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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

Beyond the Medal — Can the Khelo India Tribal Games Transform India's Sports Governance?

 **HINDUSTAN TIMES**

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SUBJECTS COVERED**SOCIAL ISSUES****REPORTS & SCHEMES****GS PAPERS****GS2****GS1****ESSAY****CURATED & WRITTEN BY****Bharat Choudhary**

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Beyond the Medal — Can the Khelo India Tribal Games Transform India's Sports Governance?

Hindustan Times 25 March 2026 **GS2** **GS1** **ESSAY**

HT Hindustan Times | MAINS RELEVANCE: **GS Paper 2** **GS Paper 1** **Essay Paper**



INTERVIEW ANGLE

"Tribal communities produce exceptional athletes but lack infrastructure and institutional support. Can the Khelo India Tribal Games create a sustainable pipeline, or is it a one-time event?"

WHY IN NEWS

The first Khelo India Tribal Games (KITG) 2026 opened on March 25 in Chhattisgarh with 2,300+ athletes across nine disciplines, raising questions about whether the event can become a sustainable pathway for tribal sporting talent.

The Editorial Argument

Hindustan Times argues that while the KITG is a welcome step, India's tribal communities have been consistently underserved by the sports ecosystem. The editorial calls for moving beyond "event-based visibility" to building **permanent institutional infrastructure** for tribal athletes.

The Talent-Infrastructure Gap

India's tribal communities have a rich tradition of physical prowess — archery, wrestling, football, hockey, and athletics are deeply embedded in tribal cultures. Yet tribal athletes face systemic barriers:

BARRIER	DETAIL
Infrastructure	Fifth Schedule areas have the fewest sports facilities per capita
Nutrition	Tribal malnutrition rates (33.8% stunting among ST children) affect athletic development
Coaching	Remote areas lack qualified coaches; Khelo India centres are concentrated in urban areas
Financial support	Tribal families cannot afford sports equipment, travel, or training camps
Identification	No systematic talent scouting mechanism in tribal areas

Tribal Athletes — The Untold Story

Despite these barriers, tribal athletes have excelled at the highest levels:

- **Mary Kom** (Manipur) — Six-time World Boxing Champion
- **Hima Das** (Assam) — India’s first gold medallist in a world track event (400m, 2018 IAAF World U20)
- **Eknath Shinde** (Maharashtra) — hockey Olympian from tribal background
- Indian women’s hockey team features multiple tribal athletes from Jharkhand and Odisha

The editorial notes that **Jharkhand alone has produced more national-level hockey players per capita** than any other state — largely from tribal communities in Khunti, Simdega, and West Singhbhum.

What the KITG Must Become

The editorial recommends transforming KITG from an event into an ecosystem:

- 1 **Permanent Tribal Sports Academies:** At least one in each Fifth Schedule state (10 states), funded under PM-JANMAN
- 2 **Nutritional support:** Link athletes to PM POSHAN (mid-day meal) and Integrated Child Development Scheme
- 3 **Scholarship guarantee:** Every KITG medallist should automatically receive a Khelo India scholarship (Rs 5 lakh/year for 8 years)
- 4 **Coaching cadre:** Deploy sports coaches in Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) — 740+ already operational
- 5 **Traditional sports recognition:** Elevate Mallakhamb, Kabaddi, Kho-Kho as full medal sports, not just demonstration

The Constitutional Mandate

PROVISION	RELEVANCE
Article 46	Promote educational and economic interests of STs
Fifth Schedule	Administration of tribal areas in 10 states
Sixth Schedule	Autonomous councils in NE tribal areas
PESA Act, 1996	Self-governance in Fifth Schedule areas
PM-JANMAN (2023)	Rs 24,104 crore for 75 PVTGs across 18 states

UPSC RELEVANCE

Khelo India programme, Fifth Schedule, PESA Act, PM-JANMAN, EMRS, SAI, tribal population data

Government policies for tribal welfare; sports governance; inclusive development

“Sport as a vehicle for social inclusion — lessons from India’s tribal communities”

★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

KITG 2026:

First edition: March 25 – April 6, 2026

Host: Chhattisgarh (Raipur, Jagdalpur, Sarguja)

Athletes: 2,300+; participants: 6,000+

Mascot: “Morveer”

7 medal + 2 demonstration sports

TRIBAL POPULATION:

Total ST: 10.43 crore (8.6% of India, Census 2011)

Highest ST population: Madhya Pradesh (1.53 crore)

Highest ST proportion: Mizoram (94.4%)

PVTGs: 75 groups across 18 states

EMRS: 740+ schools sanctioned for tribal students

SPORTS INFRASTRUCTURE:

SAI: Sports Authority of India (est. 1984)

Khelo India: launched 2018

Scholarship: Rs 5 lakh/year for 8 years per identified athlete

KISCE: 12 Khelo India State Centres of Excellence

OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

PM-JANMAN: Rs 24,104 crore for 75 PVTGs

Article 46: promote educational/economic interests of STs

National Sports Day: August 29

Tribal literacy rate: 59% vs national 74%

Sources: [Hindustan Times](#), [PIB](#)

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