

STUDY OF

TRIBAL WOMEN AND GIRLS OF JHARKHAND IN SPORTS

EXTENDING LIMITS TO PHYSICAL EXPRESSION,
ESTABLISHING IDENTITY, HONOUR AND
ECONOMIC SECURITY



AWARDED BY

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Facilitating people centric public policy

Study of **Tribal Women and Girls of Jharkhand in Sports**

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List of Abbreviations

B.P.Ed	Bachelors in Physical Education
CCL	Central Coalfields Limited
CISF	Central Industrial Security Forces
CRPF	Central Reserve Police Force
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
FGDs	Focused Group Discussions
GAD	Gender And Development
ICS	Indian Civil Services
ITBP	Indo-Tibetan Border Police
JSSPS	Jharkhand State Sports Promotion Society

NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
NSNIS	Netaji Subhas National Institute of Sports
PIs	Personal Interviews
POs	Participant Observations
PSU	Public Sector Undertaking
SAI	Sports Authority of India
SES	Socio-Economic Status
SSB	Sashastra Seema Bal
ST	Scheduled Tribe
WAD	Women And Development
WID	Women In Development

Chapter 1

Gendering the Adivasi Playground

Adivasi women have been at the forefront of the professional sporting arena for a longtime. Beyond the general perception that Adivasi women are ‘hardy’ as they have to toil hard for their living, is a long story of struggle, sweat, blood, breaking of gender stereotypes and social norms and most evidently poverty. Aspirations and imagination of a ‘settled’ life also adds generously to outline the story of emergence of Adivasi women on the playgrounds that lie beyond the paddy fields and the forested groves of Jharkhand. This book attempts to focus on the trajectory of emergence of these

women from marginal rural communities to the front page of the daily newspapers. The trajectory that we seek to focus on would not chart the chronological progression of the women athletes to eulogize their stories of success but instead would dive deep into events, moments, crisis, paradoxes and other minute nuances of their everyday life. These moments which are often foreclosed to make way for the more powerful stories of success would be unpacked, explored, curated and would be woven into meaningful discussions which will allow the reader to gain insight of the materiality of struggle of the subaltern Adivasi women in general and her journey to arrive at the playground in particular. This book will bring empirical evidences from the field into a meaningful conversation with the plethora of concepts that help us to navigate through various vibrant and powerful discourses, debates, social constructs and will attempt to portray through a curation of case studies and analytical excerpts the stark materiality that constitutes the story of an Adivasi sportswoman.

The fundamental emphasis of the research is to foreground the perspective of women on their lived realities and experiences through recollection and reflections on their past. The interviewed narrations allow them to arrive at an understanding of physical expression as women, as Adivasis and also as sportspersons. It also allows them, not just as passive respondents of the research but as active participants in the curation of such a narrative, to

articulate the materiality as they embarked on this journey; on how they encountered various social norms and constructs and how they negotiated to overcome such social barriers as well as how their struggles shaped their future aspirations and influenced their choices that allowed them to not only undertake but continue the journey of establishing themselves as sportspersons.

This book also offers the opportunity to explore some fundamental questions concerning the history of the emergent subaltern figures; particularly the question(s) and the quest of being and becoming an Adivasi and the tension of belonging to the nation state of India. This tension constitutes the core of Adivasi subjectivity within an emergent state of Jharkhand. With its history of struggle for autonomy over *Jal, Jungle* and *Zameen* (Water, Forests and Land), its tryst with the Maoist insurgents and with the current government's approach to mitigate long standing contradictions with resisting faction through sports, these intersectional junctures make this book project contextually important and temporally relevant. History stands in testimony for Adivasi sportspersons who have been important figures of political representation. Sportspersons turned politicians such as Jaipal Singh Munda have led the charge of the struggle from such a superimposed subject position. However, whether history will repeat, resonate or rhyme, and whether Jharkhand will find another *Marang Gomke*¹ is a question that only time will tell. The book, however, will explore

the legacy of Marang Gomke and the context of the armed Maoist insurgency to adequately preface the political dimensions of the status of sports in Jharkhand and the position of Adivasi sportswomen within it. While the discourse(s) of Empowerment² and Development remain(s) an underlying leitmotif and a powerful theoretical fulcrum that holds such stories of success, struggle and disappointments together, the emergence of the 'backward' Adivasi state of Jharkhand, riddled with a troubled history of leftwing insurgency offered a fertile ground for sports to evolve as a vehicle to address, rehabilitate and restore peace, prosperity and development in the region. Sports for Development has remained a very important yet under-studied perspective in the larger discussions of Adivasi State formation and its relationship with the discourse of Development. The exploration of Empowerment as a discourse in the context of the Third World Adivasi women allows us to analyse the shortcomings of the various models of gender inclusion that have been introduced through the larger push of WID³, WAD⁴ and GAD⁵ models of Development through both national and state level policy and through a wide network of CSOs, NGOs and other community level organisations through financial impetus of Development aid. An analysis of the institutions of training and the intimate and evocative interviews allow us a deep insight into the impact and affects that such development programmes have on their targeted communities and whether they manage to

successfully ‘empower’ them or not?

This book attempts to bring these emergent thematic debates to a discussion over the empirical experiences of women sportspersons from Adivasi communities and their struggles. The discussion it envisages seeks to inform policy framers, development practitioners and state government(s) who happen to work at the cusp of empowerment and development of women from Adivasi communities while tackling tensions of autonomy of Adivasi lands, national integrity and left wing extremism. However, before we proceed any further we must define the fundamental concepts that hold the trajectory of the book in place, that is ‘Physical Expression’ and how sport aids to extend it. In the following section we shall briefly explore the legacy that Jaipal Singh left behind as a sportsperson, intellectual as well as a powerful political leader who took the cause of Adivasis forward. The succeeding sections will then explore the history and the status of women in sports in Jharkhand and finally introduce the reader to the content, function and purpose of each succeeding chapter of this book.

1.1 Defining Physical Expression and its Extension

Tribal women have athletic body structures due to long kilometres of walking for their daily needs. The game also proved an escape for us from our hardship...I started playing with a bamboo

hockey stick and slippers...

For girls... the chance to get out and see
the world is sometimes enough incentive...

Savitri Purthy, Former Indian Hockey Player

Savitri Purthy's perception of tribal-Adivasi women's bodies remains in stark contrast with the generic perception of women's bodies and their physical prowess. Patriarchal society has largely maintained its hegemonic control over women's minds and bodies through an array of ideological tools which continues to perpetuate conditions that control the role and function of women as per the norms set by patriarchs. Social construction of biological inferiority is one such ideological tool. Denying social sanction and recognition to the physical expression of emotion is one of the most powerful ideological tools employed to 'keep women in their place' (Prakash 1990). Such ideological tools are employed as part of socialisation of women as she grows up. The lived experience of a girl child growing up as a woman is less about self actualisation and realisation but more about conforming to the accepted norms of behaviour, acceptable aspirations which are in synchronisation with the patriarchal notions of women's role in society and an acquired docility. The social construction of biological and physical inferiority adds to the docility of women in general. In *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir explains the efficacy and the deep impact of such an ideological tool, she writes:

...this (apparent and socially constructed) lack of physical power leads to a more general timidity: she has no faith in a force she has not experienced in her body; she does not dare to be enterprising, to revolt, to invent; doomed to docility, to resignation, she can take in society only as a place already made for her; she regards the existing state of affairs as-something fixed. (de Beauvoir, 1986)

This book seeks to highlight how the Adivasi women athletes broke away from this apparent yet powerfully constructed norm, how they broke away from the 'fixed' and charted trajectories of life that the larger patriarchal society had decided on their behalf. Prakash (1990) brings the discussion out onto the playgrounds. She explains how the sports arena had been constructed as a site of expression of physical, martial and emotional prowess of the male sex and establish a sense of authority not only over the sports arena but over society as a whole, particularly relegating women away from the arena. She emphasises how in the traditional Indian context, dance became the only way for women to express their emotions and physical prowess and traditionally women were largely kept away from sports; especially women from marginal communities were discouraged from physical expression of any sorts, particularly in the sports arena. Hence, from the feminist perspective, the sports arena also becomes the space which needs to be reclaimed. Inclusion within the folds of society was not imagined

by feminists as a docile or reduced inclusion but rather inclusion within spaces which the male patriarch exclusively reserves to portray his prowess. Prakash (1990) articulates that:

Nowhere is this myth of her biological inferiority so readily and forcefully demonstrable as in the sports arena. And nowhere can it be as effectively demolished.

The book draws its understanding of physical expression and its extension largely from de Beauvoir (1985) and Prakash (1990) and their reading of the social construction of women's biological inferiority within a patriarchal society and how every woman athlete today is making a statement against the generations of social discriminations and challenges...(Prakash, 1990). Prakash (1990) focuses on the socially constructed assumptions and myths surrounding women's physical prowess and through a close examination of such myths attempts to recapture the right to physical expression through sports, especially competitive sports, and explores the relationship between sports and physical expression.

It is this act of destroying, subverting and breaking of socially constructed barriers that women sportspersons coming from marginal communities have been struggling with. Many have prevailed over such powerful barriers; this book focuses particularly on the journey of personas who continue breaking such barriers at various stages of their lives. It explores how such social barriers pose in

different forms, constituting a different constellation of challenges for the emergent sportswomen have thwarted their progress; but the resilience of a few and the contagious inspiration that they have kindled in others have helped them as a community of sportspersons to continue on their journeys to actualise their otherwise undermined potentials.

1.2 The Legacy of Jaipal Singh Munda: An embodiment of Adivasi Identity, Politics and their unique connection with Sports

I can't say how many people in the team know about Jaipal Singh Munda, to be honest, I've never asked them. Maybe today, I will tell them. (Naidu, 2021)

Growing up, we heard about Jaipal Singh Munda, because of the game they used to hold to commemorate his birth anniversary on the 3rd of January every year...as the years went by, we slowly learnt what a big leader he was and what he had done for us. As you learnt more, you wanted to learn more and so on. Nikki Pradhan, Midfielder, Indian Hockey Team

When we were young, we were all fighting for the same dream. To become a Jaipal Singh Munda,...but it wasn't just to become like him on the hockey pitch. That was just a small part of it. The dream was to become

someone who can inspire people outside of it.
Savitri Purthy, Former Indian Hockey Player

Savitri Purthy and Nikki Pradhan are two well known figures from Jharkhand. While Savitri has retired as a professional hockey player, Nikki is breaking into it. Although generations apart, both admire and idolise Jaipal Singh Munda and consider his contribution towards hockey and the Adivasis of Jharkhand as unparalleled. Jaipal Singh Munda is not just a hockey icon but also a statesman. His life trajectory appears as an umbilicus that connects sports with the struggle of the Adivasi communities seeking justice for generations of oppression and cognitive crimes that dominant classes and communities had subjected them to; his life also connects sports with their politics of autonomy of *Jal, Jungle* and *Zameen* and their demand for statehood. The state of Jharkhand is a young state. It emerged from a longstanding struggle of the Adivasis for a separate state from Bihar. The struggle of the Adivasi communities (such as Mundas, Santhals, Hos, Oraons and other communities) for equity of opportunity, justice and participation in governance cannot be separated from their lived experiences as forest dwelling and peasant citizens in general and as women coming from such marginalised communities in particular. Colonisation, impact of dominant cultures, especially upper caste Hindu communities and other dominant social groups, have further shaped their marginalisation and the constitution of a unique Adivasi subjectivity. An understand-

ing of this subjectivity becomes vital for understanding the past, the future and the contemporary aspirations of the Adivasi populations. Sports feature as a very important part of a contemporary Adivasi's life; here sports does not refer just to traditional Adivasi sports associated with hunting and other martial activities but sports as an activity with its roots in the occidental traditions of the mediterranean archipelagos of ancient Greece. Sports as Adivasis experience today and participate were largely brought in by Christian missionaries and the colonisers. The geographical region of Chotanagpur plateau experienced the influx of missionary activities through schools and conversion of the Adivasi people from their indigenous religious belief systems into Christianity. The project of civilising the savage was one of the primary functions of the missionaries and schooling was a foundational mode of operationalising the project of civilising the savage. Sports such as football, hockey, cricket, athletics, archery, et cetera, were introduced to the Adivasi communities through such schooling systems; which over time became a part of the Adivasi experience of life.

However, what concerns the project at hand is the unique connection that sports have with Adivasi identity and its politics. The connection is not an apparent one but rather an embodied connection; the legacy of Jaipal Singh Munda embodies not just the Adivasi experience of the missionaries and their exposure to occidental sports but also embodies and

represents the Adivasi struggle for asserting their political identity and agency as the subcontinent transited from being a colony of the British crown to an independent nation.

Jaipal Singh Munda was born as Pramod Pahan in 1903 in Takra village, Ranchi district, the then province of Bihar. His parents were peasants who had embraced Christianity. They enrolled Pramod in the local village school, where missionaries introduced him to a range of sports, such as hockey, cricket and football, alongside many others from his community. In 1910, his achievements in academics and in sports secured him a place at the prestigious St Paul's School in Ranchi, under the name 'Jaipal Singh'. The school's principal, Canon Cosgrave, took him under his wing, and during his return to England in 1918, Jaipal Singh accompanied him and on arrival in England was enrolled at St John's College, University of Oxford, in 1922. At Oxford, Jaipal Singh excelled in academics as well as sports. He was a University Blue (university team member) in hockey. In 1926, he graduated with Honours in Economics. Jaipal Singh then took the ICS (Indian Civil Service) exam, where he was selected as a probationer and was also selected as captain of the Indian hockey team that would compete at the 1928 Amsterdam Summer Olympics. Fate prevented him from playing the finals that won India a gold medal in the Olympics or becoming an ICS officer. Upon his return to India he worked as the principal of Raj Kumar College and as a revenue minister for

the ruler of Bikaner. However, his identity as an Adivasi prevented him from continuing with either of the roles and he had to return to his hometown of Ranchi where he decided to work for the rights of the Adivasi communities under the banner of Chotanagpur Adivasi Mahasabha, which was demanding a separate state of 'Jharkhand', along with other demands relating to the rights of the Adivasi community. In 1946, he was appointed to the Constituent Assembly, to represent the tribal-Adivasi population of the country.

What remains crucial for us in this narration is the physical and mental prowess that Pramod Pahan, later Jaipal Singh Munda, demonstrated through sports and also through academics which brought him to notice. The relevance of sports on the trajectory of Jaipal Singh's life resonates with the life and journey of many more sportspeople emerging out of Chotanagpur with Adivasi roots. Along with the break and the exposure that hockey, archery, football and other sports brings to their lives, comes a host of discriminations, uncountable instances of unjust and normalised derogatory treatment and denial of opportunities. The resonances of their journey is of significance to this book which transcends their singular identity(/ies) of being a woman, or a sportsperson or an Adivasi; with their struggles they continue to remain living archives of marginalisation at the intersections of each of their identities; what remains worth noting is that these women sporting personas, just like their inspiration-

al figure were resilient and hence they prevailed to continue on their respective journeys. The legacy of Jaipal Singh Munda is not just an instance of sporting inspiration but rather an icon which reminds the Adivasis of the spirit to struggle; a word which is but a common denominator for almost all Adivasis, particularly women. Raghunandan (2020) in his article titled Jaipal Singh Munda: *Tribal Statesman with a Hockey Stick and a Vision of Gold* writes:

Jaipal Singh Munda was different. Despite his gifts as a sportsman, few remember him in that role anymore. He championed tribal rights without desire for political gain, and unreservedly criticised policies that exploited them. His purpose in the sporting system was to champion causes outside of it. What he represented was clear as day. The Olympics were to Munda what Pietermaritzburg was to Gandhi. He never played for India after the Amsterdam Games, and in the years to follow, formed the Adivasi Mahasabha, an organisation that stood up for a separate state for and of the tribal population of the Chota Nagpur plateau. He argued to make land a fundamental right for tribals at the Constituent Assembly in 1946, and beseeched India's leadership to ensure reservations and respect for those he called the original settlers of the land.

The struggle of the Adivasi women are steep and Jaipal Singh Munda a beacon of hope who

has inspired generations of Adivasi women to continue with his legacy to become torch bearers of the Adivasi communities of Jharkhand.

1.3 Women in Sports and the State of Jharkhand

Jharkhand, which earned statehood in 2000, has produced a number of international players, including Sylvanus Dung Dung, Michael Kindo, Sumrai Tete, and siblings Bimal and Asunta Lakra. Currently, two players from the state—Salima Tete and Nikki Pradhan—are in the Indian women's core probable group of 24 for the Tokyo Olympics (Patwardhan, 2021). It is no miracle that certain regions start producing elite sportspersons. Behind every sportsperson what remains shrouded is a long history of athletic physical culture and an enabling ecosystem that nurtures sporting talent and motivation. This section will turn the focus of the chapter to the history of such tradition and ecosystem that remains hidden. Although, Jharkhand as a state is rather young, the region has a long yet under-studied tradition of sports. The Adivasi population of the region had a long history of sports. Traditional Adivasi sports were largely associated with their life as forest dwellers and had a significant emphasis on hunting, gathering as well as with rituals associated with peasantry. The region also had a history of women participating in various forms of sports ranging from ritual hunting,

commonly called *Jani Shikar*, to various forms of dances, strategic team games such as *Sekkor*, *Kati*, *Bahu Chor* et cetera. *Jani Shikar* has its origin in the long forgotten tradition of women being hunters. It is a unique ritual hunt practiced by indigenous women, mainly belonging to the Oraons. The ritual hunt is very popular and the community has popular lyrics celebrating the same. It goes as:

*Baro Bachare Raja, Jani shikar vaini ka
munde raja pagri bandhai*

(O Raja, every 12 years, we go out on a women's hunt wearing a turban like a Munda king.)

