

Dipa Karmakar: Powerful. Phenomenal. Par Excellence.



Photography: Tamanna Satsangi Concept & Styling: Sonam Oberoi Location: Jaypee Greens Golf & Spa Resort, Greater Noida

A Dreamer, A Go-Getter and more than that India's First Female Gymnast to reach the Olympic Games, Dipa Karmakar, has changed the look of the game ever since she won the bronze medal at the 2014 Commonwealth Games. She has been unstoppable since then winning another bronze at the Asian Gymnastics Championship in 2015 and receiving the highly regarded Padma Shri in 2017. Dipa is all set to rule the Asian Games this August, but before that let's take a look at what this 24 years old gymnast has to say about her dreams, goals and paving way for the younger generation, in an intriguing interview with Women Fitness India.

Ms. Namita Nayyar:

You are the first Indian female gymnast to compete at the Olympics Games and the first Indian gymnast to do so in 52 years. Share with us your journey in the world of sports. How did it all start? Girls have to overcome a number of obstacles both on personal & sports level until they achieve recognition, do share some moments of struggle to serve as an inspiration for others?

Ms. Dipa Karmakar:

The journey of a woman coming from a small town and playing a sport that no one knows about is always a hard one. It all started at the age of five. At that age, I did not have goals or dreams to become a gymnast, I think I was too young to decide that. In 2007, Nandi sir saw the potential in me and that's when we decided that I should give gymnastics a shot. In 2008, I won my first junior Nationals in Jalpaiguri and the rest is history.

As a woman, the challenge is much tougher owing to various misconceptions prevalent in society and this tends to be very personal and will differ from family to family. From a sporting point of view, more and more women are taking up sports and wanting to compete at a good level but there exists a dearth of women coaches, and girls also have issues when it comes to accessing good infrastructure i.e. a situation where a girl has to travel long distances to get to the training facility, but this can be risky for her to travel alone. But here, I would also like to add that women are as motivated, if not more than the men and we deserve our chances and the support. If recent performances at major sporting events are to go by, women are doing better than men. My hope is that this is proof of what sports women are capable of provided they get the right backing.



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Ms. Namita Nayyar:

You first gained attention when you won a bronze medal at the 2014 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow, becoming the first Indian female gymnast to do so in the history of the Games and becoming an inspiration for thousands of women who look up to you. What is a day like in the life of Dipa Karmakar both while training for competitions and on a daily basis?

Ms. Dipa Karmakar:

To excel in a sport, an athlete has to undergo tremendous hardship and make huge sacrifices on a daily basis. A day in my life is no different, before competitions, the training is definitely more intense and the focus tends to encompass technical aspects, physical training and also preparing on the mental side of things. When a competition isn't around the corner, the training is not as intense with more liberal recovery times. During this phase, a lot of planning goes into which events to target, what new moves can be looked at and also studying the competition.

Ms. Namita Nayyar:

You are the fifth woman in gymnastics history to land the Produnova vault, which currently has a 7.0 D-score, and is the hardest vault performed in women's artistic gymnastics. Share with us your preparation, training, and motivation that has helped you to reach this height and helped achieve such expertise in your sport.

Ms. Dipa Karmakar:

My day starts early at 6am where I start my day with breakfast and head for my training, I train rigorously for 4 hours and then have my lunch and rest for a while before heading for my training again which usually goes on till 8 in the evening.

Ms. Namita Nayyar:

You are a proud recipient of Padma Shri, the fourth highest civilian award in the Republic of India. No doubt it is a matter of great honour to be invested in an individual, when were you informed and what was your first reaction? Do share your family reaction?

Ms. Dipa Karmakar:

The announcement was made a few days before I was undergoing surgery. It was a very proud moment not just for my family and coach but also the entire gymnastic federation because no one earlier had received a Padma Shri for gymnastics at such a young age. However, I was worried if I would be able to make it to the Rashtrapati Bhavan and receive my award. However, post my

surgery, my physio had put in all his efforts to make sure I was able to walk up to the President and receive my award which was a great honour for me.

Ms. Namita Nayyar:

Winning involves a lot of determination and hard work, more so in the life of a sportswoman. What exercises comprise your fitness regime when you are preparing for competition? Elaborate on cardio, flexibility & strength training?

Ms. Dipa Karmakar:

When I am preparing for my competition, it is usually intense training which also includes my rehab sessions. My fitness regime includes a lot of strength training, flexibility, agility, static and dynamic movements and certain exercises which are specific to gymnastic. In cardio, I sprint for 70-80 metres. To ensure that the muscles remain flexible and strong I do certain hamstring exercises. My post training exercises include a lot of stretching and muscle massages.



