



Impact of Khelo India Initiatives on Sports Development in Maharashtra: A Secondary Data Analysis (2018–2025)

Sanket S. Savekar

Director of Physical Education & Sports , Pratibha College of Commerce and Computer Studies, Pune

Sayali B. Mandrekar

Assistant Professor, Sant Sohrobanath Ambaye Government College and Research Centre, Goa

ABSTRACT

The Khelo India Programme was launched in January 2018 by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports as one of India's most ambitious grassroots sports development initiatives. By consolidating three earlier schemes into a single framework, it set out to revive sporting culture, identify raw talent, upgrade infrastructure, and support athletes through structured scholarships and scientific training. This study examines the impact of Khelo India on sports development in Maharashtra between 2018 and 2025, drawing exclusively on secondary data from official government sources the Khelo India dashboard, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports reports, Sports Authority of India (SAI) publications, and records maintained by the Maharashtra Department of Sports. The data point to a consistent pattern of high performance: Maharashtra has topped the Khelo India Youth Games (KIYG) medal tally in five of seven editions, including the last three in succession. At KIYG 2025, held in Bihar from 4 to 15 May, Maharashtra finished first with 158 medals (58 gold, 47 silver, 53 bronze) spread across 14 sport disciplines. The study concludes that Khelo India is associated with meaningful growth in Maharashtra's sports ecosystem, through expanded access to quality infrastructure, support for over 2,781 athletes nationally via annual scholarships worth up to ₹ 6.28 lakh per athlete, and the creation of competitive pathways running from the district to the national level. The alignment between central government funding and Maharashtra's own athlete incentive schemes appears to have produced a mutually reinforcing effect on participation, performance, and aspiration although, given the secondary data design, causal attribution remains inherently limited.



Keywords : Athlete Scholarships; Grassroots Sports; Khelo India; Khelo India Youth Games; Maharashtra Sports Development; Physical Education Policy; Secondary Data Analysis

Introduction

Sport has long occupied a strange dual space in Indian public life celebrated in moments of international glory, yet chronically underfunded at the grassroots. For decades, India's sports infrastructure was marked by a stark urban-rural divide: world-class facilities in a handful of metropolitan centres, and a near-total absence of structured coaching, competitive exposure, and financial support in small towns and rural districts. Talented athletes from Marathwada, Vidarbha, and Konkan regularly faded into obscurity, not for lack of ability but because the system had no machinery to support them. The Khelo India Programme, inaugurated in January 2018, was designed to address precisely this gap. By creating a national competitive calendar for school and university athletes, offering long-term scholarships to identified talent, and channelling funds into sports infrastructure, the programme sought to democratise access to elite sports development. Maharashtra, a state with deep sporting traditions in wrestling (kushti), kabaddi, athletics, and swimming, has emerged as one of the strongest performers under this programme. Cities such as Kolhapur, Pune, Nashik, Mumbai, and Nagpur have long served as centres of athletic activity. Pune's Balewadi Stadium complex ranks among the finest multi-sport facilities in the country; Nashik has become a recognised hub for distance runners and archers; and the Konkan coast has produced several notable swimmers. The arrival of Khelo India injected structured central government support into an already-active sporting ecosystem, and the results are documented in the present study. Much of the existing commentary on Khelo India, however, operates at the national level aggregating scholarship counts, infrastructure spending, and medal tallies across all states without asking how individual states have actually converted these inputs into competitive outcomes over time. Where state-specific accounts do exist, infrastructure development and scholarship provision tend to be treated as separate, isolated variables rather than as parts of one connected support system operating across multiple years. Maharashtra's record five KIYG titles in seven editions, including three in a row has not, to our knowledge, been the subject of a dedicated, multi-year analysis that traces how central and state-level interventions combined to produce this outcome. It is this gap the absence of a state-specific, longitudinal account linking programme design to competitive performance that the present study seeks to address.



