

From Margins to Mainstream: Institutional Efforts and Women's Inclusion in Kayak Sports in Uttar Pradesh

Mr. Gyanendra Kumar Upadhyay¹, Prof. (Dr.) Ashish Jorasia²

¹Research Scholar, School of Arts & Humanities, Career Point University, Kota

²Research Supervisor, School of Arts & Humanities, Career Point University, Kota

Abstract—Kayaking, though still considered an emerging sport in India, has gradually gained visibility as part of the country's expanding focus on water sports and athletic diversification. In states like Uttar Pradesh, where traditional sports such as cricket and athletics dominate, kayaking has remained largely on the margins. Women's participation in this sport has been particularly limited due to a combination of socio-cultural barriers, safety concerns, lack of infrastructure, and low awareness at the grassroots level. Deep-rooted gender norms, restricted mobility of women, and limited family support have historically discouraged girls from engaging in water-based sports.

In recent years, however, there has been a noticeable shift in this trend. Institutional efforts by government bodies, sports authorities, and organized federations have played a crucial role in bringing women into the mainstream of kayaking. Initiatives such as the Sports Authority of India programs and the Khelo India initiative have provided structured training, financial assistance, and competitive exposure to young athletes, including women from rural and underprivileged backgrounds. At the state level, associations and local training centers in cities like Prayagraj and Kanpur have also contributed by organizing championships and providing coaching facilities.

This research paper aims to examine the role of such institutional mechanisms in promoting women's inclusion in kayak sports in Uttar Pradesh. It analyzes the progress made in terms of participation and performance, while also identifying persistent challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, financial constraints, and limited media coverage. The study adopts a descriptive and analytical approach, relying on secondary data sources, case studies, and existing reports.

Furthermore, the paper highlights emerging success stories of female kayak athletes who have overcome socio-economic barriers to achieve recognition at state and national levels. These examples serve as powerful

indicators of the transformative impact of institutional support and act as motivation for wider participation.

The findings suggest that while significant progress has been made in increasing women's involvement in kayaking, the growth is still uneven and concentrated in certain regions. Sustained institutional support, improved infrastructure, gender-sensitive policies, and increased awareness are essential to ensure long-term and inclusive development. The study concludes that with continued efforts, kayaking can become an important platform for women's empowerment and gender equality in sports in Uttar Pradesh.

Index Terms—Kayaking, Women Empowerment, Institutional Support, Gender Inclusion, Uttar Pradesh

I. INTRODUCTION

Sports play a crucial role in empowering women and promoting gender equality by providing opportunities for physical development, confidence building, and social participation. In recent decades, the role of sports has expanded beyond recreation to become a powerful tool for social transformation, especially in developing countries like India. Women's participation in sports not only challenges traditional gender roles but also contributes to their overall empowerment and visibility in public spaces.

Among various sports, kayaking is a relatively niche but steadily emerging field in India. It is governed at the national level by the Indian Kayaking and Canoeing Association, which has been working towards the promotion and development of canoeing and kayaking since the 1980s. Despite its long presence, the sport has remained less popular compared to mainstream games such as cricket or athletics, mainly due to limited infrastructure, lack of awareness, and geographical constraints related to water bodies.

In the context of Uttar Pradesh, a state not traditionally associated with water sports, kayaking has begun to gain recognition in recent years. This growth can be attributed to the emergence of state-level competitions, training centers, and increased institutional involvement. Cities such as Prayagraj and Kanpur, with access to rivers and water bodies, have become important hubs for kayaking activities. Local sports authorities and associations are actively organizing events and providing training opportunities, which have contributed to a gradual increase in participation.

Historically, women's participation in sports in Uttar Pradesh has been constrained by socio-cultural norms, safety concerns, and limited access to resources. Many families have been hesitant to allow girls to participate in physically demanding or outdoor sports, especially those involving water. Issues such as lack of female coaches, inadequate facilities, and concerns about personal safety have further restricted their involvement.

