

# Opportunities, Awareness and Probable Solutions to General Challenges in Women's Cricket

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## Abstract

This research delves into the historical backdrop, present challenges, opportunities, and future outlook for female athletes in India, focusing particularly on cricket. It identifies structural barriers like insufficient infrastructure and funding, entrenched cultural norms perpetuating gender biases, and societal stereotypes as hindrances to the progress and recognition of female athletes. Discrimination in selection processes, unequal media representation, and financial instability are also highlighted as significant hurdles. Despite these challenges, the study underscores avenues for growth and empowerment, such as initiatives like Khelo India and increasing corporate sponsorship, which aim to foster a more inclusive and supportive sporting environment. Methodologically, the research employs a thorough literature review, case studies, and an online survey targeting female sportspersons in Bhopal to gather diverse insights. The survey reveals varying perspectives on gender equity in sports opportunities, indicating room for improvement. Ultimately, collaborative efforts from stakeholders across sectors are essential to ensure the continued advancement and empowerment of Indian women in sports, envisioning a future where they can thrive, inspire, and leave a lasting legacy of resilience and achievement.

**Keywords:** gender biases, media representation, Khelo India, corporate sponsorship, online survey

## 1. Introduction

Women's cricket has evolved significantly over the years, carving out a distinct identity in a domain historically dominated by men. Despite substantial progress, the sport continues to grapple with numerous challenges, including gender bias, limited resources, and societal stereotypes. This research paper aims to delve into the multifaceted landscape of women's cricket, exploring the opportunities available, the awareness among stakeholders, and potential solutions to overcome prevailing obstacles.

There are diverse opportunities available for women in cricket, extending beyond mere participation to include roles in coaching, umpiring, media, sports management, fitness, sponsorship, entrepreneurship, and social media. The rise of the Indian women's cricket team and domestic leagues has created extensive prospects for female cricketers to excel and build professional careers. Notable players like Deepti Sharma and Simranjit Kaur exemplify the significant contributions at various levels. Furthermore, women also play a crucial role in coaching and media such as Vrinda Rathi and Isa Guha. While there are burgeoning opportunities in sports management, event organization, and fitness, as we can learn from the contributions of players like Smriti Mandhana and Jhulan Goswami, there are also

discriminations and gender biases faced by female cricketers in India. Female players often encounter issues such as inadequate facilities, lesser financial support, and unequal opportunities compared to their male counterparts. The cultural perception of cricket as a male-dominated sport and the societal pressure on female players to conform to traditional gender roles are major barriers. Media also plays a crucial role in perpetuating gender stereotypes and sexism, as can be recalled with instances like the Mithali Raj dress controversy and Harmanpreet Kaur's weight shaming. Despite positive steps like pay parity, systemic changes in infrastructure and corporate support, include improved media coverage, economic parity, grassroots participation, education, empowerment advocacy campaigns, and gender sensitivity training are deemed necessary for promoting gender equality in cricket.

This research aims not only to highlight the existing challenges in women's cricket but also to propose actionable solutions that can foster a more inclusive and equitable environment for female cricketers. By understanding the opportunities and addressing the challenges through awareness and strategic interventions, we can pave the way for a more balanced and progressive future for women's cricket in India.

## **2. Literature Review On Gender Disparities And Stereotypes In Cricket**

Sachin Prakash and Dr. Sandeep Bhalla [1] provided a comprehensive look into the evolution and significance of women's Test cricket highlighting the historical context, challenges, and progress of women's Test cricket, underscoring its vital role in the broader cricketing landscape. Similarly, Souvik Naha's [2] research paper delves into the intricate dynamics of gender, authority, and power among cricket spectators at Calcutta's Eden Gardens during that period. The study highlighted the symbolic presence of women in the stadium, reflecting broader power dynamics and gender hierarchies in urban Indian society. Naha's research offers valuable insights into the evolving interplay of gender, power, and cricket spectatorship in Calcutta, highlighting both challenges and shifting societal attitudes.

Varisha Sharma [3], on other hand, dissected the manifestation of gender bias in Indian cricket, utilizing both qualitative and quantitative methods. Sharma identified significant disparities in representation, pay, access to training facilities, and media coverage. Her study emphasized the need for promoting women's cricket at all levels, ensuring equal pay, and enhancing media visibility. Raadhika Gupta [4] argued that men's cricket, traditionally a symbol of nationalism, often reinforces gender roles. By including women in cricket, a more inclusive nationalism can be promoted and so she advocated for a hybrid approach balancing sex segregation and integration, emphasizing that true equality should permeate all levels of cricket, from elite international matches to grassroots initiatives. Following this, Sudip Naskar [5] stressed the importance of gender-neutral language in cricket, advocating for terms like "batter" instead of "batsman". Naskar's research emphasizes that linguistic changes should be accompanied by shifts in societal attitudes to foster inclusivity and equality in sports.

