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## Women sports and journalism: Case study of Indian women cricket

**Sandhya Chauhan and Aditya Kumar Shukla**

### Abstract

This research analyzes the work of various authors, published on some of the elite websites. It is done in an order to analyze the coverage given by media to the women sports in India, taking women cricket in the prime focus. The main aim here was to demonstrate that journalism is more about public interest than any other news value and media prioritizes profit and the talent and hard work of some sections of the society gets a back seat due to biological reasons. This has been shown by examining scenarios where women gave their sweat and time to the country and got nil telecasts of their matches in return. The aspects researched are the media strategies, power of a unified nation, skills and potential in the women cricket team and success as a craft of media. I assessed how with the aid of social media, Indian cricket team took a major leap towards success in 2017. This research provides valuable information in context to the hurdles and struggles faced by women sports, primarily women cricket in India with respect to the journalism being the friend and the foe.

**Keywords:** Women sports, Journalism, Indian women cricket, media coverage

### Introduction

The oppression and adversities that a sportswoman encounters in India eminently differs from what a man in sports witnesses. Nisha millet, a swimmer who abandoned swimming after representing India at two Olympics, she brought up to the notice that genders are equally split in swimming at an early age despite of that sad notion she is delighted at the progress made by the women's cricket team. She believes that more girls will come into the sport from now. India have world's number one Tennis doubles player, Sania Mirza and the World's number one badminton player, Saina Nehwal. Despite of those stats, other team sports are in dire straits. Indians must understand the need to safeguard the idea that women and girls have equivalent opportunity to reap the advantages of sport by overpowering sexism in sport at various levels, which comprises demanding and exacting explicit scenarios of assault and discrimination and also addressing the latent obstacles to equality. Elite sport never ceased setting men and women apart. As per an article on thewomenorg the men's decathlon has been contested at every Olympics since 1912 but there is still no place at major championships for the women's event. While men play five sets at Tennis Grand Slams, women can only compete over three sets. These disparities encompassing masculinity, sports and sexism existed since the dawn of mankind. Women sports are not shown like men sports, broadcasters prefer telecasting men sports, print visuals are heavily dominated by the same. The blame keeps constantly shifting from audience to broadcasters to players and their genders, nothing cracks this nut of women sports and inadequate coverage despite of significant amount of efforts made by various self funded organizations and governments. It will be telecasted once money starts going into women sports and it will be only when audience wants to watch women. They are not shown because they are not watched; they are not watched because they are not shown. It is a never ceasing cycle. Women's sports are always seen as something secondary and inessential. For centuries, cricket remained a province to males, men's Indian cricket team continued to own a prestigious and amplified position along with over magnified status. Everything that is completely opposite to the status given to Indian women's cricket team. The extent of coverage women's cricket has got in the past when compared to its male counterpart have been absurdly less.

Cricket, India's most popular sport also happens to be the most underrated one when the women are considered.

Popularity is a media driven game. It comes from the support of people and considering the hard truth of India being a male dominated society it's apparent where the support of the people is concentrated with respect to the sports. Women's cricket in India strives for the same limelight as the exceptional men's cricket team does and a patriarchal India is so impotent of giving women that much eminence just yet.

The second most populous country and not even one-third of the people are familiar with the names of the players of Indian women's cricket team and in the face of the fattened thoughtfulness in the direction of the fact that it is the same country where people tends to remember the batting and bowling average of the players too along with their names only if you pan the lens towards men's team.

All sorts of media ranging from newspapers to television channels are chasing profit in the facade of readership and TRP which rapidly increases as the figure touches a 300000 spectators mark when it's about the gentlemen's game i.e., men's cricket and shrinks to 1000 when that 'men' is replaced by 'women'.

