

In Search of an Identity: Indian Women Cricket

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Abstract: Cricket is a religion in India. It's not just another game or sport. Cricket is followed, loved and worshipped in Indian sub-continent. Cricketers are treated as gods and have humongous fan following in India. However and unfortunately this magnitude of following is not equivalent for both men's and women's cricket. Though in recent years Indian women's cricket has shown great promise and sense of accomplishment in line with the male counterparts but in the patriarchal society a girl has various hurdles to cross. Cricket (or for that matter) for any sport in India it's not easy for a woman choosing a sport as their career. However many female sportsman have reached the top against all odds and obstacles and shown path to other's to believe in themselves and achieve their dreams. Especially in recent decade, may it be team sport or individual sport, world has witnessed some substantial success stories from Indian women in sporting events. This paper is an attempt to understand, highlight the fundamental problems faced by the sporting culture in India. The corruption, biasness, political interference, organisational failures and what a good governance can achieve. Though Hockey remains India's national sport till date on paper it has lost all its glory and Cricket has all the attention. Interestingly Indian Women's Cricket is a new and fast growing media delight and a career in which a girl can search for her identity, achieve success and prove her substance.

Keywords: *Identity, humongous, magnitude, equivalent, fundamental, corruption*

Introduction

Cricket is a religion in India. It's not just another sport, Cricket is worshipped in sub-continent and the players are treated as gods by their disciples. People follow games and sports passionately in India but unfortunately the magnitude of love and adulation that 'cricket' (especially Men's cricket) get in this part of the world does not resonate to any other sport ...not even women's cricket. Predominantly sports in India has always been associated with men. In recent times though girls are allowed to actively participate in sports but are not encouraged to take-up sports seriously as a career. The conditions of women in India who want to take up sports are sub-par when compared it to the international standards.

In India Female Sport Spark

India has produced several top class and internationally acclaimed female sportsman who have reached the top against all odds and overcame the hurdles to achieve their dreams. Very few but illustrious names coming to mind who have made

India proud. P.T.Usha often called the "queen of Indian track and field" has won 101 international medals for India. Karnam Malleswari the first and only Indian woman weightlifter to win an Olympic medal (bronze medal - 2000 Sydney Olympics). MC Mary Kom - five-time boxing world champion and the first lady boxer to have won the bronze medal at the Olympics (2012 London) for India. Geeta Phogat won India's first gold medal in wrestling at common wealth games (2010). Sania Mirza one of the most recognized faces in Indian sports, who brought glamour to Indian female sports. Anjali Bhagwat - a professional shooter who became world's number one in 10m Air Rifle in 2002. Saina Nehwal, PV Sindhu the golden duo of Indian badminton they both have already carved a niche for themselves in the world of badminton after their performances in the London 2012 and Rio 2016 Olympics. Also in recent time's names like Dutee Chand (Sprinter), Hima Das (Athletics) and Dipa Karmakar (artistic gymnast.) have gathered attention, accolades and fame from all over the world for their outstanding sporting abilities.

The fundamental Problem in Sporting Culture

India has always had culturally and art wise diverse, but in recent years India has roped tremendous success in games and sports, and especially when the achievements come from females, it gives immense satisfaction to all Indians. However many questions lie unanswered beneath above success stories. In such a huge country, are these few names enough and sufficient to pat of backs?? Don't we should strive for more success?? Baring the above individual performances on a whole Indian female sporting scenario share a pathetic condition. There are many vital reasons for these situation. Primary reason for such situation is mismanagement by the authorities, reluctance from governing bodies and nepotism and internal politics. It hurts to see politicians and ex-bureaucrats holding positions as Chairman and Committee members of sports associations who are absolutely clueless about the sport. The government of India is taking efforts to promote and encourage the sporting activities at junior and middle age levels by funding and sponsoring lot of events and tournaments. Lot of money is been invested on trainings and grooming of young raw talent but the overall desired results compared to other rich and even poor under developed countries is far from satisfactory. Sports in India are considered a secondary and supplementary activity and above that erupts biasness, corruption and political interference. Due to which many times a good player is left out damaging his confidence and belief. Also the corporate sponsoring young talent are sometimes not sure that the sponsorship money will be efficiently used in promoting the game and the welfare of the players.

Indian Women Cricketer

Though Hockey remains India's national sport till date on paper it has lost all its importance and glory in the past few years. Forget about female hockey but India's men's hockey is in shambles today and we struggle to even qualify for Olympics.

