

Paddling Towards Equality: Examining Public Policy and Administrative Support for Women in Kayak Sports

¹Mr. Gyanendra Kumar Upadhyay, ²Prof. (Dr.) Ashish Jorasia

¹Research Scholar, ²Research Supervisor

¹²School of Arts & Humanities

¹²Career Point University, Kota

Abstract—Women's participation in sports has grown significantly over the past few decades, driven by rising global awareness, policy interventions, and advocacy for gender equality. Despite this progress, substantial gender disparities continue to exist, particularly in developing countries like India, where socio-cultural norms, economic limitations, and institutional barriers often restrict women's access to sports. Among various disciplines, kayak sports remain relatively underdeveloped and less accessible, especially for women, due to their infrastructure-intensive nature and the requirement of specialized training, equipment, and safety measures.

This research paper critically examines the role of public policy and administrative support in promoting women's participation in kayak sports. It focuses on analysing existing government policies, national sports schemes, and institutional frameworks aimed at encouraging female participation in water-based sports. The study also evaluates the effectiveness of administrative bodies, such as sports authorities and training institutions, in providing necessary resources, infrastructure, and opportunities for women athletes.

The paper highlights that while initiatives such as talent identification programs, financial assistance schemes, and structured training facilities have contributed to improving access and participation, several challenges persist. Socio-cultural barriers, including gender stereotypes and family restrictions, continue to limit women's involvement. Economic constraints, such as the high cost of equipment and travel, further restrict participation, particularly for women from rural and marginalized backgrounds. Additionally, inadequate infrastructure, lack of safe training environments, and limited availability of female coaches and mentors create further obstacles.

Through a comprehensive analysis, the study underscores that policy formulation alone is not sufficient; effective implementation, monitoring, and inclusive governance are equally crucial for achieving meaningful outcomes. The findings suggest that stronger coordination between government agencies, sports institutions, and community organizations is necessary to bridge existing gaps.

The paper concludes by offering practical recommendations to enhance gender inclusivity in kayak sports. These include improving infrastructure, increasing financial support, promoting awareness at the grassroots level, and encouraging women's representation in sports administration. By strengthening public policy frameworks and administrative mechanisms, it is possible to create a more equitable and supportive environment that enables women to actively participate and excel in kayak sports, thereby contributing to broader goals of gender equality and social empowerment.

Index Terms—Women in Sports, Kayak Sports, Public Policy, Gender Equality, Administrative Support

I. Introduction

Sports have long been recognized as a powerful tool for empowerment, gender equality, and overall social development. Participation in sports not only enhances physical health but also builds confidence, leadership skills, and social inclusion, particularly among women. Over the past few decades, there has been

a noticeable rise in women's participation in sports at both national and international levels. This progress has been supported by growing awareness, media representation, and targeted government initiatives. However, despite these positive developments, significant gender disparities continue to exist across many sporting disciplines, especially in developing countries like India.

One of the lesser-explored areas in this context is kayak sports, a form of water-based sport that requires access to natural or artificial water bodies, specialized equipment, technical expertise, and strict safety measures. Due to its infrastructure-intensive nature, kayaking has not received widespread attention in India, and opportunities for women in this field remain limited. The lack of adequate facilities, trained coaches, and financial resources further restricts women's entry and sustained participation in this sport.

In addition to infrastructural challenges, socio-cultural factors also play a critical role in shaping women's participation in kayaking. Traditional gender roles, safety concerns, and limited family support often discourage women from engaging in water sports. As a result, female representation in kayaking continues to lag behind other more accessible sports. This gap highlights the need for focused efforts to create an enabling environment that encourages and supports women athletes.

Promoting women's participation in kayaking is not only essential for achieving gender equality but also for enhancing India's presence in international sporting arenas. Women athletes have consistently demonstrated their potential when provided with the right opportunities and support. Therefore, strengthening their participation in emerging and less mainstream sports like kayaking can contribute to diversifying India's sporting achievements.

