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## **Bias: Sports ‘n’ Gender**

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### **Abstract**

Gender bias is an often debated subject. And the ‘buck’ does not stop here. The prevailing socio-political aspects highlight that the fairer gender remains not only side-lined but continues to live in a suppressed state. The women of today confronting the oddity continue to excel in the entire field. Sports are one field which is believed to balance issues related to gender without any reservations. However a general observation is it in prize money, star value, advertisements/sponsorship importance or media coverage given narrates that all is not well in sports arena. The present study is an effort to compile the expressions of women who adorn ‘colours’ at different level and to arrive at a workable solution which the Indian sportswomen deserve.

### **Objectives:**

1. To critically analyse the sporting situation with reference to women
2. To understand women sportspersons perception towards media coverage regarding their projection in media from Indian perspective.

### **Introduction**

Attitude towards gender parity could be considered as one of the prime factor for scaling the socio-economic progress of a country. Even though gender discrimination is not propagated by any religious or cultural philosophy of any country, the favour towards masculine gender persists. And it appears to be taking an extra edge in developing countries. A general observation reveals that in majority of developing countries, female children are not only defenceless but also are forced to experience the trauma of being neglected and unwanted. The gender preference or social discrimination appears evident with the demarcation of the primary and secondary roles set for the genders by the society. This makes, despite the

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increased visibility of women in the public sphere, closing gender gaps has remained a herculean task.

Women in India - a country which is economically progressive and socially constantly changing, experience contradictory pictures. On one hand the society accords her the highest status equivalent to a 'goddess' and on the other it uses all its weapons to physically - emotionally abuse her. Perceptions towards women largely remain unchanged due to the prevailing patriarchal system. However it is important to note here Indian women despite of all oddity have been constantly working to excel in the fields including those which were initially conceptualized as 'Mans Domain'. The modern woman, despite of her proven abilities for multi-tasking, continues to experience gender discrimination while etching her path to success.

The preferential balance of the society which swings its preferential needle towards masculine gender, should at least be detrimental in sports field. Sports arena can flourish only when it is free from any biased apprehensions - be it gender, religion or economic status of the sportsperson. Unlike in the past a closer look at today's sports field includes endorsements and prize money along depending on their 'star value'. This though primarily depends on their personal performance, media exposure also plays a vital role in attaining 'star value'. Hence there appears a lot of stress on media content.

Sports communication is not just one of the specialized branch of journalism but also important branch. The space and time dedicated by various genres of media for sports affirms that sports pages/coverage enjoys good readership/viewership. While media content on sports is enjoying maximum readership/viewership and revenue, influence of media content on its users has been well researched and accepted by researchers and public. Applying this to sports content, it then becomes obvious that the information regarding sports field and its performers should influence the readers/viewers to recognize and appreciate the achievers.

Achievements by Indian sportsperson though cannot be compared to population size of India; there are handful of sportspersons who have set standards for the future generation in all genres of sports in India. The achievement of Indian sportswomen though not overwhelming but deserves an accolade considering the socio-cultural background of the country. It is necessary at this juncture to explore and understand the perceptions of Indian women sportspersons about the support they receive with reference be it media coverage or prize

money. While it's time for women sportspersons to demand for equal prize money and treatment when compared to their male counterparts; while the issue of women and their role in the sporting world currently being debated in the wider world Indian sportswomen cannot left behind in a state of being perplexed. Apart from this since media also has its influence on its users it is essential to analyse if the sports content published helps in encouraging parents in enrolling their girl child into a sporting activity, hence this study.

### **Women in Sports**

Women appear to have established their liking towards sports for a long time. Prior to 1870, activities for women were recreational rather than competitive in nature (Richard C. Bell, Ed.D., J.D; 2007). A reference to the history reveals that women were virtually excluded from sports in ancient Greece. The women did however create their own program of sports-The Herace Games, in honour of Hera, the wife of Zeus. These athletic events were held for women and can be called as the beginning for women in sports. Women's participation in sports for competitive physical activity was limited until Federal Legislation, commonly referred to as Title IX, and became law. It required American society to recognize a woman's right to participate in sports on a plane equivalent to that of men. In the late 1800's and early 1900's, women began to form clubs that were sporting in nature.

