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Status and recognition of sportswomen in Indian society

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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 Nehwal. Similar legendary sportswomen are Karnam Malleshwari, Anju Bobby George, P.T. 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 yesteryear 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.

Keywords: Recognition, sportswomen, Indian society

Introduction

History of Women Participating in Sports

Gong back in history, historical sources enable us to have only a glimpse of the recreations of girls during the Vedic and Epic periods. Music and dancing formed the principle indoor games. Public and dramatic concerts were often organized and girls used to go out to see them along with their elders or lovers. In fashionable circles game with the ball seems to have been the chief outdoor of physical exercise. Shakuntala and Kunti are, for instance, represented as spending their leisure hours in this game in the Mahabharata. The Ramayana represents girls as going in the evening to gardens for playing and talking with their friends, but this was probably possible only in towns and cities. We have some reference to girls going out to swim as well girls playing a number of courtyard games like "hide and seek" and "run and catch". These gave very good exercise to the players and were well calculated to help their general development and gave suppleness to their limbs. They were, however played usually before the marriage. Today in India, women and girls have long been deprived of participation in games and sports by direct or indirect social inhibition. For a long time women played no more than a very limited role in the Olympic movement. Even 1992 women represented less than 305 of the competitors at the Summer Olympic Games. On their way to Olympia women were faced with a great number of obstacles. The opposition which they met was directed at not only women's participation in sport but also the masculinization that this was alleged to produce as well as the emancipation of women and the perceived threat of change in the gender order itself. In an age in everyday life were being radically transformed by processes of modernization, some hoped that sport and the Olympic Games might contribute towards upholding the myth of the male as the stronger sex.

Social Handicaps Then

Dronacharya, Indian mythology's greatest coach, banished an aspiring and brilliant low-caste

archer from his camp lest his favourite student, Arjuna, be upstaged. Eklavya paid with his thumb for his audacity. Today, Indian sportswomen are akin to the lowest caste in the games arena. They are shunned, objectified and treated as loose change by the men who dominate the field and the bureaucracy that controls it.

Status of Women in Society

Today India remains male dominated and the sporting world is still a men's world. Indian culture and society looks up to a woman as a mother of a race and therefore India has been symbolized as Mother India, keeping in view the exemplary of a woman i.e. patience, endurance, love, affection, sympathy and generosity. She is looked only as a member of the group, as daughter, wife or a mother and not as an individual with an identity or rights of her own. The society is firm with the belief that women are naturally inferior to men in terms of strength and speed.

Social Pressures

Customs and traditions seep their way into de motivating every woman achiever. The mind frame of the society; that 'the woman is made to take care of children and family' reigns supreme and every achiever has to make a fight back through this mind frame to reach and remain on the top. Captain of Indian National Women Basketball Team Prashanti Singh points to more deep-rooted social perceptions towards women in general. It shows up when marriage happens. "Most of the time it is hard to find a partner of the same mindset and lifestyle. These are outgoing girls who can take their own decisions... and there are very few matches that woman athletes find," says the basketball captain. "When I started playing in school, many of the girls left the sport because their fathers and brothers didn't like them playing. My father, who was a sportsman, also insisted that we complete our studies first as he had never seen a woman sportsperson make more money than a man. The day I became India captain, that mindset changed," she says.

Recognition

Our society has time and again failed to give our women athletes the recognition they deserve. We would rather spend our spare time watching Ashwairya Rai dancing around trees than Karnam Malleshwari hefting a ton. Also Indian parents don't want their girl child to take up sports. Our male dominated society expects women to play only inside the kitchen.

Conclusion

With all these points in mind, we need to create a climate in which sports and fitness are for everyone to enjoy and where everyone's abilities are tested and respected. As women develop greater interest in sport, their own attitude to their bodies has changed and women's sporting performances have improved as a result of more competition. With the support from the media and respect from the public, female athletes will finally get the same recognition as their male counterparts. Over a long period of time women have demanded changes in society to give them equal status with men. Social change has gradually given women greater opportunities. But the battle for equal opportunities with man is still being fought. The socialist governments that have ruled this country since independence have failed to reform our culture. But no excellence in sports is possible until we have a culture that extols physical work. Our society has to work

towards a massive cultural reform such as:

- Increase the numbers of IOC members who are women, doubling the number by the year 2000.
- More women must be appointed to commissions and working groups as well as to the international federations and national Olympic committees, recommending the appointment of women
- Seminars for women in administration and leadership, coaching and sports journalism should be organized every year.
- The Olympic Study Centre is encouraged to make studies on the role of women and sport.
- The Government should allot a specific budget for women's sport.
- The SAI should start specific schemes for women only.

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