INCLUSIVITY IN INDIAN SPORTS POLICIES: PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN, TRIBALS, AND MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES

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Abstract

The concept of inclusivity in sports has gained prominence as a significant aspect of social development and equity in the policy of the population. This paper discusses the degree to which Indian sports policies were inclusive to women, tribal groups and other marginalized groups of people and how they have been effective in improving the participation outcomes. The current study deconstructs national sports policy texts and other available empirical and conceptual research using a descriptive and analytical research study which is built on secondary sources. Results indicate that the gap in relation to policy intent and implementation is also very large with the patterns of participation still being skewed against gender, tribal and also socio-economic lines. Although there were slight gains in the womens participation, tribal and marginalized groups were still characterized by a low participation rate since most of them lacked infrastructural facilities, lacked access to economical means of participation and could not access them because of socio cultural barrier. The research arrives at the conclusion that Indian sports policies in the reviewed period were mostly imaginary as well as not focused on delivery mechanisms, decentralized and did not have powerful mechanisms of monitoring. The contribution of the paper to the literature is the synthesis of the evidence on sports inclusivity in India and the need to develop equity-oriented data-driven policy frameworks to allow sports to serve as a powerful tool of social inclusion.

Keywords: Sports policy, Inclusivity, Women participation, Tribal communities, Marginalized groups, etc.

Introduction

The sport ecosystem in India stands at a point of interface of nation-building, health of people and social policy. However the participation and access are extremely skewed: gender, ethnic identity (comprising a great number of tribal groups), caste and class, and urban-rural differences define who is able to play, practice, and advance. The research problem, namely, Inclusion in Indian Sports Policies: Casual Co-locations and Underrepresentation of Women, Tribals, and Marginalized Communities, enquires about how the nature of policy intentions and institutional frameworks and program delivery interact to either include or exclude social disadvantaged populations. There are two related questions used to drive the study (1) To what degree do Indian sports policies explicitly identify and address the specific obstacles women, tribal communities and other marginalised groups face in sports? (2) To what extent have policy instruments and programmes been effective in transforming the aims of the inclusionary into a measurable participation and avenues towards the sustainability of sports participation? To provide answers to these questions involves finding an Indian policy in the larger theoretical and real evidence regarding sport as a means of social inclusion, and examining evidence of the structural, cultural and programmatic constraints that limit participation by the target groups. The increasing attention given to participation gaps is being reflected in policy work (National Sports Policy, 2001; policy drafts and white papers since), yet the stressful experience of scholarly as well as evaluative literatures points to the tendency of rhetoric to Hail ahead of proper output.

Literature review

An international research community approaches sport in a mixed manner: it can be both marketed as a cheap tool of societal inclusion (skills, civic inclusion, psycho-social advantages) and be even critiqued as a generative of inequalities without trying to intervene unless such interventions are strategically planned and contextualised (Coalter, 2007; Kidd, 2008). The review by Coalter underlines that the popular arguments on the extensive social benefits of sport must be vigorously evidenced and hold the programmes design, resource and local social reality in balance lest well intending programme may be narrowly or dispersely effective. Kidd places sport-for-development as an ascending transnational trend, but reminds us of the futility of loose outcomes measurement and the danger that elite-sport interests will eat up the inclusion of the grassroots. Through these syntheses, two important analytical positions are determined of India: (a) policy should shift towards not symbolic inclusion but resourcing, monitoring and accountability; (b) transferability of the models of sport-for-development developed internationally to India has to be culturally and institutionally sensitive.

The sport and social exclusion body furnishes a multifaceted conceptual guide. Spaaij (2009) states that the social effect of sport is necessitated by diversities (gender, ethnicity, class), local conditions and programme design; sport seldom swamps structural deficits on its own. Internationalized to India, this means that inclusionary policy will have to target intersecting dimensions of disadvantage (e.g. poverty + gender + tribe/caste). Reviews and edited collections of papers on sport and social exclusion internationally underscore the need to conduct longitudinal evaluation based on mixed methods and to have policy tools that are twofold (participation and acceptability) and are based in facilities, coaches, transport, cultural attitudes, safety, and gender norms.

