

Para-athletes refuse to give up

Amit, 31, is now an assistant coach in the Haryana sports department. The state government awarded ₹4 crore to him for his achievements and in 2013, he was conferred the country's highest sporting honour, the Arjuna Award.

Across the country, para-sport has allowed hundreds of people with disabilities to take control of their lives, giving them economic freedom and respect in a society which generally looks down on the physically-challenged.

Hardly recognised around a decade ago, state governments are also acknowledging the achievements of para-athletes and rewarding them with cash and jobs.

"There was a time when disabled people were a burden on the family, but para-sports has changed all that. Now, the same families take pride in their sporting achievements. No longer are they dependent on their families. Rather, they are contributing to the family's income," said Amit, who hails from Bayanpur in Sonapat.

In Haryana alone, para-athletes have received cash awards worth ₹20 crore for

their feats at national and international events in the last five years. Para-athletes from Punjab, Rajasthan and Karnataka have also shown their mettle in national events and the Paralympics – the special Olympics held alongside the summer Games. "Now, disabled people are encouraged by family-members to pursue the sports seriously," said paralympian Girraj, secretary-general of the Haryana Paralympics Association.

Digambar Singh, from Alawalpur in Palwal, remembers being abused and assaulted by his father and brothers because of his dysfunctional left hand and leg before he was thrown out of his home three years ago. Since he discovered para-sports, Digambar has won 12 national medals, including eight golds, besides more than Rs 6 lakh in cash.

25-year-old Laxmi Sharma, winner of the state's highest sporting honour the Bhim Award, said para-sports gave her an identity and made her feel "part of the mainstream". Last year, the Sports Authority of India (SAI) too started employing para-Olympians as coaches. Jagseer Singh of Rajasthan, an Arjuna award-winning para-athlete, is now an inspector in the Income Tax

department.

The Madhya Pradesh government too gives a job to the winner of the state sports award every year and so far 10 para-athletes have found employment.

"The pride and money associated with para-sports have given me a new lease of life. I can take care of my needs and am confident that very soon I will give a comfortable life to my parents," said Sunil Phogat (35) from Rohtak.

Double-amputee Pawan Malik, 27, who also works as a tea vendor, is hoping to get artificial legs with the cash award from his medal-winning achievement at the Panchkula national games recently. For most para-athletes, the pride of standing on their own feat is their most prized award. Their medal of honour.

Dalip Singh backs SAD, BJP

He also trained guns on his brother for "ill-treating" his own mother. Referring to Uday Singh as "aapji", he said, "You threw me and your own mother out when we were partaking langar at Bhaini Sahib in 2009. You did not let her see