

# Sports as a Solution for Issues of Gender Discrimination

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## Abstract

Present article "Sports as a solution for issues of gender discrimination" discusses the world wide prevalent phenomena of gender discrimination and also highlights the monumental incidents from the world of sports and Olympics which played a decisive role in bringing about gender equality in sports and Olympics.

Discrimination and crime against women and girls is a globally pervasive and long-running phenomenon that is very evident in Indian society also at every level. India's ranking (130th) in UN Gender Development Index has been very disappointing, despite satisfactory economic growth rate in recent time. It's pathetic to know that women have been suppressed by their family members and society for many reasons and they have been targeted for many types of violence and discriminatory practices in the male dominated social system across the world. In present scenario it will be very unfair to keep women deprived of liberties, privileges and authorities which are enjoyed by the males. Ethically, morally and practically it is unfair to deny due respect and authority, which it deserve, to the 50% population of this planet.

Education, Social awareness and Legal Reforms are strong conventional measures to restore gender equality in society but these seems inadequate, so apart from conventional methods other alternatives also must be explored and adopted, and Sports seems to be a strong and valuable medium to bring about many social and cultural reforms across the world as sports has an universal presence followed and practiced by countless people world over. 'Sports' is a great school of human values in itself. Sports can provide the solutions for many prevailing social and cultural problems. Sports also had a dark phase of severe gender discrimination in the past but later various pioneers and their monumental efforts lead the way to bring about and establish gender equality in sports especially in Olympics. Same success stories also can be inspirational and instrumental for whole world in bring about and establish gender equality across the world in all spheres of life.

**Keywords:** GDI, HDI, Gender Discrimination, Gender Equality, Gender Stereotype, Olympic

## Introduction

Gender discrimination is an age old global phenomena. Women have been suppressed by their family members and society for many reasons. They have been targeted for many types of violence and discriminatory practices in the male dominated social system across the world. Wrong and old practices in the society from ancient times have taken the form of well-developed customs and traditions.

Evidences are there in ancient time, Vedic civilization onwards women were supposed to be under the patronage of men and they were denied the right to education, right to widow remarriage, right to inheritance and ownership of property. Later social evils like child marriage, dowry system, Sati Pratha, Devdasi Pratha in ancient India worsen the situations for women. During the British Raj, many social reformers such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, and Jyotirao Phule started agitations for the empowerment of women and as a result of their efforts Sati was finally abolished and the Widow Remarriage Act was formulated in 1856. Later, stalwarts like Mahatma Gandhi and Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru advocated women rights and as a result of their concentrated efforts that the status of women in social, economic and political life began to elevate in the Indian society. Although women in India have made a considerable progress in the seven-decade of Independence still the battle is only half won.

**Aim of the Study**

The aim of the present article is to highlight the possible causes of gender discrimination in the society and sports. It also aims at highlighting the struggle for gender equality in sports and Olympics, and how Olympic movement can be instrumental in promoting gender equality in present world.

**Beginning of Gender Discrimination and Crime Against Women**

Evolution of mankind has been full of its struggle against natural forces and its never ending all possible efforts to make adjustments with nature. But in later stages with development of man's ability of application of mind he started his endeavor to withstand and overcome natural forces. Then man was only a food seeker and was always struggling for protection and shelter. In primitive society 'might is right' was the only principle to survive, later it was called as principle of 'survival of the fittest', propounded by Darwin.

Gradually civilizations developed at different places of the world which turned into foundation and establishment of different families, clans, tribes, religions and religious leaders, kings and kingdoms. Through the different phases of ancient, medieval and modern ages, clash of clans, religions and kingdoms took place in order to expend its dominance and territories. Battles and wars were the inevitable parts of this process and killings, plundering and forceful possession of women by the winners were obvious outcome of these battles and wars. Everything apart, women were the worst victims of all such battles and wars across the world. Even mythological stories from anywhere in the world are full of instances where women were treated as an object to be fought for, as women from the defeated territories were considered as rewards and means of entertainment and amusement by the winning warriors' male fraternity. These were the earliest strong but bad indicators of male domination in the social systems across the world which resulted in formation of strong patriarchal social system almost everywhere in the world.

