

An Exploratory study on the Economic Impact of Women's Cricket in Developing Countries like India with special reference to their Empowerment, Linkage impact and Upliftment

Yoana Gupta

Modern School Barakhamba Road, New Delhi

DOI: 10.46609/IJSSER.2025.v10i10.009 URL: <https://doi.org/10.46609/IJSSER.2025.v10i10.009>

Received: 26 September 2025 / Accepted: 14 October 2025 / Published: 22 October 2025

ABSTRACT

The growth of Indian Women's Cricket has been the dedicated endeavour of a few namely Shantha Rangaswamy, Diana Edulji to begin with and then moving to eminent players like Mythali Raj, Harmanpreet kaur. Jhulan Goswami, Smriti Mandhana who have taken the game to a stage where it has been given the same respect and adulation as the men's team. This paper analyses the growth path of the game and the various important impact that the game has had on the status of women in India in the Tier2 & Tier 3 cities. How has the game effected their status in the family, as well as the status of the family in the area that they live? How has it further effected the facilities and the career prospects of young women in that area? Has it empowered these young players to follow their dream unabashedly?

Key words: Women's Cricket, Women's Premier League (WPL), Gender Disparity, Sports Sponsorship, Development Challenges

1. Introduction

The cricket scenario has been primarily dominated by the 'men's cricket team'. The Women's Cricket association of India (WCAI) was formed in 1973, much before the Men's team won the 1983 World cup. They played their first match against the West Indies in 1976. This team was led by Captain Shantha Rangaswamy she won the match by a convincing margin against all odds. At that time the situation of the game bordered on embarrassment as there were no proper facilities in terms of infrastructure. Most of the players of that time played what is now termed as 'unprofessional', cricket. They received no perks, no financial support, and no hope of any type of payments. Diana Edulji along with Shantha Rangaswamy are considered as two important pillars who laid the foundation of Indian Women's Cricket.

This sport officially began under the enthusiastic and enterprising spirit of Mr. Mahendra Kumar Sharma. He registered the Women's Cricket Association of India under the Societies Act at Lucknow in 1973 under the President ship of Begum Hamida Habibullah.

A large number of girls who entered this sport were left to figure out how to play professional cricket. As in the case of the men's team, women also started their carrier by playing the game in gullies and byways of small towns across India, without a well-defined structure.

This was the state of Women's cricket in India and if one compares this with a developed nation like England, it was a century apart.

Female participation in games like tennis, gymnastics, weightlifting, hockey, swimming were more popular than the game of cricket.

Over the years for some reason the game had been sidelined. It struggled for recognition and support in a country where cricket is considered a religion. This game has always been male dominated. Boys and men playing at every nook and corner were looked at with interest, but at the same time women playing cricket were laughed at or looked down upon.

It is against such odds that this sport has achieved a level today where there is recognition, pride, support and acceptance of the game not only by the audience but also by parents and families who are openly encouraging their wards to take up the sport and bring accolades not only to the institution they play for but also to themselves, their cities and the areas in which they reside.

2. The pathway followed to become a women cricketer

In India a large number of the female population especially in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities are involved with housework and performing tasks on their small farms. Majority of them do not get the opportunity to finish their education leave alone them getting the luxury of playing a sport and that too cricket. It is the lack of gendered responsibility that may have been absent during the growing up period due to the position of women in the existing patriarchal set up, that paved the way for cricketers like Swati who represented the sport in all categories since 2007, but she was made to give up the sport once she reached a marriageable age of 26 years. The above example is the problems that women face in continuing with this sport as it has brought in its wake a lot of pressures not only on the players but also on their families.

Some of the main reasons for the stigmatized approach to the game was the presence of societal and cultural barriers that they faced while playing the sport. These could be broken down among the following heads;

