



The Historical Evolution of Field Hockey: From Ancient Origins to the Rise of Women's Hockey in India

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the historical trajectory of field hockey, tracing its roots from ancient civilizations to its modernization in Europe and its subsequent introduction and growth in India. A significant focus is placed on the gendered evolution of the sport, highlighting the socio-cultural barriers Indian women faced compared to their Western counterparts, and how women's hockey eventually established its own institutional framework in India.

Introduction

Field hockey is a team sport played on open playgrounds, distinct from Ice Hockey, which is played at a faster pace on ice sheets. Modern field hockey involves two teams of eleven players each, utilizing a hard ball and specialized curved sticks. Over centuries, the game has transitioned from a rudimentary pastime with regional variations into a highly regulated international sport. Today, it holds a prestigious position as the national sport of India.

Hockey is the national sport of India. But it did not begin in India itself. It is rather difficult to say where it actually emerged. No doubt, some facts indicate that a game similar to hockey used to be played in Egypt around 4000 BC years ago.ⁱ

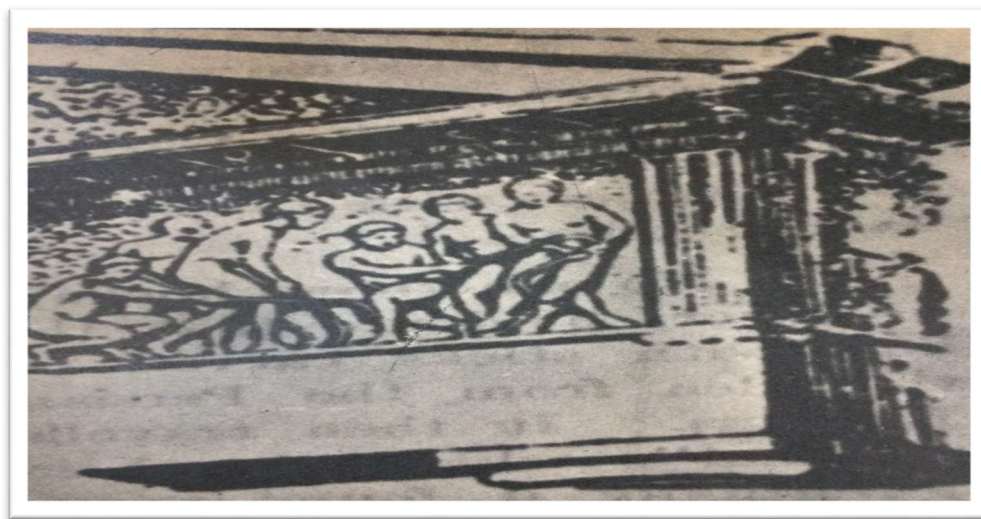


An engraved image of a Hockey player bowing on the wall the Athen

In ancient Egypt, a picture was discovered, in 2000 BC, engraved on a wall of a tomb, built in Beni Hasan, near a place called Minia in the Nile Valley. In this picture, two persons are seen ‘bullying’ like modern hockey.ⁱⁱ

In the same way, a game looking like hockey used to be played in Farce in 2000 BC. But the people of Farce had to run after the ball, carrying sticks made of shrouds in hands. The Greeks in the way learned this game from the people of Farce.ⁱⁱⁱ

In 1922, an evidence discovered from Athens indicate that such a game used to be played in ancient Greek as well. Another picture imprinted on a wall constructed by Themistocles was also found in 1500 BC. In this picture, six men are shown playing a Hockey-like game.^{iv}



Another engraved image found in the Athens



But those players look awkward, 'bullying' with their hockey's turned downward. Whereas the hockey's are bent upward in the modern hockey. Later on, this game was adopted by the Romans, who further spread it in the European countries. Centuries ago, the same kind of sport was said to be played in different European countries. It was known as 'Herle' in Ireland. The people of Scotland had assigned it a local name 'Sinti', which was very popular in the 12th century.^v

This sport was very popular in France during the 15th century. A 500 years old picture shows hockey being played there.^{vi}

This game was called 'Houquet' in France. This name basically meant, "Shepherds curved stick". The word 'Hockey' itself seems to be adopted from this French word.^{vii}



An old picture showing the game of Hockey in France

Another country where hockey was initially played is Holland, where it was played with a soft and large ball in a unique way. But the country where the modern hockey emerged is England, where this sport was very popular in the middle of the 16th century. In England, it was called 'bendi'. The word hockey itself was used for the first time in 1838.^{viii}