On July 23<sup>rd</sup> 2017, however, successfully witnessed a step forward in the stubborn culture of cricket spectatorship, when the country unified to watch the ICC Women's World Cup final that was played between India and England. The essence of togetherness and the spirit of nationalism was boundless and unquestionably evident- A rare atmosphere in women's cricket otherwise Print visuals are heavily dominated by Hardik Pandya and MS Dhoni when men's team performs well in some another ODI whereas one get to see the info of a women's team match only if he swipe four times on CricBuzz's screen i.e., one of the top 5 apps for live streaming of cricket. And it's justifiable also as why CricBuzz would or any other media would keep something on its priority queue if it doesn't interest the visitors. The broadcasters or media are not to be blamed alone. They do play a part ; a huge one yet a part constituting to this problem lies in the mindsets of people because simply Harmanpreet's version of sixes are not belligerent enough to hold all these viewers captive who are accustomed to the Virat kohli's earth shattering version of sixes.

"News industry demonstrates little interest in women's sports" and clearly "gen-ders its sports coverage to cater for male tastes in the pursuit of male audiences and advertising revenue"

### **Theoretical frame work**

Suman Layak and Indulekha Aravind in The Economic Times describes the viewership figures taking in account the leap it took comparing it to men's cricket. Cricket started off as a male's territorial game but the Women's World Cup did break some TV records. During the finals, the 48<sup>th</sup> over of the Indian innings witnessed almost 1.9 million views in the digital viewership which was a way higher than the average for top men's cricket tournaments and the viewership on television of the whole World Cup would be around 100 million. The Indian women's team played their debut test match in 1976 which was against the West Indies and the Women's Cricket Association of India was formed in 1973. From those initial efforts to the eminent merging with the Board of Control for Cricket in India in 2006 and finally giagantic leap – as of now the entire funding is done by BCCI. Indian women cricket came a long way and have an even longer journey to travel.

Pravin Gahukar remarks that it might approach you as a surprise that almost 70-80% of these records are owned by Mithali Raj, like a lone warrior. With most runs in one day Internationals, Mithali is the leading scorer in ODI cricket with enormous 6190 Runs in 167 innings. She is the first and the only woman to surpass the mark of six thousand international runs in ODI and the youngest batswoman to score a hundred in ODI cricket; she went on scoring a century knock of 114, not out on her ODI debut. She has most number of fifties in any calendar year as she scored 10 fifties in a calendar year 2017 outranking Ellyse Perry's record of 9 which she created in 2016.

Abhishek Roy expresses that people disbarred themselves from watching any women's cricket match when all they got to see was Mithali defending and sweeping every ball she faced. He provides evidences that current Mithali Raj has variety in how she hits the ball, indeed a way better than certain male players of Indian men's cricket team. There are some very large and notable disparities in women and men's version of cricket starting from the conditions of the field to the economic chairs in their dugouts with no scintillating 'ornaments' as one gets to see in IPL and International men's cricket matches. There are women who have quality bowling and batting skills, on looking closely one can detect the aptness of swinging like "Ameer" style and the touch of pulling like Pointing. Now there arises the same question again, what could be the reason that they are not as much hyped and popular as men or as they should be.

Answering to a question "Did people forget about the Indian women's cricket team?", Nikhil points out that in India everyone would know the timings and schedule of upcoming men's cricket matches throughout the year but no one would have a slight idea about the Women's World Cup until the team reaches the final, harsh but true. Around 70-80 percent people are not aware regarding the names of the players in Indian Women's cricket team, NOT YET. They have achieved some remarkable milestones by now.

While answering the question "What are some effective actions BCCI can take to promote women's cricket to higher level in India?", Pravin recalls that it is evident from the recently held Women World Cup that Indian women are made up of potency, capability, determination and bravery. It is conclusive that a fighting spirit guides them which have the ability and strength to perform sufficiently well at bigger stage.

