

Principles and Global Relevance of Bhāratīya Khel (Indian Games)

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Abstract: The traditional Indian games, collectively known as *Bhāratīya Khel*, encapsulate the essence of India's historical, cultural, and social fabric. Rooted in ancient texts and practices, these games, including Kabaddi, Kho-Kho, Chaturanga (chess), and Mallakhamb, extend beyond mere entertainment to promote physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. They embody philosophical values derived from Indian scriptures, such as the *Rig Veda*, *Mahābhārata*, and *Nāṭyaśāstra*, emphasizing principles like endurance, discipline, and self-realization. Such games are played across generations, *Bhāratīya Khel* have served as instruments for survival training, social bonding, and cultural expression. Digital entertainment has reduced awareness of these games. Government and cultural initiatives aim to revitalize them in modern educational frameworks. These efforts highlight their importance for fitness, cultural preservation and social cohesion, positioning *Bhāratīya Khel* as vital to Indian identity globally. Based on secondary sources, this article enhances understanding of *Bhāratīya Khel* for future generations, aiming to preserve indigenous knowledge and show its relevance in modern education and recreation.

Keywords: *Bhāratīya Khel*, Wellbeing, Cultural Expression, History, Social Bonding

1. Introduction

Khel or Game in form of physical engagement and entertainment have always been an integral part of *Bhāratīya* (Indian) civilization, which does not only provide entertainment but also makes people more active in both ways physiologically and psychologically. Rooted in our local *Bhāratīya* art, culture, history, and societal

values, '*Bhāratīya Khel*' encompasses a wide array of sports and playful activities that have traditionally provided entertainment, fostered community bonds, and promoted physical and mental agility. The beating heart of *Bhāratīya* culture and tradition is reflected not just in its diverse languages, culinary delights, or iconic dances but also in its age-old games that have shaped the very essence of leisure and community life. The genesis of these games is often linked to ancient practices that were aimed at honing survival skills, understanding strategy, and even engaging with spiritual beliefs. *Bhāratīya Khel* or Indian traditional games - represent a treasure trove of history, innovation, and social connection that have transcended generations. This article will enhance the understanding about the *Bhāratīya Khel* to the new generations who are having lesser physical participation in playing games in comparison to the digital games may be because of lack of awareness about *the Bhāratīya Khel*.

2. Objective

The major objective of the study is

1. To enhance the understanding about the *Bhāratīya Khel* to the new generations.
2. To explore the possible relevance and principles of the *Bhāratīya Khel*

3. Research Methodology

The study is qualitative research with detailed descriptions of *Bhāratīya Khel* using the multiple sources of information including secondary sources. The research emphasizes cultural significance, regional variations, and the pedagogical value embedded within *Bhāratīya Khel*. Through this approach, the study aims to preserve indigenous knowledge systems and highlight their relevance in contemporary educational and recreational contexts.

4. Historical Foundations

Bhārata's (India's) vast rural landscape harbours a diversity of traditional games played by the people that reflect their ethnological and historical richness. Many ancient *Bhāratīya* texts, including the *Vedas*, *Mahābhārata*, *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Nāṭyaśāstra*, *Manusmṛti*, and the *Puranas*, highlight principles of physical training, martial arts, dance, yoga, and games that connect body, mind, and spirit. According to Aiyar

(2013), many of these games date back to ancient texts, including the *Mahābhārata*, which mentions strategic board games, and other Vedic scriptures that allude to early forms of martial arts and wrestling (Aiyar, 2013). Games like Kabaddi and Kho-Kho, which are among the most widely recognized indigenous and entertaining play, are not only sources of local pride but also means through which socio-cultural folk knowledge is transmitted across generations.

The *Rig Veda* contains the oldest known mention of games like gambling. In the Dyuta-Sukta, or “Ode to the Dice,” which appears in the eleventh volume of the Rig Veda, a gambler addresses the dice that have ruined his life and pleads with them to spare him. Of the 64 Kalas described by Vatsyayana as *Bahya Kalas*, or “external arts,” Dyuta Viseshā, or the “art of knowing specific gambling,” is a gambling technique that requires formal education. According to its etymology, Kala means “the performance of an art.” There are 64 Kalas,” according to Hindu scripture. According to legend, *Guru Sandipani Muni* taught Lord *Balaram* and *Krishna* 64 Kalas in just 64 days. According to the *Mahābhārata*, Yudhishtira had a serious gambling addiction as he gambled away his whole kingdom, his freedom, and his wife’s freedom (Dwivedi, 2021).

