Chapter – I

Introduction

'A picture is worth one thousand words'

Though the proverb has no fixed origin, these two differential and discriminatory pictures speak amply about the overall reality. Grounded on the conviction that women and men are physiologically ‘differently wired’ and women’s place in the private realm is primarily as care-giver. Medical science has also reinforced the paradigm that vigorous sports and its involvement is a waste of vital forces that would otherwise be used for childbearing and cultivating feminine personality traits. Thus, sporting ability has always been considered compatible with male physique whereas the nature of women’s body disqualified them from rigorous physical activity. Like the title of "World's Greatest Athlete" has been given to the person who wins the Olympic decathlon and while women athletes till date are not entitled to participate, they remain far from this achievement whereas male athletes continue to remain the sole proprietor of this superior athletic identity. Social expectations and social roles based on such pre-determined perception along with often invisible control mechanism embedded in family, schools to Universities, peer groups, work places, and media generate a network of impediments for women athletes and their athletic aspirations and career.

It is understandable, accordingly, why within Indian sociological imagination, women’s sports is indubitably a silenced issue. Although a good number of studies on gender inequality has been undertaken by various Indian sociologists like Indian Women (Jain: 1975), Tyranny of the Household (Jain, Banerjee: 1985), Women’s Work Class and the Urban Household: A Study of Shimla, North India (Sharma: 1986), Family, Kinship and Marriage in India (Uberoi: 1993), Law and Gender Inequality:
The Politics of Women's Rights in India (Agnes: 2001), Sociology of Gender (Rege: 2003), Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment in India (Kishor, Gupta: 2009), they principally highlighted the gender gap and bias in areas like family, education, health, gendered violence, and employment. Therefore the discursive frameworks on the gendered nature of sports i.e. how women athletes encounter discrimination in the multifaceted dimensions of sports compared to male athletes and how this subtle and often invisible sexism is further fuelled by distorted media coverage and other factors like social class, ethnicity, sexuality, religion and language along with patriarchal arrangement of things continue to remain an underdeveloped field of enquiry for sociological interest.

Historically, research on the gendered nature of sports has not only emphasised the basic question, i.e. “do girls/women unequally participate in sports compared to men/boys”, but also other related issues like differences between men and women sports, construction of gender identities. Sheila Scraton and Anne Flintoff in their work Gender and Sports: A Reader (2002), Jean Williams in A Game for Rough Girls? (2003) have shown that sports are construed to be traditionally associated with masculinity as girls/women are considered unsuitable to engage in sports because they have physiological differences with men. These physiological differences have been taken as yardstick to regard women as somewhat handicapped for sports. Michael Messner in his study on American society pointed out that beside biological traits women are discouraged to engage in sports due to their ‘gender’ which is attached to gender performative roles (a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame) like maintaining feminine bodies, taking care of children and family. Consequently, being man/boy and woman/girl play a vital function in creating a divide between masculine sports e.g. football, rugby, basketball, rowing, which are mainly outdoor
sports associated with imagery of power, brute force, toughness, skill, endurance, stamina and in contrast, feminine sports, mostly indoor in nature e.g. skating, handball, volleyball, gymnastics, dance associated primarily with similes of grace, balance, minimum power and in some context mimicked or expressed form of sexuality (Huggins, Randell 2007; Scraton, Flintoff 2002; McDonagh, Pappano 2008). In these patriarchal structural arrangements, men who desire to pursue a sport lacking in aggressiveness and male camaraderie are viewed as having been stripped of that share of masculine power. In essence when men choose to participate in a traditionally female sport, they are considered to put themselves on equal ground with women and are often labelled as effeminate. This holds true when women take part in sports usually dominated by men, like boxing, wrestling, they are often labelled as ‘man’ or ‘lesbian’ (Williams 2003). Martha Saavedra in her article “Women, Sport and Development” (2008) claim that women participants in the world of sports put their “femininity” at risk and threaten the social order. Hence, involvement of women in sports is a transgression that needs to be explained, encouraged, prevented, or managed, but somehow is not natural. Unfortunately, this argument has not been considered significant as well as is still an uncharted territory in mainstream Indian sociology.

Furthermore, pioneering studies approximately since 1990s on gendered nature of sports (Jennifer Hargreaves 1994, Jim McKay, Michael A. Messner, Don Sabo 2000, Sheila Scraton, Anne Flintoff 2002, Eileen McDonagh, Laura Pappano 2008) have also focused on the role of various social entities like class location, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, disability along with gender in influencing women’s participation in sports. The claim that all women do not form a homogeneous group and that their socially ascribed status positions them both structurally and politically in differential stratas compared to women belonging to a privileged section has also been addressed
by feminist sports sociologists. Therefore the espousal of ‘intersectional approach’ to
the study of sports by feminist sports sociologists has enriched and broadened its
theoretical outlook by decentring ‘gender’ as the solitary focal point of analysis and
illustrate how ‘multiple social identities’ of sportswomen i.e. their class, race, sexuality,
religion, age, disability, integrate to amplify their social differentiation and oppression
within the institution of sports. In addition media coverage of women’s sports,
language and sports has also exposed the hidden intersectional realities that accentuate
their existing inferior status.

Interestingly, Indian sociological discourse has failed to use the ‘intersectional
lens’ to unearth the suppressed reality and provide a complete picture about the
experiences of its women athletes. Persistent focus on male athletes and male
dominated sports shift attention from the marginalized sportswomen who are burdened
with multiple sources of discrimination. Women athletes in India who are structurally
and politically located in contrasting stratas of the society experience unequal reality,
life chances compared to their male counterparts and their privileged female
counterparts. Though the outcome of intersectional collision doesn’t bear similar
consequence for all women athletes, the problem of exclusion and gendering within
mainstream sports remain universal.

This chapter further includes a brief review of the existing literature on these
issues. The overview of the relevant literature has helped the researcher not only in
identifying the research objectives like how outdoor athletic sports is gendered in West
Bengal and how such gendering is facilitated by multiple social ascriptions, but also in
outlining the research design by deciding the overall methodological parameters. In the
second section of the study the relevance of applying different theoretical approaches
have been presented for a better understanding of the research problem, which has
ultimately led the researcher to analyze and interpret the results in a compact and comprehensive manner. The detailed analysis of the results has been presented in the next three chapters, ending finally with the concluding remarks. This work hopefully will encourage more researches in this neglected area and open up new vistas and discourses which, in turn, witness the dawn of remedying the void both in Sociology of Sports and Sociology of Gender especially in India.

**Review of Relevant Literature**

Sport is defined as an institutional, structured and sanctioned competitive activity beyond the realm of play that involve physical exertion and the use of relatively complex athletic skills. However prior to 1870 sports for women/girls manly existed in the form of play which was recreational and informal compared to sports for men/boys which were sports specific in nature. Sports, therefore, have been considered as an important medium reflecting the mores, values and general culture of society (Delaney, Madigan, 2009). A methodical academic enquiry about sports and athleticism as a social institution and the role it plays in everyday life of individuals especially shaping and reinforcing the gendered identity of women (athletes) would be inadequate without addressing previous researches in this concerned area of study. Therefore, the literature review is organized in distinct successive phases. Firstly, it historically reviews the emergence of academic interest in sports, both within sociological and non sociological literature, secondly, it discusses the conceptual and methodological limitations of previous research and the absence of ‘gender’ as a category of inquiry, thirdly, it discusses the feminist perspectives and contributions, and lastly it provides an overview of researches on intersectional experiences of women athletes within the domain of sports.
The systematic study of ‘Sports’ and institutionalization of sociology of sports within the broader discipline of sociology dates back to mid 1960’s (Coakley, Dunning, 2001: 21 - 22) both in North America and in Britain. Nonetheless the initial academic enquiry about sports was quasi-sociological in nature and its roots can be traced back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries both in English and non-English speaking countries (Coakley, Dunning, 2001: 22, Malcolm, 2012: 18). Formal academic research in this area emerged as a reactionary outcome of some proto-sociological studies that minimally acknowledged sports as opposed to in-depth analyses within mainstream sociological texts. The expansion of sociological interest in sports began with G. S. Kenyon and John W. Loy’s programmatic paper ‘Toward a Sociology of Sport’ (1965) in which the authors were the first to identify ‘mainstream’ sociologists who had addressed sports in their respective studies (Malcolm, 2012:17). Such an academic endeavour invited vigorous scholarly contributions on sports that were sufficient to institute sport as a legitimate object of sociological enquiry within 1960’s. However, despite the availability of substantial scholarly texts, productive analyses and a promising prospect none of these researches were devoted to women’s experiences within sports but were dominated with men’s experiences, that consistently denied (with an androcentric bias) to recognize women as a category of enquiry. The ubiquitous absence of women’s issues in sport studies has been largely taken for granted by (sport) social scientists until the emergence of feminist sport sociology in 1970’s. Tracing the origin of sport sociology and early intellectual contribution of scholars Dominic Malcolm in his book Sport and Sociology (2012: 17) identified three
distinct patterns of literature that exhibits the existence of academic analysis of sports within sociology prior to and post institutionalization of the sub-discipline.

