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India's Sporting Excellence in the Asian Games: An Analysis of Historical Trends, Medal Achievements, Institutional Challenges and Emerging Priorities

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Abstract

The Asian Games provide a critical opportunity to examine India's sporting capabilities, global competitiveness and the growth of the sports ecosystem. Present paper examines India's performance from the very first Asian Games in 1951 to the recent 2026 Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games. It highlights historical trends, medal successes, institutional obstacles and new objectives. The study adopts a descriptive, analytical and comparative methodology, based on secondary data from official sports records, government papers and policy documents. India scripted history at the Hangzhou Asian Games 2023, bagging 107 medals – 28 gold, 38 silver and 41 bronze medals. In the 2026 Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games later, India had won 85 medals -- 21 gold, 27 silver and 37 bronze -- to end up fourth in the overall rankings. Though the medal haul might have reduced, the performance of India was indicative of ongoing competition in sporting disciplines. The paper discusses achievements by discipline, female participation, government initiatives, sports infrastructure, institutional support and athlete development programs. It also highlights difficulties related to grassroots infrastructure, geographical imbalances, financial resources, coaching standards and sports governance. The study highlights the need to promote talent identification, scientific training, technological innovation, institutional accountability and inclusive sports development to improve India's international competitiveness and establish sustained sporting greatness toward Viksit Bharat @2047

Keywords: Asian Games, India's Sporting Excellence towards *Viksit Bharat @2047,* Medal Achievements, Sports Development, Institutional Challenges, Sports Governance.

Introduction

Sports are an important facet of national development. They represent the physical ability, competitive spirit, institutional efficiency and international recognition of a country. Besides relaxation and amusement, sports also contribute to human resource development, national integration, social inclusion, female empowerment and international cooperation. In this day and age, there is an increasing association between sporting achievement and the accessibility of infrastructure, scientific training, financial resources, institutional support, good governance and systematic talent development. International sport tournaments are an opportunity to compare the achievements of different countries and analyse the efficiency of their policies in the development of sports. Among such contests, the Asian Games play an important position as one of the largest continental multisport events in the world, bringing together athletes from Asian countries and fostering sporting excellence, friendship and regional collaboration (Olympic Council of Asia [OCA], 2026).

Evolution of the Asian Games and India's Participation

India has had a prominent participation in the Asian Games from the very beginning. The idea of a continental sports event developed in the post-World War II era, with newly-independent Asian countries seeking to foster regional collaboration and international understanding through sports. Indian sports administrator, Prof Guru Dutt Sondhi, played a key part in the conceptualisation of the Asian Games movement. This was followed by the formation of the Asian Games Federation in New Delhi in 1949,

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establishing an organisational framework for the regulation of continental sporting contests (Olympic Council of Asia, 2026). The first Asian Games was held in New Delhi from 4 to 11 March 1951 with 489 participants from 11 countries competing. India showcased its sporting prowess in the inaugural edition winning a total of 51 medals – 15 gold, 16 silver and 20 bronze – to rank second in the overall medals' tally. The event was India's historic tie with the Asian Games and showed the country's potential to engage successfully in international athletic contests (OCA, 2026; Indian Olympic Association [IOA], 2026). India has participated in the Asian Games since 1951 and has had its share of wins and losses in the many sporting categories. The country hosted the Games again in New Delhi in 1982, a major milestone in the development of the country's sports infrastructure and international sports organization. Over the succeeding decades, India's sporting performance has developed alongside changes to its economic circumstances, institutional systems, public funding, athlete development programs and international competition.

Trends in India's Medal Achievements

The results of India in the Asian Games are very useful to understand the evolving nature of Indian sporting ability and worldwide competitiveness. The country's performances have varied from one edition to another but there has been notable progress in recent decades in terms of the ability to win medals, participation in various sports and worldwide exposure. India had won 57 medals in the 2014 Incheon Asian Games and 69 medals at the 2018 Jakarta-Palembang Asian Games. India scored its best-ever medal haul of 107 medals — 28 gold, 38 silver and 41 bronzes – at the 19th Asian Games, officially known as Hangzhou 2022, but held in September–October 2023. It was a tremendous breakthrough. India ended up fourth in the overall medal tally. These achievements showed the improvement in the competitive performance in athletics, shooting, archery, badminton and some other sports (Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports [MYAS], 2023; Government of India, 2025). The 20th Asian Games will be held in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan from 19 September to 4 October, 2026 and is another opportunity to assess India's growth in the area of sports. India finished fourth on the overall medal tally with 85 medals including 21 gold, 27 silver and 37 bronzes. The 2026 medal tally was India's second-best result in the Asian Games, while the overall tally of medals was lower than the Hangzhou Games. Total 503 Indian competitors participated in the competition and they had won medals including 24 in athletics, 15 in shooting and nine in archery (Indian Olympic Association, 2026). Indian athletes had also shone in individual and team sports at the 2026 Asian Games. India claimed gold in men's and women's hockey, had some good showings in recurve archery and secured its first Asian Games medals in soft tennis and mixed martial arts. It also won its first gold medal in women's trap shooting and a weightlifting silver medal after 28 years. (Prime Minister's Office, Government of India, 2026) These successes were in keeping with the growing breadth of sports disciplines in which India has shown international competitiveness. But the decline in the total number of medals won by India — from 107 in 2023 to 85 in 2026 — raises serious questions about consistency of performance, athlete development, competitive readiness and the efficacy of institutional assistance. It also stresses the necessity to differentiate between the number of medals, the quality of medals, discipline-wise successes and ongoing worldwide competitiveness.

