

# The Role of Tribal Women in Sports Development in Uttarakhand

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## **Abstract:**

Uttarakhand, a state nestled in the northern part of India, is home to a rich diversity of tribal communities. Among these, women have traditionally had limited roles in sports due to socio-cultural norms. However, recent developments suggest that tribal women in Uttarakhand are breaking barriers, showing remarkable resilience and talent in various sporting arenas. This paper explores the evolving role of women from tribal communities in sports, focusing on their challenges, achievements, and the impact of these developments on their communities. This paper explores the role of tribal women in sports development in Uttarakhand, a region rich in cultural diversity and natural resources. Tribal communities such as the Jaunsari, Bhotia, Tharu, and Buksa have a long-standing connection with physical activities, often rooted in their daily lives and traditional practices. Despite their inherent strength and resilience, tribal women face significant barriers in accessing and participating in modern sports, including socioeconomic challenges, cultural restrictions, and lack of

infrastructure. However, tribal women face obstacles such as socioeconomic limitations, gender biases, and inadequate infrastructure. Despite these barriers, women like **Pooja Bohra**, a noted mountaineer from the region, and **Manisha Rawat**, an accomplished archer, have emerged as role models, showcasing the potential of tribal women in sports. This study highlights their contributions to grassroots sports development, examines the transformative impact of sports on their economic and social empowerment, and presents case studies of tribal women breaking stereotypes through sports. By analyzing these dynamics, the paper underscores the importance of inclusive policies and community initiatives to foster tribal women's participation in sports and leverage their potential for broader social change.

**Keywords:** Tribal Women, Uttarakhand Sports Development, Empowerment Traditional Games, Gender Equality.

## Introduction

Often referred to as the "Land of the Gods," Uttarakhand is well-known for its magnificent scenery and rich cultural legacy. Tribal groups, including the Jaunsari, Tharu, Bhotia, and Buksa, are among its many ethnic groups and play a significant part in the state's cultural social life. These tribes possess distinctive customs and lifestyles that are compatible with physical stamina and resilience, qualities that are a natural fit for athletic pursuits (Kumar, 2018). In many tribal groups, women are essential to maintaining traditional legacy while negotiating the benefits and difficulties of modernization. By playing both established and new roles, they play a crucial part in family and community systems. Sports have been a potent medium in recent years for Indigenous women to break through social boundaries, gain personal recognition, and cultivate a feeling of pride in their community. Playing sports opens doors for social and economic empowerment in addition to assisting in the removal of patriarchal restrictions (Singh & Rawat, 2018). Tribal women in Uttarakhand confront several barriers to their potential, including as cultural limitations, economic difficulties, and restricted access to sporting facilities. These obstacles frequently keep individuals from engaging in and succeeding in contemporary sports. Success stories like those of archer Manisha Rawat and climber Pooja Bohra, however, show how athletics can change lives and emphasize how critical it is to address these problems. (Mehta, 2019). By examining the contributions, challenges, and opportunities for tribal women in Uttarakhand's sports landscape, this paper seeks to shed light on their critical role in developing a vibrant and inclusive sports culture in the state.

## **Tribal Communities in Uttarakhand**

Tribes like the Jaunsari, who have a tradition of archery and wrestling; the Tharu, who are skilled in endurance exercises; and the Bhotia, who, because of their position in the Himalayan region, are skilled at trekking and mountain sports, are found throughout the state (Kumar, 2018). These communities, although rooted in traditional practices, are gradually embracing modern sports.

## **Contributions of Tribal Women to Sports**

Tribal women are incredibly strong, agile, and resilient; these qualities are frequently developed from daily labor such as farming, water carrying, and hiking. Because of these qualities, they are ideal for activities like wrestling, mountaineering, and athletics. The potential of tribal women in adventure sports is exemplified by the well-known mountaineer Pooja Bohra (Sharma, 2021). Because of her exceptional archery skills, Manisha Rawat has raised awareness of the talent coming from tribal tribes (Das, 2020).

## **Challenges Faced by Tribal Women in Sports**

### **1. Socioeconomic Barriers**

Tribal women frequently reside in areas with low economic development, which restricts their access to resources, training, and sporting facilities. Their prospects of participating are further hampered by the fact that many tribal villages lack access to basic amenities like gyms, sports fields, and qualified coaches (Singh & Rawat, 2018). Gupta & Singh (2019) add that obstacles are made worse by financial limitations, as many native families cannot afford the necessary gear, travel, or registration fees for sporting events. Singh and Rawat (2018) observed that financial and infrastructural deficiencies disproportionately impact tribal women's opportunities in sports compared to their urban counterparts. According to Mehta (2019), "Women's access to and affordability of the fundamental equipment needed for sports participation and training are directly impacted by poverty. He stresses that access to training facilities and key equipment, including uniforms, sports gear, and other necessities, is directly impacted by a lack of financial resources. Tribal women have few chances to compete on a regional, national, or worldwide scale in the absence of adequate financial assistance or government initiatives.