Ancient *Bhāratīya Khel* reflect a legacy that spans thousands of years, emphasizing cultural values, mental agility, and physical prowess. Such activities have been very much successful in promoting holistic well-being through physical and mental exercises since the birth of Indus Valley Civilization. The major concepts behind playing such engaging games were the Physical Fitness and *Dharma*. Physical Fitness has been emphasized in ancient texts like vedas and Upanishads, that advocates for Balance (*Santulan*), Discipline (*Anushashan*), and Physical Strength (*Bhautik Kshamta*) as holistic approach of healthy life of the human beings while *Dharma* touches many aspects of the ethical conduct, helping hands towards each other aligned with Indian philosophical principles. Major *Bhāratīya Khel* like Pachisi, *Chaturanga*, *Malla-khamb*, *Kalaripayattu*, *Tir-Dhanush* (Archery), Chariot Race etc. has been continued to be played by people of India since ancient times. *Pachisi* was known as “Royal Game of Bharata” because of its strategic depth which is a precursor to modern game Ludo. *Chaturanga* has been played for military tactics by ancestors which needed strategic thinking. This game is currently famous in form of chess. *Malla-khamb* was traditional sport that combines gymnastics and yoga involving acrobatic exercises on a wooden pole, and was famous for showcasing strength and

grace. *Kalripayattu*, which was an ancient martial art mostly played in Kerala and neighboring region, was famous for boosting discipline and concentration among the people. This game involved armed and unarmed both type of techniques during the play. *Tir-Dhanush* (Archery) is one of the famous games still played in most of the rural areas in India. This game has been played in ancient India also and has also been mythologized in pious epics like the Mahābhārata, Rāmāyaṇa etc. This game has taught the skill and discipline among the *Bhāratiya* Culture. Another famous game Chariot Racing was very much popular during the Era of Mauryan and Gupta, that had demonstrated royal power and grandeur (Admin, 2023). Another one of the most played game Kho-Kho was influenced by the Mahābhārata, a Hindu sacred scripture. According to tradition, the strategy that *Abhimanyu* employed to defeat the defensive circle during the Mahābhārata battle is commonly applied in the Kho-Kho game. During ancient times, it was also played with chariots and was called *Rathera*. The Deccan Gymkhana club in Pune created the contemporary version of Kho Kho in 1914, giving the game official rules and organization. It was showcased among other traditional Indian games in the 1936 Berlin Olympics. Today, Kho-Kho is considered as a medal game in the South Asian Games (Writer, 2023).

Cultural Roots and military training were the major reasons of initiating the games in past generations. Games like Chaturanga (the precursor to chess) are mentioned. Games were often used for strategic thinking, physical fitness, and social interaction. Several games served as training for warriors. For instance, martial arts and Lathi Chhora were not only for entertainment but also helped develop combat skills. There were also some regional variations where geographical and cultural diversity made the similar game, played by the people in different styles and varying rules. For e.g., Kabaddi is played differently in different states of India.

Revival of such games were also found at the time of colonialism by the *Bhāratiya* people, emphasizing national identity and pride. This was evident in the Indian independence movement, where traditional games were promoted as part of cultural heritage. The need of the hour is to promote and preserve the Indian traditional games not only at the national level but also at the global platform. Therefore, in response of that government of India has shown special interests in promoting, preserving, and communicating the *Bhāratiya* Khel.

As per the latest updates, *Bhāratiya Khel* has been given special focus under the initiative of the Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) Division of the Ministry of

Education, Government of India on 29th July, 2022, to commemorate the second anniversary of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 where, the Hon'ble Education Minister Sh. Dharmendra Pradhan along with Hon'ble Home Minister Sh. Amit Shah launched an initiative called 75 Bhāratīya Games/Khel in schools (MoE, 2022).

5. Concepts and Principles of Bhāratīya Khel

The *Bhāratīya* meaning of khel is not only a matter of winning and losing the game for entertainment purposes but it teaches people to play throughout the life. The concept of *Bhāratīya* Khel or Indian sports, grounded in ancient *Bhāratīya* literature and philosophy which reflects principles that extend beyond mere physical exertion, intertwining with moral, spiritual, and socio-cultural values. In order to develop a well cultured *Bhāratīya* individual, creative activities plays an important role, but the principles of Bhāratīya Khel can be derived from the 64 *Kalas*, out of 64 *Kalas*, 5 important *Kalas*, *Dyuta-vishesha*, *Akarsha-Krida*, *Balaka-kridanaka*, *Vainayiki vidya* and *Vaijayiki vidya* has special focus over the art of playing, gambling, dice, toys, discipline, and strategic victory. *Dyuta-visesha* is an art of knowing specific gambling, *Akarsha-krida* is an art of playing with dice or magnet, *Balaka-kridanaka* as an art of using children's toys, *Vainayiki vidya* is an art of enforcing discipline and *Vaijayiki vidya* as an art of gaining victory,

Some of the important and major principles of *Bhāratīya* Khel have been categorised below into 10 points taken from ancient *Bhāratīya* literature:

1. **Principle of Amalgamation of Body, Mind, and Soul:** Yoga Sutras of Patanjali and Vedic texts (especially Atharva Veda) emphasizes over the detailed discussion about the amalgamation of body, mind, and soul. Yog Sutras of Patanjali talks about the union of body, mind, and spirit as essential for holistic growth of individuals, groups, and communities for the societal contribution (Feuerstein, 1989). While *Atharva veda* has given special emphasis over physical health and well-being, stressing balance and harmony in body and mind. As per this text, Physical training was regarded as a path to spirituality, preparing the mind for higher pursuits (Whitney, 1904).
2. **Principle of Yama and Niyama (Moral Conduct, Self-Discipline, and Control):** The principle of *Yama* (restraints) and *Niyama* (observances)

from the Yoga Sutras stress restraint, moral conduct, and self-control. This has been mentioned as eight rules of conduct in *Viṣṇupurāṇa* and yoga philosophy viz. non-violence, truth, non-stealing, celibacy, non-possesiveness, purity, contentment and toil (Sarswati, 2009). *Yama* and *Niyama*, show control by the rule of the play or game just like manacles of the prisoners were moving beyond the rule is not permissible (Viveknanda, 1896). Rule might be the norms of the games where violation of norms will make the players out of game. These were expected qualities in athletes and warriors, enhancing their self-discipline on and off the field (Wendy Doniger, 1992). He elaborates on each principle in relation to achieving balance and harmony within oneself and with society which were foundational to the discipline required in sports and martial training. The Rules were made strict for each game; for example, in traditional wrestling (*Malla-Yuddha*), a wrestler's diet, training, and moral code were crucial.