Centuries passed but condition of women remained pathetic. Social ethics and rules for women were framed by men. Even today condition is not much different and in this regard and India too is not an exception.

With change in time, tremendous positive changes were witnessed in social condition of women across the world especially in Europe. In today's modern age when active presence of women can be witnessed along with men in all walks of lives from the depths of deep oceans to the immeasurable heights of space, still lots of women are struggling with issues of gender inequalities in many parts of the world, especially in third world countries of Asia and Africa. Nature of issues of gender equalities may differ from place to place but one thing is common in all circumstances, that women have been denied the space and authority which they truly deserve in the society. In many countries' governments have granted women many legal rights and protections but practically still they are living the life under male controlled social system. At many places legal rights and protections to women are only documentary showpieces.

**What Gender and Gender Stereotype Refers To**

Gender is not being a man or a woman only; it is not simply a matter of having different biological and physical characteristics. Gender is a very inclusive term

which refers to the socially constructed social and cultural attributes and norms associated with being male or female. As the gender attributes and norms are socially constructed means that they are also subject to change or amendments with change of insight of the societies from time to time. In every society there are gender specific attributes, norms, values and responsibilities which men and women are expected to remain devoted and adhered to.

**Gender Stereotype**

A gender stereotype is a predetermined set of attitudes and behaviors that is believed to be typical of all men or women.<sup>3</sup> Gender stereotypes are one-sided and exaggerated images of men and women which are deployed repeatedly in everyday life.<sup>4</sup> Society expects males and females to adopt, believe in, and fulfill specific gender roles and stereotypes that have been established.<sup>5</sup>

Traditional female stereotypes treatment with females begins from birth itself and remains continued until death. Once a new baby's sex is revealed, manifestation of signs of typical gender stereotype start appearing, they are dressed in either blue or pink, given gifts of trucks and guns or dolls and animals, and referred to as strong and alert or soft and delicate. The new kids have to encounter these gender stereotypes throughout their lifetime. Traditionally, females have been expected to wear dresses, cook and clean, raise children, maintain a beautiful and delicate body, and remain passive, moral and pure. Women have been stereotyped as being feminine and attributes like being attractive, physically delicate, kind hearted, quiet and obedient, well behaved, emotional, submissive, nurturing are considered symbols of femininity.

On other hand males are expected to demonstrate certain characteristics and behaviours that are "masculine", they are expected to be strong, independent, born leaders, decisive, and athletic. Society demands compliance to the enforced gender order and violations of these gender norms are considered as threat and challenge to the social gender order especially in many Asian and African countries and India too is not an exception. Generally violators of traditional and prevailing social gender norms are ridiculed and discouraged, in worst case they are seen with great hate and scorn and even honour killings takes place in some cases. While "traditional" gender stereotypes have remained fairly constant over the past few centuries, they have also been challenged and confronted by many women and feminists.<sup>6</sup>

**Gender Equality**

Gender equality refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities to women and men, and girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration and recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men and same time giving due respect and space to the women specific natural phenomena like child birth and menstruation etc.. Gender equality is not a women's issue but should concern and fully engage men as well as women. Equality between women and men is seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of sustainable people-centered development.<sup>7</sup>

**Gender Inequality A Global Phenomena**

Almost 50% of the world population and Indian population comprise of females but they are kept deprived of liberties, privileges and authorities which are enjoyed by the males.

	<b>Total Population (Billion)</b>	<b>Female Population (Billion)</b>	<b>% of Female Population</b>
World Population (2017) <sup>8</sup>	7.53 approx.	3.73 approx.	49.55 approx.
Indian population (2011) <sup>9</sup>	1.21 approx.	0.58 approx.	48.00 approx.

Gender inequality is a matter of serious global concern since long long time. Even developed countries of present time also have a dark history of gender inequalities. Despite being 50% of world population females are not represented adequately neither in governance system nor at places of work.