## **2. Cultural and Gender Norms**

Traditional gender norms and patriarchal behaviors frequently prevent indigenous women from participating in sports. Women's participation in competitive or recreational sports is restricted in many indigenous societies because they are expected to prioritize marriage, family responsibilities, and caring (Das, 2020). Cultural stigmas and expectations regarding modesty and behavior prevent tribal women from pursuing sports careers. These gender norms further dissuade families from supporting their daughters' athletic ambitions. Das (2020) points out that cultural constraints, particularly those tied to gender expectations, limit women's access to sports participation and growth opportunities.

## **3. Limited Representation in Sports Policies**

Although sports policies exist in India, tribal women remain underrepresented due to the lack of inclusive strategies. Singh & Rawat (2018) highlighted that the opinions of tribal women are frequently left out of the creation and execution of national and state sports policies. The gap between opportunities and access is further widened by the fact that many of these solutions do not directly address their unique requirements. Singh and Rawat (2018) suggest that tribal women should be directly involved in policy planning to ensure equitable access to sports opportunities.

## **4. Geographical Isolation**

Tribal women often live in geographically isolated regions, far from sports facilities and competitions. This lack of connectivity and distance from urban areas results in limited access to opportunities that could foster skill-building and participation in competitive sports. Gupta & Singh (2019) emphasize that physical distance from urban sports centers has proven to be a major obstacle for tribal women in accessing training and participating in competitions.

### **Impact of Sports on Tribal Women**

Sports have the potential to transform the lives of tribal women:

- **Health Improvement:** Tribal women's general health and well-being are greatly improved by regular sports involvement. Physical activity enhances cardiovascular health by encouraging improved blood circulation, lowering the risk of hypertension, and averting heart-related conditions. Additionally, it increases endurance, flexibility, and muscular strength, all contributing to general physical fitness. Additionally, an active lifestyle lowers the risk of obesity and related lifestyle-related disorders

including diabetes and osteoporosis by assisting in the maintenance of a healthy weight. Sports have a big influence on mental health in addition to their physical health advantages. By encouraging the production of endorphins, which are naturally occurring mood enhancers, physical activity helps to lower stress, anxiety, and sadness. Additionally, it gives Indigenous women a sense of strength and increases their self-confidence, which motivates them to live more active and healthy lifestyles. In addition to promoting physical fitness, sports are essential for enhancing mental health, which in turn improves quality of life, according to research studies like those by the CDC (2016) and Das (2020).

- **Economic Empowerment:** By providing pathways to financial independence through sponsorships, scholarships, and employment possibilities, sports participation may be a potent instrument for indigenous women's economic development. Scholarships allow many gifted athletes from native communities to pursue higher education, which would otherwise be financially difficult. These scholarships help individuals succeed in their areas by paying for their education as well as giving them access to good sports equipment, food, and training. Government and corporate sponsorships also provide financial assistance, enabling women to compete nationally and internationally without facing financial limitations.

A career in sports offers a variety of employment options outside of financial aid, such as positions as coaches, referees, fitness instructors, professional players, and sports administrators. Through sports quotas, women who excel in sports may also land government employment, guaranteeing social security and a steady salary. Younger generations are further inspired to overcome social and economic restrictions by the athletic achievements of indigenous women. According to Mehta (2019), athletics may help women become financially independent while allowing them to support their family and communities. Society may support tribal women's holistic development and promote gender equality and economic stability by making investments in sports.

- **Social Recognition:** Tribal women who play sports gain social attention, which enables them to defy gender stereotypes and overcome social hurdles. Women athletes who succeed in their sports are recognized and admired both inside and outside of their communities. They get respect and gratitude for their accomplishments, which are a source of pride for them as well as for their families and communities. As they gain notoriety, they serve as role models, encouraging young females to follow their aspirations unhindered by traditional gender norms. The idea that women, particularly those from tribal origins, are only capable of taking care of the home is challenged by

sports. Through their power, tenacity, and commitment, female athletes show that women are just as capable of succeeding in physically demanding and competitive fields. More acceptance of women in leadership positions, education, and other non-traditional occupations is facilitated by this change in view. Additionally, public acknowledgment of female athletes and media coverage help to shift cultural perceptions of gender equalitySharma (2021) asserts that women's athletic achievement not only raises their personal status but also opens the door for more significant societal transformation. As more tribal women achieve success in athletics, they encourage a new generation to defy limiting conventions, which eventually results in a culture that is more progressive and inclusive.

## **Opportunities for Tribal Women in Sports**

### **1. Government Policies and Schemes**

Government initiatives such as scholarships and specialized sports programs can create pathways for tribal women's inclusion. Singh & Rawat (2018) emphasize that tribal women should be directly targeted in sports outreach programs to improve access to training and financial opportunities.

### **2. Media Representation**

Promoting the stories of successful tribal women athletes can inspire other young girls to take up sports. The role of media in celebrating these achievements can contribute to breaking gender norms and increasing participation in sports (Guha, 2018).

### **3. Community Engagement and Awareness Campaigns**

Raising awareness among tribal communities and local leaders about the value of sports can encourage families to support their daughters' athletic goals. Social campaigns can address gender biases and emphasize the role of sports in empowerment (Mishra & Soni, 2020).

