

**Women and Sports: The Long Struggle**

Dr.Parmdeep kaur Tiwana

Asst.professor Physical Education
Khalsa college Patiala (PUNJAB), India

Abstract:

From the ancient times men had been playing the leading role in the field of sports. At That time, in the Olympics women were not allowed even to watch the sports. There was no place for the women in sports. In Olympics women had to struggle a lot to keep themselves standing along with men. After a long struggle women had created a milestone in the women history by proving themselves equal to men in sports. Initially, when women were allowed to participate in sports, only some of events were included for them e.g.in 1900 Paris Olympics, tennis, golf and Yachting were included for women. But as time passed the women had shown that they can participate and win every sports .So in present time even sports like boxing, wrestling, had also been included for women. Still there are some problems which are being faced only by women of under development and undeveloped countries as compared to developed countries. Sometimes their social restrictions and traditions become hurdle for them. Talking of Indian women, although their entry in sports at world level was far behind of European , American and Australian women , yet their performance in commonwealth 2011 is as appreciable as above said foreigner women .Lastly women have a long road ahead to reach, if ever ,true equality with men.

Participation of women in sports has been a matter of fear, anxiety and protest in the male dominated society for many decades. In the Ancient times, women could not think of participating in games, they were not even allowed to watch the games. In the Ancient Olympic Games, participation was limited only to men. During the Modern Olympic Games, held in 1896, there was no participation from women. In fact, the founder of the Modern Olympics, Baron Pierre de Coubertin, denied them the right to participate in the games by saying that it is "Impractical, Uninteresting, Unaesthetic and Incorrect". Apart from this, on several occasions, he had even said that the Olympics had no place for women. He felt that rather than seeking records for herself, a woman's greatest achievement was to encourage her sons to excel.

In real terms, Women's arrival in games began during 1840-1901. But this was not given any recognition. As Mariah Burton Nelson had aptly remarked in the context of women's participation in sports, "sports alter the balance of power between the sexes. It changes lives. It empowers women, thereby, inexorably changing everything."³ Therefore, ultimately after a long struggle, women could secure their place in the Olympic games in 1900 but only three games were included for them. They were: Tennis, Golf and Yachting. Women have embarked a long journey in the quest of due respect and recognition in the field of sports. Women's participation in sports had become an important issue in 1920's and 1930's. Alice Milliat of France had made a tremendous contribution in this direction. The idea of women Olympic Games was actually her brain child. Alice Milliat was a translator by profession, a rower and sports administrator by avocation she was the founder and President of La Federation Sportive Feminine International and was an amateur Rowing player and sports co-ordinator. She started sports event for women mainly to raise her voice against the discriminating attitude of IOC and IAAF, as these institutes were almost refusing to begin games for women.

For this purpose, Alliac Milliat, first of all, made IOC give equal status on the basis of sex and it was her sheer dedication and achievement that woman could get opportunities to grow in the field of sports.

Charlatte Cooper of Britain, after bagging Gold medal in Paris Olympic Games, held in 1900, had become a source of inspiration for large number of women. French Athlete Fanny Blankers Koen was the first Woman who won 4 medals in a single sport. Larissa Latynina of Soviet Union Set a new record by bagging 9 Gold, 4 Silver and 4 Bronze medals. Nawal El Moutawekel of Moroccan made distinctions by winning a Gold Medal in 400m hurdle race. After getting recognition in sports, there was no age bar for women.

Luigina Giavotte won Gold Medal when she was just 11 years and 10 months old. On the other side, Lorna Johnstone (70 years), member of Equestrian Team of Great Britain, refused the concept of age in sports by participating in Olympic.

Despite the great contribution of women in sports, her role has been suppressed. According to Nelson, "Feminism is about freedom: individual and collective liberty to make decisions. Sports have freed women, and continue to free women, from restrictive dress behaviours, law and customs, and from the belief that women can't or should not achieve or compete or win".⁴

Although, the beginning of sports was quite feeble/weak but women have carved a niche for themselves in a patriarchal set up. According to Vertinsky, "The beginning of Women's sports was feeble but women's demands for sport and physical education were expression of varied attempts at female liberation that would become increasingly evident as the century matured".⁵ This demand and freedom of women gradually started showing its effect. Women sports persons have started participating equally to men in various sports events with sheer hard work.

It is possible for women to take part in any sport of their own choice in today's world i.e. wrestling, Boxing and Body building events. As these sports have been known/only to be meant for men/ for men's mastery over them. Women have refused the fact completely that the fair sex is physically weaker by participating and winning such man dominated sports. Women athletes play and challenge men athletes in almost every sport or event. A typical athlete is an empowered woman who is competitive, strong and enjoys taking risks.

