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Role of sports in realizing the vision of Viksit Bharat

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Abstract

Viksit Bharat, which translates to "Developed India", is a vision and national mission that aspires to transform India into a fully developed nation by the year 2047, marking 100 years of the country's independence. Sports play a vital role in realizing the vision of Viksit Bharat by contributing to the holistic development of individuals and society. As India aims to become a globally recognized economic and cultural power, sports act as a catalyst in building a healthier, more disciplined, and empowered population. Participation in sports fosters national unity, instills values of teamwork, perseverance, and fair play, and promotes social inclusion across caste, class, and gender lines. Prime Minister Narendra Modi perceives sports as a cornerstone in achieving the vision of Viksit Bharat, seamlessly intertwining physical fitness with national development. This paper explores the role of sports in driving economic growth, promoting health and wellness, social development, national development, and international recognition, while also highlighting government initiatives such as Khelo India, Fit India Movement and others.

Keywords: Viksit Bharat, national development, health and wellness, Fit India, Khelo India

Introduction

India stands at a crucial point in its progress, striving to achieve the goal of becoming a Viksit Bharat a fully developed nation by 2047, marking 100 years of independence. This ambitious vision encompasses a multidimensional transformation that includes economic prosperity, social equity, robust infrastructure, technological innovation, and global leadership. Among the various sectors contributing to this goal, sports have emerged as a powerful and strategic driver of national development. Sports are now recognized for their role in enhancing public health and well-being, fostering discipline, promoting social cohesion, creating economic opportunities, and strengthening global recognition. Honourable Prime Minister Narendra Modi has consistently emphasized the significance of integrating sports into the national fabric to shape a healthier, stronger, and more empowered youth population. The Government of India, acknowledging this transformative potential, has introduced several strategic initiatives and policy interventions. Collectively, these efforts reflect a major change where sports are viewed not merely as a domain of physical excellence, but as a strategic tool for national advancement.

Sports as a driver of national development

Economic contribution

According to the Deloitte–Google report, India's sports market is projected to grow to \$130 billion by 2030, positioning the sector as a key driver of national economic growth. This expansion is expected to generate approximately 10.5 million jobs. One of the key contributors to this growth is the sports goods and apparel segment, which is forecast to reach \$58 billion by 2030. This surge is driven by a rapidly growing, fitness-conscious population and increasing consumer spending on sports merchandise.

The esports sector is also gaining momentum, with market projections reaching \$200 million by 2030. Growth in this domain is largely attributed to the rise in fan engagement through digital platforms. The widespread availability of high-speed internet and smartphones has transformed how sports content is consumed in India. Streaming services such as Jio Cinema,

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Disney+ Hotstar, and Sony Liv provide high-definition access to sports events, significantly enhancing the fan experience. AI-driven technologies, along with the growth of social media and platforms like YouTube, are further increasing sports accessibility and engagement.

Commercial opportunities within the sports ecosystem are rapidly expanding. Revenues come from sponsorships, broadcasting rights, merchandising, esports, and live sporting events. For example, the Indian Premier League (IPL) alone generates an estimated \$1.2 billion annually from media and sponsorship deals. Interestingly, about 90% of sports fans in India follow more than one sport, which broadens the investment landscape beyond games like cricket.

In addition, the rise in sporting activities hosted in India at the national and international level is expected to generate significant economic benefits across several allied sectors such as sports tourism. A robust sports equipment manufacturing ecosystem is also essential for economic development. Strengthening domestic production will not only reduce reliance on imports but also create jobs, enhance export potential, and promote Atmanirbhar Bharat (self-reliant India) in the sports sector. Moreover, the growth of sports in India is fostering a vibrant landscape for start-ups and entrepreneurship. Investment in sporting infrastructure, including stadiums, training academies, and community sports centres, stimulates economic activity through operations and long-term usage.

Promoting public health and wellness

Sports play a pivotal role in promoting both physical and mental well-being, particularly in a country like India where lifestyle diseases are on the rise. On World Health Day (7 April 2025), Prime Minister Narendra Modi issued a powerful call urging Indians to combat the rapidly rising obesity epidemic by adopting healthier lifestyles. He emphasized that physical fitness is essential for achieving a Viksit Bharat (a developed India). He highlighted the alarming projection that by 2050, over 44 crore Indians could be affected by obesity, warning that such a silent crisis threatens public health and national progress. Framing health as both “ultimate wealth and fortune,” he reiterated that individual choices such as reducing cooking oil consumption by 10% have far-reaching implications, describing this as a meaningful personal action with collective benefit.

