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FROM DISPARITIES TO OPPORTUNITIES: ANALYSING GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN INDIAN SPORTS AND LEGAL SYSTEMS

AUTHORED BY- BARSHA RANI DAS

Abstract:

Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world. Gender bias is tearing apart our social fabric and degrades each one of us. The challenges to gender equality in Indian sports include unequal funding for women athletes, sexual harassment, a lack of female coaches, biased media that gives very little space to women's sports, a lack of role models, no maternity leave, and safety concerns. However, it is the solid foundation laid by the Indian Constitution and allied laws that work towards the effectuation of gender equality. Ensuring gender equality in sports is not just about fairness on the field but also about challenging societal norms and creating a more inclusive world. There is much that India can learn from experiences in other countries, especially in regard to Title IX, increased media presence for women's sports, sensitization programs for officials in gender sensitivity, and scholarships encouraging girls' participation, all of which would greatly help in redressing the deficiencies of Indian sports at the moment.

Keywords: gender equality, gender-based discrimination, initiatives, inclusive

1. Introduction

“Half of the Indian population too are women. Women have always been discriminated against and have suffered and are suffering discrimination in silence. Self-sacrifice and self-denial are their nobility and fortitude and yet they have been subjected to all equities indignities, inequality and discrimination”- Justice K. Rama Swamy

The growing social awareness across the globe has brought a number of issues to the front among which gender equality and empowerment of women are very significant. Discrimination among women in the form of male-female differentiation constitutes the biological core of the gender based system. However, the rise in the level of education which nourishes a progressive,

egalitarian and enlightened outlook and the forces of industrialization and modernization has brought in a sea-change in man's mind and outlook.¹

In traditional sense, it was a part of family ideology that a woman's place was in the home, while a man's task was to go out to work, to earn money and support for his wife and children. While the female functions were said to be procreative and sustenance oriented; the male functions were protective and procurement oriented.² Although the principle of equality of men and women was recognised as early as 1945 in the UN Charter, and in the UN Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, several researchers have pointed out that development planners worked on the assumption that what would benefit one section of society especially men would trickle down to the other women and that they did not need to fully address women's position in the process of development.³

Women's participation in sport has a long history. It is a history marked by division and discrimination but also one filled with major accomplishments by female athletes and important advances for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. In 1896, Baron Pierre de Coubertin, founder of the modern Olympics, stated: "No matter how toughened a sportswoman may be, her organism is not cut out to sustain certain shocks." Such stereotypes fuelled gender-based discrimination in physical education and in recreational and competitive sport, sporting organizations and sport media.⁴

1.1 Overview of gender discrimination in India

The notion that men and women are naturally different has been used for many years to justify the exclusion of women from some or all sports. Many people feel that since women could never equal or surpass men's achievements, there was no apparent reason why women would be allowed to get involved in sport. Gender and sport are one of the most important issues in terms of gender inequality.⁵

¹ S.P. Pani and Niranjan Pani (eds.), *Essays on Contemporary Gender Issues*, 1st ed. 19–20 (Hirmoli Press, New Delhi, 2010), at pp. 19–20.

² Mala Bhandari, *Quality of Life of Urban Working Women* 1–3 (Abhijeet Publications, Delhi, 2004), at pp. 1–3.

³ Bhaswati Das and Vimal Khawas (eds.), *Gender Issues in Development: Concerns for the 21st Century* 1–3 (Rawat Publications, Jaipur, 2009), at pp. 1–3.

⁴ Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *Women 2000 and beyond: Women, Gender Equality and Sport* 2–40 (The Division for the Advancement of Women of the United Nations Secretariat, New York, December 2007).

⁵ Bhartiya Stree Shakti, *A Study on Gender Issues in Sports in India* 1–79 (The National Commission for Women, New Delhi, January 2005).

Despite India's magnificent former performance in the Olympic Games of the pre-Independence era, gradually, the calibre of sports and games declined, leaving India as the uncrowned monarch in the sports arena. Women from India have done quite well in international sports related to badminton, athletics, boxing, and weightlifting. However, there is an urge for more women to participate in sports, and specific programs in this regard need to be worked out and implemented.

