



INDIAN ARCHERY'S PROGRESS AT THE INTERNATIONAL LEVEL: A REVIEW OF PERFORMANCE, POLICY, AND PROSPECTS UP TO 2023

Dr. Anil Ramrao Kamlapure

Director of Physical Education and Sports, Indira College of Science and Commerce College, Pune, Dist. Pune, Maharashtra, India.

Paper Received On: 21 October 2024

Peer Reviewed On: 25 November 2024

Published On: 01 December 2024

Abstract

Indian archery has traversed a remarkable trajectory from modest beginnings in the 1970s to becoming a force in international competition, particularly in the compound bow discipline. While the recurve format—the only archery discipline in the Olympic programme until 2024—has yielded consistent participation but no Olympic medals, the compound discipline has produced historic world championships and continental dominance. This paper reviews India's international archery progress up to 2023, analysing performance across the Olympic Games, World Championships, Asian Games, and World Cup circuits. It examines the institutional evolution of the Archery Association of India (AAI), the impact of government support schemes such as the Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS) and Khelo India, and the contributions of key athletes including Deepika Kumari, Jyothi Surekha Vennam, Aditi Swami, and Ojas Deotale. The review identifies a structural bifurcation: recurve archery, despite individual brilliance, has struggled against Korean dominance, while compound archery has surged to world-beating status. The year 2023 marked a watershed, with India topping the World Championships medals tally and achieving a clean sweep of compound gold at the Hangzhou Asian Games. The paper concludes by assessing the implications of compound archery's inclusion in the Los Angeles 2028 Olympics and the challenges of sustaining grassroots development.

1. Introduction

Archery in India has evolved from a traditional pursuit into a structured competitive sport with a significant international footprint. The formal institutionalisation of the sport began with the founding of the Archery Association of India (AAI) on 8 August 1973, a year after archery was reintroduced to the Olympic Games at Munich 1972. Since India's Olympic archery debut at Seoul 1988, the country has been a consistent participant but has remained without an Olympic medal—a gap that has defined much of the narrative around the sport.

However, international performance beyond the Olympics tells a more layered story. India has won medals at the World Archery Championships, the Asian Games, and the Archery World Cup circuit, with compound archery emerging as a particular strength from the mid-2010s onward. The year 2023 represented a historic peak: Indian compound archers won three gold medals and a bronze at the World Championships in Berlin, topping the medals table for the first time, and followed this with a clean sweep of all five compound gold medals at the Hangzhou Asian Games.

This review paper synthesises available evidence to trace the arc of Indian archery's international progress up to 2023. It addresses four central questions: How has India performed across major international competitions? What institutional and policy factors have shaped this performance? Who have been the pivotal athletes? And what does the future hold, particularly with compound archery's inclusion in the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics?

2. Institutional Foundations and Historical Context

2.1 Formation and Early Years of the AAI

The Archery Association of India was established in 1973 under the leadership of Vijay Kumar Malhotra, often described as the “godfather” of Indian archery. The founding coincided with archery's return to the Olympic programme, signalling an intent to build a competitive presence on the global stage. Early efforts were rudimentary: founding members recall purchasing their first FITA Rules Book in 1967 simply to understand the rules and distances involved.

The AAI became affiliated with the World Archery Federation (then FITA) in 1973 and with World Archery Asia in 1978. It is responsible for organising, promoting, and controlling archery in India, and operates under the recognition of the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, the Indian Olympic Association, and the international federation.

2.2 Governance Challenges and Suspension

Despite its long history, the AAI has faced significant governance instability. Government recognition was withdrawn on 7 December 2012 due to the federation's failure to conduct

elections in accordance with the National Sports Development Code of India, 2011. The crisis deepened in August 2019 when World Archery suspended the AAI, forcing Indian archers to compete under a neutral flag at events affecting Olympic qualification. Conditional suspension was lifted in January 2020 following fresh elections, and full government recognition was restored in November 2020.

