

Food:
A Source of Voice and Power of Northeastern Women in
Mary Kom's *Unbreakable*

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Food is one of the most basic components of human life. Every muscle, every fiber and every cell of human body relies on food for energy to survive. Sports hold a sacred place in most of the cultures and literatures. Great literary works capture the broad appeal of sports and its ability to transform individuals and society. Sports is one of those areas where food plays a vital role. Nutritious diet is very important and is ineluctable, irrespective of the nature of sport. Women of all society need more nutritious food to be strong physically and mentally. Northeastern women depend more on nature for their food.

Lately sports nutrition is one of the main areas of research which deals with consumption of food and its impact on a performance. The type of food consumed by an athlete during the training session and prior to performance plays a direct impact on the performance. Food that is required for a player depends upon the age, gender, place that one lives in and also by the game played. But it is wistful that, in India, a proper diet for any player is given only in few international tournaments and for very few professional players. Sports Authority of India was established in 1982. One of its major ideas is to provide nutritious food for the players and give professional training. Unfortunately it is done only to a certain extent. Mary Kom, on Aug 2, 2016, expressed her grievance in Rajya Sabha how players are provided with the required food supplements only during the competitions and not in the practice session.

Sports nutrition is a field which tells how nutritional knowledge adds fuel for any physical activity and how a player's performance can make a tremendous impact. A normal human requires about 2,000 calories per day. However for an athlete it will not be quiet sufficient. At least 3,000 to 8,000 calories will be required for them based on their field of sport. Proper nutrition not only develops the skill and performance of an individual but also helps in a speedy recovery from every injury, which is inevitable in sports.

A country, where we claim to be the largest producer of various food products, it is heartbreaking to see that it gives least importance for its athletes. Not even an Olympian is given proper nutritious diet during the part of their training. Diet for them is maintained only during their matches. Many of the players are not economically higher for taking care of their calorie supplements. It is the responsibility of the government to take care of such players. Not even the University and National level players are given proper food supplements that are required for the

players. Some organizations like SAI (Sports Authority of India), NIN (National Institute of Nutrition) take minimum care of player which is okay to a certain level. Calorie requirements depend upon the game we take up. Games like Basketball, Boxing, Football, Swimming burn a lot of calories per hour. Around 650 to 980 cal per hour is burned in such games.

Northeast Indians mainly Manipuri's have been giving confidence and is being a constant role model for the rest of the country in the field of sports. One of the biggest advantages of the people can be referred to the food they take in. Staple foods of Northeast Indian are fish and rice. Leafy vegetables, herbs and roots are very much included in their diet. Soaking, boiling and steaming are the methods they normally use. Modest amount of oil is used in their diet. Mostly these people use pepper and chilly instead of spicy masala. Deep fry is also mostly avoided by them. It can be said that these Organic food items have helped Kom in her later years. She strongly believes all her strength is from her hard work of early years. "I am tough because of my background. They made me who I am today. They gave me the strength to keen fighting. Indeed, they made me want to fight in the first place" (Kom 3).

India is known for its culture and traditional food. Just by having those traditional foods in proper supplements, according to the nature of sport, gives the desired result. The Ace Boxer, M.C. Mary Kom in her autobiography said how she has suffered all along in her childhood even without proper food. The autobiography *Unbreakable* tells about her heart rendering achievements amidst many stumbling blocks of her Boxing career and her personal life. It is the traditional food that helped her to come this long way. She says:

I remember that, after a whole day of hard work, like digging trenches, Apa earned just enough to buy rice for one day. When he could, he leased farms and cultivated rice. As a child, he had learnt how to hunt, fish and grow vegetables. When we had no money to buy rice, he would hunt and fish, and sell the fish to buy rice. (Kom 11)

Rice and wheat being the staple food for majority of India, it is more than enough to stay fit and healthy just by consuming this. In view of Kom, just the regular exercise and proper food supplement is more than enough. In one of her interviews she said: "Mostly, its boiled rice or sticky rice. Without rice, I won't be able to survive. Sometimes, I eat sweets like Jalebi, ice cream and all too. But no masala or spicy food. I take regular supplement and that really helps me" (Khare).

Food of Northeastern people is mostly organic even in this business world. It is very much healthy when compared to the rest of Indian foods. People there grow their own food items. They normally eat whole grain dishes, unpolished rice and fresh fruits and vegetables. Using minimum oil is one of the biggest advantages of Northeastern people. An herb used in their food is used to treat a lot of ailments, even without consuming them separately as medicine.

Lately there are details of Kom's daily diet how she takes home-cooked Manipuri food, protein, multi-vitamins and vegetables with meat. Many a time players are not provided with proper

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food during their international tournaments. Once during such tournament Kom tells the experience of how she used both her hands to hold the chop stick to pick up the food.

One time, in China, we were given chop sticks to eat our meals with. Just when I had painfully begun to master the art of using a knife and fork, I had to use two sticks to fill my stomach. I ended up using both my hands to hold the chop stick to pick up the food and push it into my mouth. My team mates asked for spoons, but I tried to manage with the sticks. It helped that I really enjoy Chinese Food. I was hungry enough that I managed the complex work required- I ate enough to eat my appetite my palate. After five years of travelling, I started taking along some packed food from home. (Tamil Nadu, Dept. of School Education 36)

This shows how sports personalities have to adjust with their food habits in a foreign land and also take care of their health and weight. Kom, even though born in poor family, worked hard, ate what she got, hunted her own desired sport and reached heights. At some point of time it was her will power and her hard childhood that kept her going in the boxing ring. One such point is doping test where cautiousness is needed. She remembers: “I had a cold and fever through the tournament, but for fear of doping charges, I did not take medication for it. It was my will power that saw me through it all.” (Kom 73)

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