

WOMEN WHO MADE US PROUD

INDIAN WOMEN ARE MAKING THEIR MARK IN VARIOUS SPHERES AT A FAST PACE. HERE ARE EIGHT WHOSE ACCOMPLISHMENTS DESERVE KUDOS. BY BINDU GOPAL RAO

Come March and there is a huge brouhaha about International Women's Day. While some may argue that just one day to celebrate women probably berates their achievements, we list out some women achievers who have been torch bearers in their fields in recent times. Their achievements inspire all to celebrate the power of women.



PV SINDHU ▲

21 year old Pusarla Venkata Sindhu or PV Sindhu did the unthinkable when she became the first Indian woman to win an Olympic silver medal at the 2016 Rio Games. While all eyes were on her better known compatriot Saina Nehwal, Sindhu displayed rare valour and tenacity that saw her win the silver after a hard fought match in the finals. In fact in 2013 she became the first ever Indian women's singles player to win a medal at the Badminton World Championships and is also the youngest recipient of the Padma Shri.

PUJA THAKUR

Wing Commander Puja Thakur was the first woman officer to lead an Inter-Service Guard of Honour when US president Barack Obama visited India as the chief guest for the 2015 Republic Day parade. In fact Obama had been quoted as saying that the sight of "incredible" Indian women in the armed forces was one of his "favourite things" in India. The daughter of an army colonel, the Rajasthan officer joined the Air Force in 2000 and says that women in the forces are more determined to outshine their male counterparts. With 15 years of service, she can easily be called the poster girl for women in the Indian Armed Services.

DEEPIKA PADUKONE ▼

Capping a year of high success, Deepika Padukone, actress, decided to tread uncharted territory by heading to Hollywood and her first movie *xXx: The Return of Xander Cage* where she plays the female lead role opposite Vin Diesel of *Fast & Furious* fame (*xXx* was released early this year). Ranked as one of the 10 highest-paid actresses in the world in the global edition of *Forbes* magazine, Deepika is the daughter of ace badminton player Prakash Padukone. A national level badminton player, she gave it up to make a mark in the fashion world and later in the movies. A columnist and celebrity endorser for brands, she is the founder of The Live Love Laugh Foundation which creates awareness on mental health in India, a result of her own battle with depression at the peak of her career.



ALAMY



SANIA MIRZA ▲

“Dreamer. Believer. Doer. Even against all odds” is how tennis ace Sania Mirza’s Twitter handle reads. The UN Women Goodwill Ambassador for South Asia, she has held the No.1 position in the women’s doubles ranking and was named in TIME Magazine’s 2016 list of the 100 most influential people in the world. The Padma Bhushan awardee is the country’s most successful female Indian tennis player and one of the highest-paid, high-profile athletes in India. Giving up her singles career to focus on doubles, she has a whopping 40 professional titles and counting. She has started the Sania Mirza Tennis Academy in Hyderabad and has also launched her autobiography aptly title *Ace against Odds*.

TESSY THOMAS

Referred to as the Missile Woman of India, Tessy is India’s first woman scientist to head a missile project at the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO). She grew up near a rocket launching station in Alleppey, Kerala and was fascinated with rockets from an early age. Since she joined the DRDO in 1988, she has worked as Associate Project Director of the 3,000 km range Agni-III missile project and was the Project Director for mission Agni IV, which was successfully tested in 2011. She was appointed the Project Director for the 5,000 km range Agni V, the long-range, nuclear-capable missile that was tested successfully in 2012.

CHHAVI RAJAWAT

The first woman sarpanch in India with a MBA degree, Chhavi gave up her well-paying corporate job to become the sarpanch of Soda, a village 60 km from Jaipur. In her role she is working to bring clean water, solar power, metalled roads, toilets and a bank to the village and is not affiliated with any political party. Chhavi has been a torch bearer for cleanliness much before the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and has helped equip 800 of the 900 households with functional toilets, through community participation. She has in fact been attacked twice by unsocial elements for her transparent governance but says the support of her parents and the villagers keeps her motivated. She is the perfect example of a woman who is striving to give back to society.

ARUNIMA SINHA

Arunima Sinha is the world’s first female amputee (and India’s first amputee) mountain climber, who scaled Mt. Everest and has also climbed five of the world’s eight highest summits. A national level volleyball player who was pushed from a running train by thieves in 2011 causing her legs to be amputated, she did not let anything deter her ambition. She has authored a book *Born Again On The Mountain*, and says mountaineering has taught her the power of humility, confidence, leadership, resilience, team building and leadership. She also runs a non-profit school for underprivileged handicapped children.

SAKSHI MALIK ▼

24 year old Sakshi Malik became the first Indian female wrestler to win a medal (at the Rio Olympics). She had previously won the silver medal at the 2014 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow as well as the bronze medal at the 2015 Asian Wrestling Championships in Doha and comes from the small town of Rohtak in Haryana. Inspired by her grandfather, Sakshi began training in wrestling when she was only 12 at an *akhara* in Chhotu Ram Stadium, Rohtak. She is all set to wed fellow wrestler Satyawart Kadian in April this year and is also gearing up for the Asian Championship 2017. And admittedly she is in a happy phase and is looking forward to train with Kadian soon.



ALAMY