Chapter Two

Relevant Theoretical Frameworks on Sports Sociology

Introduction:

Historically, there exists a vast theoretical literature on sociology of sports that helped in shaping the discipline, but it was not until 1960’s that organized sports occupied a central position within mainstream sociological analysis (Hargreaves, 2000:06). Analyzing sports as social, cultural phenomena during its initial phase incorporated diverse and conflicting theories of society like the functionalist theory which was principally uncritical and analyzed sports with a positivist functional orientation whereas Marxist perspective stimulated a contradictory argument against the capitalist nature of sports. However during the 1970’s and 1980’s sports studies captured the attention of other theorists with a more critical stance refuting conventional ideas about sports and its practices leading to a theoretical expansion by situating sports in relation to other institutions like politics, economy, power, class etc. Though these projects undertaken by various sports sociologists paved the way for future studies they primarily highlighted the relationship (irrespective of being harmonious or critical) between societal structures and sports, their nature and outcome of interaction, examined questions of agency and structure, and most essentially these analysis were predominantly based on the examination of male sports. Consequently, there has been a consistent paucity of research and theoretical development in relation to women’s experiences, particularly to gender relations, which was unable to document how women/women athletes encounter discrimination in the multifaceted dimensions of sports and related state of things compared to male/male athletes. For a long period of time Sports history and sociology were both under male domination and reflected the male experiences that were generalized as experiences of all human. In
this respect the traditional theoretical understanding of sport sociology reflected male practices, experiences and dominance not only in sports but also within the academic discourse.

In this dissertation relevant theoretical perspectives from various sociological traditions have been applied to study and analyze the issue of women/women athletes’ marginalization in sports. The first section of this chapter elucidates the contribution of earliest sociological traditions to sports. Whereas the second segment emphasize the importance of feminist intervention along with intersectional approach unearthing the hidden marginalization of women/women athletes and acknowledge the intersecting experiences between gender, religion, sexuality, language, media and social class within sports that accentuate such discrimination.

**Early Sociological Theories on Sports: Absence of Gender**

**Functionalist Approach:**

Functionalism or functionalist perspective is one of the oldest theoretical tradition in sociology. It is based on the assumption that society is an organised system of interrelated parts which functions to maintain the equilibrium of the society (Delaney & Madigan, 2009:23). Functionalist standpoint advocates the positive functions performed by social structures in producing and reproducing social order and cohesion. In the late 19th century (i.e. in 1970’s) many sport sociologists (Luschen 1967, Allardt 1970, Wohl 1970, Edwards 1973, Stevenson 1972, Nixon 1972, Gruneau 1976) embraced the functionalist view of sports in society. Sociologists with Functionalist approach considered sports as a microcosm of social system, a valuable social institution, which contributes to social stability and is functional and beneficial for individuals and society as whole. Early contributions to the functional analysis of sports can be credited to Luschen (1967), who applied Parsonian perspective to his
study and offered a functional role of sports in pattern maintenance and social integration. Stevenson and Nixon (1972) also espoused the traditional functionalist framework to outline five major social functions of sports. Firstly it was *socio-emotional functions* wherein a sport contributes to the maintenance of socio-psychological stability by proving opportunities for conflict, tension management, camaraderie, and community bonding. Secondly it was *socialization*, where sports help to inculcate the cultural beliefs and values. Thirdly it was *social integration*, where a sport creates a platform for diverse individuals to interact with one another. Fourthly it was *political functions*, where sports are used as a tool for serving socio-political and ideological purposes. Fifthly it was *social mobility*, which provides individuals with prospect for upward mobility. Further works on sports and society has been produced by adopting the functionalist perspective, like Harry Edwards *Sociology of Sports* (1967) in which the author describes sports (as a social institution) having primarily ‘socialization and value maintenance function’. Tatano’s work *A Model-Construction of sports as Culture* (1981) studied the importance of sport symbols and the interrelations between sports system and other systems. In conclusion, Tatano observes that

Even if the sports system is not a closed or separate system, we can systematically analyze empirical and complex sport phenomena, because we can analyze the mechanism of structural-functional interrelations between the sport system and other systems (1981:24).

Functionalism though provided the first generation sports sociologists a framework to analyse ‘sports and society’ as a subject matter of inquiry, they are subjected to criticism on several grounds. To begin with, the analysis on the functional nature of sports has been primarily based on male experience in sports. Functionalist
approach to the study of sports and society represents sports as ‘affirmative culture’ (Delaney & Madigan, 2009) for males which maintains social order and cohesion. In other word sports has been seen as a medium for maintaining the status-quo (for men). Considering sports as a social institution, contributing positively to the society and reflecting its culture, norms and values covertly validates the existing unequal gender relation found in the society. Thus, as Delaney and Madigan (2009) states, functional analysis to sports is one-dimensional, underemphasising the presence of sexism, inequality, conflict, coercion and other contradictory aspects present within the realm of sports. It celebrates male athleticism on one hand and approves images of passive unathletic female, as a prerequisite purpose for proper functioning of integration, stability and order in the society.

**Marxist Approaches (Conflict Theory):**

“The conflict view is...founded upon the assumption that....any society....may provide extraordinarily good lives for some but this is usually only possible because the great majority are oppressed and degraded”

- Wes Sharrock (1977: 515-16)

Conflict theory developed as one of the first theoretical orientation of sociology along with functionalism. In sociology, conflict theory materialized through the works of Karl Marx. Its focal point of analysis is on the role of power which creates inequality among members of society leading to unequal relationship, unequal distribution of scarce resources and resulted in domination and exploitation of disadvantaged people by the advantaged group. Unlike functionalism, which perceives society as an ordered system, conflict theory recognises the asymmetrical distribution of power and opportunities among the people and how such disparity is maintained and
justified through force and the ideology of the powerful. In other word, conflict theorists are concerned with the role of power and domination found in all spheres of social structure. They argued that power elite controls and manipulates the rules, norms, values to their interest in every sphere of social system, which is also manifested in the institution of sports. Some conflict theorists enthused by the Marxist Tradition produced significant number of works on sociology of sports since 1970s giving rise to Marxist sociology of sports. Though Marxist sports sociology is not a unified theory, what they have in common is their critical approach towards the nature of capitalist sports that is commercialization of sports globally. This group of scholars (Hoch 1972, Vinnai 1973, Gruneau 1975, Brohm 1978, Rigauer 1982, Beamish 1982, 1988) studied modern sports as a reflection of capitalism and class relations and expression of class power and social control. It also stressed how modern sports are reservoirs of dominant ideology, a weapon to empower elites to keep the mass under control. Hoch in his famous work *Rip off the Big Game: The Exploitation of Sports by the Power Elite* (1972), used the Marxist standpoint to argue that religion (which Marx considered as opium of the masses) has been replaced by sports as the ‘opiate of the masses’. Stating how ‘sports’ is used by the powerful to divert common people from the reality by having an absolute control over the culture, and distance them from the matter of the state, i.e. ‘escape from the mundane’. Another advocate of Marxist perspective on sports, Gruneau discusses in ‘Modernization or Hegemony: Two views on Sports and Social Development’ (1975) the relationship between capitalism and sports and outlined four important effect of capitalism on sports –firstly, capitalist production process has reduced sports into a commodity on a global scale by commercialisation. It (sports) is no longer recreational; secondly, sports is used as a vehicle for political socialization (learning to accept the dominant ideas, values, norms)
thus, serving capitalist interest by reproducing unequal class relations that already exist; thirdly, sports reflect the ‘bourgeois ideology’ fostering false consciousness for the lower (suppressed) class; fourthly, sports generate and intensify alienation by reducing athletic performances into objects of exchange value and commodity relations (ibid, 1975: 23-25). Marxist analysis of sports has underscored how capitalism utilises sports as a tool for exploiting the already oppressed class.

**Cultural Marxism: Hegemony Theory**

**Antonio Gramsci**

Antonio Gramsci’s theory of ideological hegemony contributes significantly to the study of the role and impact of sports in society. Stressing on the role of individual as active recipients rather than passive consumers of dominant ideology, Gramsci applied the concept of hegemony to explain the exploitative and liberating nature of sports. According to him, ‘hegemony’ or ‘ideological domination’ is a ‘soft’ or ‘persuasive’ form of control contrary to coercive force which is legitimised by the positive reaction of people towards the values, ideas and beliefs established by the ruling social class. According to Gramsci (1971), social order is maintained through a dynamic process of coercion and consent whereby dominant groups produce dominant cultural beliefs, called hegemonic ideologies, and subordinated groups to consent to structural conditions that may be oppressive given the power of hegemonic ideologies. Like other institutions of the state power, sports too serve as an important vehicle of transmitting the dominant ideology that result in naturalising the unequal power relation between the dominant and subordinate groups. According to Gramsci, this unequal relation is maintained and continued through a negotiation between the giver and the recipient on the basis of procuring benefits for conforming to the prevailing ideology. As Gramsci said
.....the fact of hegemony presupposes that account be taken of the interests and the tendencies of the groups over which hegemony is to be exercised, and that a certain compromise equilibrium should be formed (1971:216).

Thus, sport is envisaged as a purveyor of ideological hegemony which aims to internally manipulate a section of the society with its compliance in exchange of safeguarding their interest.

Although, highly relevant and significant, Marxist sociology of sports has been challenged on a number of grounds. Like, as Hargreaves (1994) argues that the sphere of gender relation is barely noticeable in Marxist analysis of sports. Its focus is rather on class difference than the relation between sports and capitalism which fails to capture the unequal positioning and differences of power among men and women. Further, Marxist approach to sports has overlooked the dual oppression of both capitalist and patriarchal ideology on women, creating a double barrier for women (in general) to participate in sports and women athletes (in particular) within sports.

**Structuralist Marxism: Theories of Social Reproduction**

**Louis Althusser**

During the 1970s analogous to the neo-Marxists approach to sports emerged ‘theories of social reproduction’ within sociology of sports through the writings of Louis Althusser and Pierre Bourdieu (Hargreaves, 1994). Though there are differences in the approaches of these two theorists, but they commonly addressed how the economies, dominant cultures and power relations of capitalist societies survive and are reproduced through the institutions of ‘Sports’ (Hargreaves, 1994). Althusser developed the theory of ‘Ideological State Apparatus’ (ISA) (1971) which highlights the State’s use of ideology to sustain control within the society through its institutions.
like education, family, religion, political as well as sports. Althusser defines ideology as a tool to determine people who they are, where they belong to and what they want. According to Althusser, Ideological State Apparatus are more powerful and controlling than conventional rules, mores, traditional beliefs because it determines a person’s place in the order of the society where the subject is trapped in the deeper logics of economical, political and ideological systems that erode human capacities for acting as agency (Turner, 2003). Althusser viewed ‘sports’ as a cultural apparatus of the state; a distinct and specialized institution where the dominant ideology is concentrated and through which it is transmitted to become a ‘lived condition’ that functions to reproduce, reaffirm the social relations of modern capitalist production. The ideologies that characterise modern sports, like competitiveness, chauvinism, nationalism, sexism, act as an efficient channel of social control which functions to reproduce and uphold the existing patterns of power relations (Hargreaves, 1994:19). Althusser points out that the rules and meanings advocated by modern sports are passively accepted and learned by people which results in a natural and automatic reproduction of a culture that satisfies capitalism. Thus sports as an arena of promoting free expression, mental and physical ability is conceived as an area of overtly demanding conformity, which latently satisfies the dominant ruling ideology.

