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Sports Policy and National Development: A Comparative Study of India & China

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Abstract

Sports, we now know, are not just a form of entertainment or physical activity; they are also linked to health, education, social inclusion, economic development, youth empowerment and the global identity of a country. Sports are a major part of India and China's national development agendas, yet the sports policies of India and China have a different structure, priority and approach. China has achieved a lot of success in elite competitive sports with a centralized and goal-oriented system. In recent years, India has focused more on the mass movement of sports, talent identification and sports infrastructure, the participation of women and differently-abled athletes, and international excellence. The Khelo Bharat Niti-2025 has been introduced by India on 10 July 2025. It is aimed at a more inclusive sports ecosystem from the grassroots to the Olympic stage. It is all about talent identification, sports science, sports medicine, sports infrastructure, social inclusion and sports as a career. Sports policy is in its first phase in China now with a vision of becoming a "Sports power" nation. China's "Plan for Building a Sports Power during the 15th Five-Year Period," published in 2026, focuses on public health, sports competition quality, sports governance and the development of the sports sector. In this research paper we compare the sports policies of both countries in terms of similarities, differences and achievements, and potential lessons for India.

Keywords: Sports Policy, India, China, Khelo India, Sports Power, Olympics, Talent Development, Sports Infrastructure, Sports Science, Sports Industry.

1. Introduction:

Sport is a key indicator of a nation's social and economic progress in the 21st century. Sports develop not just physical health but also mental toughness, discipline, leadership, team spirit, and social responsibility. And the international image of a country's soft power and global standing will be further enhanced by sports. India and China are two big Asian powers with huge populations and a lot of young people who try to make their lives more productive and creative. Accordingly, both countries have put sports at the top of their national development agendas. The development of sports policy in India has already been led by the National Sports Policy-2001, the Khelo India, the Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS), and the recently introduced Khelo Bharat Policy-2025. The aim of the new policy is not only to win medals; it aims to connect sports to health, social development, economic opportunities, and nation building. Sports became a national strategic focus in China early on. Chinese training, talent finding, specialized sports institutions, and intensive preparations for international competitions have made China a strong player in several Olympic Games. China is now expanding its policy to include not only high-performance sports but also general public fitness. China's current policy framework is an attempt to balance these areas and competitive sports.

2. Objectives of the Study:

The main aims of this academic paper are as follows:

1. To examine the sports policies of India and China in the present day.
2. To analyze the main objectives of sports policy formulation in the two nations.
3. To do a comparative analysis of the systems for discovering and nurturing talent in sports.
4. To investigate the impact of the sports infrastructure and the sport sciences.
5. To analyze the policy provisions for women, disabled, and rural athletes.
6. To understand the economic and social importance of sport.
7. To draw possible lessons that India can learn from China.
8. To examine the challenges faced by the sports policies of these two nations.

3. Research Methodology:

The research in this paper is embedded in a descriptive and comparative methodological framework. The researcher undertakes an analysis of the official sports policies, policy documents, and relevant governmental publications of India as well as China. In the case of India, the core baselines of the research refer to the "Khelo India Policy-2025" and "Khelo India Programme" developed by the Ministry of Sports. In the case of China, the most relevant pieces of evidence considered in the research include the current sports policy issued by the General Administration of Sport of China and the documents related to the "15th Five-Year Plan."

4. India's Current Sports Policy:

India's sports policy has undergone significant changes in recent years. Previously, the emphasis was primarily on international achievements and the development of specific sports; however, the current policy seeks to pursue both **"Sports for All"** and **"Sports for Excellence"** simultaneously.

4.1 Khelo India Policy -2025

The Government of India notified the Khelo India Policy-2025 on July 10, 2025. The policy's broad vision views sports as a means for nation-building, health, economic development, and social progress.

The key objectives of the policy include—

- Expansion of Sports at the Grassroots Level,
- Talent Identification and Development,
- Development of Sports Competitions and Leagues,
- Availability of Sports Infrastructure,
- Promotion of Sports Science and Sports Medicine,
- Support Systems for Athletes,
- Promotion of the Sports Industry,
- Social Inclusion,
- Making Sports A Career Option For The Youth.

4.2 Khelo India-

Khelo India is one of India's flagship sports development schemes. It focuses on sports infrastructure, sports competitions, talent development, sports academies, Fit India, and inclusive sports activities. It also includes provisions for rural and traditional sports, as well as for women and athletes with disabilities.

4.3 High-Performance Sports-

To enhance medal-winning potential at the international level, India has worked towards providing training, equipment, overseas training, and competition-related support to elite athletes through schemes like TOPS.

4.4 Sports and Social Development-

Indian policy does not limit sports merely to winning medals. Efforts are being made to link sports with youth development, gender equality, social inclusion, health, and national unity. The official framework of 'Khelo India' also connects sports with social integration, gender equality, and a healthy lifestyle.

