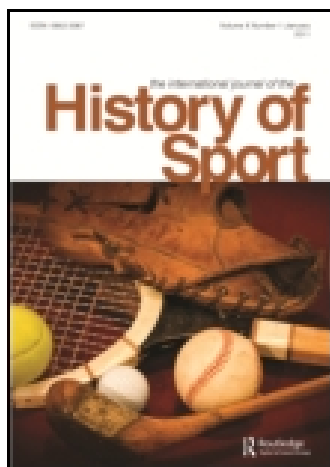


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### Crossing Boundaries and Changing Identities: Empowering South Asian Women through Sport and Physical Activities

Samantha Nanayakkara <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> School of Sciences and Physical Education , University of Canterbury , Dovedale Avenue, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch , 8140 , New Zealand

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## **Crossing Boundaries and Changing Identities: Empowering South Asian Women through Sport and Physical Activities**

Samantha Nanayakkara\*

*School of Sciences and Physical Education, University of Canterbury, Dovedale Avenue, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch 8140, New Zealand*

The participation of women in sport is significant to socio-economic empowerment in any country. Evidence reveal that although South Asian female athletes are capable of winning medals in the Olympics, a very low percentage of the South Asian female population ever participate actively in sport. The status and circumstances to participate in sport are restricted for many female athletes in South Asia. This paper examined the main factors that influence women's sporting participation in South Asian countries. Data were analysed by using documentary analysis method. This paper analysed a combination of concepts addressing women and sport in South Asia in two ways. Firstly, it emphasises the issues and patterns of women's participation in sport in South Asian countries after the independence from the British Empire. Secondly, it highlights the benefits to South Asian societies of women's participation in sport, but argues why South Asian women are trivialised in sports participation. Results revealed the inequalities and discrimination that constrain women from participating in the South Asian sports sector as personal, social and cultural barriers. Possible solutions are provided to reduce these factors to encourage South Asian women's participation in sport. Success and the implications of South Asian governments' interventions on women and sport are also discussed. Results of this study revealed the inequalities and discrimination that constrain women from participating in the South Asian sports sector is continuing.

**Keywords:** empowerment; inequalities; South Asian women; sport participation; trivialisation

### **Traversée de frontières et changement d'identités : responsabiliser les femmes d'Asie du sud par les activités physiques et sportives**

La pratique sportive des femmes est liée à la responsabilité socio-économique dans n'importe quel pays. Des sources révèlent que bien que les athlètes féminines d'Asie du sud soient capables de gagner des médailles aux Jeux olympiques, un pourcentage très bas de la population féminine de cette région n'a jamais pratiqué activement le sport. Le statut et les circonstances pour pratiquer le sport sont limités pour beaucoup d'athlètes féminines en Asie du Sud. Cet article a examiné les facteurs principaux qui influencent la pratique sportive des femmes dans les Pays d'Asie du Sud. Les données ont été analysées en utilisant la méthode d'analyse documentaire. Cet article a analysé une combinaison de concepts s'attachant aux femmes et au sport en Asie du Sud de deux façons. Premièrement, il prend en compte les modèles de pratique sportives des femmes dans les Pays d'Asie du Sud après leur indépendance de l'Empire britannique. Deuxièmement, il

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\*Email: [svj11@pg.canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:svj11@pg.canterbury.ac.nz)

souligne les avantages de la pratique sportive des femmes dans les sociétés du Sud de l'Asie, mais s'interroge sur les raisons pour lesquelles elles y sont marginalisées. Les résultats indiquent que les inégalités et la discrimination qui empêchent les femmes d'intégrer le secteur sportif en Asie du Sud relèvent de barrières personnelles, sociales et culturelles. Des solutions possibles sont proposées pour réduire ces facteurs et encourager la pratique sportive. Le succès et les effets des interventions des gouvernements d'Asie du Sud sur les femmes et le sport sont aussi discutés. Les résultats de cette étude révèlent que les inégalités et la discrimination qui freinent la pratique sportive des femmes se maintiennent toujours en Asie du Sud.

**Mots-clés:** responsabilité; inégalités; femmes d'Asie du Sud; pratique sportive; marginalisation

**Cruzando fronteras y cambiando identidades: el empoderamiento de las mujeres del sudeste asiático a través del deporte y la actividad física**

La participación de las mujeres en el deporte es relevante para el empoderamiento socioeconómico en cualquier país. Está demostrado que demuestran que, a pesar de que las deportistas del sudeste asiático son capaces de ganar medallas en los Juegos Olímpicos, un porcentaje muy bajo de la población femenina del sudeste asiático practica deporte de forma activa y regular. La capacidad y las circunstancias que permiten practicar deporte se encuentran limitadas para muchas mujeres de los países del sudeste asiático. Se utilizó un método de análisis documental para hacer un vaciado de datos. Este artículo analiza una combinación de conceptos relativos a las mujeres y el deporte en los países del sudeste asiático de dos maneras diferentes. En primer lugar, subraya las problemáticas y los patrones de la práctica deportiva femenina en los países del sudeste asiático tras la independencia del Imperio Británico. En segundo lugar, subraya los beneficios que la práctica deportiva femenina puede aportar a las sociedades del sudeste asiático, pero al mismo tiempo argumenta por qué la práctica deportiva femenina en estas sociedades se ha visto trivializada. Los resultados revelan las desigualdades y la discriminación que limitan la participación de las mujeres en el ámbito deportivo del sudeste asiático, como por ejemplo barreras personales, sociales y culturales. Se apuntan posibles soluciones para mitigar estos factores y para estimular la práctica deportiva de las mujeres del sudeste asiático. También se analizan los casos de éxito y la implicación de las políticas gubernamentales en materia de deporte femenino. Este estudio revela que continúan vigentes las desigualdades y la discriminación que limitan la práctica deportiva de las mujeres del sudeste asiático.