**Pierre Bourdieu**

Pierre Bourdieu provides a more systematic and explicit analysis of sporting activity within his theory of social reproduction. He conceived sports as ‘Physical Capital’, i.e. those physical attributes and abilities such as strength and skill that are embodied through particular sporting and social practices, a class specific activity which is determined by ones position of class in the society. Physical capital refers to the development of bodies in ways which are recognized as possessing value in social
fields. The production of physical capital refers to the social formation of bodies by individuals through sporting, leisure and other activities in ways which express a class location and which are accorded symbolic value. According to Bourdieu ‘sports’ as physical capital is homologous to capitalist economy as it reflects the embedded class structure and class differences present in the society that work together to reproduce and preserve the power relation between classes. He employed the term ‘habitus’ to explain the process of reproduction. Bourdieu describes habitus as “those internalised structures, dispositions, tendencies, habits, ways of acting, that are both individualistic and yet typical of one’s social group” (Oliver, O’Reilly, 2010:54). The habitus is internalized and is determined by the social conditions in which an individual lives, that deeply affects people’s orientation towards their activities and lifestyles. For example preference for foods, dress, manner of eating, ways of talking, ways of walking and even the choice of sports one engages in that Bourdieu terms it as the development of ‘taste’ can be seen as a conscious manifestation of one’s habitus. Bourdieu hence confirms that habitus itself acts as a structured structure that organizes its members perception of the social world. Similarly affiliation to and participation in particular sporting activity according to Bourdieu is class specific in nature, that is individuals (taste) choice of sports is not solely determined by ones passion or love for the sport but is influenced by ones class position. It is as if individuals are thus ‘caged’ in class specific life-styles which encompass cultural tastes or preferences, such as sports. Like for instance Bourdieu observes that the working classes have an instrumental orientation and prefer sport demanding strength, endurance and propensity to violence; whereas privileged classes regard their body as an end in itself for reasons of appearance or health and participate in those activities such as running or movements without any other
aim than physical exercise and the symbolic appropriation of the world reduced to the status of a landscape (cited in Hargreaves, 2000: 20).

Bourdieu further claims that the choice of sports i.e. what kind of sport one will engage or what kind of sport one can afford to engage in and who will engage in which sports is also determined by the class background and gender of individuals. For example in India some sports like Tennis, Squash, Shooting, Golf and equestrian sports are still dominated by both men and women belonging to the upper class of the society or rather the elites of the society engage in these sports, similarly football or cricket is conceived differently in terms of ‘who plays’ the game, or ‘who dominates’ the genre of sports, men’s cricket or football is considered as an elite sports compared to women’s cricket or football which is underrated. Physical capital develops through an interrelationship between social location, the ‘habitus’ and taste. Social locations refer to the material circumstances which contextualise people's daily lives. These locations are important as they are characterised by varying degrees of 'distance from necessity', or material and financial want (Bourdieu, 1985). This denotes that individuals have unequal opportunities for acquiring that physical capital most valued in society, as its initial accumulation requires an investment of spare time and economic capital. Bourdieu claims that women’s sports are determined by their class, for instance it is relatively easy for women from privileged backgrounds to take part in exotic and adventurous sports such as climbing, sailing, skiing and to make inroads into sports which had been traditionally monopolized by men and provide settings for display of affluence, social standing compared to women who lacked the privilege of time and money.

However Bourdieu’s analysis of sports falls short of appreciating how cultural fields like sports itself possess the capacity for women to resist and reform the
prevalent gender relations instead of being subjected to a complex system of cultural facts.

**The Civilizing Process: Norbert Elias**

Figurational sociology gained academic attention within sociology of sports through the famous work of Norbert Elias *The Civilizing Process* (1939, 1969, 1982). Figurational Sociology, according to Elias envisages society as a dynamic nexus of mutually oriented interdependent individuals giving rise to social structures and social processes (eg civilizing process). This perspective stresses on the interdependent relation between individuals in social structures (figuration) and how this social bond is governed by a balance of power intended to reinforce the two edged character of figurations which may be both enabling and constraining. The civilizing process as Elias describes it is a long term social process of regulating behaviour of individuals with reference to its social structure has been applied to the study of the development of modern sport. To begin with, the civilizing process which is also analogous to social control emerged in societies of Western Europe between the middle ages and the early years of the twentieth century as a practice of refinement of manners through self-control and constraints according to the acceptable codes and social standards sanctioned by the powerful knowledge of the society. The codes of behaviour focused primarily on bodily practices and bodily habits about how to eat, how to move, how and when to control and express ones emotion. ‘Sport’ was considered as an important medium of social control through The ‘Sportization process’ as Elias terms it, that is ‘dampening of Angriffslust’ or dampening down or curbing the covetousness for attacking. The sportization process (a form of civilizing process) implies progressive systemisation of manners and actions through strict rules applying to sports for regulating conflict, providing fare chances to all for winning and increasing self
discipline (Murphy, Sheard, Waddington, 2000). Elias has traced the gradual development of modern sports like football, fox hunting in Europe through the sportization process which overtly demonstrate sanctioned acts of aggression and violence through sports for public enjoyment.

In spite of the significant contribution of figurational sociology to sociology of sports, this perspective is criticised by sports feminists for having neglected the gender issue. To distinctively point out this perspective on sports has taken for granted the male dominance in the field of sports by not specifically discussing about women’s involvement in sports. As Jennifer Hargreaves points out:

....with the exception of a section about fox hunting, in which a limited number of upper-class women would have actively participated... the focus, is exclusively about male sports and shared traditions. It is not an accident that all figurational sports sociology has been written by men about male sports.....such a position represents an alignment with the dominant values and modes of thinking of Western societies. Because it claims to be objective and uncritical, in a subtle but fundamental manner it is supporting the popular idea that sport is more suited to men than to women (1992:165).

Furthermore, the civilizing process confines women to private domain and liberates men in the public front. The civilizing process civilizes individual according to their biological sex roles. A woman will be considered as a civilized being if she performs on the basis of her gender roles, otherwise she will be labelled as a deviant being. Displaying femininity through conforming to accepted, sanctioned gender roles makes a woman civilized. So any woman breaching the prescribed code of civility like engaging in sports, treading in the male domain will be labelled as an uncivilized being.
Elias never discussed about the difference in the pattern and process and effect of the civilizing process on men and women. He at the same time never discussed about women’s sports.

**Social Constructionist perspective on Body, Gender and Sexuality**

"Any sociology of the body involves a discussion of social control and any discussion of social control must consider the control of women's bodies under patriarchy"

(Turner, 1984: 2-3).

Social Constructionist perspective emphasises on the socially created nature of social life. It argues that the society is actively and creatively produced by human beings and their interactions are merely given or taken for granted situation. Social world is hence conceived as interacting and interpretive network woven by individuals and group that is subject to habitualization to retain their meaningful character which precedes institutionalisation. It is the emergence of institutions which social constructionists perceive as an objective to social reality that claims legitimate authority over individuals’ (subjective) experiences and generate knowledge about the social world. Social constructionist perspective seeks to understand the process by which knowledge becomes ‘taken for granted reality’ for individuals influencing and controlling human actions and conduct in their everyday life. As opposed to natural empiricism which claims that our senses are our best guide to knowledge about nature, social constructionism raises serious criticisms about the reliability of such evidence of the senses, claiming that culture determines how we apprehend and comprehend the world. Our knowledge of the natural and social world is determined or constructed by background cultural assumptions. Sociologists argue that what appear to be naturally occurring phenomena are in fact products of social processes (Turner, 1984:11). Berger and Luckmann posits in their groundbreaking work *Social construction of reality- A*
treatise in the sociology of knowledge that “From the moment of birth, man’s organismic development, and indeed a large part of his biological being as such, are subjected to continuing socially determined interference” (1966:48). They further advocate that “...the self cannot be adequately understood apart from the particular social context in which they were shaped” (1966:48). For example

The character of the self as a social product is not limited to the particular configuration the individual identifies as himself, (for instance as a ‘man’, in a particular way in which this identity is defined and formed in the culture in question), but to the comprehensive psychological equipment that serves as an appendage to the particular configuration (for instance, “manly emotions, attitudes and even somatic reactions) (1966:50).

Berger and Luckmann posits that social order is a human product and is not biologically derived; rather biological facts serve as a necessary presupposition for the production of social order (1966:52). Consequently, the biological constitution of individuals constantly lies in an interrelationship with its social environment that is subjected to a variety of socio-cultural determinations. Body, gender and sexuality has been the best evidence of what Berger and Luckmann states

.....the plasticity of the human organism and its susceptibility to socially determined interferences (1966:49).

The systematic study of body within the theoretical investigation of sociology gained explicit importance during the late twentieth century. More specifically, the rising discourse on body as an important social issue driven by the intellectual works of Michel Foucault, Erving Goffman and Pierre Bourdieu along with feminists (second
wave) and postmodern social theory gradually shaped the social constructionist view. In contrast to the naturalistic approaches which overemphasise the biological aspect determining one’s capabilities, constraints and shaping the identity of individuals, the social constructionist standpoint advocates the importance of analysing body as a socially reproduced entity which is perceived beyond one’s own biological orientation, given meaning by the larger society influencing individual’s perception about oneself and eventually determining one’s own position in the society.

Foucault’s work is one of the most critical and influential social constructionist approaches that conceive the body not as a passive receptor of social meanings but as a socially sculpted artefact produced by the existing dominant discourse of knowledge. For Foucault “the body is not only given meaning by discourse, but is wholly constituted by discourse” (Shilling, 1993: 81). However, central to Foucault’s work was the role of power (mediated through institutions) in governing the everyday bodily practices, remodelling the body a social unit that can be subjected to control and monitoring. Foucault wrote:

Power is strong because it produces effects at the level of desire—as also at the level of knowledge. Far from preventing knowledge, power produces it. If it has been possible to constitute knowledge of the body.......It was on the basis of power over the body that a physiological, organic knowledge of it became possible (1977: 50).

The body, then, far from being a natural, physical entity becomes a tenuous object easily penetrated and manipulated by power and through which the dominant ideology can be instituted. It is through this investment of power that the ‘body of the society’ or more specifically the ‘social body’ comes to existence. As Foucault claims
I believe the great fantasy is the idea of a social body constituted by the universality of wills. Now the phenomenon of the social body is the effect not of a consensus but of the materiality of power operating on the very bodies of individuals (1977: 55).

To Foucault the inscription of power on the body occurs from the moment the body enters culture, that is, from the moment it is being conceived (Cahill, 2000). Foucault’s analysis of the relationship between discourse, power, sexuality and subjectivity that seeks to establish a disciplinary knowledge, a universal truth and reaffirm the prevailing ideology has been pertinent to feminist studies, sports sociology as well as to sports feminism.

Though Foucault's own work took too little account of gender and the experiences of women (Theberge, 1991), his theoretical outlook has been adopted by feminists along with feminist sports sociologists. Feminists and sports feminists inspired by Foucault critically analysed the significance of ‘gender’ in the play of power where female ‘body’ is perceived as a locus of control and manipulation according to gendered norms and identities within various spheres of social life including sports. King claims that

Woman’s historical association with the body has resulted in her being judged by and valued for her appearance more than man, often above all else, and has also engendered the fear and dread of otherness (2004:36).

Goffman’s (1963, 1972, 1983) constructionist analysis of body claims that the ‘body’ is used as a medium to maintain the social relations of dominance and subordination i.e. power relation (Shilling, 1993). For instance as Goffman explained, the bodily expressions of deference, such as when men open doors for women, can be
seen as not merely symbolic but as constitutive of gender inequalities (Shilling, 1993). He further argues that, “men often treat women as faulted actors with respect to ‘normal’ capacity for various forms of physical exertion” (Goffman, 1974:196-7). Bourdieu’s conception of ‘distinctive body’ (1988) also supplements the social constructionist study of body that claims the body as physical capital- a bearer of symbolic value. According to Bourdieu the natural body no longer hold any meaning unless and until it gets transformed into a socially constructed entity to gain distinction as ‘body for others’. Such modification and manipulation of natural bodies into ‘distinctive bodies’ which possess value in social fields is recognised as physical capital by Bourdieu (Shilling, 1993). Consequently, it is through this distinctive body that the relation between existing social structures and cultural practices are manifested which according to Bourdieu is integral to the maintenance of social inequalities (Shilling, 1993). For example as Bourdieu assert that sports as a physical capital is highly valued for men and boys and estimated low for women, whereas in contrast beauty contests are considered as valuable physical capital for women (Hargreaves, 1994: 21). Connell’s analysis of the gendered body similarly suggests that the social categories that conceptualises the body as a social entity transcends the natural physical abilities of individuals. Connell terms this contradiction between social processes of categorization and the bodily bases on which they rest as the ‘negation of biology’. As a result bodily similarities of individuals are not acknowledged instead they are negated or suppressed and differences are exaggerated (Shilling, 1993: 95). Consequently, according to Connell the inflated or fabricated biological differences become the yardstick of constructing a generalised socially-determined criteria of gender identities that produce gender differences which in the process act to produce social differences. For example as Connell states
examples of the negation of biology include situations where young girls are
defined as ‘weak’ and ‘fragile’ even though they may be taller and stronger than
their male counterparts, and when a young boy cries in response to pain, yet is
reprimanded and told to ‘act like a man’ (1987: 80).