## **Case Studies from India:**

### **1. Dutee Chand**

A sprinter from Odisha won the Gold Medal in the 100m sprint at the 2013 Junior National Championships. She represented India in the Commonwealth Games

and the Olympics. She became one of the first tribal women athletes to compete on the global stage, setting an example of resilience. She faced financial constraints, societal norms, and a lack of access to proper training infrastructure. Dutee's determination and support from sports scholarships brought her success. Mehta, A. (2019)

## **2. Mary Kom**

A boxer from Manipur became a Six-time World Boxing Champion. She won a bronze medal in the 2012 London Olympics. She was awarded the Padma Bhushan and Padma Shree for her contributions to sports. Mary Kom is from a tribal community in Manipur, northeast India. Despite financial struggles, she overcame societal expectations and became a celebrated role model. She faced gender norms discouraging women from taking up sports. She had limited infrastructure and economic hardship. Das, R. (2020)

## **3. Lal remsiami**

Lal remsiami comes from Mizoram, a north east state with a strong tribal population. A Hockey player from Mizoram represented India at the 2018 Asian Games and has been part of the Indian Women's Hockey team. She was recognized for her commitment to sports despite economic limitations. She faced many challenges like a Lack of infrastructure in her region and Limited access to high-quality coaching facilities. Singh, P., & Rawat, S. (2018).

## **4. Bembem Devi**

Bembem Devi comes from the tribal community in Manipur, contributing significantly to the Indian Women's Football team. She represented India in regional and national football championships. A pioneer in women's football in India and an advocate for tribal women's sports opportunities. She faced socioeconomic barriers and a lack of support for women's football in rural areas.

## **5. Phaguni Devi**

She belongs to a lesser-known tribal group in Nagaland, one of the northeastern states with limited sporting opportunities. She represented Nagaland in national athletics competitions. She Competed in regional cross-country competitions while highlighting challenges related to accessibility and infrastructure. She faced Socioeconomic constraints and a lack of organized sports infrastructure in rural areas. Singh, P., & Rawat, S. (2018)

## **6. AnjuDevi**

Anju comes from a rural tribal background in Arunachal Pradesh, emphasizing the challenges tribal women face to access high-level competitions. She competed in various national-level athletics competitions, focusing on cross-country and endurance races. She has promoted grassroots sports development in her state. Das, R. (2020).

### **Case Studies from Uttarakhand:**

#### **1. Poonam Rawat**

Poonam from the Jaunsari community has demonstrated exceptional skills in local athletic competitions while actively promoting sports among tribal youth in her community.

#### **2. Kamla Devi**

Kamla a Tharu Tribe has represented her community in state-level competitions despite facing resource constraints. Her achievements inspire younger generations to prioritize sports and education.

#### **3. Anjali Thakur**

Anjali from Bhotia Community has been a local success story, training in wool production and sports simultaneously to sustain her economic needs and fulfill her sporting dreams.

These women exemplify the transformative power of sports and resilience while offering insights into how targeted interventions can strengthen participation (Das, 2020; Mehta, 2019).

### **Recommendations**

#### **1. Develop Infrastructure for Training:**

Governments and NGOs should invest in improving sports training facilities in tribal regions to ensure accessibility. Access to equipment and proper facilities fosters equal participation opportunities for tribal women. Mehta, A. (2019)

#### **2. Policy Inclusion for Gender Equality**

State and national sports policies should actively include tribal women in sports development programs to address socioeconomic disparities and gender bias. Singh, P., & Rawat, S. (2018).

### **3. Promotion of Awareness Campaigns**

Sports organizations should launch community-driven awareness programs emphasizing the health and social benefits of sports for tribal women, targeting traditional gender norms and misconceptions. Das, R. (2020).

### **4. Encourage Local and National Sponsorships**

Encourage partnerships with corporate and local industries to sponsor female athletes' training, competitions, and career development to ensure sustainable talent promotion. Das, R. (2020) & Mehta, A. (2019).

### **5. Implement Skill Development Workshops**

Organize workshops and camps focusing on sports skills, coaching, and technical education to enhance participation among tribal women. These programs can boost confidence and competitiveness. Das, R. (2020).

## **Conclusion**

Tribal women in Uttarakhand possess immense potential to contribute to sports development. By addressing their challenges and fostering an inclusive sports culture, they can play a pivotal role in transforming not only their lives but also the broader social landscape of the region. Sports can bridge tradition and modernity, empowering tribal women and preserving their cultural identity. In conclusion, promoting tribal women's participation in sports in Uttarakhand requires addressing barriers such as poverty, lack of infrastructure, and traditional gender norms. Strategic measures like building training facilities, launching community sports programs, creating safe spaces, and integrating physical education into schools can bridge these gaps. Role model initiatives and government funding must focus on equal opportunities to ensure social inclusion and gender equity. With these collective efforts, Uttarakhand can empower tribal women, improve their health and well-being, and foster community development through sports.

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