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Ms. Namita Nayyar:

Sports-specific nutrition is an integral part of a sports person's diet to cope with the physical stress and recover from wear & tear. There is no doubt you too need to take special care of your diet? What diet do you follow to stay healthy and physically fit?

Ms. Dipa Karmakar:

The key to remaining healthy – whether you are healthy or not – is to have a balanced diet where all the macronutrients are well-represented. But focusing on gymnastics, the diet needs to be structured in such a way that it allows you to be explosive during competition. Unlike running, football, boxing, where endurance is a priority, gymnastics is a sport where you will compete over short bursts and therefore protein and starchy carbohydrates is a big contributor.

Ms. Namita Nayyar:

Being a professional athlete, you are a role model for many striving to make their dream come true, provide us with some motivational words to help others climb up the ladder of success in this field?

Ms. Dipa Karmakar:

Every day is a chance to showcase a better version of you and thus, keep striving towards getting to this better version.

Ms. Namita Nayyar:

In 2017, you were chosen for Forbes' list of super achievers from Asia under the age of 30. It has been a true reward for all the hard work. Tell us what motivated you to choose this particular sport?

Ms. Dipa Karmakar:

When you give 200% every time you go out and compete, it is very satisfying to have reputed institutions like Forbes to recognize your efforts.

A big reason to choose gymnastics is that it gives you this feeling that you can fly. I think very few sports give you that feeling and that was very appealing to me. Moreover, it was also a sport that forced all around fitness as a gymnast needs to be competent across disciplines even if you choose to prioritize certain events over others.



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Ms. Namita Nayyar:

You were not able to compete at the Commonwealth Games 2018 due to the ACL injury that you suffered last year. What tips would you like to provide to beginners to better cope with such an injury & return back to competition when fully recovered?

Ms. Dipa Karmakar:

The one tip I would mention here is to always be patient. When you are a competitor, it is a terrible feeling to watch from the sidelines as you want to be out in the middle competing. But in order to compete at a level that you feel you can, you must take your recovery process very seriously, and nothing should distract your rehabilitation process. The problem with youngsters is that they get too impatient and jump into training as soon as some of the pain subsides and that is very harmful in the long-run.

Ms. Namita Nayyar:

In April 2016, you became the first Indian woman gymnast to qualify on for the Olympics and the first gymnast of either sex from her country to grace the Games since Tokyo 1964. For your commendable performance in Rio Olympics 2016, the Government of India conferred upon you the Khel Ratna award in August 2016. Having performed so well throughout your career, who were your role models, inspiration, and motivator in your career as an athlete?

Ms. Dipa Karmakar:

My biggest motivator is my coach who has not only been my biggest branch of support throughout my career but also stayed patient as coaching is very demanding and an athlete's life is filled with ups and downs. India needs more coaches of his calibre and I am very fortunate to have had a mentor like Nandi sir during the entire duration of my career thus far.

My biggest inspiration and my motivator is my coach, always helping me push my boundaries and helping me aim for more .

Ms. Namita Nayyar:

Share with us how is your preparation for the Asian Games presently progressing?

Ms. Dipa Karmakar:

Last year was a slow year as a lot of time went into the recovery process and thus, preparation for the Asian Games commenced a little later than we had planned. But speaking now, I am confident about my preparations thus far and I have full confidence that I will be able to do well in Jakarta. I just gave my comeback performance, after the Rio Olympics, at the Asian Games trials, because I had to take a break due to my surgery. I have been able to make this comeback with the support of Nandi Sir, Sajad Sir, Sports Authority of India, GoSports Foundation, Dr. Anant Joshi, and Meraki. With their support I am going to perform one and a half years after my surgery. Please pray for me that I am able to perform well in the competition.

Ms. Namita Nayyar:

Women Fitness works with a goal to reach out to women all over the world providing them with best in health, fitness, nutrition, beauty & fashion. What do you wish to say about the website (Womenfitness.org) and a message for our visitors?

Ms. Dipa Karmakar:

I would like to continue encouraging your team as spreading awareness on health and fitness is critically important owing to changing lifestyles. Hoping that your portal continues to tell the stories of various athletes and fitness professionals.

Follow Dipa's journey here:

<https://twitter.com/dipakarmakar>

<https://www.facebook.com/Dipakarmakarforindia>

<https://www.instagram.com/dipakarmakarofficial/>

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