International Journal of Yoga, Physiotherapy and Physical Education
www.sportsjournal.in
ISSN: 2456-5067
Received: 06-03-2025, Accepted: 07-04-2025, Published: 22-04-2025
Volume 10, Issue 2, 2025, Page No. 21-23

Sports in India as a catalyst for development: A comprehensive review

Himani Bhardwaj[1], Saamdu Chetri[2]
[1] Research Scholar, Department of Happiness, Shoolini University of Biomedical Sciences, Solan, Himachal Pradesh, India
[2] Director and Professor, Department of Happiness, Shoolini University of Biomedical Sciences, Solan, Himachal Pradesh, India
Corresponding Author: Himani Bardwaj

Abstract
This paper examines the multifaceted role of sports in society with a particular focus on India's sporting landscape. It explores how sports contribute to physical health, mental wellbeing, social bonding, and character development while tracing India's rich sporting heritage from ancient indigenous games to modern competitive sports. The study analyzes the evolution of sports education in India through government initiatives like Khelo India, private academies and integrated sports-academic institutions that aim to nurture athletic talent without compromising educational outcomes. Despite infrastructure limitations and funding challenges, these sports schools have successfully produced international athletes and elevated national sporting standards. As India seeks to strengthen its global sporting presence, this paper highlights the critical role these institutions play in developing the next generation of athletes while preserving the country's diverse sporting traditions.

Keywords: Sports, sports school, development, infrastructure

Introduction

Sports have been an essential component of human culture for thousands of years. Sports are defined as the physical activities that are guided by a system of rules or conventions (Guttmann, 2004) [7] and are frequently played competitively and have always been important for maintaining physical health, providing pleasure, fostering social bonds, and expressing one's culture. Sports have its roots in prehistoric periods, when physical pursuits like hunting and combat were necessary for existence. These pastimes transformed into more organized forms of competition and leisure as civilizations advanced. Many sports have been codified by ancient societies like Greece and Rome (Young, 2004). Majorly, sports encompass a vast array of activities, from individual pursuits to team competitions, amateur participation to professional leagues and categorized as team sports (hockey football, basketball, cricket), individual sports (tennis, golf, swimming), combat sports (boxing, wrestling, martial arts), extreme sports (skateboarding, snowboarding, surfing), motor sports (Formula 1 racing, MotoGP) and lastly mind sports (chess, poker).

Importance of sports in society

Sports play a multifaceted role in modern society, contributing to various aspects of human life. They foster social cohesion, promote mental health, and contribute to economic growth. According to Coalter (2007) [2], sports participation can build social capital and community identity. Research by Eime *et al*. (2013) [5] demonstrates that engagement in sports improves psychological and social health outcomes. In education, sports programs have been linked to improved academic performance and reduced dropout rates (Lumpkin & Favor, 2012) [10]. Sports also serve as a powerful tool for social inclusion and conflict resolution, particularly in divided societies **(**Schulenkorf *et al*., 2016) [17].

1. Physical Health

Sports are essential for promoting physical health since they improve muscular strength, cardiovascular fitness, and overall body composition. Engaging in sports on a regular basis helps lower the chance of developing chronic illnesses like obesity, type II diabetes, cardiovascular disease and many more. Participating in sports can also enhance bone density, balance, and coordination—all of which are critical for maintaining long-term health and preventing injuries. According to the World Health Organization (2023), regular physical activity, including sports, can reduce the risk of premature death by 20-30%. Another study by Warburton, Nicole & Bredin (2006) [22] found that sports participation is associated with a reduced risk of over 25 chronic conditions. Furthermore, Eime *et al*. (2013) [5] reported that team sports, in particular, offer additional health benefits due to their social nature and higher levels of enjoyment, leading to sustained participation.

2. Mental health

Sports participation has been linked to improved mental health outcomes, including reduced symptoms of depression and anxiety, enhanced self-esteem, and better cognitive function, boost self-esteem, and enhance cognitive function, Eime *et al*. (2013) [5]. Sports also provide opportunities for social interaction and support, which are crucial for mental well-being. In a study by Taliaferro (2008) [21], it was found that for adolescents and young adults, involvement in sports has been associated with lower rates of suicidal ideation and improved academic performance, both of which are linked to better mental health outcomes.

3. Social bonding

Sports activities, whether participatory or spectator-based, create opportunities for social interaction and bonding. They bring people together, fostering a sense of community and shared identity. Team sports, in particular, promote cooperation, trust, and mutual support among participants,

(Coalter, 2007) [2]. Even individual sports often involve training partners or competition communities. Sports events, from local matches to international tournaments, create shared experiences that can unite diverse groups of people. Nicholson *et al*. (2013) [14] found that sports clubs serve as important social hubs in communities, facilitating connections between individuals from different backgrounds. Putnam (2000) [15] highlighted how sports involvement can build trust and reciprocity among community members.