Programme Structure

Khelo India was formally launched on 31 January 2018, consolidating three earlier schemes the Rajiv Gandhi Khel Abhiyan, the Urban Sports Infrastructure Scheme, and the National Sports Talent Search Scheme. The government's initial outlay was ₹ 1,756 crore for 2017-18 to 2019-20, and this had grown to ₹ 900 crore in a single year by the interim budget of 2024-25. The programme now operates across five key verticals:

- Khelo India Youth Games (KIYG): the flagship annual competition for athletes under 18. Held across rotating host states, it brings together over 5,000 athletes across 27 competitive sport disciplines.
- Khelo India University Games (KIUG): a parallel competition for university athletes up to age 25. The 2024 edition attracted over 4,500 athletes from 200 universities across 20 sports.
- Athlete Scholarship Programme: each year, 1,000 athletes identified through KIYG and KIUG are selected for eight-year scholarship support totalling ₹ 6.28 lakh per annum, covering training, equipment, nutrition, medical care, and out of pocket allowances. As of December 2024, 2,781 Khelo India Athletes (KIAs) were actively receiving support nationally.
- Infrastructure Development: central funding channelled to states for the construction and upgradation of synthetic tracks, swimming pools, gymnastics halls, shooting ranges, and grassroots training centres.
- Khelo India Centres (KICs): community-level training centres at the district and block level, functioning as the earliest stage of the talent pipeline.

The recently introduced National Sports Policy 2025 further embeds Khelo India within a longer strategic horizon, aligned with India's stated goal of becoming a top-10 sporting nation by 2036.

Conceptual Framework

To make sense of how Khelo India's various components might translate into the medal outcomes reported later in this paper, the study adopts a simple input-process-output logic, adapted from long-term athlete development (LTAD) thinking. The underlying idea is straightforward: programme inputs do not produce results directly, but only after they are converted into sustained processes at the athlete and institutional level, and those processes are in turn shaped by contextual factors specific to the state in question.



Table 1 : Conceptual Framework Linking Khelo India Interventions to Sports Development Outcomes

Programme Inputs	Mediating Processes	Development Outcomes
Central funding; infrastructure grants (tracks, pools, gymnastics halls)	Improved access to training facilities at district and state level	Higher-quality preparation ahead of KIYG/KIUG
Athlete scholarships (₹6.28 lakh p.a., 8-year LTAD model)	Reduced athlete dropout; continuity of training across adolescence	Sustained medal-winning cohorts across editions
Annual competitive calendar (KIYG, KIUG)	Structured competitive exposure and talent identification	Broader participation; discipline-wise depth
State-level incentive schemes (cash prizes)	Additional motivation layered on central support	Athlete retention beyond the scholarship period

Contextual moderators a state's pre-existing sporting culture, its school and university competition network, and the presence or absence of a complementary state incentive scheme are treated as factors that strengthen or weaken the input-process-output chain, rather than as inputs in their own right. This framework is used descriptively throughout the Results and Discussion section: Maharashtra's medal performance is read as the output of a process that was, in turn, enabled by a particular combination of central inputs and state-level moderators.

Review of Related Literature

The Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (2024) reports substantial progress in grassroots participation and infrastructure creation under the Khelo India framework. The Sports Authority of India (2024) highlights the establishment of 23 National Centres of Excellence (NCOEs) across the country, with Maharashtra benefitting from NCOE facilities at Aurangabad.

A recurring theme in the wider literature on sports development is the importance of continuity: short-term or one-off interventions tend to yield minimal results compared with sustained, multi-year commitments of the kind built into Khelo India's design. Clarke and Mondal (2022) situate Indian sports policy within broader international frameworks, observing that countries which have risen in Olympic standings have almost invariably combined grassroots participation structures with long-term athlete



development models both of which are present in Khelo India's design. A related tension runs through the wider sports development literature, between broad-basing participation on one hand and concentrating resources on elite performers on the other. Khelo India attempts to bridge this divide by running mass participation events while simultaneously selecting athletes each year for long-term scholarship support.

Research Questions

- What specific Khelo India interventions have been implemented in Maharashtra, and how have they evolved between 2018 and 2025?
- What does Maharashtra's KIYG track record reveal about the association between these interventions and competitive outcomes?
- How have scholarship and infrastructure support mechanisms benefitted Maharashtra's athletes?
- What policy lessons does Maharashtra's experience offer for other states?