Firstly, as Malcolm suggests is the ‘classical’ sociological texts which analyse sports as part of a broader sociological analysis, i.e. sport activity is taken as an example to describe larger social phenomena. One of the earliest English writings on sports can be found in Thorstein Veblens’s *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899). The tenth chapter titled ‘Modern Survivals of Prowess’ is studded with the author’s analysis about the nature and social role of sports in the modern nineteenth century America. Veblen portrayed a pessimistic image of sports and sports culture in his study. Arguing that sporting activity reflects the ferocious predatory disposition or “rehabilitation of early barbarian temperament” (Tilman, 2007: 114) in man that is shaded off through skills like cunningness and chicanery (1899: 192) typical of the leisure class and delinquent class (Veblen, 1899). In modern industrial society sports as an institution for Veblen manifested nothing more than ‘histrionic’ (1899: 193) display of ‘boyishness temperament in sporting men’ a source of generating physical and economic wastes which could otherwise be used to better advantage. Though Veblen did not clearly mention the alternative ways in which resources might be used, nevertheless he was critical to the ceremonial and predatory purposes of sporting events that represents and fosters the ‘pecuniary culture and are of no use for the purposes of the collective life. (1899: 207). Another classical work in sociology that mentions sports in its study is William Graham Sumner’s *Folkways* (1906). In the seventeenth chapter titled ‘Popular sports, exhibitions, and drama’ the author examines the functions of games in society and explains how certain popular sports have diffused as ‘mores’ within groups and sub-groups that served as public amusements, entertainment. Sumner also adds that engagements in popular games and sports were class appropriate in nature that
restricted or approved certain classes to engage in such leisure activities. Like for example as provided by Sumner, engaging in gambling, cock-fighting, bull-fighting were limited to a particular class or group of people while disapproved for others. German Sociologist Max Weber on the other side mentions ‘sports’ or ‘sporting activity’ in relation to Puritan ethic or ascetic Protestantism in his famous work Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (1930: 111 - 112). Weber observed that the Puritan idea of calling and its emphasis on ascetic conduct i.e. abstaining from spontaneous enjoyment of life and idleness was strictly endorsed in sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe and any activity that was conceived to provoke undisciplined impulse and purely means of enjoyment was condemned. Similarly, engaging in any sports or physical activities that was devoid of rational purpose and concentration on impulsive enjoyment of life, (like display of raw instinct or irrational gambling instinct) that disengage men both from work in a calling and from religion, was considered by Puritan ethics as an enemy of rational asceticism. Only those sports were accepted that served a rational function of enhancing physical efficiency for supplementing the potential and continuity of working capability. Consequently, Puritan aversion to sports was justified as an irrational expression of energy that is otherwise unproductive for the society, individual and for the religion. Eminent Sociologist Norbert Elias in his ground breaking work The Civilizing Process (1939) on the other hand analyzed sports as a medium of imparting socially desirable behaviour and conduct through greater self-control over violent behaviour and impulsiveness to attack others. The civilizing process according to Elias refers to the changing and evolving balance of restraints exercised upon and through the individual, from social constraints towards more self-restraint and self steered conduct. Though Elias established a technical meaning of the civilizing process, it refers, according to a
concise summary by Loic Wacquant, to the “long-term of transformation of interpersonal relations, tastes, modes of behaviour, and knowledge that accompanies the formation of a unified state capable of monopolizing physical violence over the whole of its territory and thus of progressively pacifying society” (Wacquant, 2003: 97). Elias analyzed the emphasis of civilizing process on cultural practices connected to (table) manners, gender relations, sports, ageing and dying, and time management (Buschendorf, Franke, Voelz, 2011: 02). ‘Sports’ 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 action through stricter 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 which overtly demonstrate sanctioned acts of aggression and violence through sports for public enjoyment. Conceptually, Elias divides sports into various differential categories like -

i. **High achievement sport**: which concentrates on ‘success’, acknowledgement of athletic participation as a profession and is characterised by performances in the Olympic Games by both professionals and amateurs where athletes participating in it undergo long, hard, highly specialised training and ii. **Leisure sport** on the other hand, is composed of two subdivisions: spectator sport and active leisure sport. Spectator sport is for the spectators who derive pleasure through witnessing sporting activity while it is high performance sport for the performers. Active leisure sport is undertaken by people, either as individuals or in a group, for their own active leisurely enjoyment. Leisure sport is undertaken by people for social and emotional refreshment. It is in
modern times that sport has undergone this complex categorisation, whereas in former times the distinction between amateur and professional sport was sufficient to convey its nature (Masilela, 2009: 01). Not directly but sociologically significant contribution to sports was made by eminent sociologist Erving Goffman in one of his major work *Strategic Interaction* (1969). Goffman’s model of ‘strategic interaction’ uses games as the central metaphor for understanding the nuances and dynamics of interaction (Birrell, Donnelly, 2004: 51). In this work Goffman uses the term ‘strategic interaction’ to describe game like events in which an individual's situation is fully dependent on the move of one's opponent and in which both players are aware of their situations and have the wit to use this awareness for advantage. Like for instance Goffman outlines the defining conditions for strategic interaction when

Two or more parties must find themselves in a well-structured situation of mutual impingement where each party must make a move and where every possible move carries fateful implications for all of the parties. In this situation, each player must influence his own decision by his knowing that the other players are likely to try to dope out his decision in advance, and may even appreciate that he knows this is likely. Courses of action or moves will then be made in light of one's thoughts about the others' thoughts about oneself. An exchange of moves made on the basis of this kind of orientation to self and others can be called strategic interaction (1969: 100 - 101).

Similarly Peter Donnelley and Susan Birrell in their article ‘Reclaiming Goffman: Erving Goffman’s Influence on the Sociology of Sport’ states that the ‘Strategic Interaction’ model is particularly applicable to the study of sport, where competitors enhance their competitive advantages through deception and misdirection based on their understanding of each other’s pattern of interaction. Infact, Goffman borrows the
concept of ‘strategy’ used in sports to explain and understand ‘deception’ in social interaction. Strategic interaction is therefore the very model for sport, where teams and athletes work to maintain their competitive advantage through deception, misdirection, feints and dodges (2004: 51).

Marxist analysis of sports has also added a new dimension in studying physical activities and sports as a part of the larger analysis of society. Antonio Gramsci has provided an analysis of sports through his concept of hegemony in his famous work *Prison Notebooks* (1971). Hegemony i.e. ‘ideological domination’ or ‘domination by consent’ signifies ideological or moral leadership, through which the ruling class maintains, sustains their dominance and influence in the society. However these ideologies are mediated through various institutions one of them being sports. According to David Rowe (2004: 97) Gramsci’s ideas have been highly influential in the social analysis of sport. Antonio Gramsci’s analysis of sports pays considerable attention to the ‘ideological superstructure’ (culture) rather than concentrating on the ‘base’ (economics) which provides many possibilities for the critical analysis of sports (Rowe, 2004: 104). John Hargreaves (1986: 09) in his work *Sports, Power and Culture* has espoused Gramscian concept and argued that ‘as sport has become more important as a component of the national culture, it has hence become more important to hegemony’. Furthermore in his work he contended that sports was significantly implicated in the process of whereby the growing economic and political power of the bourgeoisie in the nineteenth century Britain was eventually transformed into that class’s hegemony in the later part of the century. Hence ‘sports’ 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.
Pierre Bourdieu’s interest in Sports can be seen in his famous text Distinction (1989) in which he draws reference to sports as a class appropriate activity through which class membership is maintained and sustained. Furthermore, Bourdieu also relates the significance of ‘body’ in his analysis of sports, where he links an individual’s perception of one’s body along with the class affiliation and how the amalgamation of both along with gender determines sports membership and continuation of the sporting activities. Bourdieu contends the key difference between working class and middle class lies in the former’s utilitarian conception of the body as an instrument to be used for particular means and latter’s conception of the body as a project (Malcolm, 2012: 43). Hence Bourdieu argues that an individual’s leisure, sports pursuit are lifestyle choices made solely not on the basis of one’s economic resources or time one can devote to that activity but also on the basis of the assessment of relative costs i.e. economic, physical, cultural, and benefits i.e. enhanced social status or physique which might accrue to the individual. Different social classes assess these costs and benefits differently and are therefore inclined, have a preference towards those particular leisure/sports. In this regard Susan Laberge and J. Kay in their article ‘Pierre Bourdieu's Socio-cultural Theory of Sport Practice’ note that Pierre Bourdieu’s broader analysis of sport and physical activity is ‘in line with his broader effort to reveal the extent to which cultural practices embody power relations’ (2002: 253).

Secondly, are texts those focused on sport-related activity un-sociologically, and emphasising on Play, Games and Leisure but not directly addressing sport. Usually known literature under this category are those which predominantly focused on the less serious version of sports i.e. ‘play’, ‘games’ and ‘leisure’. These include works as early as eighteenth and nineteenth century like that of Peter Beckford’s “Thoughts upon Hare and Fox Hunting” (1796), Pierce Egan’s Boxiana or Sketches of Ancient and Modern
Pugilism (1812) which is a collection of articles on boxing written by Egan himself. Cultural historian Johan Huizinga’s work Homo Ludens (1938, 1949) which centered on the nature and significance of play as a cultural phenomenon, work on play and games-playing by anthropologist John M. Roberts and psychologists Brian Sutton-Smith’s ‘Child Training and Game Involvement’ (1962) have discussed broadly the functions of games and classified games on the basis of their outcome attributes. Their work as well provided a definition of games as “recreational activities characterized by organized play, competition, two or more sides, criteria for determining the winner and agreed upon rules” (Roberts, Sutton-Smith, 1962: 166). French Sociologist Joffre Dumazedier’s work Toward a Society of Leisure (1952, 1967) described the mundane facts of leisure, explains the relation between leisure and everyday life and the problems associated with a leisure society. Likewise French philosopher/sociologist Roger Caillois’s Man, Play and Games (1961) also provide a detailed understanding of the concept of play and games, the differences and their classifications and social functions in the society.