In the field of sports, the Olympics are known as the biggest meet of many sports. Athletes in this meet do not play for a team or club, they represent their country and competing for country in the Olympics is considered the highest honour for the Athletes. In this modern era, in Olympics, difference of victory between men and women can be a matter of not more than a few centimeters or a fraction of seconds in the sports world. So, after a long struggle women have almost achieved their target. In the beginning when the modern Olympics were started, it was believed that women were not suited emotionally or socially to strenuous and competitive physical activities.

But today they have proved that they are not feeble. They have competed men in every field of sports.

When a comparison is made between the performance of men and women a very slight difference is noticed in Athletics events. In 100m sprint, the difference between a man

named Usain Bolts (time 9.58 seconds) and a woman named Florence Griffith Joyner (time 10.49 seconds) is 0.91 seconds and in the 200m sprint the difference is 2.15 seconds of above said person. Similarly in the event of 800 meters the difference is just 0:12:27 seconds by Rudhisha (Kenya) in male category and Jarmila Korstadinons (Czechoslovakia) in female category. When the 20,000 meter male and female walkers are compared with each other, the difference is only 0:01:99:0 seconds between Mexican Walker Bunardo Segura and Russian women Olimpiada Ivanova. The 4 x 200 relay racer's result show the difference 0:8: 78 seconds and in case of 4 x 400 meter relay race, the difference is 0: 47: 74.

When the field events (shot put, high jump and long jump) are compared with each other, in the event of high jump the difference is 0.36m in Cuban man Javile Sotomayor and woman Stefka Kostadinova (United States). Similarly in the event of long jump the difference is 1.43 m between male jumper Mike Powell (United States) and female jumper Galina Chistyakov (Soviet Union). In throwing events when shot-putters were compared in both sexes the difference is only 0.49 m between Randy Barnes (man) and Natalya Isovskaya (woman).

Many women all over the world have not only won medals in Olympic games but also headed various institutions and have graced the designations of chairman and general secretary of national Olympic Committee. Besides they have made their mark and have established themselves successfully in the fields of coaching, sports manager and sports journalism.

Entry of Indian women in the Olympics was quite late than the women of other countries as Europe, America, Africa, Australia and France. Foreign women started getting equal rights to men in Europe and American society due to women empowerment which resulted in participation of women in sports in the beginning of 19th and 20th century. On the other side, Indian women are still struggling for the right of equality. In Ancient period, if we analyse Indian women in the past history of sports, of women participation in sports was like a nightmare. Her position was worse in Indian culture.

Medieval India is supposed to be the 'dark age' for Indian women. Medieval India saw many foreign conquests which resulted in the decline in women's status. When foreign conquerors like Mughals invaded India they brought with them their own culture. For them woman was the sole property of her father, brother or husband and she did not have any will of her own. Major reason for the decline in women's status was polygamy. Polygamy system was prevalent among these foreign conquerors. These invaders would

picked up any woman they wanted and kept her in their 'harems'. In order to protect themselves Indian women started using 'Purdah' which covered that body. Due to this reason their status and freedom also became affected. They were not allowed to move freely and this led to further deterioration of their status.

Problems mentioned above resulted in changed mindset of people. Now they began to consider a girl as misery and burdon, which had to be shielded from the rages of intruders and needed extra care. All this gave rise to some new evils such as child marriage, restriction on girl education and many other activities like dancing, playing and freedom. So under this situation playing or trying to play was a far away thing, Even the girls had to struggle hard for her life.

The status of women in modern India is a sort of a paradox. If on one hand she is at the peak of ladder of success, on the other hand she is mutely suffering the violence, customs and women feticide affiliated on her by her own family members. No doubt, women in modern times have achieved a lot still they have to struggle for going outdoors. Instead of this, women have left secured domain of their home and are now in the battlefield of life, fully asmoured with their talent to achieve the heights and they have come out of the alleged laws and customs and trying to achieve their targets. They have proved themselves. But the sex ratio shows that Indian society is still prejudiced against women.

In comparison to the developed countries, there is discrimination with Indian Women. In spite of this, Indian women are achieving special targets in the field of sports, which is inspiration for other women. Likewise P.T. Usha has the honour of becoming the first woman to participate in the Olympic Games. She is also known as 'Golden Pari' and 'Running Machine'. If we go though the history we came to know that N. Polley was the first women to participate in Olympic Games in 1924, but there is no cogent proof in its support. Shiny Wilson and K.M. Beenamol have performed extraordinary to reach upto the Olympic level. Anju Bobby George has also participated in the Olympics, Common Wealth and other International level programs and by winning Silver Medal in IAAF World Athletic Meet has provided honour to India. Karnam Malleswari was the first Indian lady to secure Bronze Medal in the field of Weight Lifting in the Olympics and she has also maintained her name at International level. Asha Aggarwal in 100m hurdles, Bobby Aloysius in high jump, Geeta Zutshi in 800m & 1500m respectively, Harwant Kaur in Discuss Throw, Jyotimoyee in 800 m & 1500m, Kamaljeet Sandhu in Relay Race, Krishna Poonia in Discuss throw, M.d. Valsamma in 400m hurdles, Prajusha Maliakkal in Long Jump & Triple Jump, Manjeet Kaur in 4 x 400 m relay race & 100m and many other athletes have also achieved in various other

sports and have inspired other Indian Women for the equal participation with the other women of the world.

