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Female Sports and non-sport Participants of Jharkhand State in Relation to their Motives and Interest

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ABSTRACT

In the early 1900s when club life was introduced in India, sporting activities also found a serious place in female lives due to the facilities provided. Women pioneers had started blazing the trail. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Health Minister in India first set an example for North Indian women by taking to competitive tennis. The efforts of such sporting personalities have yielded fruits. The female sensation in badminton today is world no 2 Saina Newhal. Similar legendary sportswomen are Karnam Malleshwari, Anju Bobby George, PT Usha and Sania Mirza. Even if they are a step ahead, a number of factors ensure that sportswomen stay two steps behind. Though the Indian culture looks up to a woman as a mother of a race, the Indian society is firm with the belief that women are naturally inferior to men because of the faith that a woman's duty is bound only to birthing and taking care of her family. The level of physical education and sports for females has been hampered because of the endless limitations. Their road to glory is a fight against prejudice, inferiority and discrimination. Customs and traditions seep their way into discouraging woman achievers. We need sportswomen of yester year to handle the reigns and encourage the upcoming generations. Our society has to work towards a massive cultural reform where we have a healthy work ethic. Until that is done Indian women will be only chasing a mirage, not medals, in international sporting events.

KEY WORDS

Sport, Motive , Interest and Sportsmen.

INTRODUCTION

Functionally, sports has been historically looked upon as a substitute for martial action to showcase one's (largely a man's) physical, mental and spiritual abilities. It offers a space to compete with an opponent in a fair manner; it also offers the performers a chance to work with others as a team to showcase the ability of a group/team to accomplish a difficult task together. The act of playing a sport can help build mutual trust, camaraderie and engenders an effect of unity. The modern state, historically, has picked up on a very specific and partly a myopic understanding of sports. As mentioned above, western sports was introduced in the subcontinent, especially in the Adivasi hinterlands, as a measure of civilising the savage. Education and sports came hand in hand.

The civilising mission of sports continued well into the post colonial phase of the subcontinent. However, across various African, Latin American and Southeast Asian contexts sports as a way of catalysing development had been experimented with by various Governmental and non-Governmental agencies. Literature reviews of Sport for Development and Peace (2007) collates almost 300 studies across continents where the efficacy of sports as a tactical device for promoting development schemes and resolving conflicts have been explored. The report looked into the use of sport in five sectors: education, health, gender, disability, and peace building with a focus on Human Development. While Jharkhand as a state has evolved out of a long struggle for statehood by the Adivasis themselves, it has also seen violent resistance movements against reigning regimes; starting with the British colonists to the post colonial Bihar Government. In the 1990s, the indigenous resistance was partly influenced by the Maoist and a protracted guerrilla war against the state was waged by the Maoists with the Adivasis at their forefront. The Indian state along with the Bihar state Government (and later the Jharkhand state) used armed force to quell the Maoist armed resistance. However, the material conditions and the fundamental contradictions with the reigning regime did not get addressed; it resulted in a long term distrust and alienation of the marginal Adivasi communities from the state.

The Maoist continued exploiting this alienation and interpreted it as a condition of exploitation of the comprador semi-feudal capitalist Governments on the poor Adivasi peasant population. Although the interpretation of the Maoists was not entirely incorrect, it did not engage with Adivasis of Jharkhand out of a noble cause of liberating them from the comprador. The Maoist retreated back to the hilly, undulating Adivasi hinterlands of southern Bihar as they were pushed out of the plains of northern Bihar by state forces; their entry into contemporary Jharkhand was a purely tactical move (Shah, 2014). Albeit to counter this situation and to build bridges of communication with the historically alienated Adivasi population of Jharkhand the current Government has been looking at sports as a possible way to resolve conflict and engender a sense of empowerment amongst Adivasi women in particular. It is at this cusp of a radical political tactic that the state of sports and its development amongst the Adivasi sportswomen of Jharkhand has been studied. It becomes imperative to discuss this, as questions of poverty, socio-economic mobility and empowerment of women are deeply embedded within a violent history and it is for the first time a standing state Government sought to use peaceful, tactical means to negotiate terms with the Adivasis. However, whether such a gesture comes as paternalistic attitude of the Government towards the 'naive' Adivasi who has been lured by the Maoist, to bring them back into the mainstream or whether they honestly wish to communicate with the Adivasi population largely through a promotion of sporting events and trust building exercises still remains a question that only time will answer.

Development of Sport in Jharkhand

Jharkhand, which earned statehood in 2000, has produced a number of international players, including Sylvanus Dung Dung, Michael Kindo, Sumrai Tete, and siblings Bimal and Asunta Lakra. Currently, two players from the state Salima Tete and Nikki Pradhan are in the Indian women's core probable group of 24 for the Tokyo Olympics (Patwardhan, 2021). It is no miracle that certain regions start producing elite sportspersons. Behind every sportsperson what remains shrouded is a long history of athletic physical culture

and an enabling ecosystem that nurtures sporting talent and motivation. This section will turn the focus of the chapter to the history of such tradition and ecosystem that remains hidden. Although, Jharkhand as a state is rather young, the region has a long yet under-studied tradition of sports. The Adivasi population of the region had a long history of sports. Traditional Adivasi sports were largely associated with their life as forest dwellers and had a significant emphasis on hunting, gathering as well as with rituals associated with peasantry.