Lastly, are texts which are both sports oriented and sociological but dwell in a marginal position with a minor influence on the larger sociological field. This category also consists of texts which are sports specific but lack sociological orientation. This last category is dominated by scholars who belonged to the physical education community (Malcolm, 2012: 18) and by those authors whose sociological contribution to sports studies is isolated or under acknowledged. George Harvey Sage notes that ‘the development of the sociology of sport has been a joint venture for physical educators and sociologists’ (Sage, 1997: 325). According to Jay Coakley and Eric Dunning (2000: xxii) one of the earliest non-English language work that paved the way towards the emergence of the term ‘sociology of sports’ and as a subject matter of enquiry can
be traced back to the work of German Sociologist Heinz Risse’s *Soziologie des Sports* (1921). Similar other contributions from non English speaking countries like Heinrich Steinitzer’s *Sports and Kultur* i.e. *Sports and Culture* (1910), G. Magnane’s *Sociologie du Sport* (1964), Von Bero Rigauer’s *Sport und Arbeit* i.e. *Sport and Work* (1969) also played as significant role in the materializing ‘sports study’ within the discipline of sociology. In addition to such pioneering works scholarly contributions in English language with physical education background like *Medical Sociology and Cultural Anthropology of Sports and Physical Education* (1964) by Ernst Jokl and *International Research in Sports and Physical Education* by Ernst Simon and Ernst Jokl (1964) also provides a strong lineage to the development of the sub-discipline of sociology of sports. In fact, Dominic Malcolm in his work *Sports and Sociology* (2012: 18) claims that the former piece of literature was the first English-Language text to combine the words ‘sports’ and ‘sociology’ in its title. Various other contributions like J. Holliman’s *American Sport: 1785-1835* (1931); Herbert Manchester’s *Four Centuries of Sport in America, 1490-1890* (1931); Steiner’s *Americans at Play* (1933), Riesman and Denney’s (1951) *Football in America: A study in culture diffusion*, Weinberg and Arond’s (1952) *The occupational culture of the boxer*, G. Stone’s (1955) *American Sports: Play and display*, R. Helanko’s ‘Sports and Socialization’ (1957), Heinz Alex Natan’s edited book on *Sport and Society: A Symposium* (1958), Peter McIntosh’s *Sport in Society* (1960), E. J. Leemans’ *A Sociological Approach to Sports* (1964), have all explicitly focused on sports which initiated the advancement of sociology of sports as an academic sub-discipline both in English and Non-English speaking countries. These texts were soon followed by some initial works from sociological perspective focusing on the relationship between sports, individual behaviour (in social and cultural settings) and social issues like Gunther Luschen's (1963) *Social stratification and social
mobility among young sportsmen, Gerald Kenyon and John Loy’s (1965) ‘Toward a Sociology of Sport’, Cyril L.R James’s Beyond a Boundary (1963) which is based on Cricket, shows how in the rituals of performance and conflict on the field, not just prowess but politics and psychology at play are also manifested. The work further raises serious questions about race, class, politics, and the facts of colonial oppression. Infact, it is one of the earliest written piece of work which has addressed the issues related to race and sport in society. Important contributors during this period also include Max Horkheimer, who wrote

The more light [that] is thrown on the functions and possibilities of life in a sporting community, the more necessary it will become to make sport the subject of very serious theoretical and empirical studies, a subject for scientific research (1963: 26).

Additionally, Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning’s ‘Dynamics of Group Sports with Special Reference to Football’ (1966), W.E. Schafer and J.M. Armer's ‘Athletes are not Inferior Students’ (1968), Lewis A. Zurcher and Arnold Meadow's On Bullfights and Baseball (1967), K. Heinila’s ‘The Totalizing Process in International Process’ (1971) which focus on inter-group conflicts in international sport, Jack Scott’s The Athletic Revolution (1971), Paul Hoch’s Rip Off the Big Game (1972), Bernie Parrish’s ‘They Call It a Game: Shoulder the NFL Stands on’ (1971), Dave Meggyesy’s Out of Their League (1971) and Gary Shaw’s ‘Meat on the Hoof’ (1972), these literatures helped in institutionalization and organizational development of sociology of sports. A significant trend that emerged in the early 1960’s is characterized by works calling for a systematic sociological analysis of sport, and the development of an academic area of study devoted exclusively to this cultural phenomenon. However, irrespective of having a strong pedigree sustained by promising researches and literatures (both
sociological and non-sociological), historical development of sociology of sports and its subject matter at its inception (like sociology in general) has been one of the major male preserves (Hargreaves, 1992, Hall, 1993, Malcolm, 2012). These earlier researches which set the foundation of the sub-discipline was indisputably dominated by men who wrote about men and which consciously discarded women’s experience within sports as well as failed to address gender as a concept of analysis within their research (Malcolm, 2012: 68). Nevertheless this inadequacy was addressed in the late 1970s, when scholars from North America began to incorporate gender in their critique of contemporary sport, and soon thereafter European sports scholars also embraced gender as a transformative concept in the discipline of Sports Studies (Bandy, 2014: 15). Therefore the following section discusses the gradual advent of ‘gender’ within sports literature which brought forth the instances of ‘women’s participation in sports’. The upcoming segment also describes and explains the relationship between the possibilities and the limitations of female sport, constraints women encounter in relation to sports which in turn have important practical and social implications.

**Discourses on Sports and Gender: Initial Endeavours around the Global**

Margaret Ann Hall (1996: 06) states that a review of sociology sport text and anthologies published prior to 1976 indicated that less than ten percent were (co-) authored by women and less than three per cent of content focused on women. In Hall’s view “There is little critical scholarship by men that is informed by feminist writing, and even less in the sociology of sport” (Hall, 1993: 51). Infact Jennifer Hargreaves in her article ‘Gender on the Sports Agenda’ (1990: 288) posits that both males and females could be ‘sports feminists’ and address the (missing) gender dynamics and its impact on the larger social arrangements. Eric Dunning in his article
titled ‘Sport as a Male Preserve: Notes on the social sources of Masculine Identity and its Transformation’ clearly states that

The sociology of sport is one of the least developed areas of sociology but, given the patriarchalism implicit in the discipline in general, it is hardly surprising that assumptions indicative of an unquestioned male dominance have been widely incorporated into such contributions as have been made to this field so far. One of the consequences of this has been that the patriarchal character of modern sports and the part that it may play in maintaining male hegemony have been questioned only by a handful of feminist writers. 1986: 79).

However as cited by Dominic Malcolm in his work *Sports and Sociology* (2012: 69) one of the earliest works on ‘gender’ in sociology of sport was produced by two male Figurational sociologists - Ken Sheard and Eric Dunning in *The Rugby Football Club as a Type of Male Preserve* (1973). Their work analyzed how the sport, Rugby and the techniques associated with it upholds the traditional ideals of masculinity or as a medium of expressing, legitimizing masculine traits. They further argued that it was within the middle and upper classes, from which most rugby players and suffragettes were drawn. Also certain mannerisms associated with the sport like celebration after a win generally manifested through (victory) songs, rituals are overtly heterosexual which objectify and vilify women and homosexuals (Sheard, Dunning, 2003: 158 - 159), in other words these displays prevented the ‘feminization of males’. According to Dunning and Sheard sports provided men with a source of ‘identity reaffirmation’ (Malcolm, 2012: 69) that in turn has developed as a counter response to threatened masculinity.
In the late 1970s, scholars from North America began to incorporate gender in their critique of contemporary sports, and soon thereafter European sports scholars’ also embraced gender as a transformative concept in the discipline of Sports Studies. Initially, scholars focussed on the female athlete as a subject of inquiry from a disciplinary perspective. With the inclusion of gender in the 1980s, scholars turned from a ‘categoric’ to a ‘relational’ perspective and gender was thus expanded beyond that of a distinct category and redefined as a dynamic, relational process that introduced new directions, theories, and paradigms for research in Sports Studies as the focus shifted from the female athlete to a cultural critique of sports using interdisciplinary and cultural studies perspectives (Bandy, 2014: 15). According to Jennifer Hargreaves (1994: 25) some of the early feminist interventions in sports sociology occurred in North-America during the 1970’s which focused on women’s sports like *American Women in Sports* (1974) by Ellen W. Gerber, Jan Felsnin, Pearl Berlin and Waneen Wyrick, *Women in Sports: From Myth to Reality* (1978) by Carole Oglesby’s which revealed women’s shared experiences of oppression and inequality in sports, Betty Spears’s *Prologue: The myth* (1978) which was based on a historical review of sports in Ancient Greece, medieval Europe, and twentieth century U.S.A that divulged how through time and across cultures majority of women were consistently discouraged or completely excluded from participating in sports, Susan Greendorfer and J.H. Lewko’s work on *Role of Family members in Sport Socialization of Children* (1978) observed the gendered socialization process within family that directed girls from a young age to perceive sports as a relatively undesirable social activity. Additionally, other significant scholarly works like Stephanie Twin’s *Out of the Bleachers: Writings on Women and Sports* (1979), Janice Kaplan’s *Women and Sports* (1980), B. Parkhouse and J. Lapin’s *Women who Win* (1980) not only represented an important reaction to the forms of
male dominance in sports sociology but also played a crucial role in unmasking
discrimination faced by women/women athletes within sports (Hargreaves, 1994: 25,
Malcolm, 2012: 69). Consequently, these researches can be acknowledged as an initial
endeavour to reveal the androcentric bias evident in the earlier works and to redress the
case of recognition of women athletes'/women’s experience in sports studies. Furthermore, these researches gradually stimulated feminist interest in sports which

**Sports and Sport Feminism: Inclusion of Gender & Global Scenario**

As cited by Dominic Malcolm (2012: 78) one of the first sport-related scholarly work written by sociologist of gender was Paul Willis’s *Women in Sports in Ideology* (1982/1994) which examined the specific form of sexual ideology in sports and the reason why differences between men and women in sports are treated in the way they are. Willis (1994: 34) further argued that the ‘commonsense’ view of sport is inflected through the patriarchal ideology supplemented with the widespread belief about the innate differences between the sexes. This in turn as conceived by Willis leads to the assumption that male sport is the ‘natural’ form of activity. Nancy Theberge in her article ‘Reflections on the Body in the Sociology of Sport’ explains that sports can be investigated as an area of male control including “control of access, control of practice and control of the very definitions of sport and gender”, in order to reveal sites of resistance to that control (1991: 385). Some authors argue that the ignorance of sport by feminists is detrimental to the understanding of female subordination because the practice of sport is one of the most overt sites of male dominance (Bennett, Whitaker, Smith and Sablove, 1987: 369; Hall, 1985: 38; Hall, 1996: 89). Studies on gender and sports espousing feminist theory advanced during the early 1980s, and this
development was triggered by a variety of broader social processes including academic institutionalization of physical education (Hall, 1996: 04), the constitutionalization of Title IX in 1972 in U.S.A and the Sex Discrimination Act in Britain in 1975 (Malcolm, 2012: 69). Mary Jo Kane in her work ‘Media Coverage of The Post Title IX Female Athlete: A Feminist Analysis of Sport, Gender, and Power’ claims that historically, definitions of maleness and masculinity were synonymous with conceptions of athleticism. At the same time, traditional notions of what it meant to be a female were in direct opposition to what it meant to be an athlete (1996: 99). Research on the gendered nature of sports has not only emphasised the basic question, i.e. “do girls/women unequally participate in sports compared to men/boys”, but also other related issues like differences between men and women sports, construction of gender identities (Lenskyj, 1987, Hargreaves, 1994, Hall, 2000, Theberge, 2000: 322-323, McDonagh, Pappano 2008: 10-11). That is being man and woman play a vital function in creating a divide between masculine sports e.g. football, rugby, wrestling which are mainly associated with imagery of power, toughness, skill, endurance, stamina and in contrast, feminine sports, e.g. gymnastics, skating, handball, volleyball, associated primarily with similes of grace, balance, minimum power and in some context mimicked or expressed form of sexuality (Hargreaves, 1994: 64-65, Huggins, Randell 2007: 04; Scraton, Flintoff 2002: 31; McDonagh, Pappano 2008: 11-13).

