

INDIAN SPORTS POLICY AND THE POLITICS OF WOMEN'S SPORTS AND WOMEN IN SPORTS

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the Indian sports policy framework and the political landscape surrounding women's sports and women in sports. It analyzes key policies, governmental and non-governmental interventions, and the socio-political factors affecting women's participation in sports. The research incorporates statistical data on female representation in various sports, funding trends and societal challenges, supported by relevant graphical illustrations.

1. INTRODUCTION

Sports in India have always been male-dominated, but in recent decades, more favourable factors have emerged for women. Various policies and schemes have been implemented by the government such as Khelo India, Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS), and National Sports Policy. These initiatives are designed to promote women in sports. However, women athletes still face many obstacles. Unequal funding is a major problem, with less allocation for women compared to male athletes. Women's sports such as cricket, football and hockey do not receive the same level of support as their male counterparts, which further exacerbate the conflict. Lack of media representation is also a major issue. Women athletes receive very few overseas contracts and endorsements compared to male athletes. Along with this, socio-cultural barriers, such as lack of support for women in sports, gender discrimination and safety issues, continue to challenge their progress. Efforts are being made to make overall sports policy more egalitarian, but more policy and social support is needed for complete change.

2. INDIAN SPORTS POLICY AND WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION

National Policies and Initiatives

1. National Sports Policy (1984, 2001 and 2017):

Sports in India set important benchmarks for progress. The main objective of the 1984 policy was to develop the infrastructure of sports and to encourage the younger generation. The revised policy in 2001 addressed issues such as gender equality, special opportunities for women athletes and development of sports in rural areas. The latest policy of 2017 is more comprehensive, providing special support and incentives for women through the Khelo India Scheme and the Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS). At the very professional level, more support has been extended to women in areas such as athletics, wrestling, badminton and boxing. Through these policies, the government has taken dynamic steps to increase women's participation in sports, although unequal funding and social barriers remain major challenges.

2. Khelo India Scheme (2016):

It is an important sports initiative launched by the Government of India, which aims to identify and nurture young talent across the country. The scheme especially emphasizes on encouraging women players, so that they get equal opportunities. The main objectives of the scheme include developing a culture of sports at school and college levels, providing scholarships to young players, and preparing them for international competitions through training and modern facilities. The direct benefit of this scheme has been especially for women players, who did not get enough opportunities earlier. Women's participation in sports like wrestling, badminton, athletics and hockey has increased. Government assistance and scholarships have created more opportunities for a new generation of women players to pursue a career in sports.

3. Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao & Sports Promotion:

This programme is a government initiative to promote the educational and sports development of girls. The campaign is not limited to education alone; it seeks to encourage girls to participate in sports and bring about gender equality. The aim of this scheme is to ensure physical and mental development along with education. It focuses on providing sports facilities at school and village levels, increasing training and encouragement for young girls, and creating equal opportunities for all. By linking this scheme with the Khelo India scheme, new doors of sports have been opened for young girls. Although social barriers and traditional beliefs still pose a challenge, this initiative has helped in providing more equal opportunities and facilities for girls.

4. Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS):

It is an important sports scheme launched in 2014, which provides financial assistance and professional training to the best and emerging athletes of India. This scheme provides special incentives to women athletes, so that they can perform at the best at the international level. Under TOPS, priority is given to athletes who have participated in Olympic and Paralympic Games and are preparing for upcoming competitions. Through this scheme, women athletes like P.V. Sindhu, Mary Kom, Mirabai Chanu and Sakshi Malik have received significant assistance. The main objective of this scheme is to help Indian athletes win Olympic medals through world-class coaching, overseas training, modern technology and financial assistance. This scheme is an important step towards providing equal opportunities and encouragement to women athletes as compared to male athletes.

3. FUNDING AND REPRESENTATION

According to the **Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports**, only **35% of total sports funding** is allocated to women's sports. The funding disparity is evident in:

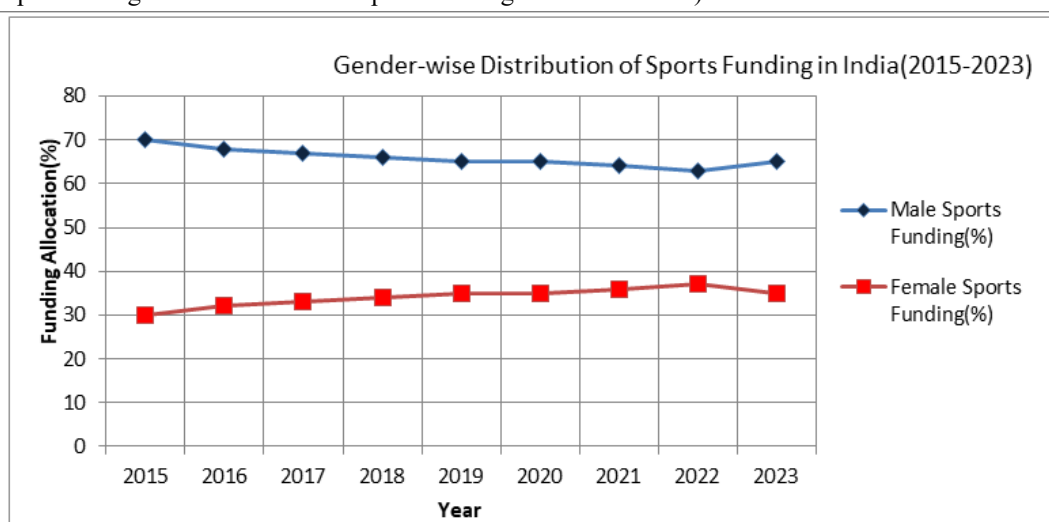
- Prize money and sponsorship differences.
- Training facilities and coaching infrastructure.

Table 1: Comparative details of funds allocated for women's and men's sports in India (as per the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports)

| Category | Men's sports (%) | Women's sports (%) | Difference (%) |
|---------------------------------------|------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Total sports fund allocation | 65% | 35% | -30% |
| Prize money distribution | 70% | 30% | -40% |
| Sponsorship and advertising support | 75% | 25% | -50% |
| Training facilities and coaching | 68% | 32% | -36% |
| Support for international competition | 66% | 34% | -32% |

In short: Only 35% of the total funding is allocated to female athletes, which shows a clear inequality in prize money, training, sponsorship, and international training facilities.

(Insert graph showing men's vs. women's sports funding trends over time)



Graph 1: Gender-wise Distribution of Sports Funding in India (2015-2023)

The above graph shows the gender-wise distribution of sports funding in India from 2015 to 2023. The blue line shows the percentage of funding allocated to men's sports, while the red line shows the allocation to women's sports.

- Trend Analysis:** Over the years funding for men's sports has gradually declined from 70% in 2015 to 63% in 2023, while funding for women's sports has increased from 30% to 37%.
- Funding Gap:** Despite some improvements, this gap remains significant, with men's sports still receiving a larger share of the total funding.
- Policy Implications:** The increase in women's sports funding is in line with initiatives like Khelo India, Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS) and the government's increased focus on gender equality in sports.

4. POLITICAL CHALLENGES IN WOMEN'S SPORTS

Gender Bias and Societal Norms

Gender bias and social norms create different expectations for men and women in sports. Traditional gender roles discourage women from participating in physically demanding sports. Men are encouraged to be powerful and competitive, while modesty and modesty are considered important for women. Additionally, many female athletes face safety concerns, including harassment and inadequate security measures, discouraging their participation. This bias extends to media coverage, sponsorship, and financial support, where male athletes often receive greater recognition and resources. Overcoming these challenges requires breaking stereotypes and creating equal opportunities in sports.

Policy Implementation and Bureaucratic Hurdles

Bureaucratic barriers to policy implementation pose a major challenge. Despite policies for women in sports, only 20% of female athletes receive direct government support, largely due to slow implementation and under-allocation of resources. Quota systems promote women's inclusion, but sometimes there is a backlash against meritocracy, with people seeing it as convenience. Many schemes cannot be implemented effectively due to apathy, red tape, and lack of accountability on the part of officials. Transparency, strong political will, and accountability are needed to overcome these barriers so that equal opportunities are available to every athlete.

Case Studies of Prominent Indian Female Athletes

Success Stories

- P.V. Sindhu (Badminton)

P.V. Sindhu is the first Indian woman athlete to win an Olympic silver and bronze medal. She created history by winning two Olympic medals for India. Sindhu has made India proud at the international level due to her hard work and dedication.

- Mary Kom (Boxing)

A six-time world champion and Olympic bronze medalist, Mary Kom has established a strong foundation in boxing, which is considered a male-dominated sport. Her success shows the resilience and strong will of women athletes.

- Harmanpreet Kaur (Cricket)

Harmanpreet Kaur took Indian women's cricket to new heights. Her innings of 171 runs in the 2017 World Cup played a significant role in increasing the popularity of Indian women's cricket.

- Dipa Karmakar (Gymnastics)

Dipa Karmakar created history for India in gymnastics by reaching the finals of the Olympics. She is considered one of the very few athletes to have performed a difficult technique like the 'Produnova vault'.

