

# हरियाणा की आवाज़



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HARYANA KI AWAAZ

Volume II Issue I

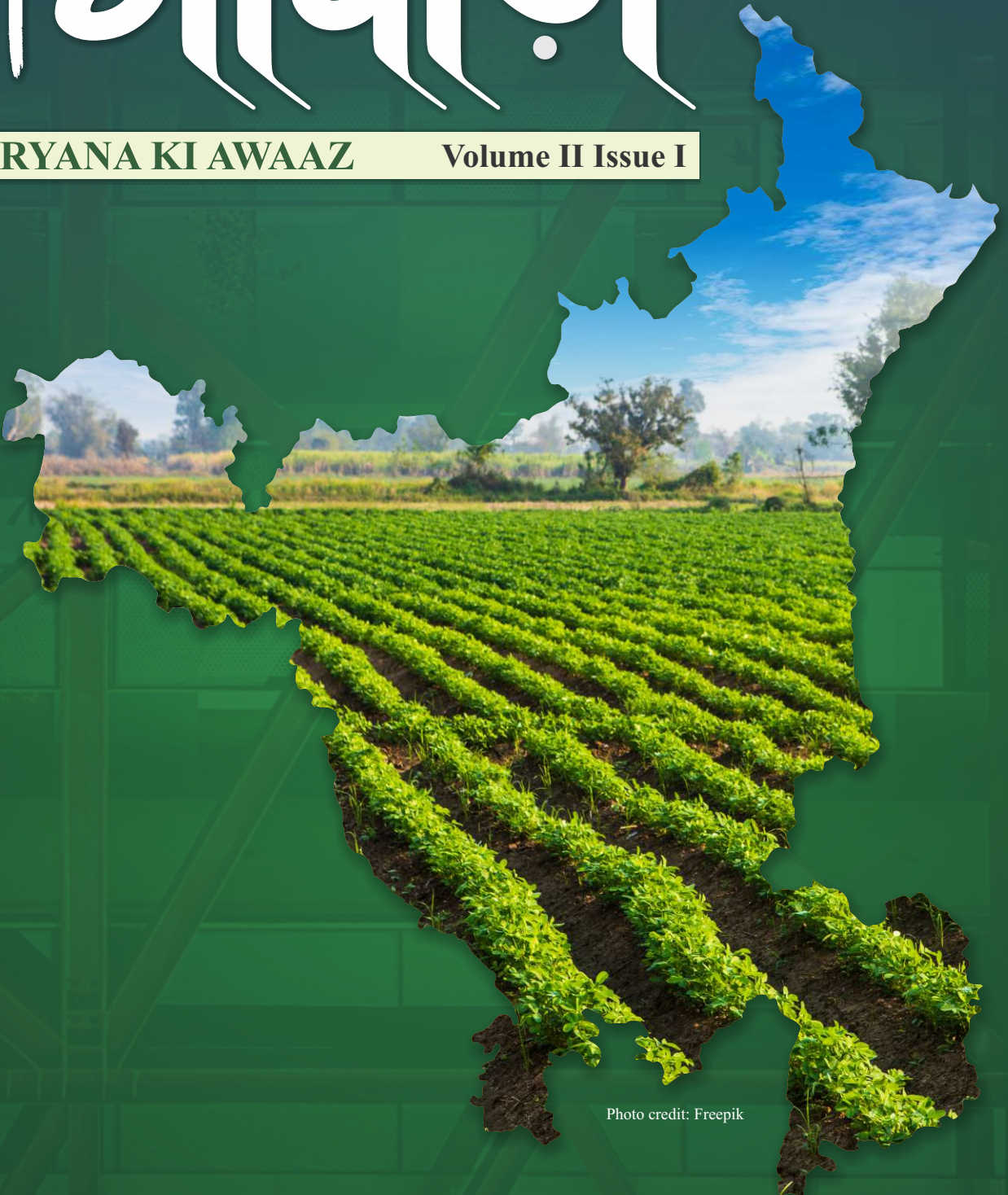


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## Acknowledgment

We would like to acknowledge and extend our appreciation to **Ms. Prachy Hooda** for her contribution to the creation, design, and presentation of this Issue. We would also like to thank **Mrs. Veena Hooda** for the translation of this issue in Hindi. Their efforts and attention to detail have played a key role in the finalisation of this issue.

We would also like to acknowledge and extend our appreciation to our respondents - **Mrs Binny Antil, Mrs Sumitra Phogat and Mrs Sheela Phogat** - for sharing their time and experiences with us.







**To,  
Redefining and Reclaiming the Story of Haryana**





## **Prachy Hooda**

Curator

There is always a stereotypical understanding of Haryana: rustic, rural (read: *dehati*), highly patriarchal and violent towards women. This has led to a very one-sided, homogenous representation of the region and its people, that lacks not just the nuances and complexities of its socio-cultural fabric, but a complete lack of interest and engagement by various stakeholders, in varied capacities (including mass media and academia alike), to acknowledge the depths of and differences in people's lived experiences.