Sports Development, Policy Initiatives and Institutional Support

India's sporting success has to be seen in the larger context of government policies, institutional interventions and investments in sports development. Over recent decades, the Government of India has launched a number of projects aimed at encouraging mass involvement, discovering new talent, strengthening sports infrastructure and improving the international performance of athletes. The program aims to promote

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sporting participation and excellence through infrastructure development, talent identification, sports contests, speciality academies and institutional support. It also spotlights chances for women, rural areas, indigenous sports and those with disabilities. Likewise, the Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS), which was introduced in 2014, provides specialised support to selected elite athletes through advanced coaching, international training, scientific assistance, specialised equipment and financial incentives (Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, 2025; Government of India, 2026). The Sports Authority of India, Indian Olympic Association, National Sports Federations, state sports departments, educational institutions and specialised training academies are an important component of the national sports development ecosystem. The way they work together is crucial for spotting sporting talent, boosting readiness for competition and delivering steady international results. However, the effectiveness of these programs needs to be continuously evaluated in terms of resource utilisation, athlete development results, institutional responsibility and sustainable athletic achievements.

Institutional Challenges and Emerging Priorities

India's sports development ecosystem has come a long way, but it is fraught with various structural and institutional obstacles. Lack of access to sports facilities, rural-urban divide, variation in institutional capabilities at the state level, lack of grassroots training chances and financial constraints might restrict the identification and development of sporting talent. Other problems include availability of qualified coaches, sports science persons, modern equipment, facilities for rehabilitation, international competition exposure and transparent athlete-selection methods. The distribution of financial resources among sporting disciplines, the continuity of athlete assistance and responsibility of sports federations, too, need to be carefully looked at. The Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (2025) has underlined the significance of transparent athlete-selection processes, financial support, infrastructure development and athlete welfare in building a robust competitive sports ecosystem in India. These priorities demonstrate that sports excellence is not just dependent on the achievements of individual athletes but also on an integrated institutional structure that is able to help athletes throughout their sporting careers. Furthermore, the evolution of international sporting standards has heightened the significance of scientific coaching, sports medicine, nutrition, psychological readiness, performance analytics as well as technology innovation. There are rising prospects to increase competitive performance through the use of artificial intelligence, data-driven talent identification, biometric monitoring and advanced training approaches. But its performance depends on equal access, professional expertise, enough financial resources and institutional coordination.

Relevance of Sporting Excellence to *Viksit Bharat* @2047

Viksit Bharat @2047 sees sporting achievement as having significant relevance for India's long-term developmental objectives. It can help establish an inclusive and internationally competitive sports ecosystem that can contribute to youth empowerment, gender equality, employment generation, national integration, human capital development and international recognition. The sports development programs of the Government of India are increasingly focused on grassroots talent identification, high-performance training, scientific support and building sustainable routes from school level involvement to international competition. These aims are also evident in initiatives to improve sporting possibilities for women, rural youth and athletes from underprivileged communities (Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, 2026). In this context, the Asian Games would be an essential yardstick to measure India's development toward sporting supremacy. The milestones achieved during the 2023 and 2026 Asian Games reflect the nation's competitive potential as well

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as emphasise the need to maintain consistency, develop institutional governance and diversify medal-winning talents.

Rationale and Focus of the Study

In this context, the present paper attempts to analyse India's performance in sports from the first Asian Games in 1951 to the Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games in 2026. The study is historical, descriptive, analytical and comparative. It looks into the shifting trends in medals, achievements in different disciplines, participation of women and India's position relative to other Asian countries. A special focus is put on the performance disparities between the Asian Games 2023 and 2026 and the resultant impact on future sport development strategies. The report also discusses important government initiatives, institutional frameworks, sports infrastructure, athlete support systems and new barriers to sporting performance. It aims to define strategic goals on grassroots growth, talent identification, scientific training, institutional responsibility, gender inclusion, technological innovation and sustainable financing of sport. The central thesis of the paper is that Indian sports' long-term success cannot be evaluated solely on the basis of overall medals won but must also account for consistency of performance, effectiveness of institutions, equity of participation, and the sustainability of the national sports development ecosystem. The research is expected to contribute toward understanding of sporting advancement in India and give policy-relevant knowledge to increase international competitiveness in future Asian Games and other major sporting contests.