Traditional sports resonated with the life and lifestyle of the communities. Given the origins of the communities as primarily hunter gatherers, literature on the Chota Nagpur tribes specifically notes the absence of any prohibition against women touching or using weapons or dancing with them (Singh 2001). One can safely say that women were largely considered to be hunters and not just gatherers by the tribe members. Apart from ritual hunting one can also find evidence of sports amongst peasant communities in which women commonly participated such as *Sekkor*, a game played by the Ho tribe. According to the Ho mythology, this ancient game was first played between two early men and devils and eventually the early men won. Traditionally, this game is played during the summer season to prevent drought and bring rain. The

sport of *Bahu Chor* is a tribal game that probably became popular as the oral epic of *Ramayana* became popular amongst the Adivasi communities. The sport is inspired by the incident of *Sita chori* mentioned in the *Ramayana*. *Bahu Chor* worked on the principles of defense and rescue. There are seven players in each team and both boys and girls play on a rectangular field. The field has two circles at both ends—one in which the *bahu* is kept while her teammates wait in the other. On cue, team members leave their marked area while holding their breath and spread out on the field. The aim is to get to the *bahu* without breaking one's breath. The opponent team members who occupy the rest of the field, on the other hand, have to stay out of reach of the advancing players and are considered to be out of game if the latter touch them. The *bahu*, or the girl, can also distract her opponents and make a dash for the other end of the field. The Santhals, one of the major Adivasi communities of the region, play the sport of *Kati*. *Kati* is a game of quick reflexes and deft footwork. It requires a keen eye, strong limbs and expert eye-hand-leg coordination. Pioneered by the Santhals, it is traditionally played after the harvest season by teams each comprising ten members. Every player has a *kati* or a semi-circular disc made of tamarind wood and a *tarhi* or a 6 ft bamboo stick. All *katis* lie on the centreline of a rectangular court. Players try to propel the bamboo stick with their feet to hit the opponent's *kati*. Every successful hit gets a

score.

While such traditional sport and lifestyle activities largely contributed to a long tradition of athleticism amongst the people of the region in general and the women in particular, it is not until the colonial period that we see the introduction of modern sports. With the missionaries slowly streaming into the Chotanagpur region, schools were established. Introduction of modern sports in the region largely happened as the colonisers and missionaries attempted to civilise the native savages. The colonial rulers introduced sports such as hockey, football, cricket and athletics in the armed forces which slowly were also introduced to the people of the region through schools and institutional training centres of the colonial state. Hence, it was not surprising when we read through the life history of Jaipal Singh that his introduction to the sport of hockey happened in school. Although schools were introducing modern sports, women in general and Adivasi women in particular were not encouraged to participate in sports.

The status of women in the history of modern sports comes into prominence much later. During the colonial period Braj Ranjan Ray, considered the father of Bengali sports journalism, tried to promote the development of women's soccer in the educational institutions and clubs of Bengal from the late 1920s.

In 1928, Ray took the initiative of establishing

the National Youth Association at Calcutta and initiated an inter-college women's football league; however, he faced a lot of resistance from the society despite support from the leading newspaper houses. Rigorous physical exercise for bodybuilding was considered opposed to femininity. Accordingly, women's sports, which was only gradually starting to mature, underwent a rapid decline (Majumdar 2003). Cricket for women was introduced at the Becker Memorial School at Kottayam, Kerala. Following the lead, cricket and football was introduced in some other Anglo-Indian schools of the country. However, in the broader context of Indian institutions, the story was fundamentally different. Although, sports was largely discouraged, radical feminist thought clearly stated the need to take on the sporting arena to express themselves. A vernacular journal of the early twentieth century titled, *Meye Mahal*, asserted:

Earlier, sport was for women an extremely limited enterprise. By sport, they understood the playing of cards or other indoor games. By the 1930s things had changed. By this time women had started taking a keen interest in cricket, football and hockey. If we are to rise from ignominy, we must take sport more seriously. When the Mohun Bagan Football Club had won the IFA shield in 1911, Indian males had made a huge issue out of it. We should also equip ourselves to achieve a similar victory. Such a victory is only possible in sport.

Post independence, 1952 Helsinki Olympics was represented by the first generation of female athletes from India. Mary D'Souza and Nilima Ghose set the precedent for the upcoming generations of women athletes as sportspersons. Although one can note a marked absence of Adivasi sportswomen in the early decades of the independent nation of India, in the recent past the number of women athletes emerging from Adivasi communities have started increasing rapidly. Jharkhand, Odisha, Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Kerala have emerged as states which have largely contributed to the Adivasi women sportspersons' numbers. The emergence of Jharkhand has been particularly noteworthy, it is not just their traditional physical attributes owing to their outdoor life, but also their motivation to continue as sports professionals that invite academic interest. In recent times Nikki Pradhan and Salima Tete, two young Adivasi girls represented the national hockey team in the Tokyo Olympics of 2020 and both come from extremely poverty ridden backgrounds and had to break various socio-economic barriers to reach the highest level of their sporting disciplines. Recent research categorically indicates the relatively higher propensity of women sportspersons from weaker socio-economic status to demonstrate high degrees of motivation. Dr. DM Jyoti from the Department of Studies in Physical Education, Sports and Sciences, Akkamahadevi Women's University Vijayapura, Karnataka writes:

The participation of women in modern sports

is influenced by various physical, physiological, sociological and psychological factors. During training, besides good physique and physical fitness of the athlete, main emphasis is laid on the development of various types of skills involved in the game as well as on teaching the strategies, techniques and tactics of the game. Until recently, the coaches have been paying inadequate attention to the social and psychological factors which have been proved to contribute to performance in events in the higher competitive sports. It is in this context that the present study aimed to probe the impact of Socio Economic Status (SES) on adjustment, achievement, motivation and personality of sportswomen. In conclusion, the low SES sportswomen have and demonstrate higher achievement motivation than the high SES sportswomen and there is a significant difference in their achievement motivation level. (Jyoti 2018).

What remains wanting at this epistemic juncture is a deep exploration of the struggle and the material reason which facilitates the maintenance of such high degrees of achievement motivation despite disabling conditions that plague the lives of such individuals. It is this paradox that this project seeks to study through a close examination of the life narratives of the sportswomen. One of the important dimensions that gets germinated is the slow but steady emergence of a supportive ecosystem

for sportswomen in Jharkhand. Apart from the athletes there are a host of other women sportspersons who have contributed to the development of a necessary ecosystem which allowed the emergent players to reach the highest level of performance. It is this gradual emergence of not just the Adivasi sportswomen playing at the highest level but the ecosystem of players, coaches and trainers who continue to motivate players to not just train but also to break the rigid social, economic and psychological barriers that require documentation and recognition. It is this emergent ecosystem that remains the primal focus of this book through which it seeks to portray to the reader a comprehensive picture of this apparently disruptive yet a long overdue movement of the subaltern figures on the playing fields.

1.4 Jharkhand State, Sports and Conflict Zones

Functionally, sports has been historically looked upon as a substitute for martial action to showcase one's (largely a man's) physical, mental and spiritual abilities. It offers a space to compete with an opponent in a fair manner; it also offers the performers a chance to work with others as a team to showcase the ability of a group/team to accomplish a difficult task together. The act of playing a sport can help build mutual trust, camaraderie and engenders an effect of unity. The modern state, historically, has picked up on a very specific and

partly a myopic understanding of sports. As mentioned above, western sports was introduced in the subcontinent, especially in the Adivasi hinterlands, as a measure of civilising the savage. Education and sports came hand in hand. The civilising mission of sports continued well into the post colonial phase of the subcontinent. However, across various African, Latin American and Southeast Asian contexts sports as a way of catalysing development had been experimented with by various governmental and non governmental agencies. Literature reviews of *Sport for Development and Peace* (2007) collates almost 300 studies across continents where the efficacy of sports as a tactical device for promoting development schemes and resolving conflicts have been explored. The report looked into the use of sport in five sectors: education, health, gender, disability, and peace building with a focus on Human Development. While Jharkhand as a state has evolved out of a long struggle for statehood by the Adivasis themselves, it has also seen violent resistance movements against reigning regimes; starting with the British colonists to the post colonial Bihar government. In the 1990s, the indigenous resistance was partly influenced by the Maoist and a protracted guerrilla war against the state was waged by the Maoists with the Adivasis at their forefront. The Indian state along with the Bihar state government (and later the Jharkhand state) used armed force to quell the Maoist armed resistance. However, the material conditions and the fundamental contradic-

tions with the reigning regime did not get addressed; it resulted in a long term distrust and alienation of the marginal Adivasi communities from the state. The Maoist continued exploiting this alienation and interpreted it as a condition of exploitation of the comprador semi-feudal capitalist governments on the poor Adivasi peasant population. Although the interpretation of the Maoists was not entirely incorrect, it did not engage with Adivasis of Jharkhand out of a noble cause of liberating them from the comprador. The Maoist retreated back to the hilly, undulating Adivasi hinterlands of southern Bihar as they were pushed out of the plains of northern Bihar by state forces; their entry into contemporary Jharkhand was a purely tactical move (Shah, 2014). Albeit to counter this situation and to build bridges of communication with the historically alienated Adivasi population of Jharkhand the current government has been looking at sports as a possible way to resolve conflict and engender a sense of empowerment amongst Adivasi women in particular. It is at this cusp of a radical political tactic that the state of sports and its development amongst the Adivasi sportswomen of Jharkhand has been studied. It becomes imperative to discuss this, as questions of poverty, socio-economic mobility and empowerment of women are deeply embedded within a violent history and it is for the first time a standing state government sought to use peaceful, tactical means to negotiate terms with the Adivasis. However, whether such a gesture comes

as paternalistic attitude of the government towards the 'naive' Adivasi who has been lured by the Maoist, to bring them back into the mainstream or whether they honestly wish to communicate with the Adivasi population largely through a promotion of sporting events and trust building exercises still remains a question that only time will answer.

Summary of Chapters

While one of the primary functions of the first chapter is to introduce the reader to the foundational analytical themes, it is also important to systematically unpack the structural arrangement of this book and help the reader to navigate through the text. Following this introductory chapter which defined the foundational analytical themes and acquainted the reader with the contextual nuances, the second chapter of this book will seek to categorically spell out the research questions that will be sought to answer. It will also spell out the methodology of the research in detail and the logistics of implementing the methods of enquiry. Finally, it will outline the narrative strategy that the document will employ to curate and present the researched material to the reader. The third chapter will explore how Adivasi women have broken barriers (structural, societal and patriarchal) to establish and assert self-identity and independence. It will further attempt to explore whether the popular assumptions about tribal society as being women centric play any role in

development of Adivasi sportswomen in Jharkhand, especially given the deep historical impact of the dominant patriarchal societies over the Adivasi societies. The fourth chapter in turn will deal with the questions of socio-economic mobility associated with establishment of women as professional sportspersons. It will largely concern itself with the aspirations of upward mobility, the anxieties and struggles associated with it and will explore whether sports worked as an enabler to facilitate the aspired growth that these emergent sportspersons sought. The fifth chapter will largely deal with the crux of life that Adivasi sportswomen encounter as poverty and political conflict continue to derail their lives. It will explore how poverty and the history of their material deprivation has brought them to the cusp of a protracted conflict with the state, and how it has deeply affected the contemporary sportswomen from the Adivasi communities seeking a more settled and less demanding engagement with the sport. Although their roles change from being performers to mentors, coaches, columnist, facilitators, et cetera, the transition has not been easy for Adivasi sportswomen. It remains rife with challenges and despite those challenges veteran players have continued to support, mentor and guide the emergent players not only to establish themselves within the sports but also to cope with the wide range of externalities that affect their lives. The sixth and the final chapter will try to bring these experiences together to explore wheth-

er such experiences can inform state level policy making and if the promise that the community of Adivasi sports women has demonstrated can be supported and established as a sustainable system. It is with such hope that the final chapter would like to bring this book to a close and would envisage a beginning.

Endnotes

1. Marang Gomke: The Great Leader; Jaipal Singh was affectionately called the Marang Gomke
2. Empowerment and Development are related yet markedly separate discourses; (Sharma, 2008)
3. WID: Women In Development; (Rathgeber, E.M. (1990), p.489-502)
4. WAD: Women And Development; (Rathgeber, E.M. (1990), p.489-502)t
5. GAD: Gender and Development; (Rathgeber, E.M. (1990), p.489-502)

Chapter 2

Methods, Methodology and Narrations

2.1 Research Questions

This chapter will serve two fundamental purposes. Firstly, it will broadly outline the research questions of this project. Secondly, it will clearly delineate the methodology employed and the narrative strategy adopted to compile the monograph of the study. Apart from this, the chapter will attempt to focus on the various relational strategies and approaches adopted by the researchers to trace and reflect on the trajectory of emergence of the Adivasi sports

women from marginal rural contexts to the front page of the daily newspapers. While the introductory chapter sets the context of the underlying concepts and themes on which the lives of these Adivasi sportswomen will be analysed, the second chapter will spell out the broad epistemic architecture that holds the research and its execution on the desired track.

The fundamental research questions that this project seeks to answer are:

- What have been the various social, cultural and economic barriers that Adivasi sportswomen face as they participate in competitive sports? How have they overcome those barriers?
- What enabled Adivasi women to emerge as professional sportspersons despite the above mentioned barriers in the recent decades? What are the critical enabling factors, facilitators that allow Adivasi women to feel empowered when they continue to participate in sports?
- Explore the correlation between the Adivasi women's experiences of poverty, long history of dispossession, dislocation, alienation, the Maoist insurgency of 1990s and whether sports can become a double edged governance tactic to diffuse the historic conflict and empower the alienated Adivasi youth, particularly women.

The conceptual rubrics that hold the book together, have been introduced in the first chapter.

They contribute significantly to the articulations of the research questions. One of the most significant concepts that has been introduced and unpacked in the first chapter has been the extension of physical expression of women, which continues to be controlled by patriarchal norms. The journey of how these Adivasi women broke out of these barriers and made a statement against generations of social discriminations and challenges contributes to the first research question. The legacy of Jaipal Singh Munda, not just as an extraordinary sports person, but also as a powerful statesman, who sought justice for generations of oppression and cognitive crimes that dominant classes and communities had subjected the Adivasi community to, contributes to the shaping of the responses to the second research question. The researchers, however, did not allow the legacy to overpower the empirical observations and relational understandings that they arrived at while conducting their primary data collection. Further, the long, shrouded history of athletic physical culture and an enabling ecosystem that nurtures sporting talent and motivation would continue to be a leitmotif to the second question. Jharkhand albeit a young state has a rich cultural history of women participating in sports. Ritual hunting of *Jani Shikar*, traditional Adivasi sports such as *Sekkor*, *Kati* and *Bahu Chor* will continue to silently resonate and complement the voices and the lived experiences of the women we interviewed to seek answers to our second question.

The third question is largely exploratory in nature where the book seeks to respond to the changes in the approach of the state to view sports. Recent developments portray that the reigning government of Jharkhand has been employing peaceful means of negotiations with the alienated Adivasi youth, largely through sports to help them build their careers through sports and at the same time refrain from participating in a violent conflict with the state.

This chapter will also briefly talk about the book's political positioning. It will definitely re-examine and establish the question of representation which has been historically biased against the Adivasis and more so towards Adivasi women. Existing literature continues to stand testimony to it (Spivak, 1988; Chakrabarty, 2002). This study becomes all the more pertinent due to this reason. The women associated with this study are the ones who have broken barriers to physically express themselves into a space that has been largely dominated by men since time immemorial.

Padma Prakash in her paper titled *Women and Sports: Extending limits to physical expression* and Boria Majumdar in his paper *Forwards and backwards: Women's Soccer in twentieth-century India*, tell us how difficult it was for women to participate in outdoor sports, compete and how they made a very late entry into the Olympics through swimming which was considered the least masculine of

all the sports. The Olympic Association lacked any representation of women at all and even today continues to remain under-represented.

Given that this book will focus on women who are in different progressive phases of their sporting careers the question of representation becomes nuanced and complex. It relates to their aspirations, desired growth and the role they continue to adopt as they transit from one phase of their career to the next. What remains worth exploring is whether desired representation had any impact on the ecosystem that has supported and continues to support the generations of sportswomen to continue to perform at the highest level of their respective disciplines.

2.2 Methodology

To answer these questions in the most appropriate manner, three conventional qualitative research methods were employed. Data was gathered through Participant Observation (POs), Personal Interviews (PIs) and Focused Group Discussions (FGDs). Thematic textual analysis was performed with the help of a rubric and inferences were drawn from the observations that were made both during data collection and also from the textual analysis. The research largely aimed at dwelling, relating and reflecting upon the lived experiences of the players to understand and gain knowledge to inform the answer to the three aforementioned research questions.

