Living The Values: Exploring How Sports Engagement Influences The Practice of Olympic Values In India

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ABSTRACT

With the 2024 Paris Olympics as a backdrop, this research investigates the role of sports in shaping Olympic Values among Indians and the differences that emerge. It delves into how these values are practiced in their daily lives, comparing individuals who engage in sports to those who don't. It examines the effect of sports engagement level (competitive vs. recreational) and gender on the practice of Olympic values. 'Me and My Life', a 5-point Likert scale, was used for data collection. Data was anonymously collected online via social media during the 2024 Olympic season. 427 respondents (Males=158, Females=269) across India participated in the survey. Results revealed that participants with a prior background in any sport demonstrated significantly higher mean on Excellence as compared to non-participants (t=2.10, p=.036). Furthermore, those who participated in competitive sports showed higher scores on Excellence as compared to recreational sports participation (t=3.72, p=.000). Findings indicated significant gender differences in Excellence, wherein males score higher than females (t=2.34, p=.020). The study suggests promoting sports activities at varied scales to cultivate a culture of excellence and foster mutual respect.

Keywords: Sports, Olympic values, Excellence, Respect, Friendship.

INTRODUCTION

Values play a vital role in the development of human life. In Indian philosophy, values are important not only for personal growth but also for the growth of society and harmony. Human values have been defined as "desirable trans-situational goals, varying in importance that serve as guiding principles in the life of a person or other social entity" (Schwartz, 1994, p. 21). The National Education Policy (NEP-2020) of India also emphasizes value-based education (Patil, V. & Patil, K. 2021). With its universal appeal, sport is leveraged as an effective means to convey important messages about healthy living, social inclusion and equal opportunities. Review indicates that many life skills can be developed through Sport (Mandigo, et al., 2018). The concept of Olympic values

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was introduced by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and mentioned three core values of the Olympics; Respect, Excellence, and Friendship (IOC, 2023a), on which the Olympic movement builds its activities. The value of respect represents respect for oneself, respect for opponents, the rules, society, and the environment. The value of excellence emphasizes constant striving to become better, pursuing personal bests, and achieving objectives through dedication and effort. It's not just about winning, but about continuous improvement and self-mastery that stems from a strong body, will, and mind. Friendship is another important value that encourages mutual understanding between people. This value broadly refers to building a peaceful and better world through solidarity, team spirit, joy, and optimism. Humanity overcomes political, economic, gender, racial, or religious differences and forges friendships in spite of differences. It is about forming bonds with teammates, opponents, and nations. The practice of these values is not limited merely to sports; everyone can aspire to integrate them in their daily lives (IOC, 2023a).

Fostering Olympic values can be achieved in many ways, but one of the important ways to instill these values is through Olympic Values Education Programs (OVEP). **This program has been successfully implemented in over 60 countries to date.** In India, OVEP was launched in May 2022. Within six months of its introduction, the program demonstrated remarkable outcomes, enabling 25,000 girls to participate in sports for the first time and achieving a 50% increase in overall sports participation across schools (International Olympic Committee, 2023). While Olympic values have been studied globally, limited research explores their practice in India beyond formal Olympic Education Programs. The present study tried to fill this gap by exploring the practice of Olympic values among Indians.

Gender differences in sport

Many studies reported gender differences in participation in sports and physical activity. Men tend to engage in sports or physical activities more frequently than women (Owen et al., 2025). Indian studies revealed that cultural norms often pose barriers to women's participation in sports (Das et al., 2023), especially in sports that require a specific dress code or are played in mixed-gender settings (Naik & Bavadekar, 2024). Besides, economic factors such as high costs associated with training, equipment, combined with insufficient sporting infrastructure, make it challenging for women to access safe and suitable spaces (Kaur, 2025; Shirotriya et al., 2023). These research reviews focused on challenges faced by women in sports; the socio-cultural environment not only affects their participation but also their aspirations and performance. Present research aims to study how gender-based social and cultural factors affect practice of Olympic values.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

'Me and My Life' scale was developed by the researchers, as no suitable tool was found for Indian adults. Pilot testing was conducted before data collec-

tion. The study was conducted after approval of the Institutional Ethics Committee (Jnana Prabodhini Samshodhan Sanstha, JPSS).

