

Women and Sports: A Journey from Paris to Rio

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GENESIS

Traditionally, the access to sport was not available for women. Men's sporting performance, experience, attitude and interest were treated as the benchmark to measure all human behaviour (Lenskyj, 1995). The social role for women in sports was that of spectator and supporter (Holland & Oglesby, 1979). Their entry in sports arena is the result of long struggle by feminists; and favourable conditions emerged as the result of two world wars, for women workforce. A major shift took place from sex to gender in sport and it became more social than biological construct. Feminist scholars and researchers elaborated the identity and differences in sports, keeping in view the issues of race, class and gender. The first attempt for rights of women was advocated by British writer Mary Wollstonecraft in her book '*A Vindication of Rights of Women*'. She advocated for women to acquire the strength of the body and the mind. Further, she said that girls should exercise like boys only than they can compete with the natural superiority of boys. She is considered as first wave feminist and this wave is mainly related with the right to vote. The second wave French feminist Simone de Beauvoir (in Bandy, 2005) in her manuscript '*The Second Sex*' stated that women should swim, climb mountains peaks, pilot an airplane, battle against elements and go

for adventure to minimise the timidity. This wave was basically concerned with sexuality, legal rights, freedom and equality of women. As a result of this wave, physical educators started taking interest in women and sports issues resulting in overall increase in women participation in sport from 1960 to 1980. Third wave feminism can be referred to as an individualistic movement. In this wave, the feminist started debating on gender roles in and outside the home. Jennifer Hargreaves in her book '*Heroines of Sport: the Politics of Difference and Identity*' examines connection of women participation in sports to individual identity. Struggle of women in sports is linked to specific cultural, economic, political, religious and global processes. Third wave feminists were of the opinion that athleticism may result in to significant social consequences (Bandy, 2005). Hargreaves studied South African, Middle Eastern Muslim, Australian Aboriginal, and Canadian women in sports, including the lesbian and the disabled (Childers, 2002). Lately, as per the contemporary feminist development the fourth wave emphasizes on online feminism in the wake of information technology revolution. It was first argued by the American writer and journalist Pythia Peay in year 2005. She combined

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justice with religious spirituality. But today, this wave is associated with the use of social media such as facebook, twitter, instagram, you tube, whats apps, hike etc. This online platform is used to raise the voice of the women for gender equality, social justice and advocates techno-friendly mode of feminism and participation of women in sports.

METHODOLOGY

The paper discusses women in sport with sports feminist perspective. It is a descriptive study based on thematic and secondary source information/ data. The textual analysis, content analysis, critical theory, gender theory, secondary source data, individual experiences are used while writing / developing the manuscript.

INTERNATIONAL OLYMPIC COMMITTEE INITIATIVES

International Olympic Committee makes every effort to promote women's participation in sports, especially Olympic Games. Sports, whether competitive or recreational/ leisure, has become a societal force having major impact on the structure of the society and condition of women (Jackson, 2001). Journey of women in Olympic started in Paris, with 22 women, contributing 2.2 percents of the total 997 participants in five sports namely Tennis, Sailing, Croquet, Equestrian and Golf. In 1990, Ms Flor Isava Fonseca had her entry in IOC Executive Board. In 1991, IOC decided that whatever event will be introduced in Olympics will have women's event. In 1997, Ms Anita L.

DeFrantz was the first woman to be elected as IOC Vice-President. IOC started Women and Sport Awards in year 2000 to promote the development of women in sport. It also conducts seminars on women and sports issues. Establishment of Women and Sports Working Group for policy planning and gender equality came in existence in 1995 and the same was established as full-fledged commission in year 2004. The area of responsibility of this commission is to advise about women in sports strategy, access for women in sports, women and sport award, monitoring and regularly reporting on gender equality, awareness of harassment and abuse in sports. The work of women in Sport Commission is to encourage and provide equal chance to women so as to participate in/ benefit from sport and physical activity (IOC website).

OLYMPISM IN ACTION

"Olympism is a philosophy of life, exalting and combining in a balanced whole the qualities of body, will and mind. Blending sport with culture and education, Olympism seeks to create a way of life based on the joy found in effort, the educational value of a good example, and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles." - **Olympic Charter.**

Olympism is the philosophy of existence having blend of body, will and mind. It is a philosophy of existence. It gives direction to mankind, builds a peaceful world through sports culture, ensures the regular celebration of the Olympic Games, and educates youth

through sports programme. Olympic Charter defined the principles of Olympism as being a celebration of sporting endeavour, culture and education (James & Osborn, 2011). The true spirit of sports encourages excellence, preserves dignity, indicates respect and extends harmony along with amity among the participants. Olympic Charter and International Olympic Committee encourage promotion of women in sports ensuring equal opportunity for men and women. Gender equality is a gradual process as the women have been deprived of their rights in patriarchal social structure. Fostering an inclusive programme following the true spirit of Olympism, at various levels of educational institutions, is a panacea against the evils of the society; especially where women issues are concerned. These institutions can play a majestic role towards gender equality as the young students are future citizens who would inculcate and propagate the requisite values. The mission of the Olympism is to build better world through sports. United Nations has also documented and promoted the access to sports for women. Games and physical activities can have an encouraging impact on health, can become and as being a tool to remove socially formed gender stereotypes. The initiatives for mass participation by women in sport are propagated by Olympic movement. With due course of time, more sports and disciplines have been opened up for women worldwide. From last two decades, the International