Delimitations and Limitations

The study is geographically limited to Maharashtra and covers the period 2018-2025. It relies exclusively on secondary data drawn from officially published sources. While the evidence is consistent, causal attribution is inherently limited in secondary data research performance improvements reflect many interacting factors, of which Khelo India is only one. Self-reported government data may also carry reporting biases that are not easily detected through secondary analysis alone.

Materials and Methods

Research Design : A descriptive research design grounded in secondary data analysis was employed. This approach fits the study's aims, since the research questions concern policy outcomes that are already documented in publicly available government databases, official reports, and verified media records. No primary data were collected; instead, the study draws upon, triangulates, and synthesises multiple authoritative sources to build a coherent evidence base.

Data Sources : Data were drawn from the following official and verified sources, all consulted for information published through mid-2025:

- Khelo India official website and dashboard (kheloindia.gov.in) for medal tallies, event records, and participation data.
- Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports reports (2018-2025) for policy documentation and scheme guidelines.



- Sports Authority of India annual reports and NCOE records (2021-2024) for infrastructure and scholarship data.
- Government of Maharashtra, Department of Sports and Youth Services (2025), for state-level incentives and athlete support data.
- Olympics.com and DD News on Air event records, used for independent verification of competition results.
- Peer-reviewed journal articles, used for contextual and comparative analysis.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection proceeded in four stages. First, medal-tally records for all seven KIYG editions (2018–2025) were compiled directly from the Khelo India dashboard, giving gold, silver, bronze, and total counts, together with each edition's host state and overall rank for Maharashtra. Second, the KIYG 2025 results were broken down discipline-by-discipline to identify the sports in which Maharashtra won gold, using the official results portal supplemented by Olympics.com event-by-event coverage. Third, scholarship and infrastructure figures the number of active KIAs, the annual scholarship value, and the status of infrastructure projects in Maharashtra were extracted from Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports and SAI annual reports for the relevant years. Fourth, state-level incentive data (Maharashtra's own cash-prize structure for medal-winning athletes) were obtained from Department of Sports and Youth Services publications. All figures were entered into a structured Microsoft Excel workbook, organised by year and variable, to allow the trend and comparative analyses reported in the next section.

Data Validation and Triangulation

Because the study relies entirely on secondary sources, particular care was taken to validate figures before they were used. Each KIYG medal count was checked against at least two independent sources typically the official Khelo India dashboard and either Olympics.com or a DD News on Air report covering the same edition. Where a discrepancy of more than one medal appeared between sources (this occurred only twice, both involving bronze-medal counts in earlier editions), the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports figure was treated as authoritative, on the basis that it is the primary government record. Scholarship and infrastructure figures were cross-checked between the Ministry's annual progress reports and SAI's own annual reports for the same year; where the two sources reported different reference dates (for instance, a scholarship count as of March versus December of the same year), the more recent figure was used and the reference date is stated alongside it in the



relevant table. This two-source minimum, applied consistently across all quantitative claims in the study, is intended to reduce the risk that a single source's error or delay in updating would distort the analysis.

Variables Analysed

The following variables were analysed: medal tally (gold, silver, bronze, total) across KIYG editions from 2018 to 2025; discipline-wise gold medal distribution at KIYG 2025; year-on-year participation data; scholarship allocation and coverage; state-level cash incentives; and infrastructure creation data.

Analytical Techniques

Four complementary techniques were used. Percentage analysis established each medal category's and each discipline's share of Maharashtra's overall total, and Maharashtra's share of gold medals available nationally at KIYG 2025. Trend analysis examined the seven-edition time series (2018-2025) to identify growth, plateaus, or reversals in medal count. Comparative cross-state analysis set Maharashtra's KIYG 2025 performance against the second- and third-placed states, Haryana and Rajasthan, to test whether Maharashtra's lead reflected a narrow or a substantial gap. Finally, descriptive and thematic interpretation was applied to qualitative programme documents policy guidelines, annual reports, and press releases to connect the quantitative medal record to the underlying scholarship, infrastructure, and incentive mechanisms. Microsoft Excel was used for tabulation and percentage/trend computation throughout. Given the secondary and non-randomised nature of the data, inferential statistics were not employed; the analysis is interpretive and evidence-driven rather than hypothesis testing in the statistical sense.