My own experiences in “progressive” university spaces made me first-hand realise the “casual” stereotyping that those coming from the region face, mostly in the form of “jokes” (which aren't humorous) and even passing remarks like “*You don't look Haryanvi*” or that “*You don't speak like Haryanvis*”. This is also partly affected by the caricature-ish depiction of Haryanvis in Bollywood, where actors try to speak a language that is nowhere close to the different dialects spoken in Haryana. In this vast pool of poor projection of what is commonly considered Haryanvi (only by those who are not from the region), recent work by a few actors, social media content creators as well as young academics feels like a breath of fresh air, precisely because it consciously aims to challenge these stereotypes and carve out a space for grassroots voices.

In this backdrop, this monthly issue *Haryana Ki Awaaz* is a small step to counter this over-simplistic view of the region and its people by providing a platform to the people of Haryana, from all walks of life, to share their stories and lived experiences. It is aimed to project them as the active agents that they have always been but have never been given enough acknowledgement for. Each issue will focus on different facets of the socio-cultural fabric of Haryana as well as its diverse social groups.

I am thankful to the Office of Interdisciplinary Studies (IDEAS) at O.P. Jindal Global University (JGU) for its support in conceptualising this initiative





## Volume II

# Born to Play: The Sports Stories of Haryana

### Issue I

#### Game Changers: Women Who Played First

Long before Haryana became the centre of women's sports, there were a few who played when those around them couldn't imagine. This issue of *Haryana ki Awaaz* brings you the stories of three remarkable women who stepped onto playing fields in the 1970s - a time when even the idea of girls in sports was almost unthinkable in the region.

Their courage wasn't loud, but it was steady. They practiced and trained with determination, and led lives shaped by discipline, resilience, and friendship. In an era of rigid social norms and limited opportunities, their commitment to sports became both a personal journey and a quiet form of rebellion.

Their decades-long camaraderie, lived experience, and love for the game laid the groundwork for what is now seen as a proud tradition: Haryanvi women excelling in sports on national and global stages.

In this issue, we revisit their stories, to honour the grit that came before the glory.



### **Mrs. Binny Antil**

Mrs. Binny Antil began her sporting journey in the early 1970s during her first year of graduation at Haryana Agricultural University (HAU), where she pursued a bachelor's degree in Sports and Humanities. Originally from Garhi village, located at the confluence of Haryana and Delhi, she spent most of her early years outside her native village due to her father's military postings. This lifestyle gave her exposure to different cities and a broad outlook from an early age.

She fondly recalls the role of A. L. Fletcher, the first Vice-Chancellor of HAU, in encouraging sports among students. He took a personal interest in developing sports culture in the university and especially motivated young women to participate in at least one sport. Inspired by this encouragement and joined by two of her cousins, Mrs. Antil took up basketball.

Between 1975 and 1978, she participated in four state-level tournaments, two inter-university tournaments, and one national-level event held in Bangalore.

At a time when traditional attire was still the norm for women, Mrs. Antil and her peers confidently wore sportswear and shorts. Thanks to Fletcher's vision, the university provided excellent facilities for women athletes, including proper dressing rooms, and promoted an inclusive environment where women's sports and modern attire were normalized. Boys and girls trained, competed, and even travelled together for tournaments, defying the more rigid gender norms of the region.

When asked whether she ever faced societal or family pressure while pursuing sports, she shared that her upbringing played a crucial role. With a father in the military and family members employed in public service, education and open-mindedness were already part of her family environment. Even the women in her family were educated and working, which made her path into sports relatively smooth.

She also credits the influence of Arya Samaj, a reformist movement her family followed, which has historically played a major role in advancing women's education and empowerment in Haryana.

After her marriage in 1979, she stepped away from sports for a while. But her passion got a kickstart years later, thanks to her college friends who introduced her to open games for all age groups. For the past 12 years, she has been an active participant in these events. While basketball isn't part of the senior tournaments, she has shifted her focus to athletics. Through these games, she has travelled to almost every major city in India, from Kolkata to Chennai.

More about her recent sporting experiences was shared by Mrs. Sumitra Phogat, our next respondent.







### **Mrs. Sumitra Phogat**

Mrs. Sumitra Phogat, a close friend of Mrs. Binny Antil, studied at Haryana Agricultural University (HAU) during the same time and played basketball alongside her. Originally from the agrarian village of Chandeni in Dadri district, Mrs. Phogat pursued a B.Sc. in Home Science. She was already married when she joined the university, with her husband serving in the army. Despite this, she received full support from her family and never faced any restrictions in pursuing sports.

She studied in her village school up to Class 10 and later moved to HAU for higher education. At the university, it was compulsory for each student to participate in at least one sport every week. She chose basketball, a decision encouraged by the university coach who noticed her tall, athletic build and saw potential in her as a natural player.

Her sporting achievements include participating in the 1975 state-level basketball tournament in Rohtak, the inter-university tournament in 1976 in Ludhiana, and the national-level tournament the following year. She fondly remembers how proud her family, especially her father, was of her performance at the national level.

