



GENDERED PERSPECTIVE OF CRICKET CULTURE IN INDIA : A SOCIO-CULTURAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT :

This paper intends to focus on the development of women's cricket in India from the perspective of social history. It locates to unexplored dimension of the history of sport to add a new aspect of existing debates on women, sports and patriarchy. The paper begins by providing an historical background of women's presence in the Cricket ground as a cricketer as well as spectator describing the patriarchal notion of the relationship between sports and Gender. While dealing with the pre-independence period, it contextualises the development of women's cricket in the light of Victorian ideals of sports-gender relationship. In post-independence epoch women exceeded domestic stereotypes and took part male controlled sporting space of Cricket though women's participation in cricket ground was manipulated by gender hierarchy. By mentioning contemporary literature which acknowledges this shift this article would try to analyse how cricket's massive popularity led to the development of women's cricket in India. As women became follower of the game, they condemned out reliability as Cricketer, Cricket Fans, Cricket commentator and Cricket writer also.

KEYWORDS : Sports History, Women, Cricket, Cricket Literature.

INTRODUCTION

Sport as a topic of admirable inquiry has gained scarce interest by professional historians hardly more than a decade ago. In 1970s an increasing number of academics gradually turned their attention to the study of sport as relevant social phenomena. From its start sports history flashy itself after mainstream history. It has only been within the precedent thirty years or so that sports historians have spread out their research to include women. Quite obviously women's sports have involved a study of the gendered character also. History of women's sport has been categorized as contributory history, classified by Gerda Lerner. It includes women's contributions in various fields and it also describes their status in society.¹With talk about women's sport it can be show also that how the playing meadow served as a metaphor for gender values.

SPORTS HISTORY AND WOMEN'S CRICKET;

In India Cricket has always been much more than a sport. In this context we can pertinently refers to Greta L. Cohen. She observed that, sport, like music, is a language that transcends culture.²Pamela J. Creedon stated that, sport even influence our concepts of heroes and heroines.³So, the matter is relevant in the context of Indian cricket, where cricket is a cultural institution, which influences our idiom, fashion and many other things. According to Boria Majumdar, Cricket is a derivative sport, innovatively and imaginatively adapted to suit with Indian socio-cultural

requirements, to fulfil political imperatives and assure economic aspirations.⁴ Cricket is a passion in India, which deal with up national belonging also. Now Cricket is asphere where Indians can demonstrate their strength at the same time it is India's majorcrack at world domination.

Pamela J. Creedon has sketched a model of women's sport wherewomen are empowered to challenge the cultural values correspond to exclusionary sports⁵. In India, sports as cultural idioms popular among women in 1950 onwards after political liberation. Cricket was as well one of the well-liked sports which expand its popularity incredibly speedy among women. Sudeshna Banerjee avowed that women's presence in Indian cricketarena was started around 1950s-1960s in the metropolitan cities, where women, as spectator and commentary listeners,were claiming to the previously undisputedly male privilege of understanding cricket.⁶Now, women's cricket has survived for 250 years in its own small and dedicated way. In fact at this moment there are few, who thinks that cricket is not a fit game for women to play and even fewer has consider it just an attempt to imitate the men.

WOMEN'S CRICKET IN THE GLOBAL CONTEXT;

Women's cricket appeared at least later half of eighteen century in England. First recorded women's cricket match took place in 1745. Starting subsequently, provincial papers had appeared and many of them carried some reference to women's cricket. For example on 26th July 1745, the 'Reading Mercury' published an account of a women's cricket match between Bramley and Hambledon of Surrey, England.⁷In the later part of nineteen century the women's cricket has been more prominent. First women's cricket club, the White Heather was founded in 1887 at Yorkshire, England. Around 1934, first women's cricket test match was played between Australia and England. But actually women's cricket came into real existence from 1958, when International Women's Cricket Council was formed by the Women's Cricket Association of Australia, England, New Zealand and South Africa to co-ordinate women's cricket. Despite all these developments, as Cricket considered to be self-consciously constructed as the gentleman's game, it came to be seen as muscular supremacy and dominated by patriarchy.⁸ Quite natural, status of women in the game was marginal. In fact by claiming equal rights over the sporting space, would have directly challenged male ethos of Cricket.