5. China's Current Sports Policy:

The state has played a crucial role in China's sports system. For a long time China focused on identifying the best athletes, training them at a professional level and preparing for international competitions through a centralized system. China is not only looking to win Olympic medals today; it is also looking at becoming a "sports powerhouse." China has tied the high-quality development of sports to the national development in the "15th Five-Year Plan" (2026).

5.1 Public Fitness - "Fitness for All" is a crucial policy in China's current action agenda. It aims to encourage daily exercise and healthy life amongst regular citizens.

5.2 Competitive sports- The foundation of China's sports system is the systematic preparation of high-performance sports. The early identification and training of talented athletes and providing them with appropriate training has been the foundation of international success across sports.

5.3 Sports and National Power - Sports are associated with national pride, global influence and social development in China. The current strategy for building sports prowess is about expanding public health and sports services and high-level performance.

5.4 Sports industry - China also considers sports as the industry for economic growth. Policy is being put on the expansion of sports competitions, sports services, sports consumption and the sports industry.

6. Comparative Study of Sports Policies of India and China:

Basis | India | China

6.1-Key Approach | Mass promotion of sports and excellence | Sports powerhouse nation and high performance

6.2-Policy Structure | Joint role of Centre and States | Strong central leadership and administration

6.3-Grassroots Sports | Khelo India, local/rural programs | Mass fitness and local sports facilities

6.4-Talent Identification | Gradually evolving national system | Relatively centralized and organized system

6.5-High performance | TOPS, National Sports Federations, etc. | Specialized training and high-performance systems

6.6-Sports science | Rapidly evolving field | Institutional application at a high level

6.7-Women's sports | Growing priority area | Comprehensive competitive and training infrastructure

6.8-Para-sports | Special emphasis on inclusion | Robust structure in the Paralympic Games

6.9-Sports industry | Emerging sector | Sector linked to more developed and larger markets

6.10-Nature of policy | Federal and multi-stakeholder | More centralized

6.11-Key objectives | Sports culture + international excellence | Sporting powerhouse + public health + international excellence

7. Talent Identification and Development:

Identifying talented athletes is a key part of achieving success in sports.

In India, the 'Khelo India' initiative is aimed at discovering and encouraging young sports talent. The system consists of sports academies, competitions, and training centers.

In China, the system of talent identification is more structured and centralized, with athletes receiving training for success at a very young age through schools and sports institutions.

On the other hand, India's system is becoming more inclusive and decentralized, while China's system is focused on centralization and specialized training. The real challenge for India is to take talent identification to the rural areas.

8. Sports Infrastructure:

Adequate grounds, stadiums, training centers, gymnasiums, swimming pools, and scientific training facilities are essential for developing sports talent.

India's Sports Policy-2025 identifies the equitable and improved availability of sports infrastructure across the country as a key objective.

China has emphasized the large-scale construction of sports facilities and the development of public sports spaces. Current Chinese policy clearly aims to strengthen public services for (mass fitness).

India still faces the challenge of rural-urban disparity. Official Indian policy documents also acknowledge the need for equitable access to sports infrastructure.

9. Sports Science and Technology:

Success in modern sports does not depend solely on physical training. Nutrition, biomechanics, sports medicine, psychology, data analytics, and recovery techniques are also important.

India's Khelo Bharat Policy-2025 explicitly prioritizes sports science, sports medicine, and innovation.

China, too, has made the use of science and technology integral to the training of high-performance athletes. Its program for building sporting prowess emphasizes high-quality sports development and modern governance systems.

There is significant scope for both competition and cooperation between the two countries in this sector.

10. Women and Inclusive Sports:

Women's participation in sports reflects the breadth of a country's sporting culture. Opportunities for female athletes in India have increased, and the 'Khelo India' framework explicitly prioritizes the participation of women and athletes with disabilities.

China, too, has developed comprehensive competitive structures for female athletes and Paralympians.

For India, specific challenges relate to social stereotypes, safe sporting environments, the availability of facilities in rural areas, and access to continuous training. Therefore, it is essential

to make not only talent identification but also the long-term careers, education, and safety of athlete's integral parts of the policy.

11. Sports and the Economy:

Today, sports serve as a fast-growing sector of economy. The economic activities in sports areas are being driven by the sectors like sports equipment, fitness, sports tourism, media, broadcasting, organization of events, sports marketing, and the professional leagues.

India is focused on creating a better economy through sports and making sports a career option for its youth with its 'Khelo Bharat Policy-2025'.

Similarly, China's sports industry is operating in accordance with the objectives of high-quality economic development. Specifically, there is an importance of the growth of sports consumption and sports competitions in China's comprehensive policy on sports.

In India, although the sport of cricket has enabled the advancement of the sport economy, there is a need for creating sustainable professional structures of various sports.

