

Games And Sports : A Gateway Of Women's Empowerment In India

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ABSTRACT

“Sport has huge potential to empower women and girls” - Remarks by Lakshmi Puri; UN Assistant Secretary-General and UN Women Deputy Executive Director.

The purpose of this paper attempts to shed light the status of women's empowerment in India through games and sports and highlights the issues and challenges of women empowerment in the field of physical education and sports. Sport is an integral part of the culture of almost every nation. However, its use to promote gender equity and empower girls and women is often overlooked because sport is not universally perceived as a suitable or desirable pursuit for girls and women. Today the empowerment of women in games and sports has become one of the most important concerns of 21st century. But practically women empowerment in games and sports is still an illusion of reality. It is observe in our day to day life how women become victimized by various social evils. Women empowerment is the vital instrument to expand women's ability to have resources and to make strategic life choices. Empowerment of women in games and sports is essentially the process of upliftment of economic, social and political status of women, the traditionally underprivileged ones, in the society. Today sports and physical activity as a strategy for the empowerment of girls and women has been gaining recognition worldwide. Women could be empowered through education, sports and physical activities and by giving them equal opportunities in different walks of life.

Research on sport, gender, and development indicates that sport can benefit girls and women by: Enhancing health and well-being, fostering self-esteem and empowerment, facilitating social inclusion and integration, challenging gender norms and providing opportunities for leadership and achievement. As an remarkable example of women empowerment in the field of sports and games in West Bengal in the year of 2019; Raja Narendra Lal Khan Women's College (Autonomous) successfully organized 'Inter College State Sports and Games Championship, 2018-19" of Paschim Medinipur and Jhargram districts Under the Auspices of Education Directorate, Department of Higher Education, Govt. of West Bengal.

Key words: *Women empowerment, gender equity, well-being, self-esteem, social inclusion.*

The word ‘Empowerment refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social, educational, gender, or economic strength of individuals and communities. Today sports and physical activity as a strategy for the empowerment of girls and women has been gaining recognition worldwide. Women could be empowered through education, sports and physical activities and by giving them equal opportunities in different walks of life. A woman is both ‘Mahamaya’ and ‘Maha Shakti’ and holds the key of the world. As ‘Swami Vivekananda’ wrote that it is very difficult to understand why in this country so much difference is made between men and women, whereas the Vedanta declares that one and the same Conscious self is present in all beings. In short, woman empowerment is the breaking of personal limitations. Sports and Physical Education play important and major role in all these segments of women Empowerment. In this year one of the best educational institute in West Bengal, **Raja Narendra Lal Khan Women’s College (Autonomous)** is going to organize a mega event in the field of sports and games ‘**Inter College State Sports and Games Championship, 2018-19**’ of Paschim Medinipur and Jhargram districts **Under the Auspices of Education Directorate, Department of Higher Education, Govt. of West Bengal**. In my personal opinion this may be one of the best examples of Women’s Empowerment in India in the field of games and sports.

Community and institutional resources are often limited for girls. Sport programs can provide them with access to mentors, strong female role models and the social support of a team or group of peers. It can also give them access to public spaces, especially in societies where their mobility is restricted. Sport involves leadership roles such as captaincy, coaching and refereeing that can enhance girls’ self-confidence. Improved perception of girls’ abilities amongst the girls themselves and their families also enhances respect for one’s body, a sense of belongingness, ownership, decision-making skills as well as a sense of identity beyond the domestic realm.

“Sport is the most effective tool of empowerment,” says Suheil Tandon, who in 2013, founded Pro Sport Development (PSD), a social enterprise that uses sport for the holistic development of youth. PSD just completed a three-day workshop with 23 football-playing girls in Ajmer district. “Earlier these girls were not even allowed to leave their homes,” says Tandon. “Now they are leaders in their villages.” In sport you cannot have caste-based segregation, say the girls. As a team they have chosen to boycott practices like child marriage. In other regions, PSD organises mixed gender matches that give girls the opportunity to play and, more crucially, boys the chance to appreciate the girls as teammates.

In the last few years, the attention of people all over the world, especially in India, has been focused towards the subject of women’s empowerment. The very fact behind this hype regarding the empowerment of women is that the discussion bears testimony to the appalling condition of women all over the world but more so in India and other developing countries.