The 2nd Women's Test match between Australia and England in Sydney in 1935

WOMEN'S CRICKET IN PRE-INDEPENDENCE INDIA;

In the eighteen century, the British brought cricket in India, as it was one of the colony of them, while the game was dominated by men. In India cricket awareness among women increases in the last decade of nineteenth century. At first matches were played between mixed squads.⁹The credit of Indian women's cricket could be claimed by an Australian school teacher, Miss Ann Kelleve. She introduced cricket as a compulsory game among her students of Baker Memorial School at Kottayam in 1913. One of her student Mrs. Aley Varghese mentioned reminiscences of her cricket days in a cricket magazine,

published in 1973.¹⁰ But the efforts of Miss Kelleve did not give a real fruit to the development of women's cricket. Even in 1950, one of the women's cricket match at Delhi has been described by one of the local newspaper as "visible music between the wickets".¹¹ In view of the fact that gender peripheries were somewhat closely determined in view of colonial ethics and domestic femininity. In fact one of the most significant occurrences in Indian society was the appearance of the 'bhadramahila' anticipated by the elite patriarchy.¹² And this stereotype image excluded women from sports field. Women's cricket became popular from both participation and the spectators point of view in 1950s to 1960s in cities like Bombay, Delhi, Madras and Calcutta. From then the game of Cricket evolved its nature in which women have been involved alongside men. In fact it was in the changing socio-cultural milieu where women wanted to be modernised with the male dominated practices even on sporting arena.¹³ So, from the point of view of spectatorship as well participation in the outdoor sports which seems to be a male activity, men-women exchange reflected.

WOMEN'S CRICKET IN POST- INDEPENDENCE;

Independence brings many shift which moves away from colonial period and unearth successive progress in women's cricket. One of the former Indian women's cricket club, Albees was founded in 1969 by an enthusiastic cricket lover Mrs. Aloo Banaji to promote women's cricket. Test cricketers like Vijay Marchant and Polly Umrigar had great support on her. This club produce many important sportspersons like Tina Lalo, cousin of Farokh Engineer and Nutan Gavaskar, sister of Sunil Gavaskar. Although these women's were exceptional, they were cricket-going family members, introduced to the game by fathers and brothers, because it was the main dinner conversation and there was no escape.¹⁴ Another important cricket club, named West Bengal Women's Cricket Association was formed in 1973 by N.C Koley at Kolkata which played an important role to encourage women's cricket. It had achieved huge popularity in Bengal. When the team was going to select its team members for national cricket championship, about 400 girls appeared for the selections, which took place at the Kalighat ground in the Calcutta maidans.¹⁵ In fact by 1970s onwards women emerged as a potential element of Indian Cricket. Souvik Naha shows in his article how women spectators' representation has been changed since 1950s onwards and it indicates changing gender relation in the patriarchal sporting arena.¹⁶ However, women's cricket gained genuine popularity when Women's Cricket Association of India was formed in 1973 by M. K. Sharma, the founder secretary of Women's Cricket Association of India under the Presidentship of Begum Hamida Habibullah. Since then officially women's cricket in India started and it gained huge enthusiasm in all over India.¹⁷ Co-incidentally in this very year first national women's championship held in Poona, with five competed state teams. Soon other tournaments like Rani Jhansi Trophy (1974), inter-university tournament (Rajkot, 1974), sub-junior and junior tournaments were introduced. Due to the initiative of Indian Women's Cricket Association, an Australian under-25 women's cricket team was visited in India in February, 1975. The tour had a great success and gathered crowd up to 25,000.¹⁸ Sudeshna Banerjee shows how women's visibility in the viewer's stands in Indian Cricket grounds threatened patriarchal monopoly of Cricket.¹⁹ There had three test matches held at Poona, Delhi and Calcutta and five zone matches. Players like Shanta Rangaswamy, Diana Eduljee, Sreerupa Bose, Sudha Shah, Ujjala Nikam and Fourieh Khalilee appeared as India's the then upcoming women cricketers. The Australian tour to India was regarded as an important part of international women's year. India's the then prime minister Mrs. Gandhi also encouraged Indian women's cricket team and she gave an hour's audience to the Delhi test match.



The Indian Women's team meet Indira Gandhi ahead of their series against West Indies in 1976.