4. Character development

Sports play a significant role in character building by fostering qualities such as discipline, teamwork, leadership, and resilience. Participation in sports helps develop perseverance and goal-setting skills as athletes work to improve their performance (Gould & Carson, 2008) [6]. Team sports, in particular, promote cooperation, communication, and social skills (Côté, 2002) [3]. Sports also teach individuals how to handle both victory and defeat gracefully, contributing to emotional maturity and sportsmanship (Shields & Bredemeier, 2007) [18]. Moreover, the challenges faced in sports often translate to life skills, helping individuals develop problem-solving abilities and mental toughness (Danish, Forniers & Wallace 2004) [4].

Sports in India

Sports in India represent a vibrant tapestry of ancient traditions and modern aspirations, reflecting the country's rich cultural heritage and its journey through historical changes. From indigenous games that date back millennia to globally popular sports introduced during the colonial era, India's sporting culture offers a unique blend of the old and the new. India has a rich and diverse sporting culture, with cricket being the most popular sport. However, the country has been making strides in various other sports as well. Many traditional Indian sports have survived the test of time and continue to be practiced today such as Kabaddi, Kho Kho and Mallakhamb. These traditional sports served multiple purposes beyond mere recreation. They were means of imparting cultural values, building community bonds, and even preparing warriors for battle in ancient times. In recent decades, India has seen a growing emphasis on sports as a means of national pride, international recognition, and socio-economic development (Singh, 2011). The government has implemented various initiatives to promote sports at both grassroots and elite levels. The National Sports Policy, first formulated in 1984 and revised in 2001, aims to integrate sports into the educational system, improve infrastructure, and enhance the country's performance in international competitions, (Government of India, 1984). One of the most significant recent initiatives is the Khelo India program, launched in 2018. This comprehensive scheme aims to revitalize the sports culture at the grassroots level by building a strong framework for all sports played in the country and establishing India as a great sporting nation. It focuses on developing young talent, creating a sports ecosystem, and promoting mass participation in sports. In recent years, India has been focusing on improving its performance in international sports competitions, including the Olympics**,** (GoI, 2021) which has led to increased investment in sports infrastructure and training facilities. Some of the popular sports that are being played at various level in India are Cricket, Hockey Football, Wrestling, Boxing, Athletics, Badminton, Tennis, Kabaddi. These sports have gained a lot of attention of the stakeholders after the focus of the authorities have shifted from cricket to other ones.

1. Sports schools in India

Sports schools in India represent a growing trend in the country's approach to sports education and athlete development. These institutions aim to provide a balanced environment where young athletes can pursue their sporting ambitions without compromising on academic education. The concept of sports schools in India can be traced back to the 1970s with the establishment of the Special Area Games Scheme by the Sports Authority of India (SAI). However, it's in the last two decades that sports schools have gained significant momentum, driven by both government initiatives and private sector involvement. These sports schools and academies play a crucial role in identifying and nurturing young talent, providing specialized training, and creating a pipeline of athletes for national and international competitions. It's important to note that while these institutions have made significant contributions to Indian sports, the landscape is continually evolving. New academies and training centers are being established, and existing ones are expanding their facilities and programs.

2. Government-run sports schools

Government-run sports schools in India play a crucial role in nurturing young athletic talent and promoting sports at the grassroots level. These institutions, such as the Sports Authority of India (SAI) training centers and various state-run academies, provide specialized training, education, and infrastructure to promising athletes Sports Authority of India, 2021). As per the report published by Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (2018), the scheme of Khelo India, launched in 2018, has further bolstered this system by identifying and supporting young talents through dedicated sports schools and academies. These schools offer a unique blend of academic education and sports training, allowing students to pursue their athletic dreams without compromising on their studies. Despite challenges such as limited resources and the need for more widespread implementation, government sports schools have produced several national and international level athletes (Majumdar, 2012) [11].

3. Private sports academies

Often sport-specific, these academies are run by former athletes, sports enthusiasts, or corporate entities like the Pullela Gopichand Badminton Academy and the Mahendra Singh Dhoni Cricket Academy. Chandra (2017) [1] postulated that these schools typically offer state-of-the-art facilities, professional coaching, and customized academic schedules to accommodate rigorous training regimens. While they have been credited with nurturing talent that might otherwise go unrecognized, critics argue that the high costs associated with these institutions can limit access to talented athletes from less privileged backgrounds (Kumar, 2019) [9].

4. Integrated sports-academic institutions

These schools aim to provide a holistic education by integrating rigorous academic curricula with high-quality sports training. Examples include the Sanskardham Sports

Academy in Gujarat and the Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences in Odisha. these schools often provide specialized support services such as nutritional guidance, sports psychology, and career counseling to help students navigate the challenges of balancing academics and athletics (Kristiansen & Houlihan, 2017) [8]. The success of integrated sports academic schools has been demonstrated in various countries, with graduates often excelling in both higher education and professional sports careers (Radtke & Coalter, 2007) [16].