- Societal and cultural barriers- besides Swati there are examples of another women cricketer called Agni who came from a joint family and was lucky that she did not have to help in household chores. She belonged to a Jat (OBC) family, was the youngest child. Her family members allowed her to learn and practice the sport. Though she was free to practice it at most times of the year, there were times when the family required an extra hand to help in the fields, and she was expected to participate. Though she had achieved many accolades in terms of being selected at various levels for example the State Team, Under 19 coaching camps etc. She was told that the moment she reached the age of 26, that she would have to give up the sport, learn housework as she would have reached a marriageable age. This is a clear indication that for a women cricketer there is an age till she can pursue her sport, as the sport was more in the form of ‘play’ rather than the form of ‘work’. This form of ‘play’ would come to an end once she reached a marriageable age as dictated by societal norms.
- Lack of Funding and resources compared to the Men’s cricket Team. The idea of women playing a sport like cricket, in the early years did not warrant dedicated funds.
- Inadequate facilities - women cricketers practiced against all odds, an example of this is a young cricketer from Meerut named Himanshu. She came from a better placed family background compared to Agni. Her parents were working, and they owned a small school, to improve her game they had set up a cricket pitch with lights and a cooler so that she could practice even at night. At times it was a better option to practice at night as the temperature in the summer months in Meerut reached up to 50⁰ C. There was a stark difference in the facilities that these two girls faced while training for the sport. Both of them came from rural background but the status of the families was entirely different. Agni had to concentrate on housework as well as play the game; and she did not have the same sport facilities as did Himanshu. This game in India already functioned under a gender bias, but along with it were the odds that arose due to different type of access to different sporting facilities. These were unequally distributed, and were dependent on the family’s social position, their class, caste, religion and education.
- Safety concerns while travelling- This was a serious issue that is faced by nearly all the female gender in India, whereby travelling alone attracts problems that their male counterparts do not have to face. This further reduces the options available for a woman to pursue the sport.
- Lack of proper equipment- given the social background that these women come from and the fact that cricket is considered by most families as ‘a stop gap arrangement’, there is limited emphasis and inclination by the family to provide adequate quality equipment.

- Problems related to sexual harassment- the most rampant problem in almost all sports that are played by women. It is part of the male superiority psyche that exists in the treatment of what they call the 'weaker sex'.
- Lack of support systems- Most female cricketer do not get high quality games as the men do in their initial years. These women to keep up with their career path have less healing time, reduced specialized rehearsal then their male counter part due to professional insecurity.
- Mental health and other challenges - Female athletes face unique health issues due to their gender. The most common ailment is the 'RED-S', a term that is used for a combination of three interrelated conditions namely, low energy, menstruation, dysfunction and low bone density. This causes painful periods and severe cramps. For these athletes not having or delayed periods are natural given the extent of physical activity that they undergo, but these further aggravate existing ailments leading to acute pain in the pelvic area which they have to endure due to their commitments.

2. Research Gap and Methodology

The paper analyses the empowerment that women cricketers have achieved over the years with the increased popularity of the game. What are the linkage impacts that this has had on the family's status, income and the upliftment of the sports women? What has been the impact on the increasing popularity of the game on the areas that they belong in terms of more players playing as well as improved facilities and infrastructure?

The methodology adopted would be the mixed method format where quantitative data would be used from authentic sources to establish the impact that this game has had on various systems connected with the it and qualitative arguments would be used to authenticate the quantitative analysis.

3. Path line that the game has achieved since its beginnings from 1976

It is the perseverance of Shantha Rangaswamy, Diana Eduljee, Jhulan Goswami, Mithali Raj and others that paved the way for the future. It is their dedication, and skill and playing the sport relentlessly in difficult situations with limited infrastructure and inadequate means that has laid the foundation for the success that has been achieved by the game today.

A significant step was when in 2006 the WCAI merged with BCCI. It is from this time period that Women's cricket was brought under the wings of the most powerful body in India. This allowed them to be a party to a number of positive aspects;

- Opportunities to play in international matches, both at home and abroad

- Development of a larger and wider domestic structure
- Nurturing talent at the grass root level.

The amalgamation of the WCAI with the BCCI has been the force that has accelerated the rise of women's cricket. This was further helped in 2022 when BCCI decided to adopt a system of equal pay. Ensuring policy measures like paying the same match fees for both men and women has clearly indicated the belief towards gender equality.

- Appointment of experienced coaches for different aspects of the game, the same way that is done in the case of the Men's team, along with specialized support staff like physiotherapists, trainers and mental health specialists, who follow a structured program to enhance abilities of the sports persons.