Margaret Ann Hall, the feminist sport sociologist in her work ‘Feminism and Sporting Bodies: Essays on Theory and Practice’ describes three types of research about gender in sport a) Categoric research that investigates the differences in athletic participation and performance between the genders, and tries to explain these differences in terms of biological or socio-cultural factors, b) Distributive research that looks at the distribution of resources between the genders in sport and focuses on
inequality. Both these types of research treat the two genders as distinct and unrelated entities. In contrast, c) *Relational research* investigates the historical and social construction of sports that produces the reinforcement of the idea that men are powerful and women are powerless (1996: 11). 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 dismantled. Margaret Ann Hall (1996), Mary Jo Kane (1995: 191) and Debra Shogan (1988: 272) all argue that the shift towards a research which deals with the relationship between femininity and masculinity, and females and males, in sport has been an important development in feminist critiques of sport. As Mary Jo Kane in her article ‘Resistance/Transformation of The Oppositional Binary: Exposing Sport as a Continuum’ describes, feminist research in sport has evolved from an initial stage of analysis that produced numerous descriptive studies of women’s participation patterns and their lack of access to various resources (1995: 193). Both Catherine MacKinnon (1987: 117 - 124) and Debra Shogan (1988) agree that this shift towards investigating the relationship between the genders is crucial to any understanding of male power in sport and society. As Shogan explains:

> Remedies to inequality in sport cannot occur if gender is seen as an irrelevant characteristic, which we must ignore in order to be just. This is because inequality is a necessary condition of gender. If gender is ignored, so too will inequality be ignored. (1988: 273).

Similarly Barbara Houston writes:

> ….in short, gender is taken to be totally irrelevant to social organization. I have no special quarrel with the claim that this is precisely how a good, just society ought to
treat gender. My worry is that this idea is not especially helpful in the detection and elimination of present gender bias. (1987: 255).

Feminist sports sociology has produced an impressive body of knowledge critiquing the fundamental role sports play in producing and maintaining patriarchal ideologies and arrangements with respect to gender. Feminist sport sociologists have found sport as a fertile area to display the way that ideas and practices, as well as bodies, are sexed through discourse. Sport is a practice that makes public the apparent sexed differences in performance between men and women. These differences help to underpin the dominant conceptualisation of human bodies as members of one or the other of two natural, dichotomous and hierarchically organised categories of gender in modern society. Each of the two categories of bodies has differential access to authority in sporting discourse production. As Margaret Ann Hall in her article ‘Knowledge and Gender: Epistemological Questions in the Social Analysis of Sport’ suggests, “sport plays a significant role in the reproduction of a specifically patriarchal social order and could, therefore, be significant in the transformation of that order. At the very least it can provide a site of resistance” (1985: 38). At the heart of this critique is the notion of biological determinism whereby all human beings are assumed to fit, by nature, into explicit and oppositional bipolar categories of “female” and “male”. Within this biology-as-destiny paradigm, the apparent given-by-nature dichotomous category of gender forces a polarization between the sexes that ignores overlap; differences are systematically emphasized whereas similarities are ignored (Davis & Delano, 1992). Gayle Rubin in her groundbreaking article ‘The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex’ discussed elaborately on the concept of ‘negation of biology’ by claiming ‘gender is socially imposed division of sexes’ and also claims that ‘gender identities is the suppression of natural similarities’ since men and women are
closer to each other than either is to anything else and the source of this division or difference is anything else but nature (1875: 179-180). Raewyn Connell also emphasised how exaggerating biological differences and suppressing physiological similarities between men and women have consistently produced categories of differentiation (1987: 81). Connell analysed how negation of similar biological attributes or shared capacity and characteristics among men and women fabricate social divisions where dissimilarities are highlighted and evaluated according to their supposed social and cultural superiority or inferiority (1987: 81). Connell cited the example of children where girls and boys are seen and treated differently inspite of sharing similar physical attributes like height, strength. This portrays how biological difference is ingrained from a tender age that in turn magnifies and reproduces through development in adulthood. To begin with, family being the primary agency of socialization imparts the established social norms and customs to its children. Michael A. Messner in his work It’s All for the Kids: Gender, Families and Youth Sports (2009) argues that family validates and exercises the existing social inequalities including gender gap present in the society. Gender division of labour within the family play a key role in constructing boundaries for women to engage in sporting activities. Beside family, Schools through its curriculum adhere to gender discrimination prevalent in the society. Ivan Illich in Deschooling Society (1971), claim that schools fulfil the expectation of the larger society by making children ‘passive consumers’ i.e. uncritically accepting the existing social orders, who in future will help to reproduce the dominant ideology of the society. Allison Huggins and Shirley Randell in their article ‘The Contribution of Sports to Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment’ (2007) observed that beside curriculum, separate dress code for boys and girls in schools too pose an obstacle. It is always comfortable and easy to run, play and move
swiftly in pants or shorts (dress code for boys in schools) than in skirts, tunic, align dress or ‘sari’ especially in case of India (dress code for girls in schools). As a result majority of boys are likely to engage in sports during recess, while girls prefer watching the boys, talking to each other or reading books. This unequal involvement in sports amid school going boys and girls is found worldwide-Pacific, Asia and Africa. Like for instance Newsome Report (1963) urged that ‘our girls should be educated in terms of their main social function—which is to make for themselves, their children and their husbands a secure and suitable home and to be mothers’ (cited in Hargreaves, 1994: 152). Researches on sports espousing the historical perspective reveal that such practices have been sustained by an ideology that maximized cultural differences between the sexes based on biological assumptions and which became part of the commonsense knowledge. However these commonsense ideas were further substantiated with medical knowledge that became part of the everyday life experiences.

Helen Lenskyj in her work Out of Bounds: Women, Sport and Sexuality (1986:18) argues that the Victorian principle was supplemented by medical rationale represented by doctors who upheld the view that women were morally superior but physically inferior. These two rationales converged to construct the knowledge that women’s unique anatomy and physiology along with their special moral obligation disqualified them from vigorous physical activities and sports (ibid, 1986: 18). Patricia A. Vertinsky in her groundbreaking work The Eternally Wounded Woman: Women, Doctors, and Exercise in the Late Nineteenth Century (1989) provides a historical account on how women especially middle-class women in the nineteenth century were seriously inhibited by medical ideologies pertaining to exercise and physical activities,
and which eventually became powerful forms of social control governing the lives of women. As Vertinsky writes:

should women become too vigorous, aggressive and competitive in their sporting activities and make the fatal mistake of entering the arena marked out as inappropriate for female endeavour, sooner or later their energy would be dissipated, their health would break down and they would be out of the race. Because they are ‘eternally wounded’, they were doomed to compete and lose, or not to compete at all. It was not that men and women were considered to march to different drummers, it was that many believed that men and women should not even be seen in the same parade 1989:22).

Hargreaves similarly points 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 (1994: 51-52). 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. Like for instance Dr. Howard Kelly wrote in the journal titled ‘Medical Gynaecology’

Good women.....possess no language and no terminology, either for feelings or their anatomy (cited in Lenskyj, 1986: 21).

Female anatomy therefore became the basis for determining their ability and allocating social roles which was further legitimised through medical and social rationale. Like for instance, Jane English’s article ‘Sex Equality in Sport’ (1988) focuses on the implicit essentialism concerning the female body in which it seems that difference in
performance, and hence authority, between male and female athletes are related to both different corporeal socialisation patterns and different bodily structures. Joanne Hill’s and Amanda Jones’ “Sport and the Body” (2016) extends a sociological and feminist understanding of sporting bodies, especially in relation to how sports is a medium of disciplining, controlling and constraining the body. Post-structural and Foucauldian understandings of the body has also been espoused within Feminist sports sociology. Inspired from the works of Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, post-structural 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. The focus on the relationship between body, gender and sports in post structuralism has particularly received increasing attention within feminist sports study. A post-structural feminist view suggests that gender is an oppressive fiction which “... runs roughshod over multiple differences among and within women who are ill-served by a conception of gender as basic” (Di Stefano, 1990: 65). In Di Stefano's term

The argument here is that a notion of gender as basic merely serves to reify, rather than to critically contrast, transform and escape the imposed myth of difference, while it ignores other crucial and as yet subjugated areas of difference (1990: 65).

