are aspects of the religion which affect how sports can be practiced, for example; women following their faith cannot engage in mixed gender sports and the environment and dress code also requires consideration. In the holy Quran, in Sura Al-Noor, it is stated that a woman is allowed to interact with, talk to and see those male relatives who are not permitted to marry her, which include her father, brother, paternal-uncle, maternal uncle and grand-father. Religion oriented people discourage women's participation in sports on account of open and liberal nature of sports. No doubt, in Islam male and female have got equal rights, but there are more restrictions for female with reference to her participation in sports as compared to male. The Muslim faith itself should not be considered as an impediment to women's participation in sports because Islam presents a positive outlook towards health and well-being. Sports and physical activities providers ought to respect religious difference. This is a crucial point for Muslim women as they are often overlooked by providers and discriminated against on the grounds of religious belief. The need of the hour is that Muslim women should be encouraged to participate in games and sports.

Keywords: Games, participation, religion, sports, women.

Introduction: For most of the Muslim women religious belief and value give meaning to the ways in which they shape their life and conduct. Islam is a fundamental aspect of their identity and their approach to sport is often determined by religious, cultural and ethnic factors.

Sport is universal in nature. It does not discriminate on the basis of caste, creed, colour or gender etc. In general, Islam promotes good health and fitness and encourages both men and women to engage in physical activity to maintain healthy lifestyle. However, there are aspects of the religion which affect how sports can be practised, for example; women following their faith cannot engage in mixed gender sports and the environment and dress code also requires consideration. For many Muslim women, apprehension about taking part stems from a fear of discrimination or of facing negative attitudes from service providers in relation to their religious and cultural needs. Throughout the world, in man-dominated Muslim societies, the question of participation of women in sports is confronted with different types of controversies and disagreements. In the holy Quran, in Sura Al-Noor, it is stated that a woman is allowed to interact with, talk to and see those male relatives who are not permitted to marry her, which include her father, brother, paternal-uncle, maternal uncle and grand-father. Religion oriented people discourage women's participation in sports on account of

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- d) **Lack of 'Women Only' sessions:** Most Muslim Women will only play sport in female only environment.
- e) **Environment:** Safety and security is important to prevent racially motivated incidents.
- f) **Employment:** More needs to be done to encourage young women to access employment within the sector to help break down barriers and act as a resource to equip other staff with knowledge about the communities they serve. This includes the administrative side of sport.
- g) **Economic Constrains:** Economic constraints are considered most important factor that hinder women's participation in sports. On account of insufficient funds and non-availability of sports goods, a number of women are not able to spread their shine in the horizon of sports.
- h) **Psychological Constraints:** Psychological constraints comprise the behavioural process resulting in the reduction of sports performance. Higher level of anxiety, lack of self-confidence, lack of motivation etc. are hindrances that suppress their desires to become a successful sports person.⁵

Initiatives to be taken for Muslim Women: Sports and physical activity providers ought to respect religious difference. This is a crucial point for Muslim women as they are often overlooked by providers and discriminated against on the grounds of religion and belief. Religious and cultural barriers make it difficult for Muslim women to participate in sport as people are often lacking sensitivity or understanding of their requirements regarding clothing, privacy and safety.

The Muslim faith itself should not be considered as an impediment to women's participation in sports because Islam presents a positive outlook towards health and well-being. The suggestions below can help providers to insure that their activities are more accessible to Muslim women-

- Special arrangement of 'women-only' coaching sessions.
- Availability of experienced women to help beginners.
- Use of positive imagery in promoting sports.
- Allowing a wide range of clothing choices. For example, in swimming women may wish to wear more than what conventional swimming costumes may allow.
- Trying to identify role models within the community who can breakdown barriers with parents.
- Action must be taken in face of discrimination or stereotyping.⁶

Results: After analysing various aspects of problems regarding Muslim women's participation in sports, it can be inferred that taking part in games and sports relieves one from physical and mental lethargy, provides rejuvenating energy to carry out one's duties properly. However, women's participation in Muslim community needs a lot of encouragement and facilities.

Discussion : The Constitution has conferred equal rights on each and every citizen. Muslim women can also master anything and everything that they can dream of. But still, due to the above mentioned constrains we are not able to produce quality sports women in a considerable number. In India only a few women like Sania Mirza have been able to illuminate themselves in the horizons of the sport-world. We should inculcate such skills in our Muslim women that we can have outstanding sportspersons among them and can be proud of 'equal opportunities for all' in our society.