Review of Literature

The Asian Games is among the top international sporting events in the world to evaluate the athletic excellence, institutional capability, sports development and competitive performance throughout Asian countries. In their work Sport Policy in India, Clarke and Mondal (2022) have explored the historical growth of India's athletic ecosystem including state policies, institutional structures, financial arrangements and hurdles to international sporting achievement. Much attention has been paid in sports economics, management and public policy study to the factors of international sporting achievement. In their seminal work "Who Wins the Olympic Games: Economic Resources and Medal Totals", Bernard and Busse (2004) investigated the relationship between country economic resources, population and international athletic achievement. The effective conversion of economic resources to athlete development, training infrastructure and competitive possibilities (Bernard & Busse, 2004). Green and Oakley (2001) conducted a comparative assessment of elite sport development systems. They analysed institutional measures taken by successful athletic nations. They recognised the significance of methodical identification of athletes, specialist coaching, scientific training, financial support and collaboration amongst athletic bodies. In "Successful Elite Sport Policies: An International Comparison in 15 Nations", De Bosscher et al. (2015) established the Sports Policy Factors Leading to International Sporting Success (SPLISS) framework. The framework highlights financial assistance, governance, chances for engagement, talent discovery, athlete career support, training facilities, coaching development, competitive exposure, and scientific research. The SPLISS methodology is crucial for India's Asian Games success as it helps evaluate how national sporting policy and institutional setups translate into competitive achievements. It can also be used as the basis for investigating the efficiency of government initiatives, sports federations and athlete development programs (De Bosscher et al., 2015).

Clarke and Mondal (2022) explored India's elite sporting performance in the Asian Games, Commonwealth Games and Olympic Games. Their comparison research showed the significance of looking at medal totals, rankings and percentage of available medals won, not merely absolute medal counts. They also cited the poor international competitiveness of India's sporting system vis-à-vis its population and

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economic potential. India's performance at the Hangzhou Asian Games in 2023 was a remarkable one with 107 medals – 28 gold, 38 silver and 41 bronzes. The Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (2023) said that India won 29 medals in athletics, 22 in shooting, and nine in archery, highlighting the increasing competitiveness of Indian sportsmen in several sports. India finished fourth in the medal tally with 85 medals — 21 gold, 27 silver and 37 bronze – at the 2026 Aichi–Nagoya Asian Games, which were contested from September 19 to October 4, 2026. It was India's second-highest Asian Games medal haul, the Indian Olympic Association said (2026). Athletics picked up 24 medals, shooting 15 and archery nine. The total number of medals fell slightly compared with 2023, but the results showed the continued competitiveness across a range of sporting disciplines. In India, Clarke and Mondal (2022) find that a range of stakeholders including government ministries, the Sports Authority of India, national sports federations, educational institutions and private groups are involved in the sporting system. However, limited policy implementation and athlete development is often due to divided duties and disparities in organisational capacities.

Launched in 2017, the *Khelo* India Program was a major governmental intervention with the objective of improving grassroots involvement, talent identification, sporting infrastructure and competitive chances. The program aims at developing a stronger athletic culture and creating avenues for the outstanding athletes to develop toward national and international tournaments (MYAS, 2017). The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education, Women, Children, Youth and Sports (2025) examined the functioning of the Sports Authority of India and *Khelo* India. It pointed to issues about institutional capabilities, financial allocations and administrative structures. The Committee recommended that the possibility of giving SAI a statutory standing and improving its professional administrative set-up be examined. These observations highlight that while India has enormously expanded its sporting programs, the efficacy of policy implementation, financial management, institutional accountability and coordination is vital to attaining sustained success in the Asian Games (Parliamentary Standing Committee, 2019, 2025). Sports infrastructure and scientific training are significant for the upgrading of the performance of the athletes. Green and Oakley (2001) contended that the most successful sporting nations have integrated systems of training institutions, specialised coaching, competition frameworks and long-term athlete development. Similarly, De Bosscher et al. (2015) found that availability of high-quality training facilities, sports science, coaching experience and athlete support are important predictors of international athletic competitiveness. Institutional governance is a salient feature of the literature on international sporting excellence. Green & Oakley (2001) showed that elite sporting achievement is dependent in part on the creation of integrated administrative and training frameworks. Also, De Bosscher et al. (2015) stressed the necessity of integrated sports policy and well-defined institutional roles. Clarke and Mondal (2022) found that weak governance was among the primary policy concerns influencing India's athletic environment. They underlined the necessity of better organization, rational distribution of resources and enhanced institutional responsibility.