Michele 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. Sheila Scraton and Anne 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. Helen Lenskyj in her book *Out of Bounds: Women, Sport and sexuality* (1986) claim that women participants in the world of sport put their femininity at risk and threaten the social order. Hence, involvement of women in sports is a transgression that needs to be explained, prevented, or managed, but somehow is not natural. Lois Bryson claims that there are varied layers of oppressive practices which reinforce sports as a male domain, and each layer “ensnares a certain number of female participants” (1987:350). Similarly, Sandra Lee Bartky (1988) influenced from the works of Foucault also examined contemporary disciplinary practices in her work ‘Foucault Femininity and Modernization of Patriarchal Power’ that aims to 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), a second category of disciplinary practices concentrates on bringing forth from the body "a specific repertoire of gestures, postures and movements" (Ibid.) and the third category of feminine disciplinary practices is directed to "the display of the body as an ornamented surface" (Ibid.), referring to docile bodies subjected to transformation, improvement and target of power. Pirko Markula’s early work titled ‘Firm but shapely fit but sexy, strong but thin: The postmodern aerobicising female bodies’ (1995) also looks at the hidden agenda of aerobics as a site for disciplining the female body. Similarly Jennifer Smith-Maguire in her work ‘Fit for Consumption: Sociology and the Business for
Fitness’ (2008) contends that the concept of fitness through gym, aerobics and other mechanisms target the body as a site for project which not only aims to uphold the vitality of physical activity but also instil the socially/culturally prescribed idea regarding ‘body’ which is gender specific in nature. As Smith-Maguire argues: “Through fitness, participants negotiate social demands and thereby produce their own bodily status” (2008: 22). It is this production of socially prescribed bodily status that leads to what Judith Butler calls ‘Performativity’ (1990) which legitimizes ones gender identity through its enactment in day to day activities. Butler further argues that acting according to cultural assumption lead us to believe that man/woman will be masculine/feminine and heterosexual. Similarly scholarly works espousing the post-structural feminist view on sports can be found in Jennifer Hargreaves’ Heroines of sport: The Politics of Difference and Identity (2000), which attempted to question and criticize the ideology of mainstream sports being malestream and addressed the fluidity of identity with respect to ones sexuality, race and disability. Another vital application of post-structuralist position regarding the ‘sex’ ‘gender’ and ‘sexuality’ identity can be found in Sheila Cavanagh and Heather Sykes ‘Transsexual Bodies at the Olympics: The International Olympic Committee’s Policy on Transsexual Athletes at the 2004 Athens Summer Games’ (2006) which argues that sports through its various rules and regulations reinforce the existing gender order which in turn upholds the dominant heterosexual culture in the larger society. Furthermore, the work criticises sex testing and its implication on athletes with diverse sexual orientation since these tests do not test sex, but maleness or femaleness of the concerned athlete. And anybody falling outside the binary opposite is excluded as an illegitimate entity. Like Cavanagh and Sykes argue:
Transsexuals and intersexed athletes – the groups most often subject to discrimination and disqualification— have always confounded a static and unchanging two sex model based on biology, and so their gendered subjectivities were erased and/or largely ignored in competitive sport prior to the 21st century (2006: 77).

Therefore sexuality of athletes has always been a matter of concern and a critical arena of investigation. Jayne Caudwell’s through her anthology *Sports, Sexualities and Queer/Theory* have provided a wide-ranging feminist post-structuralist vision of sport sociology and described its potential for the study of sports by questioning certain (prevailing) practices (2006: 02). They are:

a) Exposing the social construction of sexuality

b) Exposing the illusion/fiction of sexual identity

c) Avoiding normative and essentializing identities

d) Resisting regimes of the ‘normal’

e) Violating compulsory sex/gender relations

f) Dismantling binary gender relations

g) Finally, undermining heteronormative hegemonic discourses.

Claudwell further concludes that there is a need for further work on sport from an intersectional perspective, and that (hetero) sexuality is not alone related to gender, but can also be seen in relation to race i.e. whiteness and heterosexuality are inseparable from Western capitalist sport culture (2006: 07). Therefore, the upcoming part will focus on the intersectional aspect of sports studies and will discuss the literatures associated with this aspect.
Sports, Gender and the Intersectional Dimension

Most recently, as researchers began to challenge the universalizing nature of feminism and its uniformity in the 1990s, the concept of gender began to be conceived as both interrelational and intersubjective. A paradigmatic shift toward intersectionality emerged and enabled scholars to critique the view that gender was monolithic, rather they purported that it intersects with a number of other dimensions of human experience and identity such as age, ethnicity, race, and social class in sport which amplifies the dimensions of discrimination. This shift encouraged a more transdisciplinary and transnational focus and has yet again transformed the scholarly analysis of sport. Feminist sport sociologist Jennifer Hargreaves (1994) argues that apart from gender, social class, race and religion also contribute to unequal participation, marginalization and trivialisation of women/girls in sports. In this regard it will be appropriate to refer Intersectional approach used by feminists. Intersectionality - the term coined by Kimberle Crenshaw (1989) is a methodology of studying the relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relationships and subject formations. The theory suggests and seeks to examine how various biological, social and cultural categories such as sex, gender, race, class, ability, and other axes of identity interact on multiple and often simultaneous levels, contributing to systematic social inequality. Intersectionality is used to analyse the production of power and processes between gender, race, ethnicity, etc and is involved with analysing social and cultural hierarchies within different discourses and institutions. However over a long period of time sport sociology and feminist sport scholarship have virtually remained silent about the intersectional experiences of women athletes, especially with regard to their gender and race (Scraton, 2001: 170). Sheila Scraton in her article ‘Reconceptualising Race, Gender and Sport: The
contribution of Black Feminism’ refers to Susan Birrell in regard to ‘broadening of our theoretical frameworks and theorizing difference within the field of gender and sport’ (2001: 170). Birrell’s claim of expanding the intellectual arena within sport studies calls for a more refined analyses of the intricate relationship of race, gender, class and sport. Although, black feminism has always taken an intersectional approach in addressing women’s lived experiences and that it has always theorized across race, ethnicity, class, and gender. However, a number of feminist theorists are exploring the value of an intersectional approach including those working within sport and physical education (Flintoff, Fitzgerald, and Scraton, 2008). Flintoff and colleagues in their work ‘The challenges of intersectionality: Researching difference in physical education’ (2008) uses an intersectional lens to understand contemporary physical education, arguing that this approach moves us beyond the problems of a single category focus on gender or race or disability. Their work suggests that exploring the material body through an intersectional lens can help us understand the complexities of difference and the relationship of gender to other social categories in sporting contexts.

Eileen McDonagh and Laura Pappano in their book Playing with the Boys: Why Separate is Not Equal in Sports, argues that

human beings constitute an intersection of many ascriptive characteristics acquired at birth, such as their race, class, religious background, language orientation, nationality, sexuality and of course their sex. The complexities of the way ascriptive status interact socially, economically and politically make it dangerous to single out just one, such as sex, as the definition of a problem. This is because whatever a person experience due to one ascriptive characteristic is modified (amplified) greatly by all the other characteristics (2008: 04).
Similarly Legal scholar Rhonda Reaves in her article ‘There's No Crying in Baseball: Sports and the Legal and Social Construction of Gender’ notes that African American women often experience discrimination because of their gender and race. Consequently, they are vulnerable to the harm of sexual harassment (both verbal and physical) in context of sports where they are coached by white males (2001: 285). A study in the Czech Republic (2005) found that 45 per cent of women athletes had experienced sexual harassment from someone in sport, 27 per cent noting harassment from a coach. In Canada, 21.8 per cent of women athletes surveyed reported relationships with a sporting authority figure of which 8.6 per cent felt obligated to enter into the relationship (UN Report, 2007: 27). In this context Patricia A. Cain in her work Women, Race and Sport (2000), was of the opinion that athletes should be judged on basis of their skill, performance, character and not on the basis of colour, class and gender. Jennifer Hargreaves in her work Sporting Females (1994) provides a historical overview regarding how participation in sports and physical education for young boys and girls in schools and colleges were not only gender appropriate but were class specific in nature. Like for instance athletics had a greater working-class following, since elite girls’ school considered participation in athletic sports as ‘unladylike’ and ‘unsophisticated’ (Hargreaves, 1994: 131). To be more specific certain training in physical activities like gymnastics, equestrian sports (like polo, horse racing) were strictly restricted for the elite sections where young girls belonging to the privileged strata had the opportunity to aesthetically build their femininity (Hargreaves, 1994: 69). Helen Lenskyj (1986: 57) also confirms that social class plays a vital role in deciding who will participate in which sports. Pierre Bourdieu in his famous work Distinction (1984) has argued that choice of sports and sport affiliation does not depend alone on ones passion and ability but is also determined by ones social class. According to
Bourdieu women’s sports are determined by their class, he states for example, that “differences between sexes in sports participation increases as one moves down the social hierarchy” (1984: 214), and that women from the dominant class are more at home with their bodies. Likewise Jennifer Hargreaves in her work Sporting Females contends that

Athletics has a greater working-class following than many other female sports.

It is seldom taught in elite girls’ schools because it was considered to be unladylike (1994: 131).

Sexuality has been another vital status which along with gender and class amplifies the existing stereotypical conception regarding women/women athletes. The separation of sports into male and female on biological grounds is reinforced by powerful ideological and political mechanisms that also strengthen heterosexual norms. What might seem ‘natural’ (differences based on biological attributes) is actually ‘social’ (i.e. based on culturally constructed, prescribed gender differences). Woven into these gender divisions is the heterosexual imperative that privileges particular expressions of masculinity (i.e. heterosexual masculinity) above femininity or homosexuality. Feminist researches on the relation between sexuality, gender and sports have argued that sport is a prime site for the (re)production of a particular kind of hegemonic (all-pervasive or dominant) heterosexual masculinity (Lenskyj 1992; Hall 1996; Messner 1992, 1996; Messner and Sabo 1994). The ‘macho’ representations of masculinity are pursued and valued above all others and in turn also aim to preserve ‘masculinity’ over ‘femininity’. In other words, heterosexual privilege and power is linked to the other major social hierarchies in society.
Religion has also been considered another dimension of social identity which along with gender amplifies discriminatory practices among women/women athletes. Fatima Fakier in her article ‘Muslim Women in Sports: Culture vs. Religion’ (2016) advocated that though Muslim women face many barriers to sports and exercise, such as hijab bans, large-scale poverty and religious intolerance, but one of the biggest barriers originates from within their own communities. Similarly a report on Muslim Women in Sports presented by ‘Women’s Sport and Fitness Foundation and Sporting Equals’ (2010: 02) revealed that lack of role models, family expectations about the role of young women have an impact on sports participation. Therefore it can be conceived that religious ideology along with gender socially disable women/women athletes in their venture to explore themselves especially in areas which are not deemed appropriate by the religious community and gendered ideology. Hence sports/athletics has been one such institution where participation of Muslim women has been limited, prohibited and undervalued.

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).

The intersectional perspective to sports study especially within feminist sports sociology has widened its field of enquiry by taking into consideration multiplicity and
plurality of experiences of women/sports women that fabricate unequal reality for them.