3. **Principle of Swasthya (Health):** *Bhāratiya* Khel has given more value to *Swasthya* (Health), with activities like Wrestling, Swimming, Yoga, and *Dand-Baithak* (Indian push-ups and squats) designed to develop both internal and external strength. The idea of *Swasthya* (well-being) extended to mental health, advocating for exercises that reduce stress, improve focus, and cultivate resilience. In traditional Indian culture of games, *Swasthya* was seen as an essential foundation for a balanced life, with physical fitness, mental clarity, and spiritual well-being deeply interwoven. These playing activities were more than physical exercises—they were part of a disciplined lifestyle aimed at holistic development. These practices were designed not only to build muscle strength and stamina but also to enhance flexibility, endurance, and agility, preparing individuals for both daily life and potential challenges. The philosophy of *Swasthya* extended beyond physical conditioning to include mental and emotional resilience. Ancient practices, especially yoga and meditation, emphasized calming the mind, fostering emotional stability, and improving focus. This approach aimed at reducing stress and achieving mental clarity, which were viewed as essential to maintaining inner peace and effective decision-making. Exercises were seen as a means of connecting the body and mind, instilling qualities like patience, determination, and mental toughness. Furthermore, these

activities were often practiced in communal settings, reinforcing social bonds, and contributing to a shared sense of wellness (Zimmer, 2020).

4. **Principles of Dignity and Fairness in Rivalry:** *Bhāratiya* Khel has some special touch of fair play which has been mentioned in many ancient literatures. The Mahābhārata and Rāmāyaṇa highlight principles of fair play and respect, even towards adversaries, as seen in the conduct of warriors like *Bhishma*, *Karna*, and *Arjuna*. A sportsman or warrior is expected to act with honor and respect, focusing on fairness and respect in competitions. In the *Dhanurveda* (an ancient treatise on warfare), respect for opponents and adherence to ethical codes were paramount, showing that victory should be achieved honourably (Basham, 1968).
5. **Principles of Commitment to Dharma and Meaningful Living:** *Bhāratiya* Khel incorporates the idea of *Dharma*, or duty, that emphasizes the obligation to fulfil the people’s social position, particularly that of a warrior or athlete who are participating in war or games. In sports, *dharma* meant that sportsmen had to purify themselves through proper training, to follow rules and be disciplined during the play. Sports and martial arts were viewed as a responsibility to preserve physical strength, preparedness, and resilience in addition to being forms of amusement. In sports, *dharma* meant that sportsmen had to follow rules, be disciplined, and train to purify themselves (Bühler, 1886). This principle deals with the players commitment to *Dharma* and purposeful righteous responsibility at the time of play.
6. **Principle of Endurance and Inner Fortitude:** Ancient texts like the Mahābhārata and Rāmāyaṇa emphasize the importance of physical endurance, strength, and mental inner fortitude, especially for warriors and athletes. This was reinforced through training in archery, wrestling, and chariot racing. Practicing these forms cultivated resilience, an essential aspect of *Khel Dharma* (the warrior or athlete code). The principle of endurance and inner fortitude in *Bhāratiya* Khel represents a multi-dimensional approach that blends physical stamina, ethical integrity, mental resilience, and community spirit. These games serve not only as physical training but as lifelong practices that prepare individuals to embody strength, patience, and endurance across all areas of life. In

many traditional Indian games, physical endurance is cultivated not just to win, but to develop self-discipline. For example, *Kushti*, *Dhanurvedya*, and *Yoga Asanas* all demand sustained focus, physical stamina, and patience. These practices promote a long-term dedication to maintaining fitness and mental clarity, making athletes more resilient to both physical fatigue and mental obstacles. Training is often seen as a form of self-purification, emphasizing the Yogic idea of *Tapas* (Hard toil or discipline and austerity) as a way to fortify oneself. Inner Fortitude, or *Antarik Shakti*, is a key aspect in *Bhāratīya* Khel that encourages athletes to develop a strong moral and ethical foundation. This is aligned with the concept of *Dharma*, where athletes and warriors are encouraged to uphold principles of fair play, respect, and self-control. Traditional sports and martial arts in India stress that true strength is not only about physical prowess but also about mental strength, patience, and the ability to face adversity with integrity. *Bhāratīya* Khel are also social and community-driven, reflecting collective resilience and cultural endurance (Bhattacharjee, 1970).