Another paper by Manan Awal [6] focuses on the transformative power of women in Indian sports. Awal highlighted how female athletes challenge stereotypes and promote societal change, asserting their agency and contributing to gender equality through their participation and achievements in sports. This can be backed by Debasis Banerjee [7] examination of the impact of media representations of women in sports where she focused on how figures like Mandira Bedi have influenced gender representation in sports media, balancing between serious analysis and television glamour.

On the other hand, Adarsh Kohli [8] investigated the psychosocial challenges faced by cricketers, highlighting that while anxiety levels are similar across genders, female cricketers exhibit higher

concentration and males display greater confidence and emphasis on teamwork. These findings underscore the differing mental preparation approaches between genders. Dr. Ranjeet Singh Sandhu and Navneet Singh's [9] study assesses anxiety levels and achievement motivation among women cricketers competing in the All India Interuniversity Women Cricket Tournament, highlighting the psychological factors impacting performance and well-being. It finds no significant difference in state anxiety between groups but notes a significant difference in trait anxiety, a stable tendency to experience anxiety across situations.

The research gap identified from this review indicates a need for more comprehensive analyses on the evolution of societal perceptions of female cricket spectators, long-term career trajectories for female cricketers, and the effectiveness of policy reforms. Additionally, further exploration into the psychological impacts on female cricketers and the reception of gender-neutral language in cricket by various stakeholders is necessary to fully understand and address the complexities of gender disparities in the sport.

### **3. Objectives**

1. To study and analyse the general societal perception about women's sports in India.
2. To identify the challenges and gender discriminations faced by women in sports, particularly female cricketers, at different stages of their sports career.
3. To highlight milestone achievements of several female sports personas in order to inspire future generations.
4. To research and provide solutions for the challenges faced by the women cricketers in India.

### **4. Research Methodology**

This study employs a multi-faceted approach to comprehensively understand the challenges, opportunities, and potential solutions concerning women's participation in sports, with a specific focus on cricket in India. The methodology encompasses three primary components:

**Literature Review:** The initial phase involves an extensive review of existing literature related to women in sports, particularly cricket in India. This review includes academic journals, scholarly articles, books, reports, and relevant online resources.

**Case Studies:** In parallel, case studies of successful female athletes, coaches, and administrators are analyzed to identify factors contributing to their achievements. This analysis involves monitoring and collating news articles, opinion pieces, interviews, and features from reputable news outlets, both national and regional.

**Online Survey:** To supplement the literature review and news analysis, an online survey using Google Forms, targeting female sportspersons in Bhopal is conducted. The survey, titled "Problems, Challenges & Opportunities for Female Sportspersons," gathers firsthand insights into the motivations, awareness levels, career aspirations, and perceived challenges faced by women athletes, with a focus on Indian cricket. The majority of participants were between the ages of 18 and 25, indicating a significant interest in cricket among young women. Participants ranged from amateurs to semi-professional players, with a notable number being part of local clubs and university teams. The survey includes a diverse range of sports experience, with many participants having played cricket for more than five years.

Both quantitative and qualitative analysis techniques are employed to analyze the gathered data. Quantitative analysis involves statistical methods to examine survey responses and identify trends, while

qualitative analysis focuses on thematic coding and interpretation of literature, case studies, and interviews. The research adheres to ethical principles, including informed consent, confidentiality, and respect for participant autonomy. Survey participants are provided with clear information about the research purpose, voluntary participation, and data handling procedures. Potential limitations include sample bias due to self-selection in the survey, limitations in the scope and availability of literature, and inherent biases in news coverage. The study focuses on Bhopal, which may not represent the entire Indian context, given the limited survey sample size. These limitations are acknowledged to interpret the research findings accurately and draw appropriate conclusions.

## **5. Awareness And Opportunities In Women's Cricket**

Women's cricket has seen significant growth in recent years, with increasing awareness among female players and the expanding opportunities available to them. This evolution is supported by various case studies that highlight the strides made in promoting and integrating women into the sport. Beyond the primary role of playing professionally, numerous avenues exist such as coaching, umpiring, media roles, sports management, fitness, sponsorship, entrepreneurship, and social media. These opportunities are not only opening new career paths for women but also helping to foster a more inclusive environment in the sport.

The rising prominence of the Indian women's cricket team and flourishing domestic leagues have created extensive prospects for female cricketers. Notable players like Deepti Sharma and Simranjit Kaur have made significant contributions at different levels, showcasing the potential for women to excel in various capacities within the sport. Furthermore, the crucial roles of women in coaching, umpiring, and mentoring are emphasized through the examples of Vrinda Rathi and Gayathri Venugopalan, who have paved the way for more women to enter these fields. The increasing presence of women in media roles, including presenters, commentators, and journalists, is another area of growth. Figures like Isa Guha and Anjum Chopra have led the way, proving that women can succeed and influence the cricket narrative off the field as well. Moreover, the contributions of players like Smriti Mandhana and Jhulan Goswami in sports management, event organization, fitness, and physiotherapy underscore the wide array of roles women can undertake in cricket.