**Sports, Gender and Media**

A growing volume of research has also examined media coverage of sports and its role in gendering of sports. Research consistently revealed that media (both print and visual) unequally report women sports news and men sports news, with the former being almost invisible and the latter dominant (Gender, Media and Sports, Pamela J. Creedon, 1994). Paul Mark Pederson in his work ‘Examining Equity in Newspaper Photographs: A Content Analysis of the Print Media Photographic Coverage of Interscholastic Athletics’ posit that the media is one of the most influential forms of socialization in today’s society in generating gender values (2002: 303). His content analysis of the newspaper photographic coverage of high school athletics revealed that female athletics, even when compared to the independent standards of enrolment, participation, and sports offered, were significantly under-represented in number of photographs and total photographic column inches. Male athletics not only received more photographic coverage, their photographs were also better positioned and more likely to be colour photographs. Pederson’s work collectively exposed how the newspapers upheld hegemonic masculinity through their under-representation and marginalization of high school female athletics. Likewise Stacey Nicely in her research titled ‘Media Framing of Female Athletes and Women’s Sports in Selected Sports Magazines’ have explored how female athletes and women’s sports are framed in sports magazines, that leads to gender misrepresentations and negative influence on the passive audience (2007: 01 - 06). Nicely further states that

Female athletes and women’s sports are often under-represented and unfairly framed in the media when compared to their male counterparts, which may be
interpreted by the mass audience as a sign that women are inferior in the sports domain (2007: 01).

Arthur A. Raney and Jennings Bryant also shared a similar view in their work *Handbook of Sports and Media* (2006) that Women’s sports are given less television airtime and significantly less newspaper coverage. Pamela J. Creedon in her work *Gender, Media and Sports* also asserted that media (both print and visual) unequally report women sports news and men sports news, with the former being almost invisible and the latter dominant thereby ignoring the achievements of sportswomen at various national and international levels (1994:06). Furthermore, research like ‘Coverage of Women’s Sports in Four Daily Newspapers’ by Margaret C. Duncan, Michael Messner and Linda Williams, (1991) concluded after investigating (4) four newspapers that:

- Stories focusing exclusively on men’s sports outnumbered stories addressing only women’s sports by a ratio of 23 to 1.
- Even when all men’s baseball and football stories were eliminated from the total number of men’s stories, men’s stories still outnumbered women’s stories by an 8.7 to 1 margin.
- Women-only sports stories accounted for 3.5 percent of all stories; men’s stories made up 81 percent of the total.
- Front page stories covering only women’s sports were even more scarce, comprising 3.2 percent of page one article, compared to 5.3 percent devoted exclusively to men’s coverage.
- There were 28.8 times as many column inches devoted to men-only sports stories as there were to women-only sports stories.
- Photographs of male athletes outnumbered those of female athletes 13 to 1.
• 92.3 percent of all photographs were pictures of men.

• In each newspaper, fewer than 5 percent of all stories were devoted to women only.

In the United States, the media coverage ratio in 2004 between men and women professional sporting events was 95 to 1 in television and 20 to 1 in print media. In Australia, a 1996 study conducted by the Australian Sports Commission found that coverage of women’s sport was just two per cent of total sport broadcasting in television, 1.4 percent in radio and 6.8 per cent in sport magazines (UN Report, 2007: 25-26). In a study conducted by Amateur Athletic Foundations of Los Angeles (2005) it was found that media tend to cover visually entertaining sports or gag sports (e.g. nuns playing volleyball against bikini-clad women). Frank Deford, a senior writer for *Sports Illustrated*, has argued that coverage of sports is mostly dictated by what people want to see. Deford stated that

Men do not want to see well built, muscular, competing women representing ‘them’ rather they demand highly sexualised image of their desired sexy sportswomen (UN Report, 2007: 25).

This disparity between women and men in sports is further accentuated by disparate media coverage. Mary Jo Kane in her article ‘Progress and Inequality: Women’s Sports and the Gender Gap’ (2017) have identified two trends in men’s and women’s sports media coverage that have remained consistent:

1. Underrepresentation of coverage- Even though 40% of all sports participants (and 43% of all scholarship athletes) are women, women’s sports still receive only 2% to 4% of all sports coverage. Sport media scholars contend that this glaring disparity reflects the fact that the media doesn’t only under-report women’s sports, and actively suppresses
information about it but also covertly conveys that women’s sports hold less value and are of less importance than men’s sports.

2. Feminization and sexualisation- Within the small amount of coverage that women’s athletics do receive, we find that female athletes are more likely to be portrayed off the court, out of uniform and in highly sexualized poses where the emphasis is on their femininity and their physical attractiveness rather than their athletic competence. Such sexualized representation upholds the heterosexual culture of the society which in turn sustains not only the gender stratification but also denounce homosexuality as an acceptable way of life.

Margaret Mac Neil’s (1994) ‘Active Women, Media representations, and Ideology’ has equated media’s portrayal of women sports to ‘soft pornography’, fuelling the ‘sexualization’ of the sporting female body. When the media emphasizes women as attractive and feminine this shifts attention from their skills to their looks and minimizes the threat these women pose to the male dominance of sport. Mary Jo Kane (2017) further argues that for years, male sports writers and editors have supplemented their reasons for not covering women’s sports is because “nobody is interested”. Angela L. Wallin in her article ‘The Objectification of Professional Female Athletes in Print Advertisements and the Consumers’ Response’ argues that media’s projection of women athletes as a hyper-sexualized commodity in reality devalues their athletic achievements and encourages the cultivation of heterosexual culture (2014:03). Eoin J. Trolan in his article ‘The Impact of the Media on Gender Inequality within Sports’ argues

Despite the prolific advancement of women sports and female athletes and the potential for strong women to be positive role models, the portrayal of these athletes in the media has been subjected to objectification and invisibility
compared to male athletes or men's sports. Though there has been tremendous growth and popularity of women's sports, female athletes are still considered inferior to male athletes and that compared to male athletes there is still an obsession with the body of female athletes rather than on her athletic skills (2013: 215).

Therefore Trolan (2013) contends that media’s analysis of sporting events and athletes serves to reaffirm gender differences and gender order. A growing volume of research has also examined media coverage of sports and its role in gendering of sports. Furthermore, women athletes are seldom hired for lucrative product endorsements that male athletes often receive. Such problems are not restricted to underdeveloped countries but are also practised in developed countries like America, Europe, Australia and many others (Huggins, Randell 2007; Pamela J. Creedon 1994). Language used by media to describe women and male athletes has also been a research concern. Laura Cavender in her work ‘You’ve Come A Long Way, Baby: Language in Sports—Can Women Compete?’ asserts that women’s sporting events are covered differently than men’s in both language and photography, effectively marking the women as “others” within the domain of sports and drawing attention to feminine traits, sexual orientation by focusing on women’s appearance, relationships with others, and passivity, whereas in contrast, male athletes’ portrayals focus more on athleticism, individual achievements, camaraderie and describes their competency with more forceful, aggressive language (including metaphors) (2015:03). For example the adjectives ‘pretty’ and ‘handsome’ both mean something like ‘good-looking’, but have background meanings corresponding to cultural ideals of good looks for females and males respectively, and are generally used gender-specifically or to invoke male or female associated properties (Eckert, McConnell, 1992: 465). Infact ‘language ideologies’ is generally used to refer to sets of representations, through which language
is imbued with cultural meaning for a certain community (Holmes, 2006: 447). Sociolinguist, Robin Lakoff contends that modifying the word “athlete” or any profession with a feminine adjective suggests that a woman holding that position is marked—in some way unnatural and that it is natural for men to hold it (cited in Linehan, 2016). However it must also be acknowledged that media representation does not solely depend upon the gender of athletes, but is also determined by ones genre of sports, race and sexuality. Here the intersection of various other social attributes (like class, race, sexuality, religion) along with gender also influences media’s approach towards reporting and covering women’s sports. As Ben Carrington in his article ‘Race, Sport and Politics: The Sporting Black Diaspora’ (2011:86) contends that the sport media can be considered as having a key role in transmitting popular ideas about race and ethnicity, ‘a role arguably more powerful than any other social institution’. Like for instance the work titled ‘Gender, Race and Media Representation’ (2006) by Dwight E. Brooks and Lisa P. Hébert have contended that media constructs the notion of masculinity, femininity differently for people of colour, and even for white people. Jacco van Sterkenburg in his research ‘Race, Ethnicity and the Sport Media’ (2011) has argued that there exists a tendency of people to categorize athletes into a number of discrete racial or ethnic categories and to link these categories implicitly or explicitly to certain characteristics or qualities: like ‘Black people have fast muscles and excel in sprinting’, ‘Dutch soccer players of Moroccan origin combine Dutch tactical skills with Moroccan technical skills’. These stereotypes when transmitted through mass media tend to automatically influence people’s perception that furthers the pre-existing categorization and hierarchy of social identities. Therefore media portrayal aims to recontextualize women athletes by repressing their athleticism and upholding the socially desired femininity through sexist language, distorted image and underrepresentation of their athletic achievements compared to their male counterparts.
Sports and Gender: Existing Indian Sociological Literature

Despite a large number of authentic, in-depth research works and ongoing vibrant discourses on Sociology of Sports and the interrelationship of sports and gender from various English speaking countries, there is a miniscule number of works on this area in Indian Sociology. Scholarly works like *Indian Women and Sports* by M. K. Singh (1990), ‘Women and sports- Extending Limits to Physical Expression’ by Padma Prakash (1990) reveals the appalling situation of women athletes in India. They have discussed about the myths surrounding women’s participation in physical activities and how Indian society consider ‘dance’ and not sports as an ideal and aesthetic form of physical activity for women. Bhupinder Singh also shares a similar view in his work *Sports Sociology: An Indian Perspective* (2004) that women has always been demoralized to engage in any form of sporting activity because sports and athleticism is considered synonymous to maleness and masculinity where ‘women’ are in direct opposition to this concept. Thus women are victims of traditional ideology and expectations that they are not ‘naturally’ suited for athletics, as a result they experience exclusion in sports compared to men (Gender Issues in Sports in India, The National Commission for Women, 2005). Apart from addressing the issue of gender discrimination in sports, works like ‘Constraints of Indian Women Participation in Games and Sports’ by N. S. Rao (2010), ‘Women and Sports - Gender Politics in Contemporary Kerala’ by Ashitha M. (2012) has also highlighted the problem of political interference in sports as well that accentuate gender discrimination within sports. Furthermore, work like ‘Gender Discrimination in Sports’ (2016) by Dr. Vishwas Manohar Deshpande portrays how school sport has served to institutionalize the gender specific and gender biased sport value system and how it has a differential impact on female and male students. However, the National Sports Policy (2007, https://yas.nic.in/sites/default/files/File371.pdf) adopted by The Ministry of Youth
Affairs and Sports of India aimed to accomplish the unfinished targets and encourage involvement of young girls and women in sports from preliminary school level, ensure equal facilities to girls/women and finally achieve ‘Sports for all’ agenda. But the actual implementation of this is yet to be assessed.