7. **Principle of Harmonized Efforts and Unified Strength:** *Bhāratīya* Khel teaches the concept of *Sahishnuta* (tolerance) and collective efforts. It can be easily traced or seen in traditional games like Kabaddi and Kho-Kho, which require well coordination and trust among team members. Team games symbolized a microcosm of society, where individual abilities contributed to collective success. These games are often played in villages, during festivals, or as rites of passage, where everyone participates, from children to elders. This creates a sense of belonging and shared resilience, reinforcing individuals and groups endurance but also the fortitude of the entire community. Ramnath in his book provides insight into how traditional games foster a sense of harmonized teamwork and unified strength among players, reflecting broader cultural values of mutual support (Ramnath, 2011).
8. **Principle of *Madhyasthata* (Moderation) and Balance:** Ancient *Bhāratīya* philosophies uphold the concept of *Madhyasthata* (moderation) as a key to maintaining harmony in both body and mind, emphasizing that excess or imbalance can lead to physical and mental distress. This focus on moderation is a recurring theme across traditional Indian wellness and

gaming systems, which advocates tailored exercise routines and dietary practices based on individual body types (doshas) and internal energies. According to Ayurveda, true health is achieved through activities that neither exhaust nor under-stimulate the body, instead promoting steady, balanced growth and resilience. The principle of balance is also embodied in ancient physical disciplines such as *Mallakhamba*, a traditional form of pole gymnastics. *Mallakhamba* practitioners develop remarkable control, agility, and strength, yet their training emphasizes gradual progression and careful alignment rather than strenuous exertion. This careful approach helps players harness their body's natural energy efficiently, showcasing the philosophical belief in measured effort and sustained physical engagement. The discipline in *Mallakhamba*, as in yoga, requires sustained focus and mental calmness, reinforcing the idea that balance in movement and mental composure are interconnected. Overall, these practices reflect a commitment to achieving physical prowess without compromising internal harmony, illustrating how moderation becomes a pathway to both strength and serenity in ancient Indian thought (Dehling, 2002).

9. **Principle of Self-Realization and Inner Growth:** *Bhāratiya Khel* (Indian traditional sports) have long embodied the concept of *Sadhana* (dedicated practice), which goes beyond mere physical exertion to embrace a deeper pursuit of self-mastery, discipline, and self-awareness. *Sadhana* emphasizes the continuous, focused effort to hone one's skills while cultivating the mind, body, and spirit. This principle was central to traditional Indian sports, where athletes engaged in practices that helped them achieve a higher understanding of themselves, both physically and mentally. In ancient texts like the *Dhanurveda* (the science of archery), sports were not viewed just as physical competition but as a means of spiritual growth and self-realization. Archery, for example, required not only strength and precision but also intense focus, control over the senses, and the ability to align one's mind with their actions. Practicing archery was seen as a form of *sadhana*, where the archer's aim extended beyond hitting the target to achieving an internal clarity and unity of mind. The principles laid out in the *Dhanurveda* emphasized discipline, mindfulness,

and balance—qualities that were necessary to become a true master of the craft. Similarly, yoga, a core aspect of *Bhāratīya Khel*, has always been more than a physical practice. It is a path to self-awareness, where every *asana* (pose) and *pranayama* (breathing technique) is designed to foster deep connection between body, breath, and mind. Yoga teaches practitioners to transcend their physical limitations by honing inner clarity, emotional resilience, and mental focus. As individuals engaged in yoga or other traditional activities, they would simultaneously work on refining their skills while deepening their understanding of their purpose in life. This approach to *sadhana* emphasizes the unity of physical actions with spiritual and mental growth, with the ultimate goal of self-realization. Whether in archery, wrestling, or yoga, athletes were encouraged to use their physical practices as a stepping stone to cultivate self-discipline, mental clarity, and a sense of purpose in all aspects of life. In this sense, the focus on *sadhana* in *Bhāratīya Khel* reflects the holistic philosophy of integrating physical strength with spiritual and intellectual development, ultimately leading to the realization of one's fullest potential.

The above principles have been categorised as per the ancient documented texts and the authors own perspective, it can also be diversified by the future editions.

6. Important *Bhāratīya Khel* (Indian Games)

This portion of the chapter explores the basic and fundamental details of the *Bhāratīya Khel* which has been listed by the Ministry of education (MoE, 2022). The list includes more than 70 Indian cultured games, the author has tried to explain some of the games (may not be matching with the name as per *Bhāratīya Khel* websites) along with the rules with the help of secondary resources, which will be helpful to the new generation audiences in order to promote and preserve *Bhāratīyata*.

1. **Adu Huli Ata:** Adu Huli Ata is traditional board *Bhāratīya Khel* involving strategic moves to trap or hunt the opponents. It is also known by “Tiger and Goat.” Two teams are required to play this game. One the “Attacker” (have 3 tigers) and other “defenders” (have 12 goats). The attacker aims to capture the defender, while the defender tries to block the attacker. Attacker capture defenders by jumping over them, while defenders aim to block the attacker’s movement. The game continues until the attacker

is blocked or enough defenders are captured. This game helps the players to improve their strategic thinking, problem solving, cultural connection, and patience skill (Gyankul, 2024).