**Palabras clave:** empoderamiento; desigualdades; mujeres del sudeste asiático; práctica deportiva; trivialización

**Grenzüberschreitungen und Identitätsänderungen: Empowerment südasiatischer Frauen durch Sport und körperliche Aktivitäten**

Die Sportteilnahme von Frauen ist in jedem Land bedeutsam für ihr sozio-ökonomisches Empowerment. Obwohl südasiatische Athletinnen in der Lage sind, Medaillen bei den Olympischen Spielen zu gewinnen, gibt es Anhaltspunkte dafür, dass ein sehr geringer Prozentsatz der südasiatischen weiblichen Bevölkerung jemals aktiv am Sport teilgenommen hat. Der Status und die Umstände sich am Sport zu beteiligen sind für viele Athletinnen in Südasien beschränkt. Dieser Artikel untersucht die wichtigsten Faktoren, welche die Sportteilnahme der Frauen in südasiatischen Ländern beeinflussen. Die Daten wurden mithilfe der Methode der Dokumentenanalyse ausgewertet. Dieser Artikel analysiert eine Kombination von Konzepten, die Frauen und Sport in Südasien in zweierlei Hinsicht ansprechen. Zunächst betont er die Probleme und Muster der Sportteilnahme von Frauen in den südasiatischen Ländern nach der Unabhängigkeit vom britischen Empire. Zweitens hebt er die Vorteile der Sportteilnahme

von Frauen für die südasiatischen Gesellschaften hervor, argumentiert allerdings, warum südasiatische Frauen in ihrer Sportteilnahme bagatellisiert werden. Die Ergebnisse zeigen die Ungleichheiten und Diskriminierung, die Frauen von der Teilnahme im südasiatischen Sportsektor durch persönliche, soziale und kulturelle Barrieren abhalten. Mögliche Lösungen werden angeboten, um diese Faktoren zu reduzieren und damit die Sportteilnahme südasiatischer Frauen zu fördern. Erfolg und die Auswirkungen von Eingriffen der südasiatischen Regierungen auf Frauen und Sport werden ebenfalls diskutiert. Die Ergebnisse dieser Studie zeigen die Ungleichheiten und Diskriminierung auf, die Frauen von der Teilnahme im südasiatischen Sportsektor weiterhin abhalten.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Empowerment; Ungleichheiten; südasiatische Frauen; Sportteilnahme; Verharmlosung

通过参与体育运动赋予南亚国家女性权利: 跨越边界线, 改变身份

不管在哪个国家, 女性参与体育运动对于获得社会经济权利起着至关重要的作用。有证据显示, 虽然南亚国家的女性运动员有能力在奥运会上夺得金牌, 但南亚国家中的女性能积极地参与体育运动的人口占总人口中的比例却非常低。对于南亚国家很多女性运动员来说, 参与体育运动受到社会地位和各种情况的限制。本文采用文献分析法, 调查和分析了南亚国家影响女性参加体育运动的诸多因素。本文的分析结合一些概念, 从两方面讨论了南亚国家女性与体育运动的关系问题。首先, 文章重点强调了南亚国家从大英帝国独立后, 女性参与体育运动的问题和参与类型。然后, 突出强调了南亚国家女性参与体育运动带给她们的益处, 但同时也指出了南亚国家女性参与体育运动被轻视的原因。结果显示, 限制南亚国家女性参与体育运动的主要原因是人际间的、社会的、文化的不平等和种族歧视。本研究还提供了一些可行性解决方案以减少这些因素的出现, 鼓励南亚国家女性参与各项体育运动。此外, 文章还讨论了南亚国家政府部门成功地干预和调解卷入女性和体育运动关系的问题。但此项研究结果表明, 限制南亚国家女性参与体育运动的不平等和遭受歧视现象仍在继续。

关键词: 赋予权利, 不平等, 南亚国家女性, 参与体育运动, 轻视

## Introduction

Sport is the most universal representation of a modern global popular culture and sport provides opportunities for women to challenge the masculine world.<sup>1</sup> The changing nature of global political circumstances has helped to extend women's liberation all over the world and has been successfully confronted traditional beliefs about their physical and psychological abilities.<sup>2</sup> As a result, women have been able to enter the world of competitive physical activities, which previously have been largely considered as masculine. Pointing a liberalist feministic view, Hong argues that, 'the body in sport and the female body in particular is a location for debate about the changing nature of ideology, power, social structures and cultural systems'.<sup>3</sup> However, the gender order of a society and the gender equality balance are closely intertwined with the structure of sport and the conditions of playing sport in different countries.<sup>4</sup> Cultural and gendered patterns of sport participation reflect underlying inequalities in access to community opportunities and infrastructure.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, participation of women in sport is significant for socio, cultural and economic empowerment in any country.

The region of South Asia comprises the states of India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bhutan, Afghanistan, the Maldives, Bangladesh and Nepal.<sup>6</sup> Women of these South Asian countries all have similar problems and severe influences: grinding poverty,

malnutrition, internal displacement, armed conflicts, racial attitudes and cultural misinterpretation, gender bias and lack of awareness. These issues have negative impacts on their socialisation in post modernity.<sup>7</sup> Apparently gender, cultured norms and religion have a very strong hold on the perception of sporting events and their suitability in South Asia.<sup>8</sup> Evidences reveal that although some South Asian female athletes are capable of winning medals in the Olympics,<sup>9</sup> a very low percentage of the South Asian female population even participate in sport. Thus, because of this deprivation, it is essential to take steps to improve the balance of male/female opportunities in South Asian sports an effective means of improving their socioeconomic status.

Researchers argue that many of the current issues and recent debates on the subject of South Asian women and sport are not fairly addressed.<sup>10</sup> While being central to a critical feminist project and/or engaged with contemporary post structuralist debates in the main, research about black and Asian women and sport remain ethnocentric.<sup>11</sup> Many researchers view sport through a 'gender lens' of white women's experiences, and black women remain unknown and unheralded.<sup>12</sup> The appropriateness of the position that South Asian women hold on the sporting and leisure experiences is challenged by the research made by non-South Asian academics.<sup>13</sup> The effect of such behaviour is to pathologise South Asian culture, universalise South Asian women and fail to provide an adequate acknowledgement of the complex relationships between race, ethnicity, gender and class.<sup>14</sup> It is important to identify the differences between women of differing cultures, through an exploratory investigation into the role of sport in the lives of some South Asian and Afro-Caribbean women, and how racism impinges on their experiences.<sup>15</sup> There is an assumption that a perceived absence from sport exists because of cultural and family constraints. One of the dominant stereotypes is that South Asian women are passive and subordinate, especially within the context of family.<sup>16</sup> However, women and sport in South Asia is one of the most under researched areas of social enquiry, with only a handful of work available.<sup>17</sup>

The purpose of this study is to provide a critical sociological interpretation of South Asian women's participation in sport. The structure of this study is in three folds. Firstly, it examines the patterns and issues relating to women's participation in sport in South Asia and the benefits accruing from this participation for South Asian societies. Secondly, it inquires the reasons South Asian females' sport participation is low at national and international level competitions. Finally, it identifies ways in which sport can become more inclusive of South Asian females.