Methods

Focused Group Discussions (FGDs), Participant Observations (POs) and Personal Interviews (PIs) were used to interact with the respondents and collect data. In FGDs, focus groups are recruited to discuss a particular topic, anything from people's feelings to their experiences (Bernard 2006). In the context of this project, we conducted FGDs with young and upcoming sportswomen who had just begun building their career in sports. PO is the foundation of ethnographic approach. It involves getting close to people and making them feel comfortable enough with one's presence so that one can observe and record information about their lives, experience and processes they are involved in (Bernard 2006). In this study, PO of sportswomen was done while in their training sessions and during their matches. To familiarise ourselves with the sportswomen and to get them at ease with us, the researchers participated in games with them.

PIs were done following a semi-structured conversation model. A semi-structured interview is open-ended but follows a general script and covers a list of topics with respondents (Bernard 2006). PIs were conducted with sportswomen under the three remaining categories of sportswomen who are aspiring, established and veteran sportswomen. While all the 12 FGDs were conducted in-person, 4 out of the 21 PIs were done in-person. The rest of the personal interviews were telephonic.

The interviews were lined up using the following methods:

- Snowballing and purposive method was used to reach various sportswomen with the help of persons who were well-established and had spent a considerable amount of time in the arena of sports.
- Through credible leads provided by the Dr. Ram Dayal Munda Tribal Research Institute, Ranchi
- Through an NGO named YUWA-India, based out of Ormanjhi, Ranchi, which works with girls on empowering them by developing their skillsets in both academics as well as sports.

Rationale

For the Adivasi sportswomen in the young and upcoming category, FGD was chosen as a research tool for collecting data as women in this age group find it difficult to interact with people. When such women have other people around them having similar experiences and age, they tend to resonate with each other, help build each others' confidence, thereby, helping in gathering anecdotal insights and rich experience narratives. PO became an important tool in grasping the required knowledge of understanding our respondents while they were undergoing training or playing a game.

For women under the aspiring, established and veteran sportspersons categories, PIs were conduct-

ed, as their experiences have been more vivid with various kinds of struggles and sensitive experiences.

Data Collection

A total of 21 PIs and 10 FGDs were done to gather information for this study. Respondents have been divided into four categories depending on their age and the stage in their career trajectory. The four categories are:

1. Young and upcoming sportswomen-FGDs were conducted with them as responding to questions was easy for them when they were in a group with others similar to their age and who played the same games. Respondents were between 12-16 years of age in this category. They were at the nascent stage of their careers, at training camps.

2. Aspiring sportswomen-PIs were conducted with players in this category who were between 16-28 years of age and were yet to reach the zenith of their careers.

3. Established sportswomen-PIs were conducted with players who were between 17-29 years of age and were representing the country at national and international levels.

4. Veteran sportspersons-PIs were conducted with coaches and ex-players whose contributions in the arena of sports have been remarkable.

While conducting this research, it was also made sure that the sample showed diversity in terms of the sports that the players were engaged with, the phase of the career they were in and the Adivasi community they belonged to. Owing to Jharkhand's rich history in sports such as hockey, archery and football, these sports have found more representation in our sample. Athletics, wrestling and swimming are some other sports which have found some respondents. Two FGDs were conducted for athletics, one FGD was conducted for swimming and two interviews were conducted for wrestling.

Geography



Figure 1: Map of Jharkhand showing the geographies covered

Data was collected across four districts of Jharkhand namely Gumla, Simdega, Pashchimi Singhbhum and Ranchi, largely coming under the Chotanagpur region. The significance of the Chotanagpur plateau,

as discussed in the first chapter, lies in the fact that the region experienced an influx of missionaries and colonial administrators who brought in the western sports to civilise the native savage; a colonial project which with all its ethical baggage gave the region a figure as significant as Jaipal Singh Munda. These districts were also chosen as the site for the research as they house most of the stadiums and training camps for various sports in the state. Research sites were mostly stadiums, training camps and hostels accommodating players under training. The following table enlists the districts with the specific locations and the sport which it was a training location for. The PIs/FGDs conducted were for sportspersons/coaches in the same sport as mentioned in the table.

District	Location	Sport
Simdega	SS Girls Uchh Vidyalaya Astroturf Stadium	Hockey
Gumla	Albert Ekka Stadium	Football
West Singhbhum	District Sports Office	Athletics, Football, Archery
Ranchi	JSSPS	Swimming, Athletics, Boxing
	Hulhundu	Football
	Birsa Munda Archery Academy	Archery

2.3 Analysis

The grounded theory approach coupled with textual analysis has been put to use to analyse the collected data. They have been used as a technique for:

1. Identifying categories and concepts that emerge from text, in this case, notes and transcripts of PIs and FGDs.

2. Linking the concepts into substantive and formal theories. The approach was developed by sociologists (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1990) and is widely used to analyse ethnographic interview data.

The mechanics of grounded theory are deceptively simple:

1. After production of transcripts of interviews and reading through a small sample of texts such as notes made during interviews/FGDs, reflection notes after returning from the field, discussion and observation determinants are identified.

2. As the categories emerge, all collected data in the form of textual transcripts are mapped to the determinants on a rubric. A rubric is developed which collates the determinants and the vignettes through hyperlinks that lead back to the transcripts. The relevant sections of the transcripts are in turn highlighted with coded colours (specified on the sheet) which correspond with the determinants.

3. Observations are made on how categories are linked together or they are projecting critical trends.

4. Using the relations amongst determinants and the observations, theoretical models/inferences are drawn, while constantly checking the models against the data.

5. Key findings are presented by using examples, that is, quotes from interviews that elucidate the theory or the inferences.

2.4 Ethical considerations

Due verbal consent was taken before recording the PIs and FGDs, for both in-person and on-call interviews. The data collection exercise was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic and therefore, it became imperative for the research team to strictly adhere to COVID-19 protocols. Temperature checks were done every day that the research team went on field. Due precautions of wearing masks, not conducting interviews in closed spaces and maintaining a 6 ft. distance between participants were maintained. Due consent was also taken by YU-WA-India for interaction with the young women associated with them.

2.5 Narrative strategy

The narrative strategy for this book will attempt to bring the analytical themes into a close conver-

sation with the data. Primarily significant quotes, experiences and emergent themes from the key respondent interviews and FGDs will be arranged within broader conceptual and theoretical frames that largely outline the chapters. The third chapter largely answers how the societal construction of gender and its experience within a subaltern, Adivasi context shapes the struggle for sportswomen. The fourth chapter focuses on how aspirations are shaped and how it contributes to socio-economic mobility and who facilitates it. The fifth and the final chapter explores the relationship between the ubiquitous experience of poverty amongst the Adivasi women and the history of protracted violence. It also explores whether sports can act as a possible catalyst in mitigating such historical conflicts. Finally, the chapter brings the monograph to a close by summarising the key themes that emerged out of the empirical study and provides a succinct section on policy suggestions.

Chapter 3

On the Breaking of Barriers - Exploring Identity and Society

3.1 On the Breaking of Barriers

Barriers prevent individuals from achieving their potentials and goals. They often expose the lack of capacity of an individual to negotiate with an internal or an external challenge. Sometimes barriers are structural and systemic. They are the fundamental causes of inequity, discrimination and injustice. The communities from which the sportswomen of Jharkhand have been emerging are largely from Adivasi communities. Adivasis have been historically disadvantaged. Their experience of colonialism

and post-colonial governance has been experientially different from the elite communities. The Adivasi identity, which is currently considered as a collective consciousness of peoples who shared a common history of displacement, dislocation and systematic disenfranchisement (Xaxa 1999) emerged out of a long struggle for equity and justice¹. The Adivasis were categorised as tribes by the colonisers on their Census and their lives were studied through an anthropological lens; the categorisation largely promoted a discourse that tribals are native savages, junglees who are in an underdeveloped/backward society who are in need of civilisation (Skaria 1999). Over the years 'tribal' communities also started looking up to the upper caste communities, as they aspired to their social standing and status, something that Orans (1965) studied as the rank concession syndrome amongst the tribes. However, the upper caste Hindu society viewed tribal societies as peoples from a lower *jati*² and they discriminated against their participation in social events, sports, et cetera. Adivasi youths continue to feel such discriminatory attitude even today. The colonial-anthropological discourse also categorised various 'tribes' as criminal tribes (Pandian 2009). Such institutionalised conceptions about the Adivasi communities (who were categorised as tribes) contributed to the powerful discourse which largely misrepresented the Adivasis and facilitated a systemic socio-economic oppression which justified historical police violence and continued institutional pressure to civilise and gentrify

them. The discourse continues to inform state policies (Rycroft & Dasgupta, 2011, Bates & Shah, 2017). Bates and Shah (2017) have studied how this discourse and historical cognitive crimes have played a critical role in turning the Adivasis towards left wing extremism; this is the first and the most fundamental barrier. Misrepresentation of Adivasis as 'backward', 'savage' or as lower *jatis* who must be kept away and who are meant for more manual and menial jobs led to what can be understood as a proletarianisation of the Adivasis. Adivasis constitute a significant section of the entire population engaged in unorganised labour since the colonial era and the picture has been shades darker in the contemporary times. This historical state of oppression, i.e. the fundamental barrier, received retaliation through resurgent movements. One was a mobilisation of the concept of 'Adivasi' which attempted to bring together communities on the basis of their shared history of displacement, dislocation and systematic disenfranchisement, culminating in the form of Adivasi Mahasabha which was led by Jaipal Singh Munda to represent the Adivasis in the Constituent Assembly, who was later addressed as the Marang Gomke. The other more recent formation was in the form of an insurgent armed struggle organised by Maoist guerrillas in coordination with a nationwide network of underground Maoist movements which sought to address the historic oppression of the 'tribal' proletariat population through an armed struggle against the oppressive bourgeois state. It is

in this complex socio-economic and political context, largely understood through an experience of abject poverty, discrimination and violence that the everyday barriers of the Adivasis present themselves. However, for Adivasi women it is not just this. As mentioned above, Adivasi societies which were previously considered liberal, underwent cultural change (Orans 1965, Mahapatra 1986); the impact of upper caste Hindu society was felt nowhere more powerfully than in the way Adivasis started treating their women³. Oppression of women within the Adivasi societies witnessed a rapid increase over generations. Adivasi women continue to face what many feminist scholars articulate as double discrimination; first owing to their 'tribal' category (which was later resisted through the Adivasi identity) and the second owing to their sex as female and through the consequent process of gendering, where females are socialised into women through a set of everyday performative practices (Butler 1988). Poverty adds to the magnitude of suffering that these structural barriers present to the Adivasi sportswomen. Despite such odds our respondents were amongst those who were able to break out of the constellations of barriers and developed the skills, physical ability, mental strength and acumen to perform at the highest benchmarks such as the Olympics and World Championships. While some have established themselves, others have started out. The next section will start with a discussion on breaking barriers amongst the youngest but

the most promising category of respondents i.e. the young and upcoming. This will be followed by an exploration of life stories of the aspiring, established and veterans, how they broke out of their barriers in their respective lives and how each phase presented to them a set of new challenges and barriers.

3.2 On the Cost of Deviance: Domesticity, Social Gaze and the Pressure to Perform

I started playing in school...

I want to make my family proud...

I want to make my village proud,

I want to represent my country...

These four phrases were the most repeated phrases that the twelve Focused Group Discussions (FGD) conducted at the Jharkhand State Sports Promotion Society's (JSSPS)⁴ Khelgaon in Ranchi at Hulhundu in Ranchi, Albert Ekka Stadium in Gumla and SS Girls Uchh Vidyalaya Hockey Stadium in Simdega with sportswomen from the Young and Upcoming Category revealed. The young women were between the ages of 12 to 18 years and belonged from different corners of the state of Jharkhand. The sports into which these women were engaged are hockey, football, archery, swimming, wrestling, and athletics. Although the dominant theme of discussion remained 'breaking of social barriers' for young teenage Adivasi women, most of the respondents chose

to speak a homogeneous narrative which largely informed the researchers about their aspiration to gain recognition. The need for recognition often trumped the possible narratives of struggle that we expected to encounter. The struggle of breaking out of their domesticity remained unarticulated and this absence of articulation of the struggle requires academic attention. For most of the respondents the verb 'breaking' could have signified breaking of gender roles and stereotypes that constitute the general perception of women. However, the silence on the quest of breaking out of such normative practices and roles and the loud emphasis on recognition indicates a unique condition.

At JSSPS, Khelgaon, Ranchi, the first impression that the researchers had at the arrival was formative. The athletes undergoing training at the JSSPS were addressed as cadets. All the sports cadets, be it boys or girls had one same haircut, cropped short to an inch. Initial conversations with the girls informed us about their disappointment at losing their long tresses; the cadets' cropped hair was as if the first sacrifice one had to make on the road to becoming a sportsperson. The reason given to them was that long hair would be a distraction from excelling at their sport. A sense of homogeneity was promoted at the institute through its dressing and behavioural norms. The sense of homogeneity was transferred on to their responses while they participated in the FGDs. All the respondents in the FGDs answered similarly to the question of what was their aim in

life, the unanimous response was:

to represent the country at the Olympics.

Apart from the repetitive assertion of their need to prove themselves at the highest level, the FGDs further enlightened the researchers of the way cadets are allotted their respective sports, which often happened without understanding or acknowledging the interests of the cadets. While a regimental disciplining of their life was apparent from such procedural features, the experience of exposure to different sports, different sports cadets and coaches was intense for many of them. The intensity of the experience was iterated by the respondents while they described the act(s) of being introduced to a sport, becoming familiar with the rules of the games and then the hard work associated with developing the skills required to play and excel at it.

We did not know the rules...

never had the right training...

We never had the right kind of equipment
such as the recurve bow...

The exposure was both challenging and enticing. While poverty, incidences of indebtedness to one's family, community, village were the major challenges the new found relationship with one's coach and fellow cadets were enticing. Both these emotions were observed amongst the respondents while they reflected upon the moments of their

journey. Exposure added to their confidence; not just of their mind but also of their bodies. The cadets spoke about their first experience of going outside the state of Jharkhand to compete with players from other states. They described the experience to be 'new, exciting and unnerving'. They found players from other states to be 'too fit' with 'well-maintained physiques' and 'appeared stronger than us'. However, once they 'got used to them' they knew that they could take on the players from other states and 'take them down'. Few of the respondents mentioned a sense of 'pride' when it came to inheritance of their skills with a bow and an arrow; what players from other states had to learn during training, they already knew how to make the bow work since 'birth'.

Poverty, however, triumphed. The basic needs of life far outweighed passion, something which remained almost unuttered. Companionship and losing out on childhood friends was another important aspect, most of them felt lonely as they were away from their home and friends; some mentioned their initial sense of feeling alienated and how they gradually warmed up to their teammates and batchmates coming from other Adivasi communities. Their experience of meeting, understanding and living with people from other communities was enlightening for them. However, many of them also recalled how their friends back home missed them and wanted to come and join them at the centre. When asked about their friends back home

almost all of them said:

They also feel like joining us in the centre for good food and education.

When the conversation came to the issue of aspiration, almost all of them wanted to become financially stable with a 'job'. They looked at sport as a way of becoming 'employable'.

...as my parents are not educated, they go to other states to work as migrant workers. I have promised myself to not let that happen to me, and get better at sports and perform better.

They wanted to have a job because they could not be totally dependent on agriculture while playing a sport. What never got mentioned was how almost all of them, barring a few exceptions, had to fight at home to be at the training centre. Each young woman we spoke to, continued to convince their families to remain at the centre without returning to their villages for long durations. Perhaps their need to become 'famous' stems from the need to prove the worth of their absence.

Silence on the articulation of struggle by the athletes themselves can be attributed to the informants being largely conditioned to perform the normative roles and accept them as 'normal'; the emphasis on recognition perhaps is provoked by the sustained lack of self worth which is cultivated amongst women as part of their experience of

growing up. It is difficult for young women as they remain entrenched deeply within the hegemonic structures to talk about the struggle of breaking out of it. Post structural feminists (notably Cixous, Irigaray, Kristeva) and later Butler (1988, 1999) employed the concept of performativity to explain this unique entrenchment of women as they continue performing their gender roles which remain sutured to their being in society. This project attempted to break into the sphere of experience that young contemporary Adivasi⁵ women often find themselves within as they continue to perform their gender roles and often find themselves trapped within it; one such role is that of a caring daughter who learns household chores and prepares to become a caring wife and eventually a caring mother. Her role as a caregiver establishes the sphere of her contribution. Women are not expected to do anything more industrious than care for the sacrosanct institution of the family and continue to participate in its reproduction. Although the rural girl child goes to school to get her fundamental education, by the time she grows up into a teengager and arrives at the cusp of puberty she is expected to voluntarily learn the norms of caring, nurturing and reproducing the familial institution. The respondents of the study from the young and upcoming category of sportswomen are all negotiating with such social conditioning. Almost all of them have stepped out of their physical domesticity but its shadow continues to shape their behaviour, aspirations and future

decisions. One of the functions of domesticity is to render women as docile norm abiding subjects. Docility functions largely through thwarting self belief and self confidence as comprehension of the self's desire and its expression gets stifled through a lack of voice and vocabulary available for women to express their passion, desire and intent (Irigaray 1985). Sports and physical expression help women to break out of this docility. Hence, despite people criticising their 'short dresses', criticising their 'sports', they continue playing. From this stems the need to prove their worth, not just to themselves but also to the society, particularly to those who point fingers towards their bodies, dresses and hair. Those who get a chance to play and pursue their sport feel the privilege and the support that their families have provided them with. The young sportswomen take it upon themselves to prove the worth of their privilege. This trait was particularly strong amongst young hockey, football and archery athletes. Nisha Linda, who was about 16 years old, talked about how her parents took pride in her being a player. Nisha quoted her parents:

My daughter is playing, she will definitely do something better in her life.