Initially, hockey was more a natural sport. At that time, anyone would go to forest to make a wooden hockey with the help of a knife. The both ends of hockey were used in this sport. But later on, when a new kind of hockey made of oak tree over steam became popular, it started to be made with one end curved inward, and the plain end was started to be used to handle it. A string would also be wrapped over the plain end to make it tightly held in hand. In those times, the players used to run in groups and



would change the direction only after pushing the opponent holding the ball. It was followed by the snatching-method, making a way for the ball being hit forcibly. It all introduced some changes in this sport as players now started to hold the ball with them, and separate themselves during the game. Thereafter, the 'sitak' came into existence, making hockey more popular among masses.^{ix}

The first hockey club of England was the 'Blackheath Club', which was nothing but a group of golf players in London in 1608. But as this group soon became more interested in hockey, it associated itself with hockey in 1861.^x The Blackheath Club later made many rules regarding hockey i.e. the goal-poles be grounded at 10 yards distance. Likewise, the distance between both goals should not be less than two hundred yards.^{xi}

As hockey kept gaining public interest, several efforts were made to make it more rule bound. In this way in 1875, the hard, white-coloured ball used in cricket was proposed to be used in hockey, so it could easily be seen on green grass. In addition to it, no player was now allowed to enter the five-yard distance from opponents' goal without the ball. Similarly, hockey was not to be raised above shoulders, and the goal hit from more than fifteen yards distance would not be counted.^{xii} The tactic introduced in 1889, assigning five forward, three half-back, two full-back and a goal-keeper, became so popular that it still continues.

The 'British Hockey Association' was established on 18th of January 1886. It brought a new life to this sport. The Prince of Wales, King Edward VII was the first president of this association.^{xiii}

As hockey is the national sport of India, it was introduced in India by the Britishers. Initially it started to be played between the British and Indian military. In Punjab, it became famous as 'khudo khundi'.^{xiv} As far as the non-military teams are concerned, this sport took birth in India in 1885. The people of Punjab showed great interest in hockey, making it travel from cantonments to academics. It was included in the Punjab University sport competitions in 1903.^{xv} In the same year, the Lahore 'Gymkhana Club' invited everyone for this sport.

On the other hand, the 'International Hockey Board' had been founded in 1900. Thereafter, the demand seeking international hockey matches was also raised. The first international hockey match was played between England and France in 1907. Following it, several matches were played in different European countries.

As a sport of single competition, hockey was included in the Fourth Olympic Games held in London in 1908. Six teams took part in this competition, in which the English team won the Gold



Medal.^{xvi} Likewise, hockey was also included in the Antwerp (Belgium) Olympic Games held in 1920. England won the Gold Medal this time as well. But four years later, it was not included in the Paris Olympic Games due to insufficient number of teams. This decision of the International Olympic Committee disappointed the countries playing hockey. Later on, the World Hockey Organisation came into existence. A Frenchman, Pal Leete took the initiative and held a meeting in Paris, on 7th of June 1924, for the countries interested in hockey. This meeting was attended by the representatives of seven countries including Austria, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, France, Spain and Switzerland etc. They formed the Federation of International Hockey (F.I.H.), which now regulates hockey at international level. Pal Leete was the first president of this federation. The Britain did not take part in this Federation because Ireland, Scotland and Wales were already members of the International Hockey Board. After the formation of F.I.H. the both of these organizations started working together. They later made several rules common for hockey at the international level.^{xvii}

On the other hand, hockey was becoming popular also in India at that time. The representatives of state organisations held a meeting in Gwalior, on 7th of September 1925, for the people interested in hockey. In this meeting, the 'Indian Hockey Federation' was formed. Bruce Turnbull became the first president of this federation, while N.S Ansari was elected as the Honorary Secretary of the same. There were only five members of this federation at that time. The head office of the Federation was shifted from Gwalior to Delhi in 1927. It is then hockey was officially started in India.^{xviii} Thereafter, India became a member of the Federation of International Hockey.

As a result of the continuous efforts of the Federation of International Hockey, this sport was included in the Amsterdam (Netherland) Olympics in 1928. Nine hockey teams in total took part in these games. Indian hockey team played for the first time in these games, and won the Gold Medal. This victory changed the history of Indian hockey team. This game now became very popular among Indians. Moreover, it also encouraged 'Women's Hockey' in India.^{xix}

Thereafter India kept winning the Gold Medals in Olympics from 1932 to 1956.^{xx} India faced defeat for the first time from Pakistan in the Roman Olympics in 1960. But it again won Gold Medal in the Tokyo Olympics in 1964. Following it, Pakistan made victory in the 1968 Olympics held in Mexico.^{xxi} Apart from it, India also participated in several big tournaments i.e. the 1964 Asia Cup and the 1971 World Cup.



