



Neo Vista

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CHESS & GENDER

IS IT DESIRABLE
TO HAVE A SEPARATE
CATEGORY FOR
WOMEN IN
INTERNATIONAL
CHESS
CHAMPIONSHIPS?



OPINION



CHESS AND GENDER

India has recently struck gold in both, open and women's categories, in International Chess Championships. The moot question of this event is, do we need gender segregation in chess tournaments too. So we decided to throw a poser out to all our readers and invite their responses: "Is it desirable to have a separate category for women in international chess championships?" The response was overwhelming – young and old participated and took positions that were either 'nay' or 'aye' or still a balanced middle path. The pieces were short, long, off the cuff, highly researched, serious, funny, tongue in cheek and chivalrous – you have them all here. And a big surprise – Rotaractors have participated too.

Here are some interesting facts and a few ironies that govern this game. As we all know, Chess originated in India as Chaturanga before 600 AD. It was a simulation of a battle field and was supposedly used to teach military strategies to princes. One legend has it that Queen Mandodari defeated her husband King Ravana in the game. This folklore is the first legendary irony governing chess and gender.

Chaturanga moved to Persia through travelers, where it became Shatranj, its pieces transforming in identity, and thereafter to Europe through Spain and was re-incarnated as Chess. It was in 1495, when Queen Isabella of Spain was the most powerful woman in Europe, that the present rules of chess were established. Herein is the second historical irony: that it is the power of a woman that gave this game global status and popularity. And the crowning irony is the fact that the 'wazir' of chaturanga, not only was reborn as 'queen' in the game, but became its most powerful piece!

With so much of woman power associated with this game, why the present day assumption that women may be 'lesser' than men and so need to be patronized through a separate category? When and why did women get categorized as "the second sex" and were subjected to the veil, the purdah and the ghonghat? But this larger picture is subject for another Opinion Section in another issue of Neo Vista perhaps.

Meanwhile I hope you enjoy reading the diverse 'chess pieces' from our respondents.

Regards,

Meera Ramachandran

Editorial Committee, Neo Vista

Pradip Mukherji



In my view for girls and boys there should be only one tournament as chess is a game of brains and not brawns. Girls are as brainy as boys; as such for IIT

and NEET type exams we have one common test. This is my 5 paisa worth on the subject.

Dattatrey Bhagwat



The question of whether it is desirable to have a separate category for women in international chess championships is a nuanced topic that requires

careful consideration. On one hand, having separate events can promote inclusivity and encourage more female participation in a traditionally male-dominated sport. Women face unique challenges in chess, including societal stereotypes and a lack of representation, which can deter them from competing at higher levels.

By providing separate categories, organizers can create a supportive environment that fosters talent and confidence among female players. On the other hand, critics argue that separate categories may inadvertently reinforce the notion that women are not capable of competing equally with men. Chess is a game of

intellect and strategy, and many believe that skill should be the sole determinant of competition, irrespective of gender. The existence of separate tournaments could perpetuate the idea that women need special provisions to succeed, which might limit their opportunities to compete against the best players in the world. Ultimately, the ideal approach may lie in a balanced solution that encourages female participation while promoting equality. Initiatives like mentoring programs, increased funding for women's events, and greater media coverage can help elevate female players without segregating the competition. The goal should be to create an environment where women feel empowered to compete at all levels, with the option of participating in both mixed and women only events, thus fostering a more inclusive chess community.

Daksha Bhagwat



It is desirable to have a separate category for women in International Chess Championship. It is said that men on Mars and women on Venus.

Nerves in human have a fixed number i.e, over 7 trillion. The growth of nerves is very complex process. In men gray matter is more which is made upto active neurons. Whereas female has more white matter responsible for communication between different areas of brain. Males have higher sympathetic & female have higher parasympathetic activities. Though the no. of chromosomes are same, female has 2X chromosomes. Y Chromosomes being smaller the genes present on the same are comparatively less. Intelligence is dependent on chromosome 7, and X chromosome. The different is IQ between two genders is very less, but is 10% more in males. The reasoning thinking and manipulating abilities are more in men. So if we will add these abilities it results in higher intelligence than female. Though there are no more differences in different abilities in two genders men perform well. We can observe the road accidents more in male due to drunk drive

