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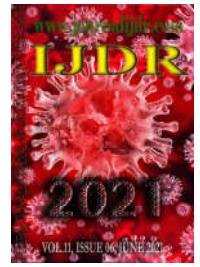
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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN SPORTSPERSONS FROM INDIA IN THE MODERN OLYMPIC GAMES: A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The primary objective of the study is to discuss the female participation from India in the Modern Olympic Games. This is a descriptive research based on the secondary data collected from sources such as the factsheets and reports available on the websites of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) and many other publications published by various authors on this issue. The results represent that the participation of women sportspersons from India in the Modern Olympic Games was uncertain and insignificant till 2000. From 2000 onwards, this number increased and in 2016 Rio Olympic Games, the female participation from India raised to 46.15% of the total participation from the country. This increase can be attributed to a number of initiatives introduced to broadbase sports in India and also to produce excellence.

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INTRODUCTION

"There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing."¹ The 'gender diversity challenge'² portrays that, though there is a significant progress toward gender equality in sports, the male and female sportspersons are still treated differently in many aspects. Evidences suggest that the sports managers, coaches and fans treat women athletes differently and their performances are often seen as inferior to that of their male counterparts in terms of competitiveness. This perception is creating barrier for the women sportspersons to get equal access to resources and facilities necessary to attain excellence in sports. As an alternative, Mary Jo Kane (cited in Cunningham, B, George 2019), a Sports Sociology Professor, suggests a continuum. The 'exceptional performance' is placed at one end of the continuum, while the 'poor performance' is placed at the other end. Examination

of the collected data reveals that the men and the women sportspersons fall all along the continuum.

This means that some women will outperform the men in sports, as some men will outperform the women. From this analysis, it can be said that the performances of female athletes are not inferior to that of the male athletes in all aspects and thus equal access must be provided to the female sportspersons. Otherwise, such a dispersion cannot be removed. Women participation in leadership positions in sporting organisations was insignificant for a long period of time. Bierema, Barescoll (2016, cited in Cunningham, B, George 2019) stated that the expectations from female leaders are different from that of the male leaders. The social expectations from female leaders are that they should be caring, supportive and nurturing. On the contrary, the social expectations from the male leaders are that they should be strong, authoritative and someone who can take charge. The authors stated that this social perception acts as a deterrent for the

women participation in the leadership positions in the sporting organisations.

India is a country where traditional attitude and religious myths of people have constructed to form the social culture that defines the gender roles in the society. An Indian woman has traditionally been observed as a liability, who has to be maintained and has roles limited towards the family and household. The rigid belief of the society has always considered women to be naturally weaker than men and therefore the negligence towards women in any aspect of life has been huge. In a country where there has been a general lack of healthy attitude towards women, a negative approach towards the women playing sports is evident throughout the history. The participation of women in sporting activities has been discouraged not only because of their traditionally defined roles in the society, but also because of the mentality of people which defines women to be incapable physically and mentally to take part in the sporting activities. Due to these reasons, women sportspersons in India often face the never ending discrimination in competitive sports and physical activities not only from their families, but also from the majority of the sporting organizations and hence many of them do not receive the desired organizational support required for their excellence in sports.

However, despite all the challenges and struggles, many Indian women have made the country proud by achieving excellence in the global sporting arena. Their achievements are indeed the driving force towards a slow change in the social perception which helps the Indian women to take up sports. These changes have led to many regulations and actions that recognizes women's rights at all levels of society and culture, including sports related gender issues. However, even with the rise in women participation in sports over time, majority of women population still lacks the support and facilities required to develop and progress. The objective of this research work is to determine the status of Indian women participation in the Modern Olympic Games by analyzing the secondary data collected from the official websites of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), Indian Olympic Association (IOA) and other journals. The results show that the participation of women sportspersons from India in the initial years of the Modern Olympic Games had been very irregular and negligible compared to the men's participation in the games. It was only after 2000 when India started sending decent number of women athletes to the games on a regular basis.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are stated below:

- To find and explain the participation of Indian women sportspersons in the Modern Olympic Games
- The initiatives taken in India to promote women participation in sports

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This is a descriptive research based on the secondary data collected from the publications of the IOC, IOA, various sports websites, journals, magazines, previous research works etc. In order to analyze the trend of the women participation from India in the Modern Olympics Games, the quantitative data available on the websites of the IOC and the IOA have also been taken into consideration.

Limitation of the Study: The limitation of the study is that the study is based on the secondary research as there was lack of comprehensive response from the respondents and the responses were also socially biased.

