

# Gendering Sports: Reflections of Socio Cultural Construct

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**Abstract:** The notion of gendering sports becomes prevalent issue of discussion not only from theoretical ground but in the practical context. The departure point of the debate is the private- public controversy between men and women in general. Scholars opined that women's sport has transformed radically as well as outstandingly in recent years in comparison to men's sport. The study will be mainly based on secondary materials like books, journals, newspapers and so on. A survey is done by the researcher considering 50 sportswomen for analyzing the situations. The objectives of the study will be – 1] to elucidate the evolutionary frame work of gendered version of sports and 2] to analyse the socio –cultural aspects in considering gendered sports. For sportswomen performance is less focused in comparison to beauty and attraction. Stereo typical notion on women involvement in sports is the base of producing inequality in wage, prizes and financial incentives. Sportswomen have to face a lot of hardship in getting sponsorships also. Sometimes sportswomen are subjected to harassments and exploitation in their fields. Women's participation in sports must be looked as a serious concern for the development of the country not only from the perspective of achievement and performance but from the economic angle also.

**Key Words:** Sports, Gender, Women, Culture, Participation

## INTRODUCTION

The notion of gendering sports becomes prevalent issue of discussion not only from theoretical ground but in the practical context. The prime focus of disagreement regarding the involvement of men as well as women in sports emerges with the sociological notion of role conflict. Some conventional beliefs are attached to sports in terms of gender. Nixon, Maresca, and Silverman (1979) pointed out that role conflict is obvious when sportswomen are related to some specific sports which are marked as masculine. To Kiovula (1995) women are acceptable in societal standard with the central focus of femininity in terms of elegance and prettiness, even when they are engaged in sports activity. Hence, role conflict comes

with gender of sports person as it creates disagreement with the ideal perception of womanhood. Thus sportswomen can identify themselves with two different roles. One role is related to the conventionally accepted femininity and the other is athletic role for girls and women. The concern of exclusion of women in the arena of sports was also linked with the issue fragility of women. So participation of women in sports was perceived as stigma of loss of femininity. Redefining the familial as well as occupational sphere, the transformation of roles should be perceived as the motivating attributes for women in participation in the sphere of various sports activities. The departure point of the debate is the private- public controversy between men and women in general. Scholars opined that women's sport has transformed radically as well as outstandingly in recent years in comparison to men's sport.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In contemporary situation, the number of woman participating in “traditional male sports” is escalating remarkably. To Zimmerman and Reaville (1998), sports women related to male domain like football, boxing, and wrestling for recreation and competition are joining in a considerable number. They mark that women are taking active part even in snowboarding, skateboarding, and inline skating enthusiastically. These are known as extreme sports. In sports sector differentiation of genders becomes less prevalent gradually across the generations. Sports women start to question the gender stereotyping through their participation. As a consequence a broader definition of femininity is taking shape. With the presence of women in those sectors the tradition notion of male domination starts to wither away during the course of time. Now sports women can enjoy the opportunity of joining extensive variety of sports fearlessly.

M.K. Singh [1990] wrote in “Indian Women and Sports” that due to the myth of menstruation – weakness sportswomen are unable to play during that time. This interpretation is given by sexist theory. On the basis of A Study on Gender issues in Sport in India (2002) several issues come into existence in the spectrum of gendering sports world. The most discussed concepts are role conflict on gender, gendered perception and even sport socialization which is really applicable for sportswomen in general. It was marked that in the developed American society sports activities are seen as male domain. Involvement in Sport can be linked with some specific features like competitiveness, achievement which are perceived as masculine qualities in traditional thought pattern. Dr. Bhalerao pointed out some basic problems in relation to sports activities of women in India. These include familial factor, social, economic, psychological, physiological aspects. Sometimes not only the patriarchal attitude of selection committee but sports equipments also can be seen as hindrances in involvement of women in sports. Conditional permission as a concept can be applied in the sphere of participation of girls in sports activities. Traditional notion of femininity is adjusted with this aspect. This feeling is focused on the basis of obstacles in the situation of playing. Girls are linked with weaker sex myth.

#### METHODOLOGY

The study will be mainly based on secondary materials like books, journals, newspapers and so on. A small survey is done by the researcher to analyse the situations of sports women in India now. The views of 50 respondents are considered in this aspect. These 30 sportswomen are from different districts of West Bengal. The samples of the survey are selected on the basis of purposive sampling method. The objectives of the study will be – 1] to elucidate the evolutionary frame work of gendered version of sports and 2] to analyse the socio –cultural aspects in considering gendered sports.