2. **Anay Kattu:** This game is also known as “Elephants and Men”. A puzzle or block-stacking game requiring careful placement and balance. Requires stacking or balancing objects, often small stones or blocks made up wood or part of broken earthen made objects. This game is generally played by multiple players taking their turns in sequence. The major objective of the game is to stack objects without letting them fall. Each player adds to the stack in turn. If a player knocks down the stack, they lose, and the game is restarted (Traditional Board Games of Karnataka, 2024).
3. **Ashta Chamma:** It is also an Indian board game similar to Ludo, popular in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, typically played by 2-4 players. This game is known by different name in different parts of India like *Katte Mane* in Kannada, *Pakidakal* or *Kavidi Kali* in Malayalam, *Ashta Chamma* in Telugu, *Daayam* or *Thaayam* in Tamil, and *Kanna Duaa* in Hindi. Objective of the game is to be the first to move all pieces around the board and reach the home space. Players roll dice or throw cowrie shells to move pieces, with moves dictated by the count shown. Players can capture opponent pieces by landing on their space. The major learning from this game is to count and hone their strategizing and decision-making skills along with great patience (Poovaiah, 2024).
4. **Atya Patya:** It is a team-based game, similar to tag, involving running and dodging, often considered a precursor to kabaddi. This game is also stated as a “game of feints”. The game is played on a court divided by horizontal lines. There are two teams that take turns as attackers and defenders. Major objective of the game is that, attackers try to cross lines without being touched by defenders just like played in Kabaddi. Attackers score points by crossing lines, while defenders try to tag them out. Teams’ alternate roles after a set time. It is primarily played in Maharashtra but also enjoys popularity in rural communities across states like Karnataka, Gujarat, and Madhya Pradesh. The game helps in improving speed, strategy, and skill combinedly (Lockman, 2024).

5. **Bandar Killa:** It is a game where players aim to capture a “fort” defended by one player. It requires a setup of one player who guards a “fort” while others (multiple attackers) attempt to capture it. Attackers try to reach the fort without being tagged by the guard. The guard tries to tag players approaching the fort. If an attacker reaches the fort, they win; if tagged, they are out. The game is mostly played in Punjab region of India (Sharma, 2024). The game also helps in improving speed, strategy, and skill combinedly.
5. **Baudi/Budhi Basanti:** This is a game of team involving tagging and evasion. It is played with two teams, one attacking and one defending. Attackers aim to score by tagging defenders. Attackers enter the defending team’s area and try to tag players without being caught. Once tagged, defenders are out of the game. The game continues until all defenders are tagged or attackers are caught. It is a traditional game mostly played in Bengal rural region.
6. **Bhala Fenk:** It is a traditional javelin-throwing game, testing accuracy and strength. The game *Bhala Fenk*, meaning “spear throw,” has deep cultural roots in India and has served both as a form of traditional sport and as a demonstration of physical prowess. It requires a similar setups like javelin throw. In this game, individual players take turns. Players get the opportunity to throw the spear or javelin as far as possible. Each player throws the javelin with the aim to cover the maximum distance. The player with the farthest throw wins the game.
7. **Chaki Badi:** This is a board game with roots in strategy and territorial control. It is also played by two or more players. Players target to control and capture areas on the game board, with moves determined by dice or shells, much like games such as Pachisi or Gutte which have been documented for their regional variations across India and their connections to cultural practices. Players move pieces around a board using strategic moves to capture spaces or eliminate opponents’ pieces. The game ends when one player dominates the board.
8. **Cheel Jappata:** *Cheel Jappata* is a traditional running and chasing game played in open spaces. It involves two teams or individual players in

which they catch or tag other players while avoiding being tagged. One player is the “*Cheel*” (eagle) who tries to catch others, who act as “*Jappata*” (sparrows). The game ends when all chicks are tagged, or after a set time (Games, 2024).

9. ***Dariya Bandha***: This game is also known as “river crossing,” involves crossing boundaries without getting tagged. The game is played on a large outdoor area with imaginary boundaries representing rivers or lakes. This game requires multiple players, divided into two teams. The objective of the team is to Cross the “river” without being tagged. Players from one team attempt to cross the field while avoiding tags from the other team. If tagged, the player is out. The game continues until all players have either crossed successfully or been tagged (Bakul, 2024).
10. ***Dash Guti***: It is a Strategy game similar to checkers, using stones or seeds as pieces. It is played by two players. The prime objective in this game is to strategically move pieces to capture the opponent’s pieces by lining up three in a row. Players take turns placing pieces on intersections of a grid, aiming to create lines while blocking the opponent. A player wins by capturing the majority of the opponent’s pieces (Foundation, 2024).
11. ***Dayakattai***: This is a dice-based board game popular in South India, involving strategic moves. Players required in this game is 2-4 players. The target in the game is to move pieces around the board and reach the “home” area. Moves are determined by the roll of a specific type of dice. Players capture opponents’ pieces by landing on them, sending them back to the start. The winner is the first to bring all piece’s home. Dayakattai holds deep cultural significance, with the game often acting as a social activity that brings families and communities together. Some variations, like “Vaahanam,” are still played in villages, featuring different rules and terminology. The game also serves as a symbol of Tamil heritage, demonstrating the creativity and resourcefulness of its players (Michail, 2024).
12. ***Dhop Khel***: This is an Assamese sport similar to rugby, using a ball and requiring physical agility. The game is historically associated with the *Rangoli Bihu festival*, which marks the spring season. The game requires

two teams to participate in this Assamese traditional game. The game involves two teams, each with 11 players, and is played on a field that measures 125 meters by 80 meters. Players use a rubber ball (called “dhop”) that is thrown into the opposing team’s court. The objective is to catch and throw the ball in specific ways to score points, with various rules and strategies, such as “Aulia” and “Hora,” governing player movements and transitions. Team score points by carrying or passing a ball to designated zones without being tackled. Teams take turns advancing the ball toward their goal area while avoiding tackles. Players use skills similar to rugby to gain control of the ball and score points (Desk, 2022).