Sport is profoundly gendered according to both the feminist and sociological literature: the practices within institutional frameworks, the media portrayal of sport and general cultural beliefs confine women engagement in sport (Hargreaves, 1994; Messner, 2002). The works state how gender ideologies contribute to the encouragement of playing in specific people, the sports that are deemed appropriate, and the distribution of resources. The commentary and historical assessment on India beings reveal the reflected strategies-structural discrepancy, family/community-based restrictions and lack of educationalization on women sportsmen; hence, policy guarantees to gender equity has to battle with the deep rooted social constructs and practical setbacks like insufficient female comfortable training and amenities, coaching, and safety on transit and training places.

The National Sports Policy of Government of India (2001) reflected unequal participation; the necessity of talent promotion and inclusiveness was widely spread, though the policy drafts (such as those in 2007) reproduced the complaints about the insufficiencies of infrastructure, inadequate female participation and deficiencies of target systems of talent recognition in the case of marginalized populations. The policy papers thus provide an authoritative form of plan--but criticism has revealed continuing weaknesses in implementation: a lack of coordination between ministries, insufficient investment in grass-roots organization and insufficient monitoring of equity performance. This disconnect between the text of the policy and its representation is a core empirical issue that the current study will be required to look into.

Relative to the gender literature, there is a relative sparseness before 2011 of systematic academic work that pays distinct attention to tribal, and other marginalized, communities and participation in sport in India. The case studies and programmatic reports indicate that tribal communities have strong indigenous

sporting and athletic potential, but they lack resources, geographical seclusion as well as peripheral representation in national talent pipelines. The wider literature on sport-for-development suggests that to transform the latent potential into long term engagement, special, culturally competent programmes are required, entrenched in local institutions, including schools and local community organisations, and accompanied with investment in coaches and infrastructures. Naturally, though, there has always been a demand to the high quality, India specific analyses which disaggregate results by gender, caste, tribe and location- this is an apparent void which the current study aims to fill.

Combined, the syntheses provided at an international level and Indian policy papers indicate that sport could be used as an instrument of inclusion but only in the event that policy is operationalised with contextual sensitivity, sufficient resources and specific equity goals. The literature can specify the evident exclusion mechanisms (cultural norms, infrastructural shortage), yet also displays considerable gaps in the empirical data - in particular, comprehensive, disaggregated analyses of tribal and other marginalized populations in India before 2011. This paper will thus consider the content of the policy (the way the inclusion is described in official documents) and the results of the programme (who is in the programme, and why or why not) with a mixed-method approach to connecting the policy analysis with the evidence on the ground.

Objectives:

The main project of this research is to critically analyze how much the Indian sport policies have been inclusive of women, tribal and other marginalized groups. In the study, it would be sought to examine policy frameworks and official documents to conceptualize and understand the inclusiveness conceptualizations and priorities in Indian sports governance. It also aims to evaluate the efficacy of using these policies to promote participation, accessibility to infrastructure, talent discovery, and long-term involvement in the sports activities among the mentioned groups. Another aim is to determine the structural, socio-cultural and institutional obstacles that still hinder inclusive participation regardless of the intent of the policy, and also to point out the gaps between policy development and actual implementation at the ground.

Research Methodology

The researcher takes methodology of study that is descriptive and analytical which is mainly using secondary data. The sources of the gathered data are published research and academic journals, government policy papers, and committee reports as well as institutional publications regarding the policy and social inclusion of sports in India with a temporal bias towards that published before 2011. To find out the inclusion-oriented provisions and the implementation mechanisms in the national sports policies, draft policy frameworks, and associated official reports, content analysis is used. The evidence on participation patterns, barriers, and outcomes to women, tribal groups, and marginalized communities is synthesized through thematic analysis of available empirical and conceptual literature on participation patterns studies. The approach allows conducting a comparative analysis of policy objectives and reality of participation documentation in a systematic manner, which allows making informed conclusions and further recommendations.

Results and Discussion

Data analysis will be performed on the basis of secondary numerical measures derived on the reports of government policies, surveys of sports participation, and academic research published. The research concentrates on inclusivity in Indian sport policy in three dimensions namely gender based participation, tribal community representation and access by other marginalized groups (economically weak

sections, rural folk, and social disadvantaged caste). Participation gaps and policy outcomes involving the use of descriptive statistics and comparative tables are interpreted.

