Girls outnumber boys from Haryana in the Rio squad. Out of the 22 from the state making the cut, there are 12 girls--six in hockey, three in wrestling, two in athletics and one in swimming, majority of them belonging to the hinterland.

Patriarchal mindset may be endemic in Haryana but when it comes to representation in the world’s highest sporting arena Olympics, girls outshine boys from the state.

Haryana is contributing the maximum share to India’s contingent for the Rio Olympics. Out of the 119-strong contingent, which is the highest ever in the country’s Olympic history, the northern state is contributing 22 players. And out of the 22, there are 12 girls--six in hockey, three in wrestling, two in athletics and one in swimming--and majority of them belong to the hinterland.

**FIVE GIRLS THEN, 12 NOW**

In the previous edition of the Games held in London 2012, only five Haryana girls vied for honours in Olympics and the overall contribution from the state was 16. But in Rio, girls will outnumber boys.

For the first-time ever, three Indian women wrestlers have made to the Olympics squad, and all three -- Sakshi Malik, Babita Phogat and Vinesh Phogat -- belong to the state.

“The girls are no less than boys. Moreover the public perception outside the state that in Haryana, girls are not given equal opportunity, is wrong. Had it been true, how come there will be more girls from Haryana participating in Rio Olympics, as compared to boys,” asked Babita, who hails from village Balali in Bhiwani.

“My father has never shown any bias because we are daughters. Rather he has given us more freedom and platform to make name for ourselves. And today everybody takes pride on us,” she added.

In the women’s hockey 16-member squad, six from the state have got a place. Seasoned Deepika Thakur has
been named vice-captain. Rani Rampal, Navjot Kaur and Monika are the product of famous Shahbad academy, while goalkeeper Savita Punia and Poonam Malik are from Hisar centre. And all belong to the hinterland.

“It is because of hockey girls that Shahbad is famous across the country. This small town enjoys the credit for producing about 40 international players and the best part is that we all are contributing equally to supporting our families,” said ace forward Rani Rampal, who hails from Shahbad in Kurukshetra.

In athletics, there are two girls from the state. Discus thrower Seema Antil Punia will be competing in her third Olympics and quarter miller Nirmala Sheron will be making her debut in Rio. Gurgaon’s Shivani Kataria will be representing the country in swimming. “Over the years, Haryana girls, especially from the rural areas, have made their name in sports both at national and international-level tournaments, including Asian, Commonwealth and Olympics. Whenever we come home after garnering victory in sporting arena, the entire village takes pride on us, we are accorded a warm welcome and honoured and rewarded by the state government. These are the incentives which motivate more and more girls in the villages to join sports,” said Seema, who hails from village Khewad in Sonepat.

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