

Comprehension:

Milkha Singh, also known as The Flying Sikh, was an Indian track and field sprinter who was introduced to the sport while serving in the Indian Army. He is the only athlete to win gold in 400 metres at the Asian Games as well as the Commonwealth Games. He also won gold medals in the 1958 and 1962 Asian Games. He represented India in the 1956 Summer Olympics in Melbourne, the 1960 Summer Olympics in Rome and the 1964 Summer Olympics in Tokyo. He was awarded the Padma Shri, India's fourth-highest civilian honour, in recognition of his sporting achievements

The race for which Singh is best remembered is his fourth-place finish in the 400 metres final at the 1960 Olympic Games. He led the race till the 200 m mark before easing off, allowing others to pass him. Singh's fourth-place time of 45.73 seconds was the Indian national record for almost 40 years.

From beginnings that saw him orphaned and displaced during the partition of India, Singh became a sporting icon in the country. In 2008, journalist Rohit Baijnath described Singh as "the finest athlete India has ever produced".

He was disappointed with his debut performance at the 1956 Melbourne Olympics. "I returned to India, chastened by my poor performance in Melbourne. I had been so excited by the prospects of being part of the Indian Olympics team, but, hadn't realized how strong and professional the competition would be. My success in India had filled me with a false sense of pride and it was only when I was on the track that I saw how inconsequential my talents were when pitted against superbly fit and seasoned athletes. It was then that I understood what competition actually meant, and that if I wanted to succeed on the international arena, I must

be prepared to test my mettle against the best athletes in the world.”

Then he decided to make sprinting the sole focus of his life. “Running had thus become my God, my religion and my beloved”. My life during those two years was governed by strict rules and regulations and a self-imposed penance. Every morning I would rise at the crack of dawn, get into my sports kit and dash off to the track, where I would run two or three miles cross-country in the company of my coach.”

On how he pushed himself through the tough days of vigorous training. “I practiced so strenuously that often I was drained of all energy, and there were times when I would increase my speed to such an extent that after my rounds, I would vomit blood or drop-down down unconscious through sheer exercise. My doctors and coaches warned me, asked me to slow down to maintain my health and equilibrium but my determination was too strong to give up. My only focus was to become the best athlete in the world. But then images of a packed stadium filled with cheering spectators, wildly applauding me as I crossed the finishing line, would flash across my mind and I would start again, encouraged by visions of victory.”

Based on your understanding of the passage, answer these five questions (1×5=5)

- (i) What is Milkha Singh known as? What realization did Milkha Singh have when he was on the track during the Melbourne Olympics?
- (ii) List any two of Milkha Singh’s achievements.
- (iii) What strict rules and regulations did Milkha Singh follow?
- (iv) State two consequences of his hard and strenuous practice.
- (v) What motivated Milkha Singh to become the best athlete in the world?