Phenomena of gender inequality are not confined to the boundaries of families and homes only. Areas of work places, jobs, salaries, institutions, education, judiciary, politics, sports etc. are full of instances of gender inequalities and discrimination. In many countries women cannot own land or inherit money, have no legal protection from domestic abuse, are prohibited from taking a job if their husband opposes, and can only get access to credit, own a business, or apply for a passport if a male relative signs off.<sup>10</sup> Ethically, morally and practically it is unfair to deny due respect and authority, which it deserve, to the 50% population of this planet.

**Why World Need Gender Equality**

The words, "There is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women" said by Kofi Annan the former UN general secretary<sup>11</sup> are enough to tell the need and necessity of women empowerment. It's logical to think that how can almost 50% of world and Indian population, which comprises of female, can be left in margins? How can such a big human capital be kept ignored? Why their talent and capacities should be left unutilized for the welfare of themselves, their families and communities. Forced inequalities between men and women harm development and prosperity of the nation. Keeping in mind the ethics and standards of civilized world, serious intervention that everyone need to focus on to bridge the gender gap. Peace and prosperity are the inevitable positive outcomes of restoring gender equalities.

There is evidence that when women have the right to vote, spending on child welfare and public health increases. For example, in the year 1920 in US, within one year of women getting the right to vote, public health spending increased by 35% leading to decrease in childhood diseases and childhood mortality going down by 8–15%.<sup>12</sup>

**Sports as A Way to Overcom Gender Inequalities**

Education, Social Awareness and Legal Reforms are strong conventional measures to restore gender equality in society. But apart from conventional methods other alternatives also must be explored and adopted. Sports seems to be a strong and valuable medium to bring about many social and

cultural reforms across the world as sports has an universal presence followed and practiced by countless people world over. 'Sports' is a great school of human values in itself. Sports can provide the solutions for many prevailing social and cultural problems. Sports have the power and attraction to pull and bring world together for a common cause and in present world nothing can be bigger or stronger than sports. If we just look at only two global sports events Olympics and FIFA World Cup, these events are sort of world human congregation. It is coming together of human race not often experienced as people from vastly different nationalities, backgrounds, rich and poor, black and whites, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists, Jewish as well as the agonistics and atheists live through a set of shared emotions over the period of 16 days to one month. No other thing has such an attraction to which everyone from the world rush crossing, crushing and cutting all barriers. There are 'Religions' and then there is 'Sports'.

Sports is a sort of religion in itself and has the power to influence and transform such a big human capital then why can't it be used as a potential solution for issues and challenges human race suffering from. Sports can be an effective solution for various global socio-economic and cultural issues and challenges like gender discrimination, racial abuse, drug abuse, alertness towards HIV, religious intolerance, unemployment, crime etc. Each and every social problem is of critical nature and must be dealt with utmost seriousness and priority. Gender discrimination and gender inequalities are one area where sports can play a crucial role.

**Traces of Gender Inequality in Sports**

'Sports', which is being seen as a tool to deal with issues of gender discrimination and inequalities, also has been a victim of this problem in the past. But gradual evolvement and transformation that sports world has witnessed, to resolve the issues of gender discrimination and gender inequalities can be a benchmark and lesson for all institutions to deal with issues of gender discrimination and gender inequalities.

The 'sports and games' are as old as the human itself on this planet and it has been an integral part of all cultures and is one of the oldest forms of human social interaction. Though there are various mythological, pre-historic and ancient stories, examples and evidences indicating existence of varieties of sports and games in all civilizations and cultures across the world, but Ancient Olympic Games (776 BC)<sup>13</sup> can be considered as the benchmark for earliest documented organized form of multi sports competition in the history of mankind.

Olympic Games are modern world's biggest sports show. Sports is always known for its unique potential to bring all together for a common cause and participating in sports and games helps in nurturing the human values and virtues like sportsman spirit, leadership quality, respect for the authority, team spirit, physical and mental tolerance capacity etc.

