



## Remodelling Society the Rowling Way

Dr. V.Vijayalayan

Department of English Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda College (Autonomous) Chennai India

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Life is hard for all, but harder for a woman, something that her very physiology testifies. As the character of Amy from the popular American sit com series The Big Bang Theory puts it, “You can’t deny that, by comparison, our internal plumbing is extremely high maintenance” (The Love Card Displacement, 11:42). However, it must be said, women to their credit have adapted themselves most amiably in this regard. As the response of Penny, Amy’s friend clarifies, “... I’ve never given it much thought” (The Love Card Displacement, 11:48). Nonetheless it must be understood that your body is something that you cannot possibly shed. Penny’s remark therefore must not be taken to mean that her physiological demands do not pose any hardship for a woman. If at all anything, it perhaps hints at a subconscious feeling of resignation towards the inevitability of the problem. However, one thing we can safely presume. Unavoidable yes, but her physiological misgiving epitomizes by no means an insurmountable crisis for a woman, it is something she is very much on top of. The same unfortunately cannot be said of her social situation. From traditional ones such as religion and marriage, to contemporary development as media, every significant social institution has tended to favour the cause of men over women. In fact, this is not the worst of it. In unduly privileging the masculine, they have not merely downsized but unabashedly denigrated the feminine. The rise of women’s movements and feminist thought in the modern era, have actively sought to undermine this obvious case of sexual inequality inherent within social institutions. However, the taint of gender bias persists to stain them, and it is very unlikely that it could ever be fully remedied. Nonetheless it is imperative that the contamination terminal as it is, be continually challenged in order that damage control at least be exercised. This is precisely what the paper professes to do, with specific reference to sport, justifiably one of the most influential social institutions in the world today. However, in doing so, rather than contesting the problem from an external stand point, it does so from within by purporting to transform the very framework of the sport institution. To this end, it seizes upon the fictional sport of quidditch propounded by the novelist Rowling, as a feasible source from which the blue print for affecting the proposed transformation is to be derived. The ultimate goal in view is to envision a social order that is sexually egalitarian in scope.

### Male Bias In Sport

It is in the past three decades, probably four at the most, that male bias has come to prominence as a talking point in the context of sport. This however, should not be taken to mean that it’s a trend which has crept into sport in fairly recent times. Male bias has been an integral part of sport from the very beginning, from the time it emerged in old world Greece as an institutionally organised event. The ancient Olympics were after all, games in which only the men were eligible to compete, with female participation ruled out as a matter of simple exclusion. This situation of course has not just gone out of favour today, but has been rendered untenable. Women taking part in sport and sporting events has not merely become prevalent, but pretty much a given. This however, represents no real cause for celebration. As the critic Jennifer Hargreaves reminds us, “In spite of the fact that more women are participating in more sports than ever before, and in spite of a significant number of feminist interventions into sports theory, much more attention is still given to the role of sports in the lives of men than to the importance of sports to women” (1). It must however, be emphasized here that though a cause for concern, the idea that sport even today continues to remain a male dominated domain merits no special explanation.

### **The Critical Point Of Contention**

The fact that women athletes are paid much less than their male counterparts, that they command a degree of recognition hardly ever matching up to the male athletes, that the number of women professionally involved in sport still remains woefully short compared to the men, are all common knowledge. Practically everyone even casually acquainted with sport is fully aware of these facts and possibly more. Thus, the real point of contention with regard to the idea of male bias in sport is not so much how it is so, rather why. It is perhaps relevant at this juncture to quote the observation of the critic Michael A. Messner, from his influential *Taking the Field*. It must be conceded before hand that the observation in question is made by Messner with specifically the American situation in view, but the idea it communicates is universally true, and most of all, directly addresses the issue of male bias in sport.

Sport, as an institution, is not fully internally consistent or coherent. Some of the terrain of sport, especially its center, is still thoroughly patriarchal..... this core of the sport institution is made up of the sport-mediacommercial complex that organizes, promotes, and profits from big-time college and pro football, big-time college and men's pro basketball, pro baseball, and men's pro ice hockey and boxing (XX-XXI).