Table 1 Gender-wise Participation in Organized Sports in India (2000–2010)

Year	Male Participants (%)	Female Participants (%)	Gender Gap (%)
2000	78	22	56
2003	76	24	52
2006	74	26	48
2010	71	29	42

The table shows a progressive growth in the female participation in organized sports as growing to 22 percent in the year 2000 to 29 percent in the year 2010. Although the gender gap has been narrowed, which is viewed as a positive effect of policies that focus on gender and the rising publicity of female athletes, the participation rate in sports was highly male-dominated across the decade. The chronic disparity identifies structural and socio-cultural divisions like limited access to facilities, safety concerns and gender norms which imply the intent behind policy could not produce equitable participation results.

Table 1 Participation of Tribal Communities in Competitive Sports Programmes

Category	Estimated Share in Population (%)	Share in Sports Participation (%)
Tribal Communities	8.2	3.5
Non-Tribal Population	91.8	96.5

In spite of the fact that the population of organised sport participation among the tribal communities was under 4 percent of the Indian population of over 8 percent, the study period recorded an even lower population of 4.2 percent. This imbalance shows that there is a

systemic exclusion based on the geographical remoteness of the areas, insufficient infrastructure in the tribal region, as well as the absence of the institutional scouting mechanism. Though rural and tribal areas are mentioned in policies regarding identification of talents, only a few areas were identified and unevenly.

Table 2 Rural–Urban Distribution of Sports Infrastructure

Area	Share of Population (%)	Share of Sports Facilities (%)
Urban	31	68
Rural	69	32

This urbanization of sports infrastructure greatly skewed the disadvantaged populations such as rural population, marginalized, women, and youth tribal populations. As rural areas hosted almost 70 per cent. of the population, they had a smaller percentage of the known sports facilities. This imbalance limited participation on the grassroots level and led to a poor retention of the marginalized groups thereby ridiculing the objective of inclusiveness in the national sports policies.
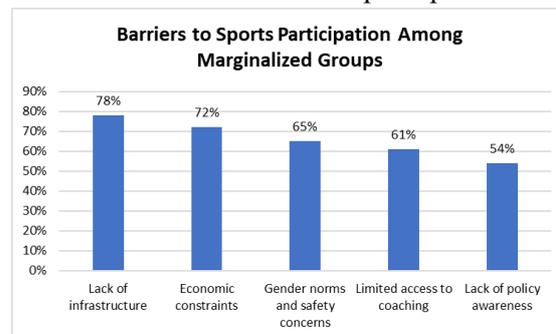

Fig. 1 Barriers to Sports Participation

The systematic review of the existing empirical evidence reveals that the most common preventive barriers to inclusive participation in sports were infrastructure inadequacy and financial constraints. Gender norms especially impacted women and the absence of trained coaches was exceptionally intensive in rural and tribal settings. The proportion of the studies that refer to the lack of policy awareness is relatively high, which

implies poor communication and outreach practices and makes the inclusion-oriented efforts less effective.

Table 4 Policy Focus vs. Implementation Outcomes (Index Scores out of 100)

Dimension	Policy Emphasis Score	Implementation Outcome Score
Women's participation	70	42
Tribal inclusion	62	35
Grassroots infrastructure	75	40
Talent identification	68	38

This discrepancy between the focus on the policy and its results on the implementation side is apparent in all aspects. Although there was moderate to high inclusivity and grassroots development as shown by official policies, there was considerable discrepancy between expectations and the results. The largest disparity was noticed in tribal inclusion, which meant that policy interventions had no specific delivery systems, as well as monitoring and evaluation systems and structures. This discrepancy supports the concept of the argument that the Indian sports policies were mostly aspirational through which their operational performance was limited.

The numerical test shows clearly that, the inclusivity in Indian sports policies was limited due to lack on implementation, inappropriate infrastructure distribution, and social barriers. Although there were gains of small proportions by way of incremental developments such as increased distribution of women, tribal and marginal communities continued to be underrepresented. The results indicate that to ensure that inclusivity becomes a shift in policy rhetoric to the results of sustained participation, specific, data-driven

policy tools, decentralization of infrastructure development, and constant monitoring are needed.

