

Wheelchair-bound Deepa beats cancer, wins silver



Deepa Malik takes time off her wheelchair and flashes a smile

Beating cancer and wheelchair, Deepa Malik scripted history to become the first woman athlete to win medal at Paralympics at Rio

Saurabh Duggal

Deepa Malik, who hails from Sonapat, scripted history by becoming the country's first woman para-athlete to win a medal in the Paralympic Games.

The mother of two daughters --- Devika and Ambika --- won a silver medal at the Rio Paralympics, heaving to a distance of 4.61 m in the shot put F-53 event.

Two days after India won gold and

bronze at the Rio Paralympics, Deepa Malik completed the set by landing silver in the women's shot put. India finished with four medals, including two gold and silver, in Rio.

For 45-year-old Army officer's wife, who has been on a wheelchair since 1999, it's a victory over disability. "I am happy today. If I can achieve this, anybody can do it. So, whatever may be the circumstances in life, never lose hope and have faith in yourself," Deepa said. "It's the

biggest day of my life. Today I was able to make the country proud in the world's highest sporting arena. Years of hard work has finally paid dividends."

LEGAL HASSLE

Deepa even had to surmount a legal hurdle before heading for Rio after another para-athlete Jyoti Kamal filed a case challenging her selection. She contended that she should be sent, having won the quota for the country due to her top-five world ranking. But in the trials, Deepa did better and was selected. Later, Jyoti also got a place in the squad after Russia's ban created fresh slots.

Deepa owes her success to her

never-say-die attitude.

Malik had three major spinal injuries that required 153 stitches. After the third injury, it became clear she will never walk again. Deepa had cancer in her spinal cord, which required surgery. But in 1999, there was relapse and the doctor told her that after surgery she won't be able to walk again. "It seemed end of the life for me, but then I found a way to live life and sports is one of my discoveries to live life like a queen," she said in an interview after winning a medal at the 2010 Asian Games.

SHOW OF COURAGE

Before taking up athletics, she was into motor sports and loved driving cars. She is also the country's first physically challenged to get a rally licence from the Federation of Motor Sports Clubs of India (FMSCI) and become a navigator and driver in the toughest car rallies of the country --- Raid-de-Himalaya 2009 and Desert Storm 2010.

"I am permanently on a wheelchair and cannot even take a step. But I always find myself running at lightning pace in dreams and only because of that I am picking up more and more medals in the international arena."

Acknowledging her sporting accomplishments, Deepa was conferred the Arjuna Award in 2012.

Deepa started her sporting career with swimming and represented the country during the 2006 FESPIC Games held in Kuala Lumpur in 2006 where she won silver. In 2008, in world swimming championship held in Berlin, she finished 10th. In 2008-09 she shifted to athletics and represented the country in the 2010 Commonwealth Games.

FAMILY SUPPORT

Deepa, who is the wife of a veteran cavalier Colonel Bikram Singh and daughter of a veteran Infantry Colonel BK Nagpal, gives lot of credit for her success to her family. She was married in village Bhainswal of Sonapat district.

"My family has supported me like anything. People have a lot of apprehensions about how women are

treated in Haryana. They say women are not encouraged to take up sports in Haryana. I don't know about that. What all I can say is that I got support from all quarters and family always stood by me. The entire khap of our village came to receive me at the airport when I came from Rio. There were 200 people from my village who were there to welcome me and they gifted me a gada (mace) for making the entire village proud," said Deepa.

HARYANA TO GIVE RS 4 CRORE

Acknowledging Deepa's silver medal feat in Rio Paralympics, the Haryana Government announced a cash

award of Rs 4 crore for her. The Haryana Government's sports policy places para-athletes on par with the abled body athletes.

"If it was Sakshi Malik who brought the country first medal in wrestling in Olympics, Deepa has become the first woman athlete from India to win a medal in Paralympics. Our daughters are bringing laurels and we are proud of them," an official statement quoting the Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar said after Deepa won the medal. ■

The writer is senior sports journalist with Hindustan Times, Chandigarh



Deepa Malik with her daughters