Chapter Three

Preserving Masculinity: Disparate Athletic participation among Women and Men

"No matter how toughened a sportswoman may be, her organism is not cut out to sustain certain shocks."

Introduction:

In this chapter I will try to address the issue of disparate and segregated athletic participation among men and women based on physiological differences which in turn structures diverse dimensions in social relations. Women have always been an invisible element of concern when it comes to providing opportunities to pursue competitive, professional athletic career. Though over the years women fought for their lawful entitlement in diverse sectors like voting rights, access to education, workplace, till date prevailing beliefs about women in athletics or women athletes continue to remain gendered both ‘on’ and ‘off’ the field. Feminist sport sociologists has considered the institution of sports as a battle ground for gender equality probing that it acts as a social force that does not merely reveal gender differences, but creates, amplifies and even imposes them (McDonagh, Pappano, 2008). Some sport feminists perceive the real problem to be embedded in the assumed notion that inherently women are physiologically different from and inferior to men that translates into the socially expected assumption about women’s reproductive ability which consequently translates into the belief that women cannot and should not compete in serious sporting activities like men (Lenskyj, 1986: 20-21, McDonagh, Pappano, 2008). McDonagh and Pappano argue that there exists an innate chemistry between athleticism and physical dominance which creates a natural alliance between sports and masculinity where women’s sports
and women’s power are treated inferior (2008: 16). Additionally, as history reveals medical science has also supplemented the knowledge of female frailty in sports by advocating that women are not physically strong enough to handle serious, vigorous sports and its involvement is a waste of vital forces that would otherwise be used for childbearing and cultivating feminine personality traits. Undoubtedly, Sports has always been a dynamic arena of tension and struggle for women athletes and perhaps both historically and cross culturally there is no other practice in which gender is more naturalized than sport (Caudwell, 2003; Davis, 1990; McKay, 1997; Messner, 2000).

In this research, the respondents were asked about their opinion regarding women athlete’s participation in outdoor athletic sports vis-a-vis their male counterparts. The departure point here is to discern whether there is a perceived physiological difference among women athlete and men athlete that influence their participation, performance and choosing a career in outdoor athletic sports in West Bengal.

“We are born different”

Perceived Biological Differences between Women and Men: The Medical Rationale

The history of women’s debut in organized sports as authorized participants dates back to 1900 in the second Modern Olympic Games held in Paris. However, according to International Olympic Committee (IOC), only 13 female athletes participated in two selected and sanctioned events i.e. golf and tennis that was conceived as ‘feminine sport’ or ‘female appropriate sport’ by the male officials who operated and managed the Olympic Games (Hargreaves, 1992: 219). Though with time the number of women participants in various sporting events increased, this exclusionary practice indisputably continued itself as they were still excluded from
participating in what was conceived as male sports. It was in not before 1970’s when the emergence of sport feminism systematically enquired about the prevailing gender inequality and discrimination practiced in organized sport events against women athletes. Sport feminists who have also examined the historical roots behind such discriminatory practices argue that there is an inclination towards circumscribing women’s lives based on rigid definition of gender appropriate behaviour in all spheres that is further supported by sex-specific medical researchers. The view that women are incompatible with sports and are attuned with motherhood rests on the universal knowledge of women’s physical inferiority and reproductive vulnerability that naturally disqualifies women from pursuing athletic career. Furthermore, Patriarchal values have also supplemented such practices that resist women from participating in any unfeminine, physically vulnerable or unattractive activities like sports. Inspite of being divergent in addressing gender and women’s issues in sports, feminist sports sociologists nevertheless unite against marginalization and subordination of women/women athletes and these contributions are undoubtedly helpful in not only addressing the question of our concern but also in making further statements or explanations.

Most of the respondents in this research have agreed that in general male athletes are physically stronger than female athletes, not only because of training and exercise but by the virtue of being born biologically as male. They have also expressed that compared to male athletes, women athletes have to perform out of their capacity to prove their vigour and ability as they are consistently compared and asked to match up with their male counterparts. What is noteworthy in this research is that majority of respondents have agreed to the fact that even today male athletes are conceived to be athletically superior to women irrespective of the success and achievements of the
latter. In this context we can refer to the ‘difference approach’ proposed by radical feminists as opposed to the liberal feminist ideology. This approach highlights how biological differences between male and female are assumed as natural and intentionally accentuated to construct the gender hierarchy as a strategy to place women behind men, limit opportunities, enforce subordination and make them victims of social powerlessness in all spheres including sports. According to this approach the problem of differentiation between men and women athletes resides both in sex or biological distinctions and the gender hierarchy it establishes, celebrates male supremacy and devalues women’s physicality in the world of sports. Men and women are considered to perceive athletics or sports differently and consequently experience divergent result that reinforces their social status in the wider social space. The difference is made distinct through the hierarchy by equating masculinity with strength and athleticism while femininity is conceived to be socially contradictory with being athletic. McKinnon argues that Men do not learn alone the skills of sports, but learn to be men through specific attributes which are valued, measured, elevated and organized in and as sports itself (McKinnon, 1987: 120). Whereas athletic ability, quality of women athletes are not regarded as universal characteristic of an athlete, but as an attribute identical to male athleticism. Subsequently women athletes is only considered successful or the probability of being lucrative in the field of sports is accepted if they internally design themselves and emulate traits that are similar to male standards of sportsmanship. Hence the difference approach advocates for ‘equality through difference’ and refutes the liberal ideology of equality on the basis of sameness. It argues that equality as sameness will not yield equal opportunities for women athletes as it comparative in nature and compels these female athletes to compare oneself to be equal (to somebody) i.e. to their male counterparts who has set standards, or whose
attributes are set as a yardstick. Beside this, the concept of ‘negation of biology’ (Friedman, 1974, Rubin, 1975, Holloway, 1982, Connell, 1986) which emphasise how exaggerating biological differences and suppressing physiological similarities between men and women have also produced categories of differentiation. Connell (1986) 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. For instance in sports, if a woman athlete is taller, stronger, agile than a male athlete or other female counterparts she will not be acknowledged as superior to that male athlete rather will be compared to other male athletes who is again taller, stronger than that female athlete in order to establish a generalized notion of male superiority over women. Consequently, the universal knowledge which is produced situates women athletes and male athlete in stratified or unequal categories with men occupying the highest rank in the hierarchy for being physically superior to women. Such understanding results in the dissemination of perceived absolute differences based on biology while entirely ignoring the existence of women athletes who are strong and competent. Additionally the complexity of social categorization and division based on biological dissimilarities in sports has been constructive in erroneously labelling and judging women athletes as physically incompetent have excluded them from availing opportunities, pursuing leadership positions and restricting their participation to certain sports only. Research on women and sports has revealed that sports cannot be merely envisaged as a neutral medium of enhancing as well as displaying athletic skills. Sports, rather provide a breeding ground of creating and glorifying social inequality. Researches reveal that sports legitimize the idea about limitations of female biology that continue to influence the type and extent of their
involvement as well as maintain their secondary or inferior status. Prevalent knowledge, rationale and practices regarding gender relations are too enacted and imparted through the institution of sports i.e. women athletes are considered as women first and athlete second whereas men are conceived as natural athletes. Subsequently male participation in sports embraces greater symbolic importance and superiority than female participation that is less socially rewarding. Thus, sports is considered as a double-dealer, on the one hand it claims to be fair and just by providing equal opportunities but on the other side assisting and reinforcing the already constructed gendered identities and stereotyped notions prevalent in the larger social structure. Lenskyj (1987) points out that sport has the potential to equalize relations between sexes. By minimizing socially constructed sex differences that had only tenuous biological bases, sports pose a serious threat to the myth of female frailty. Furthermore she also claims that women should utilize the arena of sports to challenge the presumed notion of female physical vulnerability. However in reality as Houlihan (2008) states woman does contest but does not completely question the existing gender expectation through sports. Instead women’s participation in sports represents a complex interplay of compliance and contestation rather than complete transformation. Additionally, the sport system along with their formal rules, restrictions, prohibition justifies the rationale behind excluding and preventing women/women athletes from full range athletic participation. Women athletes, then, are not only denied of exploring their own sporting ability to the fullest extent but their participation, achievements occupy a subordinate position in the patriarchal sports culture. In this context we can refer to some narratives the respondents have shared on this issue that reflects their individual perceptions.
Pushpa Das (25 years, 200 m sprinter): Yes, there are differences between women and men’s physical attributes which influence our performances. Male athletes perform better than us in terms of speed, timings. Though the skills taught are same for both male and female athletes they are physically stronger than us (female athletes).