This prolonged institutional uncertainty coincided with a period of transition in Indian archery, particularly in the recurve discipline, where performance at the elite level fluctuated. The stabilisation of governance from 2020 onward provided a platform for the compound discipline's breakthrough performances in 2022–2023.

3. Olympic Performance: Participation Without Podium

3.1 A History of Near-Misses

India's Olympic archery record is characterised by consistent qualification and recurring quarter-final exits. The country debuted in archery at the 1988 Seoul Olympics, where Sanjeev Singh (36th) and Limba Ram (39th) represented India in the men's individual recurve event. Through the 1990s, Indian archers competed regularly but without advancing deep into elimination rounds.

The 2004 Athens Olympics marked a turning point of sorts. Satyadev Prasad achieved India's best individual finish to that point, reaching the pre-quarterfinals (10th place). The women's team also reached the quarter-finals, a feat repeated at Beijing 2008. Between 2004 and 2020, India's men's, women's, and mixed teams made the quarter-finals six times but never secured a podium finish.

3.2 The Deepika Kumari Era

Deepika Kumari's emergence in the early 2010s raised expectations of an Olympic breakthrough. She reached the world No. 1 ranking in 2012, becoming the first Indian archer—male or female—to achieve that distinction. Her performances at World Cup events were exceptional: she has won four silver medals at World Cup Finals, the most by any Indian archer. At the Olympics, however, Kumari's results did not match her world-ranking stature. At London 2012, the women's team lost in the first round. At Rio 2016 and Tokyo 2020, she again fell short of the medal rounds. The gap between World Cup success and Olympic performance has been attributed to the heightened pressure of the Olympic stage and the dominance of Korean archers in the recurve discipline.

3.3 Qualification for Paris 2024

By 2023, India had begun to secure qualification pathways for the Paris 2024 Olympics. Dhiraj Bommadevara, a rising recurve archer, won an individual quota place, and both men's and women's teams qualified through world rankings—the first time both teams had qualified in twelve years. Bommadevara's performance at the 2023 World Cup, where he defeated Korean legend Kim Woojin, signalled a potential shift in competitive capacity.

4. World Championships: The Compound Breakthrough

4.1 Recurve Foundations

India's first significant World Championships medal in recurve came in 2011, when the women's team of Deepika Kumari, Bombayla Devi Laishram, and Chekrovolu Swuro won silver in Turin. This remained a high-water mark for recurve team performance at the global level for over a decade. Across the 92-year history of the World Archery Championships prior to 2023, India had won only 11 medals in total, across both disciplines.

4.2 The 2023 Berlin World Championships

The 2023 World Archery Championships in Berlin represented a qualitative leap. India won three gold medals and one bronze, finishing third in the overall medal tally and topping the compound medal table for the first time.

The women's compound team of Parneet Kaur, Jyothi Surekha Vennam, and Aditi Gopichand Swami won India's first-ever World Championships gold, defeating top-seeded Mexico in the final after upsetting three-time champions Colombia in the semi-finals. Aditi Swami then became the first Indian—male or female—to win an individual world title, defeating veteran teammate Jyothi Surekha in the semi-finals before claiming gold. Ojas Deotale matched this feat in the men's compound individual event, defeating world No. 1 Mike Schlosser in the semi-finals.

These results were historically significant not only for their novelty but for their scale: India had never previously won a gold medal at the World Championships in any discipline. The compound archers' performance transformed India's standing in the sport.

5. Asian Games: From Bronze to Continental Dominance

5.1 Early Medals and the Recurve Era

India's Asian Games archery history began at the 2006 Doha Games, where the men's recurve team won bronze. At Guangzhou 2010, Tarundeep Rai won silver in the men's individual recurve, and both men's and women's teams secured bronze. These results established India as a regional contender but not a dominant force.