**Objectives of the study**

To the best of this researcher’s knowledge, no in-depth study has been undertaken on gender discrimination of Indian women athletes in sports belonging to various class strata, religion. In the light of this the research has tried to explore:

1) Are women athletes prevented from choosing sports as a career in West Bengal?
2) Whether outdoor athletic sports are gendered in West Bengal? If so, what are the root causes?
3) Whether and how social class, religion, language, family, norms, values, school and media (both print and visual) accelerates such discrimination in this state.

**Methodological Parameters**

Research Design

The present study has attempted to use a mixed method approach to explore women athletes’ subjective perceptions of their experience within the domain of sports vis-à-vis their male counterparts i.e. male athletes. Mixed methods are a new approach in social research, also known as the third path or third methodological movement that emerged as an alternative to the dichotomy of qualitative (QUAL) and quantitative (QUAN) traditions (Teddlie, Tashakkori, 2007:04). Mixed Methods (MM) is traditionally defined as requiring (necessarily) the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods and data (Hesse-Biber, Johnson, 2013:103). Mixed methods have
been defined by Charles Teddlie and Abbas Tashakkori as “a type of research design in which QUAL and QUAN approaches are used in types of question, procedures and for inferences” (2003:711). According to Claire M. Woolley “Mixed methods research questions are those that ask either what and how or what and why. In such cases both quantitative and qualitative approaches are of use: respectively, addressing what and the how or why” (2008:08). The combination of multiple methodological practices, empirical materials, perspectives, and observers in a single study is best understood, then, as a strategy that adds rigor, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth to any inquiry. (Denzin, Lincoln, 2008:07). Hesse-Biber and Johnson (2013:103-104) states that

Given the complexity of research problems that traverse any one disciplinary point of view, we argue for reaching out across our disciplinary divides to explore the deployment, when needed, of a plurality of methodological approaches and philosophical perspectives and methods techniques that are both multiple and mixed (2013:103-104).

Mixed Methods approach has been employed here because of its superiority over any single approach design. Mixed methods research can simultaneously address a range of confirmatory and exploratory questions with both the qualitative and the quantitative approaches, provides better and stronger inferences, and also provides the opportunity for a greater assortment of divergent views (Teddlie, Tashakkori, 2009: 33). Therefore, in this research the researcher’s aim has been to adhere to mixed methods strategies, so that the combined use of both qualitative and quantitative approaches provides an expanded understanding of the research problem. The study has espoused a partially mixed concurrent dominant status design where both qualitative and quantitative data are collected simultaneously but major thrust has been given on
Qualitative method and data. Partial Mixed Methods occur when the quantitative and qualitative phases are not mixed within or across stages. Instead, with partially mixed methods both the qualitative and quantitative elements are conducted either concurrently or sequentially in their entirety before being mixed at the data interpreting stage. Nancy L. Leech & Anthony J. Onwuegbuzie in their article ‘A Typology of Mixed Methods Research Designs’ has defined “A partially mixed concurrent dominant status design involves conducting a study with two facets that occur concurrently, such that either facet has the greater emphasis” (2007: 268).

Three-dimensional typology of mixed methods designs (Leech, Onwuegbuzie, 2007: 269)

1. Level of mixing (partially mixed versus fully mixed)

2. Time orientation (concurrent versus Sequential)

3. Emphasis of approaches (equal status versus dominant status).

In this study Qualitative approach (within the partially mixed concurrent dominant status design) has been give more emphasis since it aims to make sense of an issue through the participants’ own meaning of it and also it interprets the issue with its focus on various social experiences. Qualitative research approaches have been used to obtain “a more naturalistic, contextual and holistic understanding of human beings in society” (Todd, Nerlich, McKeown & Clarke 2004: 04). These approaches have focused on studying phenomena in their natural settings and striving to make sense of or interpreting phenomena with respect to the meanings people bring to them (Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor & Tindall 1994; Denzin & Lincoln 2005). Using the qualitative approach here means adherence to qualitative methods both epistemologically and ontologically, that is when the researcher stresses on the understanding of the social world through an examination of the interpretation of the world by its participants as
well as believing in a constructionist paradigm, which entails that social properties are outcomes of the interactions between individuals (Bryman, 2001: 366). Here the researcher has used this qualitative interpretative approach (epistemologically) primarily to focus on women athletes’ lived experiences as an athlete and as a woman i.e. the world here is viewed through women athletes’ perceptions and experiences within the domain of sports compared to male athletes. Besides this, ontologically, the constructionist method emphasise on the fact that both ‘sports’ and ‘gender’ are socially/culturally constructed and complement each other in shaping women athletes’ everyday lived experiences. Since for this kind of exploratory study qualitative methods (relying on in depth understanding) appear to be most suitable, hence the study has used different methods of qualitative approach. In this research inductive style of inquiry has been followed, focusing on individual meanings and also on importance of rendering the complexity of a situation. (Creswell, 2011: 04).

Qualitative research has always tended to be concerned with the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2007: 37) and since in this research the point of focus has been women athletes’ lived experiences both as an athlete and as a woman therefore qualitative methods have been adopted. Though the research has mostly emphasised on qualitative methods and data, certain quantitative measures are also used in some specific contexts. For instance, while analyzing demographic data and other aspects quantitative methods are of help. Creswell metaphorically describes qualitative research as an ‘intricate fabric composed of minute threads, many colours, different textures and various blend of material’ (2007: 35). Therefore qualitative research, as a set of interpretive activities, privileges no single methodological practice over another. Qualitative researchers use semiotics, narrative, content, discourse, archival and phonemic analysis, even statistics, tables, graphs, and numbers. They also
draw on and utilize the approaches, methods, and techniques of ethnomethodology, phenomenology, hermeneutics, feminism, deconstructionism, ethnography, interviewing, psychoanalysis, cultural studies, survey research and participant observation among others, all of these research practices are approaches to qualitative inquiry.

In addition to mixed methods research this research has also used feminist research methodology and epistemology. They are mainly qualitative in nature following the interpretivist /constructivist paradigm which sees gender as the nucleus of women’s perceptions and lives, shaping consciousness, skills, institutions and the distribution of power and privilege. Millen (1997) states that feminism is a powerful conceptual tool for critiquing traditional sociological research, but notions of conducting ‘feminist research’ may contain some unchallenged assumptions about who should be researched and which methodologies are used (http://www.socresonline.org.uk/socresonline/2/3/3.html). Some conceptions of feminist research organised around power issues and equality of research relations (might) suggest that feminist methodology would include an attempt to raise the feminist consciousness of these women, whilst preserving their accounts of their own experience. Likewise, by drawing on the insights and struggles of women athletes’ lived experiences, the goal was to unearth subjugated knowledge and express deep feelings of exclusion from the dominant avenues of knowledge building (Hesse- Biber, 2011: 03). Elizabeth Anderson (1995:50) describes feminist epistemology as being concerned with the way in which gender influences our concept of knowledge and “practices of inquiry and justification”. Here the researcher has kept in mind the feminist consciousness of opening up intellectual and emotional space for all women to articulate their relations to one another and the wider society. Since feminists have forged new epistemologies of knowledge by incorporating women’s lived experiences,
emotions, and feelings into the knowledge building process, therefore it has been attempted to take a more in-depth point of view to obtain a better and fuller understanding of the research problem. The ideas of Dorothy Smith (1987/2004), an early proponent of the feminist standpoint perspective have also been followed, who stresses the necessity of starting research from women’s lives, taking into account women’s everyday experiences through paying particular attention to and finding and analyzing the gaps that occur when women try to fit their lives into the dominant culture’s way of conceptualizing women’s situation (Hesse-Biber, 2011: 10).

This research has also incorporated the intersectional perspective that questions any form of inequality on women athletes imposed on the basis of their varied social identity like class, race, religion, sexuality, age, nationality apart from gender. Intersectionality is a theoretical perspective which 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 notion of intersectionality has further served as an instrument that has helped to grasp the complex interplay between the marginalised and privileged as well as the interconnections between various social categories (i.e. class, gender, sexuality) which shapes the reality for the deprived/disadvantaged (in this case it is the women athletes). 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’ approach 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. The espousal of intersectional perspective as a new transformative paradigm within feminist scholarship in the last decade has dilated their theoretical and methodological prospect of studying women’s lived experiences from multiple standpoints i.e. recognizing “plurality of women’s lived experiences”. Patricia Hill Collins (1990) argues for the need to understand interlocking axes of oppression because as Kathy Davis summed up

Intersectionality addresses the most central theoretical and normative concern within feminist scholarship: namely, the acknowledgement of differences among women (2008:70).

Therefore the primary aim of this study is to include women athletes’ lived experiences, their perception about their marginalization through their nuanced social identity i.e. in relation to not their gender alone, but also in relation to their socially ascribed identities like their class, sexuality within the sphere of sports and how these identities intersect to shape their everyday life experiences, build dominant knowledge regarding their identity. In this study gender, class and sexuality have been taken as social categories of identity that intersect to amplify their existence. One of feminism’s central claims is that women’s perspectives have often been silenced or ignored; as a result of which, feminist researchers have been interested in listening for gaps and absences in women’s talk, and considering what meanings might lie beyond explicit speech. Following this tradition the researcher has also employed Feminist Qualitative Content Analysis to analyze the intersectional experiences of women athletes. Significant real life events faced by women athletes have also been given in the study to support and substantiate the notion of intersectional identities and incidents faced by women athletes in India. Three leading English Newspapers in India titled Times of
India, The Hindustan Times and The Telegraph and one Bengali (regional) newspaper i.e. Ananda Bazar Patrika has been examined and an in-depth feminist qualitative analysis of the newspaper content has been done to reveal the silenced issue of interlocking experiences along with real life incidents of women athletes. Content Analysis separately can be understood as the systematic study of texts and other cultural products or non-living data forms. While by adding a feminist lens to the method of content analysis transforms the method into a unique technique of inquiry, which questions and unearths hidden meanings of material and symbolic cultures that would otherwise be unexplored. Patricia Lina Leavy in her article ‘The Feminist Practice of Content Analysis and Representative Characters’ (2000) points out that feminists employ content analysis from a deconstructionist perspective in which the text is analyzed not only to interpret what is in it but also what is missing or silenced. The goal of Feminist Qualitative Content Analysis is this present study is to deconstruct the text (Newspaper articles) and reveal its inner meaning, or the contradictions of latent and manifested connotations concealed within it to unearth the hidden intersectional experiences of women athletes not only compared to their male counterparts but also compared to privileged sportswomen in West Bengal. Gender, Class, Religion and Sexuality has been taken as social categories of identity that intersect to amplify their secondary existence.