Phulan Khatun (23 years, 1500 m runner): Physiological differences between men and women are a natural thing and we cannot deny this reality. We are born different. That is why separate events are conducted for male and female athletes. Being physically stronger than us (female athletes) their timings, speed, agility and overall performance is better than us (female athlete). When asked the reason for difference in strength, she replied: hormonal differences are important, and male testosterone hormone provides good strength. We (women) do not produce testosterone so some women athletes push testosterone injection for better performance like men. With rigorous training we (female athletes) become strong and acquire skills to be a successful athlete. Similarly male athletes also train and exercise, but the difference is that they are naturally strong and we (female athletes) are trained to be strong as well as train to be an athlete.

It is not only evident that there is a perceived concept of male physical superiority it is also quiet intriguing that majority of female athletes both experienced and novice have consented the notion of male physiological supremacy as a natural and universal fact both within and outside the world of sports. Majority of respondents have expressed that the difference does not lie in the cognitive capability of acquiring athletic skills, but in the inherent physical and biological capacity of performing where male athletes are endowed with a natural ability essential for being athletic. The respondents have equated this inbred physiological ‘strength’ with being athletic, that indubitably qualifies men as a natural athlete and women unequipped for such venture. Internalization of such notion impels female athletes to accept and legitimize their own
physical inferiority which in turn prevents them to challenge and surpass such concepts. In other words women athletes have accepted the physical domination of male and have consented that domination which in Gramscian term can be said as ‘hegemony’. Additionally, such beliefs and ideas lead to differential practices among male athletes and female athletes within sports that further reinstate their stereotyped status designed on the basis of physiological distinction, i.e. male athletes are associated with strength, power and women athletes as relatively powerless, inferior. This unquestioned acceptance of physical differences as ‘natural’ ‘in-born’ overshadows the achieved status of female athletes by their ascribed status ‘female’ who is conferred (both biologically and socially) with those potentialities which are specifically non athletic. According to the respondents hormonal differences also play a vital role in differential athletic performance and they consider the presence of testosterone in male athletes as the key to their superior ability. As expressed by Asha Roy (24 years, 100 m, 200 m sprinter): Our body does not produce testosterone in sufficient amounts like it is naturally produced in males. We have two important hormones i.e. oestrogen and progesterone which does not play any significant role in enhancing our athletic abilities. We need a good amount of testosterone for a strong competitive performance and we do to take it externally under permissible limits.

Apart from structural differences, other biological properties like hormones, muscle size, bone widths etc are analysed to substantiate male superiority and strength over female. Katie Shell and Sharon Phillips through their research has explained how various anatomical properties especially hormonal properties affecting athletic participation among male and female athletes are inadequately understood and examined. The National Strength and Conditioning Association states that though hormones play a role in the development of absolute strength in men and women they
most likely do not account for significant male-female differences in absolute strength because like testosterone, the androgens that are secreted from the adrenal glands and ovaries also influence strength. Similarly Ebben and Jensen (1998) in their work has shown that the concept of strength, fitness has been always associated with the male hormone testosterone, whereas influences of other hormones (like androstenedione) which play a similar role for both male and female athletes in relation to physical activity is never brought to the fore front. Such asymmetrical and inadequate explanations create misconceptions regarding women athletes’ capacity that conceptualize ‘strength’ only in relation to male physique, circulating both within and outside the domain of sports. For instance internationally renowned Tennis player Jo-Wilfred Tsonga in 2013 publicly said that women's hormones lead to mental instability in tennis when asked about why the men's game seems to always have the top-four seeds in major semi finals while it’s not the same on women’s side? He further continued “...I mean, it's just about hormones and all this stuff. We don't have all these bad things, so we are physically in a good shape every time, and you (women) are not.

That's it.”
The concept of ‘lived body’ introduced by philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) can be applied here in this context. According to Marleau-Ponty our ideas about the human body and the nature of perception are conditioned by notions and concepts from natural science. For Merleau-Ponty the body is both physiological and psychological, i.e. the mind is in the body and the body is in the mind. Consequently, the conception about our own body is not objective but subjective, lived body, which is in constant dialogue with the world. In this study the respondents unanimously agree that the natural existence of testosterone hormone in men and the absence of the same in women make a huge difference in their athletic performances. That is the women athletes conceive their bodies lacking certain qualities that would have otherwise made her more capable in relation to male athletes. Or in other words women athletes’ natural body possess those qualities which the larger world refutes to accept as essential for being an athlete. This concrete material relation of women athletes’ bodily existence with men shapes the perception about her own physical inadequacy that becomes infused with everyday understanding of the world. Such ideas are seldom questioned since it becomes natural not to examine them.

As one of the respondents Mallika Mondal (26 years, Long Jump athlete) shared: There is a difference between male athlete’s and women athlete’s physiology which influence respective performances. It is a natural thing that the entire bodily structure is different; that is what makes us male and female. They have more stamina and muscular strength. That is why we have separate categories for males and females; otherwise it would be difficult for us to compete as they would outperform us because of their better speed and timing. We have to take external supplements for producing strength. Though we undergo similar rigorous training their (male athlete) performance, timing, speed, distance covered is better than us (female athlete). She
Men athletes are in a sense privileged as they do not menstruate like us. They do not have 3-4 days off from their practice schedule like us. Naturally they get the chance to enhance their skills without a break. However irrespective of these problems we Women athletes never fail to perform on the field.

Here in this study it is clear from the narrative above that, women athletes are made to sit out or restricted from practising during their menstruating days by their coaches, who, in turn represents the established medical knowledge. The baton of control has been passed from malestream gynaecology to coaches who safeguard the medical legacy by reinstating the concept ‘menstruation’ as a ‘disease for women’, a taboo to be avoided. Infact coaches are socially structured not to produce athletes or sportsperson but an athlete with a gendered identity that reinforce the socially imposed, prescribed gendered mannerisms through sports so that the existing gender hierarchy continues to prevail. Lenskyj in her work Out of Bounds: Women, Sports and Sexuality cites from a journal titled ‘Coaching Methods for Women’ which elaborated on how women athletes should be coached by their coaches keeping in mind not to accentuate any masculine qualities that would hamper their femininity:

Coaches should put a damper on masculine mannerisms that are not necessary to a girl’s performance or that create an undesirable impression....[Such] mannerisms are frequently given as reasons for the public’s negativism towards athletics for women..... The coach should seize every opportunity to improve the girl’s behaviour. It may not make the woman a better athlete, but it will eventually make the athlete a better woman (1986:99).