INTERNATIONAL CRICKET :

Since there was an upsurge in interest on women's cricket the girl's game attracted enormous crowd and it was definitely an optimistic message to other member counties of International Women's Cricket Council. In fact during that time some of the men's club also took initiatives for women's cricket coaching. Sometimes women themselves took effort for separate coaching units for women's cricket²⁰. Since its birth time Women's Cricket Association of India received the membership of International Women's Cricket Council. In 1975 Indian Women's Cricket Association invited New Zealand girls and thus they visited in early 1976. Interestingly Indian Board offered to finance their air fares, which a hostess country has never been able to afford before. But these efforts were regional or domestic levels, however Indian Women Cricketers had played their first international test match in 1976 with West Indies. In October-November 1976, both the team played six test matches at six cities in India. The first test match won by Indian girls in the presence of 25000 spectators²¹. In January 1977 Indian girls team went to New Zealand and Australia to play test matches under the captency of Shanta Rangaswamy. Popular sportswriter Moti Nandy also mention about Shanta Rangaswamy in one of his fiction Kolaboti.²²

WOMEN'S CRICKET WORLD CUP:

History of Women's Cricket should have as a feature in addition with Women's Cricket World Cup. Women's Cricket World Cup had begun in 1973 with its first venue in England. India did not participate in first world cup, but soon women's cricket interest in India had turn out to be greater than before. As Women's Cricket Association of India was a member of International Women's Cricket Council, they hoped to be able to stage the next women's cricket world cup in 1977-78. Apart from India, three nations participated in the second women's cricket world cup – Australia, England and New Zealand. Indian team was captained by Subhangi Kulkarni, who was became the secretary of Indian Women's Cricket Association. Since then women's cricket has been very close to the mainstream cricket. In 2006 Indian Women's Cricket Association has been merged with Board of Control for Cricket in India.



WOMEN SPECTATORSHIP:

Women's participation in the arena of cricket can be investigated from spectatorship point of view also. Leela Majumdar, one of the cricket admirer and later popular children's writer, gives an account of his childhood memories in his autobiography 'Pakdandi'. She claimed that in 1920s women spectators in Calcutta were the girls from the family of Sarada Ranjan Roy and his brothers, who were considered to be the first cricket family in Bengal.²³ But women viewers in the gallery was cut off from the rest of the spectators to sustain the status quo prevailed over women's involvement to the game. Although during 1920s cricket had become a point of conversation among upper class women contrary to the stereotypical depiction of cricket as an predominantly patriarchal domain. From 1950s onwards, women becoming remarkably visible in viewers stand in various cricket grounds of Indian metropolitan cities. One of the contemporary Bengali authors, Sankari Prasad Basu gives a vivid description of women spectators. He sketched women spectator as thoughtless and unaware class of cricket enjoyments.²⁴ Probably Women's rising participation in cricket had challenged traditional gender ethics. There was raise an accusation in galleries that women, who were basically unaware about cricket, should not be there.²⁵ In fact in 1950s and 60s women had to bear with the remarks that women were unjustifiably blocking the tickets for knitting.²⁶ Sudeshna Banerjee argued that, in cricket dominant gender stereotypes are closely related to masculinity, thus women spectatorship of cricket disturbed the patriarchal monopoly of cricket.²⁷ Right from the 1950s printed literature and newspaper editorials raised their voice to control women's space in cricket. From the 1970s growing interest of women's cricket increased the number of women spectators. For occasion, in February, 1975 during the visit of Australian under-25 women's cricket team, there was a crowd of 35,000 at the third test of Eden Gardens, Calcutta. Even in the sixth women's World Cup final in 1997, there was a record crowd of 80,000 spectators at Eden Gardens, Calcutta in which a large number were women²⁸.

WOMEN CRICKET COMMENTATOR

Gender perspective of cricket should also include the discussion of the role of women cricket analyst or television commentator. In fact in the male domain of cricket, women's distinct visibility make certain of obtaining popularity of women's cricket. Women cricket commentators had been traced as early in 1937. The first female cricket commentator of BBC radio Marjorie Pollard broadcasts ball-by-ball coverage on the England vs Australia women's test at the Oval.²⁹ In India, Shanta Rangaswamy, pioneer of women's cricket in India and first Indian Women's Cricket captain was later become a cricket commentator. Moreover former Indian women Cricketers like Sandhya Agarwal, Diana Edulji, Sreerupa Bose and Anjum Chopra played the role of cricket commentator in radio and Television.³⁰ Sreerupa Bose, former captain of Indian Women's Cricket team and national coach, played the role of a cricket analyst both in All India Radio and Doordarshan. Sudeshna Banerjee considered her as one of the chief architects of the spectacular improvement of Women's Cricket in India.³¹ Anjum Chopra too played the role of radio analyst as the Fourth Umpire on Doordarshan. Women entered into field of audio-visual media as cricket commentator with a channel named Set Max. First Ruby Bhatia and then Mandira Bedi had been launched by Set Max as an experiment to widen cricket telecast to a broader world³². According to Sudeshna Banerjee, actually Mandira's role was not just of a cricket expert, but it was an attempt to catch the attention of a larger spectator by using femininity of a women commentator.³³