Adoption of the social constructionist perspective by sports feminists have
explicitly emphasised that the female body in sport has often been presented as a body in
trouble (Cole, 1993). Feminist scholarship in sports history has exclusively recognised
that sport played a historical role in the maintenance of hierarchical gender relations
based on the notion that female body is athletically inferior to male body (Hall, 1996,
Pappano, McDonagh, 1998). Further analyses done by sports feminists have revealed the
accepted or romanticised understandings of female resistance within sports especially
during the Victorian Era where the fragility of the female body was produced and
modified as a medical ‘truth’, to endorse gender appropriate activities for men and
dominance in sport was initially maintained by exclusivity, supported by a set of medical
(Doctors), biological (scientists), moral (teachers) and religious (priests) discourses.
These discourses asserted that women were morally and spiritually stronger but
physically and intellectually weaker than men and that there was no redeeming value to
the individual or the society in women playing sport, because of the damage such
participation would do to the reproductive ability of the female body (Lenskyj, 1986,
Theberge, 2000). The most significant physiological differences between men and
women were connected with procreation. As women menstruate, bear children and men
do not; this belief of innate biological differences between men and women sanctioned
by medical, scientific discourses provided a rationale for limiting women’s association
with sports. Sports feminist asserted that social meanings attached to the women’s and
men’s body create an illusion of strength and weakness dividing women and men into two hierarchical categories based on their natural bodily abilities, where men are considered as naturally superior to women. Whitson (1990) claim that the notion of ideal feminine body and masculine body is transmitted to women and men in virtually all aspects of life and through all societal institutions: family, school, religion, professional life, and the media. From childhood days, young boys and girls inculcate the gendered practices of play based on the normative notion of female frailty in sports and acclimatize to stereotypical activities resulting in conforming to expected notion of gender appropriate activities in their later adult experiences (Whitson, 1990, Delamere, Shaw, 2002). Like for example Horowitz’s collection *Boys and their Toys?: Masculinity, Technology and Class in America* (2001) examines “manhood in the workplace,” “learning to be men” and “manhood at play.” Hargreaves (1994) asserts that the essence of biological reductionism has always been used specifically to construct social ideas about gender and defend the inequality between men and women in sports. She further claims that just because large number of boys and men engage in sports, and women, generally confined within private spheres, the visible evidence confirmed that this practice is in the ‘natural’ order of things. Patricia Vertinsky (1990) similarly argues that strength, dominance, aggression and competitive nature are taken to be ‘natural’ and essential qualities of men suited to the rigours of sports whereas in contrast women are perceived as emotionally weak, soft spoken, passive and vulnerable, therefore unsuitable for any strenuous physical activities and competitive sports. Numerous accounts of apparently adverse effects of female exercise were published throughout the nineteenth century and continued to have credible and influential effect on female participation in sports. Like for example in 1887 the chairperson of the *British Medical Association* proposed that:
in the interest of social progress, national efficiency and the progressive movement of human race, women should be denied education and other activities which would cause constitutional overstrain and inability to produce healthy offspring (cited in Hargreaves, 1994:45).

These justifications were established as self evident truth, consciously infused in everyday cultural rituals, reproduced through bodily practices became part of ‘unquestioned, taken for granted commonsense behaviour’ which systematically subordinated and controlled (women) athlete’s participation in sports. Like for instance women’s boxing and weight lifting events were sanctioned and gained international recognition not before 1980’s compared to men’s event which achieved recognition as early as 1680, as it was thought that women’s breast would be injured while boxing (Hargreaves, 1994: 217). In contrast to that musical gymnastics, ice-skating and synchronized swimming were affirmed as feminine-appropriate sport as they exhibited socially approved images of femininity, demonstrating essential differences from traditional images of sporting masculinity. Consequently, as pointed out by Marleau-Ponty (1962) gender difference that are inscribed on the body to accentuate the ideal body of femininity and masculinity through various practices, shape the consciousness of individuals, framing their self identity and subjectivity. Furthermore, as Hargreaves (1994) claims that women’s uncritical acceptance of their own bodily incapacitation also legitimised the already established medical scientific fact, validating the powerful knowledge of women’s incompetence in sports compared to men. Hence, the medical stereotype of the ‘delicate female’ was gradually established in all spheres of social life, where female body became vulnerable to the invasion of (patriarchal) ideology.

Messner (1988) describes female athlete and her body as ‘a contested ideological terrain’. In sports specifically, (like in other areas of life) conventional and
stereotypical representation of women athlete’s body is complemented with the ideological assumptions about masculinising effects on the female body. The acquisition of strength, athletic skills, muscularity has always been empowering for men, whereas for women athletes possessing a strong muscular physique has been valued far less and considered as ‘unwomanly’, ‘unappealing’, concealing the desired feminine body. Horne and Bentley (1989) state that the female body has always been idealized and presented to a set of bodily attributes – fit yet beautiful, slim yet sexy, erotic and sexually desirable to the opposite sex. Hargreaves asserts that

....the body is the visible sign of sexuality, and since in sports and other exercise regimes the focus is on the physical body, they provide obvious channels for its sexualized display (1994: 160).

Featherstone (1982) similarly argues that the idea of exercise or any sporting activity for female athletes is usually merged with their ‘sexuality’ since they challenge the traditional images of femininity. Social constructivist perspective views sexuality as a practice which is influenced profoundly by social prescriptions. It tries to debunk the idea of sexuality as ‘instinctual’ or ‘natural’ – that binds genders to specific roles and demeanour (Gagnon & Simon, 1973; Osmond & Thorne, 1993; Weeks, 1985). Tiefer (1987, 1995) suggested that sexuality must be viewed as a construct that emerges in interactions as a result of social and cultural expectations and negotiations, not as something emerging from ‘inside’ of each person. Foucault’s analysis of sexuality reveals a fundamental link between power, knowledge and discourse. Foucault believed that knowledge is always a form of power, in fact knowledge is power -- (Mason, 2016, http://www.moyak.com/papers/michel-foucault-power.html- accessed on 24.10.2017). For Foucault
Knowledge linked to power, not only assumes the authority of 'the truth' but has the power to make itself true. All knowledge, once applied in the real world, has effects, and in that sense at least, 'becomes true.' Knowledge, once used to regulate the conduct of others, entails constraint, regulation and the disciplining of practice. Thus, 'there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time, power relations (Foucault, 1977:27).

According to Foucault, sexuality is a site of repression as well as stimulation, through which modern power is manifested and modern discourse on sex is constructed that aims to control and normalize individuals (Foucault, 1977). Hence, Foucault conceives of ‘sexuality’ as “a historically imbued system of discourse which has produced the notion of ‘sex’ as part of its strategy to conceal and thereby to perpetuate power relations” (Munro, 2003). Foucault wrote:

Sexuality must not be thought of as a kind of natural given which power tries to hold in check, or as an obscure domain which knowledge tries gradually to uncover. It is the name which can be given to a historical construct; not a furtive reality that is difficult to grasp, but a great surface network in which the stimulation of bodies, the intensification of pleasures, the incitement to discourse, the formation of special knowledges, the strengthening of controls and resistance, are linked to one another in accordance with a few major strategies of knowledge and power (1980: 105-106).

Foucault, in his work The History of Sexuality, Volume-1 (1976) discussed how Sexuality – the correlative of that slowly developed discursive practice ‘scientia sexualis’ corresponds to the functional requirements of a discourse that must produce
its truth (Hurley, 1998: 68). According to Foucault sexuality was subjected to scientific
discursivity, medical intervention and confession to identify and reveal the ‘normal’
and ‘pathological’ truth about sex that tried to remain hidden. Foucault claims that the
deployment of sexuality since the seventeenth century developed first through the
familial institutions where parents, relatives became the chief agents of regulating
sexuality with support from external groups of doctors, educators and psychologists.
The role of family to anchor sexuality and provide it with a permanent structure was
developed through two primary dimensions: the husband-wife axis and the parent–
children axis (Foucault, 1976). It is through these institutions that the knowledge of
sexuality, its function and its legitimacy was employed. Foucault discussed that such
practice and quest for knowledge about sexuality gave birth to a new personage in the
19th century ‘the homosexual’- a mysterious physiology with a pathological, unnatural
and contrary sexual sensation. Foucault wrote

   Homosexuality appeared as one forms of sexuality when it was transposed from
the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, hermaphrodisim of the
soul. The sodomite has been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a
species (1980: 43)

By the end of nineteenth century sexuality was subjected to medical and scientific
intrusion which gradually led to the formation of a discourse, a discourse that
functioned to create and claim truth through the ‘scientific practice’ of ‘productive
sexuality’. Foucault observed that

   ....the medical examinations, the psychiatric investigation, the pedagogical
report, and family controls may have the over-all and apparent objective of
saying no to all wayward or unproductive sexualities, but the fact is that they
function as mechanisms with a double impetus: pleasure and power. The pleasure that comes of exercising a power (1980: 45).

Sexuality, then, isn't something that power represses, but a great conduit of power itself. Foucault’s conception of sexuality has intersected with feminist outlook as both propose that sexuality is a product of power – knowledge duo which objectifies the body by imposing constraints to appropriate sanctioned legitimate activities. Mackinnon in her article ‘Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State: An Agenda for Theory’ (1982) claims that

Sexuality is that social process which creates, organizes, expresses, and directs desire, creating the social beings we know as women and men, as their relations create society. Sexuality to feminism is socially constructed yet constructing, universal as activity yet historically specific, jointly comprised of matter and mind. As the organized expropriation of the work of some for the benefit of others defines a class-workers-the organized expropriation of the sexuality of some for the use of others defines the sex, woman. Heterosexuality is its structure, gender and family its congealed forms, sex roles its qualities generalized to social persona, reproduction a consequence, and control its issue (1982: 516).

Similarly women athletes’ participation in sports has always been an important site of investigation about her sexual orientation. Rather sports provide a ground for testing female athletes’ sexuality. Christine Grant, women’s athletic director at the University of Iowa, stated that a stereotypical conception continued to persist that there exists a positive correlation between women’s association in sports and lesbianism which alarm all women athletes lesbian or not resulting in emphasising femininity or to
hide their sexuality (Carillo & Deford, 1999). Lenskyj (1986) claims that the ideological ground controlled by medical rationale about women athletes sexuality helped to perpetuate the “loss of femininity” myth that was used as an effective means to control all women and particularly those in sports. Griffin (2002) likewise assert that the predominant heterosexist culture and knowledge creates distorted identity for women athletes being labelled as ‘mannish lesbian’ exposing them not alone to homophobia or social control but also revealing the power and stigma of the lesbian label. Consequently, the female athletes’ body becomes particular target of power which needs to be intervened, and subjected to constant inspection and control. Its uncontrolled sexuality must be inhibited and inherent weakness of character exposed, particularly as it is primarily conceived as a reproductive body. Every indication of abnormality is thoroughly and enthusiastically examined and classified by numerous ‘experts’ eager to provide irrefutable proof of its inherent pathology. Though Foucault’s conception of power has been criticised by feminist scholars for not directly acknowledging its detrimental consequences for women, nevertheless Foucault’s “capillary” conception of power-, i.e. micro-diversity of power relations which permeates all social strata producing and constraining subjectivity can be employed as a conceptual tool to analyze the diverse obstacles and subjugation faced by women athlete’s. Foucault emphasised that power should be analysed on the basis of where it is exercised over individuals, the actual practices of subjugation rather than the intentions that guide attempts at domination (Jessop, 2007: 36). Power is employed and exercised through networks rather than being applied at particular points where individuals not only circulate between its thread but also simultaneously exercise this power. As Foucault said:
The individual is not to be conceived as a sort of elementary nucleus, a primitive atom, a multiple and inert material on which power comes to fasten.......or crushes individual. In fact it is already one of the prime effects of power that certain bodies, certain gestures, certain discourses, certain desires, come to be identified and constituted as individuals. The individual is an effect of power........and at the same times its vehicle (Foucault, 1976: 98).