The Parliamentary Standing Committee (2025) additionally observed that sports administration required expert management, enough budget and institutional reforms to increase the performance of the program. The literature indicates that these institutional elements affect participation in the Asian Games, athletes' preparation, the continuity of training and their ability to compete with the premier sporting nations of Asia (Clarke & Mondal, 2022; De Bosscher et al., 2015). Gender equality and social inclusion have become essential features of sports development and worldwide competitiveness. Clarke and Mondal (2022) underlined the gender inequalities in India's participation in elite level international sports. They studied the participation in Olympics between 2000 and 2020 and found that the percentage of women participating as Indian athletes was lesser than the men. This brings up wider problems about equitable opportunity, access to

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infrastructure, financial assistance, and institutional support. The Indian Express (2026) reported on the Indian contingent's performance at the 2026 Asian Games, detailing that women accounted for 38 of India's 85 medals, including 11 gold medals. International sporting competitiveness has become more and more a function of scientific training, technical innovation, strategic investment and professional sports management. Bernard and Busse (2004) showed the importance of economic resources for international medal accomplishment and De Bosscher et al. (2015) illustrated how policy and institutional structures might affect athletic outcomes. In the Indian context, Clarke and Mondal (2022) stressed the need for systematic policy implementation and institutional development to translate the country's sporting potential into continuous international success.

The literature demonstrates that sporting brilliance is a multifaceted outcome driven by economic resources, institutional governance, policy efficacy, talent identification, scientific training and exposure to international competition. The studies of Green and Oakley (2001), Bernard and Busse (2004), De Bosscher et al. (2015) and Clarke and Mondal (2022) give a sound conceptual underpinning for the drivers of international sporting achievement. Thus, the literature emphasises the need to move from a one-dimensional assessment focused on medal achievements to a holistic review of institutional efficiency, sports governance, athlete development, gender inclusion and international competitiveness. Such an approach can result in evidence-based policymaking and aid to identify reforms required to bolster India's status as a top sporting nation in Asia.

Research Gaps

Despite the growing importance of sports in India's national development agenda, there are several research gaps concerning the country's performance in the Asian Games, especially in relation to the long-term medal performance, institutional effectiveness, athlete development and international competitiveness. For one, previous studies and assessments tend to focus on medal counts, individual successes and event-specific results rather than undertake a full longitudinal review of India's sporting progress since the inaugural Asian Games in 1951. While the participation and medal achievements of India have been duly recorded by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (2023) and the Indian Olympic Association (2026), a systematic analysis of historical performance trajectories, inter-edition variations and discipline wise competitiveness is still needed (MYAS, 2023; IOA, 2026). Second, there has been little attention paid to the assessment of the relationship between sports policy, institutional investments, athlete development programs and competitive successes. To promote the grassroots participation, athletic infrastructure and high-performance training, government initiatives like *Khelo* India, Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS) and *Khelo* Bharat Niti 2025 have been launched. However, the extent to which these initiatives individually lead to meaningful gains in Asian Games performance needs additional empirical examination (Government of India, 2025; Sports Authority of India, 2026). Thirdly, research needs to investigate differences in sporting performance across disciplines, geographies and genders. Variations in institutional capability, availability of training facilities, coaching standards, financial support and international exposure chances may affect athletes' competitive success. Fourth, the evolving association between India's success in medals and worldwide sporting competition needs to be studied closely. The record 107 medals won at Hangzhou in 2023 and 85 medals at Aichi-Nagoya in 2026 raise doubts about the consistency, sustainability and diversification of India's sporting successes (IOA, 2026). Lastly, there is limited integrated analysis on sports governance changes, technology innovation, sports science, athlete welfare and long-term talent development within the larger framework of *Viksit Bharat* @2047. The present study attempts to address these deficiencies by combining a historical

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Volume 04, Issue 05, May 2025

performance analysis with an assessment of sports policies, institutional governance, athlete development and emerging goals for improving India's international sporting competitiveness.

Objectives of the Study

The paper has following main objectives:

1. To examine the historical trends in India's participation and medal achievements in the Asian Games from 1951 to 2026.

2. To analyse discipline-wise performance, gender participation and changing patterns of sporting excellence.

3. To assess India's international sporting competitiveness through comparative medal achievements and overall rankings.

4. To examine the role of government sports policies, institutional support, infrastructure development and athlete development programmes.

5. To identify major institutional, financial, administrative and operational challenges affecting sporting performance.

6. To suggest emerging priorities and strategic interventions for strengthening India's sporting excellence towards *Viksit Bharat @2047*.