This study was based on qualitative methods and documentary analysis. Core principles of Bronfenbrenner's 'social ecological' theory<sup>18</sup> and Stuart Mill's 'Liberal Feminist' theory<sup>19</sup> were employed to analyse the nature of South Asian women's participation in sport. McLaren and Hawe<sup>20</sup> emphasise that an ecological perspective encompasses the physical, social, cultural and historical aspects of the environment and takes into consideration the attributes and behaviours of the persons within that environment. Therefore, the social ecological theory propounded by Bronfenbrenner was useful to understand the patterns of South Asian women's sport participation, because it enabled the potential constraints that come from many influences including personal, societal and historical focused on South Asian women that could impact negatively or positively on their sport participation.

The main idea of liberal feminism emphasises the equal rights of men and women.<sup>21</sup> Liberal feminist perspective encompasses gender equality in the public



and private sphere and takes into consideration equal access to education, pay, and working conditions.<sup>22</sup> Liberal feminists believe individuals should be treated in accordance with their talents and strengths regardless of their gender. Liberal feminists also believe that women would achieve better equality if they were more visible in the current social structure and that changes in equal nature opportunities will end patriarchy.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, liberal feminist theory is useful to understand South Asian women's sport participation patterns because it provides a means to identify the nature of the past and present status in women's sport development, women's participation opportunities in sport, and male domination and prevailing gender ideology in sport in South Asia. Liberal feminist theory will also be useful to understand how South Asian women adapt to secular modernity in sport.

### The Patterns and Issues Relating to Women's Participation in Sports in South Asia

The formative roots of South Asian women participating in sports extend as far back as the Indus Valley civilisation (3250–600 BC) and evidence has revealed that women participated in dancing and swimming in that period.<sup>24</sup> During the Vedic period, women showed their physical strength and ability to defend themselves by receiving military training and paying attention to physical culture in the same way as men.<sup>25</sup> Sport has been accepted as an integral part of the Indian culture for both men and women since ancient times; for instance, Maha Bharatha (1000–800 BC) gives special attention to physical fitness and recounts that on the banks of the Yamuna river, Lord Krishna used to play ball games with maidens.<sup>26</sup> Maha Bharatha also states that maidens were engaged in water games in the river Yamuna. Ramayana states that in the early Hindu period (600–320 BC) ball games were popular among Indian women.<sup>27</sup> Archery was a popular game among Indian women during the later Hindu period (320–1200 AD) and girls have engaged in stick aerobics during this period.<sup>28</sup> It should be noted that during the ancient time, countries such as Pakistan and Bangladesh were divisions of Bengal (India).

Sri Lanka, a country with a strong Indian influence on religion, culture and politics, also provides archaeological evidence of women participating in sport since historical periods. Ancient Sri Lankan literatures support this evidence from as far back as 12 and 13 BC; for instance, *Sasandawatha*<sup>29</sup> states '*Vamiyan pahala penda nuba nagena . . .*' (When the ball, struck by the maidens rises to the sky). Also *Thisara Vivvranaya*, includes '*Lali kelana lada sonda liya . . .*' (Fair maidens that sport with playing balls with their open tender palms ushering the colour of very new lotuses).<sup>30</sup> This source also indicates that South Asian females in 12 and 13 BC spent their leisure time with dance and folk games, determined to stay active.

The obliteration of the Medieval Empires and the European colonialism strongly impacted on South Asian cultural changes including women's involvement in sport.<sup>31</sup> This would suggest that the involvement in practice of South Asian women's sport in ancient times was confined to mainly as leisure activities, which with traditional games have been transformed into western sport initiatives in the post-modern societies due to the western cultural influences. The changing nature of South Asian women's sport participation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in contemporary South Asian societies has been mainly linked with the changes of the economical, social and political status of South Asian women. The analyses of the South Asian women's insights into the influences of gender and culture on these

changes in sport participation are intertwined with three major developments namely:

- (1) Women's involvement in political movements
- (2) Education reforms
- (3) Government policies

The following considers each of these developments in turn.

### ***Women's Involvement in Political Movements***

The changing nature of South Asian women's gender culture was strongly combined with women's movement in politics. The European (Portuguese, Dutch, French and British) colonial imperialism was the common predicament for many South Asian countries during sixteenth to twenty-first centuries.<sup>32</sup> Countries such as India (Pakistan and Bangladesh were divisions of India during the colonial period) Sri Lanka, Nepal and Maldives were under colonial imperialism during and after the Second World War.<sup>33</sup> As a result, People of South Asian countries were struggling for liberation against British imperialism over many years. Consequently, women supported and actively participated in these independence movements.<sup>34</sup>

Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi, Sarojini Naidoo, Vijayalakshmi Pandith, Suchetra Kriplani were women leaders in the struggle for freedom in India in the early 1900s.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, Begum Jahanara Shah Nawaz played a major role in the All-India Muslim Ladies conference and when Pakistan was created in 1947, became a member of the Pakistan constituent assembly. Fatima Jinnah and Begam Rana were the other Muslim female icons of the All-India Muslim league in the early 1900s.<sup>36</sup> Doreen Wickramasinghe became a leading female activist in the '*Sooriya Mal movement*' which was created in 1933 as a new anti-imperialist and anti-war movement in Sri Lanka.<sup>37</sup> Sri Lankan women were actively engaged in politics via women's organisations such as the Tamil Women's Union (1919), the *Mallika Kulagana Samithiya* (1925) and the *Lanka Mahila Samithi*. Vivien Gunawardane and Selina Perera were the pioneers of Sri Lankan women's activism in politics.<sup>38</sup> Accounts of the battle of *Nalapani* in Nepal in 1814 provide evidence of Nepali women's engagement in the liberation struggle against British imperialism.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, Bangladeshi women also had participated in the anti-British political movement in the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>40</sup> The outcomes resulting from these movements seeking autonomy and democracy helped to achieve women's rights, mainly the right of women to vote in India and Sri Lanka before independence (in early 1920s) followed by Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Maldives after their independence.<sup>41</sup> This situation directly influenced the raising of the social status of South Asian women and is directly related to the subsequent greater freedom in the lives of South Asian women.

In the late 1940s, India and Sri Lanka were granted independence from the British Monarchy. Women also have played a major role in the liberation struggles of Pakistan and Bangladesh.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, in 1948 the Nepal Women Association was formed with the purpose of raising social and political awareness among Nepali women and increasing women's welfare.<sup>43</sup> In the mid 1960s Maldives became independent from the British. All these South Asian countries enthusiastically



embraced the task of individual nation building. Due to the economic changes in South Asian countries in the post-independence era, there were new employment opportunities created at all levels and these became available to both men and women. Working women impacted on changing the perception of women's status of these countries and working women continued struggles demanding further improvement in their basic economic and social rights.<sup>44</sup>

Women involved in South Asian politics in the post-independence era enormously helped to change the role of gender in South Asia.<sup>45</sup> In 1961 Sirimavo Bandaranayake in Sri Lanka became the world first female prime minister followed by Indira Gandhi (India), Benazir Bhutto (Pakistan), Sheikh Hasina and Begam Kalida Zia (Bangladesh), Chandrika Bandaranayake Kumaratunga (Sri Lanka). These political leaders became the role models in their societies and immensely helped to empower and change the status of women in South Asia. These efforts promoted South Asian women's respect and dignity, and helped gain liberation from the prevailing male dominant society.