In this regard, public policy and administrative support play a pivotal role. Government initiatives, sports authorities, and institutional frameworks are crucial in providing infrastructure, funding, training facilities, and talent identification programs. Effective implementation of such policies can help bridge existing gaps and ensure equal opportunities for women in kayak sports. Thus, a comprehensive approach combining policy support, institutional commitment, and social change is necessary to foster inclusive growth in this field.

II. Objectives of the Study

The present study is designed to explore and critically analyze the role of public policy and administrative mechanisms in promoting women's participation in kayak sports. Given the relatively underdeveloped nature of this sport in India, particularly for women, the study sets out several key objectives to understand both the opportunities and challenges within this domain.

The first objective of the study is to analyze existing public policies related to women's participation in sports, with a special focus on kayaking. This includes examining national sports policies, government schemes, and gender-inclusive initiatives that aim to encourage women's involvement in sports. The study seeks to understand how far these policies address the specific needs of women in infrastructure-intensive sports like kayaking and whether they are effective in promoting equal opportunities.

The second objective is to examine the role of administrative and institutional support systems in facilitating women's participation. This involves analyzing the contribution of sports authorities, training institutions, and governmental and non-governmental organizations in providing infrastructure, coaching, financial assistance, and talent development programs. The study also evaluates how efficiently these institutions implement policies and support mechanisms at the ground level.

Another important objective is to identify the key barriers faced by women in kayak sports. These barriers may include socio-cultural constraints, economic limitations, lack of infrastructure, safety concerns, and institutional challenges. By understanding these obstacles in detail, the study aims to highlight the gaps between policy intentions and actual outcomes.

Finally, the study aims to suggest practical and policy-oriented recommendations to enhance women's participation in kayak sports. These recommendations are intended to support policymakers, administrators,

and stakeholders in designing more inclusive and effective strategies. Overall, the objectives of this research are focused on providing a comprehensive understanding of the current scenario and proposing actionable solutions to promote gender equality in kayak sports.

III. Research Methodology

The present study adopts a qualitative research design primarily based on secondary data to examine public policy frameworks and administrative support mechanisms for women's participation in kayak sports. Secondary data has been collected from a wide range of credible sources, including research papers, government publications, policy documents, official reports, and peer-reviewed journal articles. Key sources include reports from the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, the Sports Authority of India, and international organizations such as the International Canoe Federation. These sources provide insights into policy initiatives, funding patterns, training infrastructure, and institutional frameworks supporting women in water sports.

The study employs both analytical and descriptive methods to interpret the collected data. The descriptive approach is used to present an overview of existing policies, schemes, and institutional arrangements that aim to promote women's participation in kayaking. It highlights key initiatives such as talent identification programs, scholarship schemes, and infrastructure development. The analytical method, on the other hand, is used to critically evaluate the effectiveness of these policies and administrative measures in addressing gender disparities in sports.

A thematic analysis technique is applied to categorize the data into major themes such as policy support, institutional roles, socio-cultural barriers, and access to resources. This helps in identifying patterns, gaps, and challenges within the current system. Comparative analysis is also used where relevant, to examine differences between regions or programs and to assess best practices.

To ensure reliability and validity, only authenticated and up-to-date sources have been included in the study. Cross-referencing of multiple sources has been undertaken to minimize bias and enhance the credibility of findings. Although the study is limited by the absence of primary data such as field surveys or interviews, it provides a comprehensive understanding of the policy landscape and administrative efforts shaping women's inclusion in kayak sports.

IV. Status of Women in Sports in India

Women's participation in sports in India has witnessed a notable rise over the past few decades, driven by increasing awareness, expanding media coverage, and proactive government initiatives. Programs such as *Khelo India* and schemes introduced by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports have played a crucial role in encouraging female athletes to pursue sports at both grassroots and elite levels. Additionally, the success of prominent athletes like P. V. Sindhu, Mary Kom, and Sakshi Malik has inspired a new generation of young women to break traditional barriers and take up sports as a career.