Prime Minister further urged Indians to incorporate regular physical activity into daily life, stressing that maintaining fitness is not merely a personal commitment but a social responsibility that contributes to the nation’s health and productivity. He warned of obesity’s links to severe conditions like heart disease, diabetes, and hypertension, while drawing attention to alarming trends such as the rise in childhood obesity and the doubling of overall obesity prevalence in recent years, stressing that 1 in 8 Indians is already obese.

Regular participation in physical activities such as sports can significantly reduce the risk of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) like diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular ailments, and hypertension. These conditions currently account for an economic burden of approximately ₹6 trillion annually due to healthcare costs and productivity losses. Moreover, in the context of rapid urbanization and a digitally driven sedentary lifestyle, sports offer an essential outlet for maintaining mental health. Engaging in sports reduces stress hormones, leading to improved mood and reduced symptoms of depression and anxiety. Thus, integrating sports into daily life

is not only vital for personal health but also for easing the country’s public health burden and enhancing the quality of life in modern society, thus laying the foundation for Viksit Bharat.

Social development

In terms of social inclusion, sports serve as a powerful equalizer by creating opportunities for marginalized communities, including women, persons with disabilities, indigenous groups, and economically disadvantaged individuals, to participate, compete, gain recognition and visibility, and build self-esteem. This contributes meaningfully to the promotion of equity, dignity, and societal cohesion. Furthermore, the integration of sports within the educational framework significantly enhances education and life skills, instilling values such as discipline, teamwork, leadership, and resilience attributes essential for holistic development, which are vital for youth empowerment and workforce readiness. Furthermore, sports facilitate community engagement by strengthening local identity, encouraging collective participation, and fostering social capital through grassroots initiatives and community-based sporting events many of which are actively supported under flagship schemes like Khelo India and Fit India. Organized sports also foster social interaction, teamwork, and a sense of belonging, which are especially important in addressing issues of urban isolation and disconnection. Community sports hubs strengthen intergenerational bonds and encourage youth to channel energy positively, thereby reducing tendencies toward anti-social behaviour. Additionally, sports-based community development initiatives have been shown to increase volunteerism and promote civic responsibility at the grassroots level. Collectively, these dimensions position sports as a strategic vehicle for inclusive growth and nation-building, aligning closely with the developmental objectives underpinning the vision of Viksit Bharat.

National unity and identity

Sports have always played an important role in bringing people together and creating a sense of national unity. They help people forget differences like caste, religion, language, or region, and join hands to support their teams. Big sporting events create moments of joy and celebration that everyone can share, thus strengthening the bonds of national pride and unity. In a diverse country like India, cricket has become a game that unites people from all parts of the nation. When the Indian team wins, the whole country celebrates together. Players represent the entire nation, not just their own city or state, which helps build a strong feeling of togetherness and national pride.

Sports are not just a form of entertainment they also help shape and express a country’s national identity. Events like parades and large gatherings during matches bring people together and create a strong sense of pride in the nation. Famous athletes like Sachin Tendulkar and Virat Kohli have become symbols of national pride, and their achievements make people feel more connected to their country. As watching and talking about sports becomes a part of daily life, sports have become an important way for people to see and understand their national identity. In this way, sports reflect a country’s culture and values.

Winning in international sports events helps countries show their strength, discipline, and talent to the world. These victories improve a country's image and give it more respect globally. Even countries that are not very rich or powerful can

gain attention and pride through success in sports. When athletes win under their national flag, it becomes a proud moment for all citizens and increases the nation's importance and reputation on the world stage.

Winning in sports lifts the spirit of the entire nation. It gives countries a chance to show their strength, skill, and unity. Such victories have a strong emotional effect on people and often become proud moments in a nation's history. The athletes who bring these victories are seen as heroes. These achievements bring citizens closer together and increase their pride in the country. By building unity, promoting national pride, and projecting India's strength globally, sports directly support the emotional, social, and diplomatic foundations of Viksit Bharat. Investing in sports is not just about winning medals it's about creating a united, confident, and forward-looking nation.

Government initiatives and policy framework

The Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports has introduced various schemes to foster youth empowerment, ignite widespread sports participation, and elevate India's stature on the global sporting stage. Initiatives like Fit India Movement, Khelo India, and Mera Yuva Bharat are not just promoting fitness and talent but are also aligning the nation's physical and mental strength with its developmental goals.

Khelo India-Launched in 2016-17, the Khelo India Scheme has witnessed remarkable financial expansion, reflecting the government's unwavering commitment to fostering mass participation and nurturing sporting excellence throughout the nation.