Earlier, women were always suppressed and treated like slaves. They were denied basic fundamental rights like the Right to free speech, the Right to Education, etc. There were several inequalities between men and women in any and every field, be it politics, sports, education or jobs at the corporate level. Even today, the perception of women remains negative. Women constitute more than half of the world's population and are still paid less than men. In addition to their domestic responsibilities like taking care of their children, cooking food, looking after the family, they contribute to the growth of the nation. Some have become successful entrepreneurs like Indra Nooyi, some are handling the politics of the nation like Sonia Gandhi, some are running the fashion world and some are representing the country at the international level by excelling in various sports like P.T.Usha. "Sprint Queen" P.T.Usha has won 102 national /International medals and awards throughout her illustrious career. She won 13 Gold medals in Asian Championships and a total of 33 International medals. She received the prestigious Arjuna Award and PadmaShree in 1984 for showing outstanding performance in sports. A year later in 1985, she was adjudged as the best women athlete at the Jakarta Asian Athlete meet. To add to her glory, In 1986 at the Seoul Asian Games, the Indian Olympic Association awarded her with the Adidas Golden Shoe and named her the Sports person of the century.

Women have been successful in asserting their equality with men in matters of education, employment, inheritance, marriage, politics and in the field of sports as well. The status of women all over the world and in India has risen exceptionally in the 20th century. Women, who remained inclined to stay within the four walls of their household have today found their own way to rise above. Various steps have been taken by the Indian Government to empower women of every age and every caste. Criminal laws against sati, dowry, female infanticide and feticides, eve teasing, rape, immoral trafficking and other offences relating to women have been enacted in addition to civil laws like the Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act 1939, the Hindu Marriage Act 1955 and other Matrimonial enactments. Recently, the Rajya Sabha has also passed the Maternity Benefits (Amendment) Bill, 2016 to benefit working women. A National Commission for Women (NCW) was also constituted for protecting women's rights. The year 2001 was declared as the Year of Women's Empowerment by the Government of India. These developments in the status of women are evidence of the fact that empowering women means empowering the nation, strengthening the economy and revitalizing the society.

Social stigmas often keep women from viewing themselves as physically powerful, proficient and self-governing individuals. In recent years, sports have surfaced as a mechanism to help women work against these self-limiting opinions. With the growing participation of women in sports globally and nationally, sports is being seen as a means of empowerment for women. Their participation in sporting activities enables them to live a life of dignity. New age sportswomen like Sania Mirza in Tennis, Mary Kom in Boxing and Saina Nehwal in Badminton

and so on are some of those Indian women who never gave up on their dreams despite of coming from conservative backgrounds.

The 2016 Summer Olympics, concluded in August 2016 at Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, witnessed more than 11,000 athletes from 207 countries. India saw a participation of 117 athletes and bagged a total of two medals, one silver and bronze; both of which were won by women. Badminton player P. V. Sindhu won historic silver medal in the women's singles badminton event. With this, she became the first Indian woman to clinch a silver medal in Olympics. On the other hand, Wrestler Sakshi Malik secured a bronze in the 58 kg category to become India's first female wrestler to win an Olympic medal. Not to forget, India was able to qualify an artistic gymnast into the Olympic competition for the very first time since 1964. Dipa Karmakar became the first Indian female ever to book an Olympic spot in the apparatus events and all-round event at the Olympic Test Event. Unfortunately, she narrowly missed out on the bronze medal, finishing 4th in the finals of the event with a score of 15.066.

In the current scenario, India is developing in terms of women empowerment where females of our nation are not only opting various career options but also is making India proud. These women have not only proved their skills but also have encourages other girls to break the gender stereotypes by taking up sports profession. Recently Indian female athletes: Sakshi Malik, Dipa Karmakar, and P.V. Sindhu have created a history at the 2016 Rio Olympics and showed the girl power to the nation. Below is the list of some of finest talent that the Indian soil has produced who gave their heart, body, mind and soul to achieve their dream to become. We always are feeling proud being an Indian for these greatest Indian sportswomen.