Even though the level of gender equality in South Asian countries is still considerably less than that achieved by western women in the post modernised society,<sup>46</sup> South Asian women have made rapid strides in most aspects of the contemporary life such as music, dance and sport. In fact, these are all much more accessible than during the pre-independence era. The social and political changes (liberalism) were established during the 1950s (post-independence era) in the South Asian region and contributed to increased female participation in athletics in many countries. For example, after Indian independence from the British Empire had been achieved, the social limits on women's participation in sports began to disappear and young girls in particular were able to compete in almost any sport.<sup>47</sup> Sri Lankan women's participation in sports also has significantly increased during the Sri Lankan post-independence era since the late 1940s.<sup>48</sup>

### ***Education Reforms***

Differences in lifestyles and livelihoods in rural and urban settings, varied cultures and personal preference have dictated the degree of South Asian women's involvement in sport and physical exercise. Prior to 1948 only a handful of Indian, Nepali, and Sri Lankan women had the opportunity to compete in western sports such as basketball, netball, football, tennis and hockey. These sports were inherited from western imperial time.<sup>49</sup> In India, women from the English and Anglo-Indian communities actively participated in field sports like cricket and soccer in the institutions and clubs of Bengal from the late 1920s.<sup>50</sup> It is evident that women's participation in western sports in the early 1900s was chiefly centred within the South Asian education system.<sup>51</sup> Most of the urban schools and those administered by either missionaries or other educators with exclusively western influence, included physical education, games, dancing and other leisure activities in their curricula.<sup>52</sup> Girls outside the missionary schools, even in the urban areas were either not exposed to or did not participate in these western sports. Physical education or sport was not an important or compulsory subject in non-mission schools. However, urban girls in non-mission schools and rural girls have been engaged in traditional sport such as Archery, Kabbadi, stick aerobics, and Aquatic sports as leisure activities during their festival seasons such as New Year and harvesting celebrations since the pre-independence era.

The International Olympic Committee was formed in 1894 and became the governing body for the world Olympic sport competitions.<sup>53</sup> Consequently, in 1927, the Olympic Association was formed in India followed by Sri Lanka in 1937, Pakistan in 1948, Nepal in 1962, Bangladesh in 1979, Bhutan in 1983 and Maldives in 1985. These associations provided much greater opportunities for the South Asian men and women to participate and benefit from involvement in international sport competitions.<sup>54</sup> Accordingly, women who participated in western sports in their mission schools were able to compete at international level. Unfortunately, urban non-missionary school girls and rural girls who were unfamiliar with western sports were not capable of taking part in any international competition and were underrepresented in global sport competitions. Thus, a huge discrepancy was developed between the South Asian missionary and rural and urban non-missionary educated females who participated in western sport and non-educated females who were not exposed to or provided with similar opportunities.

To remedy the above mentioned imbalances in opportunities for all women to participate in sport, both the Indian and Sri Lankan governments have implemented sport and educational legislations which have since been regaining control over the sport and education systems. Thereby governments have provided a societal encouragement for urban and rural women's participation in sports through establishment of government schools with improved sporting facilities. As a consequence, there have been large improvements in women's sport participation, particularly amongst rural women and disadvantaged urban women.<sup>55</sup>

On the other hand, there was a dramatic societal demand for sport since, its ability of nation building as soon after the Imperialism. According to Mangan,

in the post-imperial period, essentially after the Second World War, as the political, national and personal confidence of the European in Asia was hugely reduced, with the rise of nationalism came sport for national image, prestige and status<sup>56</sup>

It seems that South Asians were encouraged and embraced to participate in world sporting competitions, because it enabled them (South Asians) to prove their strength and prestige to the rest of the world by winning a world sport competition. Consequently, South Asian governments were required to increase the supplements to fulfil the demand for sport in the society.

Due to the dramatic transformation in economic and social development in South Asian countries during the post-independence era, there has been a huge change in attitudes in many cultures. Consequently, many South Asian women were confident within themselves regarding their culture and religion and participate in sport. Accordingly, the western sports which were originally exclusive to women from high socioeconomic backgrounds were made available to the middle and working classes. As a result, the middle and working class women embraced in western sport such as netball, volleyball and track and field events and these events have become very popular among all of them.<sup>57</sup> This dissemination of opportunities throughout the entire education system empowered women through sports, in particular of those from rural and urban disadvantaged backgrounds. As a result of this new approach to education, there was an increased awareness and acceptance of holistic school systems which incorporated a physical education (PE) curriculum. Thus, PE curriculum for all students regardless of gender often included compulsory drills and games conducted at an allocated during the school day time even in the remotest areas. However, it must be noted that the number of South Asian women

participating in traditional sports has plummeted since the growth in participation of western sport.<sup>58</sup>

Reforms such as the 1947 Education Act in Sri Lanka, and the University Education Commission (1948–1949), and Secondary Education Commission (1952–1953), in India, helped to reshape women's sporting participation.<sup>59</sup> Under these reforms the Ministries of Education in India and in Sri Lanka took control over the private schools. This resulted in a redistribution of federal money among rural schools with consequential commitment to educational infrastructure investment and development in rural areas. Following those educational developments, teacher training colleges were established in South Asia in the early part of the twentieth century and by 1950s both male and female physical education teachers were being specially trained. In particular India was at the forefront of teacher training in South Asia and exported Physical Education teacher training programmes to other South Asian countries like Sri Lanka. For instance, Lakshmibai National College of physical Education (1957) and Saidapet (Madras) Teacher Training College vigorously promoted games and athletics for both girls and boys in government and private schools in India and other South Asian countries such as Sri Lanka. Other activities like Girl Guides and Boy Scout movements and Young Men Christian Association (YMCA) encouraged both physical activity and community service. Certain western sports such as netball, football and basketball were included in the list of school sports festivals. Therefore, girls particularly of school pupil age had ample opportunity to participate in drill squads, dance troupes, Volleyball, Basketball, Netball, Hockey, Badminton, Tennis and Table Tennis. As a result, a significant increase was observed in school girls' participation in sports all over the country. The outcome was an inclusive nationwide of opportunity to participate in sport particularly by rural women.

