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In India, women see boxing as a ticket to middle-class life

Women in the southern Indian city of Trivandrum are stepping into the ring to escape traditional gender roles, enhance their self-esteem and perhaps even land a coveted government job

BY SOMINI SENGUPTA

NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE, TRIVANDRUM, INDIA

The girls punched hard. From across India they came to this big, steamy government-run gym. Before entering the boxing ring, they bowed their heads to the floor, as though entering a temple. A sweet-shop owner's daughter let loose a right hook. A construction worker's daughter leaned against the rope, streams of sweat dripping from her face. Bouncing, ducking, like a grasshopper on speed, was a short girl from Calcutta with close-set eyes; she had forsaken her sister's wedding for a chance to come here and fight. The thud of glove against glove echoed against the cavernous walls.

In a country with numerous obstacles for them, young women are gearing up to punch in the big league.

The International Olympic Committee earlier this month announced the entry of women's boxing in the 2012 London Games. India was among the countries pushing to break the gender bar.

"This is my dream come true," Mangte Chungneijang Merykom, 27, India's most acclaimed boxer, better known as Mary Kom, said this week.

Kom is India's greatest hope in the boxing competition. Since the International Boxing Association started the women's world championships in 2001, Kom holds the record with four gold medals.

With relatively little support from the government, Indian women have performed surprisingly well in the world championships. China is India's stiffest competitor. In the last championships, held in Ningbo City, China, the home team won 11 medals, followed by Russia's five, and four each by India and the US.

Kom, having just returned from a training camp in Beijing, was quick to explain why. Even the coaches in China are fit, she said, and athletes are served meat for breakfast, lunch and dinner. India's modest sports camps serve meat or fish once a day. The athletes wash their own clothes by hand. There are no dedicated



Girls spar at a boxing camp in Trivandrum, India. India was among the countries that pushed for the International Olympics Committee to make women's boxing an Olympic sport.

PHOTOS: NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE

physical therapists for boxers who are injured.

No matter. Boxing represents a new kind of freedom to the women who entered this steamy, old-fashioned ring on India's southern tip.

Hema Yogesh, 16, a spice farmer's daughter, ran away from home to join her first boxing camp. Her father was furious at first. But soon, she brought home her first gold medal from a state competition. Her schoolmates showered her with garlands and cheers. Her father, she said, burst out in tears. She did too. He now wants her to compete internationally.

Boxing, Hema said, had taught her "courage."

It also fueled ambition. Like most of the girls at this camp, Hema sees boxing as a ticket to a middle-class life. The Indian government rewards athletes with coveted government employment, usually with the police or with the railways. No one in Hema's family has ever had a government job.

What would life be like without boxing, Hema was asked. She would have had to stay at home, she said, and look after the family's two cows. She made a face.

For other women, boxing brings less tangible rewards: the confidence to go out on the streets without fear, for instance. Or as a boxer named Usha Nagisetty put it, a chance to be somebody.

"Before boxing, I had nothing," said Nagisetty, 24, who came to train this summer at another camp, in the central Indian city of Bhopal. "Who is Usha? No one knew. I was fat. I was average in studies. I didn't think life had anything to offer me."

Kom is today among her country's most prized athletes. She has a job for life in the police department, a government-built bungalow and a host of lucrative honors, including the nation's highest prize in sports, the Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna, which she will be awarded this week, along with prize money of nearly US\$15,000.

To get there, she had to fight several personal bouts.

At 17, she left home to join a government-run sports training center in Imphal, the capital of her home state, Manipur, and begged the boxing coach to let her enter the ring.

"She was so small, I told her no," the coach, L. Ibomcha Singh, said.

Tears rolled down her face. The coach relented.

Kom kept boxing a secret from her family — until she won a state championship in 2000, and everyone, including her parents, discovered what she had been up to. Her father goaded her to give it up. Boxing is too dangerous, he told her. Members of her clan disapproved. The boys in her hometown ridiculed her. She held out.

"One day, I will show you who I am," she recalled thinking. One medal came after another, then marriage, then more pressure to give up fighting.

"My father told me, 'OK, you leave it now. You're married,'" she said. She resisted that too. Her husband, K. Onkhler, a former soccer player, stood by her.

Today, the two of them together run a makeshift sports academy out of their home, in part as a way to keep local children out of trouble. Manipur, nestled in the hills bordering Myanmar, is known for its network of drug runners and armed insurgents; children are drawn into both.

Kom's greatest test came after the birth of her twin boys, in August 2007. For more than 18 months, she stayed out of the ring. Returning was tough on body and soul. Her back hurt. Her reflexes had slowed. It was hard to wean the boys off her breasts, harder still to leave them at home and go off to camp for a month at a time. She lost her first match, in September of last year.

She did not give up. She trained harder than ever before. Two months later, she was back in the ring for the women's world championships in Ningbo City. She won her record fourth gold medal.

Fighting in the 2012 Olympics is her latest crucible. Weighing barely 46kg, Kom has fought in the pinweight category. To compete in the Olympics, she must be at least 48kg, the lowest of three weight slots established for women.