The online survey conducted as part of this research also indicates growing interest among young girls in cricket, highlighting the importance of sustained support and promotion. The majority of respondents (77.6%) express optimism about the career prospects in sports, suggesting a growing awareness and belief in the potential for professional advancement. A significant number of respondents displayed a high level of awareness about various roles in women's cricket beyond just playing professionally. Many were knowledgeable about opportunities in coaching, umpiring, media, sports management, and entrepreneurship. Despite this awareness, concerns about pursuing cricket professionally were prevalent due to perceived instability and lack of support.

## **6. Challenges And Barriers For Women In Cricket**

Indian women's cricket has made significant strides over the past few decades, gaining recognition and respect both domestically and internationally. However, the journey has not been without its challenges. Despite the achievements and progress, Indian women cricketers face numerous obstacles that hinder their full potential. This essay explores the existing challenges in Indian women's cricket and discusses the potential future of the sport, drawing insights from chapters 4 and 5 of the provided document.

**Resource Disparities:** One of the most significant challenges faced by Indian women cricketers is the disparity in resources compared to their male counterparts. From unequal training grounds to inadequate equipment, travel woes, and poor accommodation, the challenges are multifaceted. Recent insights from initiatives like the Equal Hue Project underscore social, infrastructural, and financial barriers hindering girls' cricket aspirations. Despite commendable steps like the BCCI's pay equity policy and the recognition of players like Harmanpreet Kaur, disparities persist. Limited access to equipment and support further compounds the issue. Female cricketers often rely on personal connections for gear, highlighting the lack of sponsorships and financial backing. It's imperative to level the playing field by investing in infrastructure and championing gender parity in cricket. The journey of female players like Kaur underscores the resilience required to overcome these challenges. It's time to ensure that the next generation of female cricketers has the support and facilities they need to shine on the international stage.

**Financial Constraints:** Financial insecurity is another major issue. While men's cricket in India is highly lucrative, women's cricket struggles with limited financial support and sponsorships. This financial gap discourages many talented female cricketers from pursuing the sport professionally, as they often face economic hardships and lack of job security. Insufficient salaries and unequal pay is among one of the many reasons why most women hesitate to choose sports and cricket as a serious career option. This is reflected in our Google Forms Survey as the overwhelming majority, 74.1% of the female sportsperson in Bhopal, chose the sport as a Hobby/Passion, indicating a strong intrinsic interest and enjoyment of the activity but only a small percentage of 17.2% chose the sport as a Career option, suggesting it may not be a widely pursued professional path. The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) increased the match costs for its contracted female cricket players in October 2022 to bring them up to line with their male counterparts and instituted a "pay equity policy."

**Media Coverage:** The portrayal of female cricketers in the media perpetuates gender biases and stereotypes, hindering their recognition and careers. Underrepresentation and tokenism relegate women's cricket to the sidelines, while sexism and objectification diminish their sporting achievements, focusing instead on appearance and personal lives. Recent cases like Mandira Bedi's hosting stint on Extraa Innings, Mithali Raj's dress controversy, and Harmanpreet Kaur's weight shaming highlight how media scrutiny often targets women's appearance over performance. The disparity in coverage between the men's and women's IPL further solidifies the belief that women's cricket is secondary. Language and tone in media coverage also reflect biases, affecting public perception. This lack of fair representation extends to social media, impacting visibility and opportunities for female cricketers. Media bias not only affects players' mental health and self-esteem but also limits sponsorship deals and career prospects, perpetuating the gender pay gap and depriving young girls of relatable role models. By challenging stereotypes and providing equitable coverage, we can create a more inclusive cricketing landscape where female players are celebrated for their talent, not their gender.

**Societal and Cultural Barriers:** The journey of women in cricket, exemplified by Mithali Raj's pioneering role, has been a battle against entrenched societal norms and gender biases. Based on the recent Google Forms Survey, it appears that the majority of the respondents (46.6%) answered "Yes" when asked if they feel any kind of partiality or narrow-mindedness towards women's sports. About 24% responded that they feel there is "somewhat" of a partiality or narrow-mindedness towards women's sports. This shows a more nuanced perspective, where respondents acknowledge the presence of some biases, but not to a full extent. Despite perceptions of cricket as a "Boy's Game," there's a shifting



landscape, with families (62.7% ) emerging as crucial supporters for female athletes. The 2017 Women's World Cup, where India's spirited performance challenged stereotypes, marked a pivotal moment. Yet, to ensure gender equality in cricket, concerted efforts are needed. Initiatives promoting women's cricket, challenging stereotypes, and amplifying their voices are crucial. By empowering female cricketers and reshaping societal perceptions, we can foster a future where their talents are celebrated and recognized on equal footing with their male counterparts.

