

WUSHU WOMAN: VISUAL REFLECTION OF WOMEN IN SPORTS IN SIKKIM

SHEELA





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BUTTERFLY WARRIOR



Never in her wildest dreams did she think of donning the national colours and representing India at an international sporting event. Her dream became a reality when she was chosen to participate in the World Martial Arts Games in Hong Kong in 2015, and the rest is history.

Binita Rai, now 26, is an exemplary woman who broke gender stereotypes and rose above social stigma to carve a niche for herself in the world of combat sports dominated mostly by men. She is a decorated warrior who has brought laurels to the state of Sikkim and her country. She has rightly earned the distinction of being the first woman coach in wushu in Sikkim, which in itself is a remarkable feat.



Coaching classes during the lockdown

Binita's journey as a combat martial artist started in 2009, when at 15 years, she swam against the tide and took the bold decision to pursue a career in combat sports, much to the opposition of her family members. This decision cost her her seat in school, much to the dismay of her parents. Combat sports have never been the first career choice for Sikkimese girls. However, it turned out to be a career-making decision for Binita. With grit and determination, she managed to complete her formal education through distance learning while pursuing her passion for combat sports. Born and brought up in a simple family, Binita saw many ups and downs in her life, which made her tough and developed a strong will power and confidence in her.



Beautiful memories captured in her photo album

Hailing from a middle-class family from a tiny village called Samdong on the outskirts of Gangtok, Binita suddenly found herself faced with a lot of pressure. 'I love wushu. I worship wushu. Wushu has given me so much that I now have the confidence and strength to face the world and walk shoulder to shoulder with men, and this is all that matters,' she said.

When asked, how she jumped into this unconventional sport, Binita said, 'I was an average student when it came to studies. My elder sister Bina Rai persuaded my family and motivated me to try sports as a career option and encouraged me to join wushu when one of our seniors Mr Kumar Tiruwa visited Phalaichadara Junior High School where I was a student. She even paid the initial fee of Rs 300 for my training. This was a turning point in my life.'



Make up is an art and she loves this art too

Binita participated in her first match in Manipur in the 4th North East India Wushu Championship and won a gold medal. Since then, there has been no looking back, and she has been consistently improving with each successive game. She has participated in many national and international events under the banner of the Sikkim Amateur Wushu Association (SAWA) since joining the association in August 2009. Binita has been training for many years with different coaches and honing her skills and techniques to become a better fighter. She has a deep respect for her coach Shri O.S. Singh, who is the state coach for wushu. Binita's hard work has taken her to many places and won her medals in both national and international tournaments. At present, she has 25 students under her who are toiling hard to learn the game.

Featured in various newspapers

Martial artists set sights on NE Wushu Championship

a NOW REPORT

GANGTOK, 09 Jan: A 12-member Sikkim Amateur Wushu Association [SAWA] team will be representing Sikkim at the 5th North-East Wushu Championship scheduled to be held from 15 to 21 January at Imphal, Manipur.

The SAWA team of martial artists will be competing in the junior and sub-junior categories- nine in different weight categories in the sub-junior category and three in the junior category.

The team members are: Rakesh Singh [32 kg], Pragya Rai [36 kg], Mahendra Sharma [36 kg], Mukesh Singh [40 kg], Kawan Subba [40 kg], Som Bahadur Tamang [44 kg] Arun Chettri [44 kg], Abhishek Rai [48 kg]

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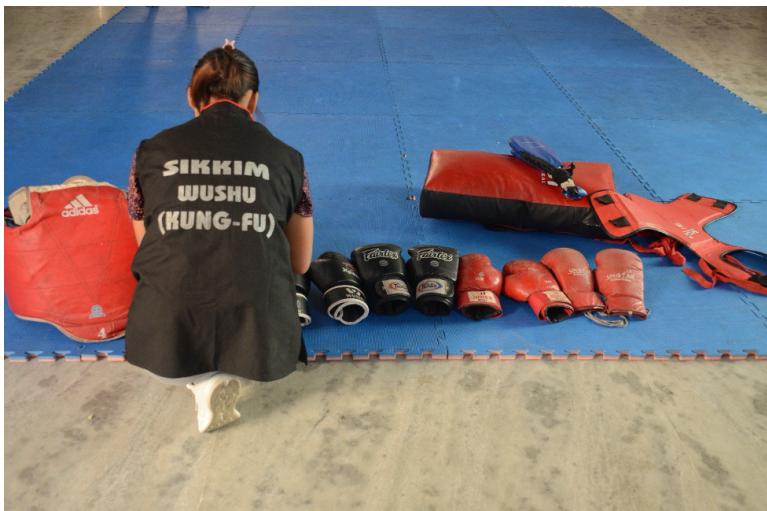


Featured in various newspapers

‘Of late, wushu has been taking the front seat as a combat sport. Earlier, it was overshadowed by other traditional sports like boxing, taekwondo, judo, and karate. This is because boxing, judo, karate, and taekwondo have been in Sikkim for quite a long time whereas wushu as a martial art was introduced to Sikkimese sportspeople only in May 2005,’ Binita said.

When asked about the status of wushu in Sikkim, she said, ‘There has been a considerable increase in the number of interested candidates taking up wushu as a chosen field. This could be attributed to the proactive measures taken by the government in recent years to promote sports in the state and wushu is not an exception to this.’

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Presently, Binita is working as a wushu coach under the Sports and Youth Affairs Department, Government of Sikkim. Practising in the White Hall Complex, guiding tiny tots and sometime grown-ups is part of her daily routine. When off duty, she rushes to her native Khesay Samdong and engages in all sorts of domestic chores. She joins her father and sister-in-law in feeding the cows, fetching fodder from nearby forests, and trying her hand at cooking and other household activities. She has a three-year-old niece who is sometimes her youngest disciple while at home.



White Memorial Hall

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Never failing in her home responsibilities



Ready to go to the jungle with a traditional bamboo basket to collect fodder

There seems to be a dearth of sportswomen, especially in wushu. According to Binita, many students who join the sport leave early or mid-way through, owing to injuries. Wushu is a full-contact game like wrestling where there is a greater probability of sustaining injuries. With other games that do not involve full contact, there are fewer chances of getting injured. At a personal level, Binita has been motivating school-going students, girls and boys, in and around her village to join the game. She also organised a camp for interested students in her alma mater in 2016.





Binita has earned almost everything that a young and energetic sportsperson aims for in a very short span of time. She aspires to encourage the youth to join sports, particularly wushu. She struggled like a larva and has blossomed into a butterfly, a beautiful butterfly warrior.





Not just a dress, but pride for her

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A few achievements

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Binita Rai in her beautiful traditional attire