Research Methodology

The present paper has been descriptive, analytical, historical and comparative in research style and it is relied mainly on secondary sources. Data from the Olympic Council of Asia, Indian Olympic Association, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Sports Authority of India, Press Information Bureau, Government policy documents, official medal statistics and pertinent research publications were used. The report deliberates on India's participation in the Asian Games from 1951 to 2026 with special focus on comparative performance in 2014, 2018, 2023 and 2026 editions. The analysis is based on descriptive data, percentage distributions, absolute and relative changes, composition of medals, comparative rankings and trends analysis. The study further analyses sports policies and institutional arrangements using qualitative document analysis and identifies their implications for sports development, athlete welfare, governance and international competitiveness. The research explores the relationship between sporting success and policy change, but does not claim causation. Moreover, the total medal counts are not directly comparable measurements of competition among editions because the Asian Games program has increased substantially over

India's Performance in the Asian Games

India's participation in the Asian Games is a testimony to a long path of sporting progress, institutional transformation and increased international competition. The first Asian Games were staged in New Delhi in 1951 and it was the beginning of India's affiliation with continental sporting brilliance. India bagged 51 medals in all to come second in the overall tally. Over the decades that followed, India's performance fluctuated widely, depending on the shifting standards of competition, the varying quality of sporting infrastructure, athlete training and the evolution of sporting institutions. The staging of the ninth Asian Games in New Delhi in 1982 was another landmark in India's sporting history. The medal record of India has usually improved from the start of the twenty first century however there are swings. The most notable accomplishment came at Hangzhou in 2023 when India grabbed a record 107 medals. India won 85 medals

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A MONTHLY, OPEN ACCESS, PEER REVIEWED (REFEREED) INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL
Volume 04, Issue 05, May 2025

and preserved its fourth position in the overall medal tally at the next Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games in 2026 (IOA, 2026).

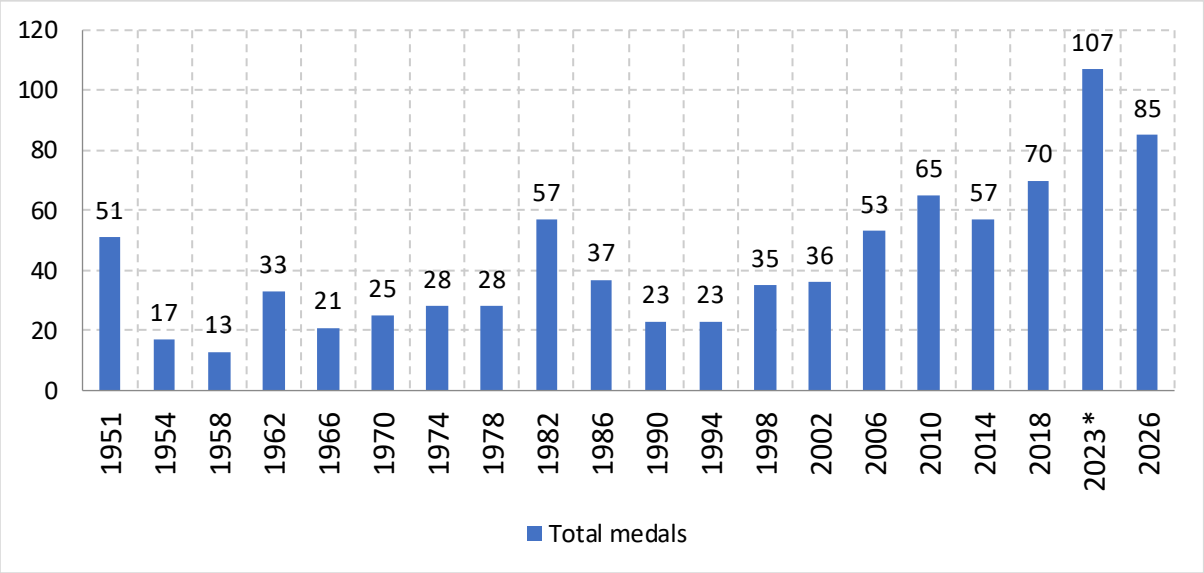
Table 1. India's Medal Achievements in the Asian Games, 1951–2026

Year	Host City	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total Medals	Rank
1951	New Delhi	15	16	20	51	2
1954	Manila	5	4	8	17	5
1958	Tokyo	5	4	4	13	7
1962	Jakarta	10	13	10	33	3
1966	Bangkok	7	3	11	21	5
1970	Bangkok	6	9	10	25	5
1974	Tehran	4	12	12	28	7
1978	Bangkok	11	11	6	28	6
1982	New Delhi	13	19	25	57	5
1986	Seoul	5	9	23	37	5
1990	Beijing	1	8	14	23	11
1994	Hiroshima	4	3	16	23	8
1998	Bangkok	7	11	17	35	9
2002	Busan	11	12	13	36	7
2006	Doha	10	17	26	53	8
2010	Guangzhou	14	17	34	65	6
2014	Incheon	11	10	36	57	8
2018	Jakarta–Palembang	16	23	31	70	8
2023	Hangzhou	28	38	41	107	4
2026	Aichi–Nagoya	21	27	37	85	4
Total	**1951–2026**	**204**	**266**	**394**	**864**	—

Sources: Historical medal records compiled from the Olympic Council of Asia, the Government of India and the Indian Olympic Association (2026).