1.2 The role of sports in empowering women and promoting gender equality

The State of the World's Children, 2007, a report by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) asserts that: "Gender discrimination is pervasive. While the degrees and forms of inequality may vary, women and girls are deprived of equal access to resources, opportunities and political power in every region of the world. The oppression of girls and women can include the preference for sons over daughters, limited personal and professional choices for girls and women, the denial of basic human rights and outright gender-based violence."⁶

Sports has the power to change lives. In 2020, UN-Women supported 95 countries and territories, including high income countries, to advance gender equality and women's empowerment.⁷ As the best female athletes in the world take to the competition floor in Paris Olympics, 2024, we come together to celebrate the achievements and realize the potential of women and girls in sport.

1.3 The impact of gender equality on women's empowerment

Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world. There has been progress over the last decades, but the world is not on track to achieve gender equality by 2030.⁸ Gender bias is undermining our social fabric and devalues all of us. It is not just a human rights issue; it is a tremendous waste of the world's human potential. By denying women equal rights, we deny half the population a chance to live life at its fullest.⁹

As Tyson Nicholas, a UN Women Strategic Military Advisor says, "Gender equality and women's empowerment are not only fundamental principles of the right to non-discrimination, they're also

⁶ The United Nations Children's Fund, *Women and Children: The Double Dividend of Gender Equality* 1–141 (United Nations Children's Fund, New York, December 2006).

⁷ "In Focus: Women and girls in sport," *UN Women – Headquarters*, 2023 available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/women-and-sport> (last visited August 9, 2024).

⁸ "United Nations: Gender equality and women's empowerment" *United Nations Sustainable Development*, 2023 available at: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/> (last visited August 9, 2024).

⁹ "Goal 5: Gender equality - The Global Goals," *The Global Goals*, 2024 available at: <https://www.globalgoals.org/goals/5-gender-equality/> (last visited August 9, 2024).

essential inputs for the achievement of peace and security, development and human rights.”¹⁰

Women’s empowerment is the process by which women become aware of gender-based unequal power relationships and acquire a greater voice in which to speak out against the inequality found in the home, workplace, and community. It involves women taking control over their lives: setting their own agendas, gaining skills, solving problems, and developing self-reliance.¹¹ Globally, no country has fully attained gender equity however Scandinavian countries like Iceland, Norway, Finland, and Sweden lead the world in their progress toward closing the gender gap.¹²

1.4 Challenges faced by women in sports

Women in sports dates back several years. It is a history marked with division and discrimination, but on the other hand, it is a history filled with many of the major accomplishments of female athletes that have made very key gains for women and girls pertaining to gender equality and empowerment.

The challenges that women in sports face are those drawing from relevant case studies and statistics to prove how gender-based discrimination has been rampant.

- 1. Funding Disparity:** While male athletes, like Neeraj Chopra and the men's doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty, got much more financing for the Paris Olympics 2024, female athletes of the likes of Mirabai Chanu and P.V. Sindhu are not on the list with the same money. Neeraj Chopra, at Rs 5.72 crore, and the men's doubles team in badminton, at Rs 5.62 crore, each get more than double of what was awarded to Mirabai Chanu at Rs 2.74 crore and PV Sindhu at Rs 3.13 crore.¹³
- 2. Sexual harassment:** Sexual harassment of women athletes is rampant in India. The most recent proof of this is in the ongoing battle between India’s wrestlers and the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) chief Brij Bhushan Singh, who the fighters have accused of sexually harassing several girls. Last year, the Sports Authority of India (SAI) sacked chief

¹⁰ “Take five: ‘Gender equality and women’s empowerment must be prioritized in matters of national, regional and international security,’” *UN Women – Asia-Pacific*, 2023 available at: <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/stories/take-five/2023/10/commander-tyson-nicholas> (last visited August 9, 2024).

