ABSTRACT


This research work has been an attempt to explore the hitherto uncharted area of the relationship between athletic sports and gender from a sociological perspective in West Bengal, India. The departure point here was to explore women athletes’ subjective perceptions about their everyday experiences as an athlete vis-a-vis their male counterparts with reference to their diverse socially ascribed identities. This study has three main objectives. Firstly, to explore whether women athletes are prevented from choosing sports as a career in West Bengal? Secondly, to examine whether outdoor athletic sports are gendered in West Bengal? Finally, it analyzes whether and how social class, religion, language, family, school and media accelerate such discrimination in this state. This study has adopted mixed method approach to examine the lives of thirty five women athletes, presently pursuing any form of athletic sport aged between 20-40 years through face to face in-depth interviewing, narrative interviewing and observation (for understanding non-verbal behaviour) along with application of quantitative approach for their demographic profile.

My findings indicate that sports play a crucial role in reinstating the distinction between women and men athletes based on their respective innate physiological characteristics. Regardless of engaging in similar genre of sports and experiencing the pressure to succeed in athletics, women athletes face the additional demands of social expectations like doing domestic chores, getting married, rearing children. Such socially sanctioned expectations are furthered by primary and secondary agencies of socialization which dissuade their agency roles. Disparate media coverage, unequal acknowledgement and inadequate women representatives in decision making roles also accentuate such gendered experiences of women athletes. Additionally, the existing ‘secondary’ or ‘inferior’ status of women athletes is furthered by the complex union of class, religious affiliation and sexuality that not only situate them in subordinate position compared to their male counterparts but also to privileged women athletes. However, irrespective of these socially prescribed barriers, women athletes not only intercede into their present structural pre conditions but many of them celebrated their identity as successful athlete. Ergo, some battles have seemed to be won but the war is going on almost certainly indiscernibly.