

Role of Games and Sports in Empowering Women

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In recent years sport and physical activity has been gaining recognition worldwide especially as a strategy for the empowerment of girls and women. In India, participation of girls and women in games and sports is dismal. Poverty, heavy domestic demand, safety concerns, lack of accessible transportation, inadequate sport and recreation facilities frequently prevent women's participation in physical activities and sports. There is need of a sport system that provides quality sporting experiences, where women and girls are actively engaged and equitably supported in a full range of roles. Women and girls should have meaningful opportunities to become involved in sports and develop their skills according to their interests, abilities, talents and choices. This paper highlights the problems faced by girls or women regarding their participation in games and sports as well as focused on some useful strategies and suggestions to improve their participation in sports at a satisfactory level.

Keywords: Empowerment, Girls, Gender equality, Participation, Sports, Women.

Introduction: Sport is an integral part of the culture of almost every nation. However, its use to equality and empower girls and women is often overlooked because sport is not universally perceived as a suitable or desirable pursuit for girls and women. Existing social constructs of masculinity and femininity or socially accepted ways of expressing what it means to be a man or woman in a particular socio-cultural context- play a key role in determining access, levels of participation and benefits from sports. In india, participation of girls and women in games and sports is dismal because they do not show keen interest in participating in sports activities. Poverty, heavy domestic demand, safety concerns, lack of accessible transportation, inadequate sport and recreation facilities and few opportunities for physical education and skill development frequently prevent women's participation in physical activities and sports.

Importance of Sports for Gender Mainstreaming: Many

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international frameworks support women's participation in sports, with some national laws requiring equal access and opportunities for women. A small but growing body of evidence has also begun to establish sport as a viable tool for addressing gender equality on a broader scale. Research on sport, gender and development indicates that sport can benefit girls and women by:

- Enhancing health and well-being;
- Fostering self-esteem and empowerment;
- Facilitating social inclusion and integration;
- Challenging gender norms ; and
- Providing opportunities for leadership and achievement

Through structured sport programmes, girls and women can become physically more active, benefiting their physical and mental health. Sports and physical education can also be a powerful health information and a great platform, connecting girls and women with useful information, skills and strategies they need to reduce health risks in their lives. Sports can help increase self-esteem by providing girls and women opportunities to learn new skills, engage them in positive relationships, acquire achievements, engage in volunteer service and receive public recognition. By providing women and girls with a voice in programme design and decision-making, training and opportunities for leadership and advocacy, sport programmes can also empower and help equip them to take greater control over their own lives.

Sport programme can help them in reducing social isolation and exclusion that many girls and women experience, particularly those who cannot attend school and live in poverty. Sport programmes can provide girls and women with safe places to gather, help them to build social networks, offer social support and connect them to health, education and employment information, services and opportunities that can help them to address their marginalization in society.¹

Benefits of women's participation for Sports and Society: The participation of women and girls in sports challenges gender stereotypes and discrimination and therefore it can be a means to promote gender equality and the empowerment of girls and women. Women in sport leadership can shape attitudes towards women's capabilities as leaders and decision makers, especially in traditional male domains. Women's involvement in sports can make a significant contribution to public life and community development.

Positive outcomes of sports for gender equality and women's empowerment are constrained by gender-based discrimination in all

areas and at all levels of sports and physical abilities and social roles. Women are frequently segregated involuntarily into different types of sports, events and competitions specifically targeted to women. Women's access to positions of leadership and decision making is constrained from the local level to the international level.

Over the past decade, there has been a growing understanding that access to and participation in sports and physical education is not only a right in itself, but can also be used to promote a number of important development goals through facilitating democratic principles, promoting leadership development and encouraging tolerance and respect, as well as providing access to opportunities and social networks. All areas of development can be influenced by sports. Sports and physical education can have a great influence over health, education, employment, social inclusion, political development and peace and security.²

Equality for women in the Olympics: Women first took part in the Olympics of 1900, with 22 women competing in only golf and tennis. Indian women started participating in the Olympics of 1952. Since that time, women's participation in the games has been slowly but steadily increasing. In 2000, Karnam Malleswari became the first woman to win an Olympic medal. In the 2012 London Olympic Games, Sushil Kumar was the flag bearer in the opening ceremony and Mary Kom was the flag bearer in the closing ceremony, which strongly advocates the equality for women. In London Olympics 60 men and 23 women competitors were there to represent India and women won 2 medals out of the total 6 medals won by India.

Every four years, The IOC (International Olympic Committee) organizes a world conference on Women and Sports. The committee aims at promoting gender equality in sports and using sport as a tool to improve the lives of women around the world.

Despite these numerous accomplishments, there is still sex discrimination. Even though the 2012 Olympics was the first, in which almost every country sent at least one woman, many Muslim countries still discourage female athletes from competing in public.