According to Lenskyj (1986) as menstruation is both a symbolic and concrete reminder of fertility and femaleness, women’s physical activity during menstruation
provided a new prominence to the issue of medical restriction on their sporting
endeavours. Subsequently, its consistent appearance reinforces the existing power
relations between men and women athletes, where women athletes experience this
monthly ‘incapacity’ and men athletes remain empowered as they do not. It is true that
one of the reasons women athletes conceive themselves as physically weak is due to
their menstrual cycle, which functions as a double trap, on one side it represents most
valued feminine virtue not to be defiled with rigorous physical activity while on the
other side it is conceived as a disability that makes women athletes body vulnerable,
unsuited for sports. In this connection we can refer to the work of Iris Marion Young
where the author claims that women’s existence in the present patriarchal social system
is defined by a basic tension of immanence and transcendence. What the author wants
to clarify is that women as human being is a free subject who has the right and ability
to transcend her femaleness and enter the state of individualism, but her situation as a
woman denies her the subjectivity and transcendence. From the above narratives we
can see that the women athletes live in a contradiction where they continuously
encounter tensions between subjectivity and being a mere object. On one hand these
women athletes identify themselves as an athlete- a neutral identity and express their
transcendence by equalizing the ability to inculcate and demonstrate athletic skills, but
on the other side they approve and accept the predominant knowledge and practices
regarding their own physical limitations and male physiological superiority. While
feminine bodily existence is a transcendence and openness to the world, it is an
ambiguous transcendence, a transcendence that is at the same time laden with
immanence. It is this enactment of the existing patriarchal imagination that women
athletes in sports underestimate their own bodily capacity compared to men that results
in their restricted performances and secondary status. Therefore the particular
significance of sporting practices is not that it is per se a site of gender difference, but its unique ability to foster arguments that these differences are natural. Feminist sociology in general and feminist sport sociology in particular have documented that there exist an inclination towards redefining the limitations of female anatomy through sports. Such propensity is validated and becomes part of common sense knowledge when both male athletes and women athletes accept and approve of their physical domination and subordination as an innate characteristic. Subsequently both male and women athletes do not challenge the present practices within sports i.e. the rationale behind certain rules, regulations and prohibitions which in turn uphold and preserve male domination. Like for instance in Olympics and other national, international athletic events, ‘Decathlon’ (comprising of ten separate prescribed track and field events) is held for two consecutive days where only male athletes are certified to participate, whereas women’s equivalent of the decathlon is the seven-event heptathlon (comprising of seven individual prescribed track and field events). Prior to and post inception of modern Olympics decathlon has remained a male preserve while women athletes were and are still excluded from this event. Also, traditionally, 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 the this achievement whereas male athletes continue to remain the sole proprietor of this superior athletic identity.

Thus as Sushmita Singha Roy (30 years, Heptathlete) said: “I practice seven events at a stretch and there is no reason why I cannot play the other three events. Though I cannot question the authorities I have questioned about this to my coach and he replied that it is the rule and this is the tradition. The difference between the two events is the presence and absence of three events, i.e. Discus throw, Pole vault, 1500
metres run. Women athletes do participate separately in these three events, but I do not know why there is no Decathlon for women?”

Swapna Barman (19 years, Heptathlete): “We (men and women athletes) have always had different events and that has been decided by the sports authority. I have to perform to whatever is expected of me as a Heptathlete. Sir has set a target and my job is to try, practise and achieve that.”

Hargreaves (1994) argues that women athletes have been systematically barred from those events that emphasise strength, physical contact, endurance or considered dangerous for their physique. It was/is considered in relation to decathlon that adding three more events will be strenuous for women athletes as they were/are conceived physically incapable of investing their energy unlike their male counterparts. Similarly, women athletes were once excluded from boxing, triple jump, pole vault, weight lifting for a long period of time in major international events on the ground that women’s reproductive systems were vulnerable to injuries in these sports. The visible rationale behind such prohibition even in this twenty first century is deeply rooted in the notion of female physical frailty promoted by medical knowledge. It rests on the belief that inspite of being trained as an athlete, women athletes being biologically women lack the strength and physical tenacity compared to male athletes to compete in more demanding events. Here we find similarity with Kay and Jeanes (2008) findings when they stated that the medical rationale plays a vital role in proscribing women’s participation in sports. The medical rationale according to the authors meant that women are physiologically unsuited for strenuous sports and its participation would otherwise harm the reproductive ability of women. According to the respondents there are several events where women athletes are still not officially permitted to participate
but no such prohibition is mentioned for male athletes. They have also expressed that as an emerging athlete they are not permitted to question the authority but follow the instructions of their coaches. Moreover, while male athletes are formally authorised to participate in all the athletic events, women athletes’ participation remains partial with additional prescribed limitations on those events. As shared by Srabani Nandu (23 years, 100 m, 200 m sprinter): “Yes in National and International events like sub-junior, junior championships, Asian Games, Commonwealth Games, even in Olympics there is no 50 km race walk, 110 metres hurdle race, decathlon for women athletes. Rather there is 20 km race walk, 100 metres hurdle race and heptathlon for women athletes.” When asked the reason for such division, she further added “I do not understand the reason for such omission. Whom should I ask? Who will answer my questions? There is nobody. Maybe those who make the rules can provide an answer. How to reach them? It is wastage of time for us.”

Another respondent Soma Biswas (18 years, Discus, Shot put thrower) shared, “There is a difference in the weight of the discus and shot put used by women and men athletes in our category. We (women athletes) use discus which weighs 1 kilograms and shot put weighing 3-4 kilograms and boys use heavier weight than us, i.e. 2 kilograms for discus and 6-7 kilograms for shot put. Though we practice with both the weights for enhancing our abilities and performance, we do not know why such rules are made for National, International events. We don’t have any choice but to accept it.”

Dyer in his work Catching up the men: Women in Sport (1982) claims that the evidence that there are no valid medical reasons intrinsic to women that should prevent or limit their participation, compared to men, is disregarded. Instead, efforts are invested to reaffirm the conservative medical theory of masculine sporting culture where women
athletes are conceived as physically weak and treated as an add-on category to men’s event. Lenskyj (1987) argues that still today the underlying ‘anatomy is destiny’ rationale remain virtually unchanged for both men and women athletes. Consequently, women athletes are considered to be less physically competent than male athletes on the basis of their assumed physiological differences which are exhibited through rules, regulations and restrictions in these athletic events. Houlihan (2008) argues that women’s entry into sports is controlled to normalize and sustain the existing male superiority. Majority of the respondents have stated that as these rules are pre decided and established at the international level they have never been asked to speak or share their opinion regarding such practices, as a matter of fact they are not encouraged to think about it as a problem. Furthermore, they feel that lack of women representatives in the decision making body lead to such exclusionary practices. The continuing inequality and imbalanced limitations between men and women athletes supported by medical opinion also reflects male control over women’s sports. Hargreaves (1994) claims that the emergence of athletics as an organized legitimate sporting event exemplified sport as a bastion of bourgeois male privilege. Since then men were/are vested with responsibilities to develop sports in their respective regions. Consequently, men’s sports were the first and sole area of interest where rapid development took place while women were consciously and strictly excluded from participating in those sports based on the medical principles of female frailty. Here we find a similarity with Messner’s (2002) findings where he stated that authority’s conservative essentialist belief in natural differences between sexes leads to the practice of providing unequal opportunities for women athletes and male athletes. Messner (2002) adds that these practices are also part of a strategy to reinstate the prevalent model of womanliness and maleness i.e. femininity and masculinity. In other words it is a simple way of defending
the Status quo. As Beauvoir expressed in her ground breaking work *The Second Sex* that “lack of physical power leading to a general timidity” where the female body is subject to patriarchal gaze reducing it to an object of manipulation (1949: 355). Similar other practices based on the medical rationale about women/women athletes’ inherent physical weakness are still witnessed in the present day world of athletics. These practices indisputably exist and supplement the prevalent notion of gender stereotypes, norms and ideology. Below is the list of several athletic events approved by International Olympic Committee (IOC) which reflects the manifestation of male control of women’s sports through disparate athletic practices justified by the medical scientific raison d’être of feminine feebleness.

