

Commendation of Sporting Excellence: The Arjuna Award Recognizing Outstanding Performance and Character

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Abstract

The Arjuna Award for exceptional performance in Sports and Games" is conferred as an acknowledgment of exceptional achievements demonstrated over the preceding quadrennial span, alongside qualities of leadership, sportsmanship, and discipline. This esteemed accolade is dispensed annually by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports to recognize remarkable individual accomplishments in the realm of sports. Following its establishment in 1961, the aggregate number of individuals from the realm of sports who have been bestowed with this accolade stands at 941 individuals up to the present juncture. Within this overall tally, a notable subset comprising 244 individuals, amounting to approximately 25.93 percent of the total, has been attributed to exceptional female performers across diverse sporting disciplines. This proportion of female awardees has demonstrated a propensity to surpass the prevailing national average for female participation, which stands at 25.93 percent, over a span of 29 years. Conversely, during the remaining 33 years, the proportion of female awardees has fallen below the national average. Consequently, the computed annual average for female sports personas receiving the Arjuna Award approximates 3.9 individuals. When the comprehensive parity index for the entire temporal span from 1961 to 2022 is computed for female recipients of the Arjuna Award, the resultant ratio stands at 1:0.37, signifying a discrepancy of 0.13 units beneath the benchmark of gender parity. This elucidates the observable disparity between male and female recipients of the award. Furthermore, in the year 2022, female recipients demonstrated a noteworthy overtaking of their male counterparts, securing 13 out of the total pool of 25 medals. It is important to note that Anna Lumsden, an Indian hockey player, stands distinguished as the inaugural and sole woman recipient of the Arjuna Award, having received this honour in the inaugural year of 1961.

Keywords: Arjun Award, Sports Events, Performance Trends, Opportunities in Games & Sports

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The burgeoning recognition of gender parity as an imperative for harnessing the complete potential of its populace in the pursuit of national progress and development is increasingly taking root in India. In this context, the participation of women is being acknowledged as an avenue to not only perform at a commensurate level but also to earn rightful recognition and standing within society. Historically, the realm of games and sports stood as a domain where women faced restricted opportunities for excellence and participation. However, as societal awareness has progressively expanded over time, many of the

constraints that traditionally curtailed women's roles have been gradually dismantled, thereby broadening their avenues for engagement, including within the domain of games and sports. Even after 75 years since India's attainment of independence, the representation of females in the realm of sports remains almost half in comparison to their male counterparts. Delving into historical context, during the sixties, the status of female athletes was markedly restricted, a scenario that witnessed marginal improvement in the ensuing decades. Notably, a pivotal transformation unfolded during the initial decade of the 21st century, with a notable augmentation in the range of sports events considered for the prestigious Arjuna Award. This surge in recognition has emboldened female athletes to partake and excel across a diverse array of sporting disciplines. Post-2010, the progress has been nothing short of remarkable, with female athletes achieving parity and, in some instances, even surpassing their male counterparts in certain events.

This trajectory of enhanced participation and performance by females in sports events has showcased consistent amelioration, indicating the synergistic impact of encouraging policies and positive strides in human resources and gender parity within the nation. Both domestic and international media have also played a constructive role by providing ample coverage and space for female athletes. Beyond the acclaim received in national and global arenas, exceptional sports personalities find themselves gainfully employed in both public and private sectors, thereby securing regular income and tenure stability.

The Arjuna Award, established to honor Indian nationals who have demonstrated exceptional prowess in national and international sports competitions, stands as the second most esteemed sports accolade in the country, following the Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Award. Annually, the list of Arjuna Award recipients is meticulously compiled by the Union Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, India. In a grand ceremony graced by dignitaries, the President of India bestows honors, certificates, and monetary rewards upon these illustrious sports achievers. The ceremony, broadcasted live across multiple channels, garners widespread attention and appreciation.

Table-1 delineates the status of female recipients of the Arjuna Award spanning the years 1961 to 2022. Over this 62-year time frame, athletics has yielded the highest number of awardees among females, totaling 48, followed by 26 in women's hockey. Badminton and shooting have emerged as equally commendable domains, each accounting for 17 awards. Notably, cricket (women) and table tennis share the third spot with 12 awards apiece. Moving on, weightlifting, kabaddi, swimming, kho kho, and wrestling collectively amount to 51 awards. In the subsequent tier of recognition, boxing, chess, and archery have amassed a cumulative total of 19 awards. These five tiers of sports encompass nearly 80 percent of the total Arjuna Awards bestowed upon females from 1961 to 2022. The remaining awards have been distributed across 18 other sporting categories as depicted in Table-2.

1.1 OBJECTIVES

The overarching aim of this study is to delve into the evolutionary patterns of growth and the overall standing of female athletes in post-Independence India as time has progressed. The precise goal is to pinpoint the existing disparity that persists in the pursuit of gender equality within the realm of sporting competitions, focusing notably on the Arjuna Award as a vehicle of acknowledgment. Additionally, an exploration and delineation of the compatibility between the natural environment and socio-economic

framework with specific sporting disciplines are intended, aiming to facilitate and foster the success of female sports achievers hailing from diverse regions across the nation.

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The subsequent set of research inquiries has been structured to scrutinize the outlined objectives:

1. Given its expansive population and varied geographical landscape, what underlies the relatively subdued performance of India on the global stage, particularly concerning female athletes?
2. To what extent can the wide array of natural and socio-economic contexts be harnessed to cultivate an environment conducive to elevating female participation and success in the realm of international sports?
3. What strategies should be employed to enhance the prominence of less frequented sporting disciplines among females, aiming to foster equality and equilibrium in terms of gender representation and achievement?

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The data pertaining to female recipients of the Arjuna Award has been meticulously organized from the comprehensive catalogue meticulously curated by the Union Ministry of Sports & Youth Affairs on an annual basis, spanning a considerable span of 22 years from 1961 to 2022. Subsequently, this data has undergone a transformation, wherein it was categorized into specific sports disciplines, maintaining a chronological order. Through an evaluation of the frequency of award recipients, a framework for determining the relative importance of distinct sporting events has been established and subjected to analysis, particularly in the context of female awardees of the esteemed Arjuna Award.