**Discrimination and Gender Bias:** Women's cricket grapples with discrimination in selection processes and team dynamics, despite its growing popularity. Incidents like Sania Mirza's attire criticism and Dipa Karmakar's struggles highlight pervasive gender biases. Statistical inadequacies in research and disparities in awards underscore systemic hurdles. While many female athletes perceive opportunities in sports careers positively, uncertainties persist. Only 20.7% of the respondents in the Google Forms survey want to continue current sport, 29.3% prefer switching careers, 39.7% are unsure, open to either, while 10.3% never intend to change. This shows uncertainty among female athletes about future sporting careers, with a significant portion considering alternative job profiles. Overall, the data reveals persistent challenges and uncertainties facing women in cricket and sports, emphasizing the urgent need to address gender disparities and cultural norms within the sporting community.

## 7. Future Prospects

Cricket holds tremendous potential as a catalyst for positive social change and gender equality. To realize this potential and foster a more equitable environment for female cricketers, it's imperative to address discrimination and promote inclusivity. Despite several challenges, the future of Indian women's cricket holds promise, thanks to several positive developments and potential solutions.

### Improved Media Coverage:

- **Equal Airtime and Visibility:** Ensure that women's cricket receives equitable media coverage compared to men's cricket. Increased visibility through news articles, social media, and televised matches can bolster interest and support for female players.
- **Promote Role Models:** Highlight successful female cricketers as role models to inspire young girls to pursue the sport seriously.
- **Skill-Based Reporting:** Shift media focus from appearance to skills by analyzing performances, strategies, and game-changing moments rather than personal lives or physical attributes.

### Economic Parity

- **Investment:** Allocate funds specifically for women's cricket infrastructure to build and maintain quality grounds, academies, and dressing rooms.
- **Corporate Partnerships:** Encourage private companies to sponsor women's cricket infrastructure through corporate social responsibility initiatives.
- **Encourage Women in Leadership:** Promote women to take leadership roles in cricket administration, coaching, and management, setting positive precedents for gender equity.

### Grassroots Participation

- **Early Participation:** Encourage participation from an early age by actively promoting women's cricket in schools, colleges, and local clubs.
- **Empowerment through Education:** Conduct workshops and seminars to educate players, coaches, and administrators about gender biases and discrimination, fostering awareness and better practices.

### Advocacy Campaigns

- **Influential Organizations:** Collaborate with influential players, organizations, and social media platforms to advocate for gender equality in cricket.
- **Social Media Advocacy:** Empower female cricketers to challenge norms and demand equal treatment through social media platforms, amplifying their voices and rallying support for gender equality.

### Safe Spaces and Support Networks

- **Create Safe Spaces:** Establish safe environments for female cricketers to express their experiences and challenges, fostering inclusivity and support.
- **Inclusive Language and Behavior:** Avoid gendered language and stereotypes, recognizing the contributions of all players based on skills and determination.
- **Transparency:** Ensure transparency and fairness in selection processes and team dynamics, preventing discrimination and bias.
- **Gender Sensitivity:** Implement gender-sensitive policies and initiatives to address discrimination and promote inclusivity, encouraging female representation in decision-making positions.

Despite facing numerous challenges, the future of women's cricket in this country is promising, as evidenced by the survey data. The responses indicate a mix of opinions regarding opportunities for male and female players with 27.6% disagreeing, 25.9% being unsure, 41.4% agreeing, and only 5.2% strongly agreeing on whether male players will have more opportunities than female players in the future, highlighting the need for continued efforts to promote gender equality in cricket. In conclusion, achieving gender equality in cricket requires collaborative efforts from various stakeholders, including media houses, cricket boards, players, and fans. By implementing the above recommendations, we can create a level playing field where talent and passion supersede gender biases.

## 8. Conclusion

This research underscores the progress and persistent challenges within India's women's cricket landscape. It emphasizes the necessity of systemic changes in infrastructure, financial support, media representation, and societal attitudes to address the barriers faced by female cricketers. Collaboration among government bodies, sports associations, media, and corporate sponsors is vital for fostering inclusivity. With continued advocacy, improved facilities, and enhanced visibility, there is significant potential for the growth of women's cricket, as evidenced by the success of prominent female cricketers and initiatives like the Women's Premier League (WPL). Overall, creating an inclusive environment is crucial for the advancement of women's cricket, ensuring opportunities for future generations of female athletes to excel and inspire.

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