The table below is a comparative study in relation to the inclusion of women’s athletic events compared to men’s event in Olympic Games. The underlying table also exhibit male control of women’s entry in sports.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No</th>
<th>Athletic Events</th>
<th>Year of Introduction for Women</th>
<th>Year of Introduction for Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>100 metres Sprint</td>
<td>1928 Summer Olympic Games</td>
<td>1896 1st Modern Summer Olympic Games</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>200 metres Sprint</td>
<td>1948</td>
<td>1900</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>400 Metres Race</td>
<td>1964</td>
<td>1896</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>800 metres Race</td>
<td>1928</td>
<td>1896</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>1500 metres</td>
<td>1972</td>
<td>1896</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>5000 metres</td>
<td>In 1984 initially introduced as 3000 m long distance run but later in 1996 it was re-introduced as 5000m long distance run.</td>
<td>1912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>10,000 metres</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>1912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>3000 m teeplechase</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>1920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Marathon</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>1896</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>100 m Hurdle</td>
<td>In 1932 initially introduced as 80 m hurdle race; later in 1972 it was re-introduced as 100m hurdle race only for Women athletes.</td>
<td>Not for Male athletes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sl. No</td>
<td>Athletic Events</td>
<td>Year of Introduction for Women</td>
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<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>110 m Hurdle</td>
<td>Not for Women athletes</td>
<td>1896</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>400m Hurdle</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>1900</td>
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<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>High Jump</td>
<td>1928</td>
<td>1896</td>
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<td>14.</td>
<td>Long Jump</td>
<td>1948</td>
<td>1896</td>
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<td>15.</td>
<td>Triple Jump</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>1896</td>
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<td>17.</td>
<td>Shot Put</td>
<td>1948</td>
<td>1896</td>
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<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Discus Throw</td>
<td>1928</td>
<td>1896</td>
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<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>Hammer Throw</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>1900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>Javelin Throw</td>
<td>1932</td>
<td>1908</td>
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<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>20 Km Race Walk</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>1956</td>
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<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>50 Km Race Walk</td>
<td>Not yet entitled to participate</td>
<td>1932</td>
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<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>4x100 m Relay Race</td>
<td>1928</td>
<td>1912</td>
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<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>4x400 m Relay Race</td>
<td>1972</td>
<td>1912</td>
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<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>Heptathlon</td>
<td>1984 Only for Women athletes</td>
<td>Not for male athletes</td>
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<tr>
<td>26.</td>
<td>Decathlon</td>
<td>Not yet entitled to participate</td>
<td>1912 Only for Male athletes</td>
</tr>
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Therefore from the above table it is evident that men’s sports were always given priority over women’s participation and progress towards equality of participation in Olympic Games and other Athletic events has been slow and still has a long way to go.

Grounded on the conviction that women and men are physiologically ‘differently wired’; sporting ability has always been considered compatible with male physique whereas the nature of women’s body disqualified them from rigorous physical activity. As a result women athletes remain burdened with added responsibilities of proving their athletic ability as well as keeping pace with male standards of performance. Hence, the patriarchal ideology along with medical rational plays a dominant role in influencing the social knowledge that reproduce the prevalent culture of male supremacy within sports. Lenskyj (1986) argues that medical experts have expanded their influence in controlling women’s lives especially female sporting participation. The major point of distinction recognized by the medical experts was the
reproductive ability of women that made them vulnerable, inferior and unsuited for strenuous physical activities whereas for men, sports was conceived as the most appropriate activity to build and display their masculinity. The universal notion of women and men being differently ‘hard-wired’ is more of a medical product than social that percolated gradually within various social institutions like sports. Due to the accepted knowledge about male physical domination and practices associated with it, woman athletes conceive themselves naturally inferior to male athletes where they not only justify their subordinate status through the established medical rationale but also by conforming to the limitations rationalized by the authority. As a consequence the number women’s participation in sports/athletics is less compared to male participation. For instance according to the annual report 2010-2011 of Government of India, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, out of 6381 trainees distributed in 58 centres of Sports Authority of India (SAI) 4576 (71.71%) are sportsmen and 1805 (28.29%) are sportswomen (Annual Report 2010-2011, Government of India, Minister of Youth Affairs & Sports, pp- 42).

**Perceived Social roles/Expectations for Women and Men**

Rogers, in his article ‘Olympic for Girls?’ (1929: 194) argued that athletics especially track and field events were ‘profoundly unnatural’ for women and were ‘essentially masculine in nature and develop wholly masculine physiques and behaviour traits’. Many others concurred that women are ‘ineffective and unpleasing on the track’ and that involvement in sport causes their ‘charms to shrink to something less than zero’ (Schultz, 2012). Like the medical rationale, social prescriptions based on male and female anatomical differences too consistently define women as inherently weak, vulnerable, unbefitting for sports and best suited for motherhood. The previous discussion mainly focused on the physiological differences between women and men
athletes and the associated disparate practices employed within sports. However, differences are also found with regard to their social status i.e. gender, class position, role and expectations both within and outside the sphere of sports. As Wilde states, society expects males and females to adopt, believe in, and fulfil specific gender roles and expectations that have been already established (2012: 05). Similarly, society has been also “trained” to think of sports in terms of “genderedness”. Hargreaves (1994) adds that along with gender, class position especially economic situation of women athletes also produce unequal opportunities compared to those women athletes coming from a privileged economic background. Majority of respondents revealed during the study that women athletes and men athletes not only differ physiologically from each other that affect their performances. Rather the assumed expectations, social proscriptions, stereotypes i.e. the naturalized sexual division of labour in the domestic (private sphere) entwined with the ‘female’ identity also create differences. Furthermore, they also agreed that beside gender, class positions of women athletes also accentuate such differences.

As Rama Das (35 year, 200 m, 100 m sprinter) said: I think biological, physical differences can be still avoided with success, but in our society women (athletes) are burdened with marriage and producing children which cannot be avoided. There is always an invisible pressure for marriage. If any woman athlete fail to succeed in her career or has been successful in her career, either way they are always suggested to settle down i.e. get married after a particular age, that is the final destination.”

Respondents have expressed that marriage is seen as a vital achievement for women besides pursuing any profession, whereas men are specifically inspired to be economically independent and pursue their career. They have also shared that though men and women athletes both experience pressure to perform well in athletics, women
athletes face the additional demand of performing social duties and fulfilling social expectations i.e. engage in feminine appropriate activities like doing domestic chores, rearing children, caring for family members. For instance as one of the respondents Saraswati Saha, married (30 years, 200 m sprinter) shared: “women athletes perform two major roles, firstly as an athlete they are expected to give 100% on field and secondly at home they are expected to give another 100% towards family and children as mothers, daughter, wife.”

Jhuma Khatoon (25 years, 1500 m Track and Field Athlete) also shared: Athletics has its limitations, chiefly physical limitations. For women athletes especially in our Indian society this limitation does come early due to age, lack of adequate financial support or in the form of marriage and children. Here, we women athletes cannot think of continuing athletics after a particular age, say 30 or after marriage and having children because there is no support from family members (specially in laws), inadequate infrastructure, no separate training facilities, lack of proper nutrition, health supplements and it will be difficult to manage both family life and athletic life. Male athletes do not face such problems related to marriage or children; they do not face such obligations, nor do they have to sacrifice their athletic career after marriage.