Tool

Data was collected using 'Me and My Life' scale developed by the researchers. The first draft of the tool comprised 99 statements on a 5-point Likert scale, designed to measure the three Olympic values: Excellence, Respect, and Friendship. Content validity was confirmed by five experts in sports, education, psychology, and social science. The final tool comprised 36 statements, 12 items in each value. A combination of both positive and negative items was included. Reliability was calculated using Cronbach's alpha (α = .64). Along with this scale, one open-ended question, wherein participants were asked to write five words that came to their mind upon seeing the Olympic rings. Demographic details such as age, gender, socioeconomic status (SES), sports participation, level of sports engagement, etc., were captured using the main tool.

Sample

The anonymous survey was conducted online via social media during the Paris Olympics 2024. A total of 427 respondents participated, comprising 158 males and 269 females, across India. The participants were aged between 18 to 75yrs (M= 37.6). Data coding and scoring were then completed. After the data cleaning process, descriptive statistics and t-test were calculated using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 29).

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Table 2 indicates that participants

Table 1: Demographic details of sample (N=427)

Demographic Category	Subcategory	N	Percentage
Gender	Female	269	63
	Male	158	37
Education	12th Grade	28	6.6
	Bachelor's	166	38.9
	Master's	211	49.4
	Doctoral	18	4.2
	Post-doctoral	4	0.9
Sports Participation	Yes	351	82.2
	No	76	17.8

Level of Participation	Hobby	216	60.8
	Competitive	139	39.2
Marital Status	Single	152	35.6
	Married	260	60.9
	Divorced	9	2.1
	Separated	3	0.7
	Widowed	3	0.7
Socioeconomic Status	Lower Middle	24	5.6
	Middle	254	59.5
	Higher Middle	147	34.4
	High	2	0.5

who engaged in sports scored significantly higher on Excellence than those who did not, t (425) =-2.10, p = .04, Cohen's d= 0.28. No significant differences were found for Friendship and Respect. This aligns with existing research in sports psychology and behavioural studies, which suggests that sports participation fosters in players qualities such as discipline, resilience, goal-setting, and a competitive mindset, which likely translate into higher performance in other areas of life (Saha et al., 2024). The key components of excellence, such as perseverance, teamwork, and leadership, are greatly enhanced due to sports engagement. Consistent results were found in the study conducted, where the relationship between sports involvement and Olympic values was explored. Results showed significantly higher mean on pursuit of excellence for those involved in sport and for those who participated in the Olympic values education program (Min & Choi, 2018). Research evidence suggests that sports participation plays an important role in boosting excellence. This perfectly aligns with NEP (2020), a holistic approach to education. By mandating inclusive and experiential learning models within sports-integrated pedagogy, the policy invariably supports the development of the value of Excellence among children and youth of the nation.

Table 3 indicates that means of excellence vary across the two purposes of engagement in sport. Competitive athletes scored significantly higher on Excellence than those who engaged in sport merely as a recreational, t (425) = -3.72, p = .001, Cohen's d=0.40. No significant differences were found for Friendship and Respect. This compelling finding reiterates the fact that competitive athletes have a strong desire to achieve

Table 2: Comparison of Olympic Values Between Participants Who Did and Did Not Engage in Sports

Values	Engage in Sports		Not Engaged in Sports		*t*(425)	95% CI		*p*	Cohen's *d*
	M	SD	M	SD		Lower	Upper		
Friendship	45.80	5.40	45.03	5.97	-1.10	-2.14	.60	.27	.13
Excellence	43.96	4.90	42.68	4.29	-2.10	-2.47	-.08	.04	.28
Respect	45.95	5.04	45.75	5.00	-0.31	-1.45	1.05	.75	.03

Table 3: Comparison of Olympic Values across Sports Engagement

Values	Competitive sport		Recreational sport		95% CI		*t*(425)	*p*	Cohen's *d*
	M	SD	M	SD	Lower	Upper			
Friendship	45.99	5.40	45.59	5.55	-1.58	.77	-0.68	.50	.07
Excellence	45.17	5.04	43.22	4.67	-2.98	-.92	-3.72	.001	.40
Respect	46.12	5.05	45.79	5.04	-1.40	.75	-0.60	.55	.06

their goals, and the performance of players decides winners or losers. This creates the need for more excellence in competitive athletes, whereas no such competition is involved in recreational or nature sports (Borge, 2024). The study by Schuler et al. (2023) indicates that in competitive settings, players receive regular feedback on their performance, allowing for continuous improvement and adaptation. Coaching combined with consistent performance analysis helps athletes to improve weaknesses and identification of strengths, viewing setbacks as opportunities for growth rather than indicators of inadequacy. There is a difference between participating in competitive sports and leisure sports. Bowker (2006) mentioned that through competitive sports, athletes learn goal setting, take more risks to pursue excellence. A sense of mastery and self-esteem is also developed through competitive sports. Given these findings, there are other allied facets like personality, type of sport (individual vs team-based), long-term engagement, etc., that influence the practice of excellence.