¹¹ “Women’s empowerment,” *United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia*, 2022 available at: <https://www.unescwa.org/sd-glossary/women%E2%80%99s-empowerment> (last visited August 13, 2024).

¹² “Global Issues: Gender Equity and Women’s Empowerment,” *Peacecorps.gov*, 2024 available at: <https://www.peacecorps.gov/educators-and-students/educators/resources/global-issues-gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment/> (last visited August 9, 2024).

¹³ “All that glitters is gold: Athletics biggest gainer in govt funding for Paris Olympics preparations” *The Economic Times* (Economic Times, 2024) available at: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/sports/all-that-glitters-is-gold-athletics-biggest-gainer-in-govt-funding-for-paris-olympics-preparations/articleshow/111753310.cms?from=mdr> (last visited August 9, 2024).

cycling coach RK Sharma after a woman cyclist accused him of inappropriate behaviour during a training trip to Slovenia.¹⁴

- 3. Lack of Female coaches:** Women sports persons are gaining popularity in India, but the representation of women coaches and supporting staff remain low. In June 2022, the Sports Authority of India (SAI) had issued guidelines to National Sporting Federations (NSF) to increase the number of women coaches and supporting staff. According to data from SAI, in 2021, only 23.6 percent of all the coaches under SAI, were women. There were 940 coaches under SAI, including contract coaches, and only 222 coaches were women.¹⁵
- 4. Sexism and objectification of female athletes:** During the Paris Olympics 2024, veteran sports commentator Bob Ballard was fired from his Olympics commentary job for making a sexist remark about the Australian female swimmers. As the women's 4x100m freestyle relay team were making their way off the pool deck in Paris, he had commented that they were "finishing up", adding "you know what women are like hanging around, doing their make-up" in the wake of their gold medal win. The clip went viral quickly, and broadcaster Eurosport later confirmed that Ballard had been yanked from the commentary line-up.¹⁶
- 5. Lack of media coverage:** The media's coverage of women's sports is equally skewed. Gender stereotypes are reinforced by media portrayals of women's sports and athletes. The media frequently portrays female athletes as women first and athletes second. In addition to that, there's also a lack of recognition for women's achievements in sports. India's doing slightly better in terms of media coverage of women's sports (cricket, for example) compared to other countries but it's still nowhere near perfect. Thus, if the entertainment industry and the newsrooms were to work in tandem to create more of a focus on women's sports in an unbiased way, this could turn into a great way to help empower women in India.¹⁷
- 6. Maternity Leave or Benefits:** There is absolutely no single federation or sports body in India that has any provisions of maternity leave or maternity benefits. The leading female sports stars of India go on to bag medals and accolades for the country but throughout their

¹⁴ Akshay Sawai, "Sexual Harassment: The Chronic Illness Of Indian Sport" *Outlook India* (Outlook India, 2023) available at: <https://www.outlookindia.com/sports/sexual-harassment-the-chronic-illness-of-indian-sport-news-281578> (last visited August 9, 2024).

¹⁵ "Sports coaching: not a level playing field – The Softcopy," *Thesoftcopy.in*, 2024 available at: <https://thesoftcopy.in/2024/04/02/sports-coaching-not-a-level-playing-field/#:~:text=According%20to%20data%20from%20SAI,should%20promote%20gender%20diversity%20initiatives> (last visited August 9, 2024).

¹⁶ Tiffanie Turnbull, "Bob Ballard: Olympics commentator axed over sexist remark" *Bbc.com* (BBC News, 2024) available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cprq880yz0xo> (last visited August 1, 2024).