13. **Ganjifa:** This is a traditional Indian card game using intricately designed circular or rectangular cards. There is different version of the game, therefore, multiple players are required depending on the version. The major goal is to collect or form sets of intricately designed cards. Players use cards with traditional Indian art, often following rules similar to rummy or trick-taking games. Each player aims to form the highest or most sets according to specific hand combinations. The game is played with a deck of hand-painted circular cards, crafted from materials like ivory, tortoise shell etc. The cards are adorned with intricate designs, often depicting elements of mythology and folklore. For example, the *Dasavatara* Ganjifa features cards illustrating the ten incarnations of Lord *Vishnu*, each suit symbolizing different aspects of Hindu cosmology (India C. i., 2024).
14. **Gella Chhatt:** Game involving quick reflexes, often played with a ball or similar object. The game is played by two teams. The target is to knock down an object and then avoid being hit by the opposite team. One team attempts to knock down a stack of objects while the other team tries to hit the players who did so with a ball. If the stack is rebuilt before everyone is hit, the original team wins; otherwise, the opposing team scores. The understanding and method of playing this game varies in different area of India. The game is commonly played in Tripura and other regions of Northeast India. It involves two teams: the “In” group and the ‘Out’ group. The “In group” appoints a leader, and the goal is for this leader to reach the safe zone, referred to as the *ghar*, without being touched by the Out-group players. The Out group attempts to stop the leader by tagging them, and

if successful, the leader is “dead,” and the roles of the teams are reversed. The game fosters physical fitness, strategy, and teamwork (Indianetzone, 2024).

15. ***Gilli Danda/Viti Dandu***: A game played with a stick and a peg; this outdoor game requires remarkable hand eye co-ordination. This is a team game requiring a good deal of outdoor space. There are references to this game in the *Mahābhārata* and in the childhood of *Krishna*. The game is played with a small stick (*gilli*) and a larger stick (*danda*), where players hit the *gilli* with the *danda* to launch it as far as possible. Played across several rural regions, this game has been associated with traditional village life and is sometimes considered an ancestor of cricket. The game is known by different names such as ‘*Dangguli*’ in West Bengal and ‘*Kitty*’ in Punjab, reflecting the game’s adaptation to various linguistic and regional traditions. The player of the turn, hit a small stick (*gilli*) with a larger stick (*danda*) and score points based on distance or position. The *gilli* is flipped into the air by hitting one end with the *danda*, then struck to send it as far as possible. The points are awarded based on how far the *gilli* travels, and the next player takes their turn (Krishnan, 2014).
16. ***Gutte or Gatti or Stone Game or Hashthok***: One of the most ancient of games, it is hours of fun with just 5 stones. Tossing and picking them in perfect rhythm without missing is a skill that speaks of excellent hand-eye co-ordination and concentration. In early days, stones were easily available by the roadside and the process of play smoothed and rounded them off. Today, this game has picked the most beautiful of stones for you and coupled them with *Kazhakodi* (kalichchikkai, kantkaranj or grey nicker bean) seeds- traditionally used to teach children as they are lighter and do not hurt when they fall. Game using small stones or seeds, focused on tossing and catching in specific patterns. The game is played by one or more players. The players toss and catch small stones or seeds in specific patterns. Players begin by tossing a stone up, picking up another from the ground, and catching the tossed stone before it lands. Difficulty increases by picking up multiple stones in a single toss. Missing a catch result in a loss of turn (Hemapriya, 2021).

17. **Kabaddi/Hututu:** A contact team sport where two teams compete, with players taking turns to raid the opponent's territory and tag as many defenders as possible while holding their breath. The game was traced to Tamil Nadu and other southern regions, *Kabaddi* is mentioned in ancient scriptures such as the *Mahābhārata*. It was formalized in India in the early 20th century and has become an international sport. This game is known for its role in building stamina, reflexes, and team coordination, kabaddi is often seen as a way of life in rural communities and serves as a tool for social unity. Two teams each with seven players are required for the play. Team score points by tagging opponents while holding one's breath and chanting "kabaddi" or "bitti" or "kit-kit." A "raider" enters the opponent's half, attempting to tag as many players as possible before returning to their side without losing breath. Opponents try to prevent the raider from returning (Thomas, 2015).
18. **Kanche/Marbles:** This is a game of shooting marbles or *Kanche* to hit and capture opponent's pieces. This game typically requires two or more players. Rules varies as the type of games played with the *Kanche*. But the target is to knock other players' marbles out of a designated circle or area. Players flick their marbles to hit opponents' marbles or achieve a set goal. The player with the most marbles by the end of the game wins (Abhishek, 2024).
19. **Kho-Kho:** This is a tag game requiring agility and team coordination, where players chase each other in a limited area. This game involves two teams, each with 12 players; only 9 players are active on the field. Players of one team crouch in a row and try to chase the other team's players who are attempting to dodge them. It is believed to have originated in Maharashtra, Kho-Kho has elements that are found in early Indian sport narratives and has evolved to represent agility, coordination, and teamwork. Kho-Kho is not just a game but a community event that brings people together, especially in rural areas, promoting values of strategy and quick thinking (Dutta, 2017).
20. **Khung Kangjei:** It is an indigenous Manipuri game played with sticks, resembling polo. Two teams with 7-9 players in each team are required for the game. The target in the game is to score goals using a bamboo stick

to hit the ball into the opponent's goal. This game is played similarly to polo but on foot, each player uses a stick to hit a wooden or rubber ball. Players can tackle and block each other, aiming to reach the opponent's goal (Mishra S. , 2022).