5.2 The Compound Ascendancy

The introduction of compound archery to the Asian Games programme at Incheon 2014 proved transformative. India won its first-ever archery gold at the Asian Games when the men's compound team—Rajat Chauhan, Sandeep Kumar, and Abhishek Verma—defeated South Korea in the final. Abhishek Verma added an individual silver, and Trisha Deb won bronze in the women's individual compound, with the women's team also taking bronze.

At Jakarta 2018, both men's and women's compound teams won silver, consolidating India's position as a compound powerhouse in Asia.

5.3 The 2023 Hangzhou Clean Sweep

The 2023 Asian Games in Hangzhou represented the zenith of Indian compound archery's continental dominance. India won seven medals in archery overall, including all five available gold medals in the compound discipline—men's individual, women's individual, men's team, women's team, and mixed team. Ojas Deotale and Jyothi Surekha Vennam each won three gold medals. India became the first non-Korean nation to top the Asian Games archery medal table in 45 years. In the recurve discipline, India also performed creditably: the men's team won silver, losing to South Korea in the final, while the women's team took bronze by defeating Vietnam. This represented the most comprehensive Indian archery performance at any major multi-sport event to date.

6. World Cup Circuit: Consistency and Emerging Talent

The Archery World Cup, held annually across multiple stages and culminating in a season finale, has been an important benchmark for Indian archers. In 2023, India finished third in the World Cup circuit with 17 medals—12 in compound and 5 in recurve—and booked five places in the World Cup final, the most entries India had ever secured at the season finale.

At the Antalya stage, India won four medals (two gold, one silver, one bronze), with Jyothi Surekha Vennam winning gold and Dhiraj Bommadevara taking bronze. At the Paris stage, India claimed five medals (two gold, three bronze), including gold for the men's compound team and the women's compound team. At the season-ending World Cup Final, Prathamesh Jawakar won silver in the compound category, while Dhiraj Bommadevara impressed by defeating Kim Woojin before falling short of a medal.

These results demonstrated depth beyond the headline World Championships performances and suggested that Indian archers were becoming consistent contenders across the international circuit.

7. Key Athletes and Their Contributions

7.1 Deepika Kumari

Deepika Kumari remains the most recognisable face of Indian archery. A former world No. 1 (2012) and world junior champion (2011), she has won multiple World Cup medals and was part of the 2011 World Championships silver-medal-winning team. Her career illustrates both the potential and the limitations of Indian recurve archery: extraordinary individual talent constrained by the structural dominance of Korean archers and the psychological demands of the Olympic stage.

7.2 Jyothi Surekha Vennam

Jyothi Surekha Vennam is arguably India's most decorated compound archer. She transitioned from swimming to archery at age 11 and has since become a cornerstone of the compound team. At the 2023 Asian Games, she won three gold medals. She has won multiple World Championships medals, including team gold in 2023, and has been ranked as high as world No. 2. Her longevity and consistency have been instrumental in the compound discipline's rise.

7.3 Aditi Gopichand Swami

Aditi Swami's breakthrough at the 2023 World Championships, where she became the first Indian individual world champion in archery, marked the arrival of a new generation. At just 17, she defeated experienced competitors, including teammate Jyothi Surekha, to claim the title. She has credited the Khelo India scheme's scholarship support with enabling her to focus on performance.

7.4 Ojas Deotale

Ojas Deotale matched Aditi Swami's historic achievement by winning the men's compound individual world title in 2023, defeating the world No. 1 in the semi-finals. He followed this with three gold medals at the Asian Games, including the individual title. His rise exemplified the depth of talent emerging in the compound discipline.

7.5 Dhiraj Bommadevara

In the recurve discipline, Dhiraj Bommadevara emerged as a bright spot in 2023. He was the only Indian recurve archer ranked in the world's top 15 and won an individual World Cup medal, defeating Kim Woojin at the World Cup Final.