When India hosted the women's World Cup in 2013, the situation was such that at that time a few 100 school children were heralded into the stadium to make it look that the stadium had spectators. The step motherly treatment given to the sport was noticed when at a drop of a hat the venue was changed, and if Sachin Tendulkar was playing even a Ranji Trophy match, the venue and the audience would leave everything and flock to wherever he was playing. Match practice for the team meant that they would be practicing against under 16 years and under 19 years boys teams. After the match the team members stayed in budget rooms in South Mumbai, while the foreign team members were put up in five-star hotels. A major boost was experienced by the game when the ICC announced that it had earmarked an investment of \$25 million over five years. This was in the year 2018. At the same time BCCI introduced the Women's Challenge. It was a one of event, featuring three teams and played in Jaipur. The tournament was a huge success as there was participation of the most talented players of the world. But prior to these events was the 2017 World cup T20. But the main impetus came with the adoption of the Women's Premier League in 2023. This has been a huge development for the encouragement, upliftment as well as supporting the cause of women's cricket.

Figure 1: Logo of Women's Premier League



Source: <https://chaquen.io/blog>

This was a water shed moment, it injected professionalism, exposure, investment ultimately leading to increasing popularity of the game.

4. Impact of the Growth of Women's cricket in India and its economic linkages.

The popularity of the sport has led to a positive impact not only for the player but her family, her city as well as on all the young players who have talent and were interested in pursuing the sport. The further effect is on all the support that the player requires with respect to coaches, equipment, training facilities etc. Besides this the media, newspapers and other online medium that are linked to the sport receive an impetus with the growth of the game.

4.1 Status of the sports women and their family

The growth of the game has promoted gender equality which has increased with increasing accolades that the game has achieved. Inauguration of the WPL has increased the participation of the sport at the grass root level. It has encouraged young women to go out and start playing and practicing the game in Tier1, 2, and Tier 3 cities, as they feel that this could be a possible career choice.

Image 2: Kranti Goud-evidence of the spread of Indian Cricket in the hinterlands



Source: cricinfo

The figure above is the journey of this talented cricketer from a village 450 km away from Indore. This is not only a testament of the spread of the game into the hinterlands, but it is also testimony to talent scouting that has started taking place. There are many like her who are participating in the just concluded world cup. Some of the others who have achieved success from small town are N Shree Charani from Kadapa a few hours away from Vishakhapatnam, and Uma Chetri from Guwahati.

The visibility of the game, along with the accolades achieved has gone a long way in breaking the mindset of the way that society used to look at young girls and women playing the sport. There has been a complete change in the thought process from it being a 'men's turf', to it being one that can be played by both 'men', and 'women'. The recently held ICC World Cup September 2025, has inspired young girls from Tier 2 cities, that cricket could be considered a lucrative career. ICC and BCCI has chosen venues like Guwahati, Indore, Vishakhapatnam and Thiruvananthapuram. This a calculated step of taking the game to the grass root level to popularize the sport and encourage talented young girls to seriously consider it as a lucrative alternative. The WPL and the ICC Tournament has helped immensely in deconstructing the cultural belief that 'cricket is a man's game'.

4.2. Women's IPL auction

An important watershed in Women's cricket. This happened on December 21, 2021. It was a moment of great pride and joy, that women cricketers were given the same respect and treated in the same manner as the men who play the game. The format followed was the same as is done in the case of the Men's IPL auction, where players were divided into three categories namely;

- Overseas players
- Indian players
- Uncapped players

It is systems like this that believe in gender equality that help in promoting the sport for women. It helps in increasing the general awareness of the game as well as the mindset of society towards women playing the game. It provides the opportunities for uncapped players to play along with experienced and well-known international sports persons. The introduction of the WPL has opened up a 'sports economy', for Women's cricket in India. This has far reaching consequences in promoting and encouraging the game at the grass root level.

4.3. Infrastructure

With the popularity of the sport increasing there has been an automatic rise in the provision of infrastructural facilities for playing the game. These are being developed in the hinterland so that talent is scouted and women get the opportunity to showcase their skill, bring accolades for the country and treat it as a lucrative career opportunity. The infrastructure includes stadiums and all connected sports equipment. Along with this are the services in terms of support staff that has to be made available to ensure fitness of the players. All of the above stated are an important linkage impact that the popularity of the sport has brought with it.

4.4. Viewership-

The current WPL matches have attracted a huge viewership through television, online engagement as well as in the increased physical presence at various venues. This indicates a growing interest in the game, translating into media attention, sponsorship and greater avenues for young women cricketers taking up the sport in the future.