12. Key Similarities in the Sports Policies of Both Countries:

The following similarities are evident in the sports policies of India and China:

1. Both regard sports as a significant tool for national development.
2. Both countries aim for excellent performance in international sports competitions.
3. Both place emphasis on talent identification and training.
4. Both consider the expansion of sports infrastructure essential.
5. Both prioritize the fitness and health of the general public.
6. Both are promoting the use of sports science and technology.
7. Both are linking sports to economic development.
8. Both are working towards promoting women's and inclusive sports.
9. In both countries, sports are linked to national pride and social development.

13. Key differences in the policies of both countries:

13.1 Administrative structure-

In India, the implementation of sports policy involves a joint role for the central and state governments. The Khelo Bharat Policy-2025 itself delineates the complementary roles of the central and state governments.

China's system has been more centralized, possessing a robust capacity to implement nationally set goals through its administrative machinery.

13.2 Approaches to Competitive Sports-

China has long organized high-performance sports as a national priority. India is now placing greater emphasis on high performance alongside broad public participation.

13.3 Sports Culture-

Sports culture in India is extremely diverse; however, due to priorities placed on education, examinations, and employment, sports are still taking time to gain acceptance as a viable full-fledged career option in many areas. In China, the institutional framework for sports training has been relatively more organized.

14. Potential lessons for India from China:

While there are positive elements of the Chinese sports system that can be of value to India, it is not possible to replicate their model.

14.1 Need for Long-term Strategies-

Years are needed for the development of athletes in various sports and therefore each sport must have long-term strategies that could take about 8-10 years to implement.

14.2 Use of Schools in Talent Identification-

Schools must be entrusted with the responsibility of identifying talented athletes.

14.3 Sports Science to be Given Importance-

Nutritionists, physiotherapists, sports psychologists, biomechanics experts, and data scientists should be available at high-performance centers.

14.4 Development of Rural Sports-

Rural sports facilities need to be strengthened and expanded.

14.5 Reasons for Sports and Education to Coexist-

A system must be developed that integrates sports with education to ensure that athletes have sufficient opportunities after completion of their careers.

15. Challenges Facing India's Current Sports Policy:

India's sports policy continues to have several obstacles to overcome, including -

- i) Inequality in accessibility between urban and rural facilities,
- ii) Scarcity of adequately trained coaches,
- iii) Inability to detect sporting talent in time,
- iv) Unequal distribution of sports science and modern training facilities,
- v) Over-commercialization of some sports and obscurity of others,
- vi) Stable job and career prospects for athletes.
- vii) Need for better coordination among different organizations.

The new policy of the Government of India contemplates improving the quality of talent development, improving infrastructure, getting better at sports science, governance and finance systems to address the aforementioned problems.

16. Challenges of China's Sports Policy:

China's sports system faces numerous challenges. One of the most pressing issues includes the need to balance the mental and educational development of athletes through competitive training. Another problem relates to the need to have equal chances in the realms of sports among different peoples and in various sports disciplines. According to China's sports policy, the problems of imbalances in sports development constitute a significant issue. The country has a general plan to solve the imbalances in developing sports sectors, the specific sports sectors and urban and rural development as part of it.

17. Discussion

A comparison shows that while both India and China use sports as a tool for national development, the historical progression of their priorities has been quite different. China has relied on its well-established centralized system for sport-related achievements, systematic identification of talent, and continuous training. India's success rests on its diverse population of youth, wide-ranging sports culture, and federal nature.

One of the most important changes in Indian government approach is that sports are no longer regarded as a mere way of winning medals internationally. Khelo India Policy-2025 connects sports with health, the development of social sphere, production of economic opportunities, and nation formation. The change in China's approach is significant too. Today, the country does not focus only on medals anymore. The current plan for sports development is aimed at mass fitness, sports services provision, high-quality development of sports, and modern sports governance.

Thus, the policies of both countries move in the same direction and include participation of public, health, sport success, and sports economy.

18. Conclusion

Conducting a comparison of India and China's sports policies shows that sports are integral to both countries' national development strategy. China's sports policy is long-term planning, centralized administration, talent identification and high-performance training systems all highly beneficial to China. In recent years India has made significant progress towards a big sports ecosystem and inclusive one through initiatives like Khelo India, TOPS and Khelo Bharat Policy-2025. India's new sports policy is not only all about talent development but also about the sports infrastructure from the grassroots level to Olympic level, sports science, social inclusion, economic development and sports as a career. On the other hand, China's current "sports powerhouse" strategy is about high performance and mass fitness and high-quality development of sports. Inspired by China's achievements, India needs to create a model for sports in its own social, economic and federal context. It would be particularly beneficial to target the school-based talent identification, long-term training, sports science, coaching quality, rural sports infrastructure and career opportunities for athletes. At the end of the day, a successful sports policy in any country shouldn't be measured only by the number of Olympic medals it wins. If every child and youth has the chance to play sports as adults and citizens are healthy, then the goal must be that the best athletes are trained, women and differently-abled athletes are equal and sports can serve to contribute to the social and economic development of the country. In this regard, the current sports policies of India and China are moving towards comprehensive sports development but the situation in India is very different and China is far from it.

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