It is evident that respondents themselves observed that men and women athletes experience different normative expectations irrespective of sharing the identical status of an ‘athlete’. Many other respondents also shared similar opinion that regardless of women and men athletes engaging in similar genre of sports and physical trainings, conventional social expectations linked with ones gender (being a female or male) continues to prevail. Inspite of more and more women engaging in sports and athletics, ideological assumptions about differences in women’s and men’s role in the society persists and is maintained through gender appropriate practices. Likewise Krane et. al
in their work claim that sportswomen live in two cultures – the sports culture that is inherently masculine and the larger social culture where femininity is celebrated for women. The traditional expectations focusing on appearance and exhibiting femininity are maintained by society’s attitudes towards athletic women (Halbert, 1997; Hardin, Chance, Dodd, & Hardin, 2002; Krane, 2001; Ross & Shinew, 2008). As a result, female athletes are faced with the dual challenge of learning to balance hegemonic femininity-a socially desirable identity and athleticism- a socially denounced characteristic both on and off the field.

Mona Biswas, married (30 years, Heptathlete) also shares that “If one is born as a woman she is expected to get married and have children. And mothers are expected to nurture and take care of the child, whereas no such pressure is given on the father except for financially providing for the child and the family. Women athletes are also expected to get married and have children like other women, they are expected to perform all the duties as a woman, for which they have to sacrifice their athletic career. I have a 5 year old son and now I can hardly think of pursuing my goals in athletics further”.

Most respondents also shared similar opinion that women athletes unlike male athletes experience burdens like getting married within a certain age and have children, other than performing well in athletics. As a result women athletes either have to give up their athletic career or balance between social expectation and athleticism which in the long run affects their performance. Majority of respondents have expressed that, for women in the Indian setting it is better to pursue athletics before marriage as it becomes difficult to continue a successful athletic performance after marriage. Paloian (2012) states that historically and cross culturally female participation in sports and athletics has always been less appreciated and encouraged. Since athletics is characterised by
aggression, strength, competition which are perceived as specifically masculine attributes, polar opposite to male defined feminine qualities, women athletes are consciously integrated into the traditionally constructed gender order, norms and roles which aims to reinstate hegemonic femininity as well as masculinity. Helen Lenskyj also notes that women’s unique biological ability to reproduce has been socially manipulated as a symbol of weakness, vulnerability whereas it has also been contrastingly used as the strongest indicator of femininity. Similarly men’s biological capability of not being able to reproduce socially uplifts their status as strong, invulnerable and above all symbolizes masculinity. Consequently, femininity is synonymously used for weakness and masculinity is associated with strength. And since women athletes’ involvement in sport challenge the masculine hegemony, they are enforced to display their femininity through biological motherhood in order to preserve women’s collective (biological and social) subordination against men’s superiority. Like for instance the medical rationale in the early 20th century justified how the natural alignment of involuntary muscles in female body is best suited for giving birth, doing domestic chores and that it should not be tampered by involving in strenuous sports because “feminine muscular development interferes with motherhood”. Besides such mandatory performance of motherhood, sexual and gendered division of labour, women athletes are also expected to exhibit their femininity through dress and appearance when not performing in any athletic event. For instance Asha Roy (24 years, 100 m, 200 m sprinter) admits that: “I do not get adequate time after practice to take care of my skin or looks, but I try to dress well and look good when not performing or attending any social function.” When asked what she meant by ‘look good’, she replied “As is it our (women athletes) physique do not resemble a normal woman (a non sportswoman), because we are muscular, toned and
we do not look feminine enough. We wear feminine clothes like salwar, saree, apply make-up to look different in public functions. By ‘look good’ I mean presentable, feminine”.

Srabani Nandu (23 years, 100 m, 200 m sprinter) also shared: “I personally think that looks are important beside performance. People, especially family relatives and media do notice how women athletes dress or present themselves when not participating in any athletic events. For me I try to look nice, presentable when I am out in public or social gathering. I like to dress in saree, salwar for family occasions. Yes I do apply slight basic makeup, like kajal, lipstick, foundation, thats all” When asked what she meant by ‘look presentable’, she replied: “to look pretty if not beautiful (smiles) and descent of course”.

Similarly other respondents have agreed that they are expected to wear feminine clothes like saree, salwar kammez, kurti when they visit their families while not taking part in any athletic events. Some have confessed that even their families disapprove of them wearing trousers and t-shirts at home or at other social events. In this regard another respondent Priyasmita Byapari (27 years, Discus Thrower) said: “My parents continue to tell me not to wear ‘chhele der jama’ (men’s clothes) like jeans, trousers, t-shirts in any public or social functions. They insist that I must wear feminine clothes and maintain a distinction between field and off field events”.

Respondents have revealed that they maintain a distinction between on field and off-field events, where they dress separately for separate occasions. It has also been noticed that majority of respondents (women athletes) consciously display feminine traits through dress, by applying feminine specific products like nail enamel, lipsticks, kohl. Most respondents confessed that they feel feminine by applying makeup, as a
change from their daily athletic routine. Terms like ‘presentable’, ‘look good’, ‘look nice’ were used by most respondents to express their concept of femininity and beauty. Lenskyj (1896) in this regard claims that women athletes either deliberately conform or are enforced to give in to those activities that fulfil male-defined standards of femininity in order to compensate for the ‘damage of femininity’ that have occurred due to engaging in traditionally male sports. Similarly Wilde states that conventional gender stereotypes linked with gender ideology continue to prevail in every aspect of social life that also includes sports. Traditionally, females have been expected to wear feminine dresses, cook and clean, raise children, maintain a beautiful and delicate body i.e. adhere to the socially constructed characteristics of ‘femininity’ through feminine behaviour and performances. Men, on the contrary are encouraged and taught to participate in strenuous, aggressive, competitive sports that are essentially masculine. It is also observed that the attempt to cultivate the ideal feminine and masculine image through gendered division of labour, dresses, mannerisms, roles and expectations deliberately aim to naturalize gender differences so as to sustain male hegemonic domination over female subordination. Conventionally, masculinity and femininity have been perceived as two opposing, bipolar construct compartmentalizing individuals either as masculine or feminine, i.e. confining their identity as male or female. And as masculine attributes occupy a superior social ranking over feminine qualities, such differences assist and intensify the existing second grade status of women athletes. Irrespective of being an athlete and pursuing athletics women athletes are still identified with their ascribed status or socially constructed gender i.e. female endowed with inherent feminine traits. And since femininity is antagonistic to athleticism, women athletes are enforced to perform their gender so as to sustain hegemonic femininity and conform to compulsory femininity. As explained by Sherrow (1996) the
principle of femininity is applied were females are expected to live up to specific
gender roles that are believed and practiced in mainstream society regardless of women
(athletes) challenging this gendered stereotype. This expectation of femininity often
results in women being dissuaded from lifting weights, sweating, grunting, being
aggressive or participating and pursuing a career in sports. Furthermore women are
expected to prove and safeguard womanhood through their reproductive ability, and are
allowed to pursue sports as long as their feminine disposition, traits and performance is
not jeopardised. It is because society expects women to be “feminine” “nurturer” of the
future generation and not demonstrate characteristics that are defined as being
masculine, women athletes are steered towards adopting femininity as their supreme
identity.

What has been also observed is that the respondents viewed this traditional
division of labour along with social expectations is exaggerated by the class affiliation
of women athletes. Affected especially by their economic conditions, women athletes
belonging to the economically backward class are further compelled to conform to such
male-defined gendered normative roles.

As Chaitali Kar (26 years, 100 m, 200 m sprinter) shares: "Majority of athletes (both
men and women) come from a poor economic background and they are expected to
perform well in their sports and get a job. But Women athletes, unlike male athletes
face additional responsibilities other than performing well i.e. doing household chores,
as they cannot afford any domestic help, get married, look after family and children.
Some even quit sports after marriage or for not getting any job. On the other side male
athletes are only expected to perform well and secure a job to support their family”.
She further added “if women athletes are compelled to work at home even after 6 hours
of practice every day without adequate rest their performance level will automatically drop down.”