or recklessness in driving. Whereas females accidents are less but these are mainly due to fear. Instead of break they apply accelerators. In the age 3 - 10 the academic performance of girls is higher due to verbal/lingual ability, but logic and reasoning subject are in higher division here the performance of boys is higher. Due to practice of repetition of same work females perform in same fields but male's performance is spectacular in fields like Engineering, Administration etc. They can think what can be result of step taken now and make lot of difference in games like Chess. Mental toughness is dependent on achievement orientation, risk orientation, confidence in abilities, Emotional Control which are comparatively less in females. In males irrespective of circumstances, the mental toughness is steady, whereas in females according to circumstances mental sensitivity increase, which fluctuate concentration & some total performance. The studies say that though the difference between males & females intelligence brain capacity is negligible. Single sex school females developed their mental toughness as did males in other schools. 1) Chess requires high concentration, visual memory. 2) Problem solving for which piece to move at what situation. 3) Confidence that can bear opposite player with no complaint through your loss. 4) Strategies 5) Visualization - concentration moves with the help of providing experience. 6) Evaluation- By different steps what alternate scenarios may be patience - Enduring difficult situation without giving up policy and frustration. 7) Patience. Other fundamental skills are strategies, openings & end games. Pattern recognition is very important for right move. In women prefrontal cortex is very significant which is related to mood, anxiety & emotions. Work orientation whereas left brain is more active in male which requires logical / analytical thinking and problem solving. Females have transformed their brain work from creativity to intelligence by persistent, so with the help of chromosome 7 and 2X they are able and more efficient than males. The ability of different creations are enhancing, so in every

field females are enhancing performance. Female has high concern about responsibility much dedication towards the work so can overcome other hindrances to perform well. Will power makes the magic which is great blessing to females, so suppressing all other infringement/ abilities required for chess they can easily win. More women will participate in competitions and our human species will prove males & females are equal.

Nidhi Jain



Chess requires mental skill like strategy, critical thinking, patience, tactic, and calmness under pressure – qualities which women may excel in. Chess does

not require physical and muscular strength so women can and should compete with men. But there are only about 13% women playing chess as compared to men. This bias has many reasons – and they need to be resolved. To encourage more women to participate it will be better that there is a separate category for Women Chess Championships.

Jyoti Hariharan



The topic of having a separate category for women in international chess championships is quite nuanced and has been debated within the chess

community.

Argument in favour of a separate category

- 1. Encouragement and Visibility:** Separate categories can encourage more women to participate in chess by providing them with more opportunities to compete at high levels and gain visibility.
- 2. Historical Context:** Historically, chess has been male-dominated. Separate categories help address this imbalance and promote gender diversity in the sport. Historically, women have had fewer opportunities and resources to develop their chess skills & this can help bridge this gap.

- 3. Role Models:** Having prominent female champions can inspire young girls to take up chess and pursue it seriously.

Arguments against a separate category:

- 1. Skill Development & Equality:** Chess is a mental sport where physical differences are irrelevant. Some argue that separate categories reinforce gender divisions rather than promoting true equality.
- 2. Perception of Ability & Competition Level:** Separate Categories can sometimes perpetuate the perception that women are inherently less capable in chess.
- 3. Integration:** Combining categories could raise the overall level of competition, pushing all players to improve.

Ultimately, the decision depends on balancing these factors and considering the broader goals of inclusivity and equality in the sport.

Personal Perspective:

Separate categories can serve as a stepping stone towards greater inclusion and equality in the long run.

Narinder Madan



The topic of Gender equality has been hotly debated across societies, cultures and even continents for time immemorial.

I am sure we all remember the word "Women's Lib", a slogan of seventies, which was coined when European and US women folks suddenly realised that they need freedom (But never knew from what). This has been the most argued topic ever since. I always wondered what prompted the women folk to seek equality with men folks. I still remember that when taking my English language class I was told that women were addressed as "Better Half". So when you are better why seek equality? It also reminds me of another proverb "behind every successful man there stands a woman".

It leads one to believe that she was the guiding force which was responsible for men's success.

Would it have been possible if women folks were not better? So, why not feel that way? I have never understood as to why the women folks consider what is achieved by men as some kind of benchmark or standard.

Every sports person needs physical prowess, enthusiasm, and uncompromising tenacity (mental power) to reach the Olympics or for that matter even the District level. Once you have achieved this level, does it matter if you are a man or a woman? You are recognized as a sports legend.

While in certain sports activities like Tennis, Badminton, Table Tennis etc. the women players have different qualifying standards. It is probably considering stamina (capacity) for physical activities. However, Chess being a mental game, in my views the gender of the players should not matter. But since the distinctions were made in other sports activities, it just got extended to chess also.

I am still wondering what logical reasons for it could be suggesting a common and level playing ground for Chess between men & women folks. A winner is a winner irrespective of the fact whether the competition was held at club, state, or International level. Similarly, why bring in the Gender factor in this chess game? It is also not possible to have mixed double tournament as we have it in other sports activities like Tennis, Badminton etc. So, it can be rightly concluded that women deserve to be considered at par in the mental games like Chess. It will be interesting to watch who wins this competition, fair sex, or males. Do you agree with me, right? Cheers! Bye for now.

Rahul Jain



Women and men are genetically wired differently.

Women by nature are more dexterous, patient and thoughtful.