Women and Sport

The region also had a history of women participating in various forms of sports ranging from ritual hunting, commonly called Jani Shikar, to various forms of dances, strategic team games such as Sekkor, Kati, Bahu Chor et cetera. Jani Shikar has its origin in the long forgotten tradition of women being hunters. It is a unique ritual hunt practiced by indigenous women, mainly belonging to the Oraons. The ritual hunt is very popular and the community has popular lyrics celebrating the same. It goes as:

Baro Bachare Raja, Jani shikar vaini ka munde raja pagri bandhai (O Raja, every 12 years, we go out on a women's hunt wearing a turban like a Munda king.)

Traditional sports and lifestyle of women

Traditional sports resonated with the life and lifestyle of the communities. Given the origins of the communities as primarily hunter gatherers, literature on the Chota Nagpur tribes specifically notes the absence of any prohibition against women touching or using weapons or dancing with them (Singh 2001). One can safely say that women were largely considered to be hunters and not just gatherers by the tribe members. Apart from ritual hunting one can also find evidence of sports amongst peasant communities in which women commonly participated such as Sekkor, a game played by the Ho tribe. According to the Ho mythology, this ancient game was first played between two early men and devils and eventually the early men won. Traditionally, this game is played during the summer season to prevent drought and bring rain. The sport of Bahu Chor is a tribal game that probably became popular as the oral epic of Ramayana became popular amongst the Adivasi communities. The sport is inspired by the incident of Sita chori mentioned in the Ramayana. Bahu Chor worked on the principles of defense and rescue. There are seven players in each team and both boys and girls play on a rectangular field. The field has two circles at both ends-one in which the bahu is kept while her teammates wait in the other. On cue, team members leave their marked area while holding their breath and spread out on the field. The aim is to get to the bahu without breaking one's breath. The opponent team members who occupy the rest of the field, on the other hand, have to stay out of reach of the advancing players and are considered to be out of game if the latter touch them. The bahu, or the girl, can also distract her opponents and make a dash for the other end of the field. The Santhals, one of the major Adivasi communities of the region, play the sport of Kati. Kati is a game of quick reflexes and deft footwork. It requires a keen eye, strong limbs and expert eyehand-leg coordination. Pioneered by the Santhals, it is traditionally played after the harvest season by teams each comprising ten members. Every player has a kati or a semi-circular disc made of tamarind wood and a tarhi or a 6 ft bamboo stick. All katis lie on the centreline of a rectangular court. Players try to propel the bamboo stick with their feet to hit the opponent's kati. Every successful hit gets a score.

Traditional Sport in Jharkhand

While such traditional sport and lifestyle activities largely contributed to a long tradition of athleticism amongst the people of the region in general and the women in particular, it is not until the colonial period that we see the introduction of modern sports. With the missionaries slowly streaming into the Chotanagpur region, schools were established. Introduction of modern sports in the region largely happened as the colonisers and missionaries attempted to civilise the native savages. The colonial rulers introduced sports such as hockey, football, cricket and athletics in the armed forces which slowly were also introduced to the people of the region through schools and institutional training centres of the colonial state. Hence, it was not surprising when

we read through the life history of Jaipal Singh that his introduction to the sport of hockey happened in school. Although schools were introducing modern sports, women in general and Adivasi women in particular were not encouraged to participate in sports. The status of women in the history of modern sports comes into prominence much later. During the colonial period Braj Ranjan Ray, considered the father of Bengali sports journalism, tried to promote the development of women's soccer in the educational institutions and clubs of Bengal from the late 1920s.

In 1928, Ray took the initiative of establishing the National Youth Association at Calcutta and initiated an inter-college women's football league; however, he faced a lot of resistance from the society despite support from the leading newspaper houses. Rigorous physical exercise for bodybuilding was considered opposed to femininity. Accordingly, women's sports, which was only gradually starting to mature, underwent a rapid decline. Cricket for women was introduced at the Becker Memorial School at Kottayam, Kerala. Following the lead, cricket and football was introduced in some other Anglo-Indian schools of the country. However, in the broader context of Indian institutions, the story was fundamentally different. Although, sports was largely discouraged, radical feminist thought clearly stated the need to take on the sporting arena to express themselves. A vernacular journal of the early twentieth century titled, *Meye Mahal*, asserted:

Earlier, sport was for women an extremely limited enterprise. By sport, they understood the playing of cards or other indoor games. By the 1930s things had changed. By this time women had started taking a keen interest in cricket, football and hockey. If we are to rise from ignominy, we must take sport more seriously. When the Mohun Bagan Football Club had won the IFA shield in 1911, Indian males had made a huge issue out of it. We should also equip ourselves to achieve a similar victory. Such a victory is only possible in sport.