Going by what Messner has to say, if sport is patriarchal in scope, it is fundamentally owing to its centre, the media, and the implicit logic he posits in this regard is really not that difficult to work out. In the first place, there can be little doubt about the fact that sport in the current context has become a thoroughly media controlled and media conditioned phenomenon. After all, excepting a few thousands at the most, who are privileged to be in the actual venue, everybody else witness sporting events only as it is broadcasted through the media. And this broadcast, as we full well know, is consciously interpolated with many superfluous items such as promotional gigs, commercial advertisements, expert commentary, panel discussions, stats and facts, all of which are carefully engineered not just to make the experience of viewing sport more enthralling, but to manipulate the mindset of the public at large towards what they are viewing. In the second place, it must be understood promoting sporting events on such a large and lavish scale involves lots of money, easily running into millions and in some cases, even billions. If the proprietors of the various media firms therefore promote sports, it is primarily with the objective of making profit, and as much of it as possible. So naturally those popular sports and sporting events that readily attract followers, and hence are prospective of yielding high profits, are given priority over others. This of course means that female sports and sporting events are hardly ever given the level of priority in promotion that those involving the men receive, for no matter what the sport is, the latter far outstrips the former in popularity. This not only ensures that women athletes end up garnering dramatically far lesser scales of recognition and recompense, but the sports and sporting events involving them also come to be regarded as comparatively much lower in significance. Thus, what Messner ultimately posits is that it is the corporate policies that underlie the media's promotion of sport, which essentially makes the sport institution male chauvinistic in character. So if sport has to be cleansed of its sexist hallmark, one of two things has to happen. Either the media has to change its policy of maximizing profits with regard to promoting sport, or else the very framework of sport has to be refashioned in such a way that The idea of gender partiality is nullified as a factor in the media's promotion of it. It is highly unlikely in fact, practically impossible that the first would ever materialize. After all, in any line of business optimizing returns is the eventual goal, and for the media promoting sport is fundamentally a business venture. This leaves us with the second, which though sounds highly improbable, would actually put an end to the issue once for all. Here is where Rowling provides us with a viable blue print to consider in the form of her fictional sport, quidditch.

### **Rudiments Of Quidditch**

For those familiar with the Harry Potter series of novels, quidditch really needs no introduction, for those others, it is basically a sport, and by far the most popular in the magical world created by Rowling. A brief outline of its rudiments perhaps would afford a clearer idea of what its essentially like. Quidditch is a sport played by witches and wizards seated astride flying brooms over a rectangular field, whose boundaries are magically circumscribed to prevent the players flying away beyond the playing area. Typically seven members make up a quidditch team, three chasers, two beaters, a keeper, a seeker, and the game involves tackling not one but four balls simultaneously, a red soccer sized quaffle, a pair of slightly smaller black bludgers, and a golden coloured snitch approximately the size of a large walnut. However, all the four balls are not to be engaged in play by all the players. The quaffle for instance, is to be handled only by the chasers, who are to pass it among each other with the aim of getting it through one of the three hoops perched atop three tall posts roughly twenty feet high, situated on either ends of the rectangular field. Every time this feat is achieved, the successful chaser's team scores ten points, and the keeper's duty obviously is to prevent the chasers from doing so. The bludgers are the beaters responsibility. Bludgers are basically bewitched to attack the players of either teams indiscriminately with the view to unseat or distract them. It is the duty of beaters to protect their team members by beating them away, with small baseball like bats they are authorized to carry. The beaters are therefore vital to furthering their team's cause on two counts. By beating away the bludgers from their players, they enable them to score without

being obstructed, and they also prevent the other team from scoring, for typically they beat the bludgers in the direction of the opponent players. Finally, the tiniest of the three balls in play, the snitch, is to be dealt with by the seekers on either side. The seekers main indeed sole duty is to catch the snitch, which brings the match to its conclusion, and earns the successful seeker's team 150 points. Sothe, the team of the seeker who catches the snitch invariably wins the contest, something that not just makes the seeker the most important player in any quidditch team, but also most prone to be fouled.