Foucault claims that in every society, the body became an important object and target of power which imposed on it constraints, prohibitions or obligations (Foucault, 1977). Foucault’s aim was to thematize the operation of the bio-power which, in discursively dissecting the body, rendered the modern individual both the object and subject of disciplinary knowledge (Andrews, 2000). The penetration of power in the body concentrates in creating an actively passive unit which Foucault termed as ‘docile bodies’ that can be manoeuvred, shaped, trained into a useful body for the sustenance of the power. Foucault’s concept of docility as discussed in his work Discipline and Punish (1975) unites the ‘analysable body to the manipulable body’ (Foucault, 1975). For Foucault a body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved (Foucault, 1975). It is this technique or manifestation of power to produce docile bodies through various social institutions like the family, schools, monasteries, armies is described by Foucault as ‘disciplinary method’. Foucault describes this disciplinary technique as a “political anatomy”, “mechanics of power” that explores breaks and rearranges the human body (Foucault, 1975: 138). As Foucault observed, “Discipline makes individuals; it is the specific technique of power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise” (1975: 170). Hence for Foucault, power is demonstrated through disciplinary process- a product of modern power that is sustained through the process of continuous surveillance. It is through surveillance that makes
disciplinary practices functional (Foucault, 1975: 174). Foucault elucidated various mechanisms that were employed to install disciplinary practices like, through observation, enclosure, partitioning, functional sites, rank order and punishments, each of these techniques functions to create formula of domination and induce the effect of power. Foucault historically traced the development and analyzed the various techniques of surveillance exercised by the authoritative machinery of the state, of which one of the most important and powerful machinery of surveillance was the ‘panoptican’. Derived from the Greek word **pan**- all and **optos**-visible (Andrews, 2000: 122), panopticon was an architectural design put forth by Jeremy Bentham in the mid-19th Century for prisons, insane asylums, schools, hospitals, and factories. As Jeremy Bentham explains:

> A building circular.....the prisoners in their cells, occupying the circumference—the officers in the centre. By blinds and other contrivances, the Inspectors concealed... from the observation of the prisoners: hence the sentiments of a sort of omnipresence—the whole circuit reviewable with little, or... without any, change of place. One station in the inspection part affording the most perfect view of every cell.


This modern structure allowed guards to continually see inside each cell from the tower without being seen but with the prisoners aware to be surely looked at, at any moment. The architecture of the panopticon hence ensured that power and authority was visible, yet unverifiable by the inmates but subjected to constant ‘gaze’. For Foucault, Panopticon represented regulatory modes of power and knowledge which instead of using violent methods, such as torture, and placing prisoners in dungeons it offered a powerful, sophisticated, progressive, modern and democratic means of internalized coercion which aimed to normalize individuals through constant gaze or
observation producing self-disciplining subjects. Since the structure demanded an unquestioned obedience, the experience of constant surveillance proved an effective ‘guarantee of order’ (Andrews, 2000:123). As Foucault said

......the major effect of panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power (Foucault, 1977: 201).

For Foucault the Panopticon was a metaphor for increasing surveillance that guided him to analyse disciplinary operation of modern power through; a) Systems of social control through self-regulation, and b) The power-knowledge interplay in producing mechanisms of self-induced functional discipline. The ultimate outcome is that we live in a modern institutionalised panoptic society subjected to constant observation, inspection and internalization of knowledge that in turn shapes and controls the knowledge about ourselves. Foucault argues that

....we are neither in the amphitheatre, nor on the stage, but in the panoptic machine, invested by its effects of power, which we bring to ourselves since we are part of its mechanisms (1977: 217).

Munro (2011) argues that in Foucauldian term ‘power’ is not an oppressive force imposed systematically from one source but a positive social presence that is omnipresent in all aspects of life, exerting itself in all directions and creating a variety of relationship. Foucault drew attention to the mechanisms of power which through disciplinary institutions secreted a machinery of control that functioned like a microscope of conduct; the fine, analytical divisions that they created formed around individuals an apparatus of observation, recording and training- a project linked to transformation of individuals (Foucault, 1984: 191). This modern technique of power
successfully secures the compliance of the agents themselves, subtler in the operation than traditional power relations, which have assumed an essentially negative and regulatory function (Munro 2003:82). Similarly, gender inequality, social differences based on sexuality between men and women, is maintained through this pervasive power dynamics that is not coerced but achieved through undisputed internalization of dominant/patriarchal values and norms as a natural process —that become integrated in the cognitive, emotional, and conative structure of the self for all (Munro, 2011: 278).

Andrews posits that sports is implicated as an “optic of modern disciplinary power: a mechanism of surveillance which renders visible and the intelligible the normal body, and the abnormal body against which the norm is constituted” (2000: 124). Disciplinary institutions like family, marriage, media, class position, sports and above all knowledge act as panopticon which describe the form and functions of a structure, designed for the normalization. By implementing corrective measures and corporal training the panopticon society intends to facilitate the controlled manufacturing of suitably docile, disciplined bodies. Lenskyj (1986) asserts that the female athletes’ body, sexuality has been subjected to disciplining, scrutinizing gaze of the human sciences far more than the male athlete i.e. “visibility is a trap” (Foucault, 1976: 200). Medical and scientific discourses confirmed the pathology of female athletes’ biology and legitimated women’s subjugation in general, and specifically for women athletes’ prescribing what kind of sporting activities women athletes’ should engage in, what clothes they should wear to preserve appropriate ‘womanliness’ and ‘productive sexuality’ both on the athletic field and in the private sphere. For example during the early twentieth century in Sweden, physical education programmes were segregated not alone on the basis of gender but also on the basis of class status of young girls and boys. Arguing for a differentiated curriculum for working class boys
and girls- boys were educated and trained as war recruits and girls to be educated for
domestic labour and for their future duties as wives and mothers (Hargreaves, 1994:
73). Similarly for ruling elite and middle class, gymnastics was treated as desirable
physical activity for girls that complemented with regimented standards of behaviour-
which was considered the best training for womanhood and motherhood. Scraton
(1986, 1992) argues that irrespective of class structure and backgrounds there is a
consistent construction of stereotyped ideas about different abilities of and appropriate
social roles for boys and girls that plays a vital role in shaping notion and attitudes
towards body, sexuality and gender.

Feminist Contribution to Sports Sociology

Myths Associated with Women”s Participation in Sports: Special reference to the
Victorian Era

“Heavy house work is safe.........heavy play is dangerous”

The root of contemporary or modern sport can be traced back to the Victorian
period in Britain and North America during the late nineteenth and early twentieth
century (Theberge, 2000, Hargreaves, 2000). Sport especially in Britain during the
Victorian and Edwardian Eras has been the subject of considerable study by feminist
sport sociologists and sport historians as this period was viewed significant leading to
today’s “sporting global village” (Anderson, 2010). Sport sociologists along with sports
feminists (Theberge, 2000, Hargreaves, 2000, Houlihan 2006) have argued that the initial
locus for the development of sports was the Boys public schools, which was the setting
for institutionalization of organized activities with rules and regulations characteristic of
present day sports. However the cult of athleticism and physical activities were infused
with the Victorian version and understanding of masculinity, analogous to physical
prowess, manliness that celebrated toughness, physical dominance and upheld the model of male athleticism. As Jenifer Hargreaves describes

Sports during the Victorian period constituted a unique form of cultural life; they were overwhelmingly symbols of masculinity and chauvinism, embodying aggressive displays of physical power and competitiveness. In the 19th century there was no question that sports were the natural domain of men and that to be good at them was to be essentially masculine (2000: 43).

Conversely women’s participation in physical activities was underdeveloped, inequitable and addressed with sheer revulsion. Victorian ideals identified women with ‘nature’ that was symbolically aligned to their reproductive roles and positions as housewives, mothers compared to men who were celebrated as ‘culture’ related with their roles at workplace outside home. Prior to 1870 sports for women/girls mainly existed in the form of play which was recreational and informal compared to sports for men/boys which were considered as serious, organized and competitive in nature. Besides accounts of detrimental consequences of female exercise were published throughout the nineteenth century which over a long period of time continued to have credibility and control on female participation in competitive sports into the twentieth century. For example Donald Walker in 1836 in a book entitled *Exercises for ladies: Calculated to preserve and improve beauty* asserts that riding for women should be condemned because “it claimed to produce natural consolidation of the bones of the lower part of the body, ensuring thoughtful impediment to future functions” (cited in Hargreaves, 2000: 105). Similarly over 70 years later, in ‘Eugenics Review’ it was claimed that
An emphasis on games and athletics is likely to cause irreparable damage to the growing adolescent girls and that hockey, specifically, could disable a woman from breastfeeding (cited in Hargreaves, 2000: 105).

The popular idea that represented women as inherently emotional, fragile and passive were taken as the rationale to restrain and exclude women from participating in any strenuous physical activity or competitive sports. In contrast men were characterized as aggressive, competitive and incisive – best suited to the rigours of sports. Jenifer Hargreaves (2002) point out that the tradition of proscribing women from any form of physical activity emerged from the Victorian cult of family which acted as a unifying force along with patriarchy for constraining the development of women’s sports. The Victorian ideal of family unit, sexual division of labour along with medical practitioners, scientific influence confined women to the private sphere of home while liberating men to freely pursue and accumulate capital - maintaining social supremacy. Though this model of family was applicable for every citizen, in reality it was followed chiefly by the elite and affluent middle classes as for majority of working class families both the husband and wife and in some cases children engaged in wage labour to finance livelihood. Nevertheless, in the larger society women’s role as a worker has always been conceived as secondary compared to her role within the family. Women, as it was argued were eminently suited, because of their intrinsic physical qualities to staying at home as good wives and engage in procreation, and by the same argument were poorly equipped for productive field. Integrated with elements of Social Darwinism, Victorian model incorporated the medical case of women’s physical inferiority to justify ‘maternity as the highest function’ of womanhood—essentially for the progress of the nation.
Lenskyj (1986) claims that in the 1800’s many doctors or medical practitioners linked women’s participation in athletics to complications during childbirth which was associated to an additional concern that physical activity caused uterine displacement-leading to dysmenorrhoea and sterility. Like for example in Britain for a young unmarried elite woman to practice ‘galloping at the fences’ was believed to carry the risk of breaking the hymen, signalling the loss of virginity and rendering her less marriageable (2000: 89). However, diverse leisure sports were later considered suitable for affluent, elite women, like tennis, croquet, swimming, gymnastics, riding, cycling with the provision that they were ‘gentle’ eminently suited for the ‘weaker sex’ without undermining ‘femininity’. Nonetheless, at the level of competitive events women reinforced the superiority of men by not participating and adopting the role of spectator, as a female audience watching the celebrated physical antics of men (Hargreaves, 2000). For example Dobbs in his work Edwardians At Play: Sports 1890- 1914 (1973) has illustrated through engravings, photographs and prints, many of which feature women as spectators- sitting in the stands with wasp- waisted dresses or walking in a leisurely fashion through the grounds. ‘Dress’ or ‘costume’ during the Victorian period was another area of moral control that hindered women’s participation in sports or made women athletes less efficient in their athletic performances. Lenskyj (1986) argues that the emphasis on ‘proper attire’ for women and women athletes was to protect womanhood and uplift ideals of femininity or heterosexual appeal. Theberge claims that this structure of heterosexual male athleticism and women’s frailty in sports developed in Victorian Edwardian Britain was transported to North America in the early twentieth century and gradually branched out to the other corners of world (2000: 322). Like for example during the 1880’s and 1890’s in Toronto, Canada, Lady cyclists were criticised for wearing male attires and treading the male domain and were labelled
as ‘modern mannish maidens’ who were abandoning ‘old sweet ways of womanhood’ (Lenskyj, 1986: 60).