#### EVOLUTIONARY FRAME WORK

With the invention of the bicycle the revolution was initiated for women in their participation in physical activities before the end of the 19th century. It can be marked that from then the dress code of women has

started to change rapidly with free flowing styles as well as fitness oriented aspect. Apart from cycling, women can enjoy horseback riding, gymnastics, and skating with their newly evolve identity. Sherrow (1996) pointed out that this chief transformation not only permitted sports women to be a part of active sports but it also gives them new access in attire, roles, and occupational sphere. Gender stereotypes can be reshaped and interpreted in a different light with the entry of sports women in public sphere. With their increased involvement in sports, they can challenge gender barriers and restrictive notions about women's physical appearance, athletic ability, and participation in sport. However, it can't be denied that traditional female stereotypes continue to prevail till today in the sports sector specially in countries like India.

#### SOCIO –CULTURAL ASPECTS

In conventional thought process sports have been constrained to and connected with “manly domain”. Woolum (1998) and Sherrow (1996) focus on the mapping out this prototype. They emphasized on the way of shaping and creating the sports world appropriate for women. The terminologies like power and team sportsmanship are traits within the “masculine domain”. During the process of internalization and socialization, societal structure has been association with “genderedness”. In the sports world boys become players with aggression and force. The societal typification has encouraged the girls to be linked with aesthetics in the same domain. Instead of team focus, girls are mostly in individual performances. Hence sports world has a clear division in the gendered version of masculinity and femininity. This forceful assertion gives the sports girls the realization about the assigned societal limitation in sports specially applicable for them. Simultaneously it can be seen as a proof that sports world has a gendered version consciously as well as unconsciously. Gender issues come with practical sports scenario in connection to their identity formation. Studies showed that the status of sports women is perceived as secondary in comparison to their male counterpart. It is also thought that serious sports are not women's concern in India. Women in sports world are conceptualized as different personality like tom boyish and manly in nature.

In comparison to male coach, a very small number of women is associated with sports related coaching. Many girls like to have female coach in the period of travelling especially. Selection process is related with sensitive aspect in gender issue. The study of gender issues in sports listed certain problematic features of gender equality in sports --limits, Lack of support, diet, safety issues, Lack of familial encouragement, training pattern, institutional focus, prejudice, conventions, norms, values, justice, process of selection, focus on physicality rather than talent.

With the involvement of sports in this gendered world, sports women have related with the version of challenge that can arise from the preconceived notion of societal conformity. The presence of women in sports should be active, strong enough, practical, competitive and independent. Thus the presence of different perception starts to break down the conventional gendering of the society at large. Society can be linked with sports world in such wonderful transformation in value, norms and entire cultural patterns. The concept of physicality of body has questioned the gender binaries. Thus sports world will help to create a new identity of women by deconstructing the traditional gendered version of presence. Till today the sports world is actively working through patriarchal ideology with the predominance of masculine understanding of the reality. In those activities clear presence of men's experiences dominates holistically. Due to this value orientation, femininity becomes suppressed in terms of expression and execution in general. Men perceive sports women as care givers as they consider women in familial relationships. Sometimes objectification of female body becomes very prominent in the activities and attitude of male sports persons. The performance focus of women is normally neglected by others. Media image can be seen here as the catalyst of perceiving this stereo typed womanhood in the packaged image of patriarchal world view.

Thus the performance becomes the back stage for sports women. The front stage deals with feminization of their presence. Thus obviously there can be chances of existing inferiority complex within the sports women. Stereo typical notion on women involvement in sports is the base of producing inequality in wage, prizes and financial incentives. Sportswomen have to

face a lot of hardship in getting sponsorships also. Sometimes sportswomen are subjected to harassments and exploitation in their fields. These attitudes actually emerge from the male resistance to challenge the incorporation of women in sports in general. Non discriminatory portrayal of sportswomen must be seen as a goal for sports media also. Gender differential appears in Indian scenario with the international recognition of Mary Kom, Sania Mirza, Dipa Karmakar, Sakshi Malik, P.V. Sindhu and similar personalities. Gender focus plays a vital role in the arena of sports in the era of cultural globalization.

### FINDINGS

On the basis of the gathered data it can be said that educational attainment of the parents has significant role in the sports career of the Indian girls. It has a link with awareness level of the parents regarding the involvement of the girl child in sports activity. Parents of 80% of the respondents have the moderate level of education. Family income is another variable for determining the interest in sports activities of girl child. In some cases involvement in sports essentially attaches to a considerable amount of spending. Here family income of 75% of the parents is above Rs 50000/. But no significant relation is determined between involvement of girls in sports with age of the parents or structure of the family ( joint or nuclear). Adler (2008) explained that the involvement and encouragement from the parents towards their children can be linked with gender stereotypes in sports of the child. This concept has direct connection with sport experiences of girls. Hums (2008) reported that the response of parents is negative in participation in sports for girl child in comparison to boy child. It implies that parents normally grant permission to their boys for active participation in sport whereas due to gender stereo typed notion, they have objection for participation of girl child in sports. In contrast to sports participation of boys is mostly outside the home, but girls are encouraged to engage in participate in sports within the periphery of home.

