

Olympians of Manipur and Their Achievements

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ABSTRACT:

Since 1984, Manipur, a state in northeastern India renowned as the "Powerhouse of Sports," has produced 19 Olympians, including three medal winners who have greatly raised India's status in international sports. The first Olympian from Manipur to play hockey at the 1984 Los Angeles Games was Pangambam Nilakomol Singh. MC Mary Kom created history with a bronze in women's boxing at the London Olympics in 2012, Shanglakpam Nilakanta Sharma won bronze in men's hockey and Saikhom Mirabai Chanu won silver in weightlifting at the Tokyo Olympics in 2020. Examining the profiles, achievements, recognitions and awards of Manipuri Olympians is the main aim of this study. In conclusion, the primary focus of this article will be qualitative analysis.

KEYWORDS: *Manipur, Weightlifting, London Olympic 2012, Tokyo Olympics 2020.*

Introduction

Manipur has contributed 8.57% of the Olympic medals (35—India/03—Manipur) since participated in the Paris Olympic 1900, while making just 0.24% of India's total population (2011 census) and 0.7% of its total land area. The contribution of players from Manipur has been 14.29 percent (21—India/03—Manipur) since the 1984 Olympic Games (Hanjabam & Singh, 2022).

Since merging with India, Manipur has been a dominant figure in game and sports. The people of Manipur have a long-standing connection to games and sports. Despite having a much smaller population than the other Indian states, Manipur has produced an impressive number of outstanding and well-known athletes. Manipur has made a significant contribution to India's sporting scene. Manipur is known as "The powerhouse of sports" or "Sports Capital of India" as given by the then President of India Ram Nath Kovind (Sanjenbam, 2021), It has produced many distinguished athletes who competed in the Olympic Games,

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earning accolades for the country and establishing national and international records. A look into the history of 'Manipuris in the Olympics' reveals that the journey begins with hockey player Pangambam Nilkomol, the first Manipuri to compete in the Olympics in 1984. He served as a goalkeeper for India's men's hockey team (Team MyGov, 2021). According to Phurailatpam (2025), the state has produced 19 Olympians since 1984. In boxing, MC Marry Kom took home the bronze at the 2012 London Olympic Games. In weightlifting, Saikhom Mirabai Chanu took home the silver medal and Shanglakpam Nilakanta Sharma won bronze medal at the 2020 Tokyo Olympic. These three renowned Olympic medallists from Manipur represented India in different Olympic edition serve as an inspiration for the next generation of Indian athletes, especially those from Manipur.

Objectives

Examining the profiles, achievements, and awards of Manipuri Olympians in various editions is the objective of the study.

Methodology

Using secondary data from government news, sports archives, media reports, and scholarly works on individuals such as Pangambam Nilakomol, Kunjarani, Mary Kom, and Mirabai Chanu, among others, this study employs a qualitative research methodology. Key themes, including successes, achievements and profiles of Manipuri Olympians, will be identified through content analysis. Analysis using statistical techniques, such as tabulation, is employed.

Profiles of Manipuri Olympians

Pangambam Nilakomol: Known as "the first Olympian of Manipur," Pangambam Nilakomol Singh represented India in hockey in the Summer Olympics in Los Angeles in 1984. He represented India and was named the best player in the 1982 Indo-Pak Hockey Test Match series between Pakistan and India. Following this accomplishment, he began playing regularly for the Indian National Junior Hockey Team, which in 1982 took part in test matches in France, Spain, and West Germany. He then played for the Indian Senior National Hockey Team at the International Hockey Tournament in Melbourne in December 1982. Additionally, he played for India in the 1983 Pentangular International Hockey Tournament in Kuala Lumpur and the Four Nations International Hockey Tournament in West Berlin. Subsequently, he went on to compete in the 1986 World Cup in London and won a bronze medal at the Asian Games in Seoul (Pangambam, 2025).



Thoiba Singh Kshetrimayum: Thoiba represented India at the 1988 Summer Olympics, finished in sixth place. In addition to the Olympics, he competed for India in the Asia Cup in 1985 and 1989, the Champions Trophy in 1985 and 1989, the Azlan Shah Trophy in 1985, the 1986 Asian Games in 1990, the World Cup in 1986, the Indo-Pak Test Series in 1986, the Five-nation in 1988, and the Indira Gandhi tournament in 1987 (Thoiba, 2025). Kshetrimayum Thoiba Singh had an incredible day of fame during the 1988 Seoul Olympics. India defeated South Korea 3-1 in an exciting match. At that moment, the crowd's primary focus was on Thoiba Singh, who defeated the Korean with two goals scored by him. The Korean folks continued to converse among themselves by staring at Thoiba and pointing fingers at him when he returned to the Olympic village. One of Thoiba's closest friends was Kim, a member of the Korean hockey team. Sports are considered to foster love, harmony, and peace between participants and nations. When they were returning from the game, they ran into each other at the Olympic village. They had a conversation before heading to the market to shop (Sanasam, 2021).