Olympic Committee in cooperation with the relevant International Sports Federations and Organising Committees has encouraged women's programmes at the Olympic Games. It has been decided that all games looking for entry in the Olympic programme must contain women's events. Further, steps for the women's participation at administration and leadership level has been also commenced by the IOC. Consequently, the present body of IOC comprises one hundred seven members in all out of which twenty four are women. In view of Von Korfleisch (1970) sports specially Olympic Games, are accepted as tools to move mountains, abolish differences among peoples and reconcile nations and in nutshell bring about peace on earth.

GENDER EQUALITY IN SPORTS

Gender equality in sports refers to the access of rights and opportunities in sports unaffected by gender. This term is used to depict the reasonable and unbiased allotment of resources and opportunities irrespective of gender. It allows removal of prejudiced practices and provides barrier free sport participation for both male and female. The literal meaning of gender equality in sport is considering gender in a neutral factor while having access to resources, rights, and opportunities. Sports are also the cultural heritage and integral part of mankind, country or civilization. It is universally thought to be as a suitable or desirable activity for women. It is hard fact that throughout the world there is lesser participation of women in sports as

compared to men, as sport is dominated by the males. It is assumed that this is because women are not willing to participate. But, reality is in contrast that they don't participate because of poor financial position, households' responsibilities, security concerns, transport access, insufficient sport facilities usually prevent women's participation in physical activities and sport. Social and cultural norms of the society are the main reasons for restriction on women from being physically active.

The challenges have also arisen in sport for women in recent years, because of increasing involvement and performance of women athletes. It cases threats to the advantages men have historically gained from their near exclusive access to and control of the world of sport. These advantages ranges from opportunity and rewards to the contribution of sport to the construction of masculinity and the ideology of gender difference (Messner, 1992 in Theberge, 1993; 312).

WHY SPORTS FOR WOMEN?

Great philosophers too advocated for equality of men and women in sports. Plato in his book Republic emphasised on the participation of women in sports/gymnastic, music and war training (Adam, J. (Ed.), 1902). Now a day, it has been proved by various researches that sports participation and physical activities facilitate better health, prevention from illnesses and strengthen immune systems. It reduces risk of heart

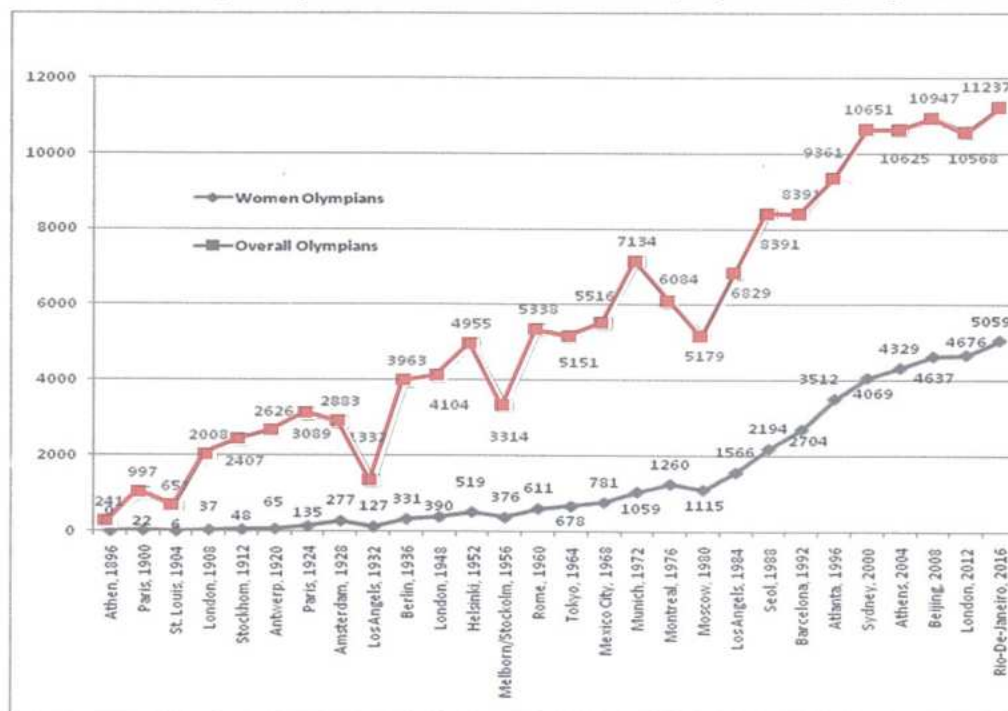
diseases, high blood pressure, diabetes, endometrial, cancers of colon and breast. It helps in positive health esteem, regular and healthier menstruations, body weight control, delay aging and osteoporosis, especially after or near menopause. Besides having a positive influence on health it is associated with better academic performances and lower dropout rates and wholesome personality development. The overall benefits of Olympism in sport can inculcate qualities like team spirit, interventions, leadership mutual understanding. Prakash (1990) stated that enjoyment comes as the result of expenditure of energy and physical exercises. The aim is to endorse well-being along with positive and dynamic outlook. When a woman demands the participation in sports, she is claiming about her right to leisure. Riordan (2007) explored that use of sport for social policy can contribute to the societal emancipation of women. Few multi-ethnic communist countries purposely used sport as tool to crack-down discrimination and get emancipation for women. Merkel (2003) stated that the powerful potential of sports is to unite and divide that has developed into a key feature in the twentieth century history of sports.