On the basis of the data collected for analyzing the socio-cultural variables in relation to sports activities of women in India, the present researcher prepare the following diagram for interpreting the role of several related factors. Among those factors some are external

and some are internal in nature. Cultural attributes are associated with both internal as well as external factors. The entire scenario is determined by the process of execution of sports specially for participation of sports girls. Challenges or hindrances can come from any of the abovementioned four aspects.

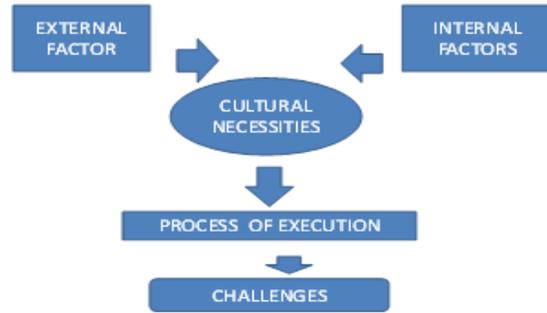


Fig:1 Diagram prepared by the researcher

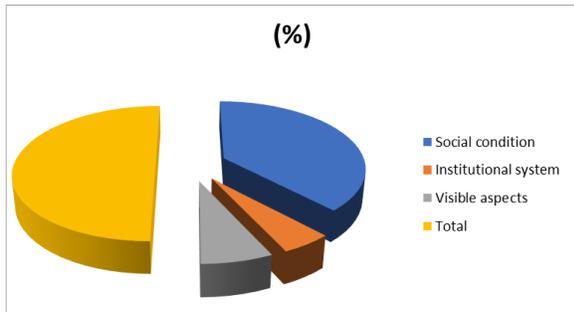
**INFRASTRUCTURE OF SPORTS FOR WOMEN IN INDIA**

**EXTERNAL FACTOR**

- **SOCIAL CONDITIONS:** Male domination, Patriarchy, Body image, Gender stereotyping, Media representation, Habitus , Hegemony, Role modeling
- **INSTITUTIONAL SYSTEM:** Institutional support, Understanding, Decision making, Perceptions, Networking, Club culture
- **VISIBLE ASPECTS:** Facilities, Space, Clothing type, Equipment, Economy, Time

On the basis of the study the following table can be constructed for mentioning the importance of factors.

External Factors	(%)
Social condition	76%
Institutional system	10%
Visible aspects	14%
Total	100%



Graphical presentation of External Factors

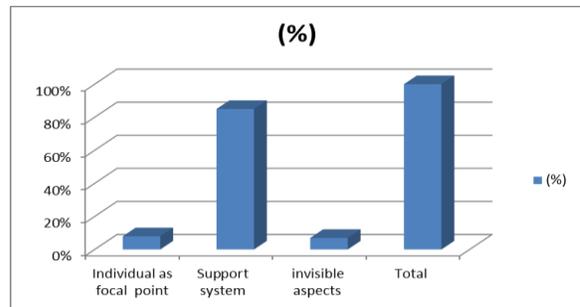
Thus the role of social condition becomes the most prevalent external factor here. They focus on issues like gender stereotyping mostly as the powerful factor of hindrance in the participation of girls in sports sector.

**INTERNAL FACTOR:**

- **INDIVIDUAL FOCAL POINTS:** Self-esteem, Confidence, Body image, Anxiety, Stress, Lack of awareness, Family culture, Supportive environment, Skills level, Acceptance of others

- **SUPPORT SYSTEM:** Parental engagement and support, Organisational engagement and support, Embedding into core provision,
- **INVISIBLE ASPECTS:** Discrimination in food habits, Preferential treatment

Internal factors	(%)
Individual as focal point	8%
Support system	85%
invisible aspects	7%
Total	100%



Graphical presentation of Internal Factors

For analyzing the importance of internal factor, it is observed that support system plays the most significant role. Most of the respondents admit that for their career, support system is considered as the pillar of life. Support system includes family, friends, peer group, sometimes colleagues, neighbour and other human resources. As women participation in sports is still controversial, so support system becomes

necessity for the existence and persistence of sports women in India.

Cultural necessities: Activity variety, Informal sessions, Discussion, Girls only sessions, Role models, Coaching, Understanding, Local context, Media

For analyzing cultural necessities, it is observed that most important responses consider Discussion, understanding, local context and media.