RESULTS

Status of participation of Indian women in the Modern Olympic Games: The status of women in India has been the subject of many

transformations over the past few centuries. With a decline in their status from the ancient times to their promotion in many areas in the recent times, the journey of women in India has been eventful. Since their first participation in the 1924 Modern Olympic Games, the rate of participation of Indian women contingent in the Olympic Games had been very poor and full of struggle for a long period of time. The reasons for this are many, including psychological, social and economic problems associated with the participation of women in sporting activities which led to non-participation of Indian women in the initial years of the Modern Olympic Games. In the recent times, several Indian women sportspersons participated in the Modern Olympic Games and five of them had won the Olympic Medals as well. The first female sportsperson from India, who won a Bronze Medal in the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games in weightlifting, was Karnam Malleswari³. In 2012 Summer Olympic Games, which took place in London, women's boxing became a part of the programme and India was represented by the five-time world champion, Mary Kom⁴, who was the only Indian to qualify for this event. She won the Bronze Medal after losing to Nicola Adams⁵ of the UK in the semi-final. Saina Nehwal⁶ became the first Indian to win a Bronze Medal in badminton in the 2012 London Olympic Games. Sakshi Malik⁷ was the first Indian woman to win a Bronze Medal in Women's 58 kg freestyle wrestling in 2016 Rio Olympic Games. P.V. Sindhu⁸ became the first ever Indian woman to win a Silver Medal at the Olympic Games by reaching the Badminton final at the Rio Olympics 2016. Though she lost to Carolina Marin⁹ of Spain in the final match, she became the youngest female sportsperson of India to win an Olympic Medal.

Apart from the medal winners, the Indian women in the recent times have been showing great performances in the Olympic Games. In the Rio Olympics 2016, the women were leading India's Olympic charge. For a country, where the women participation in sports has long been ignored and hence not supported, securing world class performances by female athletes has created an emerging generation of national icons. Dipa Karmakar¹⁰, for example, became the first gymnast from India to compete in the Olympic Games. Though she missed out on medals, she got the fourth place in the individual vault final and won the hearts of the sports loving people of India. Lalita Babar¹¹ became the first female athlete from India who qualified for an individual Olympic track and field event since 1984. Aditi Ashok¹², the eighteen years old emerging golf icon of the country, became the youngest contender in the women's golf event. The successes of these women sportspersons not only established them as the sporting idols of the country, but also created a platform for Indian women to participate and excel in the sporting activities.

Table 1.0. Medals won by the female sportspersons from India in various Summer Olympic Games

Year	Name	Medal	Event
2000 Sydney	Karnam Malleswari	Bronze	Weightlifting (69 Kg category)
2012 London	Saina Nehwal	Bronze	Badminton (Women's Singles)
2012 London	Mary Kom	Bronze	Boxing (Women's Flyweight)
2016 Rio de Janeiro	P.V. Sindhu	Silver	Badminton (Women's Singles)
2016 Rio de Janeiro	Sakshi Malik	Bronze	Wrestling (Women's Freestyle 58 Kg.)

(Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_women_at_the_Olympics)

Women Sportspersons from India in the Modern Olympic Games: This area of the study focuses on the comparative analysis of the number of women athletes from India participated in the Modern Olympic Games with that of the male participation from India. This comparison is represented in table 2.0. The percentage of female participation in the Olympic Games with respect to the total participation is also given in the table. The graphical representation of the number of Indian women participating in the Modern Olympic Games in comparison with that of the men since 1900 is represented below:

Table 2.0. Women participation from India in the Modern Olympic Games

Year	Men Athletes	Women Athletes	Total Athletes	% of Women
1900	1	0	1	0
1920	5	0	5	0
1924	13	2	15	13.3
1928	21	0	21	0
1932	22	0	22	0
1936	27	0	27	0
1948	79	0	79	0
1952	60	4	64	6.3
1956	58	1	59	1.7
1960	45	0	45	0
1964	52	1	53	1.9
1968	25	0	25	0
1972	40	1	41	2.4
1976	26	0	26	0
1980	58	18	76	23.7
1984	41	7	48	14.6
1988	39	6	45	13.4
1992	47	6	53	11.3
1996	44	4	48	8.3
2000	45	20	65	30.8
2004	48	25	73	34.3
2008	32	25	57	43.9
2012	60	23	83	27.7
2016	63	54	117	46.15

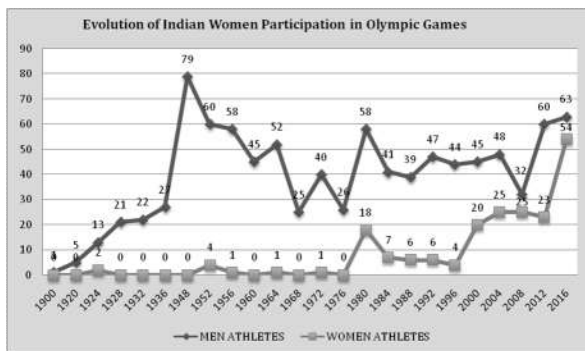


Table 3.0. Grouped Frequency Distribution of the women participation in the Modern Olympic Games