Table 1: Viewership of T20 Women’s Cricket Tournament.

Year	Viewership
2017	100 million
2018	
2019	246 million
2020-Womens T20 Challenge	701 million
2021	1100 million
2022	1640 million
2023	1920 million

Source: cricinfo; espn sports.

The above table is a clear indication of the rising popularity of the game. This will help in achieving a greater number of women to take up the sport not only because they are passionate for the game, but it also is a lucrative career alternative.

This is also seen in the figure below where the confidence in one's ability leads to success and accolades, which the current Indian Women's team has and is achieving.

Figure 2: The Rise of the Super Stars



Source: Timesofsports.com

4.5 Sponsorship

Sponsorship is extremely important for any sports and especially for a women's sport in India. Women in India and the major subcontinent are subject to being relegated to the bottom due to the conservative mindset of the family. This is a result of the patriarchy and the caste system that is followed from centuries in the country. The rise of a sport entails freedom from the clutches of archaic beliefs, it provides a road to freedom and empowerment for the girl child. This is exactly what has been the case for Women with the rise of the WPL and various T20 tournaments. As the viewership increased so did the sponsorship that the team obtained. Due to increased digitalization and the role of the media the extent and number of sponsors for the Indian women Cricket team has increased phenomenally.

It is the same sponsor for the Men's and the Women's cricket team. The moment the women's cricket team came under the BCCI umbrella for all official matches the sponsor became the same. With the remuneration being gender neutral the growth and popularity of the sport has increased exponentially. It has led to a large following of the game with young women wanting to become cricketers and excel in the sport just as their male counterpart.

Under the new pay policy, women cricketers will receive the same salary as their male counterparts, i.e. Rs 15 lakh for Test Matches, Rs 6 Lakhs for ODI matches and Rs 3 Lakhs for

T20 matches. Previously women cricketers earned Rs 4 lakhs for test matches and Rs 1 lakh for T20s and ODI's.

Once this disparity was removed there was no stopping the heights that the game has and could achieve in the future. With the sponsors came investment in infrastructure and other facilities so that the game could be developed at the grass root level. All of this translated itself into coaching camps, superior equipment and better facilities, such that talented, dedicated and hard-working players have the opportunity to rise from all walks of life and show their talent to the world.

5. Conclusion and the Way Ahead

Women's cricket in India has travelled a long long way, from its humble beginnings where the ability to excel depended on the individual and whatever support the family could give, examples like Himanshu and Agni to the new icons who have come from small towns like Uma Chettri and Charani. The sport has developed in leaps and bounds. This has been possible due to the unfaltering efforts by Shantha Rangaswamy Diana Edulji, Mythali Raj, Harmanpreet, Jhulen Goswami, Harmanpreet Kaur and others that have given their sweat and life in the promotion of this game in India. They knew that Cricket in India is a religion, and wanted it to be gender neutral. It was their hard work that led to the iconic status that the game has today.

They understood that behind every women cricketer it is not only the hard work but the dream in every wicket, the sweat and tears of every player, of her family, of her town and village. It is the ticket to freedom from poverty and a wholesome existence for her parents and her siblings. Above all it is the belief in herself and the adulation that she achieves for her hard work and persistence. It is her ultimate empowerment. From the present stratus the game can only move in one direction and that is upward, with the increased adulation that the players are getting almost to the same level as their male counterpart.

Bibliography

1. Elyasi, S., Empowering Women in Sport Analyzing Sponsorship: Trends and Opportunities for Growth January 2024Psychology of Woman Journal. *Research Gate*.
2. Macmillan, C., et al., Injury Prevention and Rehabilitation of Female Cricketers-Springer Link □Chapter □First Online: 13 May 2025 □Pp 181–190 □Cite this chapter Cricket Sports Medicine *Springer Link*.
3. Thariyan, P., Dr Thomas, T.,The Womens Premier League- Aparadigm shift in Indian 'Womens Cricket'; 2025; Research Gate. (n.d.). *Research Gate*.

4. Sharma, S., Understanding Women's Cricket Through Time: Who Becomes a Good Player? Vol. 59, Issue No. 38, 21 Sep, 2024. (n.d.). *EPW*.