8. Policy Support and Institutional Development

8.1 Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS)

The Target Olympic Podium Scheme, administered by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, provides financial support, international exposure, and access to high-performance equipment

for elite athletes. Core archers under TOPS include Ojas Deotale, Aditi Swami, Jyothi Surekha Vennam, Abhishek Verma, Parneet Kaur, Priyansh, and Prathamesh Jawkar. The Mission Olympic Cell has also approved funding for backup equipment sets to support athletes during competitions.

8.2 Khelo India and Grassroots Development

Khelo India functions as a feeder system for young athletes, with over 2,500 athletes receiving annual scholarships including monthly financial support. Aditi Swami has publicly credited the Khelo India scholarship with providing the financial stability that allowed her to focus solely on archery. The scheme also supports residential academies, such as the Madhya Pradesh State Academy in Jabalpur, which has been accredited for archery.

8.3 National Centres of Excellence and Infrastructure

The Sports Authority of India has established National Centres of Excellence (NCOEs) across the country, including archery-specific facilities at centres such as Sonipat and Guwahati. A national archery academy is being developed in Chhattisgarh with ₹68.2 crore in funding from NTPC, featuring a 30-lane outdoor range, an indoor facility, and a high-performance centre. These infrastructure investments signal a long-term commitment to developing the sport beyond ephemeral success.

9. The Compound–Recurve Divide: A Structural Analysis

The divergence between India's compound and recurve performances invites explanation. Several factors emerge from the available evidence.

Equipment and physiology. According to Sanjeeva Singh, a former high-performance director, the compound bow suits Indian body types better. "Good height and a particular body structure help a recurve archer. You also need power," he noted. "The compound bow is good for people with shorter height. So, it suits Indians. The upper limit is 60 pounds for bows. But the force required to draw reduces significantly due to the let-off, making it a level playing field".

Competitive landscape. Recurve archery is dominated by South Korea, which has invested heavily in systematic talent identification and training for decades. India's best recurve results have come against non-Korean opposition, but Korean archers remain a near-insurmountable barrier at the Olympic level. In compound archery, the competitive field is more distributed, with strong programmes in the United States, Mexico, Colombia, and European nations. India's rise in compound has coincided with the discipline's inclusion in major multi-sport events, creating a more accessible pathway to international medals.

Institutional focus. Compound archery was only introduced to the Asian Games in 2014 and to the World Championships in the mid-1990s. India's first national compound championship was held in 2004, nearly two decades after the international federation introduced the discipline. The subsequent investment in compound—through TOPS, Khelo India, and dedicated coaching—has yielded rapid returns.

Coaching and technical support. The appointment of full-time travelling coaches such as Sergio Pagni for the compound team has been credited with the discipline's 2023 success. Pagni was named Coach of the Year for sculpting the golden year.

10. The Road Ahead: Los Angeles 2028 and Beyond

The inclusion of compound archery in the Los Angeles 2028 Olympics represents a historic opportunity for India to break its Olympic medal drought in archery. Compound archery will make its Olympic debut at LA28, and India is currently ranked No. 2 in the world in the mixed compound team category. The country's track record in compound—three gold medals at the 2023 World Championships and a clean sweep at the Asian Games—suggests that a podium finish is a realistic target.

However, several challenges remain. The transition from World Championships and Asian Games success to Olympic performance is not automatic; the Olympic stage brings unique pressures and a different competitive dynamic. Sustained success will require continued investment in grassroots programmes, coaching, sports science, and competitive exposure. The infrastructure being developed—NCOEs, the Chhattisgarh academy, and Khelo India centres—provides a foundation, but the pipeline from talent identification to elite performance must be strengthened. The compound discipline's rise offers a template: focused investment, dedicated coaching, and consistent international competition can produce world-class results.