Helene Madison of the United States of America (10yard free-style, 1932 Olympics) and Maria-Teresa de Filippis of Italy (European Grand Prix auto race in 1958) are some of the first women to achieve the feat in the international sporting.

History of sports in India dates back to the Vedic era. However sport for Indian women was largely recreational. Women participation in competitive sports can be studied post-Independence and it took nearly a quarter century to see Indian women to win laurels in International sporting events. Kamaljeet Sandhu won gold medal at 1970 Asian Games in 400m race. She also participated in the 1972 Olympics. During the past three decades India has seen many International representations by women. Sports women of yester years of International reputation like P.T.Usha, M.D. Valsamma, Shanta Rangaswamy, to present day Sania Mirza, Saina Nehwal Aparna Popat, Nisha Millet, Shikha Tandon, Humpry Mary Kom, Mithali Raj to name a few have all brought laurels to Indian sports field.

## Gender and Sports

In the world of sports, gender has become one of the main events. Women across the globe are taking an increasingly active role in sports. They are becoming more visible, assertive and active. This is because “winning in sports not only provides a momentary rush of accomplishment - it also involves a race toward combating social stereotyping and reaching the goal of gender equality.( [http://www.ilo.org/global/publications/magazines-and-journals/world-of-work-magazine/articles/WCMS\\_081377/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/global/publications/magazines-and-journals/world-of-work-magazine/articles/WCMS_081377/lang--en/index.htm)). When the first Olympic Games of the modern era took place in 1896, the idea of women taking part was thought to be "unfeminine". By 1900, societal views had modernized enough to allow 11 women to stand beside the 1,319 men at the opening ceremony at the Paris Olympics, although their participation was restricted to sports regarded as "suitable" for women - tennis and golf. By the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens, over 40 per cent of participants were female. The number of all-male team which was 35 at the 1992 Barcelona Olympics, came down to 12 at Sydney in 2000 (*South China Morning Post*, December 2005). It is important to note that major sport which initially displayed disparity between the genders have shed off their reservations against women sportspersons. Ex: The 250-year-old Royal & Ancient Club in Scotland, considered the world's leading authority on golf, lifted a long-standing ban on women playing in the Open Championship in 2005 and in tennis, all the grand slam tournaments offering both men and women competitors equal prize money.

The equality in prize money is not just to fight out gender discrimination in terms of earning pecuniary benefits but it also symbolizes recognition. Unfortunately the humiliations received by female sportsperson makes less impact. Be it the humiliation experienced by P.T. Usha, (an athlete of her status was asked to share a room with other women) or the recognition which the Indian women cricket or Hockey team earned when their performance have equalled or even bettered their male counterparts, the treatment accorded to them in terms of facilities and monetary compensation is distinctly second class.

The reasons for the not so supportive actions could be many. Apart from some common myths related to female reproductive system the performance level of women and importance attached to their performance play a vital role. Even amongst the members of the progressive minded society an ideal women however educated and qualified should she be she should perform her patriotic duties of attracting a mate, bearing and rearing children and serving her husband ( Namarta Vadhera, et.al; 2012). But the society needs to change its perceptions

towards women along with the changing times. It is then here becomes important for media to play a vital role as its reflections influences the mind-set of its users. It is the media which has to make society accept that though women's sport can never be 'equal' to men's sports, because of the differences in their physical conditions.

### **Women Athletes as Sexual Objects**

In most of the cases, women athletes are merely showcased as 'objects of desire' rather than as athletes at all. The most common example of this is "Sports Illustrated Swimwear Cover". It has nothing to do with women sports; it is more of a 'soft core pornography'.

In 1980's, when there was a huge craze for aerobics, women are promoted more as 'objects of desire' by the corporate media. There is less importance given to what they really gain from aerobics - fitness and health. Instead, many new health and fitness products came into the market projecting the ideal image of a woman - thin, young and beautiful. While women sportspersons in tennis and athletics are largely projected from sensational motives Indian sports field rarely permits women sports to be projected as sensational. Examples like Ashwini Nachappa or Sania Mirza could be stand-alone examples.