Telling women they are weak only makes them stronger. Telling women they are not good enough pushes them harder. Women athletes are impassioned, hardworking and dedicated group of women who will persevere no matter how society deals with them. Needless to say, "Women have a long road ahead to reach, if ever, true equality with men."

Event	Sex	Record	Diff.	Athlete	Nationality	Date	Meet	Place
100 m progression	Men	9.58 (+0.9m/s)	0.91	U. Bolt	Jamaica	16-8-09	World Champions	Berlin, Germany
	Women	10.49 (0.0m/s)		F.G. Joyner	United States	16-7-88	US Olympic Trials	Indianapolis United States
200 m progression	Men	19.19 (-0.3m/s)	2.15	U. Bolt	Jamaica	20-8-09	World Champions	Berlin, Germany
	Women	21.34 (+1.3m/s)		F. G. Joyner	United States	29-9-88	Olympic Games	Seoul, South Korea
800 m progression	Men	01:41.01	0:12.27	D. Rudisha	Kenya	29-8-10	Rieti Meeting	Rieti, Italy
	Women	01:53.28		J.Kratochvilova	Czechoslovakia	26-7-83		Munich, Germany
20,000 m walk (track)	Men	1:17:25.6	0:01:99.0	B. Segura	Mexico	07-5-94		Bergen, Norway
	Women	1:26:52.3		O. Ivanova	Russia	06-9-01		Brisbane, Australia
4X200 m relay	Men	01:18.68	0:08.78	M. Marsh L. Burrell F. Heard C. Lewis	United States	17-4-94	Mt. SAC Relays	Walnut, United States
	Women	01:27.46		L. Jenkins, L. C. Richardson, N. Perry, M. Jones	United State	20-4-00	Penn Relays	Philadelphia, United States
4X800 m relay	Men	07:02.43	0:47.74	J.Mutua, W.Yiampoy, I. Kombich, W. Bungei	Kenya	25-8-06	Memorial Van Damme	Brussels, Belgium
	Women	07:50.17		N.OliZarenko, L. Gurina, L. Borisova, I.Podyalovsayas	Soviet Union	05-8-84		Moscow, Soviet Union

Table 1: Difference between men and women in some track events(Athletics)

Source: <http://www.wikipedia.com> (The list of athletics world records)

Event	Sex	Record	Diff .	Athlete	Nationality	Date	Meet	Place
High jump progression	Men	2.45 m	0.36 m	J.Sotomayor	Cuba	27-7-93		Salamanca, Spain
	Women	2.09 m		S.Kostandinova	Bulgaria	30-8-87	World Championships	Rome, Italy
Long jump progression	Men	8.95m (+0.3 m/s)	1.43 m	M.Powell	United States	30-8-91	World Championships	Tokyo, Japan
	Women	7.52 m (+1.4m/s)		G.Chistyakova	Soviet Union	11-6-88		Leningrad, U.S.S.R
Shot put progression	Men	23.12 m	0.49 m	Randy Barnes	United States	20-5-90	Jack in the box	Westwood United States
	Women	22.63 m		N.Lisovskaya	Soviet Union	07-6-87		Moscow, Soviet Union

Table 2: Difference between men and women in some field events (Athletics)

Source: <http://www.wikipedia.com> (The list of athletics world records)

Reference

1. J. Larkin et al. (2007) stated that it is true in all countries that girls and women are less likely than boys and men to participate in sport, and sport continues to be dominated by males.
2. C. Hannan, Challenging the gender order (Keynote speech to the fourth world conference on women and sport, Kumamoto, Japan, 11-14 May 2006).
3. Nelson, Burton Mariah "Who we might Become." Nike is a Goddess, Ed. Lissa Smith. New York: Atlantic, 1998.
4. Ibid.
5. Vertinsky Patricia "Women, sport, and exercise in the 19th century" Women and Sport. Ed. D. Margaret Costa. Champaign: Human Kinetics, 1994.
6. <http://olympicwomen.co.uk>
7. <http://www.wikipedia.com> (The list of Altheletics World Records)