Soubam Suresh Singh: At the Sydney Summer Olympics 2000, an Indian boxer competed in the 48 kg men's light flyweight division. In the first round (2-2) and second round (3-3), Suresh matched the Korean blow-by-blow. However, Kim turned the heat on Suresh in the third round, and he vanished into the background. The Koreans in step five points while the Suresh got none, which was the difference in the final score of 8-3. Suresh made a brave effort to close the points difference in the fourth and final round, but Kim had a significant advantage. Although Suresh won the first round 2-1, the fight ended in a 9-5 loss (The Tribune, 2025).

Lourembam Brojeshori Devi: In the 2000 Olympic Games Sydney, Brojeshori competed in the Women's Half-Lightweight division and advanced to the quarterfinals against China's Liu Yuxiang. Addition to her participation in the Olympics, she competed at the South Asian Games in 2006 and the Asian and Commonwealth Games in 2012 (Chabungbam, 2013).

Ngangom Dingku Singh: The renowned Indian boxer competed in the bantamweight class at the 2000 Sydney Olympics. Serhiy Danylchenko of Ukraine, who went on to win bronze, defeated him in the Round of 16 (Rahul Venkat, 2021). Remarkably, in his boxing career Dingko won the gold medal at the 1998 Asian Games in Bangkok and was dubbed the "Best Boxer" in the 1997 King's Cup match (Tenzing, 2025).

Thingbaijam Sanamacha Chanu: Sydney 2000 was Sanamacha's first Olympic experience. In that particular Games, she placed sixth. Because of her performance in the World Weightlifting Championship, she was later added to the Olympic team for Athens in 2004 (Guru, n.d.).



Nameirakpam Kunjarani Devi: After winning seven silver medals at the world championship (Tenzing, 2025). When Kunjarani Devi represented India in weightlifting in the 2004 Olympics in Athens, his lifetime ambition came true. In the end, she placed fourth in the 48 kg division, while Aree Wiratthaworn of Thailand won bronze by lifting 200 kg. Only 190 kg was manageable for Kunjarani (Venkat, 2023).

Khumujam Tombi Devi: Tombi participated in the 2008 Beijing Olympics, but her campaign only lasted two and a half minutes when her opponent Ana Hormigo of Portugal eliminated her in the women's 48kg preliminary round (PTI, 2008).

Laishram Devendro Singh: In the 2012 London Olympics, Indian boxer Laishram Devendro fought valiantly against Irishman Paddy Barnes in the 49 kg quarterfinals, almost missing out on a medal (India Today Online, 2012).

Ngangbam Soniya Chanu: In the London Olympics 2012 women's 48 kg weightlifting competition, Chanu did not give it her all, placing eighth. Chanu placed seventh with a total lift of 171 kg, consisting of 74 kg in snatch and 97 kg in clean and jerk (PTI, 2012).

Laishram Bombayla Devi: Bombayla made her Olympic debut in Beijing in 2008, where China defeated the Indian team in the quarterfinals, despite her previous great success. She returned from her first Olympic appearance empty-handed after losing to Iwona Marcinkiewicz 101-103 in the solo event in the round of 64. She was eliminated by Aida Roman in the second round of the women's recurve competition at the 2012 London Olympics, and she was a member of the Indian team that unexpectedly lost to the Danish team in the first round. She performed much better in the Rio 2016 women's individual recurve competition, winning her first and second-round matches before losing to Alejandra Valencia in the round of 16. The women's recurve team, which also made it to the quarterfinals, was eliminated from the Olympic Games after losing to Russia (Lokegaonkar, 2019).