Class Interval	Class Frequency
0-9	18
10-19	1
20-29	4
30-39	0
40-49	0
50-59	1

From table 3.0, it can be observed that the maximum class frequency (18) is in the class interval of '0-9' which clearly reflects the poor plight of the women participation from India in the Modern Olympic Games. However, an improvement can also be observed from table 2.0 in the number of women participants from India in the Olympic Games since 2000. The grouped frequency distribution of the male participation in the Modern Olympic Games is given below:

Table 4.0. Grouped Frequency Distribution of the male participation in the Modern Olympic Games

Class Interval	Class Frequency
0-9	2
10-19	1
20-29	5
30-39	2
40-49	7
50-59	3
60-69	3
70-79	1

From the above table, the maximum class frequency (7) can be observed in the class interval of '40-49' and the class frequencies can

also be seen in the class intervals of 50-59, 60-69 and 70-79, which are 3, 3 and 1 respectively. This clearly represents that the male participation was much higher than the female participation from India in the Modern Olympic Games. However, the gap between the male and female participation from India in the Modern Olympic Games reduced in 2016 when 63 male athletes and 54 female athletes participated in the Rio Olympic Games (Table 2.0).

DISCUSSION

From the above tables and graph, it can be said that the number of female participation from India in the Modern Olympic Games had been very uncertain and less compared to the male participation. India sent far lower number of women sportspersons to the Olympic Games till 2000 and the overall size of its Olympic contingent is also significantly small in number. From table 2.0, it can be observed that the country did not send any female sportsperson to the Olympic Games for quite a number of times. Till 1976, the number of female participants from India had mostly remained 0, the highest being 13.3% (2 out of 15 participants) in 1924. From table 2.0, it is also revealed that India started sending a significantly higher number of female sportspersons to the games since 2000. From 2000 onwards, India started sending quite a number of deserving female participants to the Games. Despite the increase in number, the rate of female participation was irregular and unpredictable. In the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, the female participation was 43.9% of total participation from India and in 2012 London Olympics, the female participation reduced to 27.7% of total participation. However, in 2016 Rio Olympic Games, the female participation increased again to 46.15% of total participation from India, which marks the highest number of Indian women participation in the Modern Olympic Games since its inception.

Despite the recent increase in the participation of the female sportspersons from India in the Modern Olympic Games, the uneven societal pattern of behaviour towards women athletes and lack of organizational support are still creating obstacles in female participation in sports in India and their participation can further be increased only if these obstacles can be removed. Sport, once considered as a leisurely and co-curricular activity in India, is now taken up by many as a serious career option. The important sports developmental schemes, including the Khelo India Programme¹³, Fit India Movement¹⁴ and Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS)¹⁵ are playing instrumental roles in broad-basing sports in India, especially among the female population of the country. To encourage women participation in sports, creating a safe environment is a must, which should be combined with an easy access to coaching and infrastructural facilities. The public and the non-profit sectors of sports must work together to fulfill these conditions. The holistic development of sports in India is possible only if more women participate and excel in the sporting activities.

The objective of the Khelo India Programme is to inculcate a culture of sports in India, which is a prerequisite in achieving excellence in sports. An important component of this scheme is to encourage women participation in sports by creating an appropriate mechanism for them. As a result, the women participation in the Khelo India Programme increased by 161%¹⁶ from 2018 to 2020¹⁷. The objective of the Target Olympic Podium Scheme is to excel in Olympic sports through the provision of international training, facilities, physical and mental conditioning, financial assistance to elite athletes and proper monitoring of the progress. The focus is to prepare the elite athletes of the country so that they can win gold medals at the Olympic Games. In 2018, 86 female sportspersons were selected under this scheme, but at present, the number increases to 190, an increase of 220%¹⁸. It is important to note that a number of female sportspersons of India, who made the country proud at the global sporting arena, have set up their academies with the objectives of expanding the reach of sports and producing champions.

Mary Kom Boxing Foundation, Usha School of Athletics, Anju Bobby George Sports Foundation, Ashwini's Sports Foundation are

some of the examples. Many of these initiatives are supported by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Government of India. It is pertinent to mention that the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Government of India, also set up a high level committee to resolve the grievances and complaints of the women sportspersons. The above schemes and initiatives are playing an important role in encouraging Indian women to participate in sporting activities and also in achieving excellence. The holistic development of sports in our country is possible only if more women participate in the sporting activities and make the country proud at the global arena of sports.

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