Results and Discussion

Maharashtra's Performance in KIYG 2025

The seventh edition of the Khelo India Youth Games was held in Bihar from 4 to 15 May 2025 the first time the state hosted the event. Over 5,000 young athletes representing all 36 states and union territories competed across 27 sports, with shooting, gymnastics, and track cycling events held in New Delhi. Twenty-six records were set during the games, of which eight were national youth records. Maharashtra secured its third consecutive KIYG title and its fifth overall, finishing atop the medal table with 158 medals.

**Table 2 : Maharashtra's Medal Tally - KIYG 2025**

Medal Category	Count	Percentage of Total
Gold	58	36.7%
Silver	47	29.7%
Bronze	53	33.5%
Total	158	100%

Of the 285 gold medals decided across 27 disciplines, Maharashtra accounted for 58 -approximately 20.4% of all gold medals available against competition from all 36 states and union territories. These golds were spread across 14 different sports, pointing to depth across disciplines rather than reliance on one or two strong events.

Discipline-wise Gold Medal Distribution - KIYG 2025

Table 3 : Maharashtra's Gold Medals by Sport Discipline - KIYG 2025

Sport Discipline	Gold Medals	Contribution (%)
Athletics	10	17.2%
Swimming	7	12.1%
Gymnastics	7	12.1%
Archery	6	10.3%
Weightlifting	5	8.6%
Other Sports (9 disciplines)	23	39.7%
Total	58	100%

Athletics, swimming, and gymnastics together account for 41% of Maharashtra's gold medals all three disciplines that depend heavily on quality infrastructure and scientific coaching. That the state also won gold in nine further disciplines suggests cross-sport development rather than dependence on a single code.

Historical Performance Across All KIYG Editions (2018-2025)

**Table 4:** Maharashtra's KIYG Performance - All Editions (2018-2025)

Ed.	Year	Host State / City	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total	Rank
1st	2018	New Delhi	36	32	43	111	2nd
2nd	2019	Pune, Maharashtra	85	62	81	228	1st
3rd	2020	Guwahati, Assam	78	77	101	256	1st
4th	2022	Panchkula, Haryana	42	39	44	125	2nd
5th	2023	Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh	56	55	50	161	1st
6th	2024	Chennai, Tamil Nadu	57	48	53	158	1st
7th	2025	Patna, Bihar	58	47	53	158	1st

Maharashtra has topped the KIYG medal table in five of seven editions (2019, 2020, 2023, 2024, and 2025) and finished second in the remaining two (2018 and 2022). No other state has matched this consistency. From 111 medals at the inaugural 2018 edition, the total climbed to 256 by 2020 a 131% increase in two editions. Even after COVID-related disruptions reduced contingent sizes in 2022, Maharashtra rebounded strongly from 2023 onward. The 2025 gold tally of 58 is the highest recorded in any single KIYG edition, which suggests that the programme's positive association with Maharashtra's performance has not plateaued.

Comparative Analysis with Top States - KIYG 2025

Table 5 : Top Three States - KIYG 2025 Final Medal Tally

Rank	State	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
1	Maharashtra	58	47	53	158
2	Haryana	39	27	51	117
3	Rajasthan	24	12	24	60

The gap between first and second place-158 medals against Haryana's 117- is substantial, particularly given that Haryana is widely regarded as India's foremost per-capita sporting state. Maharashtra's gold-medal lead (58 against 39) is especially notable, since gold count determines the KIYG champion. The margin over third-placed Rajasthan (158 against 60 total medals) further underlines Maharashtra's depth across disciplines.



Athlete Scholarship and Support System

One of the mechanisms most closely associated with Maharashtra's sustained KIYG performance is the layered financial and scientific support provided under the Khelo India scholarship programme. Nationally, 1,000 athletes are selected each year; as of December 2024, 2,781 active Khelo India Athletes (KIAs) were receiving support.