Similarly Sunanda Sarkar (24 years, 100 m Sprinter) shares: “When I used to stay at my village home I had to do many household activities before and after practice. My parents left for work early in the morning. Each one of us used to do our own bit of work. My elder sister is married and my elder brother is studying in college. Yes the additional chores made me tired especially after practice, but we did not have any other option, we cannot afford any domestic help.”

As all respondents in this study has agreed that athletics is not an elite sports and it is predominantly participated by economically poor people what is also observed that gender and class together create a complex state of affairs which women athletes coming from an underprivileged class background cannot escape. Birrell (2002) and Hargreaves (1994) both focused on this aspect of women’s access and continuation of sporting career based not only on ones gender, but also their affiliation to social class. The very concept of division of labour based on the gender has always been positively functional for the patriarchal society as it reinforces male domination and female subordination. However such subordination is also accentuated by the class affiliation of women/ women athletes. According to Hargreaves (1994) the oppressive characteristics of private sphere of home i.e. the demands for domestic labour and mothering that limit women’s access to sports in general, and women athletes’ continuation of sporting career in particular affects working class women to a greater extent than middle-class women. What is observed from the respondents’ experience is that women athletes who usually belong to a lower economic background are burdened with ‘multiple shifts’ where they are not only expected to perform on field as an athlete but are further compelled to perform social roles and duties because of their socially
identified gender status and also due to their inability to afford leisure time because of their class position. Likewise women or women athletes from different class positions are unequally constrained by income levels and resources, but they also share common constraints resulting from their subordination to men, hence they become victims of dual subordination (Green, Hebron, Woodward, 1989).

**Conclusion:**

From field (public sphere) to home (private sphere) women athletes are expected to balance their athletic skills and feminine qualities. According to Helen Lenskyj (1986) attributes like caring, mothering, maternal instinct which signifies true womanhood are not alone based on women’s natural capacity to reproduce but is also a representation of male defined standards of behaviour of women. As acquisition and display of strength, athletic skills is naturally associated with masculinity, women athletes whose involvement in sports otherwise challenge this standard are pressurised to conform to traditional gender stereotypes in order to preserve their femininity through certain practices which are polar opposite to sporting (masculine) activities. Therefore such prevalent feminine appropriate activities are fostered among women athletes to compensate for their “loss of femininity” that have taken place with their involvement in the male domain of activity i.e. sports. Though women athletes were very much aware of the norms and stereotypes of the patriarchy they live in, they are further disempowered due to their class position which along with their gender deprives them from expanding their opportunities as athletes compared to male athletes as well as those women athletes who belong to the privileged section. Therefore the intersection of gender with class supplements the existing disparate social practices that limit women athlete’s access to opportunities. Additionally it also intensify the existing second grade status of women athletes by legitimizing prevalent mechanisms of social
control based on both gender and class positions that create and sustain unequal position of women athletes. The next section will elaborately discuss the various mechanisms of social control exercised on women athletes that restrict their prospects of pursuing a career in athletics.

Social control and Sports: Social control based on perceived biological construct among men and women (primary and secondary agencies of socialization, marriage and motherhood)

In the previous section I have tried to focus primarily on differential social expectations between men and women athletes which ultimately reinforce the pre-existing gender hierarchy. In addition the traditional definitions of femininity and masculinity and the associated practice of gender differentiation is also maintained through mechanisms of social control which in turn aims to safeguard the prevailing gendered social order. This section aims to focus on various techniques of social control employed on women athletes by primary and secondary agencies of socialization i.e. family, school, neighbour and peer groups which determine and preserve their social location compared to both male athletes as well as women athletes who occupy a privileged position. Additionally this section will also discuss how these agencies of control reinforce the prevailing gender stereotype and provide disparate opportunities to (aspiring) women athletes that facilitate their exclusion and gendering.

Historically and throughout society social control has always been positively functional for the dominant culture or knowledge producing strata since it serves, satisfies the purpose of the status quo. In sociological literature social control has been conceptualized as means through which social order (consensus, stability, law and order) is or can be maintained. "Social control" is a phrase usually attributed to E.A. Ross (1901). Ross used the phrase to refer to the widest range of influence and
regulations societies imposed upon individuals. More specifically it can be defined as “various means used by a society to bring its recalcitrant members back into line” (Berger, 1963: 68), or “means to eliminate undesirable personnel” (1963: 69). According to Walton (1990) social control aims to achieve conformity among those who are rebellious, non-compliant i.e. it seeks to restraint deviance to sustain social order. Hence it is clear that social control ‘intends to arrest’ what is perceived as ‘deviance’ by the larger society. And in order to understand the concept of ‘social control’ it is important to analyse the notion of deviance, or what the society considers ‘anomalous’. Young and Atkinson (2008) states that deviance as a concept is both socially and culturally constructed which is ideologically framed. Similarly, Becker (1963) posits in his labelling theory that ‘it is not the act itself that makes an action deviant, but rather how society reacts to it’. Conflict theorists note that power plays a central role in defining and punishing deviance. The group in power imposes its definitions of deviance on other groups, and proposes regulatory proscriptions to keep the other group under control. In this relation Marxist critical theorist Louis Althusser’s concept of Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) (1971) is worth mentioning. Althusser explains the concept of social control through his idea of Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) or institutions like family, school, and religion that functions massively and predominantly by ideology approved by the state or the ruling class. According to Althusser these state apparatuses (family, school, and religion) permeates, determines, and reproduces the dominant values and basic social relations thereby ensuring its continuing existence (Leitch, 2001: 1477). In Foucauldian term social control can be synonymously identified as ‘disciplinary practices’ (1979) accomplished via several modern techniques like surveillance or gaze which intends to control and shape the consciousness of individual so as to reduce them to objects of manipulation for the
‘Power’. For Foucault the disciplinary practices are also acted upon the body of its subjects, it rearranges its gestures and behaviours, manipulates and breaks it to augment the full potential of the body. Foucault employed the concept of panopticon to refer to various institutions like family, educational institution, state that employ disciplinary regimes on its members and transform them into docile bodies. As Howe explains

Foucault’s ideas about the establishment of a ‘carceral network,’ understood as an extension of surveillance and normalisation throughout society […] connect in self-evident ways to feminist sociologies of the social control of women, thereby providing an analytical space in which women can be included in any properly-constituted ‘social’ analysis of penalty (2008: 115-116).

Post-modern critique of social control examines modern rationality and knowledge as a form of illegitimate power that marginalises and excludes those who do not conform to its categories. Taking these views into consideration then anyone can be accused or labelled as a non-conformist based on what the ‘Power’ or ‘Powerful group’ determine as deviant and prescribe disciplinary action to normalize its defiant members. Similarly Ericsson and Jon (2006) states that women and girls are subjected to social control or disciplinary regimes that specifically aims at making them conform to traditional or male defined femininity and prevent them from deviating from the cultural script of acceptable femininity. Mylet (2007) claims that it is usually assumed that a woman will be feminine while a man will be masculine and when a person does not conform to this supposed and stereotypical standard it is concluded they are different or abnormal or socially deviant. And any kind of deviant behaviour that does not fit the norm is policed by society so that an overall dominant norm is established. Likewise when women and men conform to the accepted notions of femininity and masculinity they do not elicit unfavourable reactions and are perceived as ‘normal’ or
labelled as conformist which is considered as positive, rewarding for the society specifically for the existing patriarchal arrangement. Whereas women’s engagement in sports challenge, disorganize this traditional gender stereotype, evokes critical reactions from the larger society and are conceived as ‘not normal’ or labelled as ‘deviant’ a ‘misfit’ which is negative, unrewarding and punishable. Family (both family of orientation and procreation) has been one of the fundamental agencies of social control that exercise disciplinary practices on its members. As Berger states

......the human group in which one’s so called private life occurs, that is the circle of one’s family also constitute a control system (1963: 77).