In this analytical endeavour, it has been presupposed that the higher the frequency of individuals receiving the award within a specific sporting event, the greater the significance and popularity of said event among females at a national scale. This premise forms the basis of the assessment.

In culmination, disparities in terms of gender-equitable distribution of awards and the varying degrees of significance across sporting events have been ascertained. This discernment underscores the core purpose of this study, which is to identify gaps and imbalances within the context of gender representation and the relative prominence of different sports disciplines. Recommendations have been proffered as a proactive measure to bolster particular sporting events deserving of heightened policy backing and widespread encouragement from the populace. These recommendations are geared towards bridging the existing disparities and harnessing the complete potential of sports to foster a harmoniously balanced development of human resources within the nation.

4.0 TEMPORAL PATTERNS OF GENDER EQUITY OVER DECADES AND PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF WOMEN AWARDEES OF THE ARJUNA AWARD

The gender parity index serves as a tool for assessing and contrasting participation, achievement, and employment opportunities across various social groups. This analytical framework is employed to juxtapose the levels of parity achieved over decades between male and female participants within the sphere of sports. The fundamental assumption underlying this endeavour is that upholding gender parity

at a 1:1 ratio and integrating individuals with physical challenges into the mainstream developmental discourse lays the groundwork for fostering societal equity and social justice.

When considering the complete duration from 1961 to 2022, the aggregate parity index for female recipients of the Arjuna Award stands at 1:0.37, trailing by 0.13 units beneath the benchmark of complete gender parity, as indicated in Table-4.1. Furthermore, the proportion of female awardees in relation to the total awards granted throughout the study period amounts to 26.38%, undershooting the anticipated theoretical proportion by a substantial 23.62%. Consequently, a compelling imperative emerges to bridge this gap through active encouragement of women's involvement in diverse sporting endeavours across different regions of India.

Analysing the temporal trends of the parity index (relative to a value of one) uncovers a progressive trajectory, ascending from 0.010 in 1961-1970 to 0.53 from 2011-2020. This progression signifies a positive momentum within sports policies towards achieving gender equality. However, it also underscores the necessity for further concerted efforts aimed at enhancing female participation in sports, ensuring their rightful representation in sporting awards.

Table-4.1: Temporal Patterns of Gender Equity Over Decades and Percentage Distribution of Women Awardees of the Arjuna Award

Year	Total	Male	Female	Gender Parity Index- PI = $\frac{\text{No. of Female}}{\text{No. of Male}}$	Proportion of females to total awards = $\frac{\text{Female awardees}}{\text{Total awards}} \times 100$
1961-1970	114	103	11	1:0.10	9.65
1971-1980	117	89	28	1:0.31	23.93
1981-1990	147	102	45	1:0.44	30.61
1991- 2000	165	132	33	1:0.25	20.00
2001-2010	135	93	42	1:0.45	31.11
2011-2020	187	122	65	1:0.53	34.76
2021- 2022	60	40	20	1:0.5	33.33
Total (1961-2022)	925	661	244	1:0.37	26.38

5.0 FEMALE ARJUN AWARDEES IN SPECIFIC SPORTS

A concise exploration is undertaken to examine the female recipients within distinct sports categories, with a special focus on exceptional achievers who have played pivotal roles in advancing their respective sports and encouraging greater female participation. This examination is facilitated by considering the frequency of award recipients as a metric. Subsequently, a narrative unfolds that delves into the specifics of each sporting event, encompassing its attributes and dynamics.

5.1 ATHLETICS

Athletics emerges as the preeminent and most prolific sporting domain among female athletes. A total of 48 accomplished females have been honoured with the esteemed Arjuna Award during the study's time span (1961-2022). This assertion finds solid confirmation within Table-5.1, where it is manifestly evident that athletics commands the foremost position in popularity among female sports participants. Calculations based on the data reveal an average of 0.77 awards conferred per annum within the domain of athletics.

A trailblazer in this category is Stephi D'Souza, a notable figure who made her mark on the international stage by representing India in the inaugural women's hockey tournament in London in 1953, subsequently assuming the role of captain in 1961. It is noteworthy that Stephi D'Souza stands as the pioneer to be recognized with the Arjuna Award for her athletic prowess in 1963. During the initial two decades (1961-1981) of the award's existence, a mere five female athletes were bestowed this accolade, thereby underscoring a four-year interval between each award, as delineated in Table 5.1.

In the annals of athletics, one name shines particularly brightly – P.T. Usha. Her legacy within Indian athletics spans from 1979, marked by her remarkable achievement of securing 4 Asian gold medals and 7 silver medals. Often hailed as the "Queen of Indian track and field," P.T. Usha's eminence is further evidenced by her status as a Member of Parliament in the upper house (Rajya Sabha) of the Indian Parliament since 2022. Another formidable presence within the realm of athletics is Dutee Chand, an Indian professional sprinter who presently holds the title of national champion in the women's 100 meters event. Dutee Chand's accomplishments include becoming the first Indian to clinch a gold medal in the global arena's 100m race. Notably, she is also the third Indian woman to have achieved qualification for the Women's 100 meters event at the Summer Olympic Games.

