

# **Kunjarani Devi: Pioneer of Indian Women's Weightlifting**

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## **Abstract**

*The awards, achievements, and recognitions of Indian women's weightlifter Kunjarani Devi at the World Championships, Asian Games and Commonwealth Games are examined in this paper. She is one of the most successful Indian weightlifting athletes due to her hard work, perseverance, and self-control. She was a renowned weightlifter who was also honoured with the Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna, the Padma Shri, and the Arjuna Award. Regardless of gender, Kunjarani Devi is a living legend who inspires young people and future generations who admire weightlifting. In conclusion, qualitative analysis will be the primary substance of this paper.*

**Key words:** *Kunjarani Devi, weightlifting, India.*

## **Introduction**

A well-known Indian weightlifting pioneer, Nameirakpam Kunjarani Devi, transformed women's weightlifting and became an inspiration to numerous young athletes, including Khumukcham Sanjita Chanu and Mirabai Chanu. At the beginning of her weightlifting career, Kunjarani Devi set two national records in Trivandrum in 1987 (Sportamatik, 2024). Continuously, she made her first international appearance in 1989, competing at the World Weightlifting Championships in Manchester, England. Kunjarani Devi went on to win an astonishing seven silver medals at the world championships between 1989 and 1997 (Nalwala, 2023). She also won gold at the 2002 Commonwealth Games and 2006 Commonwealth Games, as well as consecutive bronze medals at the Asian Games in 1990 and 1994 (Nag, 2024). In addition to her athletic career, Kunjarani is currently serving as the Commandant of GC CRPF (Imphal Times, 2025). Kunjarani was awarded Arjun award in 1990 and shared Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna award with Leander Paes in 1996-1997. She was given the KK Birla Sports Award that same year. Additionally, in 2011, the Padma Shri, the fourth-highest civilian honour, was awarded (Sportamatik, 2024). As a result, her dedication, hard work,

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tenacity, and comeback represent and sustain her weightlifting career to a prosperous conclusion. Kunjarani is now a role model and inspiration for young, aspiring athletes, especially women in weightlifting.

### **Objective of the study**

The objective of the study is to examine the awards, achievements, and recognitions of Indian women's weightlifter Kunjarani Devi at the World Championships, Asian Games, and Commonwealth Games in the realm of weightlifting.

### **Methodology**

The qualitative method is used to analyse the data. To collect the required secondary data, the following sources will be consulted: personal records, published material, books, articles, newspapers, and reports on Kunjarani Devi. To analyse the data, statistical methods like tabulation were employed.

### **World Championships**

One of India's most renowned female weightlifters, Kunjarani Devi, is also referred to as the Hercules from Manipur because of her incredible strength and perseverance. PT Usha was the inspiration behind Kunjarani Devi, and their claim to fame was the 1982 Asian Games. At home in New Delhi, the Indian track star ran her way to two silver medals. Although PT Usha garnered national attention, this was a turning point for 14-year-old Kunjarani Devi. During the 1989 World Weightlifting Championships in Manchester, England, Kunjarani Devi received her first international recognition. Kunjarani Devi, who competed in the 44kg final, won a silver medal, marking India's first-ever podium finish at the World Weightlifting Championships, with an overall lift of 132.5 kg, which included 57.5 kg in the snatch and 75.5 kg in the clean and jerk. For Kunjarani Devi, winning the silver was an incredible achievement. China's Xing Fen, her rival that day, won the gold by lifting a world-record 165 kg. It wasn't the only instance in which a Chinese weightlifter presented difficulties. Kunjarani Devi stated, "They were just better prepared than us, to be honest. My goal was always to take the fight to the Chinese. India was discovering weightlifting as a sport while they already had all the systems in place and the blueprint for success" (Venkat, 2023). Kunjarani Devi barely missed the 1993 tournament due to a last-minute injury, but she went on to win an amazing seven silver medals at the world championships from 1989 to 1997 (1989, 1991, 1992, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997).



## **Asian Games**

Kunjarani Secured bronze twice in the Asian Games Beijing, 1990 and in the Asian Games Hiroshima, 1994 (Sportamatik, 2024).

## **Commonwealth Games**

At the 2002 Commonwealth Games in Manchester, Kunjarani won the gold medal in the 48kg overall, clean and jerk, and snatch categories (Venkat, 2023). Additionally, India's campaign at the 18th Commonwealth Games was ignited early by veteran Kunjarani Devi, who won the nation's maiden gold medal at the Commonwealth Games in Melbourne in 2006. The Indian, who competed in the 48-kg division, set a new record in the clean and jerk, lifting a total of 166 kg, including 72 kg in the snatch and 94 kg in the clean and jerk (Press Trust of India, 2006).

## **Life as a Coach**

By coaching the Indian weightlifting team, Kunjarani Devi is quietly moulding the country's future weightlifters. India gained significant honours from her students Sanjita Chanu and Mirabai Chanu. At the national and international sporting events, both weightlifters have stood outstanding. India earned an unprecedented gold and silver at the 20th Commonwealth Games thanks to Sanjita and Mirabai, while Mirabai took home a silver medal at the 2021 Tokyo Olympics. Mirabai gave her dedicated coach Kunjarani the prize in her honour (Pandhare, 2018). It has been an incredible journey and achievement for Kunjarani and the Indian populace to contribute to weightlifting and, more specifically, Indian sports.

## **Life in Indian Armed Force**

Kunjarani Devi, who currently serves as Commandant of GC CRPF (Imphal Times, 2025) and nodal officer of the Central sports team in the Central Reserve Police Force (IndiaOnline, n.d.). She continued to serve the country in the military in addition to her athletic career.

## **Kunjarani Devi's Weightlifting Achievements**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Event &amp; Venue</b>	<b>Weight</b>	<b>Medal</b>
1989	World Championships, Manchester	44kg	Silver
1991	World Championships, Donaueschingen	44kg	Silver
1992	World Championships, Varna	44kg	Silver
1994	World Championships, Istanbul	46kg	Silver
1995	World Championships, Warsaw	46kg	Silver
1996	World Championships, Guangzhou	46kg	Silver
1997	World Championships, Chiang Mai	46kg	Silver
1990	Asian Games, Beijing	44kg	Bronze
1994	Asian Games, Hiroshima	46kg	Bronze
2002	Commonwealth Games, Manchester	48kg	Gold
2006	Commonwealth Games, Melbourne	48kg	Gold

*Sources: Wikipedia, 2025.*

## **Awards and Recognitions**

According to a Sportsmatik, 2024 report, Kunjarani Devi has received the honours and recognition listed below in the weightlifting world:

- Kunjarani was awarded Arjun award in 1990
- Shared Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna award with Leander Paes in 1996-1997
- KK Birla Sports Award 1996-1997
- The fourth-Highest civilian honour Padma Shri was awarded in 2011



## Conclusion

The accomplishments of Kunjarani Devi in the weightlifting are the real and authentic outcome of her diligence, tenacity, and commitment. Over the course of her weightlifting career, she took home two bronze medals from the Asian Games, two gold medals from the Commonwealth Games, and six silver medals in world championships. She also received major honours including the Padma Shri, Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna, and Arjuna Award. Her impact on Indian sports will endure for millennia. As a coach, she also bears the task of nurturing superstars like Sanjita Chanu and Mirabai Chanu. Kunjarani Devi is currently the Commandant of the GC CRPF in addition to being an athlete.

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