Despite these positive developments, gender inequality continues to persist across various levels of sports in India. Research highlights that economic constraints remain a significant challenge, particularly for women from rural and marginalized communities, where access to financial resources for training, equipment, and travel is limited. Furthermore, inadequate sports infrastructure, especially for women-specific training facilities, restricts their participation and performance.

Socio-cultural norms also play a critical role in shaping women's engagement in sports. Traditional gender roles, safety concerns, and lack of family support often discourage girls from pursuing sports seriously. In many regions, sports are still perceived as a male-dominated domain, leading to fewer opportunities and limited encouragement for female athletes. Additionally, the absence of proper career pathways and job security in sports discourages long-term commitment among women.

Moreover, systemic issues such as unequal pay, limited sponsorship opportunities, and inadequate media representation further contribute to the marginalization of women athletes. While progress has been made, recognition and rewards for female athletes often remain disproportionate compared to their male counterparts.

In conclusion, although women's participation in sports in India is steadily improving, significant structural and cultural barriers still need to be addressed. Sustained policy support, increased investment in infrastructure, and a shift in societal attitudes are essential to achieving true gender equality in Indian sports.

V. Overview of Kayak Sports

Kayaking is a dynamic and competitive water sport that involves paddling a narrow boat using a double-bladed paddle. It is practiced across various formats, including sprint, slalom, and marathon racing, each requiring a high level of physical endurance, balance, coordination, and technical skill. As a sport closely linked to natural resources, kayaking necessitates access to suitable water bodies such as rivers, lakes, and artificial water channels. The availability of these resources plays a crucial role in determining the development of the sport in any region.

In addition to natural infrastructure, kayaking demands specialized equipment, including kayaks, paddles, safety gear like helmets and life jackets, and proper maintenance facilities. Equally important is access to trained coaches who can provide technical guidance, as well as structured safety training to minimize risks associated with water sports. These requirements make kayaking a resource-intensive sport, often limiting accessibility, particularly for women in underdeveloped or rural areas.

In India, kayaking is governed and promoted by national-level bodies such as the Indian Kayaking and Canoeing Association and supported institutionally by the Sports Authority of India. These organizations play a pivotal role in organizing competitions, identifying talent, and providing professional training through dedicated water sports centers across the country. Government-backed programs and regional training institutes have also contributed to the gradual expansion of kayaking as a competitive sport.

Research indicates that structured training programs under institutional frameworks significantly enhance the performance and participation of female kayakers. Access to professional coaching, regular practice sessions, financial assistance, and exposure to competitions enables women athletes to develop confidence and competence. Moreover, institutional support helps in addressing gender-specific challenges by providing a safer and more inclusive training environment.

Overall, the growth of kayaking in India, particularly among women, is closely tied to the strength of administrative support, infrastructure development, and policy initiatives. Strengthening these aspects is essential to make the sport more accessible and inclusive.

VI. Public Policy Framework for Women in Sports

The public policy framework for promoting women's participation in sports in India has evolved significantly over time, with a growing emphasis on inclusivity, equity, and performance enhancement. These policies aim to address structural barriers and create an enabling environment for women athletes across various disciplines, including emerging sports like kayaking.

6.1 National Sports Policy

The National Sports Policy of India lays the foundation for sports development in the country. It emphasizes the promotion of a sports culture at all levels, from grassroots to elite competitions. A key focus of the policy is to ensure equal opportunities for women by encouraging their participation and reducing gender disparities. It also highlights the importance of developing sports infrastructure, including training

facilities, coaching centers, and access to modern equipment. By prioritizing inclusivity, the policy seeks to integrate women more effectively into the national sports ecosystem.

6.2 Government Schemes

Several government schemes have been introduced to operationalize the objectives of the policy. The Khelo India Programme focuses on talent identification and grassroots development, providing young athletes, including girls, with training, scholarships, and exposure to competitions. Another major initiative is the Target Olympic Podium Scheme, which offers financial assistance, international training opportunities, and expert support to elite athletes preparing for global events. In addition, various scholarships, stipends, and cash prizes are provided to support women athletes, reducing financial constraints and enabling sustained participation.