11. Conclusion

Indian archery's international progress up to 2023 is a story of two disciplines moving in different directions. Recurve archery, the traditional Olympic format, has produced individual brilliance—most notably in Deepika Kumari—but has been unable to break through the Korean-dominated Olympic medal ceiling. Compound archery, introduced to major competitions later, has surged to world-beating status, culminating in a historic 2023 that saw India top the World Championships medals table and sweep the Asian Games compound gold medals. This bifurcation reflects deeper structural factors: the suitability of compound equipment to Indian physiology, the more distributed competitive landscape in compound, and the focused institutional support that has flowed into the discipline. The governance

stabilisation of the Archery Association of India after 2020, combined with schemes such as TOPS and Khelo India, created the conditions for the compound breakthrough. The inclusion of compound archery in the Los Angeles 2028 Olympics transforms the horizon. For the first time, India enters an Olympic cycle with a genuine medal prospect in archery. Whether this potential is realised will depend on the continuity of investment, the quality of coaching, and the ability to translate continental and world championship dominance into Olympic performance. The foundations laid up to 2023 provide reason for cautious optimism.

References

- The Bridge*. (2026, May 1). The rise of compound archery in India. <https://thebridge.in/amp/archery/compound-rise-india-56434>
- The Bridge*. (2023, December 31). Indian archery in 2023: Compound archers produce dominant show. <https://thebridge.in/amp/archery/indian-archery-2023-compound-archers-dominant-45385>
- The Hindu*. (2025, April 9). Compound archery to make Olympic debut at LA28: All you need to know about event, how's it different from recurve, how does India benefit. <https://sportstar.thehindu.com/archery/compound-archery-to-make-olympic-debut-at-2028-los-angeles-summer-games/article69432680.ece>
- The Bridge*. (2023, September 13). Medals won by Indian archers in Asian Games history. <https://thebridge.in/asian-games/indian-archers-medals-won-asian-games-history-43791>
- Sportstar*. (2023, September 30). Indian archers at the Asian Games - List of medal winners over the years. <https://sportstar.thehindu.com/asian-games/asian-games-india-archery-medallists-full-list-tournament-history-records/article67323937.ece>
- Wikipedia. (n.d.). Archery Association of India. Retrieved September 20, 2026, from https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archery_Association_of_India
- Olympedia. (n.d.). India in archery. <http://www.olympedia.org/countries/IND/sports/ARC.3>
- The Bridge*. (2021, October 13). Indian athletes who have been World No. 1. <https://thebridge.in/olympics/indian-athletes-world-number-one-27309>
- World Archery*. (2023, August 17). India claim recurve team bronze double. <https://www.worldarchery.sport/fr/node/201351>
- World Archery*. (2020, January 23). World Archery conditionally lifts suspension of Indian federation. <https://www.worldarchery.sport/news/177315/world-archery-conditionally-lifts-suspension-indian-federation>
- Press Information Bureau, Government of India. (2020, November 26). Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports restores recognition of Archery Association of India. <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1676040#1>
- Sports Authority of India. (n.d.). With a view to provide additional impetus in the preparation of Olympic probable for Tokyo 2021, Paris 2024 and Los Angeles 2028... https://www.sportsauthorityofindia.gov.in/sai/public/assets/pdfs/annualreports/2020-21/SAI_AR_2020-21_English.pdf#78#9
- The Times of India*. (2025, October 19). Tripartite pact signed to set up Rs 68.2 crore national archery academy in Chhattisgarh. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/raipur/tripartite-pact-signed-to-set-up-rs-68-2-crore-national-archery-academy-in-chhattisgarh/articleshow/124682319.cms>
- The Bridge*. (2025, December 1). Khelo India platform has been instrumental in journey to global success: World champion Aditi Swami after winning KIUG gold. <https://thebridge.in/kiug/khelo-india-platform-instrumental-journey-global-success-world-champion-aditi-swami-winning-kiug-gold-63178>
- ESPN. (2023, December 20). Coach of the Year: Sergio Pagni sculpts golden 2023 for Indian compound archery. https://www.espn.ph/espn/story/_/id/39153866/