After completing her studies, Mrs. Phogat took up public employment as a lecturer in Home Science in Charkhi Dadri district (earlier a part of Bhiwani). She continued her association with sports even after starting her career, playing badminton and shotput in annual college competitions. She also encouraged and guided students who were interested in sports and wanted to train or compete.

For nearly two decades, Mrs. Phogat actively participated in the Open Masters Athletics tournaments, barring a short two-year break due to personal reasons. She continued until 2022, when she and her longtime friends decided to retire from the tournaments due to advancing age and increased risk of injuries.



Interestingly, her entry into the senior athletics circuit was somewhat accidental. A batchmate from HAU, who later became the Haryana unit president of the senior games, informed her about tournaments specifically held for seniors. This led her to participate and also pass on the information to her friends and colleagues.

In these tournaments, she mostly competed in javelin throw, discus throw, and shotput. But for her, the seniors' tournaments were more than just a celebration of fitness and competition - they became a cherished annual tradition. These events provided an opportunity to reunite with friends, travel to new cities, and reconnect with oneself beyond everyday responsibilities.

Between 2005 and 2022, Mrs. Phogat travelled extensively across India: from Bangalore and Chennai to Pondicherry, Guwahati, and Jaipur. She even participated in an international tournament in Thailand. All of this became possible because of her enduring love for sports.





### **Mrs. Sushila Phogat**

Mrs. Sushila Phogat, originally from Rohtak, got married into a family in Dadri and worked there as a Hindi lecturer. She studied at Jat College, Rohtak, where her father was the principal and her brother worked in the English department. She actively participated in the college's annual athletic meet and always showed a keen interest in sports.

In 2004, she was posted to the Government Girls Senior Secondary School in Charkhi. It was here that her journey into active sports truly began. The school's DP encouraged her and other female teachers to focus on their fitness and participate in sports activities. What began as a fun activity soon turned into a serious passion. Mrs. Phogat gradually became more involved and started taking part in open athletics tournaments alongside her peers, mainly in the hammer throw and discus throw events. The school principal and many other teachers were also actively involved in sports, which created a supportive environment.

For Mrs. Phogat and her colleagues, work never felt like a burden. After finishing their teaching duties or during free periods, they would gather on the school playground to practice together. Later, they even participated in competitions as a team. These efforts were made with dedication, as they were all determined to perform well at the national level. She also mentioned that her participation in sports led to an increment in her salary.

Mrs. Phogat's hard work paid off in 2009-10 when she won two gold medals (in hammer and discus throw) and one silver medal (in shotput) at a tournament held in Thailand.



She recalls feeling a sense of childlike energy and happiness during training and competitions. When asked if she faced any challenges when she suddenly returned to sports in 2004 after a long break, she laughed and said that she had that rustic Haryanvi energy. Having always done household work, she never felt the physical demands of sports to be anything unfamiliar or difficult.

Looking back on nearly two decades of her sporting journey, she says with a smile:

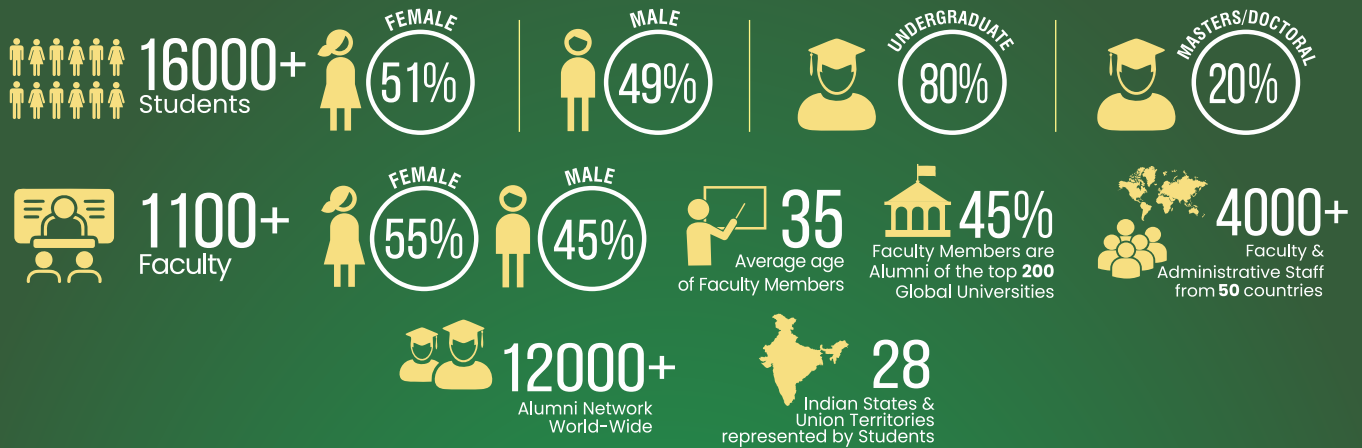
*“Bahut hi khele, aur bahut hi enjoy kiya.”*

Joking about the realities of aging, she added:

“Warm-up is necessary before playing, but with age, by the time you're done warming up, there's no energy left to actually play!”



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