Table 6: Khelo India Athlete Scholarship Package

Support Component	Provision	Outcome for Athlete
Out-of-Pocket Allowance	₹ 1.20 lakh per annum	Financial support; covers living and travel
Training & Competition Support	₹ 5.00 lakh per annum	Access to coaching, camps, equipment
Total Annual Package	₹ 6.28 lakh per annum	Comprehensive development support
Duration	8 years (LTAD model)	Continuity; reduces dropout risk
Sports Science Services	Nutrition, physiotherapy, medical	Optimised recovery and training
International Exposure	Case-by-case, HPC approval	Competitive experience and confidence

The eight-year LTAD commitment built into the scholarship model addresses a well-documented weakness of earlier Indian sports policy: one-off cash prizes or short-term support that produced high dropout rates. Athletes who showed promise at 15 or 16 typically returned to under-resourced environments and left competitive sport within two or three years. The current scholarship structure instead offers financial security that makes sport a viable long-term pathway a factor that matters particularly for families in rural or semi-urban Maharashtra (Clarke & Mondal, 2022). Several of Maharashtra's KIYG 2025 gold medallists are products of this support structure, having been identified at the 2022 or 2023 editions and carried through to peak form by 2025.

Maharashtra State-Level Incentives

The Government of Maharashtra reinforces the central scholarship framework with its own athlete incentive structure. Under the state sports policy, medal-winning



athletes at national competitions receive cash prizes of ₹5 lakh (gold), ₹3 lakh (silver), and ₹2 lakh (bronze), with substantially higher rewards for international representation (Government of Maharashtra, 2025). This dual-support architecture central scholarship for training, state reward for performance creates a motivation structure that plausibly supports athletes at both the development and competition stages.

Infrastructure Impact

Maharashtra has received Khelo India infrastructure funding for the creation and upgradation of sports facilities at multiple tiers. The Balewadi Sports Complex in Pune has served as a KIYG host venue, and district-level Khelo India Centres have extended structured coaching to athletes outside the major urban centres.

Table 7 : *Infrastructure Development and Associated Performance Outcomes*

Infrastructure Component	Status in Maharashtra	Associated Performance Outcome
Synthetic Athletics Tracks	Multiple districts incl. Nashik, Pune, Nagpur	10 gold medals in athletics at KIYG 2025
Indoor Swimming Pools	Mumbai, Pune major hubs	7 gold medals in swimming at KIYG 2025
Gymnastics Centres	Balewadi, Mumbai SAI centres	7 gold medals in gymnastics at KIYG 2025
Archery Ranges	Nashik, Aurangabad NCOE	6 gold medals in archery at KIYG 2025
Khelo India Centres	Expanding district-wise	Wider rural and semi-urban talent identification

Discussion

Maharashtra’s sustained performance in the Khelo India Youth Games is not simply a function of population size. Several states with comparable or larger populations Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal have consistently finished well behind in the medal tally. Three contextual factors appear relevant here. First, the state already had sporting infrastructure and institutional culture in place, which allowed Khelo India funding to be deployed faster: facilities in Pune, Mumbai, and Nashik were upgraded rather than built from scratch. Second, Maharashtra’s established school and university



sports system inter-school, inter-district, and inter-university competitions creates a competitive pathway for young athletes well before they reach the KIYG stage. Third, the complementary state incentive framework appears, on the evidence assembled here, to keep athletes in sport for longer.

These findings sit comfortably alongside Clarke and Mondal's (2022) observation that countries which have risen in Olympic standings tend to combine grassroots participation with long-term athlete development models Maharashtra's dual-track approach, running mass participation events alongside an eight-year scholarship structure, reflects exactly this combination. The pattern in the data is also consistent with a broader claim common in the long-term athlete development literature: that sustained, multi-year support outperforms one-off grants in producing athlete retention and competitive success. Maharashtra's five KIYG titles across the last five editions, achieved under a scholarship model explicitly built around an eight-year commitment, are difficult to explain without some version of that continuity effect. Similarly, the coincidence of central scholarship support with Maharashtra's own state-level cash-incentive scheme suggests the kind of layered, multi-tier incentive structure that state-level sports policy is generally thought to benefit from though this study's design does not allow that mechanism to be isolated from the other contextual advantages Maharashtra holds. At the same time, the concentration of medal success in five or six disciplines is a reminder that even a well-resourced state has not achieved uniform depth across all sports, which points to a limit on how far infrastructure investment alone can broaden participation without more targeted, discipline-specific effort.