On being asked what doing better in life meant, she explained,

...like making our lives better. Those girls who don't get permission to play are doing nothing, but as we are privileged we will do something

better in life. And parents have that hope that we will take care of them when they are old.

These women felt that they were privileged enough to be allowed by their parents to pursue football, and they had to make it work towards their and their family's upliftment. For those of their friends who could not make it, Khushboo Linda said,

Gender bias is the problem. They say how girls can play like boys.

Anisha Lakra said that society thinks, "girls are meant to do household work" and at first her parents also faced the dilemma of letting their daughter play like boys. Sona Linda, said that her neighbours were still of the view that:

We play with boys so we might be on a bad track in life.

All the women came from similar backgrounds, their parents were mostly daily wage workers, factory workers and agricultural workers. Khushboo Linda talked about how her neighbours discourage her parents from letting her play as they don't think she would be able to achieve much by 'playing games'. All the women spoke about how people put apprehensions in their parents' minds by pointing out their playing with boys and raising questions about the moral chastity of women:

what else happens in the centre, who knows?

Parents of most of the players do not give in to

such comments, and ask their daughters to prove themselves with their game so that people would stop raising such questions about them. However, there are others whose parents want them to give up football and help the family in earning a living. Jayanthi Dey and Vidhyani Barjo talked about how people in their villages criticised them for wearing shorts, but their parents were supportive of them. Parents who had themselves been associated with any sport are mostly supportive of their children pursuing sports too. Sindhu Chandrawal spoke about her switching from archery to football, because the training centre for archery was far, and it would get dark returning from there. Jyoti Kumari, a respondent, talked about how the people in her village were understanding enough of her returning late from practice as Rekha Oraon, a national level player, who hailed from the same village, had already done all of it and proven herself.

Performance at the highest level at times worked as a saving grace from social stigma; as if performance can purge a sportswoman off her moral crimes of stepping out and defying the normative. Hence, the need to perform and the need to prove oneself at the highest level is felt by these women. The motivation to perform always did not come from an intrinsic passion for the sport but as a response to the social stigma of being a deviant 'woman', a sports'woman'.

3.3 On walking the Tightrope: Passion, Poverty and Performance

Athletes often mention that the key to consistency of performance is commitment, dedication, perseverance and most importantly the passion that the athlete has for the sport. Interestingly in the transcripts of all the FGDs and PIs the word 'passion' was not mentioned by any of the respondents.

However, empirical evidence informs us that the women were passionate enough about their respective games. They had pursued it despite all difficulties. While the analysis iterated in the previous section indicates that a sportswoman views performance as a way to respond to the normative social gaze, as a way to prove herself to everybody who questioned her ability, her worth, her existence, what gets lost is the love, the joy, that she perhaps has for the act of playing the sport. In the midst of all the struggle perhaps she forgets how she has always been 'in love' with the game she plays, how life without it would be difficult to imagine. The fate of passion as our interactions indicate is uncertain. COVID-19 induced lockdown served as a time for these women to realise that if they stay at home, it would be difficult for them to pursue their sport. Most of the sportswomen came from families which found it difficult to make ends meet. Maintaining the required diet, having appropriate facilities and equipment to practice posed as a severe hindrance. However, for some the lockdown

resulted in a struggle for survival. Nikki Kullu, a 17 year old hockey player from Simdega, said:

Due to COVID there was no work available and we did not have enough money to buy food. And so I worked in the village, on a road construction site to get some money; I would help my family with my earnings. Not only me-Kiran and Kajol (her batch mates), they have also worked with me.

Therefore, 'playing well' and 'performing' are also survival strategies. Better performance allows them to stay at the training centre with better amenities than they have at home. Some women also spoke about their friends who wanted to get where they are. Disha Dhan, an archer said:

They also feel like joining us in the centre for good food and education. Some don't even get permission to study further.

Many players on being asked what their future plans were spoke about getting a job with the railways, the army or the police. On being asked why they opted for these particular jobs, they said,

Because then we don't have to stop playing.

They love their sport but the cost of love and passion are too high to express. The crude fact remains that only if they perform and survive can their passion survive. They don't have the luxury to celebrate or articulate their passion. Along with them

their love and passion for the sport is in a constant state of survival.

Players at the Hulhundu centre in Ranchi, receive Rs. 500 every month to take care of their training kits and diet. On being asked how they utilise the money they said:

It mostly goes to buy the kit as it is expensive. Shoes last 1-2 months and have to be replaced frequently.

They are unable to spend any money on their diet and eat mostly what is available at home. Sonali Tirkey, said how all her money got spent in travelling to and fro between her home and the centre. She wished and the others resonated with her on this that it would be better for them if their centre was residential; they would not incur travelling costs everyday and get a good diet too. As the centre is a non-residential one, Nikita Toppo said:

My mother sometimes complains about the expenses but she still manages to cover my travel and dietary expenses.

She also added how she missed an opportunity to be in the state team of Jharkhand because of her exams. The women said that they had to give equal importance to both studies and football, as they would not be allowed to play if they didn't study. On being asked about the centre and how they felt about being there, responses were mixed. The women talked about the problems they faced

at the centre. Nisha Linda said:

We don't have changing rooms, and toilets.
We face a lot of problems in changing clothes.

However their love for the centre and the sport was also very visible. They said that they missed being at the centre and practicing there during the COVID-19 lockdown as their villages hardly had any facilities of even having a clear space to play and that it was no fun to play and practice alone. Neetu Linda, Purnima and Sunita Linda are role models for the younger girls at the Hulhundu centre. All three have managed to get a job due to their sporting abilities in football. The women wanted to stay in touch with the game while they also had a job. On being asked about their future aspirations, all of them wanted to pursue higher studies but never to give up on football.

3.4 On the Journey(s) of Empowerment: Athletes, their Lives and their Moments

Empowerment as an experience cannot be analysed unless the experience is described. As discussed above, the descriptions of the feeling of empowerment are also very difficult to articulate for women as they often feel empowered in retrospect. The language of expression is far too phallogocentric (Irigaray 1985) for women to find words to express the difference of their experiences. Experience and articulation of empowerment, hence, is difficult. It

often misses out on vital feelings that constitute it. One way to crystallise and present such experiences can be achieved through sequences of life stories, events and experiences, as heard from the concerned respondents and then discussing them. In the following section we will describe the life stories of four women athlete(s), Pratima Birua, Nikki Pradhan, Rakhi Tirkey and Asunta Lakra who are all established players; some are into coaching and the others are continuing to perform. Through their life experiences, description of events and reflections of their relationship with their fellow athletes, coaches and current trainees, we will attempt to condense the experiences of empowerment and how they broke different barriers at different phases of their lives.

Story of Pratima Birua

Pratima Birua was born in the village of Torpa, in Khunti district of Jharkhand. She described her village to be a hamlet deep into the forests which lacked any sort of sports facilities back then. Birua has been a national level player who went on to become a hockey coach in the year 2008. She belongs to the Lohra community which she described as "backward and illiterate". Her aspirations of becoming an international player were cut short when she got injured in her knee during a match. Due to her family's poor financial situation and lack of any help provided by the government, she could not

get timely treatment. She then had to leave playing hockey. Pratima still walks with a slight limp but one hardly notices it when she is out on the hockey field coaching young women. Pratima is married to a hockey player, who currently serves under the Tripura police. Pratima's journey from a far-flung village to the training centre at Bariatu, Ranchi had been nothing short of a struggle. Back in 1995, she recalls, there used to be only two training centres across the state of Bihar. She describes the act of mingling with the people outside of her village and into the city of Ranchi itself difficult. At the training centre, the players got tracksuits made of a jute-like material. Wooden sticks were given instead of hockey sticks. Pratima recalls her fellow team mates to be Sumrai Tete, Masira Surin and Kanti-ba. Her unfulfilled dream of representing the country left a lot of angst within her. Her persistence led to her pursuing a diploma in physical education. In 2008, vacancies came in the state of Jharkhand for coaches. She applied, cleared the examination and became a coach at the SS Girls Uchh Vidyalaya, Simdega. After she became a coach, she says that it became her sole aim to train young women to be in the Indian team. She could not travel to other countries but had the opportunity to visit many states for tournaments. She came across people from different cultures and backgrounds, which also gave her a reality check of how disadvantaged she was. She noticed how parents of players used to drop them for training everyday while her parents

could not even spare her money to maintain her diet, how her parents did not have enough money to buy her a hockey stick while parents of other players got them full kits.

There was a letter which was released by the government that coaches who served for more than 10 years will be permanent or get a salary hike. I am hoping for that to be applicable so that in these days of inflation I could also feel good.

On being asked if what she makes from this job is enough, she said:

In these times, it is merely possible to make our ends meet. As coaches and role models for our students we need to dress up properly but it's not possible, like some students who ask for personal help we are helpless for such requests. For these things it is a bit less for us. Even if the government does not make me permanent, if only I could get a salary increment then it would be better.

All the barriers that she crossed to be where she is has made her a role model for children back in her village.

They ask me to take their girls and train them, so that they become like me.

The villagers now want a training centre near their village so that the children choose games over vio-

lence and change their lives for the better. Several other sportswomen who were interviewed spoke highly of Birua. She has not only been an excellent coach but has also helped her trainees financially and emotionally.

I tell my students to stick to the goal which brought them here. I tell them to look back at their village where they have come from, at other girls their age and what they are doing in their lives, and to work hard to make their country proud, to make their parents proud.

Amongst the players she coaches, four have become international players already. They are Salima Tete, Beauty Dungdung, Sangita Kumari and Sushma Kumari. Her trainees love her:

Pratima Birua was my coach at that time who taught me how to play in a good way. I played all the national and international matches from there. After that I got selected for India camp in 2016 and even now I am in India camp...After coming to Simdega Centre, coach Pratima Birua gave me shoes as I did not have shoes. -Sangita Kumari, Junior Hockey team, India.

My coach in Simdega, Pratima Birua ma'am, has also been very helpful. She has motivated me, supported me and guided me a lot. She keeps telling me that I have it in me, I can achieve whatever I set my mind to. She only

told me about the vacancies in CRPF and I had applied along with 2 other girls. I was in class 12th then. I qualified in the trials and got this job." -Sushma Kumari, Junior Hockey team, India.

...I was selected in the Simdega centre, where they have astroturf. Pratima Ma'am trained us here. I am in the camp because of her. She was very supportive. In 2019, I was selected for the India camp. -Beauty Dungdung, Junior Hockey team, India.

Story of Nikki Pradhan

Nikki Pradhan belongs to a small village named Hesal in the district of Khunti, Jharkhand. Despite Hesal having no grounds for children to play in, it has given 2 international and 25-30 national-level women hockey players. Nikki's family consists of her mother, a homemaker, her father, a retired police personnel, four girls including her and a brother, who is the youngest. People around used to wonder aloud on how her family would fare ahead as they were four sisters. This used to hurt Nikki and fuelled her will towards establishing her identity through hockey. She later attended school in Ranchi where a lot of students were engaged in sports. Such an environment helped her develop an interest in games. When she was in the 4th standard, five international hockey players were invited to her school for felicitation as they had won

gold in the Asian Games. They spoke about their journey which motivated Nikki enough to decide for herself that she wanted to try out hockey as a career. She thought she would be able to follow her idols in their footsteps. In 2006, she appeared for trials at the Government Girls High School, a junior SAI centre in Bariatu, Ranchi and got selected. However, when she had only started to pick up the game well, in 2008 she was removed from the centre. Nikki describes this as one of the lowest times of her life. She had to go back home and face all those people again who wondered how a family with four daughters would fare. But then, the state coaches liked her performance and decided to keep her at their centre. In 2010, she crossed the age limit of being at the centre, i.e. 18, and was again asked to leave the centre. But the school principal and the coaches were supportive enough to let her stay in a shared occupancy in the hostel. It was rent-free but she now had to get her own food. This posed difficulties for her as she was always short on money and did not have time enough to both cook and train. However, right after this, in 2011, her breakthrough happened. She got selected in the Jharkhand Hockey team, where except her all the others were international players, for the 31st National Games held in Ranchi. Nikki went on to get selected in the Junior India camp. Due to her short stature, her talent for hockey was always doubted. People wondered if there was a shortage of good players because somebody like her with a short

stature got selected. But Nikki just had hockey on her mind, she was of the view that when she had a hockey stick with her like the others, she had it all and could play the best game possible. She did not pay heed to what the others said, but let her game do the talking. Nikki played for the Junior Asia Cup in the year 2011. It was the first time that she played with a kit with "India" written on it. She describes it as quite an emotional moment, she was happy and sad at the same time. Happy because her dream of representing the country was coming true, sad because she feared not giving a performance that is worthy of wearing the jersey. In the year 2012, her performance as a player secured her a job with the railways. When she turned 19, she was no longer eligible for the junior camp, but she kept playing for the south-eastern railways. Due to her hard work and practice she finally got selected for the senior camp in 2015. It was like a dream come true and since then she has been representing India in the Hockey team. In 2016, she became the first sportswoman from Jharkhand to represent India at the Olympics. She talks of the experience as surreal. She walked next to sportspersons from around the world whom she had only seen on the television before. She found the event to be extremely pressurising as she was representing the country at the world's biggest sports tournament. There were huge audiences watching the sport events which added onto the performance pressure.

Moreover, the physique of the opponents from

the western countries was different. They were taller and well-built owing to better nutrition. But in hockey, Nikki says, every player has their advantages. With her short stature, Nikki feels she has an advantage when it comes to making turns. What helped her through those matches at the Olympics was her years of experience in the game and maintaining focus on the game. She has continuously worked hard on improving her game for many years and she gives her Adivasi roots the credit for this persistence. She says,

We Adivasi people are very loyal towards our work, we love to do whatever work we do. That is why we excel at certain things better than others.

Nikki thinks she is gifted at running fast and she, therefore, keeps working on it to be better. In the matches, her speed helps the team to get the ball back when they have lost it to the opponent.

Nikki playing at the Olympics motivated other women to take up the game seriously. As a result, four others have made into the senior and the junior hockey teams. She is glad she helped hockey in Jharkhand get its sheen back. Her parents are proud of her. After the Olympics, she has also gained a lot of recognition. Wherever she goes she is recognised and treated with respect. That she is a tiny girl, but playing in the international team. Her coaches from before keep in touch with her, especially when she is in the news, to congratulate

her and to tell her that because of her they and the school is gaining recognition. Her financial situation got better because she got a job in the south-eastern railways due to hockey. She doesn't think she would have ever come to Ranchi had it not been because of hockey. The game has also helped her be strong mentally and learn useful skills such as being ready to deal with any situation that may come her way. That failure today does not mean failure for the rest of her life; for tomorrow is another day and she has to be ready for it.

Story of Rakhi Tirkey

Rakhi Tirkey has six other members in her family. She has one brother who plays football and three sisters. The eldest sister is married and the rest are all national level wrestlers. They got into wrestling by chance. Bholanath Singh, the general secretary for the Wrestling Association in Jharkhand stays in the same locality as they do. One fine day he stopped them while they were headed for school and asked them:

Kushti khelegi? (Do you want to wrestle?).

They agreed and the next day were at the training centre. This was in 2012. In the same year both the sisters became national level players. The Tirkey sisters stay in Ranchi, in a dilapidated house by the Kanke dam reservoir. Their parents brew rice beer and sell it for a living. They belong to the Oraon

community. Rakhi has a Bachelor's degree in Arts from Ranchi College and has plans to pursue a diploma in physical education.

At first when Rakhi began with wrestling, she thought it was mostly about lifting and throwing the opponent to the ground. She only gained clarity on techniques once she started playing at the state level. Once she met and watched the Phogat sisters play, she got inspired to be like them in her game. She also got more interested in the game and took this up as a challenge that she had to get as good as the Phogat sisters. When they played and succeeded despite being five sisters, then Rakhi and her sisters were just three, then what was preventing them from performing too?

Within two months of beginning practice, Rakhi Tirkey received a gold medal at the state level in her category. She went on to play at the state level and finally the national level. She also won a silver in the junior category, attended senior camp in Jharkhand and then the India camp too. The Tirkey sisters have served as an inspiration to many other girls of the Adivasi community who have started wrestling because of them. They also received coverage in newspapers which claimed that Rakhi Tirkey had made the state, her parents, the Adivasi and the wrestling communities proud. However, there was no support from the system's side. Rakhi claims to have never received scholarships on time and in some years to have not received the amount

at all. Whenever she does receive the amount, it does not suffice for all the expenses. A lot of money goes into buying uniforms which are in two colours, red and blue, and shoes. Due to wear and tear, they have to be bought repeatedly. A good costume costs around ₹1200 and shoes cost ₹1500. Other than this there is glucose and fruits to be bought. Her diet consists of lentils and rice everyday from home and she has hardly been able to follow the diet of a wrestler strictly due to her family's financial situation. She thinks it is because of her diet that she is not able to perform better. There is no SAI centre or day boarding facilities available for wrestling in Ranchi for women. Despite that, she has kept on practising for the past 9 years. Now that she is a senior player, she takes along younger women from her community to practice:

so that they also have a future. In our society, like women, wrestling is also not given much encouragement or support.