Table-5.1: Arjun Award recipients among females in Athletics (Total recipients=48)

Year	Name of the recipient	Year	Name of the recipient	Year	Name of the recipient	Year	Name of the recipient
1963	Stephi D' Souza	1988	Ashwani Nachappa	2000	K.M. Beenamol	2011	Preeja Sridharan
1968	Manjit Walia	1989	Mercy Kuttan		Rachna Govil*	2012	Sudha Singh
1975	V. Anusuya Bai	1993	K. Saramma		Vijaymala Bhanot*		Deepa Malik
1976	Geeta Zutsi	1994	K.C. Rosa Kutty	2002	Anju Bobby George		Kavita Raut
1978-79	Angel Mary Joseph	1995	Jyotirmoye Sikdar		Sarswati Saha	2014	Tintu Luka
1982	M.D. Balsamma		Malathi K. Holla*	2003	Soma Biswas	2015	M.R. Poovamma
1983	P.T. Usha	1996	Padmini Thomas		Madhuri Saxena	2016	Lalita Babar
1984	Shiny K. Abraham	1997	Reeth Abraham	2004	J.J. Shobha	2017	Khusbir Kaur

1985	Asha Agarwal	1998	Neelam J. Singh	2005	Manjeet Kaur	2018	Hima Das
1986	Suman Rawat		Ruchita Mistry	2007	Chitra K. Soman	2019	Swapna Varman
1987	Vandana Rao	1999	Gurmeet Kaur	2009	Sinimol Paulose	2020	Duti Chand
	Vandana Shanbag		Sunita Rani	2010	Krishna Punia	2022	Seema Punia

*Paraplegic sport

Source: Developed by the author based on the list of Arjun Award recipients from the website of Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs.

5.2 HOCKEY (WOMEN)

Hockey emerges as the second most prominent sporting discipline in terms of being recognized with the Arjuna Award, as depicted in Table 5.2, when considering the relative significance attributed to sports among female athletes. A total of 26 remarkable female athletes have been bestowed with this prestigious award within the realm of hockey, spanning a span of 62 years from 1961 to 2022. On average, 0.41 awards have been conferred annually for this particular sporting event. The pioneering individual in this domain is Anna Lumsden, the sole female recipient of the Arjuna Award for her excellence in women's hockey, a distinction bestowed upon her in 1963. Noteworthy among India's sporting landscape, the Indian women's national field hockey team serves as the country's representation on the international stage and operates under the aegis of Hockey India. Currently holding the 6th rank in the FIH World Rankings, they stand as Asia's premier team, having secured gold medals in the 2002 Commonwealth Games and the 1982 Asian Games. Their accomplishments extend to clinching victory in the Women's Asia Cup twice – in 2004 and 2017 – and triumphing in the Asian Champions Trophy in 2016. An assembly of distinguished awardees of the Arjuna Award within this domain includes notable names such as Savita Punia, Deepika Thakur, Monika Malik, Vandana Kataria, and Deep Grace Ekka. Worth mentioning is the impact of the film "Chak De! India," produced by Shahrukh Khan, which has played a pivotal role in heightening the popularity of hockey among female enthusiasts

Table-5.2: Arjun Award recipients among females in Hockey (women) Total= 26

Year	Name of the recipients	Year	Name of the recipients
1961	Anna Lumsden	2001	Sita Gosain
1965	Elvera Britto	2002	Mamata Kharab
1966	Sunita Puri	2003	Suraj Lata Devi
1973	Dr. O. Maskaranhas	2004	Innocent Helen Mary
1974	Ajinder Kaur	2006	Jyoti Sunita Kullu
1975	Roopa Saini	2009	Surinder Kaur
1977-78	L.L. Fernandes	2010	Jasjeet Kaur Handa
1979-80	Rekha B.Mundhphan	2016	Ritu Rani
1981	Varsha Soni	2018	Savita Punia

1984	Raj bir Kaur	2020	Deepika Thakur
1985	Prem Maya Sonia	2021	1-Monika Malik
1998	S. Omna Kumari		2-Vandana Kataria
2000	Tingonleima Chanu	2022	Deep Grace Ekka

Source: Developed by the author based on the list of Arjun Award recipients from the website of Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs.

5.3 BADMINTON

In the hierarchy of popularity among female athletes, badminton claims the third position as a favoured sporting pursuit. Within this realm, a total of 17 accomplished women have been conferred with the prestigious Arjuna Award. Meena Shah holds the distinction of being the first woman recipient of the Arjuna Award in this domain, having received the honour in 1962. A perusal of Table 5.3 substantiates that the average interval between awards tallies at 3.8 years. Prominent luminaries in the realm of badminton include the remarkable Saina Nehwal and P.V. Sindhu. Saina Nehwal etched her name in history by securing a bronze medal in badminton at the 2012 Summer Olympics held in London, a historic achievement that marked her as the first Indian player to attain such an accolade. P.V. Sindhu, on the other hand, attained the distinction of becoming both the youngest and the first Indian woman to claim an Olympic Silver medal, achieved at the 2016 Rio Olympics. Adding to her list of accolades, Saina Nehwal's achievements extend beyond the Arjuna Award, encompassing the Padma Shri, Padma Bhushan, and the Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna Award.

Table-5.3: Arjun Award recipient among females in Badminton and Shooting

A-Badminton Total =17		B-Shooting Total =18	
Year	Recipients	Year	Recipients
1962	Meena Shah	1968	Rajyashree Kumari
1970	Damyanti Tambe	1969	Bhuvaneshwari Kumari
1971	Shobha Murthy	1985	Soma Datta
1973	Jayamma Srinivasan	1997	Shilpi Singh
1976	Ami Ghia	1998	Roopa Unnikrishnan
1977	Kanwal Thakar Singh	2000	Anjali Vedpathak Bhagwat
1982	Madhumita (Goswami)Bist	2002	Suma Siddharth Sirur
1998	Ranjini Ramanujam*	2004	Deepali A. Deshpande
2005	Aparna Popat	2007	Avneet Kaur Sidhu
2009	1-Saina Nehwal	2011	Tejashwini Sawant
	2- Parul D. Parmar* (Para athlete)	2012	Annu Raj Singh
2011	Jwala Gatta	2014	Hima Sidhu
2012	Ashwini Ponappa	2016	Apoorvi Chandela
2013	P.V. Sindhu	2018	1-Rahi Sarnobat
2018	N. Sikki Reddy		2-Sreyashi Singh
2022	1-Manasi G.C. Joshi* (Para Badminton)	2019	Anjum Moudgil
	2- Gerlin Anika* (Deaf Badminton)	2020	Manu Bhakar
		2022	Elavenil Velarivan

*Paralympic

Source: Developed by the author based on the list of Arjun Award recipients from the website of Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs.