SAKSHI MALIK (WRESTLING): Sakshi Malik is an Indian freestyle wrestler who was born on 3rd September 1992. Recently she gained fame at the 2016 Summer Olympics where she won the bronze medal in the 58 kg category and became the 1st Indian female wrestler to win a medal at the Olympics and the 4th female Olympic medalist from the country. Earlier at the 2015 Asian Wrestling Championship of Doha, she won a bronze and a silver medal at the

2014 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow. Born in the Mokhra village of Haryana, Sakshi got her motivation towards wrestling by seeing her grandfather Badhlu Ram. Even after facing opposition from the locals she continued towards her dream and marked her 1st success as a professional wrestler at the Junior World Championships 2010 by winning the bronze medal in the 58 kg freestyle event. Apart from her various successes in wrestling field she is currently

employed with Indian Railways in the commercial department of its Delhi division, in the Northern Railway zone and is a part of the JSW Sports Excellence Program. Due to her performance, she has received multiple cash prizes including a brand new BMW from former Indian Cricketer Sachin Tendulkar and is also honored with the highest sporting honor of India-Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna in 2016.



P.V. SINDHU (BADMINTON): Pusarla Venkata Sindhu is an Indian professional badminton player born on 5th July 1995. At the Summer Olympics of 2016, she became the 1st Indian woman to win an Olympic silver medal and is one of 2 Indian badminton players to ever win an Olympic medal other than Saina Nehwal. She has won various medals at international badminton championships like bronze at the World Championships in 2013 and 2014, Incheon Asian Games in 2014 and Asia Championship (2014)

and a gold medal at the Commonwealth Games in 2011. Daughter of Arjuna award winner was also honored with the same award in 2013 along with Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna (2016) and Padma Shri (2015). Since 2013, she has been employed with Bharat Petroleum as deputy sports manager in Hyderabad.



DIPA KARMAKAR (GYMNASTICS): Dipa Karmakar is an artistic gymnast who was born on 9th August 1993 in Agartala. She is the 1st Indian female gymnast to compete in Olympics in 52 years. She is also one of the 5 women who has successfully landed the Produnova that is considered the most difficult vault in gymnastics. She is also the 1st Indian female gymnast to win a medal at the 2014 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow. Since 2007 she has won 77 medals including 67 gold in the state, national and international championships. She was

honored with Khel Ratna award for her commendable performance in Rio Olympics in 2016.

SANIA MIRZA (TENNIS): Sania Mirza is an Indian professional tennis player and is currently ranked as the No. 1 in women doubles. Born on 15th November 1986, tennis sensation is one of the highest-paid and high-profile tennis player in the country. 30 years old is the 1st Indian tennis player to win women doubles Grand Slam title with Martina Hingis in Wimbledon 2015.



She is also the 2nd Indian tennis player to receive highest sports honor- Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna Award. Other awards include Arjuna Award (2005), WTA New Comer of the year (2005), Padma Shri (2006), Padma Bhushan (2016) and in 2014 government of Telangana appointed her as the brand ambassador of the state. She is also the 1st South Asian woman to be appointed as the UN Women Goodwill Ambassador in their history and has established a tennis academy in Hyderabad. Tennis queen began playing tennis at the age of 6 and rose to prominence

when went to the 3rd round of the Australian Open in 2005.



SAINA NEHWAL (BADMINTON): Born 17th March 1990, Saina Nehwal is the 1st and only female Indian former world no. 1 professional badminton singles player from India. She represented India 3 times in the Olympics and won the bronze medal in her 2nd appearance. She is the 1st Indian badminton player to have won an Olympic medal, the BWF World Junior Championships and is the 1st Indian female and youngest Asian to win a 4-star tournament. She is also credited for increasing the popularity of badminton

in India and was awarded highly prestigious awards like Padma Bhushan, Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna, and Arjuna award. Apart from being a successful badminton player, she is also a brown belt in Karate. She is one of the athletes supported by Olympic Gold Quest.