**Traces of Gender Inequality in Ancient Olympics**

Ancient Olympic too have a history of gender discrimination and gender inequalities. Many examples of gender discrimination can be traced in history of Olympics also. The ancient Olympic Games were originally a festival or celebration of and for Zeus and were a series of athletic competitions among representatives of city-states and one of the Panhellenic Games of ancient Greece. The first Olympic is traditionally dated to 776 BC.<sup>14</sup>

One of the main themes of sport in ancient Greece was separation of genders. Only male athletes were allowed to participate in Olympics and they did not wear any clothes and competed naked. Instead of increasing females to participate and attend athletic events, women were extremely discouraged to participate in sports and extreme laws were in effect to stop women from attending the Olympics. Married women were prohibited from attending the Olympics by laws of Elis (the city that hosted the games). If a female participant was caught in the Olympic stadium, the city of Elis stated that they were to be thrown into the river from Mount Tylaion. This law while harsh and possibly lethal was never recorded as being enforced and infact there is a story of women who has violated the Olympic games law and social norm. Kallipateria, from a noble family disguised herself as a trainer to watch her son fight and win the Olympic prize for boxing during the award ceremony, Kallipatria rushed out to greet her son and congratulate him. Due to her status she went unpunished but because of her actions at every Olympics after trainers had to enter naked (to prove their gender). Not every woman was barred from Olympics though, as maidens were allowed to attend in order to facilitate these women in finding a male as a husband or lover. No women were allowed to participate in the sporting events of Olympics.<sup>15</sup>

Greeks being the sports loving civilization, later realized the need to have sports culture for females also so later they instituted separate games for females. The Heraean Games, the first recorded competition for women in the Olympic Stadium, were held as early as the sixth century BC after the beginning of Olympic games.<sup>16</sup> The ancient Heraean Games were known to be a series of athletic events in which only women athletes participated. This event was held to honor the Greek mythological goddess Hera. Just like the Olympic games, Heraean Games were held once every four years.<sup>17</sup>

In Greek culture privileges and liberties for women were very limited in comparison to men but Sparta state was an exception. Spartan women were famous in ancient Greece for having more freedom than elsewhere in the Greek world. To contemporaries outside of Sparta, Spartan women had a reputation for promiscuity and controlling their husbands. Unlike their Athenian counterparts, Spartan women could legally own and inherit property and they were usually better educated. Spartan boys were educated in the state arranged Agoge from the age of seven, state also institutionalised the education of girls. Unlike their male counterparts, however, Spartan girls would have been raised at home with

their mothers while they were being educated. Women also took part in gymnastics and dance as physical activities, so they could give birth to healthy babies. The Spartan exercise regimen for girls was designed to make them "every bit as fit as their brothers". They learnt to ride, other exercise for Spartan women included running, wrestling, throwing the discus and javelin, and "trials of strength". It is possible that Spartan girls exercised naked, and Archaic Spartan art certainly portrays naked girls, unlike the art of other areas of Greece. Girls might have competed in Gymnopaedia, the Spartan festival of naked youths. They also competed in running races for various festivals, of which the most prestigious was the Heraean Games. Spartan women normally married at around the age of 18 to Spartan men closely related in age. Since citizen boys were taken into military camps at the age of 7 for the purpose of training to eventually become a "Spartan" at around the age of 30, they were forced to sneak out of camps to find and see their wives. Men's absence from their families gave married women a great deal of freedoms and responsibilities. They owned the property and were in charge of the household while their husbands were away. Furthermore, the greatest importance of marriage within Sparta was the bearing of children. Women had a pivotal role for raising healthy and strong children; as a result they were required to maintain athleticism and good eating habits. For Sparta, all activities including marriage were direct with the single purpose of improving their military.<sup>18</sup>

It was seen as a guarantee that the strong and fit Spartan women would reproduce, and when they had babies, those babies would be strong warriors in the making. For even though Spartan women were allowed to mingle amongst the Spartan men, they were still seen as little more than baby-makers. Their methods and motives were just slightly different than the rest of the Greeks.<sup>19</sup>

The games were in decline for many years but continued past AD 385, by which time flooding and earthquakes had damaged the buildings and invasions by Roman barbarians had reached Olympia. In 394 Theodosius I abolished Olympic Games as these were considered a legacy of Greek culture and Romans were committed to destroy all signs of Greek legacy.