5.4 SHOOTING

The participation of women in shooting as a significant sporting endeavor is steadily gaining prominence. A total of 17 female athletes have received the esteemed Arjuna Awards thus far for their accomplishments. Notably, Rajyashree Kumari stood as the pioneer, being the inaugural female recipient of the Arjuna Award in the realm of shooting back in 1966. Noteworthy is the substantial hiatus that marked the intervals between award bestowals within the shooting domain. To illustrate, considerable spans of 17 years each were observed from 1968 to 1985 and subsequently in 1997. Nonetheless, there has been subsequent amelioration in this pattern. On an average, the conferment of the award has taken approximately 3.7 years. An illustrious figure in this discipline is Sreyashi Singh, distinguished as one of India's preeminent exponents in the trap category of shooting.

5.5 CRICKET

Cricket holds a significant place in India's sporting landscape, though its popularity among females doesn't match that among males. Over a span of 62 years (1961-2022), a total of 12 women have been honored with the Arjuna Award. Notably, Shantha Rangaswamy was the trailblazer in this realm, securing the Arjuna Award in 1976 as the first female cricketer to achieve this distinction (as indicated in Table 5.4-A). Rangaswamy made her mark in 16 Test matches and 19 ODIs for India, spanning from 1976 to 1991. She's additionally acclaimed for being the inaugural female cricketer to be honored with a lifetime achievement award by the BCCI. Under her leadership, the Indian women's cricket team achieved their maiden Test victory in 1976 against the West Indies, coinciding with the year she received the Arjuna Award.

In 2003, Mithali Raj, a prominent figure in women's cricket, was bestowed with the prestigious Arjuna Award, an accolade that came merely five years after her debut in international cricket. Her achievements extended further as she became the first female cricketer to earn the Wisden India Cricketer of the Year award in April 2015 (refer to Table 5.4). Noteworthy also is Deepti Sharma, a standout all-rounder, who etched her name in history as the first Indian bowler to claim 100 wickets in the shortest format of cricket. Her excellence culminated in the receipt of the Arjuna Award in Cricket in the year 2022.

5.6 TABLE TENNIS

A total of 13 female table tennis players have achieved the esteemed Arjuna Award during the timeframe spanning 1961 to 2022, as detailed in Table 5.4-B. Pioneering this honour was Usha Sunder Das, who became the first female recipient of the Arjuna Award for Table Tennis in 1966. Fast-forwarding to recent times, Shreeja Akula earned the Arjuna Award for her accomplishments in table tennis in the year 2022. Currently, Manika Batra stands at the pinnacle of female Indian table tennis players, holding the position of the number one ranked player.

Table-5.4: Arjun Award recipients among females in Cricket and Table Tennis

A-Cricket: Total=12		B-Table Tennis: Total= 13	
Year	Recipients	Year	Recipients
1976	Shantha Rangaswamy	1966	Usha Sunder
1983	Diana Edulji	1971	Kaity Farookh Khodaji
1985	Shubhangi Kulkarni	1976	S. Shailja
1986	Sandhya Agarwal	1978-79	Shernaz Kermani*
2003	Mithali Raj	1979-80	Indu Puri
2005	Anju Jain	1987	Monalisa Barua
2006	Anjum Chopra	1989	Niyati Shah
2010	Jhulan Goswami	2002	Mantu Ghosh
2017	Harman Preet Kaur	2013	Mouma Das
2018	Smriti Mandhana	2018	Manika Batra
2019	Poonam Yadav	2020	Madhuri Patkar
2020	Deepti Sharma	2021	Bhavina Patel
		2022	Sreeja Akula

*Paraplegic sport

Source: Developed by the author based on the list of Arjun Award recipients from the website of Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs.

5.7 WEIGHTLIFTING

Over the duration of the study period (1961-2022), a total of 10 female weightlifters have been honored with the prestigious Arjuna Award, as outlined in Table 5.5. Jyotsna Dutta marked the inception of this recognition for women in weightlifting by becoming the first recipient in 1989. Evidently, the sport has witnessed a progressive increase in female participation over time. Among the illustrious Indian women's weightlifters, Mirabai Chanu, Karnam Malleswari, and Kunjarani Devi stand out prominently. Mirabai Chanu, a notable figure who secured the Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna award in 2018, has been nominated for the Arjuna Award by the Indian Weightlifting Federation (IWLFF) for the 2020/21 period. India's contributions to women's weightlifting have been noteworthy throughout the years (1961-2022). Karnam Malleswari etched her name in history by becoming the first Indian woman to clinch a bronze medal at the Sydney Olympics in 2000. Notably, she achieved another significant milestone by becoming the first female sportsperson to be honored with the Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna Award in 1999, alongside being recognized as a Padma Shri awardee.

Table-5.5: Arjun Award recipients among females in Weightlifting, Kabaddi and Kho Kho during 1961-2022.

Year	A-Weightlifting Total=10	Year	B- Kabaddi Total=9	Year	C-Kho Kho Total=9
1989	Jyotsna Dutta	1978	S.P. Khataavkar	1971	Achala Suberao Devra
1990	N. Kunja Rani	1981	Monika Nath	1973	B.H. Parekh
1991	Chhaya Adak	1983	Maya Kashinath	1974	N.C. Sarolkar
1993	Bharati Singh	1986	Rama Sarkar	1975	Usha Basant Nagarkar

1994	K. Malleswari	1996	Neeta Moreshwar Dadave	1981	Shushma Sarolkar
1997	N. Laxmi	2011	Tejaswinin Bai V	1983	Veena Narayan Parab
2000	Sanmacha Chanu Thingbaijam	2014	Mamtha Pujary	1985	S.B. Kulkarni
2006	Geeta Rani	2015	Abhilash Mhatre	1998	Shobha Narayan
2012	Ngangbam Soniya Chanu	2022	Sakshi Kumari	2020	Sarika Kale Sudhakar
2014	Renu Bala Chanu				
2018	Meera bai Chanu (RGKR)				

Source: Developed by the author based on the list of Arjun Award recipients from the website of the Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs.