The Khelo India initiative primarily aims to strengthen the sporting culture in the country by ensuring the active participation of youth through annual sports competitions. It focuses on identifying promising athletes at an early stage and providing them with systematic training and guidance via established sports academies. A key component of the program is the development of robust sports infrastructure at the block, district, and state levels.

To achieve its objectives effectively, the Khelo India programme has been strategically divided into 12 focused verticals. These include the development of play fields and the creation or enhancement of sports infrastructure, promoting sports as a tool for peace and development, and establishing Khelo India Centres at the state level. The initiative also encompasses organizing annual sports competitions, identifying and nurturing talent, and encouraging greater participation of women in sports. Additionally, it supports national, regional, and state-level sports academies, promotes inclusivity by engaging persons with disabilities, and revives rural, indigenous, and tribal games. The programme further emphasizes improving the physical fitness of schoolchildren and building a strong base of community-level coaches.

Contribution towards Viksit Bharat

The 12 verticals of Khelo India serve as strategic pillars driving India toward the vision of Viksit Bharat by promoting sports culture across the nation and ensuring structured progress. From grassroots infrastructure to elite athlete development, these verticals ensure inclusive participation, talent nurturing, and community engagement. The increasing financial allocations over the years for the Khelo India Programme reflect the government's commitment to positioning sports as a catalyst for national development.

KIRTI (Khelo India Rising Talent Identification)-Phase 1 was launched on March 12, 2024, by Union Sports Minister Anurag Thakur in Chandigarh, KIRTI (Khelo India Rising Talent Identification) is India's first nationwide, tech-driven grassroots talent hunt targeting schoolchildren aged 9 to 18. Its key objectives are twofold: to discover and nurture sporting talent in every corner of the country, and to use sport as a healthy alternative to drug misuse and screen addictions.

Phase 2 of the KIRTI (Khelo India Rising Talent Identification) initiative was launched on 19 July 2024 in New Delhi by Dr. Mansukh Mandaviya, the Union Minister for Youth Affairs & Sports. This phase introduces advanced ICT technologies and aligns with global best practices to create an inclusive and athlete-focused system for identifying sporting talent. Targeting the financial year 2024–25, the programme aims to carry out 20 lakh talent assessments across the country, with a district-level approach and active participation from all states. The ultimate goal is to develop a strong talent pipeline capable of achieving success at prestigious international competitions like the Olympic Games.

Contribution towards Viksit Bharat

The Khelo India Rising Talent Identification (KIRTI) programme significantly supports the vision of Viksit Bharat. By utilizing advanced ICT tools and global best practices, KIRTI ensures that every child, regardless of socio-economic background or region, has equal access to sports opportunities, thereby promoting inclusivity and equity key pillars of a developed nation. The programme's focus on athlete-centered development fosters excellence among youth, aligning with Viksit Bharat's goal of building a skilled, confident, and globally competitive population. Additionally, by aiming for global sporting achievements like Olympic medals, it elevates India's international stature and inspires national pride. KIRTI also creates employment opportunities in sports sciences, coaching, and sports administration, supporting economic growth and contributing to the development of a robust sports ecosystem essential for a developed and self-reliant India.

Fit India movement

Launched on 29th August 2019 to mark National Sports Day, the Fit India Movement was introduced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to motivate people to embrace active and healthier lifestyles. The movement emphasizes preventive healthcare by promoting regular physical activity, balanced nutrition, and mental well-being across all age groups.

The campaign aims to make fitness an essential part of daily life by promoting it as easy, fun, and free. Its key objectives include spreading awareness about the importance of fitness and encouraging participation in physical activities through focused campaigns. The movement also emphasizes the promotion of indigenous sports and strives to extend the message of fitness to every school, college, university, panchayat, and village across the country. Additionally, it seeks to create a nationwide platform where citizens can share fitness-related information, inspire others with personal fitness stories, and collectively work towards building a healthier and more active India.

Best practices under the initiative include the implementation of Fit India School Certification, workplace fitness engagement, digital challenges, fitness pledges, and the celebration of Fit India Week and Sundays on Cycle. The motto "Fitness Ka Dose, Adha Ghanta Roz" encapsulates the

core message of the Fit India Movement, encouraging individuals to dedicate at least 30-60 minutes daily to physical activity for a healthier lifestyle. It emphasizes that even a small, consistent effort towards fitness can lead to significant long-term health benefits.