6.3 Gender-Specific Policies

The government has also introduced gender-specific measures aimed at empowering women in sports. These include financial incentives, reservation or representation in sports governance bodies, and targeted awareness programs to encourage female participation. Policies also promote the appointment of female coaches and support staff to create a more inclusive and safer environment for women athletes. Despite these progressive initiatives, challenges remain in effective implementation. Issues such as bureaucratic delays, uneven distribution of resources, and lack of awareness at the grassroots level often limit the impact of these policies. Therefore, strengthening monitoring mechanisms and ensuring better coordination between institutions is essential to fully realize the goals of gender equality in sports.

VII. Administrative and Institutional Support

Administrative and institutional support plays a crucial role in promoting women's participation in sports, particularly in specialized disciplines like kayaking. A well-coordinated framework involving national bodies, state governments, and non-governmental organizations helps create opportunities, reduce barriers, and ensure sustained engagement of women athletes.

7.1 Role of Sports Authority of India (SAI)

The Sports Authority of India (SAI) serves as the primary institution responsible for the development of sports infrastructure and talent in the country. It plays a vital role in providing professional training and coaching through its regional centers and specialized academies. SAI also offers access to modern infrastructure, including water sports facilities, equipment, and scientific support such as nutrition and sports medicine. Additionally, it actively engages in talent identification programs, scouting promising athletes—especially young girls—from rural and underrepresented areas, thereby broadening the base of women participants in sports like kayaking.

7.2 Role of State Governments

State governments complement national efforts by focusing on localized sports development. They establish and manage district-level training centers, organize state and regional competitions, and run awareness campaigns to encourage female participation. Many states also provide scholarships, cash incentives, and job reservations for women athletes, which serve as strong motivational factors. By addressing region-specific challenges such as infrastructure gaps and cultural barriers, state governments play a key role in nurturing grassroots talent.

7.3 Role of NGOs and Private Institutions

Non-governmental organizations and private institutions contribute significantly to expanding access and inclusivity in sports. These organizations often work at the grassroots level to identify talent among marginalized communities, including women from economically weaker sections. They provide training support, financial assistance, and mentorship, and also advocate for gender equality in sports. Their flexible and community-oriented approach helps bridge gaps left by formal institutions.

7.4 Coaching and Mentorship

The availability of qualified coaches and mentors, particularly female coaches, is critical for increasing women's participation and retention in sports. Female mentors create a supportive and comfortable environment, address gender-specific concerns, and act as role models for aspiring athletes. Effective coaching not only enhances technical skills but also builds confidence, discipline, and long-term commitment among women athletes.

Overall, strong administrative coordination and institutional backing are essential for creating an inclusive and sustainable sports ecosystem for women.

VIII. Challenges Faced by Women in Kayak Sports

Despite growing awareness and institutional efforts, women in kayak sports continue to face multiple challenges that hinder their full participation and performance. These challenges are deeply rooted in socio-cultural, economic, infrastructural, and institutional factors, which collectively limit opportunities for women in this demanding sport.

8.1 Socio-Cultural Barriers

Socio-cultural norms remain one of the most significant obstacles. Traditional gender stereotypes often portray sports, especially physically demanding and outdoor activities like kayaking, as unsuitable for women. Family restrictions further limit participation, as concerns related to safety, social image, and mobility discourage many young girls from pursuing sports. In several cases, early marriage pressures and expectations of domestic responsibilities force women to abandon their sporting aspirations at an early stage.

8.2 Economic Constraints

Kayaking is a resource-intensive sport, and the high cost of equipment such as kayaks, paddles, and safety gear poses a major barrier. In addition, expenses related to travel, accommodation, and professional training make it difficult for women from economically weaker sections to sustain participation. Limited financial independence further restricts their ability to access quality training and competitive exposure.