¹⁷ "The Bright Future Of Women's Sports In India If We Play It Right" *Flame.edu.in*, 2023 available at: <https://www.flame.edu.in/in-the-media/the-bright-future-of-womens-sports-in-india-if-we-play-it-right> (last visited August 10, 2024).

careers, they are expected to stay trapped within the system because they are simply not offered any better. Indian squash player, Dipika Pallikal was told her career was over when she decided to embrace motherhood, her sponsors pulled out. An upcoming star like Tababi Devi, who won a Youth Olympics silver in 2018 and then decided to become a mother, is now just 20 and struggling without any support on how to make a comeback.¹⁸

- 7. Safety and transportation issues:** Sports facilities means a place to exercise or practice the sport; for many girls, especially in more populous urban centers, this translates into crossing dangerous areas to reach facilities or having no way to travel to reach facilities located miles away. A girl and her family may be forced to forego participating if no safe alternative exists. Manipur which has produced Olympic champions from Mary Kom to Mirabai Chanu, there has been no dearth of sportspeople from the state. It is an emerging sports powerhouse, but 48% of its female athletes commute more than 10 km to reach their practice facilities.¹⁹

Despite all the progress and gradual achievements made, women in sports continue to face huge challenges with regards to unequal media time and funding, and lower pay against their male counterparts. While the Olympic Games in Tokyo in 2020 may have seen almost the same number of women (48%) participating as men, it was still a far cry for women coaches (13%), and women officials and administrators (32%). This underscores the deep structures of exclusion and discrimination at the core of sport worldwide.²⁰

1.5 A review of the Indian Constitution, legislations and sports policies/initiatives

The basic principle of gender equality is embedded in the Constitution of India through its Preamble, fundamental rights, fundamental duties and the directive principles of state policy. The Constitution itself views women as equal, not only in relation to others, but it also authorizes the State to present before it measures of positive discrimination in respect of women.

¹⁸ Mendra Dorjey Sahni, "For How Long Will India Refuse to Provide Maternity Benefits to Its Sportswomen?" *The Quint* (The Quint, 2023) available at: <https://www.thequint.com/sports/why-doesnt-indian-sports-have-maternity-benefits-for-female-athletes-sportswomen#read-more> (last visited August 10, 2024).

¹⁹ Shivani Naik, "Manipur is sporting powerhouse, but 48 % female athletes travel over 10km to reach practice facility: Pilot survey" *The Indian Express* (The Indian Express, 2023) available at: <https://indianexpress.com/article/sports/sport-others/manipur-is-sporting-powerhouse-but-48-female-athletes-travel-over-10km-to-reach-practice-facility-pilot-survey-8374019/> (last visited August 10, 2024).

²⁰ Meena Gopal, "Breaking the Silence on the Harm to Sportswomen" *The India Forum* (TheIndiaForum, 2023) available at: <https://www.theindiaforum.in/gender/breaking-silence-harm-sportswomen> (last visited August 10, 2024).

1. Provisions in the Constitution of India

A. Fundamental Rights

Article 14: Ensures equality before the law and equal protection of the laws by the State.

Article 15: Prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth- (1) State not to discriminate on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth or any of them.

(2) No citizen to be subjected to any disability, liability, restriction or condition, on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth or any of them with regard to access to public spaces and facilities.

(3) Empowers the State to make special provisions for women and children.

(4) Empowers the State to make special provisions for the advancement of socially backward classes of citizens or Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

Article 16: Equality of Opportunity in matters of Public Employment-

(1) Ensures equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State.

(2) Prohibits discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, etc. in employment or appointment to any office under the State.

B. Directive Principles of State Policy

- i. **Article 39(a):** that the citizens, men and women equally, have the right to an adequate means to livelihood
- ii. **Article 39(d):** that there is equal pay for equal work for both men and women
- iii. **Article 42:** The State shall make provision for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief.

C. Fundamental Duty

Article 51A (e) enjoins upon every citizen the duty to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women.