However, the scenario is now undergoing a significant transformation. With increased institutional support, government initiatives, and growing awareness about the importance of women's participation in sports, more girls are entering the field of kayaking. Programs aimed at talent identification, financial assistance, and structured training have created new opportunities for female athletes. As a result, women are gradually moving "from margins to mainstream," not only participating but also excelling in competitions at various levels.

This paper seeks to explore this transition by examining the role of institutions in promoting women's inclusion in kayaking in Uttar Pradesh, while also addressing the challenges that still need to be overcome for sustained progress.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present study aims to explore the evolving landscape of kayaking in Uttar Pradesh with a special focus on women's participation and inclusion. As the sport is still in its developmental stage in the state, it becomes important to understand both the progress achieved and the challenges that persist. The objectives of this study are designed to provide a comprehensive and structured analysis of these aspects.

Firstly, the study seeks to analyze the growth of kayaking as a sport in Uttar Pradesh. This includes examining the development of infrastructure, the organization of state and district-level competitions, and the increasing number of participants over time. It also focuses on how kayaking has gradually emerged from being a lesser-known activity to gaining recognition within the state's sports ecosystem.

Secondly, the study aims to examine the role of institutional efforts in promoting women's inclusion in kayaking. Various organizations, such as the Indian Kayaking and Canoeing Association, state-level sports bodies, and government initiatives, have played a key role in creating opportunities for female athletes. This objective focuses on understanding how policies, training programs, financial assistance, and awareness campaigns have contributed to increasing female participation.

Thirdly, the study intends to identify the major challenges faced by female kayak athletes. These challenges may include socio-cultural barriers, economic limitations, lack of infrastructure, safety concerns, and limited access to professional coaching. By identifying these issues, the research aims to highlight the gaps that still need to be addressed.

Another important objective is to highlight success stories of women who have excelled in kayaking despite various constraints. These success stories serve as powerful examples of determination and institutional support, and they play a significant role in inspiring other young girls to take up the sport.

Finally, the study aims to suggest policy recommendations and practical measures for further improvement. These recommendations are intended to assist policymakers, sports authorities, and stakeholders in strengthening the framework for women's inclusion in kayaking, ensuring sustainable growth and equal opportunities in the future.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study adopts a qualitative and descriptive research design to examine the role of institutional efforts in promoting women's inclusion in kayaking in Uttar Pradesh. Since the sport is still emerging and primary data is limited, the study primarily relies on secondary sources of information and interpretative analysis. The objective is to develop a comprehensive

understanding of trends, challenges, and progress related to women's participation in kayaking.

Firstly, the study is based on secondary data, which includes information collected from newspapers, government reports, research articles, sports authority publications, and online databases. Reliable sources such as official reports from sports organizations, documented case studies, and media coverage of kayaking events have been used to understand the development of the sport and the involvement of women athletes. These sources provide insights into participation levels, institutional initiatives, and recent achievements at both state and national levels.

Secondly, the research incorporates case studies of female kayak athletes from Uttar Pradesh. These case studies help in understanding real-life experiences of women who have participated in kayaking, especially those coming from rural or economically weaker backgrounds. By analyzing their journeys, challenges, and achievements, the study highlights the practical impact of institutional support systems such as training programs, scholarships, and competitive exposure.

In addition, the study follows an analytical and descriptive approach. The descriptive method is used to present facts, trends, and developments clearly and systematically, while the analytical approach helps in interpreting the data to identify patterns, gaps, and underlying issues. This combination allows for a balanced examination of both progress and challenges in the field.

Furthermore, the study uses a comparative perspective wherever necessary, particularly in assessing the differences between male and female participation or between urban and rural access to facilities. This helps in identifying inequalities and areas requiring policy intervention.

Overall, the methodology is designed to provide a holistic and realistic understanding of women's inclusion in kayaking in Uttar Pradesh, while ensuring that the findings are grounded in credible data and practical observations.