Methods adopted for the research

In this research primarily I have used different methods of qualitative approach i.e. face to face in-depth - interviewing method, followed by narrative interviewing method and observation (for understanding non-verbal behaviour). A semi-structured interview schedule was used as a tool to conduct the interview and record respondents’
experience that they shared during the interview period. According to Rosalind Edwards and Janet Holland

The structured interview is at the quantitative end of the scale, and more used in survey approaches. The rest of the scale, semi-structured and unstructured, is the area occupied by qualitative researchers, with the interviews characterized by increasing levels of flexibility and lack of structure (2013: 2-3).

Through in depth interviewing method, the researcher can understand the perspectives, interpretations and meanings given by the informants to particular issues and problems. As Bruce L. Berg emphasise that the value of interviewing is not only because it builds a holistic snapshot, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants; but also because it enables interviewees to “speak in their own voice and express their own thoughts and feelings” (2007:96). Similarly Terri L. Orbuch explained, interview accounts offer a means of identifying

...culturally embedded normative explanations [of events and behaviours, because they] represent ways in which people organize views of themselves, of others, and of their social worlds (1997: 455).

It is argued however that they do more than providing information on cultural and subjective meanings. Rigorous analysis of accounts provides two intertwined sets of findings: evidence of the nature of the phenomenon under investigation, including the contexts and situations in which it emerges, as well as insights into the cultural frames people use to make sense of these experiences. Combined, they offer important insights for theoretical understanding. Thus, the interview method which is the “favourite methodological tool of the qualitative researcher” (Denzin and Lincoln
1994: 353) has been followed in this research. Besides, it is commonly believed that the strength of qualitative interviewing is precisely its capacity to access self-reflexivity among interview subjects, leading to the telling of stories that allow us to understand and theorize the social world:

Respondents may reveal feelings, beliefs, and private doubts that contradict or conflict with ‘what everyone thinks’, including sentiments that break the dominant feeling rules. .....in other cases, interviewers will discover the anxiety, ambivalence, and uncertainty that lie behind respondents’ conformity (Denzin, Lincoln, 1994:137).

As human interaction and negotiation is seen as the basis for the creation and understanding of social life in interpretive approaches, it is the interaction of the participants in the interview situation – the researcher and the researched – that creates knowledge (Edwards, Holland, 2013: 17). The data in the form of talk that comprises the interview is regarded as a co-construction – what Steinar Kvale (1996) calls a literal inter-view. Moreover, as in qualitative interviewing, ‘rambling’ or going off at tangents is often encouraged- it gives insight into what the interviewee sees as relevant and important (Bryman, 2001:437), thus in this case, in-depth interview has helped me to understand both young and adult women’s particular standpoints regarding their language use patterns vis-a-vis their male counterparts. Besides, the central idea of qualitative interviewing is to explore that knowledge can be produced in structured encounters organized around “telling about experience.” As put forward by Marjorie L. De Vault and Glenda Gross in ‘Feminist Qualitative Interviewing: Experience, Talk, and Knowledge’ (2012), qualitative in-depth interviewing should address the
fascinating complexity of human talk- the flexibility and productive powers of language; the subtle shades of meaning conveyed through the nuances of speech, gesture, and expression; issues of translation; the ineluctable location of any moment or stretch of talk; the specialized vocabularies of particular settings and groups; the organizing effects of format and genre; the injuries and uses of silence; the challenges inherent in listening; and so on (Hesse-Biber, 2011: 206). It has always been kept in mind that in the conduct of any interview research, feminist scholars often attempt to maintain a reflexive awareness that research relations are never simple encounters, innocent of identities and lines of power. Rather, they are always embedded in and shaped by cultural constructions of similarity, difference, and significance. In addition, the desire for an inclusivity that acknowledges and values difference has also led feminist thinkers to key insights about the challenges of listening to others. It is often said that listening is not as simple as it sounds, and failures of listening are also often part of our interactions with others. Since the mid 1980s, scholars have been developing an interdisciplinary stream of thought focused on narrative and representation, sometimes referred to as a linguistic or narrative ‘turn’ (Behar and Gordon, 1996; Clifford & Marcus, 1986). One central idea to be noted here is that narratives are fundamental to identity and to the ways that people make sense of their worlds. People are constantly telling stories, to themselves and to others. As Elliot G. Mishler suggested in his most influential book Research Interviewing: Context and Narratives (1986) that ‘interviewing’, ‘discourse analysis’ and ‘narrative analysis’ can offer an enriched and distinctive possibilities for maintaining the coherence of a person’s perspective.
Narratives are defined as a movement from a start point to an end point, with digressions that involves the showing or the telling of story events. It is a re-presentation of events and, chiefly, re-presents space and time (Cobley, 2001: 237). Or as Chase (2005) suggests, Narrative might be the term assigned to any text or discourse, or, it might be text used within the context of a mode of inquiry in Qualitative research, with a specific focus on the stories told by individuals. Narratives are a preferred choice here because it attempts to provide significant insights to the subjective experiences of women. It is true that people tell stories about life history (Gee, 1991) and about their psyches (Schafer, 1983) and those stories are very ‘basic’ ways of thinking about the world or what they experience from the world. Narrative is considered a particular form of representation implementing signs which takes place in human discourse and also it is the showing or the telling of the events and the mode selected for that to take place. Narratives, described as stories that people tell about their lives and their experiences, helps the researcher understand the entire context of the research problem as well as to interpret the whole thing more precisely. For instance, while answering a particular question, when a respondent narrates a life experience not only does it adds to the credibility of the narrated incident, but also makes the entire interviewing process more lively and spontaneous. Similarly Michael Bamberg in his article “Narrative Analysis” states that “When narrators tell a story, they give narrative form to experience” (2012: 77). Narrative, therefore, can be said to provide a portal into two realms: (a) the realm of experience, where speakers lay out how they as individuals experience certain events and confer their subjective meaning onto these experiences; and (b) the realm of narrative means (or devices) that are put to use to make (this) sense (ibid: 77). Therefore, this method has been used in my research
in order to get detailed information regarding the respondents’ experiences with regard to their socio-cultural status, position and thus acquiring a full-fledged tangible account of the all round situation in question. In addition to these methods, observation has helped me to understand the non-verbal behaviour of the informants. Besides, some necessary quantitative indicators and/or measures have been used for the analysis of the basic demographic profile.

In the present study the units of analysis are 35 women athletes residing in West-Bengal, in the age group of 20-40 years, who are associated with any form of athletic sports and have participated in any District, National or International athletic events. In this study the respondents have been selected primarily on the basis of purposive sampling technique. Initially respondents are being selected from all over Kolkata, keeping in mind the research objectives. Further, the method of snowball sampling has also been used to select respondents for this study. Since the research has specialized group of respondents i.e. athletes, firstly I have talked to some known persons, fulfilling my criteria. After that I have contacted them for seeking time for the interview and have taken their face-to-face in-depth interview with the help of the interview schedule. In some cases I have written down all the answers, while in several cases I have also recorded the entire interview session. After completing the interview, I have also prepared field notes so that all necessary and relevant details are included in the research. Since for this research 35 respondents were needed, so I used my social network to contact more interviewees and also asked the existing respondents to give some other references. Thus, through snowballing I could get the desired number of respondents for my study and was able to conduct the interview and proceed with the interpretation.
Units of Analysis and Sampling:

In the present exploratory study the units of analysis i.e. the target respondents are 35 women athletes residing in West Bengal and who at present are pursuing any form of athletic sport aged between 20-40 years. A non-probability purposive sampling technique has been used to select the respondents. Further the method of snowballing sampling technique has also been used to select respondents for this study. Since the research has included skilled/trained women athletes who have participated either in district level or national level or international level athletic events, firstly I had to go to Netaji Subhash Eastern Center (SAI-Sports Authority of India), located in Salt Lake, Kolkata to some known coaches, under whom the athletes train or had trained. Then after speaking to the women athletes for seeking time for the interview and conducting face-to-face in-depth interview with the help of the interview schedule, I snowballed further to contact more interviewees and also asked the individual respondents to give some more references. Thus, through snowballing I could get the desired number of respondents i.e. 35 for this study and was able to conduct in-depth interview and proceed for interpretation. Some of the respondents were interviewed in SAI (Sports Authority of India) Netaji Subhas Eastern Centre, Kolkata; others were interviewed outside SAI, in different other locations in Kolkata. There is also an emphasis on the narratives of their lived experiences.

My intention to select respondents experienced in both national and international athletic events. 20 years was selected as the lowest age limit because in this age almost every individual- female or male attain certain maturity, which is required of them for understanding my questions and answering them with full confidence and comprehension. Further by the age of 20 an athlete has encountered and
participated in various competitions and has undergone rigorous training which has shaped her experience, understanding, and knowledge of the sport that will in turn help my research work.

With this backdrop I have attempted to present quantitatively the basic demographic questions. With the help of some univariate tables the demographic data has been represented, however, since my work is essentially based on qualitative methodological approach therefore the data regarding women athletes’ experience of gendering, marginalization and exclusion and that of their intersectional experiences i.e. based on their gender, class and sexuality has been presented qualitatively. In this study all the respondents’ names have been changed to maintain anonymity and confidentiality of their identity.