21. ***Kushti (Bhāratiya Wrestling)***: *Kushti* or *Pehlwani* is a form of wrestling practiced in traditional *Akharas* (wrestling arenas) across India. An ancient sport, *Kushti* is associated with spiritual discipline and the warrior ethos of Indian martial traditions. Two players are required to play this game. Although it has faced decline, *Kushti* is being revived through wrestling tournaments and state initiatives to promote traditional martial arts (Mishra P. , 2018).
22. ***Langdi***: It is a hopping game, often played in a tag or race format. The game typically involves two teams of 12 players each, with the chasers attempting to tag defenders who can step out of the ground but must maintain their balance on one foot. Objective of the player is to tag players while hopping on one leg. One player is chosen as the “*langdi*” and must hop on one leg to tag others. Tagged players become “*langdi*” The game continues until players are exhausted or a time limit is reached. It has numerous regional variations, such as being called “*Langadi Tang*” in Delhi, “*Kukurazu*” in Northeast India, and “*Kuntata*” in the South (Federation, 2024).
23. ***Malla-khamb***: This is a type of gymnastics performed on a vertical wooden pole or rope. It is typically performed individually in which player perform gymnastic routines on a vertical pole or rope. Players must perform a series of acrobatic moves, demonstrating strength, flexibility, and balance. Points are awarded for skill, creativity, and execution. *Malla-khamb* is an ancient Indian sport with a deep cultural and historical significance, dating back to the 12th century. Its name is derived from the Sanskrit words “*Malla*” (meaning gymnast or wrestler) and “*Khamb*” (meaning pole), and it was originally used as a training tool for wrestlers, helping them develop strength, flexibility, and mental discipline. The sport was nearly lost but was revived in the late 17th century by Balambhatta Dada Deodhar, who introduced it as part of the physical training regimen for the Maratha army (Dr. Shalini Menon, 2024).

24. **Pachisi/Chaupar:** Pachisi or Chaupar game was considered as the national game of ancient India, which involves strategic movement based on dice rolls. Many Archaeological findings suggests that *Pachisi* has roots in the 6th century CE. It has symbolic meanings in Indian mythology, with references to the *Mahābhārata*. It was played during festive occasions, *Pachisi* encourages strategic planning and patience among players, making it popular in family and community gatherings (Singh, 2016).
25. **Porok Pamin Sinam:** This is another important traditional sport involving coordination, typically played in Northeast part of India. This game is also known as cock-fighting, is popular in Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur, India. This game typically involves two contestants, each standing on one leg with the other leg held up by hand, while hopping around to try to push the opponent out of a marked circle. The objective is to maintain balance on one leg while forcing the opponent to lose theirs. If a player falls, let's go of their leg, or steps outside the circle, they are disqualified. The game highlights agility, balance, and strength, reflecting a cultural connection to the hunting and survival skills of these regions. This competitive balance-based game is not only a sport but also a cultural expression in the Northeast Indian stat. This traditional sport from Northeast India involves coordination and strategy. The game may be a combination of physical and mental challenges, such as racing or completing tasks based on instructions or team dynamics (India S. i., 2024).

There have been hundreds of such games played in India which are reflective of the rich diversity of Indian culture and offer insights into the traditional ways of life, often tied to historical and geographical contexts. Such games are increasingly recognized for their educational value, promoting skills like teamwork, strategy, and physical fitness. They serve as tools for character development and cultural education. *Bhāratīya* Khel foster social interaction, group, and community bonding, reinforcing social ties and cultural identity. They often serve as a bridge between generations, enabling elders to pass down knowledge and traditions to younger participants.

7. Global Relevance and Comparative Insights

Bhāratīya Khel like *Mallakhamb*, *Kalaripayattu*, Archery, Chaturanga and Pachisi etc. are experiencing a resurgence with championships and formalized training

institutions, and are being recognized, and practiced internationally, celebrated as a martial heritage, promoted at grassroots levels, with Indian athletes achieving success in global competitions like the Olympics. Such games are digitally revived through online platforms, reaching global audiences, and preserving traditional gameplay. The traditional Indian sports, collectively termed *Bhāratīya Khel*, embody centuries-old practices that are not only recreational but also rich in cultural, spiritual, and social significance. Their global relevance is found in the insights they offer on sustainable, community-oriented approaches to physical fitness and cultural preservation, which resonate with similar practices worldwide promoting the *Bhāratīya* culture of playing.