As a result of the education reforms in Sri Lanka in 1972, a practical component of Health and Physical Education was included in NCGE exams, thus boosting women's participation in Sri Lankan sport competitions, particularly in athletics.<sup>60</sup> Around 1980, barriers for females to participate in sports in rural areas were further reduced because of the decentralisation of government funding for sports outside the capital, Colombo, by the establishment of school sports clubs and Colleges of Education.<sup>61</sup> This opened doors for females living in rural areas and encouraged them to participate in sports that were previously mainly restricted to major cities. Similarly, urban women were also encouraged to take part in sporting activities throughout the programmes delivered by nationwide school sport clubs. This provided opportunities to identify and develop the sporting talents of rural participants. For example, athlete Sriyani Dhammika Manike of *Manavila Upananda Vidyalaya* (a rural school) who won gold and bronze medals in the 3000 m, and 1500 m, at the Fourth South Asian Sports Competition while urban athlete Tanya Vanheer of Methodist College, Colombo won the bronze medal in the 200 m.<sup>62</sup>

The up-grading of the School Athletic Games in Sri Lanka laid the foundation for women to participate in sports at an international level. Susanthika Jayasinghe, the female Olympic Bronze medallist in athletics who gained the Olympic silver after US athlete Marian Jones was disqualified for doping at the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games, is an example of such a female athlete whose talents were identified through the School Athletic Games scheme. This was the most prestigious award in the Sri Lankan sporting arena that a female could have achieved. Damayanthi Darsha is another female athlete who developed skills through the School Athletic Games. She

won a bronze medal in 1994 and two gold medals in 1998, at the Asian games, and a bronze medal at the Grand Prix Athletic Meet in 1999. Darsha gained the Duncan White award in 1999, the highest ranked female to receive the presidential sport award that is presented to any athlete in Sri Lanka.

### **Government Policies**

Not only the education reforms, but also newly created sport policies have promoted sport among women in South Asia. The All India Council of Sport that was established in 1954, for instance, had a positive impact on the athletes and coaching bodies, making it easier for their way to participate at international level.<sup>63</sup> These reforms led to distinguished achievements at international level. For instance, the Indian athlete, Stephanie D' Souza won gold in 4 m × 100 m relay in 1954, and bronze in the 1958 Asian Games, and represented India in the first International Women's hockey Tournament in London in 1953. Meena Parande, the first Maharashtrian lady to represent India in a World Table tennis Championship twice in London in 1954 and in Japan in 1956, was ranked number three in Asia in 1954.

The nature of women and sport in India was reshaped immensely by the Sports Authority of India organising the National Sport Festival for Women in 1975. The Netaji Subhas National Institute of Sports in *Patiala*, established in 1975, encouraged scientific research as a foundation for sports training methods.<sup>64</sup> Consequently, women had the opportunity to train in this institution. India established the *Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna* award, the *Arjuna* award and the *Droncharya* award to sports icons in India, which awakened a heighten sense of nationalism, motivation and determination in male and female athletes to compete at the international level.<sup>65</sup> The most significant step taken to enhance women's sport in India was the establishment of the Ministry of Sport in 1982. India decentralised the sport management system and promoted sport in rural areas including promoting women's sport as the top priority of the sporting agenda. As a result, Indian female athletes such as Geeta Zutshi (athletics) P.T. Usha (athletics) Ashwini Nachappa (athletics), Devasia Valasamma (athletics), Kunjavani Devi (weight lifting), Karnam Malleshwari (weight lifting), Diana Edulji (cricket), Sania Mizra (tennis), the Indian Women's Cricket Team, and Saina Nehwal (badminton) were all able to triumph in international sporting competitions.

In 1962, the Sri Lankan athlete, Nirmala Dissanayake who was from a rural background was the first woman in Sri Lanka to record victory in an international sporting competition, winning the bronze medal for the 400 m race in the 1962 Asian games in Jakarta. Ranjanie Jayasuriya, another Sri Lankan athlete, also won a silver medal for Tennis (singles) in the same competition.<sup>66</sup> The establishment of the Sri Lankan Ministry of Sports in 1970 has opened the doors to athletes including women to compete at international competitions much greater than the past.

In the 1980s and the 1990s, the introduction of projects like the University Games, *Mahaweli* Games<sup>67</sup> and Youth Games as well as the up-grading of School Athletic Games, were important turning points in Sri Lankan sports history. These provided females with the opportunity to excel in athletics.<sup>68</sup> The Ministry of *Mahaweli* development in Sri Lanka implemented '*Mahaweli* Games' to enhance the social status of residents of the '*Mahaweli*' Project. This opened doors for *Mahaweli* residents to improve their sporting abilities. Sriyani Kulawansa, a hurdler, was a gold medallist in the 1991 South Asian Games; was a bronze medallist in the 1998

Asian Athletic Games and a silver medallist at the Commonwealth Games. She also participated at an international level in Barcelona 1992, Sydney 2000, and at the 2004 Athens Olympic Games. This is a good example of a female athlete whose talents were identified through the 'Mahaweli Games' Scheme.<sup>69</sup>

During the early years of the post independent period (until 1960s) there were no records of female athletes participating in sport in other South Asian countries, i.e. Pakistan, Maldives, Nepal and Afghanistan. Muslim women in particular in South Asian countries were confined to domestic work.<sup>70</sup> However, there had been various attempts at social and political reforms aimed at improving Muslim women's status in South Asian countries. In particular the Muslim personal law of *Sharia* (1948) and the Charter of Women's Rights (1956 constitution) in Pakistan endorsed government legislations which was focused on improving women's rights.<sup>71</sup> These reforms have helped strengthen the Pakistani women's movement. However, as observed in other Muslim dominated countries the participation of Pakistani women in sport is still limited because of religious observances.

In 1962, the Pakistan board of Sports was established to improve sporting achievements among men. However, similar women focused institution namely, the Pakistan Women's Action Forum was established in 1981. In 1986 this forum discussed the possible opportunities for Pakistani females to compete in international sports. This forum also defined the mandatory dress codes required for women to participate.<sup>72</sup> This situation has resulted in an increase in the number of female sports participants in Pakistan. For instance; Rubab Raza became the first female swimmer to represent Pakistan in the 2004 and 2008 Olympics. In addition, 22-year-old Naseem Hamid, who was born and raised in the slums of *Korangi* in Pakistan, of very impoverished parents, became South Asia's fastest women by winning the 100 m race in the South Asian Games 2009. She is the first Pakistani female athlete to win this athletic event. Sara Nasir also returned to Pakistan with gold in karate in the same competition.<sup>73</sup> A Pakistani women's Cricket team competing in the 2009 world cup, was the first group of women in the history of Pakistani women's sport to take part in an international Cricket tournament. Anmar Habib was the first women skier to represent Pakistan at 2010 winter Olympics.