Rakhi wonders how her life would have been different had she been living in her ancestral village. Her parents would be told by the relatives to make the girls leave wrestling as who would marry them with their broken limbs? But now the relatives are all proud of her and boast about her being a national level medal winner and travelling across the country. Her parents have always been supportive of her making her own decisions. They thought that with the help of wrestling their daughter

would be able to find herself a better future. They never anticipated that she would go as far as representing the state in the nationals or to the India camp. Their family was even visited by the Chief Minister of Jharkhand. He had told her how he was following her trajectory and was proud of the fact that an Adivasi girl was into wrestling and was getting medals at the national level.

Wrestling also gave her the opportunity to travel the country. She had only seen trains pass by but never gotten into one before. That changed when she got to travel through the length and breadth of the country and visited the states of Haryana, Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala and various other places for her tournaments. Rakhi thinks herself privileged to have gotten this opportunity as most Adivasi women do not get the opportunity to move out even of their villages. She also got the chance to mingle with sportswomen from other parts of the country and got to understand their communities. She made good friends from Madhya Pradesh and Bihar with whom she goes sight-seeing around the cities they play in.

When the Tirkey sisters had begun practising wrestling with their coach, Bholanath Singh, there were no other girls other than them. But when Rakhi scored a medal at the state level, many Adivasi girls from her friend circle, from college, school, neighbourhood, an orphanage next to her place and even her village in Old Ranchi wanted to come

practice with her. Currently a group of 30 Adivasi women play wrestling. They all practice together and have gone to play at the junior, senior and national levels together. Rakhi thinks that Adivasi women are not scared of any scratches or bruises that might happen due to the game. However, Rakhi was a little hesitant towards wearing the costume, but later when she started playing matches wearing it she got comfortable with it.

Due to the lack of female players, Rakhi in the beginning used to wrestle with boys. She was hesitant about it at first, as one will have to maintain close contact due to the nature of the game. Also, she was scared thinking how her moves would pan out. But the coach used to be present at all times and gradually she built her confidence to wrestle with them. She still practises with the boys to hone all the techniques that she learns.

She also had her hair cropped short like men for most of her childhood and until quite recently. People used to mistake her for being a boy. In shared rickshaws she was many a time asked to sit next to the driver, them assuming her to be a boy.

Since getting into wrestling and winning medals, Rakhi has gained recognition. Many newspaper dailies have covered her story of becoming a state-level champion of wrestling. While going for practice on her bicycle or while buying ration in shops people recognise her from the newspapers. When she goes to her village, children surround her and ask about

wrestling and her experiences of travelling across the country. Whenever such an incident happens it makes her feel happy about herself.

Whenever she plays a match, there is a lot of audience which makes her feel like a celebrity. She thinks the reason for the audience being more with respect to a men's match is because women wrestling is not a common sight to behold.

Rakhi has also been felicitated by the Adivasi community with a memento and told how proud the community was of her accomplishments. They encouraged her to keep on playing and making the community proud.

Rakhi, however, is disappointed with the system. Despite her winning medals at the national level, she has received no encouragement from the government. According to her, in the state of Jharkhand, girls perform better than boys. Still, girls do not have a residential training centre in Jharkhand. This, she feels, is hindering her and many others to get to the Olympics. Football, hockey and archery have their girls residential training centres but not wrestling. Gradually, due to this, she is losing her motivation in the game. The number of women wrestlers are also decreasing due to the same reason. Rakhi is of the opinion that women players are valued less than the men. The coach is more attentive towards the men. Women are hesitant to express themselves due to which if they want to go play somewhere for a tournament, they

are unable to. The scholarship amount is small considering the fact that so much is to be done with it; diet, training equipment, wrestling singlets, et cetera. When they travel, only the ticket amount is covered by the government. No arrangements for food are made or any monetary support given to spend on it. The hosts for the competition only cover expenses from the day the competition begins. Many girls who play along with Rakhi, are not from well to do families. Their parents do not have a stable income to support their girls well through the sport. In other states, Rakhi says, girls get jobs with the state police on scoring medals at the state level. This does not happen in Jharkhand. If it would have been, Rakhi's situation would have been better. Her parents would not have to sell rice beer to sustain the family, they would not be living in a *kaccha* house by the dam reservoir.

Story of Asunta Lakra

Asunta Lakra belongs to a small village amongst the forests in Simdega district of Jharkhand. Her village lacked basic public amenities like roads, electricity and drinking water. She grew up with three brothers and two sisters. Her father was a former hockey player and both her parents largely engaged in agriculture throughout her life. All her brothers, Birendra Lakra, Bimal Lakra and Binay Lakra have been hockey players. Asunta considers her elder brother who is no more, Binay, to be her role

model. It was he who introduced her to hockey. All her brothers used to stay at St. Ignatius Centre. Whenever they used to come back, Asunta used to play with them in their courtyard. Once, she saw passport-sized photographs of female hockey players in her brother's wallet and got fascinated by the t-shirts that they were wearing. She told her brother Binay that she wanted to play hockey. He talked to the coach at the women's centre in Bariatu, Ranchi and the coach decided to give Asunta a chance. He liked the fact that she had a good height and was eager to learn. She recounts her time thus:

When I joined the Bariatu centre, I had to travel from Simdega to Ranchi by bus. There used to be one bus at 4:00 AM. If I missed this bus there was no other way to get to Ranchi. I used to wake up at 2:30 AM and get to the bus stand with my father on his cycle, with a torch for a light. Either this or I used to stay over at some relative's place in Simdega to catch the bus early in the morning. I remember how I never used to have anything to eat. My parents used to worry a lot about me, if I had reached or not, how was I doing? I used to send a letter home which used to take a week to get there. They did not even know when I would return. Whenever holiday was declared I used to travel back to Simdega, hoping the bus would reach on time, and I would find somebody from our village to take me back. Once the bus got late and

I reached Simdega late at night. There was a group of people who took note of the fact that a lone girl had arrived and they started looking towards me. I was scared, but one of the men recognised me due to my father. My father had also been a hockey player and was known in the village.

Buying training equipment was another ordeal.

When I joined the centre, I needed to have a hockey stick. My father was unable to buy it for me. My brother thought if a new stick had to be bought, it would rather be for him as he was a professional hockey player then and I could use his old one. He also got me shoes borrowed from somebody. I used to wear his used t-shirts also, it felt nice to wear them.

Her training at the Bariatu centre was relentless.

My diet had not been good before coming to the centre. Every morning I used to have last night's food boiled in water with salt. I used to walk to school and not have lunch. I used to return around 4:00 PM on foot. The next meal was dinner. Being a sportsperson, diet is important. I used to faint while training because maybe my haemoglobin level was low. I had no idea before of the diet required for a sportsperson. For me, rice in water was my

food. My coach used to threaten me saying that if I didn't train harder, he would complain to my brother. If my t-shirt wasn't wet with sweat while training, he would complain to my brother. He threatened me into becoming a better sportsperson. I am thankful to him because it worked and helped me get where I am. I did not know then what potential hockey held. I did not know what kind of a future I could have with it. I was playing because I had fun while playing and the t-shirt attracted me like I told you before.

In the beginning, Asunta did not get selected for the India camp. She felt bad about it as she had always been competitive by nature. She observed those selected for the India camp practising and learnt the same techniques herself. She worked hard until she finally got selected for the India camp.

From the year 2000 until 2014 I played for India continuously. Once I got into the Indian team, I think I was in such high spirits that I used to run around the field endlessly without thinking about anything. I never sat on the bench, I wanted to play and I played for 70 minutes. Whenever the coach asked me to come out, I used to refuse and get back in.

She recounts her best moment in hockey when she struck the first goal for India against Australia, in the Commonwealth Games, 2006. She was happier for the fact that Dilip Tirkey, the only Adivasi

to have represented India thrice in the Olympics, praised her for the strike. She felt validated by his gesture.

After 2014, when Asunta retired from playing hockey, she joined her office of the railways full time. Asunta's life has been a trailblazer for a lot of younger players to admire and follow. After playing for more than 20 years, sitting at a desk all day long felt cumbersome to her. She thought of her life's trajectory, from a far-flung village in Simdega, to Ranchi, and then to the rest of the world, she had quite an exposure. She thought of other girls from her own village who would have dreams like she did. She decided to stay in touch with hockey by visiting centres and talking to young women under training to motivate them. She found herself getting along well with them. With Salima Tete, Sushma Kumari, Sangita Kumari and Beauty Dungdung she shared a special bond. Everytime they walked back towards their hostel, they would stop by to speak with her whenever she would be available. They would talk of how they could better their game, how they could make it to the India camp and then finally, get to represent the nation.

Asunta remembers a time at the India camp when half of the women used to be from Jharkhand and around 5-6 would get selected in the team. But for the better half of her career she was the only one from Jharkhand in the Indian hockey team. Now she thinks the situation has improved and

soon it will get better too. She is of the mind that women in Jharkhand have something unfathomable about them because of the community in which they grow up.

In our Adivasi community, girls from a young age do a lot of household chores. They are not dependent on their parents. They do all the household chores. By the age of 10-12 years, they can look after a household all by themselves. So from the age of 6-7 years, these girls start working laboriously everyday. Soon it becomes a habit and that comes in handy when they begin to play. They have this thing within them that catalyses them, so that they tackle anything fearlessly in life. I have seen my seniors before me, I have seen myself. We come from dark villages from where we have fought endlessly to be where we are today. When we finally gain freedom, we feel nothing. When we are given facilities, when we are given food to eat on time, it becomes too easy for us. So, in our Adivasi community it is so, that women look after the entire household. It is not that men don't, but women work extremely hard. The daughter would always be with the mother and work alongside her. So, she works equally hard and learns from her. They experience so much and become wise. They become strong. I used to see my batchmates and my seniors, all of them, when we used to train after injuries.

Girls from other states used to scream and cry during gym sessions. After the training, the coaches used to get amazed when we used to work out. "However hard you train them, they don't look tired at all. What do these Jharkhand and Odisha girls have in them?". This is because we work hard all our lives. When a national level game is happening and it is against Jharkhand or Odisha, and the match is during the day, when it is around 12:00-1:00 PM, the coaches say, "Oh! Today it is Jharkhand's day or Odisha's day!". Everybody is sure that we will win the match because it is our day. The harder the sun the more they'll run. They don't even drink water, they just keep running. This is the actual truth. Adivasi women are this strong.

Asunta feels that if a sportsperson plays under the country's name they deserve to have their finances sorted too. A lot of Adivasi women from Jharkhand come from families which survive on one meal a day. Asunta feels that if a woman is emerging from this kind of a situation, she needs to help others in her family to get out of it too. Once the finances are sorted the women gain independence and freedom to act upon their choices. But for these women, who were running complete households by the age of 12 were already looking after themselves and the others. Asunta also feels that a due amount of recognition should be given to players. Sometimes, she feels discriminated against by

the state authorities when it comes to recognition. Despite playing for the country for fourteen long years, being the captain of the team did not make her a deserving candidate for an award. She feels that since she belongs from an Adivasi community she has been treated this way.

How many Barriers does one need to Break?

The group discussions of the young Adivasi sports-women and the life stories of the established sports-women from Jharkhand inform us of the different kinds of struggles that they had to overcome on their journey to establish themselves as professional sportswomen. While the young women embark on breaking the first and the most challenging of the barriers, i.e. to step out of their domesticity, they confront a life that will continue to present them with more challenges. Their aspirations will require them to break some more barriers, however, some of these barriers will become critical in deciding the fate of their careers, more often ending them. One wonders, where do these barriers for Adivasi sports-women end? The aspirations of the sportswomen, although modest, come at a considerable cost.

Experienced players who have performed and have brought back laurels for the nation continue to struggle for recognition and a post retirement livelihood. Once the sportswomen cross over the societal barriers that limit them within the folds of domesticity, an ailing ecosystem makes their lives as

sportspersons difficult. Be it Pratima Birua, Sumrai Tete, Asunta Lakra struggling to get a decent paying job that helps them to take their role as sportsperson to a different dimension or for the younger lot such as Salima Tete, Nikki Pradhan facing challenges to sustain their careers, the ecosystem to support sportswomen in general and Adivasi sportswomen in particular are largely absent. The life stories of those which we have captured are only a small representation of the struggle and the indomitable spirit of the Adivasi women; it stands testimony to their performances which have been largely ignored, their needs relegated in favour of a man and their future which is considered to be of least priority continue to get neglected. Inequities start at home when Asunta Lakra's need to get a hockey stick is ignored over her brother's need for the same, or Rakhi Tirkey's coaches decide to pay more attention to men's training or Nikki Pradhan repeatedly being asked to leave the hostel or Pratima Birua struggling to make her ends meet with a grossly inadequate salary largely points towards a normalised structural inequity at work. Those women who manage to negotiate with such inequities and force the society to turn their heads also face discrimination. Sumrai Tete is one such figure; she was an India team regular and has brought back several laurels for the nation. When she was asked about the status of recognitions for women sportspersons, she replied:

I won many medals, played well too during

my career. I expected that I would be awarded the Arjuna Award when I was playing; but I was not, which was quite disappointing. I think the awards are rigged, as they give it to those who have some people to talk them up. I come from a background where I had no one to push my nomination and maybe that was the reason why I did not get it. I have never achieved anything easily. After I retired from the games, I served for 10 years as a coach before I got the Major Dhyan Chand Award. I was definitely happy when I received the award, but I was disappointed that I did not get it at the right time. I had this passion that I will have certain achievements in my life; not receiving the Arjuna award was a major disappointment.

Pratima Birua had played the nationals representing Bihar. She became a coach in the year 2008 after pursuing her diploma in physical education at the SS Girls Uchh Vidyalaya, Simdega. Her struggles started when she wanted to move to a city to pursue hockey, and despite having achieved what she has, there is no reflection of it on the kind of salary and recognition she receives. The researchers spoke to many younger sportswomen in hockey, many of them idolise her and respect her for the fact that she has had a crucial role to play in their lives when it comes to being a hockey player. She has supported them emotionally, financially and with the techniques of the game. However, she

remains a hidden figure.

Barriers for sportswomen of Jharkhand continue to be a never ending enigma. They continue to take on challenges not only on the playing field but also outside it. Most of the time the struggles outside the arena overwhelms them and continue to prevent them from reaching it, let alone the struggle within it. Despite all such barriers they have walked their way into Ranchi and have flown out of it. As institutions started to recognize their zeal, their talent, their ability to work hard have helped them overcome the lack of the most basic necessities. However, one can hope for a better future as these athletes have proved it with their mettle. Their efforts cannot be ignored any further as they went on to not just represent India at the 2020 Olympics but also won the recognition of the global community. Whether such recognition would change the status of women sportspersons in states such as Jharkhand or not, is a question that only time will answer.

Endnote

1. The struggle of the Adivasis can be traced back to the Santal Hul of 1855.
2. Caste and Tribe are colonial categories. Traditionally in India different communities were addressed by dominant communities through the conceptual category of

Jati/ Zat (Guha, 2015)

3. Santal Society was structurally patriarchal but the influence of Hindu societies further entrenched the normative roles for women within the fabric of the everyday of the Santal society.

4. Founded in 2016, JSSPS is a joint initiative by the Government of Jharkhand and the Central Coalfields Limited. Judo, hockey, boxing, weight lifting, shooting, synchronised diving, swimming, table tennis, badminton, athletics, archery, football, taekwondo and wrestling are the sports in which training is being given to both boys and girls with a special focus on candidates belonging to the OBC and Adivasi communities.

5. Adivasi society is often termed as egalitarian, however generations of acculturation with dominant upper caste Hindu society shaped their beliefs and practices and the narrative that Adivasi society is relatively egalitarian needs to be examined with reference to empirical evidence.

Chapter 4

From Ranchi to Tokyo - Mapping Socio-Economic Mobility through Sport

4.1 Aspirations and Institutions

Indian women's hockey team...the ladies who defied odds fly high at Tokyo Olympics - The New Indian Express, 2021

With a Legacy of Stellar Players, Jharkhand Aims To Become India's Next Hockey Power-house - Indiatimes.com (Sengar, 2021)

Montage is a cinematic effect where a sequence of discrete and separate images when portrayed and observed in succession builds a narrative which

traces a different and a unique trajectory than the images themselves. The textual montage of the two news headlines tell us a narrative; a narrative where aspiration is the unmentioned protagonist, the aspiration of the sportswomen of Jharkhand, particularly playing hockey, football, archery, swimming and other Olympic sports.