At the national level, the KIYG-to-Olympics pipeline is demonstrably functional: Khelo India-identified athletes including Manu Bhaker, Saurabh Chaudhary, Anshu Malik, and Srihari Nataraj represented India at the 2020 Tokyo and 2024 Paris Olympics. These are not Maharashtra athletes specifically, but they do show that the programme's talent-identification mechanism can produce elite international competitors. Maharashtra's consistent production of KIYG champions across seven editions positions it well to feed into this pipeline in the years ahead.

The analysis also points to areas that need attention. The concentration of medal success in five or six disciplines athletics, swimming, gymnastics, archery, weightlifting suggests that infrastructure investment has not yet reached uniform depth across the state. Districts in Vidarbha, Marathwada, and rural Konkan remain underserved by Khelo India Centres. Women's participation, while improving, still falls short of parity in several disciplines. Coach availability at the district level continues to constrain the expansion of the talent pipeline beyond Maharashtra's established urban hubs.



Conclusions and Recommendations

The evidence assembled here, drawn from official government sources and verified competition records, is consistent and informative. Maharashtra has topped the KIYG medal table in five of seven editions, including the last three in succession, winning 158 medals across 14 sport disciplines at KIYG 2025. This performance is associated with three core contributions of the Khelo India programme infrastructure development that enables quality training across multiple disciplines; financial inclusion through scholarships that make elite sports development accessible to athletes from non-affluent backgrounds; and competitive exposure through a reliable annual national platform. The alignment between central Khelo India funding and Maharashtra's own state incentive structures appear to have amplified these effects. It bears repeating that secondary data analysis cannot establish direct causation Maharashtra's pre-existing sporting culture, institutional network, and geography also play significant roles, and this study's conceptual framework treats them as moderators precisely for that reason.

Based on these findings, the following recommendations are offered:

- Expand Khelo India Centres to all 36 districts of Maharashtra, prioritising Vidarbha, Marathwada, and Konkan regions currently underrepresented in KIYG medal tables.
- Strengthen district-level talent identification by integrating sports science screening into school competitions, allowing earlier identification of scholarship candidates.
- Increase targeted support for women athletes in disciplines where female participation lags, including combat sports, weightlifting, and team games.
- Develop structured coach development and certification programmes in partnership with SAI and physical education universities.
- Establish sport-specific academies in high-potential districts for example, an archery academy in a tribal area, or a distance-running centre in Nashik.
- Strengthen monitoring and evaluation by creating a public-facing dashboard that tracks not just medals but athlete retention rates, scholarship utilisation, and longitudinal career outcomes.
- Explore closer collaboration between Maharashtra's universities and the Khelo India framework, so that scholarship athletes do not have to choose between sport and higher education.



References

- Clarke, J., & Mondal, S. (2022). Sport policy in India. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 14(4), 729-741.
- DD News on Air. (2025, May 15). Khelo India Youth Games 2025 ends; Maharashtra tops medal tally with 158 medals. Prasar Bharati.
- Government of Maharashtra, Department of Sports and Youth Services. (2025). Sports policy and athlete incentive schemes. Government of Maharashtra.
- Khelo India. (2025). Khelo India Youth Games 2025: Official results and medal tally. Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Government of India.
- Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports. (2021). Khelo India - national programme for development of sports: Operational guidelines 2021-22 to 2025-26. Government of India.
- Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports. (2024). Khelo India programme: Annual progress report 2023-24. Government of India.
- Olympics.com. (2019, February 9). Khelo India Youth Games 2019: Final medal tally.
- Olympics.com. (2023, February 11). Khelo India Youth Games 2023: Final medal tally.
- Olympics.com. (2024, January 31). Khelo India Youth Games 2024: Final medal tally.
- Olympics.com. (2025, May 15). Khelo India Youth Games 2025: Final medal tally.
- Press Information Bureau. (2021, February 25). Khelo India - national programme for development of sports. Government of India.
- Press Information Bureau. (2025). A new era for Indian sports: Nurturing talent, honouring heroes. Government of India.
- Sports Authority of India. (2024). Annual report 2023-24. Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Government of India.