### **The Uniqueness Of Quidditch**

All the details thus set forth, not only impart a basic understanding of quidditch the sport, but also clearly bear out how it is unlike any sport that is played in the real world. Aside the magical elements that obviously cannot be replicated, no single popular sport in our own world combines so clinically the ideas of evading, passing, intercepting, catching, blocking, and striking, like quidditch does. Of course, what Rowling has affected is plain to perceive, a simple matter of consolidation where by salient aspects pertaining to many popular sports have been brought together into a single framework. For instance, the idea of putting the quaffle through the hoops is taken from basketball, stopping it from going through from football, passing and intercepting it in play from hockey, catching the snitch from cricket, evading the bludgers from dodge ball, and beating them away from baseball. There is nonetheless one more facet about quidditch that makes it unlike the various sports that we muggles play. This facet however, is not derivative in scope, in fact, it runs radically counter to our conception of sport in the actual world. It is the sport's unisexual character. Like popular sports in our own world, quidditch is not conceived dually in terms of two mutually exclusive gender disciplines. So there is no such thing as a women's quidditch team for which only the witches try out, and a men's for which only the wizards do so. Ultimately trials for a quidditch team involve both witches and wizards competing on equal footing with each other, with players essentially chosen on the basis of their skill level and expertise. Politics certainly might sometime play a part in influencing who finally gets on to the team. Malfoy for instance, practically buys himself into the Slytherine team as a seeker, by getting his wealthy dad to sponsor expensive brooms for the entire side. However, such politics dirty as it is, do not generally involve preferences meted out on the basis of gender partiality. This is to say, what Malfoy was able to do, is something that a witch could also do, if she too has such a rich and well connected father. Similarly positions within the team are also not earmarked on the basis of one's sex. Irrespective of what you happen to be, witch or wizard, you stand an equal chance of being chosen to play as chaser, keeper, beater or seeker. Perhaps it might be grudgingly conceded here that generally wizards are given priority over witches in the matter of choosing beaters for a team, something that even Rowling herself acknowledges in her Quidditch through the Ages. To quote her own words, "Beaters need a good deal of physical strength to repel the Bludgers. This is therefore the position that, more than any other, has tended to be taken by wizards rather than witches" (58). However, here too, it must be noted that if wizards are preferred, its not because they are men, but because they are in general physically stronger. Hence, just in case a physically imposing witch exceptionally skilled in wielding the club is in contention for a beater's position, it is very likely that she would be chosen. So the practice of preferring wizards over witches for beaters in a side is more professionally than sexually motivated. The idea of gender equality that the unisexual character of quidditch upholds, is thus not just a blatant notion in principle, but a latent fact in practice. This point while making the game ideal in conception from a novelistic point of view, concurrently renders it exemplary for emulation from the perspective of real world sports.

### **The Remodelling**

It is noticeable that for all the magic in it, the wizardine world fashioned by Rowling is curiously lacking in certain aspects. There is nothing for instance, to relay information instantly as it happens, like the media in our own world. However, if there was one such in place, and it specialised in sport, there can be little doubt that it would prioritise in promoting quidditch over all other sport, much like cricket in the subcontinent. The analogy however ceases here, for unlike the muggle world, there is no possibility of the media in the magical world taking it a step further and making it gender bias. After all, unlike cricket, there are no two distinct gender disciplines in place as far as quidditch is concerned, to even accommodate such a possibility. So ultimately, if sport in the real world has to be cleansed of its sexist character, it has to be unisexualised like quidditch. The idea of course, might impress one as highly improbable, indeed, utterly impossible at first sight. However, it is not so impracticable as it seems.

## **II. CONCLUSION**

Gender is not an innate endowment, something that one is born with, it is a social construction, something that one is conditioned into becoming. This is where the role of social institutions attain crucial significance, for it is ultimately through the distinct sets of practices and roles they sanction for men and women that gender comes into being. This sanctioning of course is invariably done to the advantage of the former,

which subsequently places them in positions of privilege, prominence, and most of all, power. The latter automatically are condemned into complimentary roles of subservience, which becomes naturalized and consolidated over time, perpetuating a self/other dichotomy. It is perhaps in sport that this perpetuation is felt most forcefully, for unlike in most other institutional practices where the feminine is at least acknowledged nominally, in sport what is masculine is virtually by default considered as normative. The fact that most popular sports played by women is invariably referred to with a specific gender tag as lets say women's cricket, while that played by the men are almost always signified generically as just cricket, bears ample testimony to the point. However, it must also be specified here that sport as an institution also presents the best opportunity for shattering the gender myth, for unlike in other institutions as marriage, where the two sexes make their foray with a preconditioned and self-conscious notion of their distinct identity, in sport they do not. Children for instance, when they first start playing with each other, do so with no regard to their distinct sexual identity. It is only after they reach a certain age, that this supposed sense of their sexual distinction is consciously imposed on them, by being set apart from each other to play separately as boys and girls. Of course, this is where the gender trouble starts, and once set in motion there is no turning back. This has to be stopped, and certainly can be, if our received notions of sexuality, specifically the primacy we attribute to heterosexuality, could be consciously and constructively reviewed. After all, the need to split boys and girls in the context of sport, does not arise from their physical disparity, as we often rationalize, but actually from our culturally conditioned psychological perception that they are mutually distinct. Such a change would not just transform the face of the sport institution altogether, but would represent a monumental step forward towards refashioning the very rubric of society as a whole. Many fields that were once regarded as exclusively reserved for men, like military combat for instance, have come to employ female professionals. In fact, such a phenomenon has become a common place thing today, something that does not even raise eye brows anymore. Within sports itself two millennium ago the idea of women ever competing professionally would have seemed totally ludicrous, but not only has it become a reality, it has become a given. The idea of doing away with two distinct disciplines for men and women in sports is thus by no means impracticable. After all, if the idea of a female soldier bearing arms alongside men in war could be practically accommodated, if the reality of a female executive running a firm with male employees has been achieved, why cannot the possibility of a Harman Preeth Kaur or a Mithali Raj playing alongside a Veerat Kohli or a Rohit Sharma in a cricket field, be too difficult to realize.

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