5.8 KABADDI

Kabaddi holds significant cultural importance as a traditional sporting event, particularly renowned in rural regions of India. Notably, Shakuntala Khatavkar marked a historic milestone as the first female Kabaddi player to be honoured with the esteemed Arjuna Award in 1978, as documented in Table 5.5. Within the realm of Kabaddi, Abhilasha Mhatre has left an indelible mark. She stands as an accomplished Indian professional Kabaddi player, having also served as the Captain of the Indian National Women's Kabaddi Team. Her exceptional contributions led to her being bestowed with the Arjuna Award by the Government of India in 2015, an accolade that truly reflects her prowess and dedication. Fondly recognized as the "Queen of Kabaddi," Abhilasha Mhatre's legacy in the sport remains impressive and inspiring.

5.9 KHO KHO

Kho Kho stands as a prominent sport in India, garnering popularity across the nation. Notably, Achala Suberao Devra holds the distinction of being the first woman to be bestowed with the Arjuna Award in 1971 within the context of Kho Kho. A total of 9 female athletes have received this esteemed honor, as delineated in Table 5.5-C. In the realm of Kho Kho, the name of Sarika Kale Sudhakar shines as one of significant eminence. Her prowess is exemplified by her Arjuna Award recognition in the year 2020. Renowned as one of the most illustrious Kho Kho players, Sarika Kale Sudhakar adeptly mastered the fundamentals of the game. She notably represented her home state of Maharashtra in numerous national championships for a remarkable span of 25 years, thus showcasing her dedication and exceptional skill in the sport.

5.10 SWIMMING

Swimming holds a significant position as a noteworthy sporting discipline. Over a span of 62 years, from 1961 to 2022, a total of 8 female athletes have been honoured with the prestigious Arjuna Award for their accomplishments in this field. Reema Dutta stands as the trailblazer, having received the inaugural Arjuna Award for her achievements in swimming in 1966. On the other end of this spectrum is Shikha Tandon, who became the 8th recipient of this award in 2005, as indicated in Table 5.6. Among these remarkable individuals is Bula Chaudhury, a highly distinguished female swimmer, who holds the remarkable

distinction of being the first woman in the world to conquer seven seas. In addition to her Arjuna Award recognition, Bula Chaudhury is a recipient of the esteemed Padma Shri award. Her achievements extend beyond swimming, as she has held the title of the national women's swimming champion and even served as an elected Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) from 2006 to 2011, representing the Nandanpur constituency in West Bengal. Bula Chaudhury's multifaceted accomplishments make her a true standout in the world of sports.

5.11 WRESTLING

Wrestling, traditionally seen as a male-dominated sport in India, has experienced a significant shift in perception during the 21st century. With the dawn of this new era, some parents who harbored an interest in wrestling have extended their encouragement to their daughters in this arena. As a result, these young women have risen to become accomplished wrestlers, making their families proud. The changing landscape is evidenced by the increasing interest of females in this sport. Geetika Jakhar etched her name in history by becoming the first female wrestler to receive the esteemed Arjuna Award in 2006, a notable milestone. This was soon followed by Alka Tomar, who secured the award in 2007. Collectively, a total of 8 female wrestlers have been recipients of the Arjuna Award, as showcased in Table 5.6. India boasts several prominent female wrestlers who have gained recognition both nationally and internationally. Among these stars, Sakshi Malik stands out with her bronze medal win in the 2016 Rio Olympics. Pooja Dhanda's prowess is evident in her victories against Olympic and World Championship medalists. Her achievements include a Bronze medal at the 2018 World Championships in Budapest in the 57 kg weight class. She also clinched Silver medals at the 2010 Summer Youth Olympics and the 2018 Commonwealth Games in Gold Coast, competing in the 60 kg and 57 kg categories, respectively. The Phogat family, encompassing Geeta Phogat, Babita Phogat, Vinesh Phogat, and Sangeeta Phogat, holds a prominent place in the world of female wrestling, showcasing the remarkable journey of a joint family in this sport. The film 'Dangal,' spearheaded by Aamir Khan, played a pivotal role in popularizing wrestling among women, further elevating its status.

The states of Haryana and Uttar Pradesh have been instrumental in fostering and encouraging women wrestlers through avenues such as employment opportunities and cash awards. This has helped pave the way for female wrestlers like Alka Tomar and Divya Kakran to shine in the wrestling arena.

Table-5.6: Arjun Award recipients among females in swimming and wrestling

Year	A- Swimming: Total=8	Year	B- Wrestling: Total=8
1966	Reema Dutta	2006	Geetika Jakhar
1974	Manjari Bhargav	2007	Alka Tomar
1975	Sunita Das	2012	Geeta Phogat
1982	Parsis Madan	2015	Babita Kumari
1983	Anita Sud	2016	Vinesh Phogat
1990	Bula Chaudhury	2020	Divya Kakran
1999	Nisha Millet	2022	Anshu Malik
2005	Shikha Tandon		Sarita Mor

Source: Developed by the author based on the list of Arjun Award recipients from the website of Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs.

5.12 CHESS

Chess is steadily gaining prominence among female sports enthusiasts. The domain of women's chess has witnessed the recognition of seven exceptional individuals who have earned the distinguished Arjuna Award. Pioneering this trend, Rohini Khadilkar secured the title of being the first female recipient of the Arjuna Award in the game during the 1980-81 period. More recently, Bhakti Pradeep Kulkarni was honoured with the Arjuna Award in 2022. In total, there have been 8 women chess players who have been bestowed with this prestigious award, as outlined in Table 5.7. Among the esteemed names in women's chess stands Harika Dronavalli, a prominent figure who holds the prestigious Grandmaster (G.M.) FIDE title. Dronavalli has demonstrated her prowess on the global stage by clinching three bronze medals in the Women's World Chess Championship, achieved in the years 2012, 2015, and 2017. Her achievements extend beyond the chessboard, as she was also honoured with the Arjuna Award for the years 2007-08 by the Government of India. Harika Dronavalli's remarkable contributions to chess have elevated her status as a celebrated chess player and an inspiration for aspiring women in the sport.