Being the primary agency of socialization feminists argue that the socializing technique of this intimate control system or the family reflects the value system, morality, customs and manners of the larger society. Similarly researches (Hussain, Naz, Khan, Daraz, Qaisar, 2015) claim that family being the foremost socializing agency transmits socially approved labels and deep-rooted messages considered specific for a (feminine) woman and a (masculine) man. Likewise, on the basis of a set of physical qualities and perceived psychological characteristics defined by the larger powerful strata, its members are assigned tasks which are gender appropriate in nature. Carter (2014) claims that individual members in a family are consciously socialized into dichotomous traditional gender roles and identity where males learn masculinity in opposition to femininity. Burke and Stats (2009) states that these different approaches and treatment based on gender eventually aid in shaping the behaviour pattern and boundaries for its members restricting certain conduct while sanctioning those which are approved by the powerful section of the society. These ‘boundaries’ which are set and conveyed through the socializing process are manifestation of the ruling/dominant ideology that act as mechanisms of control. Such ideological control aims to encourage
conformity to the prevalent gender stratification and prevent any diversion from this arrangement. Birrell (2000) claims that women’s participation in sports and athletics has never been enthusiastically supported by the larger social world but regarded as a deviant action which breach and pose a threat to the social existence of womanhood. Women’s active engagement in sports is conceived as treading a ‘man’s world’ that is disavowed since it questions the very existence of femininity and masculinity as productive functional social categories for the patriarchal ideology. Lenskyj (1986) similarly argues that traditionally and till date there has been continuous effort to reclaim myths about inherent incompatibility between sports and femininity. Consequently, women athletes are subjected to a range of curative prescriptions in the form of social control which aim to restore and cultivate the ‘womanliness’ of women athletes through various institutionalized practices sanctioned by the dominant powerful ideology. In this study it was found that many respondents have been subjected to various disciplinary regimes by their family (both family of orientation and procreation), schools and peer groups to correct the after effects of their deviant engagement, i.e. engagement is sports/athletics. For instance one of the respondents Sujata Sarkar (28 years, 1500 meters track and field athlete) shared, “When I was convincing my parents to allow me to pursue athletics, the first thing my father told me was why did I choose a boys sports? Instead I could have opted for dance. Initially both my parents were against me pursuing athletics. My coach helped me to persuade my parents. But my mother kept one condition before allowing me to go for practice and that was doing the household chores (including cooking, cleaning, grocery shopping).”

Another respondent Arpita Singh (25 years, Shot Put thrower) similarly shared “Whenever I visit my parents they keep on insisting me to get married as according to them I must settle down and behave maturely i.e. like a woman”
The predominant regulative practice that was unearthed from the narratives was marriage, motherhood, domestic division of labour. Marriage is seen as a mechanism of control since it relocates and assigns both men and women with additional gender roles and expectations as husband and wife, mother and father therefore reinforcing the already established gender dichotomy. In other words these disciplinary regimes were imposed to ‘normalize’ the women athletes and make them conform to male defined heterosexual femininity. One of the respondents Himashree Roy (24 years, 100 m, 200 m Sprinter) shared: When I told my parents about my ambition to take up athletics as a career, my father protested stating sports will make me manly and nobody will ever marry me, my future will be doomed. He was against my involvement in sports. Instead he suggested that my sister and I should stay at home, study and help our mother in household activities.

Saraswati Saha, married (30 years, 200 m sprinter) said “It is extremely difficult to manage family and athletic career after marriage. I personally faced a lot of trouble after marriage. One is constantly pressurised to conceive after marriage by in-laws, parents and other elderly members. After having children one is expected to sacrifice career and take care of the child. As athletics is all about fitness, once it is gone it takes a lot to come back and perform well. After I conceived I was unable to continue for a period of 3 years, which called for an end to my athletic career. Women athletes need a lot of support from their family members both in-laws and their own parents, they should be given adequate time to pursue their goals and then opt for marriage and children. In our society it is very difficult for a woman to make a glorious come back in athletics or sports after marriage and having children.”

Gendered division of labour and marriage has been a vital modus operandi and consequence of social control mechanism exercised by the family in reinforcing the
existing gendered order. Eitzen and Zinn (1989) claims that ideological social control primarily accomplished through socialization that sanctions the prevalent gendered division of labour and gender roles aims to ‘de-athlete’ women athletes i.e. strip off the perceived masculine athletic attributes and reinstall the conceived notion of femininity and compulsory heteronormativity. Hall (2002) claims that cultivating femininity and masculinity is synonymous to cultivating heterosexuality, hence when women athletes are subjected to regulatory practices to accentuate their femininity it covertly imposes compulsory heterosexuality, or compulsory femininity that is desirable for sustaining patriarchy. Cooper (1972) provides a strong critique of the family claiming that it pervades the inner life, destroying the sexual and social independence of the individual. Feminist enquiry into the concept of the concept ‘social control’ or ‘discipline’ by extending Foucault’s analysis of disciplinary practices have also provided similar understanding on the formation of feminine ‘docile bodies’ in all areas of everyday life. Bartky (2000) claims that Foucault’s analysis of ‘panopticon’ as a modern disciplinary institution resonates throughout society, like in the form of patriarchy, heterosexual family structure, schools etc. Reiterating Judith Butler’s perception on gender or femininity and masculinity as a ‘mode of enacting and re-enacting received gender norms’ Bartky argues that disciplinary institutions practice, produce and reproduce the prevalent gendered identity. Bartky further states that women are far more restricted and subjected to disciplinary practices than men so as to extract the desired feminine display, posture under the male gaze. Like for instance as Bartky discusses

An aesthetics of femininity mandates fragility and lack of muscular strength.....the face of the ideally feminine women must never display the marks of character, wisdom and experience that we so admire in men (1990: 73).
Consequently as Jennifer Hargreaves states the most adored or the ideal female body can never be associated with an athlete who is conceived to resemble a male physique, but those who have conformed to the prescribed disciplinary routines to accentuate anti-masculine qualities i.e. femininity. Irrespective of belonging to a gender neutral, empowering position, the ‘disciplinary project of femininity’ undertaken by these institutions (through marriage, motherhood, domestic division of labour) aim to confine women athletes into the prevailing regime of gender structure. Schwan similarly claims that like prison, family, Schools and peer groups also operate as an extension of the larger society that performs the task of confinement, surveillance and constant supervision of performance of its members especially women (2001:03). As Foucault himself stated

...the disciplinary apparatus of the institution takes as its target all aspects of the individual inmate: physical exercise and labour; general conduct; moral and mental attitude. It provides, in other words, ‘a total education (1977: 236).

These disciplinary practices transform the ‘autonomous athletic identity’ of women athletes to ‘docile identity’ that intends to maintain the status-quo. Millet (1969) posits that one of the controlling mechanisms of patriarchy is through the family. It is both a mirror of and a connection with the larger society- a patriarchal unit within a patriarchal whole. Mediating between the individual and the social structure, the family affects control and conformity supplementing political and other disciplining authorities. As the fundamental instrument and the foundation unit of patriarchal society the family and its roles are prototypical. Serving as an agent of the larger society, the family not only encourages its own members to adjust and conform, but acts as a unit in the government of the patriarchal state which rules its citizens through its family heads. Althusser similarly believed that family and religion together
operated as means of circulating dominant ideology in the pre-capitalist era whereas later, family, along with educational system, started training children and adults in the dominant discourses, techniques and traditions (1971: 96-97). Louis Althusser recognized family as Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) which represents the ‘interest of the ruling class’ and functions predominantly by ideology. It was Althusser who recognized that Educational State Apparatus teaches and trains people of all age group through ‘compulsory curriculum’ according to the role they need to perform in the society so as to maintain the status quo (1971: 96). In this study it was found that apart from family, respondent’s schools too practiced several regulatory regimes on them as students that ultimately reinforced that existing gender pattern, norms and culture.