JWALA GUTTA (BADMINTON): Left-handed Indian international badminton player, Jwala



Gutta was born on 7th September 1983 in Wardha, Maharashtra and brought up in Hyderabad. Indo-Chinese descent started her training at the age of 10 under the professional training of S.M Arif. At the age of 13, she won Under-13 Mini National Championship in Kerela (1996). Till 2013, she won the National Badminton Championship for 14 times and has been consistently shining among the top 20 in the world charts. She bagged many medals for India including major events like BWF World

Championships, Commonwealth Games, Thomas & Uber Cup team, Asian Badminton Championships, Nepal International Series tournament 2008 and Yonex Dutch Open Grand Prix 2008 in the Women(s) Doubles category. She is also the 1st women to qualify for 2 events in Olympics in Indian History. She was also awarded the India(s) 2nd highest sporting honor-



Arjuna Award for her achievements as a badminton player in 2011.

MANIKA BATRA (TABLE TENNIS): Manika Batra is the top-ranked female table tennis player born on 15th June 1995 in Delhi, India. She represented India at the 2014 Commonwealth Games, Glasgow and 2014 Asian games. She won the silver medal for 2011 under-21 category of Chile Open, 3 medals at the 2015 Commonwealth Table tennis Championships and 3 Gold at the 2016 South Asian Games.



MITHALI RAJ (CRICKET): Mithali Raj is the captain of the Indian Women cricket team. All-rounder right-hand batsman was born on 3rd December 1982 in a Tamil family in Jodhpur, Rajasthan. She was picked for the Indian women cricket team at the age of 17 and made her debut ODI against Ireland in 1999 with an impressive score of 114 (and remain not out). At the age of 19, in her 3rd international test she broke the record of Karen Rolton of the world(s) highest individual test score by scoring a new high of 214 against England in August 2002 that stood for 19

months. At 2013 Women(s) World Cup, she was starred as the No.1 Cricketer in the ODI (One Day International). She is also named as the Tendulkar of Indian women(s) cricket as she is currently the all-time leading run-scorer of India in all formats (Tests, ODIs, and T20s). Indian skipper is the 1st woman to cross the 5000 runs milestone in One-Day Internationals who was awarded the Arjuna award by the Government of India in 2003 and Padma Shri in 2015.



JHULAN GOSWAMI (CRICKET): Jhulan Nishit

Goswami is an all-round cricketer of the Indian national women(s) cricket team who was born on 25th November 1982 in Nadia; West Bengal. She is India(s) fastest woman bowler who always surprises the batsman. In 2009 she was appointed to lead the team for the upcoming world cup. Right-hand batsman also won the ICC Women(s) Player of the Year in 2007. She was also honored with the Arjuna Award in 2010 and Padma Shri in 2012.



ARUNIMA SINHA (VOLLEYBALL & MOUNTAINEER):

Arunima Sinha was a national level volleyball player who was born in 1988. Her volleyball career was interrupted by a tragic train accident in 2011. In the incident, she was pushed from a running train by thieves while she was resisting them and as a result one of her legs had to be amputated below the knee. She is the world(s) 1st female amputee to climb Mount Everest. Inspired by successful cancer battle of the Indian cricketer Yuvraj Singh, she excelled in the basic mountaineering course from the Nehru

Institute of Mountaineering and climbed Everest with a prosthetic leg. She has climbed 6 peaks: Everest in Asia, Kilimanjaro in Africa, Elbrus in Europe, Kosciuszko, Australia, Aconcagua in Argentina as the world(s) five highest peaks and Carstensz Pyramid (Puncak Jaya), Indonesia with an aim to climb all the continent(s) highest peaks and put the national flag of India.

MC MARY KOM (BOXER): Mangte Chungneijang Mary Kom is an Indian boxer hailing from the Kom-Koki tribe in Manipur who was born on 1st March 1983. Magnificent Mary is a 5 time World Amateur Boxing champion and the only woman boxer to have won a medal in each one of the six world championships. She is only Indian woman boxer to have qualified for Summer Olympics of 2012 and won the bronze medal. She became the 1st Indian woman boxer to get a Gold Medal in the 2014 Asian Games in Incheon, South Korea. She is also a supporter of animal rights and has been associated with animal rights organization- PETA India. For her achievements in the sports field, she has been awarded Arjuna Award



(2003), Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna Award (2009), Padma Shree (2010) and Padma Bhushan (2013). On 26th April 2016, the 33-year-old was nominated as a member of the Rajya Sabha,



the upper house of the Indian Parliament, India. The struggle of her life and sports achievements were depicted in her autobiography called Unbreakable and a Bollywood movie named as Mary Kom.