Below are two advertisements of corset specifically prescribed for women cyclists and women who engaged in outdoor sports activities during the Victorian and Edwardian era (published in 1897 and 1902 respectively). These advertisements specifically emphasise the shape of the body rather than enhancing cycling activity. It also upholds the concept of women being aesthetically/sexually appealing while engaging in any athletic/sporting activity i.e. by maintaining socially acceptable body posture, grace and poise.

1. 1897

2. 1902

The Victorians and Edwardians therefore maximized cultural differences between the sexes and used biological explanations and justification claiming that women’s anatomy and physiology cannot endure the strain of sporting competition (Lenskyj, 1986). Consequently, biological reductionism laid the foundation for socially constructing ideas about gender and validates the existing inequalities between men and women in sports that continue even in the present twenty first century.

**Early Feminist Contribution to Sociology of Sports**

It was only with the emergence of sports feminism in the late 1970’s that unearthed the hidden gender discrimination in sports as well as in sports literature and
aimed to improve, equalize opportunities for women in sports. Early Feminist academic
venture within sports studies paved way towards more sophisticated, systematic analysis
of sports as an institution especially by addressing ‘gender’ as crucial category of
prejudice. Discussed below are the various ways in which early feminists i.e. liberal,
radical and Marxist feminist discourses have perceived the institution of sports which
unequivocally share inspite of numerous fragmentations, a critical orientation towards
the social control model of sports and the hegemonic construction, preservation of
gender identities within sports.

**Liberal Feminist Approach: Equality of opportunity**

The role of sports in oppressing, and potentially liberating women has been
challenged by the various feminist theoretical frameworks. One of the earliest theoretical
formations deployed in feminist research is liberal feminism. It asserts that general
principles of liberty and equality should apply to all women in society. The early
pioneers such as Mary Wollstonecraft, John Stuart Mill, and Harriet Taylor, who
challenged the essentialist notions of femininity, the dichotomy that posited rationality as
masculine/male and emotionality as feminine or female advocated for natural rights of
women and equality before law. The second wave liberal feminism since the 1960s and
1970s focused on equality of access and opportunity, different socialization practices,
gender stereotyping, and discrimination (Scraton, Flintoff, 2013: 97). ‘Equal rights’ or
‘Reformist’ feminism is other labels for this perspective as they advocate in stimulating
women to take up non-traditional roles and occupations and to develop masculine
characteristics to acquire power (Van Zoonen, 1991: 33). Liberal feminism in general is
based on the belief that women are disadvantaged because they do not have equal access
to resources and opportunities compared to men. Their argument advocate that women
had been debarred from actively participating in various activities because the social
order accommodates women as different i.e. “anti-rationalists” and “more natural than men” (De Stefano, 1990: 67). The basic tenet of liberal feminist ideology as explained by Tapper is:

Liberal feminism, from its origins in the late eighteenth century, has been based on two principles: that the liberal conception of the individual ought to be extended to include women, and that women ought to be accepted on equal terms with men in the public realm (1986: 37).

According to Zoonen (1991) liberal feminist discourse questions the irrational prejudice and stereotype about the supposedly natural role of women as wives, mothers, care giver which account for the unequal position of women. Liberal feminist approach to the study of sports has always challenged historically acquired inequalities in sports between men and women which exhibit culture’s tendency to cast males as being large and muscular and females as being small and thin. They reject biologically determined explanation for women’s lack of participation in sports and consider sports as a gendered institution with inadequate provision and limited opportunities for women to partake. Differences in female sports participation are seen to be the result of socialization practices carried out by institutions such as the family, media and school. For example, girls are socialized into feminine or gender appropriate activities such as netball, gymnastics, or swimming whereas boys are socialized into masculine sports such as football, rugby, or cricket and into a male physicality (Scraton, 1992). Furthermore, discriminatory practices prevent women from having equal access to sporting opportunities including facilities and resources. They advocate that if women are given the opportunity they can participate in full range of sports that men enjoy. Liberal feminists were instrumental in the passage of Title IX legislation in 1972 in United States of America that offered women, among many other rights and
protections, to equalize opportunities between sexes as part of ‘sports for all campaign’ (Costa & Guthrie, 1994). Liberal feminist ideology in sports thus concerns itself with providing ‘equal opportunity’ to women in comparison to men through legal and social reforms. Though relevant, however, there are contradictory implications in liberal feminist position. Like, as Jenifer Hargreaves states, the conception of equal opportunity symbolized ‘catching up the men’, that is it takes for granted the gendered nature of sports, where women’s right has to be fitted in. As Tapper explains

The political effect of understanding the oppression of women in liberal terms is to ask for reforms within the status quo... (1986: 37).

Sargisson (1996: 81) states that the liberal approach to sport studies provides a traditional approach to equality. Similarly the introduction of Title IX which witnessed influx of women in sports failed to challenge the dualistic view of human nature and the valuing of the mind over the body (Roth, Basow, 2004). Theoretically, liberal feminism fails to examine the complexities of gender relation of power in sports. It fails to question ‘sexual difference’ that is seen as the root of oppression through which women are irrationally excluded from public sphere. Further it doesn’t question the ‘patriarchal ideology’ for creating a barrier for women and at the same time it fails to capture discrimination within the field of sports.

**Radical Feminist Approach: Separatism & power**

In the chronological order next comes the Radical feminist approach, which developed out of radical politics in the 1960s and 1970s which saw the development of women’s consciousness-raising groups and which asserted that ‘patriarchy’—an elaborate system of male domination is the root cause of women’s oppression. Unlike liberal approach, radical philosophy alleges that the ability of men to dominate women
is the most basic form of oppression based on physical and psychological differences between sexes. The earliest radical feminists, such as Millett (1969), claimed that the oppressed position of women in patriarchal society was due to the social construction of gender-appropriate behaviour which limited women’s access to positions of authority in that society. Women were trained to accept and value the virtues of passivity, nurturance, deference and care for others. These virtues were enacted in their roles as wife or lover, mother, homemaker or in the limited employment opportunities that women were deemed capable of filling. Patriarchy as a social system is accused of exploiting women and account for women’s inferior position in the society. Radical Feminists have been in the forefront of exposing male abuse of women and advocates for politicizing issues which earlier were considered as private like wife battering, marital rape, pornography, women trafficking. ‘Family’ formerly conceived as a private sphere is now considered as an important nurturer of patriarchy (through socialization) along with other institutions like school, marriage, and media. Radical feminists explored the nature of oppression through the personal experiences of women (i.e. the “personal is political”) and centralized (hetero) sexuality as a major site of men’s domination over women. This has led to an analysis of compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian feminism. Rich (1980) argues that heterosexuality is defined as the norm both for individuals and within institutional settings, thus it becomes the only legitimate form of sexuality. Compulsory heterosexuality acts as a form of social and sexual control by normalizing and naturalizing (hetero) sexuality. Radical feminism challenges the positive correlation between sports and masculinity, and argues for separate sports for men and women. In contrast to liberal feminists, radical feminists tend to be apprehensive of governmental intervention, perceiving that the state itself reflect and uphold men’s interests. They take a pro-women and anti-male stance
blaming patriarchal ideology for excluding women from and within sports. Radical feminists are more interested in the power maintained over women by men within and through sport. Radical feminists have been interested in the role sport plays in socially constructing male sexual dominance and female sexual submission. For example, Lenskyj (1986) argues that discussions about “femininity” in sport should focus on sexuality; such is the strong association between gender and sexuality. Furthermore patriarchal ideology employ sport as an institution to encourage women sports person to develop an acceptable “femininity” central to which is heterosexual attractiveness and availability (Scraton, Flintoff, 2013:98). Radical feminists also claims that women’s objectification is furthered by the media portrayal emphasising their appearance, their clothing, role as mothers, wife in the domestic sphere more than their performance as a sports person hence endorse a “heterosexist” image (Hargreaves 1993; Creedon, 1994; Lenskyj, 1994; Griffin, 1998). Radical feminists have been instrumental in unearthing issues of lesbianism and homophobia in sport (Scraton, Flintoff, 2000). Research in this area shows how lesbians in sport and physical education are constructed as deviant, silenced, delegitimized, and stigmatized as abnormal. Radical feminism challenges unequal gender relations in sport questions the institutional understanding of male violence and homophobia as well as the significance of women and gay and lesbian space (Scraton, Flintoff, 2013:99). Radical sports feminism further encourages the reconstruction of sport into forms that celebrate women’s values rather than those more traditionally associated with masculine aggression and competition (Birrell, Richter, 1987).

It is worth mentioning that radical feminist perspective was the first to address and challenge the patriarchal ideology and its negative impact leading to subjugation of women in all spheres of social life, including sports. However, some of their
propositions have incited arguments among the feminist group. Its tendency to essentialism and biological reductionism suggests that there is an essence to being a woman thus emphasizing women’s perceived natural or biologically determined qualities have invited criticism from other feminist thinkers. Such claim for separate sports for men and women covertly sanctions the biological distinction between the two sexes. Further it also accepts male superiority and domination over females in sports. Secondly, radical perspective focuses only on patriarchy as a rationale for oppression of (women) and women athletes, overlooking other social status of (women) athletes like class, race, religion, nationality which along with patriarchal ideology leads to their discrimination and exclusion within sports.

**Socialist Feminist Approach: Dual oppression**

The third feminist theoretical tradition that derives its ideas and identity from Marxism is socialist feminism. Socialist feminism unlike Radical and Liberal feminism does not focus exclusively on gender to account for women’s position, but incorporates the analysis of class and economic condition of women as well. They perceive that gender inequality is derived from capitalism, class and economic exploitation. It claims that women’s subordination in the social system, including private and public sphere (family and work place) serves the underlying interest of the capitalism, firstly a) by serving family (husband and children) as an unpaid domestic labour (lack of financial independence) and secondly b) by serving capitalists as a low paid labour (restricted to the labour class, low social status). The nurturing, moral, education and domestic work women do in the family is said to be indispensable for the maintenance of Capitalism (Van Zoonen, 1991:37). In sphere of sports, socialist feminists argue that sexism in sports is a component of ‘bourgeois ideology’ which underpins sexual division of labour, necessary for the survival of capitalism.
Thus women have less financial capacity to engage in sports for being low earners and having less time due to domestic or familial duties, which is considered solely as ‘women’s responsibility’. In addition Women’s dual role in the paid labour force and in domestic sphere restricts their time and energies for sport and recreation. Class differences between women have also been seen to affect their access to sports. For example it is argued that working class women find it more difficult to engage in sports than middle-class women. Socialist feminism has also been critical of the disparities between men’s and women’s opportunities for sponsorship, prize money, and sporting careers (Hall, 1996).

However, much like the liberal and radical approach, socialist feminism in their analysis of gender and sports tend to overlook the role and complex interaction of other social variables, along with gender such as age, sexuality and race in accentuating discrimination within sports. Instead Ideology has been the main object of study where sport is perceived as an Ideological instrument representing the capitalist and patriarchal society as the natural order. Thus such a claim needs to be addressed to expose ways in which inequalities in sports is accentuated by various other social attributes of women like class, race, age, religion and sexuality other than the biased gender-class model.