5.13 BOXING

Boxing has experienced a notable surge in significance within the first decade of the 21st century. M.C. Mary Kom stands as the trailblazer, being the first woman to receive the Arjuna Award in 2003. A remarkable six-time world boxing champion, Mary Kom is rightfully regarded as India's premier boxer, even serving as the inspiration for a Bollywood biopic. Despite being 40 years old and a mother of two, she continues to make waves in the sport. The pugilist hailing from Manipur, in India's northeastern region, achieved a bronze medal in the flyweight category at the 2012 London Olympics. In total, 7 female athletes have been rightfully honored with the Arjuna Award, a testament to their remarkable contributions in the field of boxing, as outlined in Table 5.7. Nikhat Zareen is a rising star on the Indian boxing horizon. Her trajectory suggests that she is poised to become a significant force in the Indian boxing scene. A historic milestone in her career was marked by her victory at the 2023 Women's World Boxing Championships, where she clinched the gold medal. Nikhat Zareen's accomplishments exemplify her potential and dedication, foreshadowing a promising future in the sport.

Table 5.7: Arjun Award recipients among females in chess and boxing

Year	A- Chess: Total=8	Year	B-Boxing: Total=7
1980-81	Rohini Khadilkar	2003	M.C. Mary Kom
1987	Bhagyashree Thipse	2009	Laishram Sarita Devi
1990	Anupama Gokhale	2013	Kavita Chahal
2000	Subbaraman VijayaLakshami	2019	Sonia Lather
2003	Koneru Hampi	2020	Lovlina Borogohain
2007-08	Harika Dronavalli	2021	Simran Jeet Kaur
2009	Tania Sachdev	2022	Nikhat Zareen
2022	Bhakti Pradeep Kulkarni		

Source: Developed by the author based on the list of Arjun Award recipients from the website of Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs.

5.14 ARCHERY

Archery, a traditional sport deeply rooted in India's history, is experiencing a gradual rise in prominence among female athletes. A pivotal moment arrived in 1981 when Krishna Das became the trailblazing female athlete to be honoured with the Arjuna Award, as documented in Table 5.8. Over the span of 62 years from 1961 to 2022, a total of 5 female archers have been recognized with this prestigious award. Dola Banerjee marked a historic milestone by becoming the first Indian to clinch a world championship title in archery. Her achievement came in the form of a gold medal in the women's individual recurve competition at the Archery World Cup Final, which took place in Dubai in November 2007. This victory not only spotlighted Dola Banerjee's prowess but also further elevated the profile of archery within the nation. As archery continues to make strides, the achievements of female archers like Dola Banerjee contribute to the overall growth and recognition of the sport among women athletes.

5.15 GYMNASTICS

Krupali Patel achieved the pioneering distinction of being the inaugural female gymnast to receive the prestigious Arjuna Award. Notably, a total cohort of four accomplished female athletes have been duly recognized with this esteemed award, as elaborated in the tabulated data of 5.8. On a parallel note of significance, Dipa Karmakar scripted a historic narrative by becoming the foremost Indian female gymnast to partake in the Olympic Games. Her qualification for the 2016 Rio Games was marked by the successful execution of the Produnova vault, earning a commendable score of 15.6 during a qualifying event for the Rio Games. It's imperative to underscore that the Produnova is renowned for its immense technical complexity, holding a formidable difficulty rating of seven.

5.16 MOUNTAINEERING

Mountaineering stands as a prevalent pursuit within both the male and female demographics in the hill regions of India. In 1984, Bachendri Pal, an Indian female mountaineer, etched her name in history as the first Indian woman to conquer the formidable heights of Mount Everest. Pal's origins trace back to a humble rural working-class family in what is now Uttarakhand, where she emerged as one of seven siblings. Acknowledgment for her remarkable achievement came in the form of the Padma Shri, a distinguished civilian honour, bestowed upon her in 1984, followed by the Arjuna Award in 1986. Subsequently, in 2019, the Government of India elevated her recognition by bestowing the Padma Bhushan, the third-tier civilian accolade. Premlata Agarwal carved her own niche as the foremost Indian woman to successfully surmount the summits of the revered seven mountain peaks. Similarly, Arunima Sinha's remarkable feat as the first female amputee to ascend Mount Everest is a testament to human resilience. In a remarkable display of perseverance, Sinha not only conquered the remaining summits of the renowned seven but also achieved the distinction of being the first amputee worldwide to summit Mount Vinson in Antarctica on January 4, 2019. In acknowledgment of her remarkable achievements, Sinha was conferred the Padma Shri award by the Government of India in 2015. Malavath Purna secured her place in the annals of mountaineering history as the youngest Indian and the world's youngest female to conquer Mount Everest's summit. Purna's conquest extended to Mount Elbrus, the loftiest peak in Russia, where on July 27, 2017, she not only reached the summit but also unfurled a grand 50-foot Indian Tricolour while melodiously singing the Indian National Anthem. Notably, her accomplishments reverberated beyond mountaineering, as evidenced by her inclusion in Forbes India's 2020 roster of self-made women. Purna further went on to achieve the remarkable feat of completing the seven summits.

Within this narrative, it's imperative to underline that a total of four exceptional female athletes have been rightfully honoured with the prestigious Arjuna Award, as meticulously documented in table 5.8-c.