Aspiration is unlike a dream; aspiration is a 'dream' which one seeks to materialise; something towards which one focuses their life and life decisions. Athletes aspire, however, the aspiration to represent one's country requires supreme confidence over one's ability to perform. All (elite) athletes aspire to perform at the Olympics; they seek to establish themselves on what is considered to be the greatest show on earth (Wamsley and Young 2005). Almost all the athletes that were interviewed as part of this book project expressed their aspiration to represent their state followed by their nation at international events; especially at the Olympics. It was important for us to note the homogenous unanimity of such an aspiration. As we explored in the previous chapter how the need for recognition amongst the respondents stemmed from an acute need to justify their (read the sportswoman's) life decisions that made them deviants, that made them stand out in the crowd, not always as a leader but mostly as an immoral, undesirable female. Success tempered the judgemental gaze of society. Hence, the need to succeed to justify their decisions and therein lies the purpose of recognition. One wonders

to what extent such social gaze shapes the aspiration of the Adivasi sportswomen from Jharkhand. One wonders what are the most powerful drivers of such a homogenous expression of aspirations. For answers to these questions the researchers not only looked through the narratives of the athletes but also studied the institutions which trained the women into sportspersons. During the field work, the primary institutions that are currently training emergent sportspersons were examined in detail. Their vision, mission and goals were reviewed along with the organisational structure and the composition of its staff members. The researchers also interacted with the coaches to understand the philosophy with which they performed their duties and shaped the psyche of the athletes.

4.2 Understanding the Institutions of Sports in Jharkhand: Jharkhand State Sports Promotion Society (JSSPS) and the Sports Authority of India (SAI) Centres

The Jharkhand State Sports Promotion Society (JSSPS) is the most important institution when it comes to training of new talents for Olympic sports. The mission of JSSPS as appears on their website reads: Our Mission-Olympic Golds.

JSSPS as described by its website is a 'unique unconventional CSR initiative of Central Coalfields Limited (CCL) which administers and operates the

Mega Sports Complex, Khelgaon and Astro turf Hockey Stadium, Morabadi' and a Sports academy where a young talent pool is nurtured and trained to participate and bring laurels from the Olympics. It was established in pursuance of the State resolution of Department of Tourism, Art, Culture, Sports & Youth Affairs, Government of Jharkhand under the Public Private Partnership (PPP) model. The JSSPS seeks to establish a Sports University in future to provide an end-to-end sports education programme at both graduate and postgraduate levels in Ranchi, Jharkhand, to promote sports as a viable career option. The University is also being planned in association with CCL, Ranchi.

The Central Coalfields Limited (A Public Sector Mini Ratna PSU) and the State Government of Jharkhand started running JSSPS in 2016 with five sports disciplines (archery, athletics, taekwondo, wrestling and football) and then introduced 10 additional Olympic Sports disciplines in 2018 (judo, hockey, boxing, weightlifting, shooting, synchronised diving, swimming, table tennis, track & field athletics and badminton). While the mission of the academy is to bring Olympic glory and gold back to India vis-a-vis Jharkhand, the goal of the institution is to spread Olympic sports to the last mile villages in search of a talent pool. About 97 percent of the trainees at the academy are Adivasi youth (both boys and girls) from remote villages of almost all 24 districts of Jharkhand. The trainees are provided boarding, lodging, training and education (basic

schooling) at Khelgaon, Ranchi. The trainees are expected to progressively represent their panchayat, followed by their district, then state and finally the nation at the highest level. The motto and the intent of the institution is largely embedded in a strong sense of nationalism in the trainees, who are addressed largely as 'cadets' and are indoctrinated with patriotic values. The JSSPS website puts across their intention and action as directed towards achieving overall development of the cadets trained at a premier training facility and an ecosystem where the cadet can imbibe nationalistic spirit.

At JSSPS, we focus on overall development of the children and provide them with state of the art infrastructure, access to quality par excellence training and school education. Each of our 'Sports Cadets' is imbued with true values of patriotism, integrity, honesty and lead by example. The various facilities in our world class maintained indoor and outdoor stadiums and outreach to more than five lakh beneficiaries across Jharkhand has made us a valued entity within a short span of time. We believe that, with a persistent and focused approach to scientifically evaluate and train the children, we shall achieve the coveted dream of Olympic Gold Medals.

With over fifteen hundred cadets being trained at the JSSPS sports academy it has emerged as the fundamental institution which not only nurtures

youth from Jharkhand to reach the highest level of sports performance, but also contributes to the necessary infrastructure and favourable ecosystem required for sustaining the effort.

Apart from the JSSPS, and the State Government sponsored facilities, the Sports Authority of India (SAI) also adds to the infrastructure that supports sports in the rural, urban and peri-urban regions of Jharkhand. The SAI centres at each district and block do not always function. Only some regions have a SAI centre or an academy that has coaches, hostel facilities and training facilities for athletes. Alongside the JSSPS facilities, the SAI facilities function to provide the necessary ecosystem which can nurture players.

4.3 Training at the Academy and its Effect on the Cadets

One of the primary focus areas of this book project was to understand the effect of the training that the cadets receive at the institutions such as the JSSPS, SAI centres, Birsa Munda Archery Academy and other similar facilities. The cadets not only learnt the skills associated with their disciplines but also underwent a certain kind of training which largely shapes their aspirations and outlook towards life at large. At these academies veteran established players work as coaches to build upon the vision of young talents to become professional sportspersons. Coaches such as Sumrai Tete, Pratima Birua and

Asunta Lakra, not only provide them with necessary equipment and training, but also help them build the right attitude one needs to remain in competitive sports.

Sangita Kumari is a young talent at the Indian team training camp. She is 19 years old and has made a break into the state team as well as at the India team reserves. She recounts how she started playing hockey at school with sticks her father made for her with bamboo. She played bare feet until she was spotted and sent to the Simdega centre for training under Pratima Birua.

I came and gave my trial properly in Simdega Centre and stayed there in the year 2012. After coming to Simdega Centre, coach Pratima Birua gave me shoes as I did not have shoes. Pratima Birua was my coach that time who taught me how to play in a good way.

Sangita is one amongst the many that Pratima Birua and Asunta Lakra have coached, inspired and provided with the required material support. Sangita currently plays national and international level matches and continues on her path to establish herself as a professional player.

With professional growth comes the aspect of life where one starts to seek certain established landmarks such as a stable cash flow, settled life and recognition. Sangita has been playing international tournaments since 2016 and like many others

has experienced socio-economic mobility, she says:

I faced a lot of problems after I started playing. I did not have a hockey stick nor shoes. There was no money in the house...Recently I got some money when I participated in an international tournament. I am taking care of my expenses with that money till now. I do not ask for money from home now and I take care of my own expenses.

Sangita has not given up on her studies. She is continuing with her undergraduate degree in humanities and will apply for a job under the sports quota in Indian railways. Like Sangita, Sushma Kumari, her colleague at the Simdega centre followed in her footsteps. Sushma too, started playing in school with sticks and developed her game at the Simdega centre. Sushma got her first hockey stick as a prize for being the player of the tournament in one of the many tournaments she won for her school. While at the Simdega centre, she secured her job at the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and Pratima Birua helped her secure the job alongside other players. Like Sangita, Sushma is continuing her undergraduate studies and will apply for promotion. She wanted to speak English fluently but was unaware of the tribe she belonged to; the only thing she knew was that she came from an Scheduled Tribe (ST) family.

Sangita and Sushma are just a few of the many who have received training and guidance at the

centres run by the Department of Tourism, Art & Culture, Sports and Youth Affairs. While the state-run academy and its coaches have pulled them out of abject poverty and have helped them be on the path to achieve recognition and fulfil their passion to play a sport, exposed them to the world full of opportunities to meet new people and have taught them to interact with people from different communities, it also had an impact on their sensibilities as Adivasis, as if their need to prove their ability as sportspersons representing India required them to bring their Adivasi and woman identity into a tension. The ecosystem within the training centre largely shapes the psyche of the athletes to figuratively sacrifice their life desires for the cause of the nation, akin to a soldier fighting at the frontier. Such an approach prevents the athletes from thinking about their being and the material condition of their own tribe and kin. It also prevents them from analysing the generational oppression and discrimination that they have been subjected to as a community. Hence they hardly open up about their experiences of discrimination. Almost all the women forth right ruled out the discussion on discrimination yet when it came to awards and recognition many have articulated the same as a case of partiality. In short, the exploration of the JSSPS, SAI, state-run training centres and their training programmes tells us why most of our respondents informed us with homogenous responses on their aspirations. They are all schooled, trained and con-

ditioned with a focused goal to achieve an Olympic gold medal in their respective sporting disciplines. The horizon of thought and reflection that Marang Gomke developed through a balance of education and sport somewhere gets lost in the race to the gold medal; the need to remain grounded within their own indigenous past is not important in a training centre which exists with a mission to bring back Olympic laurels for one's nation. The statesman with a hockey stick, that Jaipal Singh Munda was, would be hard to get from such an institution. Despite its myopic scope, state sponsored centres' trainings did produce a host of champions such as Salima Tete and Nikki Pradhan who played in the national hockey team at Tokyo Olympics, wrestlers such as Chanchala Kumari and footballers such as Sumati Kumari and Astam Oraon who are currently playing national and international tournaments. These women have not only achieved sporting laurels for their nation but have also contributed as role models for the upcoming generations who are emerging from poor, conflict ridden backgrounds to seek out a career and possible socio-economic mobility both as women as well as Adivasis.

4.4 Coaches, Coaching and 'Career(s)'

Our Ma'am, Pratima treats us all very well
and we receive a lot of love from her.
-Beauty Dungdung

Institutes are mostly what the coaches make

out of them. The researchers interacted with seven coaches across three of the most popular sporting disciplines, hockey, football and archery. All the coaches working in the JSSPS academy, the state-run centres and the SAI centres were established sportspersons themselves and have brought laurels for the nation and for their states. All of them are professionally trained coaches and hold diplomas and degrees in coaching. However the purpose of this section is to highlight their significance not just as coaches, teaching and honing skills of the players, but also as being a guide, a companion and a patron to many of the emerging players. This section analyses how the coaches donned various hats to ensure that the players emerging from the most poverty ridden margins can take off as successful sportspersons and establish themselves professionally. The coaches often adopted the players and took care of their nutrition, health, finances, bureaucratic hurdles and dealt with the societal pressure which often demotivated parents of young players to support their child's pursuit. The discussions in this section will explore through the words of the several coaches how they ensure that their trainees, players or cadets make their way up to the highest level of performance; how they have managed to keep the motivation high, develop skills, manage finances and pull them out from poverty.

In hockey, Sumrai Tete, Pratima Birua and Asunta Lakra are the foremost names. While Sumrai Tete was decorated with the Jharkhand Ratna

award and Asunta Lakra was an established international player, Pratima Birua continues to be the silent nurturer. Pratima Birua is a coach who builds foundational skills in players and builds their vision as a sportsperson. Pratima was a national level player herself, she missed out on becoming an international player due to a knee injury which she could not treat for the lack of funds; later she earned a Diploma in Physical Education coaching from Patiala and joined as the hockey coach at the Simdega Centre in 2008. Since then she has helped shape the best hockey players that Jharkhand has gifted to the nation. Currently, Pratima Birua says that:

I train girls here and 4-5 girls from here have gone out to represent hockey at the national level. There are 3 girls from here who are in the junior national team and one player named Salima Tete is in the senior national hockey team.

Her motivation stems from her own struggle to establish herself as a player and she took up the noble yet silent task of aiding young girls to establish themselves. She knows from her experience the challenges that the young Adivasi girls would face as they break out of their domestic shackles and into the harsh competitive world of sports.

Sumrai Tete, Masira Surin, Kantiba, were the players I used to play alongside during my years. Due to lack of government support I

could not get better treatment for my knee injury due to which I missed the opportunity to be an international player. And therefore, I wish now that all the students who I train must play international hockey.

The charter of work as a coach does not require her to call and convince the parents of the girls who train under her to continue supporting their daughter or to advise her students to apply for different state and central government jobs under sports quota. She also ensures that the players receive their quote of nutrition or ration even when they are not physically present at the centre. During the recent COVID-19 induced lockdown coach Birua ensured that rations reach the family of the players under her. When we asked her if she talks to the families of the players training under her she replied:

Yes I do talk to them when they have connectivity. Most of them stay in remote locations, connecting over phone is difficult. I talk to their parents. During the recent lockdown the District Collector had ordered to map families of those who were not receiving rations. So to ensure that the families received ration we contacted them.

Coach Birua helps students write applications and deal with bureaucratic bottlenecks too; she suffered as an emerging athlete to negotiate with the bureaucracy and now she extends her support to

the next generation.

Their journey of coming out from their villages and connecting to the mainstream people in town is itself very difficult. Even I have faced the same difficulty. The rural people are mostly unaware of the nuances and the activities of the sports department and the documents that are to be made for participating in sports. Making certificates from the block office takes too much time.

While most of the emerging players have grown up aspiring to become like Asunta Lakra and Sumrai Tete, Pratima Birua provides them with the necessary equipment and skills. Sangita Kumari says that:

After coming to Simdega Centre coach Pratima Birua gave me shoes as I did not have shoes.

Another emerging player Sushma Kumari owes her career to coach Birua. She said:

Fr. Benedict used to show us Asunta Lakra on television, watching her play used to motivate me. But my coach, Pratima Birua has also been very helpful. She used to give me money for uniforms, shoes and travel and helped me to get a job. My parents don't know much about hockey. They just know that I am out here somewhere in the country playing hockey, which match it is or where I am

going, they don't know that. It is my coach who knows everything and keeps motivating me.

Sumrai Tete and Asunta Lakra continue as coaches at the centre as well; they shape teams, inspire them with their stick work and help build confidence to take on opponents. Sumrai Tete and Asunta Lakra share a very humble background and understand the nuances of the struggle that Adivasi women face as they come out into competitive hockey. For Tete, her hockey journey started as a schoolgirl and from there on despite poverty she established herself as a regular in the Indian senior team and for three years (2011-2014) she was the national coach. During her years the state of Jharkhand was not formed and she represented the erstwhile state of Bihar from which Jharkhand was carved out in the year 2000.

I got selected for Government Girls High School, Bariatu in the year 1990. I completed my education till class 12th from there and I trained at the hockey centre. I played sub-junior nationals, school nationals, then in 1993-94, I played the senior-nationals, representing Bihar. During that time I got selected for the India team camp. In 1995, I attended my first India camp. I continued to be in the team from then till 2006. Many tournaments happened during this time where I participated and won medals. In 1997, I joined the Rail-

ways and after that I kept playing for the state, for the railways and for the country. After I retired from sports, I got a diploma in hockey in 2008-09 and during 2011 till 2014 I was the coach for the India Hockey team. In 2017, I was awarded the Major Dhyan Chand Award. In the year 2007, the Jharkhand State awarded me the Jharkhand Ratna Award along with M.S. Dhoni.

Like hockey, football, archery, track and field athletics and swimming also have such hidden figures who get rarely mentioned, yet they ensure that players emerge, they break out of their shackles and establish themselves. Veena Kerketta, Rinki Kujur and Shivani Toppo are few of the important figures who have helped shape the game of football for both women and men in Jharkhand. Veena Kerketta was not only a famous striker during her days as a professional player but also a very credible coach who took care of her trainees and kept them motivated. Coming from an Adivasi background herself she knew the struggles that most of her trainees undergo, much like coach Birua, coach Veena goes beyond her charter of work to help her trainees establish their career.

90% of the players in hockey and football are from the Adivasi community. The issues they mostly face are with respect to their financial situation. They don't have money to buy shoes and other things that are required to play the

game. The government is trying to provide things, they give 2 pairs of shoes for the entire year, kits too, but it is not sufficient.

Children come to train with me who don't even understand Hindi. Now if a child is not able to understand Hindi, how would they even understand the technical terms that I use in English? It gets quite difficult to explain things to them, and a lot of attention has to be paid to them. Despite these problems, the children who are able to deal with all these issues, are tough and resilient, sail through and succeed. Girls like Sumati Kumari Oraon, Astam Oraon who belong to a poor family, but still have made their place in the international team are the kind of girls I am talking about. I try to motivate them and guide them as much as possible. Motivation works like a medicine.

Although motivation works like medicine, some of the issues are endemic. Lack of senior category players in football being one. She cites lack of institutional support as the primary cause.

We are getting players in all the categories except the senior category, because we do not have facilities available for them. We have written to the government demanding increment of seats and an assistant coach. We have also raised this demand repeatedly that the centre be allowed to keep well-performing

players in the centre even after they turn 18 years. Most of them come from weak economic backgrounds, and for them to keep on playing with just the support of their parents is not possible. This leads them to leaving the game altogether and getting back to the old life of poverty they had. Their education also could not go well because they were focusing on the games. The time that they go away is the time when they just need polishing. Every other day you see in the media that some national player is working at some hotel or working in the fields. There should be a policy regarding this that till the age of 25, players have centres, where they can practice and stay. If things stay the way they are, there are great chances that parents would stop sending their children into games, because there is no end result visible.

Veena Kerketta herself is also an iconic figure amongst coaches. She not only broke the glass ceiling as a woman football player but also as a coach. She is a rare example where a female coach in football trained boys.

When I returned with my NIS degree in 2007 I started coaching in 2008, beginning with a centre in Simdega for boys. They were quite narrow minded there. The principal wanted a male coach for the boys and served me taunts on how I was the odd one out because

I was a female. But I took it as a challenge, and I stayed there for six months. When I was leaving the principal said that maybe so much would not have been accomplished had there been a male coach. I felt nice that I was able to deliver. Currently I am serving at St. Patrick's in Gumla. It is a residential centre for girls.