WOMEN'S CRICKET IN LITERATURE;

In pre-independence period some of the Bengali children magazine wrote about women's cricket very briefly. There were only a few example of women writer like Leela Majumdar, Monika Bandopadhyay and Nilima Gangopadhyay who wrote about cricket solely. But during 1950s and 1960s the notable progress of women's cricket in India has been reflected on contemporary literature as well. The famous cricket writer Sankari Prasad Basu, the most brilliant of cricket writer in Bengali language has observed how the cricket was popular among women's, though he sketches women as an emerging, but unthinking and ignorant categories of cricket enjoyment.³⁴ Besides Basu, there were others like Jayanta Dutta, Pushpen Sarkar, Mukul Dutta who wrote frequently on women in cricket. But the most

enthusiastic writing of women's cricket came from column of Moti Nandy, one of the contemporary Bengali sports writers, who created one of his novel series 'Kalabati', which is based on the story of a women cricketer. In his story he gives an idea about how women's cricket grew up magnetism among girls³⁵.

WOMEN'S CRICKET IN AUDIO-VISUAL;

After 1991, with the opening of Indian Society to global market, cricket became bound up with nationalism, entertainment and culture, even though there is a doubt whether it could be apt in women's cricket. Global media and corporate houses are always ready to give financial support to cricket, albeit largely to men's cricket. Even if women's cricket in India has remarkably improved during a short span of 35-40 years³⁶, there is still lack of corporate attention. It is same in other countries also. For instance, in 2009, the England Women's cricket team played World Cup and T20 championship, but the media attention given to them was least compared with the male game.³⁷ In 13 December, 1997 Sport Star had eleven articles and in 20 December, 1997 it had nine articles during the Women's Cricket World Cup, but none was on women's cricket³⁸. Bollywood, which seems to be the mirror of Indian society did not pay attention to the girls game. Only exception is 'Dil Bole Harippa', even though with the message that women are still stereotypical in field of cricket. In its long history of Bollywood, one documentary-drama, 'Poor Cousins of Million Dollar Babies' had been filmed on Women's cricket team in India by Sunil Yash Kalra.

CONCLUSION :

Prospect of women's cricket looked more promising in the 1990s than at any earlier time. Many cricket barriers have moved out, such as women are now being permitted to play at Lords and are admitted to the Long Room there. Even women are enjoying full membership of the Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC). Although gaining passable public support, sponsorship and media attention sustained to be a problem for women's cricket in the 1990s.³⁹ Now for IPL cricket has achieved global interest not by means of the conventional means – widen outwards from its metropolitan heartland – but all the way through the pursuing of commercial and media attention in India. Cricket has now become more than a game – it has now acquired wealth and global viewer ship. IPL can be considered as the 'Indianization' of international cricket.⁴⁰ But this global media and wealth has denied to covering the women's cricket. They rather allowed entering female co-hosts in cricket programs for increase the TRP rating of their channels⁴¹. At the same time they played an important role to keep alive the pre-existing gender stereotype. In this context we should deal with reference to cheerleaders, who were launched into the Indian Premier League, to add glamour and entertainment to the game. Recently there is some step up in levels of sponsorship and government support, women's cricket still suffered from some negative images.

NOTES:-

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⁴ Majumdar, Boria, Twenty two yards to Freedom, New Delhi, 2004, Pg-1

⁵ Creedon, Women, Media and Sport, Pg-22

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- ²⁵ Basu, Idene Shiter Dupur, Calcutta, 1960, p. 110
- ²⁶ Basu, Ramaniyo Cricket, p-150
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- ³⁰ Outlookindia.com, Magazine, 14th Nov 2005, Interview of Anjum Chopra by G.Rajaraman,
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