Table 4 indicates a significant difference in the mean for Excellence, wherein males scored higher than females, t (425) = -2.34, p=.02, Cohen's d=0.22. The reason behind this could be that often, women face societal pressures that shape their perceptions of success and excellence. Traditional roles tend to emphasize community and familial responsibilities over individual achievements, potentially influencing how women engage with the concept of excellence in general (Behera & Sahu, 2024). With reference to Indian sports in particular, a study by Tanni and Khan (2024) reiterated that women face signifi-

Table 4: Gender Differences in Olympic Values

Values	Female		Male		*t*(425)	95% CI		*p*	Cohen's *d*
	M	SD	M	SD		Lower	Upper		
Friendship	45.80	5.47	45.43	5.57	0.66	-.72	1.45	.51	.06
Excellence	43.32	4.57	44.44	5.17	-2.34	-2.07	-.18	.02	.22
Respect	46.26	4.95	45.32	5.13	1.88	-.04	1.94	.06	.18

Table 5: Classification of responses

Excellence	**Friendship**	**Respect**
Dedication	Unity	Respect
Discipline	Togetherness	Equality
Hard work	Global challenge	Integrity
Perseverance	Friendship	Honesty
Strength	Teamwork	Sportsmanship
Courage	Happiness	Fair Play
Success	Joy	Spirit of the Game
Passion	Participation	Diversity of continents
Inspiration	Interconnection	Cultural respect
Motivation	connecting globally	
Dreams		
Pride		
Achievement		
Winning		
Medals		
National Representation		
Sports Development		

cant economic and socio-cultural barriers, as well as a lack of infrastructure, which limit their participation (Willinger et al., 2022). This finding provides an opportunity to encourage more women's participation in sports. The reason is that engaging women in sports helps challenge traditional gender stereotypes and encourages them to pursue excellence not only on the field but also in broader life contexts.

Along with quantitative data, qualitative data was collected through one open-ended question wherein participants were asked to write five words that came to their mind upon seeing the Olympic rings. Responses were classified under three core Olympic values.

While classifying responses, it was observed that participants wrote one or the other shade of the three Olympic values; however number of responses is higher in **Excellence, which** is consistent with the quantitative results mentioned above. It consists of words like striving for personal best through dedication, perseverance, hard work, and passion, symbolizing the pursuit of dreams and achievements like winning medals and representing one's nation. **Friendship** highlights unity, togetherness, and building strong bonds across borders, celebrating teamwork, happiness, participation, and global connection through sports. **Respect** underlines the importance of fairness, integrity, equality, and honoring diverse cultures and traditions, ensuring that competition remains honorable and inclusive. Together, these values foster a spirit that transcends winning, encouraging mutual growth, harmony, and global understanding.

CONCLUSION

The findings indicate that participation in sports has a significant effect on levels of excellence. Individuals who participated in competitive sports demonstrated higher scores in excellence as compared to those participating at a recreational or hobby level. Furthermore, the results revealed a significant gender difference, with male participants exhibiting higher excellence scores than their female counterparts. The qualitative analysis showed that words denoting excellence occurred most frequently.

This study highlights the potential application for nurturing values through sports. Findings can be helpful in the implications of the NEP (2020) for integrating sport into the school curriculum, which supports the holistic development of students. Further exploration is needed to understand the underlying factors contributing to gender disparity in sports participation and values. The recent National Sports Policy 2025 (NSP 2025) offers a comprehensive roadmap that aims to promote sports for nation-building.

In future, researcher will try to reach individuals from all states in India with large sample size so that generalizability of the findings can be possible. The survey was conducted online that may have excluded individuals who do not have internet access or are less familiar with digital platforms.

Conflict of interest: None

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