Statistics have shown that BCCI has made considerable amounts of efforts and regulated the facilities to a large degree ever since the women's cricket came under the patronage of BCCI. They implemented pre-tournament practice sessions, staff for coaching and camps are being held for training like it happens for their male counterpart. Though it was never enough. But statistics also points towards the large room for improvements concerning the development and growth of women's cricket in India. The most basic step that BCCI could take is to multiply the participation of girls at the fundamental level that is the school level, start emphasizing the need of women sports and encouraging and propelling girls towards taking part and actively performing in sport, not just cricket any port of their choice.

Conducting camps, training sessions and tours, organizing tournaments for women on regional and national levels would be a fruitful add on, sports should be given an appropriate weightage and importance ratio as compared to academic excellence. This would not only aid them in being conscientious about the physical stamina and fitness but such

tournaments will provide them a stage to overcome the feelings derived from ego and pride and dejections and disappointments, as a result it will help them battle the hurdles in a positive manner consequently preparing them for the limelight and for the time when they play for the country. As mentioned in some of the elite news websites that after the World Cup, there is a change which can be sensed in various things and practices and the cause guiding that change was that most of the matches were shown on television and as women's team get more matches televised, the more the people will know what our women are doing and what they are capable of. It is believed by female cricketers that before the World Cup, they have won various matches which the masses are oblivious to because they were not shown on the TV.

Mysuru mentioned that vice captain, Harmanpreet Kaur told IANS (Indo-Asian news service) that after they won the World Cup, a lot of people have been asking her about her IBL, BBL, etc, she adds that now people really want to see women's cricket and that is a big achievement for them.

Currently the flamed talk is about the IPL and if we look over the past seven years including this year the IPL has used the glamour tool of women, had women cheerleaders, hosts and comperes but had nothing for ladies on the field. It still is a glaring question what is taking them this long to have IPL for women's cricket.

"Ever since the World Cup, there has been a marked increase in following for the women's game, with social media contributing heavily to the surge."

An article on ANI describes how the women owe it all to social platforms as social media ignited in flames while the Women's World Cup was played. There were number of articles published each day which in turn led to the rapid growth in people's response and participation. Female players witnessed a sudden increase in the count of their followers, especially the captain- Mithali Raj.

From ICC, social media has given a large platform to discuss and express the thrill and celebration of women's cricket. Social media played the catalyst of change as it spread the word for women's achievements and it effortlessly brought the nation together to uphold the strength of our women by letting them know that we are here for the miseries too and the country got your back no matter what. It was observed, that people developed curiosity to dig about the life and journey of female cricketers, enlightening them with the facts, figures and the bumps women's cricket have faced on its road till here. The change social media brought was something TV alone could have never done.

In a country where you have only heard a boy wanting to be the next Sachin Tendulkar and the next Virat Kohli, now here are girls who want to be the next Harmanpreet Kaur, Jhulan Goswami and the next Mithali Raj. It all comes down to doing exceptional, they did well, media chased them, and they conquered the headlines as soon as they conquered the hearts and heads of people. It reinforces the idea of journalism being about the public interest; the moment women's cricket started guiding the contentedness in people, the moment it started interesting them, media was suddenly all about it. If we connect dot to dot, this has a story to tell.

As per the data available on various sites, Mithali Raj had only 3000 followers on Twitter prior to when the Tournament begun and now that 3000 got converted to 50K mark and is still counting.

Rediff sports mentioned in an article that the impact of media cannot be understated in the recent rise in the profile of

women cricketers. Smriti Mandhana who is amongst one of the centurions in the tournament has now a follower base of around 30,000 followed by kaur who is the third in the queue among Indians with around 20,000 followers. Ten ICC Women's World Cup matches are being telecast live on television, while the remaining 21 matches are being streamed online. In addition, the International Cricket Council's digital media has done a great job with the highlights of the matches, which acquired a significant amount of grip across various platforms. Cricketers told the media that whenever they get time they are looking at their phones and surfing social media and they find the clips of the players, they also told that families and friends who were not inclined towards the sports are also sparing views for cricket. Their friends who never watched cricket when sent them wishes, the power of social media is made abundantly clear.