ANJALI BHAGWAT (AIR RIFLE): Anjali Bhagwat is a professional Indian shooter who was born on 5th December 1969 in Mumbai. Indian shooting queen is the only Indian to win the ISSF Champion(s) Trophy in Air Rifle Men & Women mixed event in

Munich (2002). She has won 12 gold and 4 silver medals in the Commonwealth Games with a record holding position in 10m Air Rifle and Sports Rifle 3P. She has set 13 new records in international competitions with 55 Gold, 35 Silver and 16 Bronze medals in India. In 2002, she became the World No.1 in Air Rifle. She was honored with the Rajiv Gandhi Khel-Ratna in

2003 and Arjuna Award in 2000.



HEENA SIDHU (AIR PISTOL): Heena Sidhu is the 1st Indian Pistol shooter to be ranked World No. 1 by ISSF who was born on 29th August 1989 in Ludhiana, Punjab. She is the 1st Indian Pistol shooter to win a Gold in the 2013 ISSF World Cup Finals-Pistol in 10 metre Air Pistol event and also the 1st Indian shooter to appear in ISSF magazine(s) cover since the formation of National Association of India (1951). She also represented India at the 2012 Summer Olympics in London. For her international achievements, she was

honored with the Arjuna Award in 2014 by the honorable President of India.



GEETA PHOGAT (WRESTLING): Geeta Phogat is a female Indian wrestler who was born on 15th December 1988 in Balali village of Haryana. She is the 1st ever Indian woman wrestler to have qualified for the Olympics and also 1st gold medal winner in the 55 kg freestyle category of the 2010 Commonwealth Games. Her father Mahavir Singh Phogat is also a former wrestler who bravely fought criticism from the villagers for making his daughters practice wrestling. She has also won a gold medal in



the Wrestling FILA Asian Olympic Qualification Tournament 2012. Mr. Perfectionist of the Bollywood, Aamir Khan has made a movie based on her and her sister(s) lives called Dangal that is set to release in December 2016.

TANIA SACHDEV (CHESS): Tania Sachdev is an Indian chess player who was born on 20th August 1986. He holds the FIDE titles of International Master (IM) and Woman Grandmaster (WGM). She became the 8th Indian player to be awarded the Woman Grandmaster title in 2005. She was introduced to the game at the age of 6 by her mother Anju and won her 1st international title at 8. She also became the 8th player to be awarded the Woman Grandmaster title in 2005. Besides playing chess professionally she is also a chess presenter, commentator, trained classical dancer and was a member of the official commentary team for 2013 World Championship Match.

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KRISHNA POONIA (DISCUS THROW): Krishna Poonia is an Indian discus thrower who was born on 5th May 1976 Agroha village of Haryana. At the Delhi Commonwealth Games, she won a gold medal with a throw of 61.51 m. She set a new national record with a throw of 64.76 m on 8th May 2012 in Hawaii, US. Earlier she also became the only 6th Indian to make it to the final round of track and field events in an Olympics event. In 2011, the Government of India also awarded her the civilian honor of Padma Shri.

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RENU BALA CHANU (WEIGHTLIFTING) : Yumnam Renu Bala Chanu is an Indian Woman Weightlifting champion who was born on 2nd October 1986. 24-year-old Guwahati-based Northeast Frontier Railway employee won the gold medal in the Women(s) 58 KG category at the 2006 Commonwealth Games. In 2014 she was also honored with the Arjuna Award for her contribution



to Indian sports.

KARNAM MALLESWARI

(WEIGHTLIFTING): Karnam Malleswari is a retired Indian weightlifter who was born on 1st June 1975 in Srikulam, Andhra Pradesh. 1994 World Championship of Turkey is considered the 1st major success where she won 2 gold and 1 bronze medal. She also set a new record by lifting 113 kg in 54 kg of the Asian championship in Korea. In 2000 Summer

Olympics in Sydney the Iron Lady became the 1st ever Indian woman to win an Olympic



medal in weightlifting. For her achievements in sports, she was honored with the Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna award in 1995-96, Arjuna Award in 1994 and Padma Shri in 1999.