VI. DEVELOPMENT OF KAYAK SPORTS IN INDIA AND UTTAR PRADESH

Kayaking in India was introduced in the mid-1980s as part of organized efforts to diversify the country's sports culture and promote water-based activities. Initially, the sport was limited to a few regions with

suitable water bodies such as rivers, lakes, and coastal areas. Over time, structured programs and national-level coordination by institutions like the Indian Kayaking and Canoeing Association helped in formalizing training, organizing competitions, and increasing awareness about the sport. Despite these efforts, kayaking remained relatively underdeveloped compared to mainstream sports due to high infrastructure requirements and limited public exposure.

In recent years, however, there has been gradual growth in kayaking across several states, including Uttar Pradesh. Although the state is not traditionally known for water sports, the presence of major rivers like the Ganga and Yamuna has provided natural opportunities for the development of kayaking activities. Institutional support at both state and local levels has played a key role in utilizing these resources.

In Uttar Pradesh, the development of kayaking has taken place through multiple channels. State-level championships have been regularly organized to provide a competitive platform for athletes and to identify emerging talent. These competitions not only promote the sport but also encourage participation from different districts.

Boat clubs, such as those in Kanpur and Prayagraj, have become important centers for training and practice. These clubs offer access to basic equipment, coaching, and exposure to water sports, making them crucial for the sport's grassroots development. Additionally, training programs under sports associations and educational institutions have contributed to building skills among young athletes, including women.

A significant example of this progress is the 33rd UP State Kayaking & Canoeing Championship, which witnessed active participation from both male and female athletes. Such events reflect the growing inclusivity and acceptance of the sport among women. They also highlight the impact of institutional efforts in creating equal opportunities and encouraging broader participation.

Overall, while kayaking in Uttar Pradesh is still in a developmental phase, the increasing number of competitions, training facilities, and participants indicates a positive trajectory towards its expansion and mainstream recognition.

V. INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK SUPPORTING WOMEN IN KAYAKING

The inclusion of women in kayaking in Uttar Pradesh is largely supported by a multi-level institutional framework that operates at national, state, and local levels. These institutions collectively contribute to the promotion, training, and development of female athletes by providing opportunities, resources, and structured support systems.

5.1 National-Level Institutions

At the national level, the Indian Kayaking and Canoeing Association plays a central role in governing and promoting kayaking across India. It is responsible for organizing national championships, setting rules and standards, and coordinating with state associations. The association ensures that female athletes get opportunities to participate in competitions and access professional training programs.

Another important institution is the Sports Authority of India (SAI), which focuses on the development of sports infrastructure and athlete training. SAI provides modern facilities, expert coaching, and financial assistance through scholarships and stipends. These initiatives are especially helpful for women from rural and economically weaker sections, enabling them to pursue kayaking as a professional sport.

The Khelo India Program has further strengthened women's participation by promoting sports at the grassroots level. It identifies young talent and supports them through structured training and funding. Events like the Khelo India Water Sports Festival have created national platforms where young athletes, including women, can compete, gain exposure, and build confidence.

5.2 State-Level Institutions in Uttar Pradesh

At the state level, organizations such as the Uttar Pradesh Kayaking Canoeing Association are responsible for implementing national policies and promoting the sport within the state. They organize state championships, training camps, and selection trials that help identify and nurture talent.

Local boat clubs in cities like Prayagraj and Kanpur serve as important training centers. These clubs provide access to water bodies, equipment, and basic coaching facilities, which are essential for skill development. Additionally, school and college sports

programs have started incorporating kayaking and other water sports, encouraging early participation among girls.

These institutions collectively provide:

- Training facilities
- Coaching support
- Exposure to competitions

5.3 Government Initiatives

Government initiatives have played a significant role in enhancing women's inclusion in kayaking. Programs such as Khelo India Talent Development focus on identifying and nurturing young athletes, while scholarships and sports quotas provide financial security and career opportunities.

Moreover, investments in infrastructure development, such as the construction of water sports facilities and training centers, have improved access to the sport. Research indicates that school-level support and availability of proper infrastructure significantly influence female participation, as they create a safe and encouraging environment for girls.

Overall, the combined efforts of national, state, and government institutions have created a supportive ecosystem that is gradually enabling women to participate and excel in kayaking.