Gender equality in sports applies to three basic areas: participation opportunities, athletic financial aid and all other athletic benefits and opportunities. Local, state and national policy makers need to be encouraged to take steps towards ending gender bias by promoting and reinforcing gender equality policies and practices in the Department of Education, state education programmes and in educational funding and research.³

Suggestions to Improve Women's Participation in Sports: Indian government and non-profit organizations should consider following steps to improve women's participation in sports and physical education-

1. Promoting the integration of gender issues within the policies of sport so that women can participate without any hassles.
2. Raising awareness to women on the importance of guaranteeing a safe and healthy environment for women involved in sport.
3. Precise actions must be taken for gender mainstreaming through documentaries, real life achievers' galleries, short films etc.
4. Taking the support of media in diffusion of positive information and making the media spot women sport events and highlight their achievements.
5. Establishment of quality physical education programmes through formative schooling period and creating an awareness of young women to the advantages they can get through the practice of sports.⁴
6. The participation of women in sports should be guaranteed of a safe and healthy environment where all kinds of sexual harassment, violence and controls will have to be banned.
7. Central and state governments should extend financial support to research within the field of women's sport.
8. Introducing women sport as a subject of study with theoretical implications will help women to realize the concept of women sport and its significance.⁵
9. The feminization of ruling bodies proves to be a main element for a policy leading to stronger diversity within the sport movement.
10. The introduction of quotas in view to assuring the participation of women in ruling bodies appears as an efficient way to eradicate this discrimination.⁶
11. Recognizing and rewarding sporting successes through Award of Excellency to women sports students needs to be enhanced.
12. Government can start capacity building initiatives for selected women athletes and sportpersons to identify and accrue the benefits conceived through sporting activities.
13. Gender ratios in sport remain highly unequal around the globe. There is an urgent need to reduce the marginalization of women within the sport milieu and to increase their participation in sport programmes.⁷
14. Gender dimensions within sport policies remains marginal and even insufficient. This integration of gender issues within public

actions in favour of sport and the attribution funds must reduce the marginalization of women within the process of sport development, increase their participation within sport programmes and throughout their implementations.⁸

15. There is need of a sport system that provides quality sporting experiences, where women and girls are actively engaged and equitably supported in a full range of roles. Women and girls should have meaningful opportunities to become involved in sports and develop their skills according to their interests, abilities, talents and choices.⁹

International Processes: The International Olympic Committee (IOC) plays a central leaders role in the world of sport, and its policies set standards in International , national and regional sporting events and procedures. In 1994, it requested that the Olympic Charter should be amended to include an explicit reference to the need for action on women and sport. This is reflected in the current Charter, adopted in 2004, which states that one of the roles of the committee is to “encourage and support the promotion of women in sports at all levels and in all structures with a view to implementing the principle of equality of men and women.” In 1995, the International Olympic Committee established a Working Group on Women and Sport, which was elevated to the status of a Commission in 2004.

The International Working Group on Women and Sport, an independent co-ordinating body of government organizations, aims to be a catalyst for the advancement and empowerment of women and sport globally. It was established in 1994 at the First World Conference on Women and Sport, held in Brighton, United Kingdom, organized by the British Sports Council and supported by the International Olympic Committee.

The Second International Working Group on Women and Sport World Conference on Women and Sport took place in Windhoek, Namibia, in 1998. The Third IWG World Conference, held in May 2006 in Kumamoto, Japan, concluded with the Kumamoto Commitment to collaboration, which expressed participants’ commitment to building a collaborative network in order to realize gender equality in and through sport.

In 2001, The first Asian Conference on Women and Sport, held in Osaka, Japan, led to the establishment of the Asian Working Group on Women and Sport.

The Commonwealth Games Federation Also promotes the role of women in sports as participants and as decision-makers.¹⁰

Conclusion: Although the present generation has witnessed a rise in the participation of girls and women in sports, the overall progress is not optimum. The need of the hour is that people ought to come forward with new approach and women need to break the 'glass ceiling'. The development and progress of a country lies in the status of its women. If we are committed to build a profound and strong foundation of our country, we must empower our womenfolk. Games and sports provide them great opportunities to establish themselves as strong and confident persons. Then, they are not confined to the narrow limits of femininity, established by the conservative society.

Government should strengthen their position by increasing funds for Women athletes. Public-private partnership in Women's sports can also prove to be a positive approach for women. Equality, in true sense, can be realized only when women of the society can move forward with equal pace with with men in all walks of life, including sports and physical education. We need more Saina Nehwals and Mary Koms to illuminate the name of our country. For this, we must take initiatives to promote the active participation of girls and women at national and international levels.

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