DEEPIKA KUMARI (ARCHERY):

Deepika Kumari is an Indian archer who was born on 13th June 194 in Ranchi, Jharkhand. The World no. 5 archer is the winner of a gold medal at the 2010 Commonwealth games in the women(s) individual event. She started her professional training of archery training by joining

Tata Archery Academy of Jamshedpur in 2006 where she also received INR 500 as a stipend. She also became the 2nd Indian to win the title after Palton Hansda won the junior compound competition at the 2006 Archery World Cup in Mexico. After winning 2 gold medals at the



Delhi Commonwealth Games in 2010 she was honored with the Outstanding Performance (Female) Award at the Sahara Sports Awards ceremony. She was also honored with the Arjuna Award in 2012, FICCI Sportsperson of the Year Award in 2014 and Padma Shri in 2016.

ANJU BOBBY GEORGE (LONG JUMP):

Anju Bobby George is an Indian athlete who was born on 19th April 1977 in Cheeranchira village of Changanassery taluk, Kottayam, Kerala. In 2003 World Championships in Athletics of Paris she created history

by winning bronze in Long Jump and became the 1st Indian athlete ever to win a medal. At the

IAAF World Athletics Final of 2005 is considered the best performance where she won a gold medal for India. She was honored with Arjuna Award in 2002 and Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna in 2004. Her talent was noticed in the national school games where she won the 3rd place in 100m hurdles and 4x100m relay. The ace athlete was appointed as the president of the Kerala State Sports Council (KSSC) and resigned from the post in June 2016.



SEEMA PUNIA (DISCUS THROW): Seema Punia Antil is an Indian discus thrower who was born on 27th July 1983 in Khewda village of Haryana. Her personal best record is 62.62 m achieved at the Pat Young(s) Throwers Classic 2016 in Salinas, California,

US. She began her sporting career at the age of 11 as a hurdler and a long-jumper and later took discus throw. She earned a nickname of Millennium Child after winning a gold medal at the World Junior Championships of Santiago in 2000.



After winning a silver medal at the 2006 Commonwealth Games she was honored with the Bhim Award by the Haryana state government. She also has received a silver medal at the Commonwealth Games and a gold at the Asian Games in 2014. She is married to Ankush Punia who is a former discus thrower and also her coach.

DUTEE CHAND (SPRINTER): Dutee Chand is an Indian professional sprinter who was born on 3rd February 1996. She became a national champion in the under-18 category by finishing 100 meters in 11.8 seconds in 2012 event. In 2013 World Youth Championships she became the 1st Indian to reach the final of global athletics 100 meters final. Since 2014, she is currently working as a ticket collector in Central Railway Station.



HARWANT KAUR (SHOT PUT): Born on 5th July 1980, Harwant Kaur is an Indian discus thrower and shot putter. In 2002 Asian Championships she won the silver medal at the Asian Championships in 2002 and Commonwealth Games in 2010. 63.5 m is



her personal best throw achieved in Kiev 2004 and is coached under the guidance of Parveer Singh.

HIMA DAS (SPRINTER): She is the first Indian to win a gold in a track event at the world level. Sprinter Hima Das scripted history by becoming the first Indian woman athlete to win a gold at the world level as she clinched the top spot in the women's 400m final race in the IAAF World Under-20 Athletics Championships here. The 18 year-old Das, a pre-tournament favorite,

clocked 51.46s to win the gold, which triggered a wild celebration at the Indian camp. This was though not her personal best as she had clocked 51.13 last month in Guwahti at the National Inter State Championships. No woman before Das has won a gold medal in a World Championship at any level, be it youth, junior or senior. She is also the first Indian, men or women, to have won a gold in a track event at the world level. Running in lane number 4, Das was behind Romania's Andrea Miklos at the final bend but produced a stunning burst during the final stretch to cross the finishing line well ahead of the field. She produced her trademark burst at the final 50m. Miklos took the silver in 52.07 while Taylor Manson of USA was third in 52.28. She won a gold medal in 200 m sprint in 23.25s at Tabor Athletics Meet in Czech Republic, 2019.

Despite the fact that all these sportswomen belong from families with low income, they managed to gather all their confidence and achieve their goals. It was these women who saved the pride of the nation at the premier international sporting event. This is a clear indicator of how games and sports in India have come up to be a gateway to women's empowerment.

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