Development of sports in a country is a reflection of its political stability.<sup>74</sup> In Afghanistan the suppression over Taliban activities has positively influenced and changed the nature of women's sport participation in that country. During the time of the Taliban, women were not treated equally as men and possessed very few personal rights. The opportunity for the men and women to participate in sporting activities together in the Afghan society was non-existent.<sup>75</sup> The Taliban had banned women's sport competitions and *Kabul Sports Stadium* was used for public executions. Afghan female athletes, Fereha Rezaie and Robina Muqimyar, were exiled from their motherland because of the death threats from the Taliban for participating in the 2004 Olympics. However, since the displaced of the Taliban there has been a steadily increasing number of women in Afghanistan who are involved in sporting activities at an international level.<sup>76</sup> For the first time in their sporting history, the Afghan women's soccer team gained international experience by playing against the Pakistani team in 2007. Another significant move was the establishment of a body building club for women in 2007 in the *Parwan* province.<sup>77</sup>

The majority of women in Bangladesh are Muslims and like many other Muslim women, they have historically been restricted to duties within the home. However, more recently Bangladeshi women are regularly active in sports such as netball,



volley ball, soccer, swimming and athletics. One of the top priorities of the government's sport policy was to encourage female participation at all levels of games and sports.<sup>78</sup> To achieve this goal, the Bangladeshi government established the Women's Sport Federation in 2000. Subsequently, Ferdows Ara Khanam won the International Olympic Committee's Asian Women's Trophy in 2004.

To date, the most significant achievement in the history of Bangladeshi women and sport observed in the South Asian Games in 2009 where Syeda Sadia Sultana, Sharmin Akhter Ratna and Tripti Datta (Shooters) Sharmin Farjana Rumi, Sharmin Akhter (taekwondo), Munni Khanom, U. Chinu Marma, Jaw U. Pru (karate), and Iti Islam (wushu), each won recognition in achieving gold medals. The Bangladeshi women's cricket team has participated in many international tournaments. However, evidence reveal that radical Muslim threats are responsible for deepening pessimism among Bangladeshi women participating in sport. The Bangladeshi government stopped the women's swimming competition in 2004 in response to the complaints of an improper dress code. Similarly the first soccer tournament in 2007 was cancelled in response to protests from Islamic groups.<sup>79</sup>

Even though radical Muslim threats spread a growing pessimistic cloud over the participation of South Asian Muslim women in sport, there has been an inauguration of a special international sporting competition named 'Women's Islamic Games'<sup>80</sup> to promote Muslim women's sport participation. This is a particularly significant opportunity for the South Asian Muslim women to take part in sport. Unfortunately, the overall situation for Muslim women to achieve better social mobility is still remaining very limited in South Asia. However, encouragement for greater acceptance of women in international sporting events is engendered from the recent establishment of the South Asian Games<sup>81</sup> by the Olympic Council of Asia. This is an arena for competition between the countries of South Asia with the hope that the positive influence of the larger group will prevail thus, providing greater opportunities for women generally to participate in sport.

### **The Benefits of Women's Sport Participation to South Asian Societies**

According to Hagreaves 'the history of women's sports show that patriarchal relations on their own do not explain women's subordination. Female sports are integral to the totality of relations of cultural power'.<sup>82</sup> This proves in the early history of the Olympic Games, women were not permitted to participate.<sup>83</sup> Today, however, participation in Olympic sports by females has grown universally.<sup>84</sup> Despite this increase, the global participation of women in sport differs. For instance, European females with middle socioeconomic status often receive the required support from their families and communities to participate in sports, develop skills, aim for excellence and embrace physical fitness.<sup>85</sup> However, the opposite is true for women in developing countries where they are generally discouraged and virtually excluded from participating in any sporting activity. This is mostly due to poverty, famine, political status and religious attitudes.<sup>86</sup>

Scientific evidence shows that sports and exercise are beneficial for the growth and development of young girls; it can have psychosocial, physical, behavioural and emotional benefits for females.<sup>87</sup> Women who are active in sports as girls feel greater confidence and pride in their physical and social well-being than do women who are sedentary during their youth.<sup>88</sup> Commensurate with these findings has been a worldwide increase in the demand for women's sport.



There has been some increase in the participation of women involved in various sporting disciplines and a number of medals have been won by South Asian women in international competitions since mid 1940s, after independence from the British Empire.<sup>89</sup> Due to globalisation, the number of women taking part in the Olympics and other mega mixed-sex sporting events is currently on the rise in South Asian countries. Recently, there has been a steady growth in the number of sporting events in South Asia particularly for women, which has enabled these events to be promoted to the status of world competitions and accepted into the program of the Olympic Games. Table 1 demonstrates the growth of South Asian women’s Olympic Games participation comparing to other Asian women.

It can be seen that there was a considerable overall growth for South Asian women participating in the Olympic Games from 1996 to 2008.

Notwithstanding this improvement, it is evident that in order for women’s participation in sports to increase in South Asia major changes in underlying attitudes and expectations need to be made. Despite the fact that South Asian female athletes have shown themselves capable of winning medals in the Olympics, only a very low percentage of these women take part in sports. Furthermore, some female athletes have a negative perception of their participation in sport, due to their social status and living conditions. Globally, women’s sports at every competing level attract large number of spectators; however, in South Asia, women still do not have the same opportunities and support structures for competing on a global scale compared to women elsewhere. Therefore, South Asian women’s participation in international competitions remains fettered and restricted.

**Reasons for the Current Trivialisation of South Asian Women’s Sports, despite their Contribution to Sports at an International Level**

There are formidable barriers for South Asian women participating in sport and these are inextricably intertwined with determinants of cultural, social, economic and political components. Each of these components will be considered in turn.

***Cultural Barriers***

Some religions have directly impacted on patriarchy; however there is no evidence been found to support the notion that all religions in South Asia have impacted the patriarchy. For example, cultures which have a strong Islamic ethos in Pakistan,

Table 1. The growth of Asian women participation in the Olympic Games from 1996–2008 (IOC, 2010).

Asian regions	Number of women participants 1996	Number of women participants 2008	Percentage increase in 2008 participation, relative to 1996 (%)
Central Asia	36	96	267
South Asia	20	38	190
South-East Asia	48	79	164
West Asia	5	20	400
East Asia	462	675	146
Total	571	908	159

Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and the Maldives, have power over females in regards to their public appearance.<sup>90</sup> According to Hindu traditions in India, Nepal and Sri Lanka, culture encourages women to be entirely subservient to men.<sup>91</sup> Conversely, Buddhism in Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Nepal promotes women's recognition and equality in society.<sup>92</sup> Therefore, religion as a whole is not the common determinant in unequal power relations between men and women in South Asia.