The Emergence of „Sports feminism”: Inclusion of gender as a social institution in Sports Sociology

“Gender as an institution structures societies and organises daily life”


Feminist theory emerged as a critique of the limitations of mainstream sociological theories that excluded women and women’s issue as a serious subject matter of inquiry. Like other sociological theories, feminist theory offers an explanation
on way of life, actions, behaviour, within a particular cultural context. Their primary point of departure has been about the interpretation of inequality within society as a ‘natural’ outcome of one’s socially ascribed status, i.e. being a MAN or WOMAN. Feminist social scientists over a long period of time have organized themselves against women’s subjugation, oppression and violence taking ‘Gender’ as the crucial point of analysis and remonstration. Though all theories pertaining to gender are not feminist, feminist theory centres most of its attention on gender, rooted on the belief that human experiences are gendered. Chafetz (2006:4) advocates that three features make a gender theory specifically feminist: (1) focus on the inequities, strains, and contradictions inherent in gender arrangements; (2) an assumption that gender relations are not immutable but rather changeable social creations; and (3) a normative commitment that societies should develop equitable gender arrangements. More specifically feminists have challenged the commonsense knowledge that sex and gender are co-extensive and have countered biological determinism as destiny for women. According to Keller (1989) the most important contribution of contemporary feminist theory is the recognition of gender as a cultural rather than biological category, existing in social space and exerting force on the world through its power to shape the development of individuals and institution. Feminists have focused on gender with the intention of unearthing how identity based on the notions of femininity and masculinity is socially construed which legitimizes the gender stratification model. Runyan and Peterson conceptualizes ‘gender’ as socially learned behaviours, repeated performances, and idealized expectations that are associated with and distinguish between the proscribed gender roles of masculinity and femininity (2013: 02). ‘Gender’ for feminists acts as a schema through which the world-view is constantly framed and institutionalized in everyday life - where experiences, opportunities, responsibilities are differentially
available to men and women based on social views about maleness and femaleness (Kramer, 2004). Lorber (1994) advocated that the social construction of gender produces a hierarchy and legitimises marginalisation and unequal treatment of women in all spheres of living. Packard (2003) argues that gender can be theorized as an institution in its own right; “a set of organized, established, procedures or routines whose rationale is taken for granted”. For instance feminist sociologist Martin in her scholarly work Gender as Social Institution has clearly stated the acute need of pursuing ‘gender’ as a social institution in order to make gender more visible in relation to sociality, practices, conflict, identity, power, and change innate within social institutions (2004: 1256-1258). Consequently, Martin delineated twelve criteria for identifying social institutions to elucidate how they are sustained, resisted and changed. They are, 1) be profoundly social, 2) endure across time and space, 3) entail distinct social practices that are repeated by group members, 4) both constraint and facilitate actions by group members, 5) have social relations characterised by particular rules and norms, 6) be constituted and reconstituted by embodied agents, 7) be internalized by group members as identities, 8) have a legitimating ideology that proclaims the necessity of their arrangement, 9) be inconsistent, contradictory and rife with conflict, 10) continuously change, 11) be organized in accord with and permeated by power, 12) not separated by micro/ macro phenomena. For Martin gender possesses all these characteristics, incorporated and regenerated by individuals who conceive their gender not influenced (internally and externally) by power relations but instead as a part of their personalities. The importance of addressing gender as a social institution is to discard the view that gender is simply the roles that individuals internalize or is related to people’s personality. Rather gender is conceded to be a complex social, political, economic, psychological relation between men and women existing in all
major social institutions like family, schools, religion, economy, state and even sports (Martin, 2004). Andersen (2006) similarly argues that real understanding of gender can be gained by examining its intersection with other institutions i.e. how it permeates, affects and interacts with other institutions, such as sports which is integral to this study. According to Pfister and Hartmann-Tews (2003) the enactment of gender in sport and the gendered structures of sport can be best described using a social constructivist approach to gender. Belore (2011) advocates that framing gender as a socially constructed institution will facilitate better understanding of sport and sports programs which can further be employed to contest power imbalances and gender hierarchies both within sport and beyond.

The interaction of sports and gender has been an area of critical concern for feminist scholars who conceived it as a logical site for the analysis of existing gender order and power relations which eventually led to the development of ‘sports feminism’ and or ‘feminist sports sociology’ in the late twentieth century. Since its inception in North America in the 1970s, sports feminists criticized the institution of ‘Sports’ for its contribution to the construction of gender and an ideology of gender difference (Theberge, 2000). Its unconditional focus on analysing ‘gender’ as a mechanism that structures the cultural experiences and outlook in everyday life within the institution of sports that was missing in other theories of sport studies criticised the institution of sports for fortifying the stereotyped conception of sex-roles that seemed natural or given. Feminists sports sociologists along with feminist scholars have criticised the functionalist conception of gender based on ‘sex-roles’ deeply influenced by the Parsonian perception i.e. instrumental versus expressive. They have directly attacked the notion of ‘masculinity as culture’ within sports and have tried to unearth how gender differences are instituted within and through sports. Furthermore feminist
sport sociologists have questioned the Andocentric or gendered nature of sports (Theberg 1987, Dewar 1991, Birrell and Cole 1994, Hargreaves 1994, Hall 1996, Coakley and Dunning 2000) and have tried to repudiate the myth about women being athletically inferior to men (Scraton 2002, Scraton and Flintoff 2002, Huggins and Randell 2007, McDonagh and Pappano 2008). Amanda Roth and Susan A. Basow (2004) advocates that Sports should be a feminist concern, because like education, work, religion, and family, the cultural institution of sports has the power to affect women’s status in society, and not necessarily in a positive manner. Sport sociologist John W. Loy (1996) also notes that feminist incorporation of gender has special significance in sport sociology since it questions the unacknowledged, unexamined assumptions about women sporting practices compared to overemphasised, assented masculine sporting practices. Loy concretely illustrates the embodiment of gender in sport as a site of social struggle about gender relations by giving an overview of the interrelationship between sport, gender and society in terms of three theses (1996: 3-5). These three theses have been termed as reflection, reinforcement/reproduction and resistance theses respectively.

1. The Reflection Thesis: This thesis proposes that sport is a "mirror" or "microcosm" of society that reflects both the positive and negative aspects of social life. Likewise sport clearly reveal gender relations by showing forms of compliance, and forms of resistance, associated with changing patterns of inequality, domination and subordination, between men and women in society.

2. The Reinforcement/Reproduction Thesis: It proposes that sport not only passively reflects but actively reproduces social formations and reinforces social inequalities. According to John Hargreaves "The significance of sports in relation to the way power is structured ... is that they are uniquely endowed with
the capacity for deploying the body in such a way as to represent and reproduce social relationships in a preferred manner" (1987: 142). One of the most dynamic instances of the reproduction thesis in the world of sport is gender relations. Traditionally majority of sport situations have been colonized by men and modern sports have long served to socialize children and youth into “gender appropriate” roles. This thesis advocates that along with family, institutions like school, media provide an ideal environment for passively inculcating the prevailing, stereotyped perception of dominant masculinity and delicate femininity ensuing continuity and reinforcement of disparate gender relations within sports and larger society.

3. The Resistance Thesis: This thesis proposes that sport situations can be regarded as "contested terrains" wherein participants can actively engage in actions to change social conditions and social relations for the betterment of disadvantaged individuals and oppressed, subordinate groups. This thesis advocates that the institution of sport can provide a site of social struggle for the resistance to dominant ideologies and practices especially for women by challenging the masculine sporting practices and put their own practices i.e. liberate women to freely participate in any physical, sporting activities.

Sport is viewed as one of a number of practices where this relationship between the two genders is made explicit, and is maintained. Feminist research tries to create a discourse where this unequal relationship of power is questioned and broken down. A more comprehensive examination of gender in sports has been given by Margaret Ann Hall the feminist sport sociologist, who elucidates three types of research about gender in sport (1996: 11):
1. Categoric research- which investigates gender as a category for exploring the differences in athletic participation and performance between women and men and tries to explain these differences in terms of biological or socio-cultural factors.

2. Distributive research- looks at the unequal distribution of resources between the genders in sport.

3. Relational research- investigates the historical and social construction of sport that produces and reaffirms the idea that men are powerful and women are powerless.

Hall (1987) and Birrell (2000) argued that ‘sports’ should be conceived as a critical arena for divulging multifaceted nature of discrimination on women athletes, influenced not by gender alone but also mediated by multiple social identities like social class, race, ethnicity which are inextricably linked. Feminist espousal of intersectional approach within sports sociology has also been implemented to analyze how coalition of gender, class, race, religion, age, disability and sexuality contribute to unequal participation, marginalization and trivialization of women/girls (athletes) in sports. According to Hargreaves (2000) the important impact of feminist intervention into sports sociology has been to expose ways in which men’s power over women in sports has been institutionalized as well as acknowledging relations of power between different groups of women and relate them to other structures of power in society. Over the years feminist scholarship in sports has shown significant development from the inclusion of women as add-ons to the recognition that sport played/s a historical role in the maintenance of hierarchical gender relations and acknowledges the importance of intersecting social categories like class, religion, disability, race, sexuality which along with gender contribute to women’s subjugation in sports. Sports
Feminist research intends to critique the fundamental role ‘sport’ as an institution plays in producing and maintaining patriarchal ideologies and gender arrangements trying to create a discourse through which this unequal relationship of power is questioned. Hall (1996), Kane (1995:191) and Shogan (1988:272) all argue that the shift towards a research which deals with the relationship between femininity and masculinity, sexuality and identity, intersecting social attributes and discrimination in sport has been an important development in feminist critiques of sport. According to Hall feminists scholarship in the world of sport divulge that female athletes and sportswomen are devalued, exploited and oppressed and aims to bring fundamental change to counter not exploitation, oppression based on gender alone but also on race, class, ethnicity, sexuality as other social categories of inequality (1987: 13).

The central tenet of sports feminism therefore is:

1. To uncover the gendered nature of sports
2. To disclose how sports is used as a medium through which patriarchal ideology is reproduced
3. To expose ways in which men’s power over women’s power in sports has been institutionalised.
4. To debunk myths associated with women’s participation in sport.
5. How the synthesis of multiple social identities of women i.e. gender, race, class, age, sexuality, religion, nationality intensifies discrimination within the realm of sports.

Historically and cross culturally sport has long been a male preserve and a clear reflection of prejudice where women have been considered incompatible with sporting
activities and have been debarred from equitable access to sports. Athleticism among females was conceived as an indicator of emotional disturbance or sexual deviation. Pioneering studies approximately since 1980s on gendered nature of sports (Kidd 1983, Birrell 1984, 1988, Theberg 1985, Hargreaves 1984, 1994, Hall 1996, McKay, Messner, Sabo 2000, Scraton, Flintoff 2002, McDonagh, Pappano 2008) has often put forward the position that women/girls face countless barriers to participating in sports coupled with discrimination and stereotyping within sports itself. Scraton and Flintoff in their work *Gender and Sports: A Reader* (2002), Williams in *A Game for Rough Girls?* (2003) have also argued that sport is construed to be traditionally associated with masculinity as girls/women are considered unsuitable to engage in sports. According to Bryson patriarchal ideologies have effectively constructed barriers to women's sport participation through four concrete processes: (1) by constructing male definitions of sport, (2) male control of women's sport, (3) ignoring women's sport, and (4) trivialization of women's sport (1987: 353). Bryson further documents precisely how sport serves to construct and reconstruct masculine hegemony through two fundamental dimensions - Firstly it associates maleness with highly valued and visible athletic skills and secondly it links maleness with the positively sanctioned use of aggression/ force/violence. For instance combat sports like judo, karate, aikido, taekwondo, wrestling and contact sports like football, hockey rugby were considered appropriate only for males as these sports exhibited force, strength and violence which were believed to be incompatible with women’s physique resulted in lack of participation of women in these sports for a long period of time (Hargreaves, 2000). Sport as an institution hence serves as an effective social mechanism for representing as well as reproducing gendered social relations.
Kay and Jeanes in their article ‘Women, Sport and Gender Inequity’ underscored three rationales that have been given for opposing women’s participation in sports (2008: 131):

1. The medical rationale - That women are physiologically unsuited to sporting activity.
2. The aesthetic rationale - That women engaging in sports are an unattractive spectacle.
3. The social rationale - the activities and behaviour associated with sports is contrary to women’s ‘real femininity’.