### **Gender Representations and Perceptions**

To understand the overall position of women in sports field and their perception towards media coverage a small study conducted. To make the understanding competitive, popular sports like Cricket, Tennis, Badminton and Golf were considered for comparative analysis. The Qualitative analysis of the opinions are extracted out of the interviews with lead sports women representing different sports. A questionnaire was also distributed among young women coaches being trained under Sports Authority of India, Southern Region, Bangalore to capture their opinion related to exposure and significance of media coverage. Following paragraphs provide the details.

### **Analysis and Discussions**

#### **Part A (Content analysis from the details available through the official websites of Sports Boards)**

The areas where gender bias can be easily identified in sports are:

**a.Lack of qualified female personnel to coach and administer:** Since a majority of families do not opt for sports as a career for women, it is obvious that there is lack of qualified female personnel to coach. Female representation in Federations and Associations

as office bearers is also relatively less. As a result of which number tournaments played by women are less.

**Women representation in executive members of select sporting India**

	Cricket	Olympic	Tennis	Golf	Badminton
Representation of women in Executive members	13 - 0	38-0	12-0	* 25-1	39-0

A visit to the official sites of select sports will obviously throw light on women representation in administration. Each of the select games follows their own pattern of forming executive body. Interestingly in the official website of BCCI unlike other sports not even a single frame of women cricketer is displayed. Golf interestingly has a separate ladies section and the administrative post is held by a woman. The number of women enrolled for a diploma in coaching (29/115) under Sports Authority of India and with no qualified women coaches to coach the trainees also throws some light on the issue.

Women having affection towards sports are now found to be trainers and promoters Ex: P T Usha, Nisha Millet etc. It is important note here that there are ample number of women athletes like elsewhere in the world who are interested in trying to make their living in the sports sector. They are also ready to go that extra mile to change cultural norms.

**b. Lower budgets:** In India except few sports like Cricket, Tennis and Golf all other sporting associations suffer from lack of funds. The associations look for government support for operational and infrastructure needs. The associations also fail largely in attracting members/sponsors.

**c. Differential prize- money:**

In international sport events like tennis, golf and Formula One there is disparity in the prize money. From Indian perspective while the men cricket players earn in crores through tournament fees and endorsements the same is not applicable to Indian women cricketers.

**d. Tournament Exposure :** Amongst the select sports Badminton is one sport which provides equal opportunities to both genders at national and international level. Star players like Prakash Padkone and Gopi Chand have established their own academy to train the young aspirants. There are as many as 45 listed international tournaments. Prestigious events like Olympic and Asian Games occur periodically in Athletics. National Games are also

conducted in India. The Athletic Federation conducts an annual athletic meet in which winners of various events at the state level will participate. Though the selection and training process in athletics looks systematic India's performance in international level is not very significant when compared to Asian countries like China, Japan and Korea. Equal representation is provided to either gender.

In India though Hockey is the national game there is huge fan following for cricket. This game as gets wide media coverage appeals and attracts sponsors to support tournaments at various age levels. At National level Indian men play five tournaments. Apart from periodical tournaments like World Cup the Cricket Board of playing nations fix matches between their teams. The popularity of Cricket can also attribute to its changing format to suit the interest of the generation. The game which slips into competitive track at the school level for boys does not happen the same for girls. Even women cricket does not enjoy the popularity which their male counterparts do. Neither there is icon ship nor money involved. Women's cricket has travelled a long distance in the country - from its beginning under the Women's Cricket Association of India (WCAI), when players had to pay to play tournaments, to now, when Indian girls receive a match fee and a daily allowance. The game is run by the BCCI these days and that has led to many benefits (Ananya Upendran; 2013). However it is evident that exposure to international game can nowhere be compared to that of men.

## **PART B**

A structured questionnaire was distributed among the women trainees in physical education aspirants at Sports Authority of India, Southern Region Bangalore and sports women in Bangalore. Nearly 25 trainees and 34 sportswomen belonging to different sport disciplines have answered the questionnaire. Following tables reflect on the perception of the respondents on their perception towards sports content.