Just like Veena, Prakash Ram, the national archery coach has a very special relationship with his trainees. Unlike football, Prakash Ram has an assistant coach Mukesh Turi who works alongside him to build on the talent pool. The Birsa Munda Archery Academy, where they are coaches, started off in Jharkhand with just three girls, today the Birsa Munda Archery Academy is the foremost archery facility in the country. For Prakash Ram and Mukesh Turi it was a long and arduous journey.

We started off with 3 girls. The environment was quite different then. Now if you see here, we have more girls than boys at our centre. One major reason is that when one girl does well in the game, the others who look up to her get motivated and join in or perform better. There are many Adivasi girls here. Firstly, they are naturally talented. Archery is a game that is connected to Jharkhand. When children are born here, a bow and an arrow is kept near them because it is auspicious.

Because of the kind of lifestyle they lead, the terrain is also hilly here, the players have an inbuilt stamina which helps them in the game. When we get the girls here, from that situation, compared to their current situation, things are a lot different. Their only problem remains a hesitation during communication. If you talk to girls here, many of them would be a little shy. This is because they don't think of themselves as being better than the rest. The ones who know themselves to be better than the rest, they are not hesitant. All the girls who are training here, nearly all of them have medals at the state or national level.

Aspiration, support and motivation are the required conditions for Adivasi athletes to step out of Ranchi and start stepping towards the Olympics, this time a few made their way to Tokyo, in the next three years it is definite that more will emerge as successful players and will make their way towards Paris 2024 Olympics. The institutes such as SAI, JSSPS, state-run centres and Birsa Munda Archery Academy have played a significant role in not just scouting, training and developing their skills as athletes but have also guided them to make a career out of it. Most of the trained athletes either already had a source of livelihood as a job or were developing their auxiliary skills to become coaches or trainers. Some of the athletes were also successfully continuing with their education. However, that does not mean that the lives

of the athletes were not challenging. Bottlenecks, hindrances continue to ravage their journeys and often become sources of disappointment, dejection and critical causes of failure. It is at these junctures coaches step up, who often become more than what their designations demand of them, to bail such athletes out of their trouble.

The coaches and their trainees share a very special relationship. While some build on their abilities and help them perform, some others fight more bureaucratic battles on behalf of their athletes; it is this ecosystem that builds upon the montage of sportswomen and their emergence. This is one of the biggest reasons that headlines such as the ones iterated in the beginning of this chapter resonate within the folds of our daily newspapers.

4.5 Jobs, Recognition and Legacy: A Way Towards Building a Sustainable Sports Culture?

The conventional approach towards sustaining and building sports careers has been through jobs where athletes are required to perform on behalf of the employer's team or take up roles to build their teams. Public Sector Companies, corporations and initiatives largely support athletes with such jobs. ONGC, Indian Oil, Indian Railways, SAIL are some of the leading PSUs that support athletes with jobs. The other sector which supports athletes are the security and police forces of the country, largely

clubbed as security services. The army, navy, Central Reserve Police Force, Central Industrial Security Forces (CISF), Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) and other military and paramilitary outfits under the Ministry of Defence or the Home Ministry.

While such jobs have their advantages, it has also contributed towards stemming the growth of focused professional coaching which can become available to the general public. Most of the accomplished players start working with services or PSUs and the upcoming generations do not get access to quality training at the beginning of their careers. Moreover, such specific jobs do not add to the business of the initiatives and hence, are not well remunerated, most of these positions remain under paid. With the changes in the global economic order post-liberalisation in the early 1990s, most of the PSUs have either changed their funding strategy or have shifted towards gradual privatisation. Privatisation has heavily affected the creation of sports quota oriented positions.

Coach Birua who is an NIS certified trainer, currently works with the state government. She said:

First 10 years we got ₹10,000, then it was increased to ₹15,000 and now it is ₹21,000. There is news that coaches who served for more than 10 years will be permanent or get a salary hike.

Adding to coach Birua, Coach Sumrai Tete said:

There is a lack of jobs. Everybody can't get a job with the railways. In a year, the railways give only 2-3 jobs, there is no guarantee that the job would go to a person from Jharkhand, or to an Adivasi.

Lives of coaches are difficult with little financial support. Their legacy remains but without the sport becoming a viable career option post retirement as a professional athlete it is not an active proposition for the youth.

With privatisation it is now a requirement for professional athletes playing at the national or international level to build on their capacities either as coaches or T.V. commentators or Sports Board administrators post their athletic life. It would require them to take up courses and explore possibilities in Sports Management, Physical Education or become certified coaches. The after-life decides how long the legacy of the athlete remains. Hence, none of the athletes that we interviewed had given up on their formal education. Almost all of them wanted to brush up their communication skills. The after-life of an athlete is actually premised on the degree of recognition that the athlete has received during her career. Coach Kerketta stressed upon recognition more as a survival strategy than as a mode of self promotion. Coach Prakash Ram recounts a very important event when a job prevented one of his athletes from being given into child

marriage. Coach Ram recounts thus:

Child marriage is quite prevalent here, girls get married once they are 16 years of age, that is when it gets difficult for us. We go convince the parents to let the girls play for a few more years and she would do well. Recently two girls from our centre joined ITBP. One of them was about to get married, but then I told the father that the form she had filled in said she was unmarried, and if she gets selected and is married already, her candidature would not be considered. The father was supportive and called off her marriage. When girls get jobs, it serves as a motivation for younger girls as well, to play better and get a job somewhere to secure themselves as well as their family. Because the times are such, you can get everything but a job. So, if a player is getting a job because of her performance in archery, we promote them a lot.

The question of career is quite pivotal for women athletes who are breaking into professional sports or whether they are retiring into an after-life. Support in the form of jobs, capacity building, and business development is critical. Be it archery, hockey, football or athletics, it becomes important to continue orienting women athletes towards a career in sports and not remain myopic about performance.

4.6 Beyond Performance, Dealing with Failures

This also brings us to another very significant question, that is the question of handling failures, disappointments and rejections which happen more often than the moments of glory. It becomes pertinent for a sports development ecosystem to have concerted focus to help athletes deal with disappointments and failures at all levels. Social, economic and cultural safety nets are paramount in ensuring that performance pressure does not get the better of the already oppressed athletes.

Komalika Bari recounts her difficult times as an archery sports cadet where she had to deal with difficult years without medals. The pressure of performance is very high on some athletes as time for practice always comes at a high cost. Komalika is a daughter of an Anganwadi Sevika, whose monthly income is less than ₹4,000.

For two years, I only practised and did not win any medals. But after 2019, my performance got better and I started to win. When I got to the 10th standard, my father asked me to focus on studies. But at last, I got the chance to give trials for the academy in 2016, my father said that if I didn't make it through to the academy, I will take a break to study.

Komalika got through the academy and is now an international player. However, more and more

stories of failure have remained silent. Coaches mostly talk about how injuries give way to poor performance which in turn gives into lack of success in the world of competitive sports. They often stress on developing good healthcare facilities for athletes as they put their bodies and mind through a lot of stress and strain. Coaches also discussed how bureaucratic barriers also come into the way and contribute towards various kinds of disappointment. Coach Birua in hockey and Coach Kerketta in football mentioned that the centres support athletes till they are 18 years old. However, at 18-19 years they reach the peak of their performance and while they peak, they lose out on their financial and logistical support. It hurts their practice and motivation levels and hence, there is a lack of players at the senior levels. Most players do not end up with jobs as they are drying out. Both coaches and players recount how more and more players have dropped out at the most critical junctures of their careers. This remains the single biggest hurdle that has come in the way of creating a good athlete pool at the senior level.

Chapter 5

Poverty, Sports and Insurgency - Exploring Possibilities of Conflict Resolution and Empowerment

This last chapter will explore in detail a burning issue which although has been touched upon tangentially in the previous chapters but could not be discussed at length. Poverty amongst the Adivasis and the history of their material deprivation has a lot to do with the limitations that the contemporary sportswomen from the Adivasi communities continue to face. Poverty and its history has brought the Adivasis at violent crossroads with the state both during the colonial era as well as in the post colonial past. Constitutional as well as armed

conflict (largely orchestrated by Maoists since the 1990s) has ravaged the region. The living conditions due to conflict have worsened over the years. For the longest time Adivasis were looked upon as savages who could only be managed through force, violence and fencing. Only recently various attempts to negotiate with indigenous resistance as well as Maoist insurgency in the Adivasi lands is being dealt with assimilative tactics to resolve the conflicts. While it stands out as a radical departure on the part of the state to step down from an aggressive tactic, it also remains riddled with difficult questions which only time can answer. The following sections will attempt to establish the deep correlations that poverty, the popular imagery of the Adivasis contribute to the challenges that percolate down to the experience of the Adivasi women who attempt to become sportspersons. They will aim to understand how such seemingly unrelated issues actually become crucial connections to understand the status of sports amongst the Adivasi women in Jharkhand. Following that the chapter will summarise the emerging themes that were collated through the empirical research and an analysis of secondary literature to arrive at policy suggestions that can further the development of a holistic ecosystem that aid Adivasis and Adivasi women to take up sports as a career not just to bring back Olympic glory but to explore her own physical, mental and spiritual horizons.

5.1 Poverty, Sports and Gendered Bodies at the Cusp of Conflict

Poverty is normal. Being poor is not an exception but a typical example amongst the sportswomen of Jharkhand. All the sportswomen we interviewed came from peasant-Adivasi families. Their monthly family incomes were seldom enough to make ends meet. Historical oppression by upper echelons of the society, largely the landed class who managed to gain land ownership during the colonial era, had normalised oppression. All across the eastern and central Indian Adivasi hinterlands, class oppression, displacement and dislocation of Adivasis from their homeland has been normalised and a well studied condition. Poverty and oppression gave way to indigenous resistance, armed struggle against oppressive landed classes and consequently the British government started, as early as 1855 with the Santal Hul. Following the Hul various other armed and social movements against oppression continued; Jharkhand movement being the culmination of its magnitude. After the movement sustained itself for generations the state of Jharkhand was established in the year 2000, almost 53 years after India gained its political freedom. Jharkhand from its inception has been known as a state that emerged out of the Adivasi struggle for statehood and self actualization alongside the state of Chhattisgarh and Uttarakhand. However, even after two decades of state formation the condition of poverty remains normalised; normalised to the extent that people es-

pecially women seldom mention it. In the midst of state formation, Adivasis continued to get treated as 'Savages', 'Backward', 'Junglees' with whom negotiation was seen as difficult; who are difficult to assimilate within the civilizational fold of Modernity. Although Maoist insurgency started in Naxalbari, in the northern part of Bengal, with an apparent Adivasi conflict the Maoists ventured into Jharkhand in the 1990s. Alpa Shah's long term ethnographic and archival study reflects that:

Although they (the Maoists) had ventured into the area earlier, the Maoists entered these Adivasi-dominated forests and hills in a concerted fashion from the early 1990s. They had come mainly from the caste-divided plains of central Bihar, where increasing state repression in the 1980s made it difficult for them to survive there. This expansion into Jharkhand was not guided by some romantic ideals of mobilising a tribal peasantry, but by the tactical needs of geographical terrain for their guerrilla warfare. Similar motives guided the retreat of the Andhra Pradesh branches of the Maoists into the forests and hills of Chhattisgarh (Shah 2013).

Albeit, Maoist established bonds with the Adivasi inhabitants of the region based on their analysis of society in India and their political position of building on a broad alliance of the peasantry, industrial proletariat, some factions of petty and

national bourgeoisie against the comprador capitalist bourgeoisie¹. The historical oppression, poverty caused due to displacement and dislocation and the emergent indigenous resistance proved to be a conducive ground for the proliferation of Maoist ideology and eventually to assemble a guerilla militia to materialise their ideological vision. Conflict with the state forces went up in the late 1990s and the region got referred to as the 'red corridor'. *The human condition* (Arendt, 1958) of Adivasi communities continued deteriorating in terms of access and control over their resources, vulnerability and access to the most basic amenities such as (food, shelter, water). Most of the sportswomen we worked with had a lived experience of this long historical poverty. Often the articulation of poverty during the interviews conducted were expressed as lack of 'jobs' by the respondents but for peasant families the condition of poverty was caused by a string of related material conditions and not just a lack of 'jobs' as most of our respondents articulated.

Many girls who play with us, their parents are not well to do. They don't have government or private jobs. We are Adivasi girls who are poor, parents do menial jobs or are unemployed. I am an Adivasi, and mostly Adivasi girls don't get ahead in life. I thought if I wrestled, maybe I could represent the state and get medals. If I continue with wrestling our economic condition could get better. I want to get a job. If possible, I will try to

get more Adivasi girls into wrestling, so that the number of girls playing wrestling goes up and the government takes notice of us. My younger sister is studying for a B.P.Ed, so that we could coach and train more Adivasi girls. They will look up to us; notice our trajectory of how we did this, and get motivated to follow the same path. (Rakhi Tirkey)

My parents are farmers, we work in fields. We face a lot of problems due to the shortage of water. We use water from the well, but during the summers the well dries up. We require a borewell for water to cultivate our fields, and for that we need money. We do not have any facilities for water, electricity. (Beauty Dungdung)

Such abject poverty, protracted conflict with the state and the rank concession syndrome (Orans 1965) of the Adivasi societies to emulate the upper caste Hindu societies, and the consistent expansionist activities of militant right-wing Hindu nationalist parties to influence socio-cultural practises of the Adivasis have led to stratified oppressive conditions² where Adivasi women appear at the lowest stratum.

The struggle for survival amongst the Adivasis is so harsh that other aspects of life such as health, education, sports, appear as a far fetched luxury. The yardsticks of the discourse of Development considers such a condition of life as vulnerable and brings

in aid but has failed to acknowledge the historical perpetuation of graded inequality, denial of access to resources and how Adivasis have become a victim of epistemic misrepresentation by the institutions of governance. The discourse of Development largely looks at the Adivasi's condition through a Eurocentric perspective and often collapses into a narrative of the 'noble savage'³; a hegemonic representation of the Adivasis by the colonial anthropologist. The quintessential 'bow and arrow' imagery of Adivasis, which has been adopted by the indigenous resistance groups, has also been a legacy of such colonial representation; on the one hand such an imagery has given the Adivasis a certain claim over 'possessing natural talent to play outdoor sports' (previously to wage war), while on the other hand subjected them to systematic infantilisation through a hegemonic representational discourse.

There is a tendency in the representational discourses of contemporary indigenous resistance to mobilise a series of stereotypes of Adivasis as our 'primitive other', with a propensity for violence and quick to take up arms. Underlying this image is the notion that these are a people with whom there is little scope for negotiation, who are incapable of understanding the art of politics apart from through the use of force, and who in turn thus need to be either protected or managed by force. For instance, Ajay Skaria argues that while Hindu castes were seen as effeminate, tribes were seen as masculine, treated more as 'public school boys who could never

quite grow up'. (Bates & Shah 2017)

It is in this constellation of discourses and textured history of oppressive violence that the Adivasi women in general and the sportswomen we worked with in particular continue to live. Although a few of them have managed to become exceptions and have worked hard to climb the ladder of socio-economic mobility, a majority of them continue to give up on their aspirations and continue with their immediate struggle for survival. Sumrai Tete recalls how abject her experience of poverty has been as she recounted times of food shortage in her village, her lines were blunt and brutally honest.

If you don't have anything at home, you won't eat.

On being asked about the Adivasi women and their eagerness to continue with sports she said:

When I came to the hostel, there were 15 of us. Out of them some failed, some did not see any scope in staying, girls whose family could afford educating them studied further. Maximum women who came with me or were my seniors, went back home because they could not get a job. Their future got engulfed in complete darkness. Neither could they go ahead with the games and have a future nor could they study. It is definitely there that studies get affected negatively once people start to play. Out of the 15 only 3 of us got

a job with the railways, the rest went back home. If the state government could take the initiative of getting players jobs in PSUs such as CCL or the Jharkhand Police, this would definitely have had a positive effect; more players would have jobs.

The bottom line is clear, unless one's association with the sport does not get remunerated one cannot continue playing. On the other hand sports also opens up, albeit for a few, a great opportunity to break out and build oneself a career. Sports and the Adivasi women are wrapped into multiple paradoxes; be it with their popular imagery or with sports as a possible alternative to their way of life; conflicts with the state as a result of Maoist insurgency or as a result of indigenous political resistance further adds layers of complexity to their life choices and in assessing its consequences.

5.2 Régimes, Raison d'état and Sport

Jharkhand plans 'SAHAY' to promote sports in Naxal-hit areas: The objective of the 'SAHAY' scheme is to reduce the gap between the people and the police through sports while grooming budding sportspersons.