It was only now when Ekta Bishth took five wickets in a match against Pakistan, it was all over the instagram- the picture showing her five wicket haul. And in the recent history when someone took wickets or extraordinary catches no one knew about it, no one shared the thrill except the one doing that. But now, through social media and via the platforms like Instagram it is reaching to the people, women's cricket is approaching the masses and it has been seen as a positive sign.

In an article titled "After the heartbreak, the hard yards for women's cricket in India" Dileep Premachandran argues that despite of BCCI having the hold and responsibility of Women's team, there was no prime push and for years women's cricket thrived in oblivion. He pans the lens towards the off-field scenario where things were no better. Women were rewarded with almost nothingness; they were being paid less than manual labourers, who skipped on meals so as to have balance in the bank.

Dileep asserts the need for India to build up on the achievements of Raj and Goswami, building up encompasses an increased and safer access to sport for women, extensive media attention, end to casual sexism and tolerance of the same and waves of change and evolution in the way we perceive women in sport.

On bringing media in the scene he suggests a solution to get the media attention and adequate coverage we have to go, watch and support our girls in the first place. They need our reassurance of being there beside them throughout the year.

As Dileep on The Wire put it, If we will go and watch them play with the essence of togetherness in us, we will bring media coverage and the rewards they actually deserves and we will clear the bumps off their road to success and heights. Then this World Cup whether ends in the shreds of defeat and nothingness or turns out to be the greatest wins of all times, it wouldn't matter instead it will be remembered for something much more than a win or defeat; live on, it'd live on.

According to Maithri Warriar It is unfortunate in a country like India where cricket runs in our blood, people stop paying heed when it comes about females playing the very same game. She stated the truth of the nil spectatorship in the year 2016. The names of the female players are unknown till date. Media waited for the team to win the Asia Cup in order to facilitate it with the attention and minimum coverage it deserved.

She examined that it was sheer passion which kept the ladies going on as they were struggling to make money through their sport. Support was another aspect which was abundantly needed and scarcely provided by their families and it was the initial hurdle they had to make their way through. Maithri

states that a girl when confesses to her parents that she wants to make a career in cricket all she gets in the place of support are the stares of disbelief.

Siddesh valvekar asserts the need of adequate recognition that isn't delivered by the media to female players. The game might not rule the heads of the fans unlike men's cricket but the effort that females put in and the amount of strength and determination that is required to perform on the field cannot be subjected to the comparison on the ground. Indeed it is a more demanding task for the females to perform under the influence of extensive pressure. There are uncountable hurdles in the path of a female cricketer starting from not getting the appreciation and sufficient recognition via media. These cricketers also gets a backseat in terms of financial fundings as women's cricket is seen as something insubstantial and not potent enough to generate golds. People are not able to understand the connect between the spectatorship, media, recognition and development of female cricket and how important it is to establish the stand of women in our country.

Siddhesh briefs about the thin interest of masses in female cricket and the apparent reason being the comparatively less happening attribute of women's game play which is not enough to garner gigantic fan followings. It is factually easier for a male player to receive recognition and appreciation for his batting and bowling instincts than for a female cricketer, they did wonders that got lost in the dust of the field. When people talk about male players they have that spark in their eyes and empty voids when it's about females.

There are large fan clubs and fan bases for male players like Virat Kohli and Ronaldo, world is going crazy over what they eat, their likes/dislikes and miniscule details about them. Females do not even receive half of it, not yet. There is a need for people who can promote and propel females in the spotlight. The country needs a society which is open minded and tries to see things through various perspectives; a society that praises when they put effort and encourages them to choose this road.

### Objectives of the Study

1. To critically analyze the coverage of women sports by different means of Journalism.
2. To find out the relationship between women sports especially cricket and Journalism.