WOMEN IN OLYMPICS

Agenda 2030 of the United Nations, adopted in year 2015, again confirms the importance of sports as a key to sustainable development. It identified UN role in the strengthening of women and of young people, individuals and society. In view of above, the Olympic

committee agenda 2020 mainly emphasised on gender equity both on and off the field. Journey of women participation started in 2nd Olympic Games at Paris in year 1900 where 22 women of the total 997 participated in five games amounting 2.2 percent of total participants. In comparison, London Olympic figured 44.2 percent women players of total 4676 participants and become the first where women competed in all sport on the Olympic programme. The Rio Olympic witnessed the history with 45.02% women participants, where out of 11237 participating Olympians, 5059 were women participants. The rise

in women participants in sports is visible during second wave of feminism that is from 1950 to 1980. In 1948, at London Olympic, the percentage of women participants was 9.50 percent and that the graph went up to 21.5 percent during Moscow Olympic Games held in 1980. The transition period from second wave to third wave of feminism witnessed 28.8 and 34 percent women athletes participation in 1992 Barcelona and 1996 Atlanta Olympic, respectively. During the so called fourth wave/ online wave of feminism the overall percentage of women Olympians were 45.02 in Rio de Janeiro Olympic Games, in year 2016.



Comparative Line Graph of overall Olympians and Women Olympians participation in Summer Olympic Games Since 1896 (athens) To 2016 (Rio-De-Janeiro)

Data Source: Estel Heggin, Research Coordinator, Olympic Studies Centre, International Olympic Committee, personal communication on January 16, 2017.

'SPORT PARTICIPATION AND OLYMPISM' GIZMO TO PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY

Sports participation provides women athletes' voice as well as makes them assertive in the society. They learn decision-making, training, and leadership opportunities. On the whole quality of life is enhanced through sports. They become more extrovert and inclusive in terms of socialization. Physical activities and games can offer a safe place for get together, helps to build-up social connection and social support. It offers attainment of better health and chance to tackle their marginalization in social structure. It assists in changing gender stereotype and offer equal opportunities and can enhance the empowerment of women, challenging gender norms and greater mobility along with wholesome personality development. The changes in gender stereotype facilitate changes in gender norms and treat men and women on the same platform. It is the stage to exhibit leadership skills and transfer women's responsibility from family life to civic involvement. It may act as tool for dealing with gender equity on larger scale. The constant effort, new inventions and studies has shown the positive as aspects of women sports participation with multiple positive effects. As argued by Cooky & Lavoie (2012), women who participate in sport have health and socio-psychological benefits. That has changed the

sensitivity about women's capabilities and capacities that is good for everyone in society.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The mission of gender equality in sports is full of challenges and blockages/obstacles. The need is to put on combined efforts from all the stakeholders ranging from parents to government bodies including sports associations and federations. The restoration of gender equality in sport needs an integrated approach. The short-term and strategic goals may be acknowledged and addressed through positive action, preparation of events and programmes, establishment of woman-friendly facilities, beginning of educating campaigns, giving transport, providing protected environments and affordable pay venues to make sport and recreation accessible and affordable to all women (Roberts, 1993 in Burnett, 2001; 76-77). It is recommended that we need to adopt policies that are inclusive and ensure women participation in games along with proving prospect for decision making. We need to organise debates about harassments and exploitation of women in and out of the sports arena. Today, there is a need to give equal opportunities in administration and with induction programmes along with provision of necessary training required for leadership. Although, efforts are made by concerned bodies; but, still there is a need to accomplish greater equality, especially in administrative bodies and

organisations. According to Roberts (1993) "women need to be empowered to organise and run sport for women by women. This empowerment programme must address training at all levels; including administration, technical aspects of sport and leadership". The efforts to achieve equality range from sport to workplace, home and schools. The mission of the Olympism is to build the better world through sports. Historically, it has been witnessed in Ancient Greek that the antagonism among Spartan and Athenian came to halt through sports. Even today, the combined contribution from family, society, International Olympic committee, sports

ministries of countries, various sports federations, associations and educational institutions can put their hands together for realization of distant aim of equal participation and opportunities for women's in sports. We have done a lot so far but there is a much more for climbing, running, swimming and trekking. The present paper may act as milestone to help the stakeholders to explore the society to understand and implement the philosophy of the Olympism with reference to gender equality and women empowerment. A better world with equal opportunities for both men and women can be achieved if efforts for women participation in sports are encouraged and emphasized.

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ELECTRONIC SOURCES:

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