Chart 1. Growth in India's Asian Games Medal Achievements, 1951–2026

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Volume 04, Issue 05, May 2025



Analysis of Historical Trends

The history shows that there were wide changes in India's sports achievements in the first few decades of Asian Games. The medal performance was variable in the period between 1951 and 2002, with achievements during the 1990s particularly limited. After 2002, there was a steadier progress with India winning 36 medals, then 53 medals in 2006 and 65 medals in 2010. Achievements dropped to 57 medals in 2014, but the successive editions saw a new growth up to the historical achievement of 107 medals at Hangzhou 2023. India's result in Aichi-Nagoya in 2026 was a fall of 22 medals or around 20.6 percent compared to the 2023 edition. The number of gold medals dropped from 28 to 21, silver from 38 to 27 and bronze from 41 to 37. However, India's fourth position in both editions suggests that the fall in absolute medals did not cause a fall in its overall ranking. This difference points out the value of considering sporting competitiveness beyond medal tallies.

India's Sporting Achievements at the 2026 Asian Games

The 20th Asian Games to be held in Aichi-Nagoya in Japan from 19 September to 4 October 2026 would be an acid test of India's sporting strength and institutional preparedness. India, with a contingent of 503 competitors, won 85 medals including 21 gold, 27 silver and 37 bronzes and finished fourth in the overall medal tally, according to the Indian Olympic Association (2026). Athletics, shooting and archery contributed the most to India's medal tally.

Table 2. Discipline-wise Medal Achievements of India at the 2026 Asian Games

Sporting Discipline	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
Athletics	1	9	14	24
Shooting	3	8	4	15
Archery	5	2	2	9
Boxing	3	0	3	6
Wrestling	2	2	2	6

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Volume 04, Issue 05, May 2025

Squash	0	2	3	5
Sailing	0	1	2	3
Cricket	2	0	0	2
Hockey	2	0	0	2
Kabaddi	2	0	0	2
Golf	1	1	0	2
Weightlifting	0	1	0	1
Wushu	0	1	0	1
Badminton	0	0	1	1
Kurash	0	0	1	1
Mixed Martial Arts	0	0	1	1
Rowing	0	0	1	1
Sepak Takraw	0	0	1	1
Soft Tennis	0	0	1	1
Table Tennis	0	0	1	1
Total	**21**	**27**	**37**	**85**

Source: Press Information Bureau, Government of India (2026), *India's Gold Medal Triumph at Aichi-Nagoya 2026*.

Major Findings

The discipline-wise data reveals the focus of India's medal haul in athletics, shooting and archery. Those disciplines accounted for 48 medals, or around 56.5 percent of the national haul. Athletics took the most medals, but archery had the most golds. India was strong in some team sports, winning gold medals in men's and women's cricket, hockey and kabaddi. The inclusion of medals in novel disciplines like mixed martial arts and soft tennis points toward the prospects of broadening India's international athletic achievements. An important characteristic of the 2026 Games was the contribution of women to the overall medal count. After the Games, reports said women competitors accounted for 38 of India's 85 medals, including 11 gold. This shows the growing importance of women's participation in the growth of sports in India (Indian Express, 2026). However, the relatively small medal tally in some sports, and the reliance on proven medal-winning sports, indicate the need to increase participation and competitive ability in a wider range of events.

Sports Policies and Their Contribution to Sporting Excellence

India's recent sporting achievements have developed alongside major changes in sports policy, institutional arrangements, financial assistance and athlete-support programmes.

National Sports Policy and *Khelo Bharat Niti* 2025

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The National Sports Policy, 2001 had focus on broad-basing of sports participation and achieving excellence at national and international levels. It recognised the responsibility of the Union Government, state governments, Indian Olympic Association and National Sports Federations in promoting sporting activities and fostering competitive qualities (Government of India, 2001). A notable policy breakthrough was creation of *Khelo Bharat Niti* 2025, aimed to create a holistic, inclusive and performance-oriented national sports ecosystem. The policy highlights five fundamental pillars - excellence on global stage, sports for economic development, sports for social development, sports as a people's movement and integration of sports with education. It also highlights infrastructure development, scientific training, talent identification, institutional responsibility, athlete welfare and technological innovation. The policy directly links sports development to the larger objectives of India under *Viksit Bharat* @2047 (MYAS, 2025). The policy provides a crucial foundation to convert sporting participation into sustained competitive excellence. But for its success, it would depend on how the scheme is implemented at the state and district levels, appropriate financial resources and better co-ordination among the sporting institutions.