Today the most popular sport in India is undoubtedly “Cricket”, there is huge difference in working thinking and developing talent in cricket as compared to other sports. Credit should be given to BCCI (board for cricket control in India) for the way they have managed and pooled in talent from pan India at a very grassroots level. India’s cricketing achievements, both males and ladies are paying dividends today. The other sports governing authorities and associations need to take a leaf out of BCCI’s management skill. BCCI has been minting money but the facilities and investment for promoting game are well organised with a sense of accountability, where as other sporting authorities have been behaving as if they are not answerable to anybody.

Today Cricket is played viewed followed and acknowledged in all groups and in all parts of the nation, starting from the grassroots up the international level. In over a period of half a century Indian cricket has not only has given some fabulously talented names to world but has imparted and infused an professional and career point of view for many youngsters. Cricket is a full-fledged profession not only for players but also for supporting fields apart from active involvement on ground as a player. The allied careers of commentators, coaches, groundsman, analysis, physios etc are bi-products of the proper planning and meticulous percolation of sporting idea. Furthermore the basic backup has been delivered due to lot of attention by the media and advertising companies. Theoretical analysis from many observer’s and media personnel have shown that viewership figures are taking leap’s for Cricket as compared to other sports. Not only men’s cricket but women’s cricket in recent years have shown promise in viewership percentages. Men’s world cup has always been popular sporting event but the last Women’s World Cup (July 2017) did break some TV records.

Just to recap from where Indian women’s cricket started it has come a long way and have an even longer journey to travel. The Indian women’s team played their debut test match in 1976 (against the West Indies and the Women’s Cricket Association of India was formed in 1973. Women’s cricket merged with the Board of Control for Cricket in India in 2006 and today the entire funding is done by BCCI. The journey from likes of Diana Eduljee, Shanta Rangaswamy, Shubhangi Kulkarni etc till today’s star’s Mithali Raj, Harmanpreet Kaur, Smriti Mandhana world has witnessed exceptional talent from India in women’s cricket.

Challenges in Search for Identity in Indian Women Cricket

However ironically still there are some wide and notable disparities in women and men’s version of cricket. Starting from popularity, money making, global viewership, acknowledgement etc as compared to the one we get to see in International men’s cricket. On Cricketing potential except for the powerful stroke making to big six hitting shear pace in fast bowling, one can hardly point any nukes in skills, footwork, spin, between men’s and women’s cricket. Even then there arises the question again, what could be the reason that they are not as much hyped and popular as men or as they should be.

As per some cricket journalists and analysts in India people are well aware of cricket schedule of men's cricket matches throughout the year but no one has any information about the Women's cricket, barring the World Cup. Which is harsh but true. The same thing applies for names of the players. Whole of India can list minimum 30 players bracketed by BCCI under their contract, but hardly anyone can name the playing eleven for women's cricket though they have achieved some remarkable milestones by now. It is quite evident that Indian Women cricket team have potential and capability and their recent success is conclusive of the fighting spirit to display on bigger stage. BCCI has made considerable amounts of efforts to a large degree ever since the women's cricket came under the patronage of BCCI. They implemented pre-tournament practice sessions, staff for coaching and camps are being held for training like it happens for men's counterpart. However in comparison to Men's cricket it is clear that there is room for improvements for women's cricket in India.

Some very basic steps that can BCCI and state organisations including schools can adapt is encourage participation of girls at the fundamental level that is the school level, start propelling girls to take up Cricket or for that matter any sport more seriously and as a profession . Conducting camps, training sessions and organizing tournaments for women on regional and national levels, Sports should be given an appropriate weightage and importance along with academic excellence. An increased and safer access to sport for women, extensive media attention, end to casual sexism and tolerance and waves of change and evolution in the way we perceive women in sport. This will help to develop sporting culture in women which will aid to strengthen their physical as well as mental growth and get a positive attitude towards self-building and career growth.

Conclusion

In the recent past women's cricket has shown spark and increase in fan following. Lot of journalists & columnist have come up with articles on womens cricket which in turn has led to the rapid growth in people's response. Social media has helped as a catalyst to change perception of women's cricket in India. People are now curious to follow and know there achievements , to dig about the life and journey of female cricketers, enlightening them with the facts, figures and the hurdles women cricketer have faced on its road to success . Women's cricket is approaching the masses and it has been seen as a positive sign. This change is very engraving and thrilling, as not only young boys thrive to become next Sachin or Virat, now there are girls who want to be the next Harmanpreet Smriti or the next Mithali Raj.