Cultural necessities	(%)
Discussion	2%
Understanding	3%
Local context	17%
Media	74%
Others	4%
Total	100%



Graphical presentation of Cultural Necessities

Process of execution: Safety, Scheduling, Type of activity (team, individual), Supportive and meaningful relationships, Interpersonal activities, Empowerment, Friendly atmosphere

On the basis of the gathered data, it can be said that process of execution is largely depended on relationships and interpersonal activities. 80% of the respondents agree that relationships and interpersonal activities are the motive forces behind the involvement of sports by women. In the sphere of sports, the availability of changing room and toilet should be important issues of concern for them.

#### BARRIERS FOR INDIAN SPORTS WOMEN

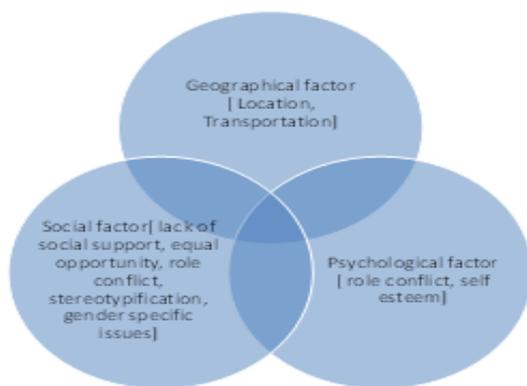


Fig:2 Diagram prepared by researcher

Involvement of women in sports is associated with some of the positive consequences. Directly they can enjoy the liberty of skill and knowledge development. Indirectly, they can develop the potential awareness not only regarding sports world but for their self esteem ultimately. They can involve in rigorous improvement of organizations. At the end the sportswomen are able to execute their leadership qualities. These aspects can be seen as following interrelated hierarchical structure.

#### INVOLVEMENT OF WOMEN IN SPORTS



Fig 3: Diagram prepared by the researcher From the application ground “Sports for Women” aims for a holistic approach towards awareness about health and fitness and thereby promoting sports among women. There is an inclination towards inculcating the culture of sports. The success will come with not only through mass participation of women in sports but by gradually achieving sporting excellence among women. With the help of Khelo India Scheme gender neutrality within sports can be easily maintained. The events/competitions may also be organised in convergence with the welfare schemes of other Ministries which are aimed at the empowerment of women. Promotional initiatives can be undertaken to create preconditions for women not only to increase their participation as athletes but also to take up leadership roles in sports like coaching and sports administration. To encourage the cultural capital of women, scholarships can be given to the women who take up sports coaching courses in various institutions of the specific region.

There are numerous restrictions on a female athlete's ability to participate in sports. In addition to not being paid equally for the same event as their male

counterparts, female athletes frequently struggle to get sponsors. A female athlete's safety is particularly concerning because she will be traveling alone with strangers from the crew. It is evident why female athletic events are not well liked or honored when discussing the support that female athletes receive from their families and the community. Since very few media houses promote female sports, the only way a female sporting event may become well-known is if they win a really significant competition. In addition, bullying, social isolation, unfavorable performance reviews, and losing their starting position are all possible experiences for women in sports. 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 and Providing opportunities for leadership and achievement.

Sport programmes can enhance the empowerment process by challenging gender norms, reducing restrictions and offering girls and women greater mobility, access to public spaces, and more opportunities for their physical, intellectual and social development. By involving families, community leaders, and boys and men in gender education, changes to gender norms can benefit men and women alike. Sport can also provide girls and women with powerful role models, leadership skills and experience that they can transfer to other domains such as their family life, civic involvement, and advocacy. All of these beneficial effects are self reinforcing, and may also make sporting opportunities for girls and women more sustainable over time. Sport programmes provide girls and women with valuable opportunities to interact and socialize with one another in a constructive way. Sports affect pay equity, leadership development, and women's health. The exclusion of women from sports creates a false image of women as the weaker sex, which leads to our exploitation in all walks of life. Feminists and women in sports must join together to end discrimination against women and girls in sports. Women athletes and administrators who have paved the way, and offers "Strategies for Change" that women and girl athletes, coaches, administrators, and parents can take to make college and university level sports more equitable. From the application ground "Sports for Women" aims for a

holistic approach towards awareness about health and fitness and thereby promoting sports among women.

In Indian sports scenario women are coming with great potentialities. Their precious contribution is marked as glory of the country in the international platform. So women's participation in sports must be looked as a serious concern for the development of the country not only from the perspective of achievement and performance but from the economic angle also. A need was therefore felt to completely revamp the existing sports ecosystem in the country, with focus on grass root-level talent identification, infrastructure building, support to athletes and creating an overall sports culture that would provide equal opportunities to women.

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