D. Other Articles

- i. **Article 243 D (3):** Not less than one-third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Panchayat to be reserved for women and such seats to be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Panchayat

- ii. **Article 243 D (4):** Not less than one-third of the total number of offices of Chairpersons in the Panchayats at each level to be reserved for women
- iii. **Article 243 T (3):** Not less than one-third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Municipality to be reserved for women and such seats to be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Municipality
- iv. **Article 243 T (4):** Reservation of offices of Chairpersons in Municipalities for the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes and women in such manner as the legislature of a State may by law provide.²¹

2. The crimes identified under the Special Laws

Although all laws are not gender-specific, the provisions of the law affecting women take on significant proportions and have been reviewed from time to time, with amendments also being carried out for keeping pace with the emerging requirements. Some have special provisions to safeguard women and their interests.

- i. The Special Marriage Act, 1954
- ii. The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955
- iii. The Hindu Succession Act, 1956 with amendment in 2005
- iv. Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956
- v. The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 (Amended in 1995)
- vi. Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961
- vii. The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971
- viii. The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976

3. Special initiatives for women

1. The Khelo India Scheme

Khelo India Scheme aims at developing sports in the country in terms of playfields, community coaching, promotion of sports in schools and universities, support to rural and indigenous sports, and infrastructure gaps. It also deals with differently-abled and women, talent search, support to sports academies, and national fitness drive for school children. It enhances holistic development, community and social integration, gender equality, healthy lifestyles, national pride, and economic opportunities through sports.²²

²¹ The Constitution of India.

²² Department of Sports, *Khelo India Scheme (2021-22 to 2025-26) Operational Guidelines* 8–109 (Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, New Delhi).

2. National Policy for Empowerment of Women, 2001

The goal of this Policy is to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women. The Policy will be widely disseminated so as to encourage active participation of all stakeholders for achieving its goals. Specifically, the objectives of this Policy include:

- i. Creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realize their full potential
- ii. The de-jure and de-facto enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedom by women on equal basis with men in all spheres – political, economic, social, cultural and civil
- iii. Equal access to participation and decision making of women in social, political and economic life of the nation
- iv. Equal access to women to health care, quality education at all levels, career and vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security and public office etc.
- v. Strengthening legal systems aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women
- vi. Changing societal attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women.²³

3. Indian Oil Shakti Project

The Indian Oil Corporation Ltd. has announced the launching of the "Indian Oil Shakti Project" in collaboration with the National Sports Development Fund (NSDF) in the financial year 2024-25. Under the aegis of its corporate social responsibility (CSR) program, this intervention will be in support of 30 female athletes under 23 years in the field of middle and long-distance running. The total financial commitment works out to about ₹16 crores over the 36 months. It has an objective to bring out India on the cooperative perspective of how to perform internationally in Athletics and showed the commitment of Indian Oil in fostering sports excellence and women empowerment.²⁴

²³ "National Policy for the Empowerment of Women| National Portal of India," *India.gov.in*, 2015 available at: <https://www.india.gov.in/national-policy-empowerment-women> (last visited August 10, 2024).

²⁴ "IndianOil News Releases | IndianOil Press Release," *Iocl.com*, 2023 available at: <https://www.iocl.com/NewsDetails/59380> (last visited August 10, 2024).

4. Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP Scheme)

In 2015, the Indian government introduced the Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (BBBP) scheme to address concerns about gender discrimination and women empowerment in the country. The scheme aims to educate citizens against gender bias and improve the efficacy of welfare services for girls. It was launched with initial funding of Rs. 100 crores. The Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Yojana aims to achieve gender equality and women empowerment moreover prevent gender-biased and sex-selective elimination²⁵

5. Sports for Women

It is an initiative where, in collaboration with National Sports Federations, women's leagues in different disciplines are organized for increasing participation of women, identification of talent, and exposure to competitions. The Sports Authority of India has also set up one National Centre of Excellence and three SAI Training Centres exclusively for women. As many as 3,146 women athletes are being trained under the Sports Promotional Schemes of SAI.²⁶

Although there is no specific legislation for women in sports in India, several programs and schemes have been issued to see to it that their participation is fostered. These programs, schemes, and policies are targeted at bridging the gender gap, promoting inclusivity, and finally guaranteeing equity amongst women within the sports fraternity.