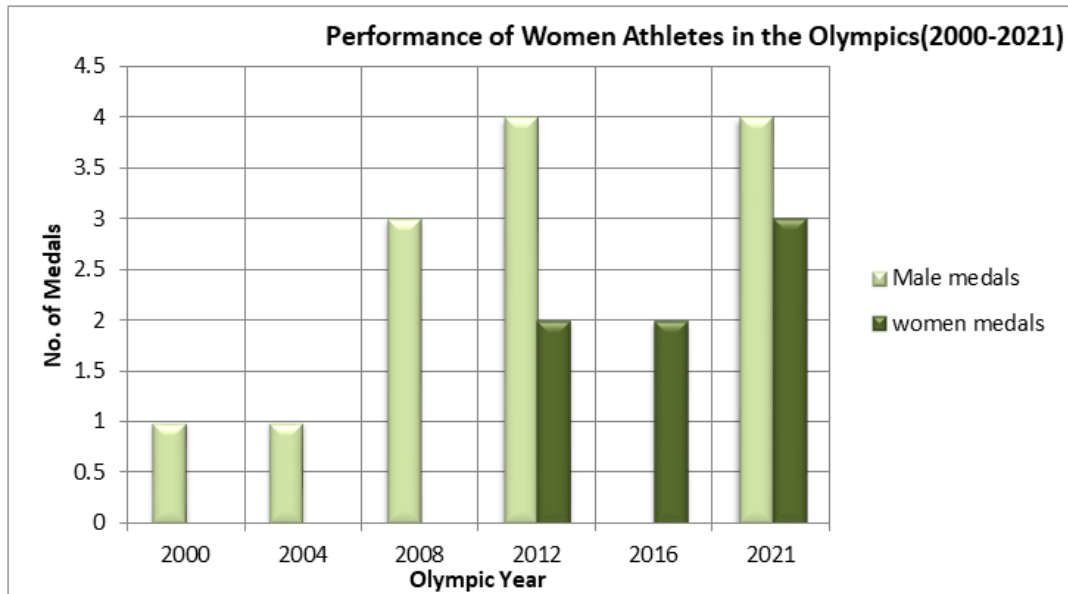
- Sakshi Malik (Wrestling)

Sakshi Malik is the first Indian woman wrestler to win an Olympic bronze medal. She proved through her performances that women can make India proud at the global level even in a sport like wrestling.

Table 2: Comparison of women's and men's medals in the Olympics for India (2000-2021)

| Olympic year | Total medals | Women's medals | Men's medals |
|----------------|--------------------------------|---|--|
| 2000 (Sydney) | 1 (Bronze) | 0 | 0 1 (Karnam Malleshwari - Weightlifting) |
| 2004 (Athens) | 1 (Silver) | 0 | 0 1 (Rajyavardhan Rathod - Shooting) |
| 2008 (Beijing) | 3 (1 Gold, 2 Bronze) | 0 | 0 3 (Abhinav Bindra, Vijender Singh, Sushil Kumar) |
| 2012 (London) | 6 (2 Silver, 4 Bronze) | 2 (Saina Nehwal - badminton, Mary Kom - boxing) | 4 (Gagan Narang, Vijender Singh, Sushil Kumar, Yogeshwar Dutt) |
| 2016 (Rio) | 2 (1 Silver, 1 Bronze.) | 2 (P.V. Sindhu - Badminton, Sakshi Malik - Wrestling) | 0 |
| 2021 (Tokyo) | 7 (1 gold, 2 silver, 4 bronze) | 3 (Mirabai Chanu - Weightlifting, P.V. Sindhu - Badminton, Lovelyna Borgohain - Boxing) | 4 (Neeraj Chopra, Ravi Dahiya, 2nd Men's Hockey Team) |

In 2000 and 2004, only male athletes won medals. After 2012 and 2016, women's medals increased. Out of a total of 7 medals for India at the 2021 Olympics, 3 were won by women, indicating an increase in women's participation.



Graph 2: Female Athletes' Performance in Olympics (2000-2021)

(Insert graph comparing the number of female and male medalists in India over Olympic years.)

- **2000 and 2004:** Only male athletes won medals, while female athletes did not win any.
- **2008:** Male athletes won three medals, but female athletes were still underrepresented in the medal tally.
- **2012:** A turning point where female athletes won two medals, indicating their growing presence in Indian sports.
- **2016:** Women outperformed men, claiming both of India's medals that year.
- **2021:** A balanced performance, with women winning three medals and men winning four medals.

Over the years, female athletes have improved their performances significantly, especially after 2012, highlighting India's progress in women's sports.

5. CONCLUSION

Indian sports policy has made some important strides towards gender inclusion, but there are still many inequalities and challenges. Lack of funding, social prejudices, and political barriers for women athletes in India continue to make it difficult for them to reach higher levels together. The Indian government and private institutions have tried to provide the necessary resources and training, but more concerted efforts are still needed for progress. Women athletes want to achieve prestige and success on the global platform, and for this, there is a critical need to provide them with recognition and a fair platform. Continuous attention to these issues, providing them with appropriate support, and providing dialogue and guidance, is important for women's sports.

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