5. Challenges and future

However, sports schools in India face several challenges. Infrastructure remains a significant issue, with many schools lacking state-of-the-art facilities and equipment. Funding is another major concern, particularly for government-run institutions. Moreover, the career prospects for athletes beyond their playing years are often uncertain, which can deter many talented individuals from pursuing sports seriously. Despite these challenges, sports schools have produced several successful athletes who have represented India at international levels. They have also contributed to raising the overall standard of sports in the country by providing structured training from a young age. The future of sports schools in India looks promising, with increasing government support and growing private sector interest. As India aims to improve its standing in the global sports arena, these institutions are likely to play a crucial role in nurturing the next generation of athletes. Sports and sports schools in India represent a complex and evolving landscape. They reflect the country's rich sporting heritage, its challenges in the modern sporting world, and its aspirations for the future.

Conclusion

Sports schools in India represent a vital component of the nation's sporting ecosystem, bridging traditional values and modern aspirations. Despite facing challenges in infrastructure and funding, these institutions have successfully nurtured athletic talent and contributed significantly to India's growing international sports presence. As government initiatives like Khelo India expand alongside private sector involvement, the future looks promising for sports education in India. These institutions not only develop athletic excellence but also instill values of discipline, teamwork, and perseverance in young athletes. The continued evolution of sports schools will be instrumental in realizing India's potential as a global sporting power while preserving its rich sporting heritage.

References

1. Chandra R. The role of private sports academies in India's sports development. Journal of Sports Sciences,2017:35(2):119–127.
2. Coalter F. A wider social role for sport: Who's keeping the score? London: Routledge, 2007.
3. Côté J. Coach and peer influence on children's development through sport. In: Silva JM, Stevens DE, editors. Psychological foundations of sport. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2002, 520–540.
4. Danish SJ, Forneris T, Wallace I. Sport-based life skills programming in the schools. Journal of Applied School Psychology,2004:21(2):41–62.
5. Eime RM, Young JA, Harvey JT, Charity MJ, Payne WR. A systematic review of the psychological and social benefits of participation in sport for children and adolescents: Informing development of a conceptual model of health through sport. International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity,2013:10(1):98.
6. Gould D, Carson S. Life skills development through sport: Current status and future directions. International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology,2008:1(1):58–78.
7. Guttmann A. From ritual to record: The nature of modern sports. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.
8. Kristiansen E, Houlihan B. Developing young athletes: The role of private sport schools in the Norwegian sport system. International Review for the Sociology of Sport,2017:52(4):447–469.
9. Kumar A. Accessibility and affordability of sports education in India. Economic and Political Weekly,2019:54(15):22–26.
10. Lumpkin A, Favor J. Comparing the academic performance of high school athletes and non-athletes in Kansas in 2008-2009. Journal of Sport Administration and Supervision,2012:4(1):41–62.
11. Majumdar B. Olympics and the Indian contingent: Prospects and retrospect. Economic and Political Weekly,2012:47(31):19–22.
12. Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Government of India. National Sports Policy. New Delhi: Government of India, 1984.
13. Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports. Khelo India Scheme. New Delhi: Government of India, 2018.
14. Nicholson M, Brown K, Hoye R. Sport's social provisions. Sport Management Review,2013:16(2):148–160.
15. Putnam RD. Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000.
16. Radtke S, Coalter F. Sports schools: An international review. Report to the Scottish Institute of Sport Foundation. Stirling: Department of Sports Studies, University of Stirling, 2007.
17. Schulenkorf N, Sherry E, Rowe K. Sport for development: An integrated literature review. Journal of Sport Management,2016:30(1):22–39.
18. Shields DL, Bredemeier BL. Advances in sport morality research. In: Tenenbaum G, Eklund RC, editors. Handbook of sport psychology. 3rd ed. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2007, 662–684.
19. Singh J. Indian sports: Traditions and culture. New Delhi: Viva Books, 2011.
20. Sports Authority of India. Annual Report 2020–2021. New Delhi: Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Government of India, 2021.
21. Taliaferro LA, Rienzo BA, Miller MD, Pigg RM, Dodd VJ. High school youth and suicide risk: Exploring protection afforded through physical activity and sport participation. Journal of School Health,2008:78(10):545–553.
22. Warburton DE, Nicol CW, Bredin SS. Health benefits of physical activity: The evidence. Canadian Medical Association Journal,2006:174(6):801–809.
23. World Health Organization. Rehabilitation for low back pain: WHO evidence-informed recommendations. Geneva: World Health Organization, 2023.
24. Young DC. A brief history of the Olympic Games. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2004.