Contribution towards Viksit Bharat

The Fit India Movement significantly contributes toward the vision of Viksit Bharat by fostering a culture of health and wellness, which is foundational to a progressive and productive nation. A physically fit population leads to enhanced productivity, reduced healthcare costs, and improved mental well-being key elements for sustainable national development. By integrating fitness into daily routines, the movement cultivates self-discipline and a proactive lifestyle among citizens. It also promotes inclusivity by reaching out to schools, colleges/universities, rural areas, and workplaces, ensuring that fitness becomes a national priority. Fit India lays the groundwork for a strong, capable, and empowered population, which is vital for achieving the vision of Viksit Bharat.

Mera Yuva Bharat (MY Bharat)

It was launched by the Honourable Prime Minister on October 31, 2023, on National Unity Day. It is a dynamic government initiative created to harness the potential of India's youth and channel their energy towards nation-building. It is a robust ecosystem that supports young individuals aged 15–29 and beneficiaries in the age group of 10-19 (programme for adolescents). It is a technology-driven platform under the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports that aims to empower young people by connecting them with various developmental and community engagement opportunities. The unique features of My Bharat include digital footprint, learning by doing, mentorship and community, personalized profiles, and community engagement. The initiative envisions making youth active stakeholders in India's progress by involving them in volunteering, skill development, leadership programs, and sports-related activities. It aims to provide them with the tools, training, and opportunities needed to contribute meaningfully to society and the economy.

Contribution towards Viksit Bharat

The establishment of Mera Yuva Bharat (MY Bharat) is expected to significantly transform youth engagement in India by fostering leadership development through experiential learning and community participation. It will empower the youth to become social innovators and proactive leaders, shifting their role from passive recipients to active drivers of national development. MY Bharat has a strong link to sports as it encourages youth participation in physical activities, grassroots sports programs, and fitness movements like Fit India. It supports sports-related volunteering, promotes leadership through sports events, and aligns with the vision of a healthy, active generation. The outcomes of Mera Yuva Bharat (MY Bharat) significantly contribute to the realization of Viksit Bharat.

Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS)

The Target Olympic Podium Scheme is a flagship program introduced in 2014 by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Government of India, and implemented through the Sports Authority of India (SAI). The main objective of the scheme is to identify, support, and nurture talented athletes who have the potential to win medals at the Olympic Games

and other prestigious international competitions. It aims to provide selected athletes with customized training at world-class facilities, access to the best coaches, continuous sports science support, equipment, exposure to international competitions, and a monthly stipend of Rs 50,000 in Core and Rs 25,000 in development. The scheme focuses on both senior and junior athletes (TOPS Core and TOPS Development groups respectively) to ensure a sustained pipeline of medal contenders. By bridging the gap between talent and performance, TOPS plays a crucial role in elevating India's sporting excellence on the global stage. The scheme also addresses sudden and unforeseen requirements of athletes and maintains regular communication with them to understand their needs and perspectives. To ensure smooth execution of these functions, implementation partner agencies are engaged, and thorough documentation and contractual obligations of beneficiaries are maintained throughout the process. These efforts collectively aim to build a strong ecosystem that enables Indian athletes to achieve podium finishes at the highest levels of competition.

Contribution towards Viksit Bharat

The Target Olympic Podium Scheme is playing a pivotal role in building a Viksit Bharat by identifying, nurturing, and supporting India's most talented athletes to excel at the global level. By providing world-class training, financial assistance, and access to expert coaching and international exposure, TOPS empowers athletes like P.V. Sindhu, Neeraj Chopra, Avinash Sable, Murali Sreeshankar, Parul Chaudhary, Lakshya Sen, Lovlina Borgohain, Nikhat Zareen, Manu Bhaker, Sandeep Singh, Vinesh Phogat, and the likes to compete with the world's best. Through its focused efforts, TOPS is not only enhancing India's sporting performance but also inspiring youth, strengthening national pride, and contributing significantly to the vision of a self-reliant and globally respected Viksit Bharat.

National Centre of Sports Sciences and Research

This initiative by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Government of India, is designed to promote advanced research, education, and innovation in sports science. Its objective is to apply scientific principles to enhance performance and athlete longevity, to disseminate sports-science knowledge, to test and certify food supplements and indigenous/traditional medicines, to facilitate injury management and rehabilitation, and to cultivate domestic sports science and medicine faculty, reducing reliance on foreign experts.

The scheme has two major components: one to establish the NCSSR and the other to create supportive departments in six universities (in sports sciences) and six medical colleges/institutes (in sports medicine) across India. Universities offer advanced courses, including M.Sc. programs in Sports Science, Sports Nutrition, Sports Biomechanics, Exercise Physiology, Sports Psychology, Sports Physiotherapy, and a certificate in Sports Anthropometry. Medical Colleges provide MD and Diploma programs in Sports Medicine.