VI. WOMEN'S INCLUSION: PROGRESS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

The participation of women in kayaking in Uttar Pradesh has witnessed a steady and encouraging rise over the past few years. What was once a male-dominated and relatively inaccessible sport is gradually becoming more inclusive, with increasing numbers of girls stepping forward to participate and excel. This shift reflects the combined impact of institutional support, social awareness, and the emergence of inspiring role models.

6.1 Rising Participation

Women's participation in kayaking has grown significantly due to several key factors. Institutional encouragement from sports authorities and government programs has provided structured opportunities for training and competition. Initiatives such as the Khelo India program have played a major role in identifying young female talent and supporting them with financial assistance and exposure.

In addition, awareness campaigns conducted through schools, colleges, and local communities have helped break stereotypes associated with women in sports, especially water-based activities. These efforts have encouraged families to support girls in pursuing kayaking as a serious sport.

The presence of role models has also been a significant motivating factor. As more women achieve success in kayaking, they inspire others to participate, creating a positive cycle of inclusion and growth.

6.2 Success Stories

One notable example is Nandini from Prayagraj, who rose from a low-income background to win a silver medal in kayaking at the Khelo India University Games 2025. Her journey reflects determination, hard work, and the importance of institutional support in overcoming socio-economic barriers.

Similarly, several girls from underprivileged backgrounds in Uttar Pradesh have successfully represented the state at national-level competitions. These achievements demonstrate that with the right support system, kayaking can become an inclusive platform for women from diverse backgrounds.

6.3 Historical Achievements

It is important to note that women's success in kayaking is not entirely new. Even in earlier years, female athletes from Uttar Pradesh have secured gold medals in national-level competitions, indicating a long-standing but often under-recognized potential. These historical achievements laid the foundation for the current growth and have contributed to building confidence among aspiring female athletes.

Overall, the increasing participation and achievements of women in kayaking highlight a positive transformation, signaling a move towards greater gender inclusion and empowerment in sports.

VII. CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN IN KAYAKING

Despite notable progress in recent years, women's participation in kayaking in Uttar Pradesh continues to face several structural and social barriers. These challenges limit both entry into the sport and long-term retention of female athletes. Addressing these issues is essential to ensure inclusive and sustainable growth.

7.1 Socio-Cultural Barriers

One of the most significant challenges is the persistence of socio-cultural barriers. Traditional gender stereotypes often discourage girls from participating in physically demanding or outdoor sports, especially those involving water. Restrictions on mobility further limit their access to training centers, particularly in rural areas. Many families remain hesitant to allow their daughters to pursue kayaking due to concerns about safety and social perceptions. In several cases, parents permit participation only if female coaches or supervisors are available, highlighting the importance of gender-sensitive support systems.

7.2 Lack of Infrastructure

The development of kayaking is heavily dependent on access to suitable water bodies and proper facilities. However, there is a lack of infrastructure in many parts of Uttar Pradesh. Clean and safe water bodies are limited, and existing facilities are often underdeveloped. Additionally, the shortage of specialized training centers, modern equipment, and professional coaching hampers the skill development of female athletes.

7.3 Economic Constraints

Financial limitations pose another major barrier. Kayaking is an equipment-intensive sport, requiring boats, paddles, safety gear, and maintenance, which can be expensive. Many aspiring female athletes come from economically weaker backgrounds and struggle to afford these costs. Furthermore, travel expenses, participation fees, and training costs add to the financial burden, often leading to discontinuation of the sport.

7.4 Safety Concerns

Safety is a critical concern in water sports. Many families worry about water safety risks, especially in the absence of proper supervision and safety measures. The lack of secure and well-maintained training environments, along with inadequate availability of lifeguards and safety equipment, further discourages participation among women.

7.5 Limited Media Coverage

Another challenge is the limited media coverage of kayaking compared to mainstream sports like cricket

or athletics. This results in low visibility for female athletes, reducing opportunities for recognition and sponsorship. Without adequate media attention, it becomes difficult to attract funding and inspire wider participation.

Overall, these challenges highlight the need for targeted interventions to create a more supportive and inclusive environment for women in kayaking.