However, as well as these distinctive religion's cultural identities, there are similar cultural identities within South Asian countries. Due to the common cultural attitudes and barriers, most South Asian female athletes have not had the opportunity to participate in sport. For example, most South Asian cultures (Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim) imposed religious observances, and Western sports dress codes (short and tight) were not allowed because they did not maintain women's dignity and pride. Consequently, many female athletes were not encouraged to participate in sport. Further to this, many South Asian countries such as Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan and Nepal, regard the virginity of a girl as very important until she gets married and most of the families are very keen for their daughters to retain this respect. A lack of awareness of sports injuries and the erroneous view that physical activity affects virginity has meant that many families forbid their daughters' participation in sports.

There are also strong similarities in harmful traditional and cultural practices between South Asian countries on female autonomy.<sup>93</sup> As the prominent culture in the subcontinent, traditional Indian Hindu practice has spread to its neighbouring countries hindering female autonomy. Consequently, harmful traditional and cultural practices such as preference for sons, child marriage, forced marriage, dowry and the castes system in most of the South Asian societies inevitably led to discrimination against women.<sup>94</sup> Accordingly, males are valued as economic assets and receive preferential treatment in South Asian society, whereas females are regarded as liabilities, get less access to health and education, and even to essential nutrients.<sup>95</sup> These harmful traditional and cultural practices in South Asia prevent female access to sport participation.

### ***Social Barriers***

As sports are subjugated to cultural and social traditions, religion, and marriage, greater emphasis is given to the wisdom and viewpoint of elders. Most South Asian women therefore have not had the opportunity to have a sporting career after their marriage.<sup>96</sup> Although men are still involved in sports even after marriage, females are required to look after their children and keep house. Few men have allowed their wives to engage in sport and most women have to confront barriers to engage and pursue sport actively. Conversely, western women are generally free to continue their sporting career even after their marriage and child birth. Therefore, western women are able to practice sport or physical activity frequently.

As South Asian countries are geographically diverse, most of the female sport participants are based as teams in their village or work place. One of the major problems caused by this isolation is that most of these sport teams are not under the patronage of the major sport clubs. Therefore, those with genuine sport talents often remain unidentified by the relevant selection committees. Poor communication between the sport governing committees and local sport clubs induce negative motivational aspirations among participants.

Lack of opportunities for coaching women in sports, and few facilities available for the training of physical education teachers remain as major problems in extending the encouragement of South Asian women in sports. A further barrier exists because the administration of most of the current sports federations are predominantly managed by males. Therefore, most of the decisions made by these sports federations are male oriented. Even though many powerful female prime ministers have held office in South Asia, women's participation and opportunities available for sports leadership are still very rare. This reflects the continuing deep-seated gender imbalance of power in South Asia.

It is very important to understand the major role the media plays in promoting women's sport. In South Asia the problem is great because of a lack of female sport media personnel. This discourages female sport participants as there is no person to champion their cause. The commentators at most of the female sport events are males and this is unfair and unbalanced. Females have an equal right to contribute to sport by being the commentators. However, the rise of Asian feminism and the women's movement has tended towards political liberation and gender equity.<sup>97</sup>

### ***Political Barriers***

The impact of internal and external military conflicts over the past several decades has had a direct negative and destabilising influence on the development of sports in South Asia. These conflicts, such as the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, the Kashmir problem in India and Pakistan, Afghan Taliban problems, and the Mao guerrilla problems in Nepal, have destroyed the previously secure social environments that existed in these countries. South Asians have thus been deprived of the chance to live in harmony. Mothers lost their husbands and sons; they survived with fear. Many people have been forced to emigrate and seek foreign refuge. This has resulted in many elite sport personnel being pressurised into leaving their country of origin and consequently, a 'muscle drain' for South Asia. Of those prominent sport persons who stayed many were left exhausted emotionally and living with stress. This situation has led to growing pessimism in parents' minds, a restriction on children participating in sports and the exclusion of women's involvement in sports due to personal safety concerns.

### ***Economic Barriers***

Most of the South Asian countries are economically impoverished and rising inflation rates have resulted in a poor level of economic growth.<sup>98</sup> South Asian countries still have increasing populations, but malnutrition, lack of a healthy environment for growing up, problems in the violation of human rights, and an insecure society continue to be problems which require greater priority and the allocation of available resources.<sup>99</sup> As a result, there has been only limited public expenditure on recreational activities. Both urban women and rural women are obligated to prioritise survival. This more urgent societal and personal survival needs mean that the idea of the involvement of females in sport remains at a very low priority. The fight against poverty is the main problem limiting opportunities for female sport participants in South Asia.

Most rural areas in South Asian countries suffer from under provision of resources.<sup>100</sup> Many remote areas do not even possess the basic facilities and

infrastructure for women's sport. Even with limited resources in these developing countries, South Asian governments have endeavoured to provide facilities through their ministries of sports. However, population growth and increasing life expectancy means that there has been an ongoing escalation in the need for more play grounds, indoor stadiums and sport equipment for various sports. Though some urban grounds are well maintained, most of the rural and remote areas show lack of infrastructure. For example, some grounds are still unable to provide toilets or changing facilities. These limitations in facilities continue to impose restrictions on improving women's sport participation.

It is essential to introduce new technologies to sport, to enhance sport activities in all South Asian countries. Unfortunately, in South Asia the use of new technologies in sport development is limited as equipment is unaffordable and there is a lack of qualified technicians for support. Limited technology and technical knowledge impact negatively in particular on the participation of South Asian females in international competitions that demand high technological equipment. Therefore, South Asia urgently requires international support and technological assistance from developed countries to facilitate the growth and development of sports.

This paper focused attention on effective sporting practice amongst South Asian women in every ethnic group, to encourage the integrity of sport in general, and participation of women in particular. It is evident that South Asian women's contribution to sport still requires development, and women's participation in sports activities needs to be improved.

### **Ways to Encourage South Asian Women's Participation in Sports**

It is important to promote women's sport participation in elite level and grassroots level. There are some national sport events only for female participants in India and Sri Lanka but not in other South Asian countries. Even in the Sri Lankan women's Sports Festival is comprised of only track and field athletic events. Despite its potential to enhance women's sports in South Asia, the sport festival on its own is not sufficient to increase women's participation. Therefore, it should mainly be oriented to include a setting up of a women's Athletic competition in South Asian countries which would include all sports events to be held annually. This would not only improve sporting competency but it would also help to integrate different ethnic groups in the South Asian region.