1.6 Initiatives to enhance legal awareness and access to justice for female athletes

It goes without saying that there is an essential need for legal awareness programs with clear objectives in effectively eliminating violence and discrimination against women. The programs should therefore be aimed at empowering women with the requisite knowledge about constitutional safeguards provided for them.

1. National Commission for Women (NCW) and the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) have recently launched a pan India legal awareness campaign to teach practical information about legal rights and remedies under various women-related legislation. The “Empowerment of Women through Legal Awareness” programme, which began in

²⁵ “Beti Bachao Beti Padhao,” *myScheme - One-stop search and discovery platform of the Government schemes*, 2015 available at: <https://www.myscheme.gov.in/schemes/bbbp> (last visited August 10, 2024).

²⁶ “Around Rs. 9.5 Crore released under ‘Sports for Women’ component of Khelo India Scheme to increase women’s participation in sports since 2020: Shri Anurag Thakur,” *Pib.gov.in*, 2020 available at: <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaselframePage.aspx?PRID=1845123> (last visited August 10, 2024).

Varanasi, aims to reach all states and union territories across the country through regular sessions to educate women about the various mechanisms of the justice delivery system.²⁷

2. The cognizance of gender equality and sexual harassment in sports has been taken by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports. Rule 10.8 states that if funding is provided to national sports federations by the government then an equal amount of money should be allotted for the tournaments for both the genders. Rule 1.6 mentions that the government has issued the guidelines to address sexual harassment of women in sports.²⁸
3. In the draft of the National Sports Development Bill of 10 July 2013, in its preamble the elimination of “sexual harassment of women in sports” is mentioned. Section 15 of this draft exclusively deals with sexual harassment which is quoted verbatim as it shall be the duty of every National Sports Federation, the National Olympic Committee, the Sports Authority of India and other sports bodies to prevent sexual harassment in sports.²⁹
4. The Women’s Justice Initiative (WJI) is its national network of lawyers and social activists, that uses the law to oppose all forms of gender-based discrimination and violence against women and to increase women’s access to the justice system as a vital means to their empowerment.³⁰
5. Promoting excellence in sports and wellness through “Khelo India” Scheme Bishnupur, Manipur. Under Khelo India, infrastructure development of football, swimming and water sports have been taken up. In addition, sports equipment has also been provided for various sports such as football, volleyball, hockey, kick boxing, gymnastics, boxing, wrestling etc. Scholarships are also being provided to individual athletes.
6. Achieving sports excellence through “Khelo India” scheme Churu district in Rajasthan has grown by leaps and bounds, both in terms of the availability of sports facilities as well as achievements earned by its sportspersons. The district administration has undertaken several efforts to build and augment sports infrastructure across multiple disciplines.³¹

Over the years, the social sector in India has exhibited remarkable success with huge number of developmental interventions by various stakeholders, in particular the Central

²⁷ “Women Entrepreneurs Review,” *Womenentrepreneursreview.com*, 2024 available at: <https://www.womenentrepreneursreview.com/viewpoint/experts-column/legal-awareness-key-step-towards-women-empowerment-nwid-1079.html> (last visited August 12, 2024).

²⁸ “The Legal And Ethical Implications Of Gender discrimination And Sexual Harassment In Sports, With Focus On India’s Sports Industry - IPLF” *IPLF*, 2023 available at: <https://www.ipandlegalfilings.com/the-legal-and-ethical-implications-of-gender-discrimination-and-sexual-harassment-in-sports-with-focus-on-indias-sports-industry/> (last visited August 12, 2024).

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ “Women’s Justice — SLIC,” *Slic.org.in*, 2020 available at: <https://www.slic.org.in/initiative/women-s-justice-initiative> (last visited August 12, 2024).

³¹ NITI Aayog UNDP Government of India, *Best Practices in Social Sector: A Compendium*, 2023 1–197 (NITI Aayog, Government of India, UNDP, New Delhi, 2023).

Ministries and State Governments. These have exhibited innovative approaches, effective strategies, long-term impact and sustainability in reaching out to the women in our society.