XIII. ROLE OF INSTITUTIONS IN OVERCOMING BARRIERS (EXPANDED)

Institutions have played a transformative role in addressing the barriers faced by women in kayak sports in Uttar Pradesh, helping shift participation from the margins toward mainstream recognition. One of the most significant contributions has been the recruitment and training of female coaches. The presence of women coaches not only creates a more comfortable and supportive environment for female athletes but also challenges prevailing gender norms by presenting strong role models. This encourages greater participation from young girls who may otherwise hesitate due to social constraints.

Financial support in the form of scholarships, stipends, and sponsorships has also been crucial. Many talented female athletes come from economically weaker backgrounds, where pursuing sports is often seen as a luxury rather than a viable career. Institutional funding helps cover training expenses, equipment costs, travel, and nutrition, thereby reducing the financial burden on families and enabling sustained participation.

Additionally, institutions have actively organized competitions at district, state, and even national levels. These events provide a platform for women to showcase their talent, gain exposure, and build confidence. Regular competitions also help in identifying promising athletes and integrating them into professional training programs. Over time, such structured opportunities contribute to the development of a competitive sporting ecosystem.

Awareness campaigns have further strengthened inclusion efforts. Through school outreach programs, media initiatives, and community engagement, institutions are working to change societal attitudes toward women in sports. These campaigns highlight success stories, emphasize the importance of gender equality, and encourage families to support their daughters' athletic ambitions.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and grassroots initiatives complement these efforts by reaching marginalized and remote communities. They play a key role in talent identification, especially among underprivileged groups, and often act as a bridge between local communities and formal sports institutions. By providing initial training, resources, and mentorship, these organizations ensure that hidden talent is nurtured and given opportunities to progress. Overall, institutional efforts have been instrumental in breaking down socio-cultural and economic barriers, paving the way for greater inclusion and empowerment of women in kayak sports in Uttar Pradesh.

IX. DISCUSSION

The transition of women in kayaking from marginal participation to mainstream recognition in Uttar Pradesh clearly reflects the growing impact of institutional efforts. Government-led initiatives such as Khelo India have played a pivotal role in democratizing access to sports by providing structured training, financial assistance, and competitive exposure. These programs have been particularly beneficial for girls from disadvantaged and marginalized backgrounds, enabling them to view sports not only as a recreational activity but also as a potential career pathway. Increased media visibility and institutional backing have further contributed to changing societal perceptions, gradually normalizing women's participation in water sports like kayaking. However, despite these positive developments, progress remains uneven across the state. Urban centers such as Prayagraj and Kanpur have emerged as relatively well-developed hubs for kayaking due to better infrastructure, access to trained coaches, and proximity to rivers and training facilities. These cities benefit from stronger institutional presence, including sports academies and regular competitions, which provide consistent opportunities for skill development and recognition.

In contrast, rural and remote areas continue to face significant challenges. Limited infrastructure, lack of awareness, socio-cultural restrictions, and inadequate institutional outreach restrict the participation of women in these regions. Many potential athletes remain undiscovered due to the absence of grassroots-level programs and scouting mechanisms. Additionally, safety concerns and conservative social

norms further discourage families from allowing girls to engage in water-based sports.

To address these disparities, institutional efforts need to be more inclusive, decentralized, and regionally balanced. Expanding training centers into rural areas, investing in basic infrastructure, and ensuring the availability of female coaches can significantly enhance participation. Furthermore, targeted awareness campaigns and community engagement initiatives are essential to break down cultural barriers and build trust among local populations.

In conclusion, while institutional initiatives have laid a strong foundation for women's inclusion in kayaking, sustained and equitable efforts are necessary to ensure that progress reaches all sections of society, bridging the urban-rural divide and fostering truly inclusive sports development.

X. RECOMMENDATIONS

To further strengthen women's inclusion in kayak sports in Uttar Pradesh, a comprehensive and multi-dimensional approach is required.