Hockey had gained very much popularity by 1887. But it was lacking women participation, and in the same year, women started taking part in this game. As a result women across the globe started taking interest in hockey.

A women organisation in England formed the 'Livingston Association' on Staten Island, which could not live long. The first 'National Association' came into existence in 1894, along the Irish Ladies Hockey Union.^{xxii}

Later in 1901, a professor of British College of Physical Education, M.K Applebee founded the 'Field Hockey' during his visit of the Harvard Summer School. He recommended that Field Hockey is good for college women's health. Following it, Miss Applebee sent an invitation to eastern women colleges including Smith Vassar, Wellesley, Bryn Mawr and Mount Holyoke etc. They accepted this invitation with utmost excitement, so their teams were selected and the first inter-class competition was held in 1902. The American women's team visited England in 1920, so does the latter soon after. It became an international.^{xxiii}

In 1922, the 'United States Field Hockey Association' was established to ensure good management of women's hockey in Philadelphia. It was aimed at developing women's hockey and encouraging women and girls to participate in it. Slowly and gradually, women's hockey became popular in schools and colleges. In the same way, the 'International Federation of Women's Hockey Association' became worldwide in 1927. Some tournaments were held between the women of Denmark and Philadelphia.^{xxiv}

About woman hockey, in particular, Clark has said: "The history of woman hockey in most after countries of the world is as old as the history of man hockey. Countries of the world is as old as the history of man hockey. There are countries where field hockey is considered to be only the woman game. The U.S.A, South Africa, and Canada have very strong woman hockey teams whereas very few man play hockey in those countries. But in India girl's hockey is not that old."

Mackey as well as Kartar Singh tell his that international hockey federation was formed in 1927. Which helped in popularising this games amongst woman on a system attic way.

This is how we come to know that, in England and other European countries, women had got equality, diminishing the gender difference. And their sport tours were now common in those countries.^{xxv} But women's hockey began far later in India, because Indian women possessed less freedom in comparison to European women. And also they did not possess equality to men.^{xxvi}



Apart from it, Indian society was full of many social evils i.e. female infanticide, child marriage, *parda pratha* and *Sati Pratha* etc. All such evils had reduced women to almost objects.^{xxvii} So it was impossible to think of any women's sport in India. In this way, Indian women's participation in hockey was much delayed in comparison to women of other countries. This was so because traditional Indian families were against it. So Indian women had to struggle a lot to be a part of this game, because they were not allowed to come out of their homes in shorts and knickers.^{xxviii}

On the other hand, the 'International Federation of Women Hockey Association' was established in 1927, as the women hockey gained impetus at the world level.^{xxix} Meanwhile, some enthusiastic Indian women had founded an association in Calcutta in 1925. As a result, several new associations came into existence at different parts of the country. In the beginning, only the women who belonged to the Anglo-Indian community could take part in this game. But later on the Hindu and Sikh girls also started taking part in it. Consequently, women's hockey emerged more vigorously in India.

In this way the, first international women's hockey competition was held in Delhi in 1938. As this game was popular only in the metropolitan cities like Delhi, Kolkata and Mumbai at the time. Indian women's hockey was regulated by Indian Hockey Association till 1949. In 1953, this team participated in games held in Britain, and that of Sydney in 1956.^{xxx}

In 1953 India participated in the 'International Women Hockey Conference' held in England. Since then India has been participating in all the International Tournaments. The first Asian Women's Hockey Championship was held India at Delhi 1967 which was organized by all India Woman Hockey Association.

All India Women's Hockey Association (AIWHA): Formed in Nagpur in 1949, the AIWHA took over governance from the men's body. The Bengal Women's Hockey Association affiliated with it in 1950. International tours followed, including competitions in Britain (1953) and Sydney (1956). In 1967, the AIWHA organized the first Asian Women's Hockey Championship in Delhi.

The Role of Punjab: The Punjab Women Hockey Association was established in 1955. In 1962, the PEPSU (Patiala and East^{xxxi} Punjab States Union) Women Hockey Association sepa^{xxxii}rated from its male counterpart. PEPSU became a pioneer state association, managing over 150 players, hosting foreign exhibition matches, sending teams for friendly tours to Ceylon (Sri Lanka), and winning the National Junior Hockey Championship in Gwalior in 1969.



From its ancient, diverse origins to the structured setups of the 19th and 20th centuries, field hockey has reflected broader societal shifts. While the men's game brought India global athletic glory early on, the trajectory of women's hockey highlights a hard-fought battle against socio-cultural constraints. The institutionalization through bodies like the 'AIWHA' and regional organizations like 'PEPSU' paved the way for Indian women to achieve athletic expression and international recognition.

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