Development of Sport Post Independence India

Post Independence, 1952 Helsinki Olympics was represented by the first generation of female athletes from India. Mary D'Souza and Nilima Ghose set the precedent for the upcoming generations of women athletes as sportspersons. Although one can note a marked absence of Adivasi sportswomen in the early decades of the independent nation of India, in the recent past the number of women athletes emerging from Adivasi communities have started increasing rapidly. Jharkhand, Odisha, Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Kerala have emerged as states which have largely contributed to the Adivasi women sportspersons' numbers. The emergence of Jharkhand has been particularly noteworthy, it is not just their traditional physical attributes owing to their outdoor life, but also their motivation to continue as sports professionals that invite academic interest. In recent times Nikki Pradhan and Salima Tete, two young Adivasi girls represented the national hockey team in the Tokyo Olympics of 2020 and both come from extremely poverty ridden backgrounds and had to break various socio-economic barriers to reach the highest level of their sporting disciplines. Recent research categorically indicates the relatively higher propensity of women sportspersons from weaker socio-economic status to demonstrate high degrees of motivation. Dr. DM Jyoti from the Department of Studies in Physical Education, Sports and Sciences, Akkamahadevi Women's University Vijayapura, Karnataka writes.

Effecting Factors in Modern Sport

The participation of women in modern sports is influenced by various physical, physiological, sociological and psychological factors. During training, besides good physique and physical fitness of the athlete, main emphasis is laid on the development of various types of skills involved in the game as well as on teaching the strategies, techniques and tactics of the game. Until recently, the coaches have been paying inadequate attention to the social and psychological factors which have been proved to contribute to performance in events in the higher competitive sports. It is in this context that the present study aimed to probe the impact of Socio Economic Status (SES) on adjustment, achievement, motivation and personality of sportswomen. In conclusion, the low SES sportswomen have and demonstrate higher achievement motivation than the high SES sportswomen and there is a significant difference in their achievement motivation level.

Achievement and Motivation of Sportswomen in Jharkhand

What remains wanting at this epistemic juncture is a deep exploration of the struggle and the material reason which facilitates the maintenance of such high degrees of achievement motivation despite disabling conditions that plague the lives of such individuals. It is this paradox that this project seeks to study through a close examination of the life narratives of the sportswomen. One of the important dimensions that gets germinated is the slow but steady emergence of a supportive ecosystem for sportswomen in Jharkhand. Apart from the athletes there are a host of other women sportspersons who have contributed to the development of a necessary ecosystem which allowed the emergent players to reach the highest level of performance. It is this gradual emergence of not just the Adivasi sportswomen playing at the highest level but the ecosystem of players, coaches and trainers who continue to motivate players to not just train but also to break the rigid social, economic and psychological barriers that require documentation and recognition. It is this emergent ecosystem that remains the primal focus of this book through which it seeks to portray to the reader a comprehensive picture of this apparently disruptive yet a long overdue movement of the subaltern figures on the playing fields.

Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women in Sport

The foundations of a sound action framework for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women in sport are already in place. Bodies at international, regional and national levels, in particular the women and sport movement, have made major efforts to provide clear policy recommendations to redress the imbalances women and girls face in their involvement in all areas and at all levels of sport. They have also worked to accelerate the process of change, in particular through advocacy, research and data collection, and monitoring and reporting progress. There are, however, a number of areas in which this framework can be significantly strengthened and expanded, including through gender-sensitive resource allocations; establishing higher targets for women's participation in decision-making and leadership and enhancing followup of these targets; and developing and implementing policies and codes of conduct in relation to violence, exploitation and harassment in sport. Action plans are needed at all levels that provide concrete guidance on what needs to be done and by which actors and that also outline timelines, concrete targets, resource implications, and monitoring and reporting requirements.

CONCLUSION

Gender mainstreaming in sport is essential and requires that sporting bodies and institutions identify and explicitly address the relevant gender perspectives in all areas of their activities, for example, in policy development, planning processes, budget procedures, human resources development including recruitment, promotion, retention and training and in research and statistics. The mainstreaming of gender perspectives into all sport policies and programmes will require a deeper understanding of the barriers women and girls may face in accessing, participating in and benefiting from sport and physical activity, and the identification of ways to address them. For example, establishing appropriate physical resources and infrastructure, developing equitable rules and regulations, and raising awareness on the benefits of sport and the capabilities of women and girls are all useful strategies for bringing about change. It is important to keep in mind, however, that gender mainstreaming does not eliminate the need for targeted activities focused on women and girls. Resources, responsibilities and power are not equitably allocated between women and girls and men and boys. Given the significance of the gender gaps in many areas of sport, redressing this situation will continue to require affirmative action and the development of specific targeted programmes for women and girls for some time to come.

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