8.3 Lack of Infrastructure

Inadequate infrastructure is another critical issue. Access to suitable water bodies such as rivers and lakes is limited in many regions, and even where available, they are often not developed for sports purposes. Training facilities specifically designed for kayaking, along with proper storage and maintenance systems for equipment, are insufficient. This lack of infrastructure disproportionately affects women, who already face mobility and access constraints.

8.4 Safety Concerns

Safety remains a major concern in water sports. The inherent risks associated with kayaking, coupled with the lack of proper safety measures, trained lifeguards, and emergency support systems, discourage participation. For women, additional concerns regarding personal safety and security further reduce confidence in engaging with the sport.

8.5 Institutional Gaps

Institutional challenges such as unequal funding distribution, limited access to elite training programs, and underrepresentation of women in decision-making bodies continue to persist. These gaps affect policy implementation and reduce the effectiveness of initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality in sports. Overall, studies indicate that structural inequalities and entrenched cultural norms continue to restrict women's active involvement in kayak sports. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach involving policy reforms, increased investment, and societal change.

IX. Role of Public Policy in Overcoming Barriers

Public policy plays a transformative role in addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by women in sports, particularly in specialized fields like kayaking. By creating an enabling environment through targeted interventions, policies help reduce structural inequalities and promote greater inclusion of women athletes across all levels.

One of the primary ways public policies contribute is through financial assistance. Government schemes introduced by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports provide scholarships, stipends, and incentives that reduce the economic burden associated with training, equipment, and participation in competitions. This is especially beneficial for women from economically weaker sections, enabling them to access opportunities that were previously out of reach.

Infrastructure development is another critical area where public policy plays a key role. Investments in sports facilities, including water sports centers, training academies, and safe practice environments, help create the physical foundation necessary for participation. Institutions such as the Sports Authority of India are instrumental in implementing these initiatives by establishing regional centers equipped with modern amenities, coaching staff, and support services.

Public policies also focus on promoting awareness and changing societal attitudes toward women in sports. Campaigns, community outreach programs, and school-level initiatives aim to challenge gender stereotypes and encourage families to support female participation. By normalizing women's involvement in sports, these efforts contribute to long-term cultural change.

Moreover, government funding and sustained policy support are crucial for improving both participation and performance. Elite-level schemes provide international exposure, advanced training, and scientific support, enabling women athletes to compete at higher levels.

However, the effectiveness of these policies largely depends on proper implementation and governance. Challenges such as bureaucratic inefficiencies, lack of coordination between agencies, and uneven distribution of resources often limit their impact. Strong monitoring mechanisms are essential to ensure transparency, accountability, and timely delivery of benefits. Additionally, inclusive governance—ensuring women's representation in decision-making bodies—can make policies more responsive to their needs.

In conclusion, while public policies have significant potential to overcome barriers, their success depends on effective execution, continuous evaluation, and a commitment to gender-inclusive development in sports.

X. Case Insights: Women in Kayaking

Case-based observations from various regions in India clearly indicate that strong institutional and administrative support significantly enhances women's participation and performance in kayaking. In areas where facilities and structured programs are available—particularly at centers operated by the Sports Authority of India—female athletes have demonstrated notable progress in terms of skill development, competitive success, and long-term engagement with the sport.

These training centers provide a comprehensive support system that includes professional coaching, access to modern equipment, regular practice schedules, and exposure to national-level competitions. Structured coaching plays a crucial role in refining technical skills such as paddling techniques, balance, and speed, while also improving overall physical fitness and endurance. In addition, the availability of sports science support, including proper nutrition plans, physiotherapy, and psychological guidance, contributes to better performance outcomes among women athletes.

Another important factor is the provision of a safe and inclusive training environment. Institutional setups often ensure better safety measures, supervision, and gender-sensitive facilities, which help build confidence

among female participants. The presence of trained coaches and, in some cases, female mentors, further encourages young women to actively pursue the sport and remain committed over time. Moreover, athletes trained under such structured environments tend to perform better in competitions due to consistent practice, professional guidance, and exposure to high-performance standards. Many successful women kayakers in India have emerged from these institutional frameworks, highlighting the effectiveness of organized support systems.