Hence they have an inborn advantage in understanding chess.

The men in mixed game will have a handicap. So the competitions should be separate.

Hritwik Shirish Avadhani (guest contributor)

Having a separate category for women in chess may unintentionally boost the semblance of gender stereotype in a game that does not need physical differences. Most games have winners due to the ability of a player-sport-related skills, but intellect pertains to this game through strategy and mental endurance-not necessarily connected with gender. By holding separate categories, the message can be sent that women are not capable enough to play with men in a game that bases everything on nothing about being physically powerful. The very contrary of equality promotion, as it will create a concept that women need a protected space to win.

Open tournaments where men and women compete in the same field will help bridge the gap between genders better. This will alter the mindsets; female players will have the chance to play against the best in the world regardless of gender. Prominent women like Judit Polgár, who went years ranking among the top players worldwide, have already shown they can match it with the best. Avoiding these divisions could be a step in the direction towards a chess world more merit-based and inclusive.

A delightful addition to Neo Vista in this issue is the contributions to this debate from members of our newly formed Rotaract Club: Rotaract Club of LS Raheja School of Architecture. I am sure the perspectives of the youth on this vital topic would be of interest to all of us. It is hoped that Neo Vista will continue to be enriched by contributions from our partners in service.

Ankita Patanwadia,

President 24-25, Rotaract Club of LSRSoA



Isn't it amusing that in 2024, we're still debating the need for a separate category for women in the International Chess Championship? Who would've thought we'd still be having this conversation? It's as if we've been stuck in a time loop since

the dawn of feminism, long before we even had the term itself. We've always insisted that, while men and women have biological differences, which in fact they do, they certainly do not apply to our mental capabilities or intelligence. Chess, after all, is not a test of physical prowess but a battlefield of wits. It demands sharpness of mind, strategic thinking, and the ability to outmaneuver your opponent. Gender? Irrelevant. The notion that women need their own category in a game dominated by intellect feels less like an acknowledgment of differences and more like a relic of a bygone era. Every player—regardless of gender—should be allowed to compete on the same board, facing the same challenges. The real victory lies in breaking down the barriers that have kept women from playing at the highest levels. Let's elevate the conversation: it's time for all players to step into the ring as equals, armed with nothing but their intellect and strategy. After all, the only thing that should matter in chess is who has the better strategy, not who has the better biology.

Atti Patel



The debate over having different categories for women in International chess championships sparks intense discussion. According to me, there should be different categories for women in international chess championship as historically there had been less access to chess education, training and competition opportunities for women. Having separate categories provides female role models, inspiring young girls to take up chess. They also ensure increase in female participation as women may feel more comfortable competing against other woman. It can also ensure more competitive balance among female players. By supporting separate categories for women we can promote equality, inclusivity and growth in international chess championship. Thus, there should be different categories for women in international chess championship.

Poorvi Agrawal



As Gloria Steinem said, *"Equality is not a concept. It's not something we should be striving for. It's a necessity."* In chess, equality should mean one championship

where the best players, regardless of gender, compete. I voice my opinion as no, it is not desirable to have a separate category for women in international chess championships.

Unlike most sports, chess is not a physically demanding game where performance is impacted by biological variances. Chess provides an equal playing field for players of both genders because of its cerebral and strategic character. It is false to say that women are naturally poorer players, yet maintaining separate women's competitions reinforces this belief. Success in the game should be determined by ability, experience, and strategy rather than gender.

Historically, women have been underrepresented in chess, but this is due to cultural factors, not ability. By creating separate categories, we risk reinforcing the barriers that have kept women from competing as an equal to men. *Instead of separation, efforts should focus on promoting inclusivity and encouraging young to participate in chess from an early age.*

Role models like Judit Polgar, who competed and succeeded in open tournaments against top male players, show that women can thrive without gender-based segregation.

Rather than segregating tournaments, the chess community should promote gender equality through mentorship, training, and sponsorship programs to support emerging talent. **Creating a single, unified championship would not only level the playing field but also challenge outdated perceptions, fostering true equality in chess.**

Rasika Patel



In my opinion, it is not desirable to maintain a separate category for women in international chess championships. Chess, unlike many physical sports, is primar-

ily a game of intellect, strategy, and mental acuity. Both men and women are equally capable of excelling in these areas, and the idea of segregating players by gender undermines the principles of equality and fairness.

At its core, chess is a game that tests cognitive skills, decision-making, and the ability to think several moves ahead—qualities that are not determined by gender. The existence of separate categories might unintentionally perpetuate the notion that women require a different standard of competition, which contradicts the belief that both genders should be afforded the same opportunities and rights.