**Table 1: Representation of respondents perception about the various channels of media communicating local/national sporting activity other than cricket**

Sl.No	Type of Media	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not able to Decide	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	English Dailies	00(00.00)	05(8.47)	00(00.00)	39(66.10)	15(25.42)
2	Sports Magazine	00(00.00)	03(05.08)	00(00.00)	51(86.44)	08(13.55)
2	Regional Dailies	00(00.00)	10(32.20)	00(00.00)	45(75.27)	04(06.77)
3	Television	00(00.00)	02(03.38)	00(00.00)	51(86.44)	06(10.16)
4	Radio	00	00	00	53(89.83)	06(10.16)
5	Internet	00	00	00	54(91.52)	05(8.47)

From the details available from Table 1 it is evident that the respondents unanimously agree that cricket earns maximum coverage amongst all genres of sports. The respondents on probing express that English dailies smartly provide enough space to regional round ups amidst national and international sporting activities. Regional language dailies have space constraints when compared to their English counterparts.

**Table2: Representation of respondents against their perception towards coverage given to sporting activities related to women in different genres of media.**

Sl.No	Type of Media	Percentage
1	English Dailies	30
2	Sports Magazine	40
2	Regional Dailies	20
3	Television	11
4	Radio	Nil
5	Internet	9

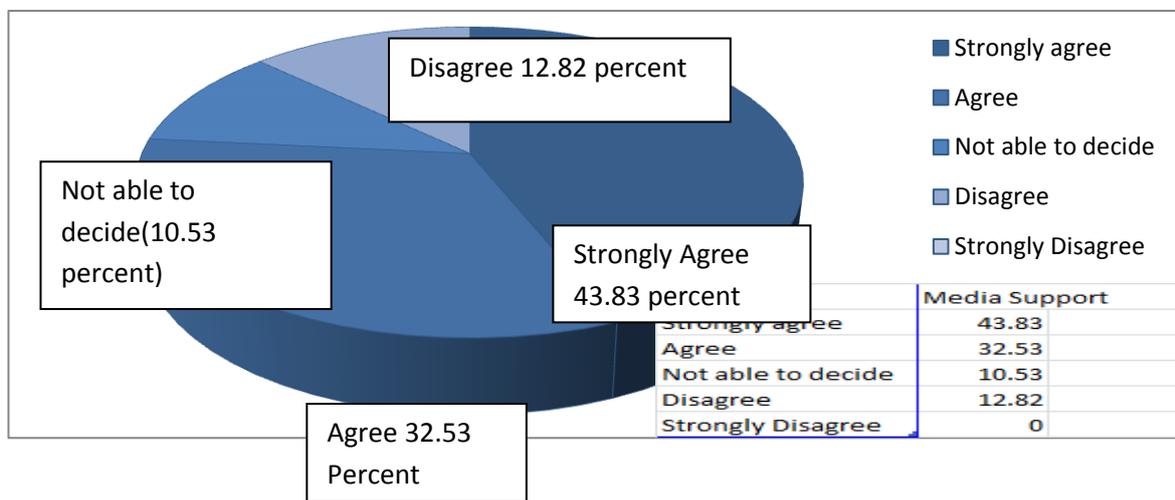
Table 2 provides details about the respondents opinion about importance given by various genres of media while covering sporting activities related to women. Interesting the respondents find good coverage related to women sports in English dailies ( 30 percent) when compared to regional dailies(20 percent). Radio fails to impress the respondents. Hardin( 2005) totally disagrees with the journalists argument that they are giving what reader demands. News and values should not be side-lined as “incorrect assumptions tend to make it simpler to keep women out of the field” (Edward Kian;2007). In her research article as SandeepDasika( 2011) expresses “ by lesser representation of the achievements of women in sports, the media has cut down the possibility of a farther reach of talent possessed by female athletes to the audience”

Table 3 : Perception of respondents against the reasons regarding cricket receiving a good coverage.

Reasons for Popularity of Cricket	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not able to decide	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Cricket Association is well structured	22(37.28)	25(42.37)	00 (00.00)	02 (03.38)	00 (00.00)
No of tournaments are more in Cricket when compared to any other sports	24(40.67)	35(59.32)	00 (00.00)	00(00.00)	00 (00.00)
A majority of other games are not media friendly	09 (15.25)	12 (20.33)	00 (00.00)	18(30.50)	20(33.89)
TRP matters	35 (59.32)	18( 30.50)	00(00.00)	06 (10.16)	00(00.00)
The media does not have enough commenters/writers to review other sports events	19(32.20)	33(55.93)	00(00.00)	07(11.86)	00(00.00)