#### **Journey of Olympics towards Gender Equality**

For centuries Olympic Games remained in oblivion. With the Renaissance, Europe began a long fascination with ancient Greek culture, and in the 18th and 19th centuries some nations staged informal sporting and folkloric festivals bearing the name "Olympic Games." However, it was not until 1892 that a young French baron, Pierre de Coubertin, seriously proposed reviving the Olympics as a major international competition that would occur every four years.<sup>20</sup> Finally on April 6, 1896, the Olympic Games, a long-lost tradition of ancient Greece, are reborn in Athens 1,500 years after being banned by Roman Emperor Theodosius I. Since 1896 Olympic games are being held at regular interval of every 4 years. The games

scheduled to be held in 1916, 1940 and 1944 were canceled due to involvement of many countries in World Wars I and II.<sup>21</sup>

Involvement of women in all areas of life is on increase and sports can't be an exception. First Olympic in 1896 held without any female participants as de Coubertin felt that their inclusion would be "impractical, uninteresting, unaesthetic, and incorrect."<sup>22</sup> Writing in the Olympic Review in 1912: Coubertin defined the Games as "the solemn and periodic exaltation of male athleticism, with internationalism as a base, loyalty as a means, art for its setting, and female applause as reward". According to the sport historian Mary Leigh, he believed that "a woman's glory rightfully came through the number and quality of children she produced, and that as far as sports were concerned, her greatest accomplishment was to encourage her sons to excel rather than to Games, seek records for herself. With such strong feelings on the part of Coubertin, it is not surprising that women were excluded from the first modern-era Olympic Games, held in Athens in 1896. By the end of the nineteenth century and during the beginning of the twentieth century, industrialization and the impact of social reform through the women's movement changed the passive role of women to an active one. This change also was slowly becoming evident in sports.<sup>23</sup> Women participated for the first time at the 1900 Paris Games in only lawn tennis and golf. Only 22 women out of a total of 997 athletes competed in Paris Games.

Female participation has increased steadily since then, with women accounting for more than 45 percent of the participants at the 2016 Games in Rio, compared with 23 per cent at the Games in 1984 and just over 13 per cent at the 1964 Games in Tokyo. But in journey towards gender equality in Olympics there have been some interesting mile stones and turning points like Women swimming in Olympics started in 1912, but from America there was no participant as in America female athletes were not allowed to compete in events without long skirts.

Qatar, Brunei and Saudi Arabic all sent female participants first time in their history under the pressure of International Olympic Committee (IOC) to the London 2012 Olympic Games. Now every national Olympic committee will have to send women to the Olympic Games. With the addition of women's boxing at the 2012 London Games, there are men and women competing in all Olympic sports. However, there are still two sporting disciplines that are solely for women: synchronized swimming and rhythmic gymnastics.<sup>24</sup>

#### **Struggle for Gender Equality in Olympic Athletics**

Track and field events are the biggest attraction of Olympic and a large numbers of Olympic medals are given away in track and field events. Numbers of Olympic Track and field events in men and women category are almost equal. Some of the globally known biggest icons of Olympic games are females like Jackie Joyner Kaersee, Nadia Comeneci, Steffi Graff, Serena William many and more. Until 1928 women were kept away from the Athletics in Olympics on the pretext of being weak and unfit. The

story of inclusion of track and field for women in Olympics is very enlightening and full of struggle. In response to the exclusion of women from track and field in the Olympic Games, Alice Milliat of France founded the Fédération Feminine Sportive de France (FFSF) and Federation Sportive Feminine Internationale (FSFI) in 1917 and 1921 respectively to oversee national and international women's athletic competition. Challenging the arbitrary decision of IOC to not let women take part in Olympics' athletics, the FSFI conducted the first Ladies' Olympic Games in 1922 in Paris, parallel to Olympic Games. And similar games every four years until 1934, and the programme of athletic events rose as high as 15, with 19 countries participating in these games in 1934 in London. In fact, the 1924 Women's International and British Games were attended by 25,000 spectators.