Dunne and Leach state in their study that gender has an enormous impact on interactions and identity formation within the school setting and the ultimate intention is to sustain traditional institutional practices and reproduce damaging gender asymmetries (2005: 10). Gendered school environment through gender appropriate uniforms, activities impacts on the quality of the schooling experience for females and males and as a consequence gender-differentiated outcomes are manifested in their future social life. Data revealed that majority of respondents in this work have studied in Bengali medium government schools and have agreed that their schools lacked proper infrastructure for sports and games, there was lack of allotment of games period within school curriculum, different and uncomfortable school uniforms for girls, lack of motivation for girls to participate in sports, absence of separate girls team specifically in co-educational school.

As Rita Mondal (23 years, Long Jump) expressed: “We never had any separate period allotted for P.T (physical training) or games in school, neither did we have any separate uniform for games. It was during the tiffin break (or lunch break) we used to
play with friends or engage in chitchats. Every year our school used to conduct annual sports meet and I used to participate and perform well”

Sharmila Burman (20 years, 100 m Sprinter) also shared: “My school did not have any field or playground. We never had any P.T classes in school. There was no sports culture in our school”.

It was noticed that most of the Bengali medium government schools in which respondents studied lacked suitable provision and infrastructure for engaging in sports. Furthermore separate and gender appropriate school uniforms for boys and girls supplemented this lack of encouragement in participation in sports.

Like one of the respondents Sumi Das shared (29 years, 100 m, 200 m Sprinter): “We had separate uniforms for boys and girls in school. I spent my primary school years in skirt and blouse and my high school uniform was saree. For boys it was half pant/ full pant and shirt. Till middle school we managed to play during break period but after wearing saree I couldn’t run or play properly because it is difficult to run and freely move in a saree unlike shorts and pants”.

Swapna Barman (19 years, Heptathlete) shared: “It is extremely difficult to play or run in a saree. Though we had physical education period once a week, and wore salwar on that particular day, but rest of the days it was difficult to play freely in a saree”

A study conducted in 2012 by the University of Notre Dame Australia looked at the effect of school uniform on incidental physical activity among 10-year-old children. They measured how much exercise the 6 year students did in their recess and lunch wearing their winter uniforms then when they wore sports specific uniforms. It found while the amount of exercise increased significantly for the girls in their sports uniforms, while it was only a marginal improvement for the boys (Norrish, Farringdon,
Bulsara, Hands, 2012: 51). Similar studies have also approved that one of the driving reason for girls’ low participation in physical activities and sports in schools is linked with the gender segregated uniform that are not sport appropriate and prevents carefree, unrestrained movement and makes girls conscious of their bodies. Evans (2006) in her research claims that school uniforms for girls act like physical shackles. Majority of school uniforms especially in India and particularly in West-Bengal still see girls wear dresses, tunics, blouses that allow constricted movement, and especially saree that does not permit the freedom of mobility needed to run and kick without tripping over. Similarly Huggins and Randell in their article ‘The Contribution of Sports to Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment’ (2007) observed 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. 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. Consequently, such dress code being part of the ‘hidden curriculum’ intentionally inhibits girls’ participation which hampers their sporting involvement and confidence compared to their male counterparts. The Sociology of education defines the “hidden curriculum” as the non-explicit aspects of the curriculum. Perrenoud (2004) believes that this type of practices are not really secret (i.e. not so hidden); it is known that in school one learn to live in society, to be a good citizen, to work seriously, and in general, to be part of the
stereotypes of the social environment. According to Vallance, the functions of hidden curriculum include

the inculcation of values, political socialization, training in obedience and docility, the perpetuation of traditional class structure-functions that may be characterized generally as social control (1977: 592).

Hidden curriculum can also be associated with the reinforcement of social inequality which is passively inculcated through schools where traditions of appropriate behaviour, of who does what and when, provide important markers and boundaries of the gender regime with which individuals identify themselves and through which they act out their gendered identity uncritically. Lesko, Jentes-Mason and Schultz in their work ‘Adolescence and School’ argues that schools not only perpetuate the conception of ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ where young women are understood as weak and inferior to boys, but also construct the notion of compulsory heterosexuality (2002: 20). Subsequently these young children remain confined within the disciplinary and controlled regime of the schooling system and become passive receiver and active producer of the dominant ideology. Schools therefore can also be referred to as a formal institution of social control which (overtly and covertly) engage in plurality of practices to regulate its members into self-regulating path of normalization though its (hidden) curriculum that acts as an omnipresent authority that reinforce the present ideology.

**Peer Group/neighbours and Social Control**

Berger in his work *The Social Construction of Reality: Invitation to Sociology* claims that ‘gossip and ridicule’ are one of the potent instrument of social control that is effectively and deliberately conveyed through neighbours or peer groups (1963: 72).
Berger further explains that neighbours and peer groups exercise social control through a high degree of social visibility and inspectability of others existence. And it is this surveillance of the peer group that is either translated through gossip or through ridiculing others way of conducting their life. Similarly in this study respondents have offered some narratives that reflect on the social control mechanisms applied by neighbours and peer group for their active involvement in athletics. Like for instance Surjamoni Murmu (20 years, 100 m, 200 m Sprinter) said “In my community women are not allowed to play or jump like boys. We cannot wear shorts or track pants t-shirts like boys during practice. Elderly people (both men and women) and young boys make fun of us if we wear shorts, we are also threatened not to wear these sports gear as they outrage our modesty. Therefore we practice wearing salwar kameez and it is extremely difficult to play and exercise in those clothes. We do not have any other option but to listen to the elders otherwise our practice will be stopped forever”.

Similarly Phulan Khatoon (23 years, 1500 m Track and Field Athlete) Shares: “Whenever I go to my village to visit my family I never or cannot wear trousers and t-shirts, but only salwar kameez or kurti. If I wear track pants and shirts the entire neighbourhood including small children gaze at me and my friends make fun of me by calling me a tomboy”

Eitzen explained that while mechanisms of social control are “believed to serve the common good,” they also lead to the loss of rights and decision making opportunities for women athletes (2000: 370). It is also worth mentioning that most respondents have agreed that irrespective of women athletes being more successful than male athletes in West Bengal, their involvement becomes restricted, controlled by the larger society. Though none of the respondents in this study have discontinued their athletic involvement after being ridiculed or criticised, but they have expressed that these
measures actually intend to prohibit women/girls from participating in sports and pursue sports as a career.

**Conclusion:**

In this study it was found that majority of women athletes were subjected to numerous disciplinary practices by their family, schools and peer group/neighbours which aims to regulate any behaviour that is conceived as non gender appropriate in nature. Family institutionalises socially sanctioned gender appropriate attributes among its members through socialization and these learned attributes contribute towards maintaining social order and integrity. Similarly secondary agency of socialization like schools also exercises their control over its member students by imparting the dominant ideology through explicit (i.e. formally written instruction) and hidden curriculum that reinstates the existing social order. The ‘education’ received in school, however, does not allow for a free development of the individual, rather, it has a clearly set agenda, with the purpose of ‘normalisation.’ Also it has been found in this study that peer groups and neighbours employ social control through ridicule and gossip over its members especially female members and in this study women athletes. Since women’s participation in sports in conceived as a gender deviant act, any form of athletic engagement is particularly kept under constant surveillance by the representatives of the larger society. What the disciplinary apparatus of family, school and peer group/neighbours tries to do is to ‘mould’ individuals in specific ways to make them socially ‘conform.’ Infact these institutions together act a disciplining network which functions together to proscribe women or women athletes’ active participation in any gender deviant activities like in this research sports.