"I will pray to God to keep my body fit," she said. "Because if my body is fit, I can do anything."



From left, scenes from a boxing camp in Trivandrum, India: Sawa, 18, from Manipur, leads a training session; girls pay homage to the ring before practice; Varsha Padmalayam, 16, center, listens to a coach's instructions.

PHOTOS: NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE

TECHNOLOGY

Removing stubborn applications

BY JAY DOUGHERTY
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Microsoft Windows Vista software sits on display inside a store in New York.

PHOTO: BLOOMBERG

In Windows, you're supposed to be able to uninstall applications with ease, right? Well, not exactly. While the venerable uninstallation utility built into Windows works most of the time in getting programs off of your computer, uninstallations rarely succeed in removing every trace of an application. And sometimes an uninstallation can fail in mid-stream, leaving you with no obvious way to remove the program. How can you deal with such dilemmas? Read on for some answers.

Q: I was installing a big office suite onto my new computer, and for some reason the installation failed. Now I'm left with a partial installation and no way to uninstall the files that were copied to my PC. How can I remove these files?

A: This problem is much more common than it should be, and by default Windows comes with no way to remove a partial installation. The good news is that Microsoft makes available for free a Windows Installer Cleanup Utility (support.microsoft.com/kb/290301) that may help. The Cleanup Utility will not actually remove any application files — including those from botched installations. But it will remove any installation files that were copied to your computer. Removing installation files will often allow you to re-start the program's installer and proceed forward with a successful installation. Once the program is installed successfully, you should be able to use the standard Add/Remove option in the Control Panel to uninstall the program, if that's what you wish to do.

Since problems with installations are fairly common — and seem to occur always when we have the least amount of time to deal with them — it makes sense to create a restore point in Windows before installing any application. That way, if the installation should fail, you could simply restore your computer using System Restore to the point it was at before the installation occurred. That's the cleanest way to remove a failed installation.

Q: I recently upgraded from Adobe Photoshop CS3 to CS4. Prior to attempting to install CS4, I tried to uninstall CS3, but the removal failed. Now I'm left with a crippled CS3 installation, and I'm unable to completely remove the product or re-install it. Can you help?

A: Stories like yours are, unfortunately, not uncommon around the Internet. Adobe has no doubt heard about frustrations like yours, and the company has released two downloadable products that may offer some help.

The Adobe CS3Clean Script (www.adobe.com/support/contact/cs3clean.html) will scour your system for any CS3 products and offer to remove all or part of them. To use the product, simply download it into a folder of your choice, and then double-click the CS3Clean.exe file. Follow the prompts, and by the end of the process, CS3 products should be removed from your computer. Note that you may need to run the utility more than once to completely remove all traces of CS3 products from your hard drive and your Windows registry.

Likewise, there's a CS4 Clean Script (kb2.adobe.com/cps/406/kb406241.html) for those who have the latest Adobe CS4 products installed and need to remove those.

Note that these scripts can be used even if uninstallation of the products was successful using the conventional Add/Remove Programs section of the Control Panel. The scripts will remove registry entries and folders left behind by the standard uninstallation.

Before running either of these tools, however, be sure to download and install the Windows Installer Cleanup Utility (support.microsoft.com/kb/290301). Once the products are removed, you should reboot your computer and re-try the installation of the newer versions.

Q: I tried to remove Symantec's Norton 2009 from my computer, and while the uninstallation seemed to work, there are remnants of the program still on my computer. How can I get rid of everything related to Symantec?

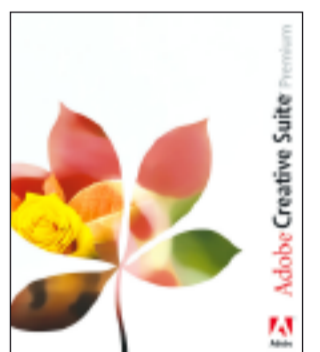
A: Symantec, like Adobe, has no doubt heard complaints like yours before, and it too has released separate, downloadable Removal Tools for a number of its products (service1.symantec.com/Support/tsgeninfo.nsf/docid/2005033108162039). Just select the removal tool for the product you own, run it, and afterwards you should be left with a clean system. The removal tool may restart your PC several times before the removal is complete.

Q: I allowed Windows to install a suggested update to my computer. After the installation, my Microsoft Word started stalling and freezing. How can I remove the update? I can't find it in the Uninstall area of Control Panel.

A: Every required and recommended update is logged by Windows. But you're right: It's just not easy to find out how to uninstall those updates.

To do so, open the Windows Control Panel and go to Add/Remove Program (XP) or Programs and Features (Vista). From the XP Add/Remove Programs window, select the check box labeled "Show updates." In Vista, click the View Installed Updates link. In both cases, you will then see the updates that have been applied both to Windows and to various other applications on your system. You can sort the list by the date installed to see the most recently installed items first.

From that point, uninstalling an update is a simple affair. Just select the update and then click Remove, as usual.



Adobe has released two downloads that help customers uninstall its software.

PHOTO: BLOOMBERG