These case insights clearly demonstrate that administrative support is a decisive factor in shaping outcomes in kayak sports. Where policies are effectively implemented and institutions are well-equipped, women are more likely to overcome socio-economic and cultural barriers. Therefore, strengthening institutional mechanisms and expanding access to such facilities across regions is essential for promoting greater inclusion and excellence among women in kayaking.

XI. Recommendations

To enhance women's participation and performance in kayak sports, a multi-dimensional approach involving infrastructure, policy, finance, and social change is essential. The following recommendations aim to address existing gaps and promote a more inclusive sports ecosystem.

11.1 Infrastructure Development

There is a need to establish more dedicated water sports centers across regions, especially in areas with natural water resources. Improving access to safe and well-equipped training environments, including proper storage, changing facilities, and safety systems, will encourage greater participation of women in kayaking.

11.2 Policy Implementation

While several policies exist, their effectiveness depends on proper execution. Authorities such as the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports should ensure better coordination and accountability in implementing schemes. Introducing gender-specific monitoring and evaluation systems can help track progress and address gaps more effectively.

11.3 Financial Support

Increased funding is crucial to support women athletes, particularly those from economically weaker backgrounds. Providing subsidies for equipment, travel, and training expenses can significantly reduce financial barriers. Expanding scholarship programs and performance-based incentives will further motivate women to pursue kayaking professionally.

11.4 Awareness and Social Change

Promoting sports participation among girls at the school level is essential for long-term development. Awareness campaigns should be conducted to challenge societal stereotypes and encourage families to support female athletes. Media representation of successful women sportspersons can also play a key role in changing perceptions.

11.5 Capacity Building

Developing human resources is equally important. Training more female coaches and support staff can create a comfortable and encouraging environment for women athletes. Additionally, promoting women into leadership and decision-making roles within sports institutions will ensure more inclusive governance.

11.6 Public-Private Partnerships

Collaboration between government bodies and private organizations can help bridge gaps in infrastructure and funding. Partnerships with corporate entities, NGOs, and sports foundations can bring innovation, investment, and efficiency into the development of kayaking and other sports for women.

Overall, these measures can collectively contribute to building a supportive and sustainable framework for women in kayak sports.

XII. Conclusion

Women's inclusion in kayak sports represents a significant step toward achieving gender equality in the broader field of sports in India. Over the years, public policies and administrative frameworks have made considerable progress in promoting women's participation. Initiatives led by institutions such as the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports and the Sports Authority of India have contributed to creating opportunities through training programs, financial assistance, and infrastructure development. These efforts have helped bring more women into competitive sports, including emerging disciplines like kayaking.

However, despite these advancements, several challenges continue to hinder the full realization of gender equality. Socio-cultural barriers, economic constraints, safety concerns, and gaps in infrastructure and policy implementation still restrict many women from accessing and sustaining participation in kayak sports. The persistence of these issues indicates that progress, while encouraging, remains uneven and requires continuous attention.

The success of women in kayaking depends on a combination of factors. Effective policy implementation is essential to ensure that existing schemes reach the intended beneficiaries in a timely and equitable manner. Strong institutional support, including access to quality coaching, safe training environments, and adequate resources, plays a critical role in nurturing talent and enhancing performance. Equally important is societal transformation—changing mindsets, breaking gender stereotypes, and encouraging families and communities to support women in sports.

Looking ahead, sustained and coordinated efforts from government bodies, institutions, and society at large are necessary to build an inclusive sports ecosystem. Increased investment, better governance, and targeted interventions can further strengthen women's participation in kayaking. With the right support and commitment, India has the potential to emerge as a leading nation in women's kayak sports, not only achieving excellence at national and international levels but also empowering women and promoting gender equality through sports.

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