Another initiative that would benefit the development of South Asian women's participation in sport would be to establish an inaugural programme that encourages involvement in sport activities among mothers and elderly women. To enable this to happen it is essential to recruit more female coaches, sport officers, media personnel and physical education teachers; thus establishing a network of sport women personnel. It is most important to establish a child care programme to assist sporting women. This would help them to find the time to attend training and coaching sessions. A child care programme would be of particular benefit to disadvantaged and rural women as they are least likely to have the money to pay for child care themselves.

The ultimate ways to encourage South Asian women's participation in sport requires a paradigm of changes in the current male dominated sport system as well as to the patriarchal culture. The involvement of the government to empower women's social status in South Asian countries is much needed. There should be integrated

programmes implemented for promoting women's status with the collaboration of ministries such as women affairs, education, health and sport. Providing access to tertiary studies and opportunities for higher positions in sport administration are the best ways to empower South Asian women. Accordingly, programmes for professional development and sport education for women should be established. For example, workshops at a national level should be introduced to empower women's leadership roles among sport coaches, sport officers, media personals, and physical education teachers. The workshops would also expand the technical knowledge of these personnel and sport participants. Furthermore, workshops for in-service physical education teachers should be established as well. There should be legislations established in all South Asian countries' for sport associations to encourage equalled representation of women.

### **Conclusion**

As has been shown, the reasons for the current trivialisation of South Asian women in sports, despite their contribution to sport at an international level are poverty and the impacts of conflicts. Personal, cultural and social issues have contributed significantly in reducing the South Asian female participation in sport. However, it is the impact of poverty at individual and governmental levels that severely impinge the increasing the level of female involvement in sport. Therefore, initiatives are necessary to implement and improve female participation in sport in South Asia at all levels. This includes organising various workshops at national level to empower women's leadership qualities, in particular among sports coaches, sports officers and physical education teachers. An Athletic Meet for women that includes all sports and a network of female sport personnel should also be established.

### **Notes on Contributor**

Samantha Nanayakkara completed her doctorate in the University of Canterbury, New Zealand. Her research mainly focuses on women and sport, sport for development and Olympic studies.

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6. See Hewitt, *The International Politics of South Asia*, 5.
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19. See Stuart Mill's 'Liberal Feminist' theory
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57. Ministry of Samurdhi, Youth affairs and Sport, Sri Lanka, *Sri Lankawe panaswasaraka kreedaa (Fifty years of Sport in Sri Lanka)*; Majumdar, 'Forwards and Backwards: Women's Soccer in Twentieth Century India'.
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66. Ministry of Samurdhi, Youth affairs and Sport, Sri Lanka *Sri Lankawe panaswasaraka kreedaa (Fifty years of Sport in Sri Lanka)*.
67. Mahaweli is the largest river in Sri Lanka that supplies water for irrigation to an area of 14,400 ha. The Ministry of Mahaweli development was established in 1977 to manage and develop the natural resources of the Mahaweli river basin. The main objective of the Ministry of Mahaweli development is to improve the human life in the Mahaweli impacted areas. During the mid 1980s nearly 130,000 landless farming families were settled in the Mahaweli downstream and the Sri Lankan government provided one ha for each family to maintain a paddy field of their own. The Mahaweli Games was established in 1986 with the collaboration of ministry of sports and ministry of Mahaweli development to improve sporting skills of Mahaweli residents
68. Ministry of Samurdhi, Youth and Sports, Sri Lanka, *Sri Lankawe panaswasaraka kreedaa (Fifty years of Sport in Sri Lanka)*.
69. Ibid.
70. Mansoor, *Women Sports in Pakistan*. <http://www.egineartides.com/?women-Sports-in-Pakistaneid> (accessed April 16, 2010).
71. Lewis, 'Pakistan: Status of Women and the Women's Movement'. *Encyclopaedia of Women's History*. [http://www.womenshistory.about.com/library/ency/blwh\\_pakistan\\_women.html](http://www.womenshistory.about.com/library/ency/blwh_pakistan_women.html) (accessed March 24, 2010).
72. Mansoor, *Women Sports in Pakistan*. <http://www.egineartides.com/?women-Sports-in-Pakistaneid> (accessed April 16, 2010).
73. OCA, *South Asian Games, 2009, list of medallists*, <http://www.oca.org> (accessed December 11, 2009).
74. Qazi, *Sports in Afghanistan*, <http://www.afghan.web.com/sports> (accessed February 13, 2010).
75. Ibid.
76. Ibid.
77. Ibid.
78. Ministry of Youth and Sports, Bangladesh, *Sport in Bangladesh*. [http://www.moy-sports.gov.bd/youth\\_development\\_01.html](http://www.moy-sports.gov.bd/youth_development_01.html) (accessed March 8, 2010).
79. Washington, *Islamic Group Threatens the Bangladesh Women's Soccer Tournament*, <http://www.womensportsfoundation.org/content/Articles> (accessed November 11, 2010).

80. The Women's Islamic Games was established in 1993 with the purpose of increasing the world Islamic women's' sport participation. This mega world sporting competition is organised by the Islamic Federation of Women's Sport (IFWS) under the patronage of the International Olympic Committee and the Olympic Council of Asia. All events in this sport competition take place in the absence of publicity and male spectators. Male referees and media coverage are only allowed in Golf, Shooting and Archery only.
81. The South Asian Games (SAG) is a biannual sporting festival that has created many opportunities to improve and reshape the men and women's sport participation in South Asian countries. The SAGames was established in 1983 and the XI SAGames hosted by the Bangladeshi government in 2010. Athletes from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka participated at the 2010 SAGames in 23 different sports.
82. See Hagreaves, *Sporting Females: Critical Issues in the History and Sociology of Women's Sports*, 288.
83. IOC, 'List of Olympic medallists'. <http://www.olympic.org> (accessed April 12, 2010).
84. Spears and Swanson, *History of Sport and Physical Activity in the United States*.
85. Talleu (2011).
86. See Women's Sports Foundation, *Trends on Women's Sport Participation*, <http://www.wsff.org.uk> (accessed April 4, 2011).
87. Lopiano, 'Equity in Women's Sports: A Health and Fairness Perspective', 281–96.
88. Department of Health and Human Services, *Promoting Better Health for Young People Through Physical Activity and Sports: A Report to the President from the Secretary of Health and Human Services and the Secretary of Education*.
89. IOC, 'List of Olympic medallists'. <http://www.olympic.org> (accessed April 12, 2010).
90. See Hussain, Fikree, and Berendes, *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*.
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