-The New Indian Express, 1st September (PTI, 2021)

Historically different regimes of power had dif-

ferent ways of negotiating with the Adivasis; historically Adivasis were considered incapable of understanding the art of politics apart from through the use of force (Bates & Shah 2017). The colonial government had a patronising attitude towards governance of Adivasis (by attempting to civilise them) and Adivasi lands (by establishing protected areas and reserves). Education and sports were included within the school curriculum which was intended to civilise the otherwise 'Savage' child. Jaipal Singh Munda's journey as a scholar and also as a hockey player started as a result of such policies. The independent post-colonial state continued its patronising attitude, though it was torn between isolationist (Elwin) and assimilationist (Ghurye) policies. However, sports and education continued in the same vein, post independence the 'civilizational' motive made way for the modernising motive. Post-liberalisation the state largely facilitated the corporate capture of crucial land resources and habitats of Adivasis. This initiated a strong response in the form of constitutional and armed resistance against the state's policies. The discourse of Development attempted to 'build capacities' of the otherwise 'backward' Adivasi and instituted schemes from a top-down perspective. The life of the Adivasis was largely seen through administrative categories and units (health, nutrition, livelihoods, education) amongst many other capacities which required western attention, the Adivasis were encouraged to engage in sports and education to learn to work in a modern and evol-

ing society. What is significant in the opening quote that precedes this section is the intent rather than the act of promoting sports. The current government's intent to promote sports is not just to build capacities or modernise the Adivasi but rather to develop familiarity, camaraderie and undo the alienation that the current government assumes is at the core of Adivasi youths turning into guerilla fighters for the Maoists. Such a tactical move is radical and is perhaps for the first time a regime attempts to negotiate with the Adivasi on the question of resistance and aspirations. The equation that the state perhaps seeks to present is as a choice between a life of disillusioned resistance chasing the Maoist dream of proletariat revolution or a life of struggle which has a possibility to establish oneself as a sportsperson, i.e. a career with a promise of a relatively comfortable life. It also indicates that conflict emanates from a lack of presence of the state in the form of an omniscient body that supports and provides opportunities to prosper, build relationships and explore possibilities.

While the radical approach of the current state government can be applauded as a progressive move what needs to be held on is the question whether such a policy is in resonance with the fundamental contradiction of the Adivasis which coerce them to join the Maoist guerillas. Whether such an approach responds affirmatively towards the long standing demand of the Adivasis of autonomy over *Jal, Jungle* and *Zameen*. Active participation is the

following question that lingers.

The field of Sports Sociology has explored in great depth the questions of efficacy of such 'Sports for conflict resolution' scenario. Kevin Young and Chiaki Okada have explored multiple cases ranging across continents (Africa, Latin America and South Asia) on the effectiveness and efficacy of Sports for Development and Conflict Resolution. They have further explored secondary sources of which SD-PIWG published Literature Reviews of *Sport for Development and Peace*⁴ (2007) to build upon their opinions on the efficacy of the approach. Young and Okada opine in their seminal volume titled *Sport, Social Development and Peace*.

The sociology of sport literature contains an entire early generation of largely functionalist sport studies taking for granted the positive functions of sport, and more recently and more critically, several notable studies regarding the possibility of friendship and integration through sporting activities (Coalter, 2005; Coleman & Iso-Ahola, 1993; Iso-Ahola, 1996), and about cultivating fair and respectful value systems to allow communities to "work" more efficiently (Coalter, 2002; Ebbeck & Gibbons, 2003). As with others, our fieldwork leads us to acknowledge the potentially positive and integrative possibilities of sport as a tool of social development, but does not suggest that sport is so autonomous that it can make social

problems magically disappear or new and better communities magically come to life.

While the possibility of 'friendship and integration' through sporting activities and cultivation of fair and respectful value systems to allow communities to 'work more efficiently' can be promoted effectively, Sports for Conflict Resolution does not necessarily respond to the fundamental contradictions that initiate conflicts or inequities that perpetuate conditions that prevent development.

Okada and Young (2014) initiate a word of caution based on their own field work in Cambodia -

It would be overly simplistic to report that our own "impact assessment" tells us that sport is helping post-conflict Cambodia "heal" and "advance." Instead, our data offer up rather more contradictory results, and contain evidence both for hope and caution (Kevin and Young, 2014).

They particularly mention the importance of such efforts trying to underscore the unique complexities and contradictions that initiate such conflict. In the case of the Adivasis of Jharkhand it has largely been articulated by their demand for *Jal, Jungle* and *Zameen*. What also needs to be explored is whether such a policy becomes technocratic and bureaucratised to the extent of further alienating the community from accessing it or whether such a policy manages to be in tune with

the communitarian articulation of their problems, contradictions and manages to address them beyond the symptomatic articulation of 'jobs'.

5.3 In lieu of a conclusion: Probabilities, Hope and Possibilities

Hope is the difference between probability and possibility.

-Isabelle Stengers,

A 'Cosmo-Politics'- Risk, Hope, Change

Exploratory studies seldom manage to conclude but they do direct us towards a hopeful future full of possibilities. It also allows us to include within our ambit a horizon of experience which perhaps remained unexplored, unheard or remained unspoken. Conversing with both athletes and coaches gave us a clear perception of the status of competitive sports amongst Adivasi women. We understood how it has shaped their aspirations historically, what sort of initiation and introduction they have received and how they have changed over time. We also learnt about the correlation between gender barriers, poverty and indigeneity through these conversations. This section will attempt to bring these correlations together to a conclusive statement, which would in turn help us chart a way forward and transform the probabilities of extending the limits to physical expression amongst Adivasi sportswomen into a

hopeful possibility. However, as we have mentioned above, such conclusions and explorations to re-adopt policy would extend beyond the strict domain of 'Sports' itself. Life and its experience seldom fit into neat categorical and conceptual boxes that bureaucracy make for itself. It will explore whether meaningful policy can be adopted to address specific contradictions, paradoxes, lacks and lapses that are currently preventing the Adivasi sportswomen to bring about the desired change they seek.

The following themes emerged out of the study that directly correlate with the experiences of Adivasi sportswomen:

a. Societal Barriers corresponding to societal constitution of gender stereotypes and role of women: Adivasi sportswomen due to their activities break such stereotyped constructs and are deemed as deviants, most of them experience social stigmatisation. However, some manage to deal with support from friends, sensitive members of the family, coaches and fellow athletes.

b. Societal Barriers corresponding to them being Adivasi: Being an Adivasi in itself is a cause of discrimination. Although many of our respondents have categorically mentioned that they have not faced active discrimination as athletes, but significant life experiences and a few senior respondents have indicated how being an Adivasi continues to be a cause of being disadvantaged in the social context.

c. Infrastructural barriers and gender insensitive infrastructural development: Almost all the sports-women and coaches directly mentioned how they have experienced inadequacies at the training centres. Although they have experienced an improvement in the facilities over the years, the improvements did not address gender specific needs such as changing rooms for women, toilets, arrangements for menstrual hygiene, et cetera.

d. Bureaucratic barriers: Coaches and athletes mentioned the problems they face to access their entitlements such as scholarships, financial support for procurement of kits, equipment, nutritional supplements, healthcare, education, et cetera. As per the opinion of athletes and coaches mostly such bureaucratic and procedural bottlenecks are caused by corrupt officials.

Sometimes, bureaucratic barriers also come into the way of preventing women from continuing with their sport as they are forced to leave the facility as they go past eighteen years of age, an age when they are finally emerging as trained players. Departure from facilities and hostels prevent them from practising their sport and they eventually drop out. Multiple coaches from hockey, football and archery have mentioned the need to address such barriers.

e. Unstructured professionalisation of sports careers: The life span of being in competitive sports is slim and players need to think of a post-retirement

plan to help the community of sportspersons to develop in future. The approach which continues in India in general and Jharkhand in particular is that of a 'job' based financing approach. Most of the athletes take up jobs with PSUs, state police force, central police forces or the armed forces to finance their sports careers. They seldom indulge in generating entrepreneurial work which would open up new dimensions of business and promote sports as a viable business option. Athletes from sports background can develop various technical, social and pedagogical abilities to promote themselves not just as a figure whom people admire but also as leader of an initiative. The dependency of athletes for jobs in the railways, police forces, etc., are very high and become a determinant on whether they will continue as sportspersons or not. With the changes in business models it has become difficult for athletes to get jobs and hence a new strategy to adapt to such situations should be brought into play.

f. Ecosystems to take care of players who are unable to break into the highest platform: Although focus of the state institutions have been on generating a pool of trained players, both men and women, who can make it to the highest level of performance to bring back Olympic glory, often what coaches complain about is a lack of safety net for those who fail to make a mark, often due to sports injuries, psychological blocks, societal oppression that the athlete must have experienced. Currently the entire care provided to the emerging athlete is be-

ing delivered by the coaches who go beyond their charter to ensure the wellbeing of their trainees. However, such a service should not be taken for granted.

g. Sports injuries and their healing: Sports injuries often make or break careers; arrangements to take such injuries seriously and finance the process of healing such injuries are non-existent. Pratima Birua herself has suffered due to a lack of financial support to seek therapy for her knee injury as she did not manage to break into the international circuit with an injured knee.

h. Sports as a means of Development and catalyst for Peace in conflicted areas: The last but a very significant issue that was discussed largely through the trope of poverty and its historical causes with the athletes and coaches edged us to explore how sports can catalyse development initiatives and emerging sporting idols from local regions can help align the aspirations of the youth towards a future that has the possibility to pull them and their communities out of poverty.

Based on these themes we would spell out a few possible policy recommendations which government agencies, active Civil Society Organisations and community organisations can contribute towards and help build an ecosystem that not only brings back Olympic glory but also ensure that sport opens up as an avenue to explore career, achieve socio-economic mobility and engender a sense of empow-

erment amongst Adivasis and Adivasi women in particular.

1. Sport should not be promoted just as a 'competitive event'. Historically, as we have also traced in this book, sport has been promoted by the state as a way of fair competition; this is a very limited understanding of sport. Instead sport should be promoted as a way of self-development, exploration and a pursuit to expand one's physical, mental and spiritual horizons. While Public Private Partnership organisations, such as JSSPS can continue to have focus on bringing back Olympic glory, they should ideally focus more on developing the sport as a wholesome life experience and not just a myopic goal of getting medals. Such myopic vision can severely derail programmes as it will render a sportsperson as a means to attaining the goal of medals. However, the focus of policy should be athlete/player centric and not achievement/medal centric. A future star will arise only if our policies focus on the players who can possibly bring back medals every year instead of a short term push for medals.

2. Work at the grassroots level should focus on addressing the critical material conditions that prevent women from stepping out. Sports departments, schools and sports oriented NGOs can put in coordinated efforts to address conservative social biases towards women and girl children that prevent them from getting exposed to sports and continuing with sports as a possible career option. Addressing such

social biases at the grassroots level through existing institutions can open the possibilities of more women joining sports as a way to establish and empower themselves.

3. Infrastructure and bureaucracy should be ideally restructured in order to facilitate access to funds, financial assistance for procurement of sports equipment as well as specialised nutrition and health care services. Infrastructure should also take care to address the everyday inadequacies faced by women athletes and coaches. Infrastructure development committees should have adequate women representation from both athletes as well as coaching circles. Nutrition and health care services as well as financing schemes with insurance companies should be arranged to aid players who continue to suffer due to sports injuries.

4. Young athletes should be encouraged to align their careers as professionals who are in progressive phases of their sports career. They should be able to develop a vision of developing and contributing back to the sports not just through performance in games but also after that as a coach, a physical trainer or as an organiser. Unless athletes look at their professional engagement as part of a larger scheme of growth and development new generations of athletes will not emerge. The current 'job' oriented approach is largely inadequate and unsustainable in an economy which is seeking to monetise and generate revenue from every possible source

and shut down roles which are largely seen as liabilities. Sports grants can help establish a player but with the current system of economy in place such grants or support will not sustain a sporting culture.

5. When sports becomes a catalyst to build bridges of communication with alienated conflict ridden communities, care must be taken that the line of communication addresses the fundamental contradictions upon which the conflict arose. Without redressing the fundamental contradictions, Sports for Development and Conflict Resolution has remained an insignificant panacea. Albeit it has great potential to develop friendship, camaraderie and sportsmanship which can have a positive impact on every section of the alienated communities. Especially in the case of Maoist insurgency in Jharkhand the foundational issue of rights over water, land and forest should be mentioned and brought into play through sports. Organisation of events, facilitating ownership of such events to the community and the active participation of people with the help of Civil Society Organisations can help build a peaceful ecosystem that will not only help the Adivasis emerge out of their dehumanised human condition but also help Adivasi youth, particularly women to explore the possibilities that sports offer to pull themselves and their communities out of the circuits of oppression.

6. Policy should also consider development of grassroots leadership amongst emerging sports wom-

en and men who are already being looked upon as aspirational figures. Their vision as leaders should be built to look beyond their sports career and bring about sensitive, just and equitable change within their communities. It is from such programmes that the Adivasis of Jharkhand might get not one but many Marang Gomkes of the future.

Endnote:

1. While the Maoists acknowledge the importance of a capitalist economy in India, the penetration of capitalist relations into the countryside and the country's increasing integration into an imperialist world economy, they argue that the capitalist economy is distorted and that it stands on a 'semi-feudal' base (CPI(Maoist) 2004a, 39). The implication is that any radical structural change is to first be brought about in the semi-feudal base: 'The vast majority of India's population still lives in the countryside...languishing under semi-feudal conditions of existence...and is in urgent need of the agrarian revolution' (ibid.). The peasantry, thus, is the main force of the revolution, and the revolution of the party of the proletariat is a peasant war to seize land in an area-wide seizure of power, replacing feudal authority with 'people's authority' (CPI(Maoist) 2004a, 40). 'Land to the tiller and power to the revolutionary people's committee' (CPI(Maoist) 2004a, 49) are therefore the crucial party slogans in the centres of work where guerrilla zones are to be established. This, according to the Maoists, is to be first in 'backward' rural areas, where the contradictions

are the sharpest. There, a people's army and people's militia are to be built to secure a dependable, self-sufficient base area (a liberated area), to be perpetually expanded in the course of the protracted people's war, finally encircling and capturing the cities (CPI(Maoist) 2004a, 37-8)

2. In recent years indigenous resistance has gained a new currency all over the world. In India, people classified by the Indian government as Scheduled Tribes, today more popularly called 'Adivasi' have become the focus of attention in various forms of resistance. Adivasis have gained prominence amongst the masses supporting the underground armed left-wing Maoist insurgency. They have been used as the representational front of social movements protesting against the neoliberal developmental policies of the state and the resultant large-scale displacements. They have also ignited special interest as both victims and agents in the communal violence emerging from the expansionist activities of militant right-wing Hindu nationalist platforms.

3. This was in accordance with a stadial theory of social evolution, popularised by legal scholars such as Henry Sumner Maine (1866) and Lewis Henry Morgan (1877), who were deeply interested in using anthropological accounts of tribals to show that they were not merely impoverished groups but rather arose from an earlier stage in the evolution of human civilisation. The treatment of tribes as noble savages facilitated a certain kind of paternalistic desire to protect them against others and from themselves as well as a desire to master them; it also enabled the most brutal suppression of revolts, which could afterwards be forgotten or put down to the boisterousness of the tribal people.

4. The report refers to almost 300 studies in related areas of "sport for development" (SDP IWG, 2007). It looks into the use of sport in five sectors: education, health, gender, disability, and peace focusing on human development.

PICTURE REPOSITORY



◆ Jaipal Singh Munda, also known as Marang Gomke (centre), with his teammates in hockey



◆ The Women's Hockey team of India at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics

◆ The Indian Women's Hockey team at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics





◆ Salima Tete,
Defender,
Hockey India,
in action



◆ Salima Tete,
Defender,
Hockey India,
at her game



◆ Nikki Pradhan, defender,
and Deep Grace Ekka,
defender, Indian women's
hockey, at the 2020 Tokyo
Olympics

- ◆ Asunta Lakra, former captain, Indian women's hockey



- ◆ Asunta Lakra, along with a fellow team mate, reveling in joy after a successful goal strike

- ◆ Beauty Dungdung, Forward, Indian women's junior hockey, in action





◆ Sangita Kumari (left), Nikki Pradhan (right) and Salima Tete (centre) in their newly received kits for women's Indian hockey team



◆ Football players from St. Albert Ekka Stadium, Gumla at the SAHAY launch in Chaibasa, Jharkhand

◆PDAG researcher
conducting a Focused
Group Discussion
with players at
SS Girls Uchh
Vidyalaya, Simdega



◆PDAG researcher
conducting a Focused
Group Discussion
with cadets of JSSPS,
Ranchi

◆PDAG
researchers
with Pratima
Birua at
Simdega





◆PDAG researcher conducting a Focused Group Discussion with football players at Albert Ekka Stadium, Gumla

◆PDAG researcher conducting a Focused Group Discussion with football players in Hulhundu, Ranchi



◆Girls and boys at practice in Hulhundu, Ranchi

◆Pratima
Birua (right)
with Salima
Tete (left)



◆Pratima Birua,
Coach, SS Girls
Uchh Vidyalaya,
Simdega

◆Rakhi Tirkey (left)
and Juhi Tirkey
(right), national-level
wrestlers



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Dr. Ram Dayal Munda Tribal Research Institute based in Ranchi, Jharkhand is one of the 26 Tribal Research Institute in the country supported by the ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India. It focuses on knowledge generation and research on tribal development, preservation of tribal heritage to provide suggestions to the state government for evidence-based planning and appropriate legislations, capacity building of tribal groups and persons/institutions associated with tribal affairs along with dissemination of information and awareness generation.