Table 3 explains that the respondents unanimously agree that Cricket Association is well structured and conducts more tournaments at all age group level when compared to any other sporting discipline. The respondents do not agree that other games are not media friends. What they strongly feel is media houses will project the games which fetch them revenue. They strongly feel Television Rating Points matters for a television channels which are exclusively meant for sports. On probing further the respondents strongly feel that popular games like Cricket, football and tennis of International importance are telecast in the private channels. DD Sports however is an exceptional they express. They opine that television as a whole does not give any importance to local level sporting activity. The Sports desk in English dailies not only provide good coverage to local sporting activity but also make good write ups. The reason for regional dailies not supporting local sporting as strongly disclosed by respondents is that regional media houses neither hire or recruit specialists to write about other sporting activities(87 percent). This reflects on the sports desk of regional language dailies which are largely managed by one maximum two staff members out of which one will compulsorily write cricket.

**Graph 1. Respondents perception regarding media coverage facilitating them in earning good mileage in terms of monetary benefits.**



The Graphic representation indicates that a majority of respondents strongly feel media coverage regarding their sporting activity will benefit them in earning monetary benefits. A majority of them look to media coverage from employment perspective as it fetches them

security. A marginal section of the respondents opine that media coverage may not help them in any regard (13percent)

**Table 5 The perception of respondents regarding media coverage highlighting issues supporting gender parity**

Issues before Media	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not able to decide	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Endorsements	00(00.00)	00 (00.00)	00 (00.00)	37( 62.71)	22(37.28)
Prize Money	00 (00.00)	00(00.00)	00 (00.00)	42 (71.18)	17( 28.81)
Event Sponsorships	00 (00.00)	00 (00.00)	00(00.00)	40 (67.79)	19(32.20)
Increase in Tournaments	03(05.08)	12(20.33)	00 (00.00)	28(47.45)	15(25.42)
Employment	03(05.08)	18(30.50)	00 (00.00)	28(47.45)	10( 16.94)

Table 5 clearly indicates that sports content in various genres of media does not create any platform for improving their status. Sports person life span being very short a majority of sportsperson look for healthy endorsements, prize money and of course employment opportunities. A marginal portion respondents feel that media has raised issues related to increase in tournaments and employment. On probing they strongly express that media has always supported their fight for equality by publishing a news related to the incident. But on its own media rarely takes up issues which can create platform for discussion.

### **Part C**

#### **Importance of Media coverage for Development of Women’s Sports**

**(Compiled opinion collected by lead sports women the need for media highlight)**

From the observations it is evident that the respondents are not very comfortable with the media content. The opinion of 20 lead sports women of the state belonging to different sporting disciplines can be compiled as:

- a. Sports, particularly women can take a better leap if media particularly in regional languages takes an initiative in providing enough space by providing specific emphasis or focus on women sportsmen. Movies like ‘Chak De’ rarely hit the screen.
- b. Media presence only can make a pathway to earn corporate endorsements. If there is less or no news then the sector will hesitate to sponsor women in sports.
- c. As suggested by Hardin(2005), lack of coverage may not only reflect on discouraging female children from entering sports arena but also make women achievers name not very

popular. Popularity earned by cricket captains belonging two different genders is just an example. Encouraging sports at school level can play an effective role.

d. Indian sportswomen have to also combat with social attitudes. Media can play a vital role by initiating debates by educating its women readers regarding administrative representation, poor resources, sexual harassment and finally family expectations and commitments.

e. Media by virtue of its power can demand the boards to reveal the prize money share

### **Conclusion**

The second class treatment for women sports person does not restrict to only Indian sporting situation. The noise created by Australia's women Olympic basketballers(Samantha Lane; 2012) and Japan's women football team with reference to their travel in economy class, is just an example. While it is important for sports women to voice their displeasure against disparities it is equally important that there is sufficient women representation at the administrative level to take up the issues related to women.

Media both electronic and print should take strong steps to create a strong platform for discussion to promote women sports. As Hardin(2005) explains interest would develop in more viewers if the media sources would increase the coverage. As EdwardKian(2007) opines "The limited overall coverage of female athletes, in turn, results in the general public under-estimating the number of women participating in competitive athletics.

It may be useful to recall here that when Independence dawned in 1947, leaders like Rajkumari Amrit Kaur realized the importance of women's participation in sport for nation building.

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