When success and international acceptance of Ladies' Olympic Games and FSFI started threatening the international domination of the International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF), the men's international governing body, then IAAF became interested in absorbing the FSFI and agreed to allow women compete in the Athletics' events of the IX Olympiad in Amsterdam in 1928. But the struggle between the IAAF and FSFI for absorption went on for 14 years. The press of that time, still a male dominated institution, was decidedly against participation by women in the Olympic Games. It is result of struggle and efforts carried out through centuries that today women are sharing equal amount of opportunities and glory in the field of sports. But still issues and challenges remains to be addressed regarding gender equalities.<sup>25</sup>

#### **Extension of Gender Equality in Other Games**

Today numbers of games and events for men and women in Olympics are almost equal. Different games, after lot of struggle, made their debut in Olympic at different times. But emergence of women in games, which were considered only men's business before like hockey, football, weightlifting, judo, taekwondo, karate, wrestling, boxing, rugby and sports climbing, is a big boost in breaking gender stereotype and in women empowerment across the world. Today world championships are held in all games in women section also.

In addition to the problems of media coverage, girls and women are hindered by lack of input from women at the administrative level. Women are conspicuously absent from the upper-level management positions where policy is determined world-wide. An informal survey undertaken by the Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles in 1990 revealed some disturbing evidence. The study discovered that of the nearly 13,000 administrative positions available in North American sports and the Olympic Movement, a mere 5% were held by women. This is in stark contrast to the fact that women constitute more than 51% of the world's population. Change is in the air, however. And, it is coming from the top. In 1994, IOC President Juan Antonio Samaranch, a strong advocate of a greater inclusion of women in sport at all levels, asked that the Study Commission for the Centennial Olympic Congress,

Congress of Unity, examine the issue of women's participation in the Olympic Games. The Commission made several recommendations including a call for more women on the IOC, an expansion of the women's competition programme and the creation of incentives for National Olympic Committees (NOCs) and International sport Federations (IFS) to train women coaches and administrators.<sup>26</sup>

In the last 20 years, the IOC has also increased the number of women's events on the Olympic programme, in cooperation with the International Federations (IFs) and the Organising Committees. With the addition of women's boxing, the 2012 Olympic Games in London were the first in which women competed in every sport on the Olympic programme. At the Olympic Games in Rio in 2016, a new record of participation for women was reached with 45% female participation (5,176 women out of 11,444 athletes). Tokyo 2020 is predicted to be the most gender equal yet with female participation of 48.8% expected. Also, since 1991, all new sports wishing to be included on the Olympic programme must feature women's events.<sup>27</sup>

The IOC is committed to bring gender equality in sport. The Olympic Charter states that one of the roles of the IOC is "to encourage and support the promotion of women in sport at all levels and in all structures, with a view to implementing the principle of equality of men and women" - (Rule 2, paragraph 7). Its commitment extends well beyond its efforts to increase women's participation in the Olympic Games. The IOC also recognises that gender equality is a critical component of effective sports administration and continues to support the promotion of women and girls in sport at all levels and structures.<sup>28</sup>

Every year the IOC "Women and Sport" trophy is awarded to a person or an institution/organisation for their remarkable contribution to the development, encouragement and reinforcement of women's participation in sport and physical activity or in the administrative structures of sport.<sup>29</sup>

#### **Other Issues of Gender Inequalities in Sports**

Despite the fact that the law and governing bodies of different games ensure women athletes receive equal opportunities as received by men athletes, still major differences exist in pay, attention, recognition and exposure. In sports females are struggling to get equivalent status and are being discouraged from ages by prevalence of gender stereotype and sexist phrases like "play like a girl". So when a woman athlete shines, it stuns the entire world, it shatters the stereotypes of what women can do.

#### **Breaking Gender Stereotype through Sports**

Sports can be strongest medium to break and change the gender stereotype at all levels and places. The journey of women participation in Olympic Games from zero participation in Athens 1896 to a new record of participation for women with 45% female participation in Rio 2016 and Tokyo 2020 is predicted to be another mile stone in the quest to promotion of gender equality with highest ever female

participation (48.8%) and female events in history of Olympic. There will be 18 mixed events (9 more than Rio 2016) in Tokyo 2020. Total 15 new events will be added in Tokyo 2020, out of which in 11 events there will be involvement of women.<sup>30</sup> Increasing proportion of female participants in the Olympics is one of the strongest indicators of breaking of gender stereotype across the world.