Table-5.8: Female Arjun Award recipients in archery, gymnastics and mountaineering

Year	A- Archery Total=5	Year	B-Gymnastics Total=6	Year	C-Mountaineering Total=4
1981	Krishna Das	1975	Mantu Debnath	1981	1-C.P. Atwal 2-Harshwant Bisht 3-Rekha Sharma
		1985	Sunita Sharma		
		1989	Krupali Patel		
2005	Dola Banerji	1998	Anju Dua*	1984	Bachhendri Pal
2012	1-Deepika Kumari	2000	Dr. Kalpana Debnath*		
	2- Bambayla Devi Laishram		2015	Deepa Karmakar	
2017	V.J. Sureka				

*Paraplegic sport

Source: Developed by the author based on the list of Arjuna Award recipients from the website of Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs.

5.17 SQUASH

The sport of squash is progressively gaining traction as a favored pursuit among female participants. In this evolving landscape, Bhuvneshwari Kumari marked a significant milestone by becoming the inaugural female recipient of the Arjuna Award in the domain of squash, a distinction she achieved in 1996. Within the sphere of Indian squash, Anaka Alankamony has emerged as a notable figure. Her prowess on the court translated to a commendable career-high global ranking of 59 in 2010. Furthermore, her accomplishments and contributions were duly recognized when she was bestowed with the esteemed Arjuna Award in 2014, an accolade that holds considerable prestige within the sporting fraternity.

5.18 JUDO

The realm of judo has seen the commendable recognition of four accomplished female practitioners through the prestigious Arjuna Award. Pioneering this accolade in judo was Poonam Chopra, who secured the distinction of being the inaugural woman to receive this honour in 1996. Fast forwarding to a more recent juncture, Sushila Devi Lkambam attained this eminent accolade in 2022, adding her name to the esteemed list of female judo athletes who have been duly honoured with the Arjuna Award.

5.19 BASKETBALL

The realm of basketball is undergoing a notable surge in prominence within the domain of female sports participation. Within this context, the Arjuna Award, a prestigious recognition, has been bestowed upon three exceptional female athletes, as delineated in table 5.9-C. Leading the charge in this narrative is Suman Sharma, who achieved the pioneering feat of becoming the first woman to be honoured with the Arjuna Award in the year 1983, in acknowledgment of her contributions and accomplishments within the realm of basketball. Adding to this legacy, Geethu Anna Jose and Prashanti Singh have also achieved the distinction of being honoured with the Arjuna Award. Their noteworthy achievements and contributions

within the realm of female basketball have earned them this prestigious recognition, further solidifying their place among the elite athletes in their field.

Table-5. 9: Arjun Award recipients among females in Squash, Judo and Basketball

Year	Squash: Total=4	Year	Judo: Total=4	Year	Basket Ball: Total=3
1982	Bhuvneshwari Kumari Alwar	1996	Poonam Chopra	1983	Suman Sharma
1997	Misha Grewal	2004	Angom Anita Chanu	2014	Geethu Anna Jose
2012	Deepika Pallikal	2007	Thombi Devi	2017	Prashanti Singh
2014	Anaka Alankmony	2022	Sushila Devi Likambam		

Source: Developed by the author based on the list of Arjun Award recipients from the website of Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs.

5.20 FOOTBALL

Football is a popular game in India. It is relatively more played in eastern regions of India where average annual rainfall is higher. There are two female sports persons to have been honored with this award during the course of 62 years of history of Arjun Awards in India. Shanti Mullik is the first female to have been honored with Arjun Award in 1983. Oinam Bembem Devi, flag bearer of Indian women's football over the past 2 decades has been named as the winner of Arjuna Award. She becomes the 2nd Indian woman footballer to win the award in 2017 (Table-5.10).

5.21 VOLLEYBALL

Within the domain of volleyball, the Arjuna Award has been bestowed upon two remarkable female athletes, as documented in Table 5.10. K.C. Elamma takes the lead as the inaugural recipient of the Arjuna Award in 1975, marking her esteemed place in the annals of female volleyball players who have achieved this honor. Subsequently, Saly Joseph secured her position as the second female volleyball player to receive this distinguished award in 1984.

5.22 WUSHU

Wushu, as a sporting discipline, has seen recognition through the Arjuna Award for female athletes. W. Sandhya Rani Devi stands out as the trailblazer in this category, having achieved the honor in 2011. Poonam Kadiyan follows suit, being the second recipient of this prestigious award in 2018. Despite these accomplishments, it is evident that Wushu has yet to garner the significant attention required to become a widely popular sport among females in India. Ongoing efforts are essential to elevate Wushu to a competitive status within the female sporting landscape, as highlighted in Table 5.10.

5.23 TENNIS

Turning to the realm of tennis, Nirupama Mankad holds the distinction of being the first female sports person to receive the Arjuna Award, an honor she was granted in 1978-79. More recently, Karman Kaur Thandi has risen to prominence as India's top women's singles tennis player, surpassing the long-standing presence of Ankita Raina. This accomplishment was solidified through her recent victory at the W60 ITF

event in Saguenay, Canada, on June 27, 2023. In the broader spectrum of female tennis excellence, Serena Williams commands the title of the greatest female tennis player of all time, boasting an unparalleled record of 23 Grand Slam titles to her credit. Furthermore, Sania Mirza has etched her name in history as the first Indian woman to clinch a Grand Slam trophy, securing an impressive tally of six tennis Grand Slam titles across both women's doubles and mixed doubles events.

Table- 5.10: Arjun Award recipients among females

Year	A-Football: Total:2	Year	B-Volleyball: Total:2	Year	C-Wushu: Total:2	Year	D-Tennis Total:2
1983	Shanti Mullick	1975	K.C. Elamma	2011	W. Sandhya Rani Devi	2004	Sania Mirza
2017	Oinam Bembem Devi	1984	Saly Joseph	2018	Pooja Kadiyan	2021	Ankita Raina

Source: Developed by the author based on the list of Arjun Award recipients from the website of Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs.