The authors argue that these rationales have been taken as yardstick to regard women as somewhat handicapped for sports or any physical activity. Women have always been considered physically weak for developing athletic skills, and participation in sports would put their “femininity” at risk and threaten the social order. Hargreaves (1994) claim that the concept of ‘femininity’ and ‘masculinity’ are socially constructed realities which act as an ideology to explain the social and cultural differences between males and females based on scientific criteria. Furthermore femininity ideology convince women to conceive themselves as weak, small, thin compared to men who are associated with physical strength, speed, large size, and aggressiveness. Besides, ideology manipulates women to strive to meet the ideal of femininity, like to be beautiful, slim, submissive, hence reproducing the socially constructed notion of body, gender and sexual differences. It is this compliance to the existing ideology that supplements and sustains the knowledge of ideal female body that is considered as unsuitable for sports and an ideal male body which is considered as best suited for sports. Sports feminists, therefore has considered sports as a vital medium through which patriarchal ideology is demonstrate by accentuating masculinity, physical
prowess defaming femininity by constructing a model of female frailty and gender inequality. The resistance of women to dominant sports practice is justified and maintained not through force alone, but also through ideological supremacy. Chafetz (1990) in her groundbreaking scholarly work *Gender equity: An integrated theory of stability and change* has discussed about two types of forces that sustains the system of gender inequality 1) those that are coercive and 2) those that are voluntaristic acts by individuals. Chafetz argues that the coercive base of gender inequality is based on three types of gender social definition. The first being *Gender Ideology* or beliefs about the basic and, typically, presumably biological differences in the nature of men and women, second being *Gender Norms* or expectations about the appropriate and approved ways for men and women to behave and third being *Gender Stereotypes* or accentuation of the differences between men and women in how they will generally respond in situations and act according to standardised idea. For Chafetz these three definitions organizes behaviour and roles for both men and women i.e. gender ideology influences and sets constraints for gender norms which in turn prescribes conduct (i.e. the do’s and do not’s) and then contribute to gender stereotyping. Secondly, Chafetz recognises that these definitions attributed to men and women are willingly adopted which leads to ‘engenderment’ whereby individuals especially women accept voluntarily their position in the structure of gender stratification. As a result, individuals become both role models and active socializing agents for engendering the next generation in their behaviour, expectations for the future and provide conventional definition of what is legitimate and gender appropriate conduct. The process of engenderment proposed by Chafetz hence reinforces gender and gendered practices as universal and normative. According to Lorber ‘gender is constantly created and re-
created out of human interaction, out of social life, and it is the texture and order of that social life…it depends on everybody constantly doing gender’ (1994: 13).

From the above deliberations on feminist contribution to sports it is clear by now that sports has long been a fruitful site for feminist work, and both sports studies and feminism have taken up gender (masculine/feminine) as the sole lens or analytical tool of enquiry. However the late 1970s and early 1980’s brought the advent of new denominator within the subject matter of feminist sports studies. Susan Birrell (2000) claims that during the 1980s feminist invasion within sports studies progressed rapidly. More and more feminist energy was directed toward the critical agenda in sport (Birrell, 2000: 67). Complementing the earlier critical theoretical concept of gender, feminists began to recognize other new theories, methods, practices that aim to enrich their perspectives and have accommodated new standpoints that go past the unilinear, essentialist and modernist dimension of reality. In fact sport studies along with sports feminism has entered into a new age of reasoning, interpretation or counter reasoning that offer conceptual challenges to the historically established order of things or cultural discourses. Scraton and Flintoff in their article ‘Gender, Feminist Theory and Sport’ (2013) state that the issues raised during the initial phase of development of sports feminism has undergone transformation over time with the emphasis shifted from “women and sport” to “gender and sport” with a critical engagement with discourses of masculinities as well as femininities. Furthermore the advent/impact of cultural studies, post modern and post structural studies in sports has added another dimension to the issues earlier taken up by sports feminists which had a significant influence in North American and European sport academic discourse. Women athletes’ sexual identity in addition to their gender was gradually brought into existence within the scope of sports feminist studies with feminist cultural studies approach intervening.
the institution of sports (Birrell, 2000: 67). Additionally the dichotomy of male/female, heterosexual/homosexual power relations has also been challenged by this new development, with its emphasis on identities, bodies, empowerment, and the significance of difference (2013: 96).

Based on the assumption that power is distributed inequitably throughout society, often along lines of gender, class, race, sexuality which is maintained not by coercion but through subtle forms of ideological dominance, Feminist cultural studies identifies sports as a distinct ‘public site for such ideological struggle’ (Birrell, Theberge, 1994). They further assert how power and gender relations are reproduced by, resisted in, and transformed through sports. Susan Birrell (2000: 67) identified four themes central to the critical feminist cultural studies project:

- The production of an ideology of masculinity and male power through sports.
- The media practices through which dominant notions of women are reproduced.
- Physicality, sexuality and body as sites for defining gender relations.
- The resistance of women to dominant sports practice.

The usefulness of this project lies in exploring and acknowledging the intersections of gender, race, class and sexuality and how these identities becomes a contested ideological terrain for women athletes within sports. Furthermore, feminist cultural studies research consistently revealed the role of media (both print and visual) as a purveyor of dominant ideology in society (Hasbrook, Duncan 1988, Creedon 1994, Davis 1997). Creedon in her work Gender, Media and Sports (1994) claim that media unequally report women sports news and men sports news, with the former being almost invisible and the latter dominant. Ignoring the achievements of sportswomen at various national and international levels, media portrays sexualized images of women
athletes in televisions and magazines, exposing the so called heterosexual feminine side of women athletes. Media fails to recognize and appreciate the athletic skills of Women athletes by comparing their ability with male athletes, like for example in India acknowledging Saina Nehwal and Pusarla V. Sindhu as Sachin Tendulkar and Saurav Ganguly of Badminton. Furthermore, Women athletes are seldom hired for lucrative product endorsements that their male counterparts receive has also been the most heated debate among cultural sport feminists.

Therefore the contribution of feminist cultural studies to the analysis of sport has provided an impetus for postmodern and post-structural feminists to put forth more building blocks within sport studies. However this section will be dedicated particularly to the post-structural feminist contribution to sports while addressing some common theoretical orientation shared with post-modern feminist literature.

Modern feminist critics aimed to reveal that the western modernist rationality necessarily endorse the masculine definition of ‘truth’ and establish knowledge in modernist term i.e. ‘Man of Reason’ where ‘woman is always the ‘other’ that is opposed to the pursuit of truth, a pursuit that is exclusively masculine,’’ (St. Pierre, 2000: 481). Both post modern and post-structural perspective critically focuses on some key philosophical concepts – language, discourse, rationality, power, resistance, freedom, knowledge, truth and the subject. The inclusion of poststructuralist feminist study especially within sports provide theoretical challenges to the macro-analyses of the structural approaches of liberal, radical, and socialist feminism by arguing that it is irrelevant to seek truth through a single explanation of a particular issue as dominant discourse tend to manipulate, hide, forbid or repress reality. They reject the liberal view that it is due to lack of equal access or opportunity, the radical claim that patriarchy, the Marxist interpretation that capitalism or the Socialist claim that the combination of
patriarchy and capitalism accounts for women’s oppression. Inspired from the works of Lacan, Derrida and Foucault, poststructuralist feminist questions the structural definition of power (repressive) and conceives power as productive, plural and manifested through multiple sites such as body, discourse, knowledge, sexuality, as the primary means of shaping the consciousness. Post structural feminists argue for the deconstruction of the term “woman” and the recognition of a diversity of femininities, masculinities, and sexualities (Scraton, Flintoff, 2013: 102). It is worth mentioning that the espousal of poststructuralist approach has enriched researches and analysis on gender and sport and particularly the work of Foucault and Butler has dilated the scope of feminist sports studies. The focus on the relationship between body, gender and sports in post structuralism has particularly received increasing attention within feminist sports study. Michel Foucault’s work is adopted by feminists in their research to explore traditional ways of thinking about power where Foucault’s conceptualizations of the normalization of power have been central to analysing body. The notion of production of “docile body” and the “disciplined body” - power of normalization has also been central to advancing arguments about body. Scraton and Flintoff (2013) asserts that there are numerous disciplinary practices that aims to reinstate the embodiment of femininity among sports women who take part in sports that have been traditionally defined as “men’s sports” such as wrestling, body building, boxing, weightlifting, football. Women who engage in these sports display their gender particularly in relation to muscles, toughness and aggressive gestures, and the clothes they wear. The women in these contexts are doing gender via a body aesthetic but often are still disciplining their bodies in order to adhere to rules of femininity. For example, in body building women’s bodies are made to comply with compulsory heterosexual femininity through their swimwear, make-up, breast implants, gestures and styles of
Similarly, Bartky (1988) influenced from the works of Foucault also examined contemporary disciplinary practices that produce a recognizably heterosexual feminine body. Bartky recognized three categories of practices; each is considered in respect to its forms, means of enforcement, and implications for female identity and subjectivity. One category "aims to produce a body of a certain size and general configuration" (Bartky, 1988: 64). The contemporary fashionable female body is "taut" and "slim," and "massiveness, power, or abundance" is met with distaste like for example women bodybuilders are often labelled as ‘dykes’ or ‘lesbian’ for having produced a distorted masculinised body. A second category of disciplinary practices concentrates on bringing forth from the body "a specific repertoire of gestures, postures and movements" (Bartky, 1988: 64). Feminine movement, gesture, and posture "must exhibit not only constriction, but grace and a certain eroticism restrained by modesty" (Bartky, 1988: 67-68) for example manifested through gymnastics, aerobics- considered as ideal for women. The third category of feminine disciplinary practices is directed to "the display of the body as an ornamented surface" (Bartky, 1988: 64), referring to docile bodies subjected to transformation, improvement and target of power. Consequently, Bartky (1998) claims that being feminine becomes crucial to a woman’s sense of herself as a ‘woman’ through the demonstration of certain gestures, posture and movements that conforms to the dominant idea of femininity or rather to the definition of femininity prescribed by power. Susan Bordo (1993) shows how women engage in self surveillance of their bodies, disciplining themselves through diet and exercise. Markula’s (1995) early work looks at aerobics as a site for disciplining the female body, but it concludes that although they work hard to achieve the ideal body, women also gain pleasure, self-confidence, and self esteem through their aerobic workout. As Bartky puts it:
There are Nautilus machines, rowing machines, ordinary and motorized exercycles, portable hip and leg cycles, belt massagers, trampolines, treadmills, arm and leg pulleys. However, given the widespread female obsession with weight, one suspect that many women are working out with these apparatuses in the health club or at the gym with a different aim in mind and in quite a different spirit than men (1990: 67).

In sports the issue of femininity and heterosexuality has continued to remain a domain of investigation especially for women. The normalizing gaze aims to observe each and every mannerism of women athletes and any violation of the expected code of conduct create an undesirable impression that needs to be scrutinized, resculpted through the disciplinary project. Lenskyj (1986) argues that just because males have the power to define the meanings of social reality and masculine style in sport is perceived as the norm any behaviour, appearance, skills displayed by women players that do not conform to the conventional notion of femininity will be labelled as masculine a predictor of lesbianism. Perceiving such deviant behaviour as a serious threat to the masculine social arrangements and in order to control such anomalous manifestation various rationales like medical, aesthetic, social converged to campaign against women’s athletic competence. For example in 1929 statement on dangers of Olympic competition (or any competitive sporting activity) for women contended that:

The development of beauty and femininity among young women was necessary to attract the most worthy fathers for their children, provide the most healthful physiques for child bearing and build the most maternal emotional and social behaviour patterns (Lenskyj, 1986:30).
These rationales prevented women from participating in sports or widely considered as non gender appropriate activity led to disciplining the body and mind that produces gendered identities and operates as an effective means of social control. Likewise Walker in his book *Exercises for women: Calculated to preserve and improve Beauty* elaborated the raison d'être of his work:

Of the exercises which I recommended, none accordingly required more strength than the young female possesses, none entail the slightest inconvenience, and all, while the best bestow health, strength and activity, are calculated to preserve grace and beauty (1836:07).