#### **Role of Sports in Breaking Gender Stereotype & Promoting Gender Equality in India**

India is known for its peace loving culture in the world since ages. Though in Indian mythological scriptures women are depicted as goddesses but in reality condition of women is pathetic and agonies and miseries of Indian women are as horrible and terrible as it can be. In ancient India Child marriage, Dowry system, Sati system, Devdasi system etc. and in today's India, besides female foeticide and infanticide and other heinous crimes against women such as rapes, dowry deaths, and honour killings are big shame for so called civilized society. Though in India women are showing remarkable progress and seems to be enjoying all possible privileges and liberties but day by day rise in crime against women and minor girls, specially sexual crime is an indication that there is something terribly wrong in our (male's) social and mental sensitivity towards women.

Crime against women and minor girls, specially sexual crime has reached that alarming level where it produces havoc in minds of parents of any girl child, and it is so dreadful and shocking that new expecting parents even don't want to have a girl child. They prevent the birth of a girl child by aborting the female fetus as soon the sex of the prospective baby is detected (illegally) to be female. Aborting a fetus is not only illegal but also a heinous crime against humanity. In recent times abortion of female fetus has taken a form of epidemic which has reached an alarming level and causing a serious imbalance in gender ratio.

The trend was first noticed when results of the 1991 national census were released, and it was confirmed to be a worsening problem when results of the 2001 national census were released. The reduction in the female population of certain Indian states continues to worsen, as results of the 2011 national census have shown. It has been observed that the trend is most pronounced in relatively prosperous regions of India. The dowry system in India is often blamed; the expectation that a large dowry must be provided for daughters in order for them to marry is frequently cited as a major cause for the problem. Pressure for parents to provide large dowries for their daughters is most intense in prosperous states where high standards of living, and modern consumerism, are more prevalent in Indian society.<sup>31</sup>

Safety of women and girl child has become an issue of grave concern for government also. As per the census 2011 the sex ratio in India is 943 per 1000 males which was 933 in the previous census 2001. Lowest sex ratio in India was in Haryana, where sex ratio is only 879 whereas the highest sex ratio was in Kerala (1084).<sup>32</sup> According to the data available in

website of NITI AYOJ the sex ratio (Females per 1000 Males) at birth in India in 2013-15 is 900, the lowest sex ratio in India is in Haryana (831), whereas the highest sex ratio is in Kerala (967) and figures of Delhi (869), Gujarat (854), Maharashtra (878), Punjab (889), Rajasthan (861), Uttar Pradesh (879), Uttarakhand (844) also are not very encouraging where sex ratio is well below than national ratio.<sup>33</sup> Haryana, a prosperous state of India, is worst hit by the problem of severe gender discrimination.

Taking cognizance of deteriorating sex ratio, government of India launched the Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (BBBP) scheme on 22 January 2015 with aims to address the issue of the declining child sex ratio (CSR) image and is a national initiative jointly run by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and the Ministry of Human Resource Development. It initially focused multi-sector action in 100 districts throughout the country where there was a low CSR. On 26 August 2016, medal winner in Olympics 2016 Miss Sakshi Malik was made brand ambassador for BBBP.<sup>34</sup>

#### **Sports is Hope to Restore Gender Equality in Indian Society**

India is not a strong sports nation. In the history of Olympics, India just could manage to win only 28 medals overall. It can't be said an encouraging sign for a nation like India with second biggest world population. Numbers of Olympic medal is a strong indicator of the health and wealth of a nation. If you look at the top 10 medal winning nations of last three Olympics there is no surprise change. In Rio Olympic too top 10 in the medals table are those that are listed as 'high income' by the World Bank. So the connection between wealth and sporting performance still remains very strong. But wealth alone cannot predict medals. Health, literacy and standards of living are all important factors too. So it's not surprising that the top 10 countries in medal standings, with the exception of China, are also in 'Very High Human Development' category in UNDP's Human Development Index (HDI)<sup>35</sup>. India finished poorly at 67<sup>th</sup> in medal tally with only 2 medals tells the story of dismal condition of its human resources. Surprisingly the 2 medals won by India in Rio Olympic 2016 were won by PV Sindhu and Sakshi Malik, a very evident indicator of emergence of girl power in sports and same time it is also a signal for government of India, that girls too can produce miracles, if they are given good care and encouragement.