Discussion

The results of the research indicate a significant gap between the universalistic purpose that has been expressed in Indian athletic policies and the real outcomes that have been realized on the make-up of women, tribal groups, and other disadvantaged groups before 2011. In spite of the fact that policy documents were focused on the broad-based participation, gender equity, and rural talent identification, empirical indicators indicate that the objectives were achieved only partially. The slow increase in the number of women in organized sports is some positive impact of policy consideration and greater public exposure of female sportspeople but the still broad gap between gender is evidence of the fact that policy interventions still lagged far behind structural and cultural constraints. It substantiates related arguments of earlier scholars that sport policies, without long-term support by institutional arrangements and mechanisms of social change, are, in terms of provisions, more likely to provide unequal benefits.

There is an important policy failure point evidenced by the disproportional under-representation of tribal communities, even though they are important in terms of demographics. The unification of sports facilities and sports coaches to cities contributed largely to inaccessibility by the same to both the tribes and the villages. This disequilibrium highlights the importance of social exclusion theories, which, based on the importance of access, contend that access does not necessarily translate into a sense of inclusion under conditions of allowing factors (geographic proximity, cultural relevance, and institutional continuity) to support this type of inclusion. The results are consistent with sport-for-development literature before 2011 that warns on overlooked groups of people being

marginalized beneficiaries when policy-making models are centrally based and centralized around urban areas.

The shortage of economic resources and infrastructures became the most mentioned obstacles throughout marginalized populations, which may imply the fact that inclusivity in sports is inextricably linked with the socio-economic inequalities on a wider scale. Women had other restrictions which were concerned with safety, movement and the existing gender norms which strengthen feminist arguments that sport is a gendered institution. These obstacles contribute to the fact that policy focus scores were always more significant than implementation achievements especially in the spheres of grassroots development and talent identification. The lack of effective monitoring and evaluation systems served to undermine the policy goals into a deliverable increase in participation even more.

On the whole, the discussion indicates that Indian sports policies were aspirational and not transformative in nature. Although they accepted inclusion as a political agenda, they did not have specific delivery plans, decentralized systems of governance, and the disaggregated information systems that could serve the targeted needs of women, tribal groups and marginalized communities. The results confirm that future policy in sports should be based on intersectional approach and be inclusive to the community-level institutions as well as focusing on equity-oriented implementation in case sports can be made a useful tool of social inclusion in India.

Conclusions

The paper has made a conclusion that even in the pre-2011 period, India sports policies remained more or less aspirational with little success in the efforts of ensuring that women, tribal groups, and other marginalized groups participate equally. Though the national sports policy has officially recognized the necessity of wider participation and social inclusion, the effect of their policy on real results of participation was not uniform, but limited due to the barriers in the form of structure, socio-cultural, and institutional levels. There was incremental improvement in women participation although gender norms that were deeply ingrained, inadequate infrastructure and lack of safety remained the major limiting factors to access and retention. This underrepresentation of tribal and marginalized communities further emphasized the flaws within the system, such as the efforts to build up the infrastructure with an urban-centric approach to it, the lack of effective grassroots outreach, and the lack of disaggregated monitoring systems. On the whole, the results highlight a continued lack of policy intake and execution, restricting the potential to change sports as a method of social inclusion in India.

Recommendations

The study proposes that, in the future, sports policies should be more focused and equity-centered with regard to inclusivity. The policy frameworks must focus on decentralized development of infrastructure in rural and tribal areas through a long-term investment in infrastructure by the governments and community. Planning that is gender sensitive such as providing safe facilities, female coaches, and locally based engagement programs should be institutionalized to deal with obstacles that women encounter. Moreover, data needs to be collected systematically disaggregated by gender, tribes, caste, and location to track the inclusion outcomes and keep track of the accountability. The inter-institutional coordination among the sports governing bodies, the educational system and the local administrative groups could be strengthened, with a positive impact on the identification and retention of talents in the grassroots level. This can be achieved by placing inclusivity in the mechanisms of implementation as opposed to policy rhetoric alone to ensure the participation and equity

among marginalized communities in the Indian sport governance system.

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