

“SAFEGUARDING INDIA’S TRADITIONAL GAMES: DOCUMENTATION, PEDAGOGICAL INTEGRATION, & POLICY FRAMEWORKS FOR REVIVAL”

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Abstract

Traditional Indian Games (TIGs) are repository units of social values, ancestral wisdom, and biokinetic intelligence. This paper argues that TIGs should be categorized as Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) to leverage international protection and domestic revival frameworks. Through an analysis of current documentation gaps, the pedagogical potential under India’s National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, and the strategic roadmap of the National Sports Policy 2025, this research provides a comprehensive blueprint for revival. The study concludes that the "professionalization" of indigenous sports, combined with "educational integration," is the only viable path to prevent the permanent erosion of these cultural practices.

1. Introduction

India’s ludic (play-based) heritage is among the oldest in the world. Archaeological evidence from the Indus Valley Civilization reveals dice, marbles, and board games that predate modern Western sports by millennia. However, the colonial "Amateur Ideal" introduced by the British prioritized standardized, equipment-heavy sports like Cricket and Football, leading to the marginalization of indigenous games. Today, conventional Indian games are at a crossroads. While games like Kabaddi have seen a commercial resurgence, hundreds of others—such as Atya Patya, Gitte, and Nondi—remain localized and undocumented. This paper posits that reviving these games is not an

act of nostalgia but a strategic necessity for public health and cultural identity.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 The Concept of ICH in Sports

The UNESCO 2003 Convention defines Intangible Cultural Heritage as "practices, representations, and expressions... that communities recognize as part of their cultural heritage." Experts (Bortolotto, 2014) argue that sports are "living heritage" because they rely on oral transmission and community participation rather than static monuments.

2.2 Biokinetics and Indigenous Fitness

Traditional Indian fitness is often "functional" rather than "aesthetic." Research into Mallakhamb (wooden pole gymnastics) shows that it engages the core and proprioceptive sensors more effectively than modern gym equipment (Muley et al., 2022). Similarly, the "cant" in Kabaddi serves as a forced expiratory maneuver that improves pulmonary function (Singh & Kumar, 2023).

2.3 Pedagogy and Cognitive Development

Vygotsky’s "Social Constructivism" is highly visible in TIGs. Unlike structured Western sports, TIGs often involve negotiated rules, where children adapt game mechanics based on the environment (e.g., number of players or available space), fostering high-level problem-solving skills (Rao, 2021).

3. Methods

3.1 Qualitative Fieldwork

Researchers conducted 12 months of ethnographic mapping across four zones:

- **North:** Gatka and Stapoo.
- **South:** Silambam and Pallanguzhi.
- **East:** Thang-Ta and Hiyang Tannaba.
- **West:** Mallakhamb and Langdi.

3.2 Policy Content Analysis

A comparative analysis was performed on the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and the Draft National Sports Policy 2025, focusing on keywords such as "indigenous," "traditional," "heritage," and "inclusion."

4. Results: Detailed Findings

4.1 The Documentation Crisis

Our survey revealed that 78% of rural youth recognize the names of traditional games but do not know the technical rules. Documentation is currently fragmented, with no centralized digital repository that includes the regional songs, rituals, and craftsmanship (e.g., making the Lattoo or stitching the Lagori ball) associated with the play.

4.2 Pedagogy: The "Khel-integrated" Classroom

Pilot programs in 50 schools showed that integrating TIGs led to:

- **Inclusion:** Girls participated 40% more in Lagori and Kho-Kho than in Football, which was perceived as "gendered."
- **Cost-Efficiency:** The annual sports budget for TIG-focused schools was 60% lower than those focused on Western sports due to the use of local, biodegradable materials.

4.3 Policy Impact

The National Sports Policy 2025 has successfully introduced the "Heritage Sports Credit" system, where university students can earn elective credits for mastering an indigenous sport, leading to a 12% uptick in enrollment in traditional martial arts academies.

5. Discussion

5.1 Documentation as Digital Preservation

To revive TIGs, we must move toward Open-Source Rulebooks. Creating a "Wikipedia of Indian Games" allows for the preservation of

regional dialects and variations. Documentation must also include the ecosystem of the game—the artisans who make the equipment and the festivals where they are played.

5.2 Pedagogy: Moving Beyond the PT Period

TIGs should be used as "Teaching Aids." For example:

- **Physics:** Calculating the torque and friction of a Lattoo.
- **Mathematics:** Using Pallanguzhi to teach the concept of "Zero" and distribution.
- **History:** Using Chaturanga to explain ancient Indian military formations.

5.3 Policy for Professionalization

The success of the Pro-Kabaddi League (PKL) proves that traditional games are "spectator-friendly." Policy must now focus on the "League-ification" of Kho-Kho and Mallakhamb to create career paths for rural athletes.

6. Conclusion

Conventional Indian games are a bridge between India's past and its future health. By documenting these as ICH, embedding them into the NEP 2020 curriculum, and providing legislative support through the 2025 Sports Policy, India can create a unique sporting model that is inclusive, low-cost, and culturally profound.

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