Sports feminists conceive the body as a critical area for exploring and deconstructing femininity. Sport is an ideal arena for the display of gender and sports feminists are engaged with the embodiment of femininity often through analyses of women who take part in sports that have been traditionally defined as “men’s sports”. In this context Butler’s work has been particularly influential to feminist thought, arguing that gender is performative. Butler in *Bodies That Matter* (1993) pointed out that ‘gender’ is constructed through the activities we do continually, often without conscious deliberation and in the process sexed bodies “is replaced by the social meanings it takes on......and gender emerges and displaces sex....i.e. gender subsumes sex” (Butler, 1993:xv). For Butler gender is not a given identity, determined nor is it something inscribed upon us. Gender according to Butler along with sexuality is performative i.e. “forced reiteration of norms” (Butler, 1993: 59) or to be precise gender identity is constructed through the repetitive performance of gender i.e. by doing or displaying femininity and masculinity. According to Goffman displays provide evidence of the actor's alignment in a gathering, the position one seems prepared to take up in what is about to happen in the social situation (1979: 69).
Similarly performativity of gender is a display, repetition of acts, an imitation and enactment of the actor in everyday life situations that validate the gender of the performer. Femininity and Masculinity is a performance where both women and men are required to participate. Butler further claims that performativity is an outcome of ‘constraints’ prescribed by the prevailing norms i.e. “performativity is the regularized....constrained repetition of norms” (Butler, 1993: 60). According to Butler constraint is not necessarily that which sets a limit to performativity; constraint is rather, that which impels and sustains performativity.......performance is not a singular act or event, but a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraints..... (Butler,1993: 60).

Butler argues that gender appropriate behaviour or performativity doesn’t alone result from habitual reiteration of certain practices, but is also a consequence of constraints from certain non gender appropriate activities which leads to adherence and performance according to ones gender. For example as Lenskyj points out that in European and American society it was conceived that muscular development for women through sports interferes with her motherhood and that men ‘should keep her away from performing heavier tasks’, both out of ‘chivalry’ and in good sense (1986:69). Furthermore, it was also conceived that the tendency for girls to emulate the activities for boys (i.e. by participating in sporting, physical activities) is regrettable as in most cases it is psychologically and physiologically harmful. Rather there are numerous suitable activities for girls and women like simple household tasks (Lenskyj, 1986). Butler’s concept can be extended to analyse how this modern disciplinary power manifested through ‘constraints’ assist the production and performance of gender in day to day life experiences. Butler also incorporates ‘sexuality’ alongside gender as an outcome of constraint and performativity. The author implies constraints as productive
which regulate and generate sexuality. Sexuality is also construed through constant prohibition of not doing anything outside heteronormativity. Hall conceives femininity as “a thinly disguised code word for heterosexuality” (Hall, 2002: 08). Birrell claims that the three ‘sex-gender-sexuality’ are not causally related, but our cultural assumptions lead us to believe they are. Consequently, the three is conceived in a complete package i.e. female-feminine-heterosexual and each category belong in a binary (2000: 69).

**Table: 01 Assumed and prevalent binary opposites of sex-gender-sexuality category (Birrell, 2000: 69)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>BINARY</th>
<th>OPPOSITES</th>
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<tr>
<td>SEX</td>
<td>FEMALE</td>
<td>MALE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GENDER</td>
<td>FEMININE</td>
<td>MASCULINE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEXUALITY</td>
<td>HETEROSEXUAL</td>
<td>HOMOSEXUAL</td>
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Similarly women or women athletes engaging in professional, competitive sports i.e. engaging in gender deviant activities which in Butler’s phrase not performing according to ones gender results in labelling women as masculine accompanied with the fear that she might lose her femininity and may become a (homosexual) lesbian. Femininity and heterosexuality has long been a central concern to women’s athleticism which has been conceived as incompatible with their sporting excellence. Like for instance the very term ‘tomboyish’ denotes a pathologizing female athlete with masculine traits questioning women athletes’ sexual orientation. Hence post structuralist analyses of sport destabilize traditional notions of the relations between
sex, gender, and sexuality (Sykes, 2006) and often provide a more celebratory view of constructions and performances of sexuality.

As noted earlier, feminist theories have been dynamic in their approach to sport studies, with newer theories building on, or challenging the prevalent knowledge, acknowledging and reflecting changes in society and gender relations. However, in the section below a new theoretical paradigm known as the Intersectional theory will be discussed reflecting on contemporary feminist sport studies or practice. Therefore the inclusion of cultural studies and post structural paradigm within sports feminism served as a bridge to a more interdisciplinary academic discourse beyond the boundaries of ascribed status into a relatively boundless terrain inhabited by broader intersectional experiences.

**Intersectional Approach:**

For a long period of time Feminist social scientists have criticised ‘Sports’ and ‘Sports Studies’ for not being gynocentric (Theberg 1987, Birrell and Cole 1994, Hargreaves 1994, Hall 1996) and have tried to dispel the myth about women being athletically inferior to men- taking ‘Gender’ as an exclusive unit of analysis (Scraton 2002, Scraton and Flintoff 2002, Huggins and Randell 2007, McDonagh and Pappano 2008). However in the last decade the development of a new transformative paradigm within Feminist scholarship (especially Black Feminists) in North America and Europe has broadened their theoretical prospect by decentring ‘gender’ and studying women’s lived experiences from multiple standpoints, incorporating multiple social identities of race, class, age, sexuality, religion, disability, nationality and even in language as intersecting axes of oppression. Intersectional approach questions the ideology that construe inequality as an inevitable consequence of one’s social position in the society, taking into account not gender alone, but also other sources of identity like race, class,
sexuality, religion, age, ability, nationality. The term ‘Intersection’ has been introduced by Kimberle Crenshaw (1989) in her attempt to illustrate how ‘multiple social identities’ of women (as well as of all human beings) apart from gender i.e. class, race, sexuality, religion, age, disability integrate to amplify their social differentiation and oppression within varied fields of social institutions. ‘Intersectional’ perspective within feminist theory demands the need to account for multiple grounds of identity which fabricate unequal reality for women (human beings) as well as intensify their subordination. Collins (1990) argues for the need to understand interlocking axes of oppression because as Davis, (2008) summed up “Intersectionality addresses the most central theoretical and normative concern within feminist scholarship: namely, the acknowledgement of differences among women”. Pioneering works like Beale’s concept of ‘Double jeopardy’ (1979), King’s concept of ‘Multiple Jeopardies’, Anthias and Yuval-Davis’s concept of ‘racialised boundaries’ (1992), Collin’s model of ‘matrix of domination’ (1999), have also acknowledged that the reality of the lives and experiences of women is shaped not by gender alone but also by other social categories. Feminists implementing Intersectional theory thus, conceive identities of class, race, gender, religion and sexuality as ‘systems of oppression’ (Weber, 2009) which give rise to exploitative interaction manifested as power relation leading to unequal distribution of and access to opportunities for women. Consequently, ‘Intersectionality’ as a methodology gradually gained reputation among feminists in Europe and North America, which led to new proliferation of researches in diverse arena including sports sociology. Feminist scholars found ‘sports’ as a significant site for analysis of gender inequality which eventually led to the development of ‘sports feminism’ and or ‘feminist sports sociology’. Feminist espousal of intersectional approach has also been implemented to analyze how coalition of gender, class, race, religion, age, disability
and sexuality contribute to unequal participation, marginalization and trivialization of women/girls (athletes) in sports. To begin with, very few studies (Kidd 1983, Messner 1992, Birrell and Theberge 1994, Hargreaves 1994, Cahn 1995, Huggins, Randell 2007, Benn, Pfister, Jawad 2012) have adopted the intersectional approach to understand how women athletes belonging to different strata of society, to different religion, having separate sexual orientation experience multiple form of oppression in sports. For instance, Reaves (2001) notes that African American women often experience discrimination because of their gender and race. Therefore they are vulnerable to the harm of sexual harassment (both verbal and physical) in sports context where they are coached by white males. Class difference among women also limits ones access to opportunities. For example women belonging to the affluent section of the society has enough resource to engage in any sports, like equestrian sports (sports that involve horse, like Polo, horse race), whereas working class women can never afford the expense of such sport. Whereas, sexual orientation of women athletes is another major area which has gained attention of sports feminists. Research (Hargreaves 1994:131, Huggins, Randell 2007) state that women athletes who tread in male territory of sports like boxing, wrestling, weight lifting is often labelled as lesbian or tomboy, which leads to the stereotypical belief that there exists a positive correlation between athletic women and homosexuality. It has been observed that the dominant heterosexual ideology within sports suppress homosexuality, as a result lesbian athletes hide their sexuality in order to avoid harassments as well as to protect their sporting career. In other words as Kidd in her work Getting Physical: Compulsory Heterosexuality in Sports (1983) observed that sportswomen who identify themselves as lesbians are denied of opportunities as coaches or administrators, thus, they become victims of homophobia (a fear, intolerance and hatred of gay men and lesbians).
Another variable that has been considered important for intersectional analysis of women athletes in sports is language. Language has been an important medium of expressing oneself. Research reveals that language plays an important role in constructing gender differences in this ‘hyper-masculinised world of’ sports. Using derogatory sexual and racist remarks to describe women athletes reinforces notions of inferiority and differences concerning their ability (Cain 2000; Huggins, Randell 2007). Instances like American commentator Don Imus’s infamous comment in April 2007 about the players of Rutgers University Women’s Basketball team as ‘nappy-headed ho’s’ - the term directly attacked their race as well as affirming their sexual promiscuity (Huggins, Randell 2007). Likewise in 2015, in World Athletic championship in Beijing, women 100 meter gold medal winner from Jamaica Shelly Ann-Fraser-Pryce was described as the ‘female bolt’ by the newspaper media for her incredible performance. The term denoted signified that she was the female version of male athlete Usain Bolt who also happens to win gold medal in the same event. Media along with language also consolidates such disparate relationship through its patriarchal representations and expressions. It has been argued that religious ideologies in some countries consistently influence women’s participation in sports. For instance, Muslim women in Muslim countries like Iran, Iraq, Brunei, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Bangladesh appear to be the most restricted in their public display of athletic skills. Like for instance the Islamic law in Iran forbids women from watching men playing sports in public. Similarly an Islamic college in Melbourne, Australia has banned its girl students from participating in running competition as it is believed to cause them to lose their ‘virginity’ leading to infertility. Hence adopting the Intersectional method within feminist sports sociology has marked a theoretical sophistication by grasping the multifaceted nature of discrimination against women athletes based on their race, class,
gender, religion, age, sexuality, nationality i.e. offering a nuanced understanding of social reality. Concurrently, it also challenges the conception of ‘women as a homogeneous group’ and that ‘all women are equally oppressed’.

In sum, what is worth mentioning in feminist approach is that it challenges the traditional sociological theory which claimed superiority over the discipline by representing the knowledge of the privileged section, i.e. men. What Smith states ‘eliminating the boundaries between who can be a knower and what can be known’ (1978:281). Taking gender as a category of analysis feminist research has placed women’s lives and other marginalized group at the centre of social inquiry. Similarly, feminist contribution to the study of sports sociology has taken experiences of women athletes within the realm of sports as a source of knowledge and brought to the fore that sports is a gendered institution, where gender relation is produced and reproduced. It critiques both the institution of sports and the Androcentric biases in sports. Various strands of feminist theory provided multidimensional approach, which unearthed the multifaceted discrimination of women athletes within the sphere of sports. Further feminist adoption of cultural study and intersectional approach has also broadened the research area by focusing not alone on gender, but on other dimensions like class, race, language, sexuality which leads to ‘multiple oppression’ of women athletes. Messner and Sabo acknowledged the contribution of feminist approach to the study of sports by stating

Feminist analysis uncovered a hidden history of female athleticism, examined sex differences in patterns of athletic socialization, and demonstrated how the dominant institutional forms of sports have naturalized men’s power and privilege over women (1990: 96).