1.7 Incorporating best global practices to enhance gender equality in Indian sports

Gender equality in sports is a global challenge, but some countries have implemented successful models to learn from. Some of those models are presented below, together with information on how they have contributed to helping further gender equality in sports.

- 1. Title IX in the United States:** Title IX is a landmark federal civil rights law in the United States. It prohibits sex-based discrimination in any school or any other education program that receives funding from the federal government. It states that “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.”³²
- 2. Sport England’s “This Girl Can” Campaign:** This Girl Can campaign was launched in January 2015. This is a nationwide campaign to get women and girls moving, regardless of shape, size and ability. It was born out of a desire to challenge the fact that despite the increase in the total number of active people across England, women showed persistent less activity as compared to men. It had to speak to the gender gap and why it existed, and there was the need to do something different.³³
- 3. Canadian Sport Policy (CSP):** The Canadian sport and physical activity sector is influenced by a number of diverse policy areas, including sport, physical activity and recreation; health; infrastructure; and diversity, equity and inclusion.³⁴
- 4. Women in Sport High-Performance Pathway Programme – Ireland**
WISH empowers, enables, and supports women coaches, who have the potential and ambition to succeed in gaining roles at elite coaching levels within their support. It shows the likely activities and experiences that take place and the coaches’ learning outcomes from them and what will change as a result of being on the programme.³⁵

³² Wikipedia Contributors, “Title IX” *Wikipedia* (Wikimedia Foundation, 2024) available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Title_IX (last visited August 12, 2024).

³³ “This Girl Can | Sport England,” *Sport England* (Sport England, 2015) available at: <https://www.sportengland.org/funds-and-campaigns/this-girl-can#a-campaign-based-on-facts-12460> (last visited August 12, 2024).

³⁴ “Canadian Sport Policy Renewal – What We Heard Report - The Sport Information Resource Centre,” *The Sport Information Resource Centre*, 2023 available at: <https://sirc.ca/canadian-sport-policies/what-we-heard/> (last visited August 12, 2024).

³⁵ “WISH – Women in Sport High-Performance Pathway Programme,” *Herts.ac.uk* (University of Hertfordshire,

5. Gender Equality Action Plan – New Zealand

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) Strategic Intentions 2020–2024 identified the priority deliverable of a Gender Action Plan to guide and scale up New Zealand’s development cooperation programming to achieve gender equality and women’s empowerment.³⁶

Successful models from other countries can be adopted to enhance gender equality in sports in India. These international models avail tried structures and solution-finders that become handy in a unique cultural, social, and legal setting in India. By their study and adoption, it would enable India to fast-track progress toward creating an athletic environment for women that is more inclusive and equitable.

1.8 Conclusion

This research has been able to serve the purpose of highlighting the vital role women play in structuring society and contributing towards business sectors, political leadership, educational advances, and even sports. This has been evident through an exhaustive review of trends, previous research, government reports, international and national documents which indicate how women have emerged as catalysts of change in the process of holistic development. Moreover, this research emphasizes the importance of gender equality in sports and how it can be very instrumental in advancing fairness, inclusiveness, and women's empowerment. The findings in this research underscore the lack of specific legislation related to women's sports in India. It reveals an institutional lacuna regarding the affirmation of gender equality within the realm of sports. Because of this shortfall, inequalities between men and women are perpetuated in participation, funding, recognition, and protection under the law; this signals broader societal problems about recognition and support for women's rights.

2024) available at: <https://www.herts.ac.uk/study/schools-of-study/life-and-medical-sciences/business-support-and-consultancy/wish> (last visited August 12, 2024).

³⁶ “Launch of the Gender Action Plan to guide New Zealand’s Development Cooperation” *New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade* (MFAT, 2021) available at: <https://www.mfat.govt.nz/en/media-and-resources/launch-of-the-gender-action-plan-to-guide-new-zealands-development-cooperation> (last visited August 12, 2024).