5.24 GOLF

Golf, as a sporting pursuit, is still in the process of garnering widespread popularity among female participants. Factors such as its cost-intensive nature and the limited availability of sporting facilities, primarily concentrated in metropolitan areas of India, have contributed to this phenomenon. Sita Rawlley carved her name in history as the inaugural female golf player to receive the Arjuna Award during the 1977-78 period. Notably, Aditi Ashok stands as another prominent figure in the realm of female golf, having received the Arjuna Award in 2020. The recognition of the Arjuna Award holds particular significance for Aditi Ashok, who stands as the sole Indian golfer representing the country on the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) Tour in the United States. Her triumphs include three victories on the Ladies European Tour, solidifying her position as a significant force within the world of golf.

5.25 CYCLING

While cycling remains a common mode of transportation among females, its transition into a professional sporting pursuit requires the support of conducive policies to encourage greater female participation. Minati Mahapatra gained distinction as the pioneer female cyclist to be honored with the Arjuna Award during the 1977-78 timeframe. Further contributing to the realm of cycling excellence is Armin R. Arthan, another notable female cyclist who has been recognized with the Arjuna Award, as detailed in table 5.11. Cycling presents substantial potential for promotion due to its economic feasibility, social acceptance, and environmentally friendly attributes.

5.26 BILLIARDS & SNOOKER

Billiards and snooker, as sporting disciplines, encounter challenges in terms of popularity and accessibility of adequate sports infrastructure across various locations. Within this landscape, Anuja Thakur made history by becoming the first female sports person to receive the Arjuna Award in billiards & snooker in the year 2005, as elaborated in table 5.11. Revanna Umadevi Nagraj is another noteworthy figure in this arena, having been honored with the Arjuna Award in 2009. The realm of snooker has witnessed the

emergence of Vidya Pillai as a prominent star player, alongside the accomplishments of others who have secured various accolades for their contributions to the sport.

Table-5.11: Arjun Award recipients among females in golf, cycling and billiards& snooker

Year	A- Golf: Total:2	Year	B- Cycling: Total:2	Year	C- Billiards & Snooker: Total:2
1977-78	Sita Rawlley	1977-78	Minati Mahapatra	2005	Anju Prakash Thakur
2020	Aditi Askok	1983	Armin R. Arthan	2009	Revanna Umadevi Nagaraj

Source: Developed by the author based on the list of Arjun Award recipients from the website of Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs

6.0 SINGULAR ARJUNA AWARDEES IN SPECIALIZED SPORTING PURSUITS

Within the distinguished realm of sporting excellence, six remarkable female athletes have achieved singular recognition through the esteemed Arjuna Award, each in their respective sporting endeavors, as comprehensively outlined in Table 5.12. Nirupama Mankad has secured her place in the annals of sporting history as the recipient of the Arjuna Award for her remarkable contributions to lawn tennis during the period of 1977-78. Similarly, Shernaz Kermani's prowess in javelin throw was duly acknowledged with the Arjuna Award in the year 1978-79. Arti Pradhan's accomplishments in the domain of adventure sports earned her the coveted Arjuna Award in 1986, underscoring her dedication to pushing the boundaries of physical achievement. Himani Uttam Parab emerged as a beacon of excellence within the Malkhamb sport, garnering the Arjuna Award in 2021 for her extraordinary skills and achievements. In the realm of fencing, C. A. Bhawani Devi distinguished herself as a trailblazer, being honored with the Arjuna Award in 2021, a testament to her commitment to mastering this intricate and demanding discipline. Lastly, Nyanmony Saikia's skill and dedication in Lawn Bowl secured her the prestigious Arjuna Award, solidifying her position among the elite athletes in this unique sporting domain.

Table-5.12: Single Arjun Award recipients among females in specific sporting event

Year	Awardee	Sports event
1977-78	Nirupama Mankad	Lawn Tennis
1978-79	Shernaz Kermani	Javelin throw
1986	Arti Pradhan	Adventure sports
2021	Himani Uttam Parab	Malkhamb
2021	C.A. Bhawani Devi	Fencing
2022	Nyanmoni Saikia	Lawn Bowl

Source: Developed by the author based on the list of Arjun Award recipients from the website of Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs.

7.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The preceding discussion culminates in the following significant conclusions:

1. The landscape of female participation in diverse sporting events was marred by societal constraints during the 1960s when the Arjuna Awards were introduced to foster and celebrate athletic excellence within the country. This era saw limited opportunities primarily concentrated in urban centers and among the privileged sections of Indian society. Consequently, only a handful of exceptional women managed to excel in sports, becoming recipients of the prestigious Arjuna Award, especially until the 1980s. The awards were predominantly channeled towards male-dominated sports, perpetuating a severe gender imbalance. However, the trajectory demonstrates a notable enhancement in gender parity, with a discernible rise in the proportion of female Arjuna Award recipients over time.
2. The last decade of the 20th century and the early years of the 21st century marked a pivotal phase wherein sports policies underwent positive transformations. This period witnessed the inclusion of an array of sporting disciplines, accompanied by increased female participation. Consequently, the gender parity index of Arjuna Awards experienced an uplift, effectively bridging the considerable gap that had persisted during previous decades.
3. The augmentation of female engagement in sports has been reinforced through avenues such as sports scholarships, comprehensive training, multi-tiered competitions, monetary incentives, acknowledgments, and the establishment of sports quotas in both public and private sectors. These combined efforts have significantly spurred female involvement in sports, propelling them towards promising careers.
4. The geographical context plays a pivotal role in determining the regional advantages of various sporting events, contingent on factors such as terrain and climatic conditions. Consequently, there exists a pressing need to bolster female engagement in sports by generating employment opportunities, income sources, and by crafting sports infrastructure within these diverse regions, ensuring accessibility for all segments of society across different ages and income brackets, thereby promoting enhanced health and well-being.
5. The formulation of national and regional policies is an essential imperative. Such policies should serve as catalysts for empowering females to participate in sports within a conducive environment characterized by parity, safety, and equitable recognition. With the requisite policy support and institutional backing, it is highly probable that women will excel across a myriad of sports, both on the national and international stages, fostering a vibrant and prosperous landscape of female athletic achievements.

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