Khelo India Programme

The *Khelo* India Program is aimed at increasing engagement in sports at the grassroots level, developing sporting infrastructure, identifying rising potential and creating pathways to move athletes toward national and international competition. The key interventions include contests at school and university level, talent discovery, financial aid, infrastructure development, support to sports academies and promotion of inclusive athletic activities. The initiative holds special importance in improving possibilities for rural youth, women and athletes from the economically weaker sections. More study is needed to ascertain whether the approach has resulted in sustained improvements in athlete development, competitive readiness and medal outcomes across individual sports and regions.

Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS)

The Target Olympic Podium Scheme was created in 2014 to give a boost to athletes with good chances of victory in major international contests. The plan offers personalised help in terms of specialist coaching, international training, competitive exposure, high-end equipment, sports science and financial support. The Sports Authority of India said TOPS was further upgraded in 2018 with the introduction of dedicated technical support procedures for athlete preparation. This approach also involves performance monitoring and frequent assessment of athlete development programs (SAI, 2026). While TOPS is focused on Olympic and Paralympic success, many athletes receiving support also compete in the Asian Games. The program thus constitutes an integral part of the high-performance sports ecosystem in India.

Khelo India Rising Talent Identification (KIRTI)

The *Khelo* India Rising Talent Identification initiative aims to systematically examine and identify the sporting potential of children and adolescents. This includes systematic talent assessment, physical performance testing, and digital technology, including data analytics and artificial intelligence. The program is especially pertinent in terms of upgrading early-stage talent identification and broadening the prospects for young athletes who could otherwise be excluded from the orbit of organised sports development systems (MYAS, 2026). The long-term success of such projects will depend on the availability of experienced coaches, adequate training conditions and ongoing institutional support following initial talent identification.

Athlete Development and Sports Infrastructure

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The basis of sustainable sporting excellence is athlete development. Continued investment in physical conditioning, technical skills, psychological preparation, nutrition, sports medicine and exposure to competition is required for successful international performance. India's sports development architecture is now coming to terms with the need to link grassroots engagement with high-performance training. The Sports Authority of India, National Centers of Excellence, state-level academies, universities, sports federations and specialised training centers are crucial to nurture athletes. However, inequalities still exist in access to contemporary infrastructure, qualified coaches, sports science facilities and financial support.

The following areas are particularly important for strengthening athlete development:

- **Grassroots Talent Identification:** The national talent pool can be augmented by early identification of sporting potential through schools, universities, rural sports programs and competitions at the community level.
- **Scientific Training and Sports Medicine:** Performance evaluation, injury prevention, rehabilitation, nutrition, psychological conditioning and evidence-based training can help athletes prepare.
- **International Experience:** Competing in international tournaments, training camps, and coaching clinics could assist athletes adapt to elevated competitive levels.
- **Women and Inclusive Sports Development:** Providing better possibilities for women, persons with disabilities and athletes from underprivileged communities can foster both sporting excellence and social inclusion.
- **Athlete Welfare and Career Security:** Education opportunities, employment help, financial protection and post-retirement aid are vital to promote ongoing engagement in competitive sport. An integrated athlete development system should not be focused on short-term preparation for major sporting events, but rather provide ongoing support from talent identification through to elite competition.

Institutional Governance and International Sporting Competitiveness

Institutional Governance

Good institutional governance is a key predictor of the quality, transparency and sustainability of sports development. The sports governance structure in India consists of the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Sports Authority of India, Indian Olympic Association, the National Sports Federations, state sports departments and other specialised entities. The duties of these bodies are complementary in the areas of policy design, financial aid, athlete selection, infrastructure development, training and international participation. But the efficiency of athlete-support systems may be undermined by overlapping tasks, varying organisational capabilities, administrative delays and inadequate coordination. One big recent development was the National Sports Governance Act, 2025, followed by rules notified in 2026. The changes paved the way for the enhancement of governance standards and the creation of structures like the National Sports Board and National Sports Tribunal (Government of India, 2026). If implemented effectively, these reforms could increase institutional accountability, openness and dispute resolution.

Challenges Affecting Institutional Performance

The major institutional issues are lack of coordination between national and state sports bodies, uneven funding allocation, poor monitoring of athlete development and varying degrees of administrative professionalism. The importance of better athlete development programs had also been stressed after the 2026 Asian Games. The Sports Ministry, when reviewing India's performance, expressed issues around reliance on

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experienced athletes, injury management and developing future medal potential (Indian Express, 2026). These problems suggest the necessity for long-term performance planning rather than simply focusing on immediate medal targets.