### Research Methodology

This is purely exploratory research. Exploration was made on the basis of secondary data available on websites, internet, and newspaper and in research papers. The cast study method of research applied here to draw the conclusions

### Women sports and Journalism: Overall Scenario

Forty out of hundred percent of all participants in sports are female, regardless of those women sports gets only 4% media coverage and female athletes by a greater margin are portrayed in sexually provocative poses more than male athletes. The truth is that people perceives how media let them. Consequently, the lack of popularity of the sport originates from the inadequate coverage given by media. There also exists a perception that what women perform under the title sports is substandard. Women's sport is an afterthought after the men's sports coverage; it has never approached media as something primary, essential, complete and as a top agenda item. Not yet. The primary concern of all the media houses is to garner viewers, readers, TRP and hence

popularity and fame amid masses. Therefore they continue highlighting men's sports fulfilling their objectives.

Journalism is not aimed enough at making efforts to familiarize masses with female sports and making people acquainted with their ladies in action. Women's leagues have the potential to be as jaw dropping as male leagues but only if they get the "screen time". It all comes down to women having less stamina, less speed, less strength. People bluntly agree that women's sports are not as exciting as men's sports. Men are just physically more capable. There exists one exception that is Tennis. Women's tennis is equally popular as men's tennis and media ensured that popularity. The current journalism does not pay much heed to the non televised entertainment aspects and value of sport. Statistics shows that this is gradually changing which however is a good thing.

### Women Cricket and Journalism: Past, Present and Future

Indian journalism and media coverage is the most appropriate answer to why Indians does not give equal importance to women cricket, not even half of what they readily exhibits for men's cricket. This encompasses social media too along with electronic and print media.

**Past:** Until 2017 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the country did not even know about that we have a Women's International Cricket team as well just because there is inadequate coverage regardless of the fact that both the teams have been performing really well but no one knows women team's whereabouts, timings, match schedules, wins or the name of players. 90% of the country did not know, not even the name of the captain of Women's cricket team who has performed in almost 180 one day internationals for India. During Women's World Cup 2017 all the group league matches were not being telecasted by sports channels but women's cricket was suddenly all over the sports and news channels when the world was going crazy over the Harmanpreet's knock and it drove TRP.

**Present:** However, this scenario went through a metamorphosis in July 2017 when the country stood united and exhibited enthusiasm for women's cricket which took over the social media. World Cup 2017 marked a new era of women's cricket and the only reason being journalism was really about them, a significant number of matches were telecasted and what women did got some screen time and consequently the public interest followed by support.

**Future:** Keeping in their minds the interest of public and the leap towards success women's cricket took in 2017, people are expecting Indian Premier League for women after a while. Prominent commentators are also expected to be seen accounting for female team's major matches. Some female players may also get endorsements and advertisements from now onwards. People are optimistic about the wonders that women's cricket is expected to do in the upcoming years and there are people who will be immensely proud and happy on seeing the lenses panned towards the women cricketers sweating for the country.

### Conclusion

Good sport demands skilled and athletic people which imply that men just have an innate benefit. Females never shared equal limelight with the boys and there are various factors ensuring that, one India being a male dominated society. There have been instances where significant efforts were

made to lift up the Indian women cricket. However, in a country where cricket (male) is being worshipped and the country is known for its crazy viewership and boundless enthusiasm, it is not an easy task for a single entity to lift women cricket up, which despite of being cricket does not hold viewers captive due to biological reasons. There were times when female cricketers played the game at its best but there was no one to watch them, let alone appreciate. Now in 2017 when they finally are getting media attention, they told about the times when they were deprived of what they worked for. (i.e., media coverage, attention, familiarity and popularity among masses). Till 2016 stadiums kept on receiving nil spectatorship and media came into action only when women's team conquered Asia cup. Social media has proved to be a boon for the women cricket in India, it contributed extensively to their success in the recent times. This research explores how journalism flip all the pens and cameras into the direction of public interest in a matter of seconds and how public interest is what's flaming and trending into media. Women cricket had always been worth a watch but media waited for public to display some interest, just enough to accumulate TRP for them and public waited for media to intensify and flood with women cricket to take a notice and a moment to appreciate them.

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