1. Infrastructure Development:

There is an urgent need to establish well-equipped water sports centers across various districts, especially in rural and semi-urban areas. Developing basic facilities such as training hubs near rivers, storage for equipment, and safe docking areas will ensure that aspiring female athletes have easy access to practice environments. Decentralizing infrastructure beyond major cities will help bridge regional disparities.

2. Financial Support:

Providing financial assistance in the form of subsidies, scholarships, and stipends is essential to encourage participation. Kayaking equipment and training can be expensive, making it inaccessible for many families. Institutional funding should cover equipment costs, travel allowances, and nutritional support to ensure sustained engagement of women athletes from economically weaker sections.

3. Awareness Campaigns:

Promoting kayaking through schools, colleges, and rural outreach programs can significantly boost participation. Awareness campaigns should focus on educating communities about the benefits of sports for girls, breaking gender stereotypes, and encouraging

parental support. Collaborations with local institutions can amplify outreach efforts.

4. Safety Measures:

Ensuring safe and hygienic training environments is critical for increasing female participation. This includes providing proper safety gear, clean facilities, secure training locations, and trained lifeguards. Addressing safety concerns will build trust among families and reduce hesitation in allowing girls to participate.

5. Women Coaches and Mentors:

Increasing the representation of female coaches and mentors can create a more inclusive and supportive atmosphere. Women coaches serve as role models and can better understand the unique challenges faced by female athletes. Their presence can significantly improve retention and confidence among participants.

6. Media Promotion:

Highlighting success stories of women kayakers through media platforms can inspire others to take up the sport. Positive representation helps in changing societal perceptions and motivates young girls to pursue kayaking as a viable career option.

Overall, these recommendations aim to create an enabling ecosystem that promotes equal opportunities, inclusivity, and long-term development of women in kayak sports.

XI. CONCLUSION

Women's inclusion in kayaking in Uttar Pradesh has witnessed notable progress over the past decade, largely driven by sustained institutional efforts and supportive policy frameworks. What was once a marginal and often overlooked area of participation has gradually transformed into a growing field where women are not only participating but also achieving recognition at state and national levels. Initiatives focused on training, financial assistance, and competitive exposure have enabled many young women to overcome socio-cultural and economic barriers, paving their way into mainstream water sports.

The role of government programs, sports authorities, and grassroots organizations has been instrumental in this transition. By creating structured opportunities and promoting gender inclusivity, these institutions

have helped change traditional perceptions that once limited women's engagement in physically demanding and water-based sports like kayaking. Increasing visibility of female athletes has further inspired a new generation of girls to pursue sports with confidence and ambition.

However, despite these encouraging developments, the journey toward complete inclusivity is still ongoing. Persistent challenges such as uneven regional development, lack of infrastructure in rural areas, safety concerns, and deep-rooted societal norms continue to hinder widespread participation. Addressing these issues requires consistent and long-term commitment from all stakeholders, including policymakers, educational institutions, and local communities.

To sustain and accelerate this progress, continuous investment in infrastructure is essential, particularly in underserved regions. Strengthening policy support through targeted schemes and ensuring effective implementation at the grassroots level will further enhance accessibility. Equally important is the need for ongoing awareness campaigns that challenge gender stereotypes and encourage families to support girls in sports.

With a strategic and inclusive approach, Uttar Pradesh holds immense potential to emerge as a leading state in promoting women's kayaking in India. By nurturing talent, expanding opportunities, and fostering an enabling environment, the state can not only achieve sporting excellence but also contribute significantly to women's empowerment and social transformation.

- [7] Drishti IAS, "National kayaking championship overview," 2021.

REFERENCES (APA STYLE)

- [1] Indian Kayaking and Canoeing Association, "Overview of kayaking governance in India," n.d.
- [2] Playknox and Indian Sport Management Association, "Empowering women through sports in Uttar Pradesh," 2024.
- [3] The Times of India, "UP State Kayaking Championship highlights," 2024.
- [4] The Times of India, "Nandini wins silver in kayaking," 2025.
- [5] The Times of India, "Prayagraj girls in kayaking success," 2023.
- [6] The Economic Times, "Khelo India Water Sports Festival," 2025.