International Sporting Competitiveness

International sporting competitiveness is the ability of a country to attain and maintain victory over athletes from other countries under equivalent conditions of competition. For Asian Games, competitiveness can be measured in terms of medal haul, gold medal share, overall ranking, consistency of performance, number of medal winning disciplines and participation in individual and team events. India's fourth place in 2023 and 2026 Asian Games suggests it can mix it with the best in Asian athletic nations. But the disparity in medal counts between successive editions indicates that the competition performance is not static. Hence, India's international competitiveness needs to be viewed in a wider context which includes competitive depth, athlete development, institutional efficiency and sustained excellence.

Emerging Priorities for Strengthening India's Sporting Excellence

The historical and comparative research reveals that India has to have a comprehensive strategy to improve sporting competitiveness in the next decades.

- **Promoting Grassroots Sports Development**: Policy focus should be on expansion of sporting facilities in schools, colleges, universities, rural areas and smaller towns. Talent identification methods should be connected with district competitions and professional training institutions.
- **Promoting Scientific and Technology-Driven Training:** Investing more in sports science, performance analytics, biomechanics, nutrition, rehabilitation and psychological conditioning to promote scientific and technology-driven training. Given the right data protection and ethical measures, there is potential to use artificial intelligence and data analysis to help spot talent, monitor performance and prevent damage.
- **Sports Governance and Institutional Responsibility:** Sports governance reforms should focus on transparent selection of athletes, professional management, financial responsibility, grievance redressal and verifiable institutional performance indicators.
- **Enhancing Women's Involvement and Gender Equity**: The successes of women athletes at the Asian Games highlight the need to provide equitable chances in sports education, facilities, coaching, financial support and competitive exposure. Policies on sports development should include gender-sensitive facilities, safety of athletes, possibilities for career and leadership.
- **Tackling Regional Inequalities:** Distribute the provision of sporting infrastructure and professional training facilities to areas beyond the established urban centers. Care should be taken in particular for the rural, tribal, geographically disadvantaged and economically poorer regions.
- **Diversifying Winning Disciplines**: India have showed strength in athletics, shooting, archery, boxing, wrestling and chosen team sports but there is a need to diversify into more disciplines to improve long-term medal aspirations. This requires discipline-specific growth plans, expert coaching, worldwide exposure and enough investment in new sports sectors.
- **Enhancing Sports Financing and Public–Private Partnership:** Sustainable financing via government investment, corporate social responsibility, sponsorship, private sports academies and institutional collaborations can be used to improve training facilities and athlete support. Financing mechanisms should be related to transparent performance evaluation without abandoning grassroots engagement and new disciplines.

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- "**Towards 2047 – Developing a Long-Term Sporting Excellence:** Framework for A comprehensive national athletic excellence structure must link grassroots engagement, educational institutions, high-performance centers and international competitiveness. Such a framework should focus on continuity in athlete development, good governance, scientific training and equal chances. The goals of the *Khelo Bharat Niti* 2025 provide a policy framework for incorporating these priorities into the larger national development agenda (Government of India, 2025).

Conclusion

India's history in the Asian Games since 1951 is a significant journey of sports progress, sporting successes and institutional transformation. The historical analysis shows significant variation in medal performance in the first decades and a general upward trend of successes in the twenty-first century. India's record 107 medals in the 2023 Hangzhou Asian Games was a noteworthy milestone in the country's sporting history. While this was a drop on the previous edition, the country nevertheless managed to finish fourth in the overall medal rankings and it's second-highest tally of medals with 85 at Aichi-Nagoya in 2026. The study has found that India's sporting success has been increasingly supported by advances in sports facilities, athlete development programs, institutional support and government initiatives. vital policy interventions like *Khelo* India, TOPS and KIRTI, along with *Khelo Bharat Niti* 2025 are vital to promote sporting participation and enhance international competitive preparation. But there are several ongoing difficulties that need to be addressed on a consistent basis, including regional imbalances, grassroots infrastructure, quality coaching, scientific training, financial resources, sports governance and athlete welfare.

The comparison with the 2023 and 2026 Asian Games points to the necessity of measuring sporting achievements beyond the total medal count. Long-term markers of sporting growth are competitiveness by discipline, female involvement, medal quality, consistency of performance and institutional effectiveness. The report indicates that the future of Indian sport hinges on establishing an inclusive, scientifically supported, professionally regulated and financially sustainable sports environment. To achieve sustainable success, it will be important to strengthen grassroots talent identification, expand chances for women and disadvantaged communities, improve athlete welfare, diversify competitive disciplines and ensure institutional accountability. A coherent national plan combining education, sports development, technological innovation and international competitiveness might make a substantial contribution to India's *Viksit Bharat* @2047 goals.

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