Rio 2016 has given a big boost to the quest to promotion of gender equalities in India and Sakshi Malik being from Haryana is a pleasant coincidence. Medals of Sakshi Malik has given a very strong and positive message regarding promotion of gender equalities in India, particularly in Haryana. Sakshi Malik is the brand ambassador of government's Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao drive to protect and educate girl child. Besides Sakshi Malik, from Haryana there are other girls also who, one after another, are continuously bringing laurels to the country. Vinesh, Geeta, Babita and Ritu Fogat, Divya kakran and latest

being Sonia Chahal again from Haryana who won the silver medal in her maiden attempt in the just concluded Women's World Boxing Championship held in New Delhi in 2018. Perception in Haryana towards girl child is changing positively, thanks to the remarkable and admirable achievements by daughters of Haryana.

Mary Kom, a legend like no other, a great inspiration for women across the world, continues to thrill the world. In just concluded Women's World Boxing Championship in Delhi Mary Kom won gold in 48 kg weight category. It's her 6<sup>th</sup> gold in world Boxing Championship. She has won one silver in world Boxing Championship. With total 7 World Boxing Championship medals, the 'Magnificent Mary', a mother of three children, also matched Cuban legend Felix Savon as the joint most successful pugilist (men and women) in the world Boxing Championship history. Indian sports women continue to thrill the world by their brilliant performances at highest levels.

Emergence of Indian women at world level in games like wrestling and boxing, which were considered unconventional and very difficult for them, is helping to break the jinx and gender stereotype in the society and the image of Indian women is changing very rapidly as they are becoming more daring and expressive. Still there are more rules to be broken and prejudices to be overcome.

Today besides Sakshi Malik and P V Sindhu India has many other female sports icons like Saina Nehwal, Mary Com, Harmanpreet Kaur, Sania Mirza, Geeta Fogat, Mithali Raj, Deepa Karmakar, Deepika Kumari, Jhoolan Goswami and many more who have done India proud at international levels. Success in sports is a great means to earn name, fame and money which gives hope and confidence to Indian girls and it is a big motivation for Indian parents also to send their daughters to sports.

In the year 1959 Arati Saha achieved the impossible by becoming the first Indian woman to cross the English Channel in 16 hours and 20 minutes. She was also the first ever Asian woman to achieve such big feat. The English Channel that separates southern England from Northern France is often compared to climbing Mount Everest because to cross the English Channel is as hard as scaling the Mount Everest.<sup>36</sup> After that the year 1984 can be said a major landmark in breaking gender stereotype conception of age old orthodox shameful thinking of Indian society, when Bachendri Pal and PT Usha became first ever Indian women to conquer Mount Everest and to reach in the final of an Olympic athletics' event (400 meter hurdle race) respectively. After that several stories of success of Indian women started surfacing, and since then there was no looking for Indian women.

Indian women cricket team reached in the semifinal of just concluded ICC Women's T20 world cup 2018. In 2017 Indian girls had finished as runner-up behind England in the ICC Women's World Cup. Two girls Ekta Bisht and Mansi Joshi from Uttarakhand were part of this very successful Indian team need a special mention as Uttarakhand being a small Himalayan state with limited exposure to women and

sex ratio (at birth) being less than national sex ratio (at birth), it is a big achievement in itself and is a strong divine message to spread awareness for gender equality in small hill state. Sports seem to be a big help in overcoming the issues of gender discrimination in India.

### Conclusion

Sport and the Olympic Movement have long been held in high regard for their ability to appreciate and celebrate human excellence. The Olympic Movement has been responsible for bringing together nations of the world. And, despite a rather slow start, the Olympic Movement has been instrumental in spreading opportunities for women in sports throughout the world. The challenge for all of us is to keep the effort under way. After 1990s enormous positive changes has come in the political environment of the world. This environment of change should be used by all of us who care about sport to ensure that women and girls truly exercise their right to participate fully in the world of sports.<sup>37</sup> Government of India must use the potential of sports to restore gender equalities in society. India can't afford to ignore the potential of its half of the human resources and sports can provide a strong and enduring solution for its many social problems including gender inequalities.

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