By combining all players into a single category, we reinforce the idea that a champion is defined by skill, talent, and dedication alone, irrespective of gender. Both men and women should have the opportunity to compete against each other on an equal footing, promoting true equality and encouraging broader participation in the sport. Ultimately, maintaining a unified championship category would reflect the spirit of inclusiveness and fairness that chess, as a global intellectual sport, should embody.

Devashri Shitole

The participation of Indian women in chess has witnessed significant growth. However, the debate surrounding separate women's categories in international championships continues. This essay argues that separate categories empower Indian women in chess.

On one hand, separate categories provide a level playing field, encouraging Indian women to participate. Notable players like Aruna Anand and Dronavalli Harika support this view. Separate categories also foster the growth of women's chess in India.

On the other hand, critics argue that separate categories perpetuate gender segregation and limit opportunities. To address this, alternatives like mixed events with gender-based seeding and increased prize money for women's events can be explored.

Ultimately, a balanced approach can empower Indian women to excel globally. By reevaluating the current system, India can create an inclusive chess environment. Separate categories can coexist with unified competitions, promoting equality and challenging stereotypes.

In conclusion, separate categories play a crucial role in empowering Indian women in chess.

Mouli Jain

The debate over whether a separate category for women in international chess championships is necessary touches on more than just competition—it's about opportunity and representation. While chess doesn't rely on physical strength, it has historically been a male-dominated game. Creating a women's category allows female players to step into the spotlight, providing a platform for them to compete at the highest levels without being overshadowed. This separation has helped many talented women rise to prominence, inspiring younger girls to take up chess and challenge the norms. It's about more than winning titles—it's about visibility and fostering a community where women feel they belong in the chess world. At the same time, some argue that gender shouldn't matter in chess. As more women compete successfully against men, it shows that the gap can be closed. But for now, having a separate category plays a vital role in ensuring women continue to have the space and encouragement they need to thrive.

Padmavati Dalia

Treasurer, Rotaract Club



Why should women have to join men's tournaments? Equality isn't about cramming everyone into the same space—it's about giving everyone room to shine. As

Tom Robbins said, **"Equality is not in regarding different things similarly, equality is in regarding different things differently."** Let's stop thinking of women's chess as "separate but equal" and start seeing it as equally valuable and prestigious.

Every time we ask if women should compete in men's tournaments, we're basically saying one is better. But who decided men's chess is the gold standard? Why not make women's tournaments so prestigious that men are saying, "Hey, I want in on that!" Equality isn't about women following men's rules—it's about making both categories stand tall and proud.

With only 3 women out of 85 Grandmasters in India (just 3.53%!), it's pretty clear women's chess needs some serious spotlight. As B.R. Ambedkar put it, **"I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have achieved."** Let's hype up women's chess, inspire the next generation of queens, and open the door for more Women Grandmasters. When women win, we all do.

In the end, it's not about having separate categories—it's how we look at them. Let's make women's chess the envy of the game. Equality isn't sameness; it's greatness in all its forms. And guess what? It's in our hands to make it happen.

Ishita Nahata

Editorial Head, Rotaract Club



The debate over whether there should be a separate category for women in international chess isn't just about competition -it's about opportunity, visibility, and

fairness. Chess is a game of strategy and intellect, so why create divisions based on gender?

People argue that maintaining separate categories unintentionally reinforces the idea that women need a distinct arena to compete, despite the fact that gender doesn't affect cognitive performance.

Judit Polgár a Hungarian chess grandmaster has proven that female chess players have the potential to become just as strong as men.

Historically, women have been underrepresented in chess, often facing societal and institutional barriers.

So supporters of separate tournaments see this as essential for ensuring fair competition.

In the long run, the goal might be to transcend gender divisions, but for now, separate categories could still play a vital role in fostering both competition and inclusivity in the chess world.

Shania Gracias

There should be separate titles for men and women. As of 2019, there are 1,643 male Grandmasters against only 37 females. This is due to a lack of female coaches and less representation. Judit Polgar, a Hungarian player, began competing in men's tournaments at age 14 and became a grandmaster at age 15. While there are exceptions to the matter, we should aim at inspiring women to compete other than being outnumbered. Men are better at chess than women because of more encouragement and an unfair gender bias. Women will not be able to make a name for themselves unless there is a fair system in place.

Shreya Jhunjunwala,

Club Service Head, Rotaract Club



I certainly disagree to this as now we're on the gender equality situation where both men and women are treated as equal and have the same numbers.

Whereas chess is a game of mind and has to do nothing with physical strength just the mind so having a separate league or category would not justify the women champions but would just hang on to the same rituals of keeping them away, so I really don't think that there's a need to have a separate category for women in international Chess Championships.

So readers, I hope you have enjoyed the variety of information, arguments and positions taken on this debate on Chess and Gender. Please write to the Editor, Neo Vista on which argument impressed you most. We may publish your response in the next issue.



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