Khadangbam Kothajit Singh: He is selected for the Indian Olympic hockey squad to compete in the 2012 London Olympics for the first time, and as a standby player, he is ranked 18th (Chabungbam, 2012). He also competed in the Rio Olympic 2016 for the second time. A tough India defeated Argentina 2-1 in a men's hockey pool match. India's scorers were Chinglensana in 8th minute) and Kothajit Khadangbam in 35th minute (Indo-Asian News Service, 2016). The team lost to Belgium 3-1 in the quarterfinals and was eliminated from the medal chase (Express Web Desk, 2016). When India played New Zealand in their second Olympic Test Event match at the Oi Hockey Stadium in Tokyo, Japan, Hockey India congratulated defender Kothajit Singh Khadangbam on reaching this milestone (Hockey India, 2019).



Thokchom Anuradha Devi: Known as the "golden girls of hockey," Anuradha plays forward for the Indian hockey women's team, which is captained by Sushila Chanu of Manipur. Twelve countries are competing in the Rio Olympics in 2016, and the team is assigned to pool 'B' of the two pools. India is competed against the world's second-ranked Argentina, third-ranked Australia, sixth-ranked USA, and tenth-ranked Japan in pool "B" (Chabungbam, 2016).

Kangujam Chinglensana Singh: Chinglensana Singh Kangujam participated in over 200 games for the Indian hockey team between 2011 and 2021. He participated in two Asian Games medal campaigns, including the gold-winning one in 2014, scored 28 goals, served as vice captain, and made his Olympic debut in Rio in 2016 (Anand, 2025).

Mangte Chungneijang Mary Kom: The International Boxing Association (AIBA) designated her "Magnificent Mary" in 2008, and she was the only female boxer to win six world titles at the AIBA Women's World Boxing Championships in 2002, 2005, 2006, 2008, 2010, and 2018 (Tenzing & Christopher, 2025). Mary Kom competed in the Olympics in Tokyo in 2020 and London in 2012. Mary Kom, India's boxing legend MC, earned bronze at the 2012 London Olympics After losing in the women's 51 kg round of 16 match, 38-year-old Indian great Mary Kom withdrew from Tokyo 2020, concluding her Olympic career (Ansari, 2021).

Pukhrambam Sushila Chanu: The Indian junior women's team, led by captain Sushila Chanu, took home the bronze at the 2013 Women's Hockey Junior World Cup in Germany. For the first time since the 1980 Olympics, Sushila captained the Indian women's hockey team at the 2016 Rio Olympics. Additionally, she was instrumental in the 2020 Tokyo Olympics (Olympics.com, n.d.).

Saikhom Mirabai Chanu: Mirabai Chanu became one of India's most adored athletes after suffering heartbreak in the Rio Olympics in 2016 and winning a silver medal at the Tokyo Olympics in 2020. The Manipur weightlifting star won the coveted podium in the women's 49kg class with a combined lift of 202 kg (87 kg snatch; 115 kg clean and jerk). The journey of Mirabai Chanu, the first weightlifter from India to earn an Olympic silver medal. particularly after failing to record a single legitimate lift in clean and jerk during her first Summer Games in Rio 2016 (Nalwala, 2022). She became the first Manipuri to ever win an Olympic silver medal. Second, Mirabai became the first Indian female weightlifter to earn an Olympic silver medal; third, Ms. Saikhom became the first Indian to win a medal on the opening day of the Olympics (Kshetri, 2021).

Shanglakpam Nilakanta Sharma: Shanglakpam Nilakanta Sharma is a member of the Indian men's hockey team at the 2020 Olympics, that won a bronze medal defeating Germany. The end of a 41-year medal drought and Manipur's Nilakanta Sharma's contribution to the Men in Blue winning the bronze medal were the main causes of the joyous atmosphere (ANI, 2021).

Shushila Devi Likmabam: In Tokyo, she competed in her first Olympic Games. After losing 10-0 to Hungary's Eva Csernoviczki in the first round of the women's 48kg, the Indian judoka was eliminated early from the Tokyo Olympics 2020. From the 2012 London Olympics, Eva Csernoviczki won a bronze medal (Venkat, 2021).

List of Manipuri Sportspersons Who Participated in the Olympic Games

From the Los Angeles Olympics 1984 to the Tokyo 2020 Games, Manipur produced 19 Olympians across multiple disciplines, including hockey, boxing, weightlifting, judo, and archery, etc. Categorically, the detail list of Manipuri Olympians is mentioned below in the table:

Sl. No.	Name	Category	Year(s)	Olympic Venue(s)
1	Pangambam Nilakomol Singh	Hockey	1984	Los Angeles
2	Kshetrimayum Thoiba Singh	Hockey	1988	Seoul
3	Soubam Suresh Singh	Boxing	2000	Sydney
4	Lourembam Brojeshori Devi	Judo	2000	Sydney
5	Ngangom Dingku Singh	Boxing	2000	Sydney
6	Thingbaijam Sanamacha Chanu	Weightlifting	2000, 2004	Sydney; Athens
7	Nameirakpam Kunjarani Devi	Weightlifting	2004	Athens
8	Khumujam Tombi Devi	Judo	2008	Beijing
9	Laishram Devendro Singh	Boxing	2012	London
10	Ngangbam Soniya Chanu	Weightlifting	2012	London
11	Laishram Bombayla Devi	Archery	2008, 2012, 2016	Beijing; London; Rio
12	Khangbam Kothajit Singh	Hockey	2012, 2016	London; Rio
13	Thokchom Anuradha Devi	Hockey	2016	Rio
14	Kangujam Chinglensana Singh	Hockey	2016	Rio
15	Mangte Chungneijang Mary Kom	Boxing	2012, 2020	London; Tokyo
16	Pukhrambam Sushila Chanu	Hockey	2016, 2020	Rio; Tokyo
17	Saikhom Mirabai Chanu	Weightlifting	2016, 2020	Rio; Tokyo
18	Shanglakpam Nilakanta Sharma	Hockey	2020	Tokyo
19	Likmabam Sushila Devi	Judo	2020	Tokyo

Source: Hanjabam & Singh (2022).



Findings

1. Since the 1900 Olympic Games, Manipur has contributed 8.57% of the Olympic medals (35—India/03—Manipur), while making up 0.24% of India's entire population (2011 census) and 0.7% of its total land area.
2. Ram Nath Kovind, the Indian president at the time, referred to Manipur as "The powerhouse of sports" or "Sports Capital of India."
3. In 1984, hockey player Pangambam Nilkamal became the first Manipuri to compete in the Olympics. He played goalie for the Indian men's hockey team.
4. Since 1984, Manipur has produced 19 Olympians.
5. India defeated South Korea in the thrilling Kshetrimayum Thoiba Singh match at the 1988 Seoul Olympics by a 3-1 goal margin. At that moment, the crowd was primarily focused on Thoiba Singh, who defeated the Korean with two goals.
6. The International Boxing Association (AIBA) named Mary Kom "*Magnificent Mary*" in 2008, and she is the only female boxer to have won six world titles in 2002, 2005, 2006, 2008, 2010, and 2018 in the AIBA Women's World Boxing Championships. Remarkably, Mary Kom won bronze at the 2012 London Olympics.
7. Mirabai became the first Manipuri ever to win a silver medal at the Olympics. Moreover, she made history as the first Indian female weightlifter to achieve this remarkable feat. In addition, Saikhom became the first Indian to ever win a medal on the opening day of the Olympics. Consequently, Mirabai Chanu's silver medal at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics made her one of India's most loved sporting heroes.
8. At the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo, Shanglakpam Nilakanta Sharma, a member of the Men's Hockey Team, earned the bronze medal following a forty-year hiatus.

Suggestion

- a. Improvements to Manipur's state sports strategy with the incorporation of Olympians like Shanglakpam Nilakanta Sharma, Mary Kom, and Mirabai.
- b. To revise the Manipur Games and Sports policy better to reflect the growth of games and sports in Manipur and to compare it with other state sports policies.
- c. Infrastructure development, such as Olympic-standard training facilities in Manipur's hill and valley districts, is a top priority for the growth of games and sports in the state.



- d. Finding talent at the grassroots level and improving rural sports facilities by partnering with SAI and other sports authorities to map talent and essence on generating more Olympians
- e. Coaching and mentoring programs for athletes should be mandatory, and top-class trainers and coaches should be hired to improve Olympic performance.
- f. Provide financial assistance, athlete welfare funds that cover health insurance and post-career livelihood, stipends, and scholarship programs for athletes and future medal-prospect Olympians;
- g. The government should set up international exposure and tournament participation for Manipuri athletes.
- h. The government should mandate sports psychology and injury prevention programs since health and wellness are among the most crucial aspects of today's games and sports environment.

Conclusion

From Pangambam Nilakomol Singh, the first Manipuri to compete in hockey at the 1984 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles, to three Olympic medallists—MC Mary Kom in boxing, Saikhom Mirabai Chanu in weightlifting, and Shanglakpam Nilakanta Sharma in hockey—the state has produced 19 Olympians in a variety of sports, exemplifying Manipur's reputation as the "Powerhouse of Sports." Ultimately, the state can continue to produce more Olympians in the future with the right vision and support.

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