

Growth and Promotion of Traditional Indian Sports and Games on the Commercial and Global Level

Balbir Singh Kalsaik

Assistant Professor of Physical Education Govt College Nerwa, Distt. Shimla, H,P,

Abstract

Traditional Indian sports such as Kabaddi, Mallakhamb, Kho-Kho, and Gilli-Danda are deeply rooted in the cultural and historical fabric of the country. For decades, these indigenous games remained overshadowed by globally popular sports like cricket and football. However, recent efforts by private enterprises, government bodies, and international organizations have propelled traditional Indian sports into commercial and global arenas. This research article explores the historical significance, recent revival, commercialization, and international promotion of Indian indigenous sports, supported by policy interventions and media representation.

Keywords: Traditional Indian sports, Kabaddi, Kho-Kho, Gilli-Danda, Indigenous games

Introduction

India's diverse heritage is mirrored in its traditional sports and games, many of which evolved as physical training exercises, martial arts, or rural leisure activities. These games were once essential to community bonding, discipline, and skill development. Yet, with colonization and globalization, British and Western sports like cricket and soccer overshadowed them (Majumdar 55). Over the past decade, however, there has been a renewed effort to not only preserve but also promote these games commercially and globally.

Historical Significance of Traditional Indian Sports

Games such as **Kabaddi**, **Kho-Kho**, and **Mallakhamb** have centuries-old roots. Kabaddi, for example, is mentioned in ancient Indian scriptures and was popular across villages due to its simplicity and minimal equipment needs (Bandyopadhyay 81). Mallakhamb, a traditional gymnastics sport using a wooden pole, is believed to have been practiced as early as the 12th century and was used for training warriors.

These sports were historically linked with physical and mental discipline, spirituality, and community identity. Their decline began during colonial rule, when British games were institutionalized through schools and clubs, and indigenous games were deemed primitive or informal.

Recent Growth and Commercialization

1. Professional Leagues and Media Exposure

The launch of the **Pro Kabaddi League (PKL)** in 2014 marked a revolutionary turn in the commercial journey of traditional Indian sports. With the involvement of STAR Sports and corporate sponsors, PKL

introduced high production values, player auctions, celebrity endorsements, and international broadcasting, transforming Kabaddi into a prime-time television spectacle (Sengupta 19).

Likewise, the Ultimate Kho Kho League, introduced in 2022, seeks to modernize and professionalize the sport of Kho-Kho through a franchise-based model inspired by the Indian Premier League (IPL). These leagues attract youth audiences and generate employment opportunities for rural athletes, thus revitalizing local talent pools.

2. Government Initiatives and Policy Support

The Government of India, through its *Khelo India* program, has recognized several traditional games for promotion, training, and integration into school and college sports curricula. Initiatives like the *Fit India Movement* and *Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat* have also promoted awareness and participation in indigenous sports.

The **Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (MYAS)** has taken steps to include traditional sports under priority disciplines, facilitating funding, infrastructure, and international exposure (MYAS Annual Report 2021-22).

Global Reach and Cultural Diplomacy

The global promotion of Indian traditional sports has gained momentum in diaspora communities. For example, Kabaddi is now played professionally in countries such as Iran, South Korea, Kenya, and Canada. The **Kabaddi World Cup**, held in India and other countries, draws international teams and global audiences, demonstrating its growing appeal.

Furthermore, Indian martial arts like **Kalaripayattu** and **Silambam** have gained international recognition as cultural exports and are taught in various global martial arts academies. UNESCO's recognition of some traditional games as intangible cultural heritage has further helped in their global legitimization.

These sports also serve as tools of **soft power** and cultural diplomacy, allowing India to project its heritage on international platforms, such as during the *International Yoga Day* celebrations where indigenous games are also showcased.

Challenges in Global and Commercial Promotion

Despite progress, several challenges remain:

Lack of uniform rules and global federations for many traditional games hampers their internationalization.

Lack of investment and infrastructure at the grassroots level deters talent development in rural and tribal regions.

Limited media coverage compared to mainstream sports like cricket diminishes visibility.

As Sharma notes, "the survival of traditional sports depends on sustainable commercialization without cultural dilution" (Sharma 2022).

Conclusion

The resurgence of traditional Indian sports marks a critical moment in the intersection of culture, commerce, and globalization. Through professional leagues, government support, and increasing international interest, indigenous sports are gaining the recognition they deserve. While challenges remain, the potential for these games to serve as vehicles of national pride, economic opportunity, and global cultural identity is immense. Sustained investment, inclusive promotion strategies, and international collaboration can further elevate traditional Indian sports to the global arena.

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