Contribution towards Viksit Bharat

By enhancing athlete support through advanced scientific testing, performance analytics, injury prevention and rehabilitation, and nutritional research, NCSSR ensures that Indian athletes receive world-class, evidence-based care. It also expands the nation's talent pool by producing

domestically trained experts in sports science and medicine, reducing dependence on foreign professionals. TOPS and NCSSR, together, are laying the groundwork for a progressive, self-sustaining, and globally competitive sporting nation, truly embodying the spirit of a Viksit Bharat.

Khelo Bharat Niti 2025

Khelo Bharat Niti – 2025 is a national sports policy developed by the Government of India, designed to support the vision of Viksit Bharat a developed, self-reliant, and inclusive India. The vision of Khelo Bharat Niti – 2025 is rooted in the idea of "Sports for Nation Building – Harnessing the Power of Sports for the Nation's Holistic Development." This policy envisions sports not merely as a competitive pursuit but as a transformative force that contributes to the overall development of the country. It seeks to build a strong and inclusive sporting culture by developing a robust ecosystem that extends from the grassroots to the elite level. The policy is structured to achieve excellence on the global stage, drive economic progress through sports-centric industries, and promote social development and entrepreneurship by encouraging participation across all sections of society. Furthermore, it aims to turn sports into a mass movement that enhances national health, well-being, and community engagement.

Intending to utilize sports as a catalyst for nation-building and overall development, the Khelo Bharat Niti–2025 lays out a well-rounded framework of objectives. The policy aims to establish inclusive and structured sports programs for all groups, ranging from grassroots to elite levels, thereby creating a seamless pathway for talent progression. A robust competitive framework will be developed through regular sports competitions and leagues at local, state, and national levels. Emphasizing the importance of physical literacy, the policy seeks to instill a lifelong culture of physical activity and sports participation. A well-structured talent identification and development system will be implemented to nurture future champions. Additionally, the policy ensures equitable access to quality sports infrastructure across urban and rural regions and provides athlete-centric support systems that include training, nutrition, mental wellness, and career guidance.

Sports science, medicine, and innovation are combined to boost athletic performance and support holistic well-being. A strong emphasis is placed on involving marginalized communities and promoting gender equity. The strategy aims to make sports a good and inspiring career choice for young people by providing skill training and clear growth opportunities. Mass participation will be encouraged to build a healthier society, while systems will be established to reward and honour both current and retired athletes. Finally, the policy calls for educational institutions to act as feeder systems, embedding sports culture within academic frameworks and contributing to a sport-focused national identity.

The Khelo Bharat Niti 2025 is centered on five main pillars designed to reshape and strengthen the sports ecosystem in India and support the broader vision of a Viksit Bharat. The first pillar, Nation's Excellence on the Global Stage, focuses on improving sports infrastructure, effective talent identification, and increasing India's competitiveness in elite sports on the international level. The second pillar, Sports for Economic Development, aims to capitalize on the growing sports sector to support industries like tourism, manufacturing, and sports technology, thereby creating jobs

and increasing national income. The third pillar, Sports for Social Development, emphasizes sports' role in promoting inclusion, education, gender equality, and public health, which helps foster unity and social harmony. The fourth pillar, Sports – A People's Movement, aims to make sports and physical activity a vital part of daily life by encouraging widespread participation and community involvement. Finally, the policy is in line with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, incorporating sports into the formal education system to promote overall development, build life skills, and ensure equal emphasis on academics and sports.

Conclusion

Sports have evolved into a strategic tool for national development. From driving economic growth through job creation, sports tourism, and manufacturing, to promoting public health and well-being by promoting physical activity and lowering the impact of lifestyle-related illnesses. Moreover, sports foster social development by promoting inclusion, gender equality, youth empowerment, and national integration values that are essential for a just and cohesive society.

Recognizing these multifaceted benefits, the Government of India has launched several forward-looking initiatives such as Khelo India, TOPS, and the Khelo India Niti 2025, which aim to build robust sports infrastructure, identify and nurture talent, and create a sporting ecosystem accessible to all. These policies not only aim to raise India's sporting standards but also align directly with the vision of Viksit Bharat, a vision of a developed, self-reliant, and inclusive India.

As the country advances towards becoming a global leader, integrating sports into national development strategies will be critical. A physically fit, mentally strong, and socially united population fostered through sports will be a key pillar of Viksit Bharat, ensuring sustainable progress and a higher quality of life for all citizens.

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