- (A) **Cultural Preservation and Heritage Value of *Bhāratīya Khel*:** *Bhāratīya Khel*, such as Kabaddi, Kho Kho, Mallakhamb, and Yubi Lakpi, carry unique regional stories, values, and skills that are passed down through generations in form of folklore and culture. These sports emphasize community participation, physical discipline, and moral values that encourage teamwork, patience, and resilience. In the same way, traditional sports in other parts of the world-like Capoeira in Brazil, which blends martial arts with cultural identity, and Sumo in Japan, which carries religious undertones-are celebrated for preserving intangible cultural heritage. Globally, UNESCO has recognized such sports for their role in fostering cultural continuity, which is crucial in today’s rapidly modernizing society
- (B) ***Bhāratīya Khel* and its Physical and Mental Health Benefits:** *Bhāratīya Khel* are designed around natural forms of physical exertion, like running, jumping, and wrestling, making them accessible and sustainable. For example, *Mallakhamb* involves acrobatics on a vertical pole, promoting flexibility, strength, and mental focus, much like gymnastics. Similarly, *Kabaddi* emphasizes anaerobic fitness, quick reflexes, and teamwork. These benefits align with current global movements promoting fitness without reliance on artificial equipment, which is becoming more popular as people look for sustainable ways to stay active. Traditional sports from other cultures, like African Dambe boxing or Turkish Oil Wrestling, share similar health benefits that stem from physical and mental rigor.
- (C) ***Bhāratīya Khel* Promotes Simplicity and Accessibility:** Many *Bhāratīya Khel* use minimal resources-often just open space and readily available

items like stones, sticks, or sand. Games like *Gutte* (stone game), *Langdi* (a hopping game), and *Kanche* (marbles) require little setup, similar to traditional games worldwide, such as Peteca in Brazil or Boule in France. This simplicity makes such games universally relatable and accessible to people of all ages, regardless of economic status, aligning with global initiatives that encourage low-cost, inclusive play

- (D) **Revitalization and Global Recognition of *Bhāratīya* Khel:** The efforts to revitalize *Bhāratīya* Khel, such as by introducing Kabaddi to the Asian Games and developing federations for games like *Malla khamb*, reflect a global trend of renewing interest in traditional sports. This is similar to the resurgence of traditional sports like Pencak Silat in Indonesia and Sambo in Russia, which have found recognition in international competitions, preserving cultural identity while adapting to modern platforms.
- (E) ***Bhāratīya* Khel for Educational Value and Skills Development:** *Bhāratīya* Khel are often designed to develop both physical and strategic thinking skills. Games like *Ashta Chamma* (an ancient board game) require foresight, planning, and patience, offering cognitive benefits akin to chess. This mirrors educational traditions worldwide where games are used to impart practical skills, such as in Native American Lacrosse, which was historically played to develop combat readiness and cooperation skills

In sum, *Bhāratīya* Khel provide comparative insights into the ways traditional sports can maintain cultural continuity, promote health, and encourage community in a manner that aligns with the values of indigenous sports globally. They are increasingly recognized not just as relics of the past, but as valuable components of a sustainable and inclusive future for physical activity

8. Future Prospects and Contemporary Research

The future prospects of *Bhāratīya* traditional games, such as *Kabaddi*, *Kho-Kho*, *Malla-khamb*, and regional games like *Gella-Chhatt* and *Langadi*, lie in their potential to be revitalized and recognized on both national and international platforms. Contemporary research and institutional support are shaping the resurgence of these games, fostering physical health, cultural pride, and community engagement. Here's an overview of current efforts and future directions for these traditional Indian sports:

1. **Bhāratīya Khel Needs In-depth Research on Health and Physical Benefits:** Studies have shown that traditional games like *Mallakhamb* and Kho Kho offer distinct physical and mental health benefits. For example, research on *Mallakhamb* suggests that it enhances flexibility, strength, and balance, making it comparable to forms of gymnastics and yoga, which are widely recognized for physical training. Traditional games also contribute to cardiovascular fitness, agility, and anaerobic endurance, as seen in Kabaddi and Kho Kho, which could appeal to modern fitness regimens focused on functional movement and bodyweight exercises
2. **Interventional needs for integrating of Bhāratīya Khel into Formal Education:** Integrating Bhāratīya traditional games into school curricula and physical education programs is gaining traction. Efforts are underway to formally include these games in the national educational framework to promote holistic development in students. This can expose young generations to their cultural heritage while enhancing their fitness and motor skills, much like the benefits observed in countries that promote indigenous sports within school systems. Research in educational psychology also shows that culturally relevant games help foster a sense of identity and belonging among youth
3. **Bhāratīya Khel needs Digitalization and Global promotion:** With the rise of digital media, efforts are being made to document and promote traditional games through social media platforms, documentaries, and online tutorials. This digital push enables these games to reach wider, global audiences, which can attract interest from enthusiasts worldwide, thereby preserving these traditions for future generations. For instance, there are online tutorials and videos and events for Gilli Danda and Lagori, which make them accessible to urban youth and global sports communities alike.
4. **Professionalization and Inclusion Bhāratīya Khel in Competitive Sports:** Many Bhāratīya traditional games are undergoing professionalization, with organized leagues and championships, such as the Pro Kabaddi League, which has popularized Kabaddi internationally. Similar initiatives are developing for Kho Kho and Mallakhamb, helping them gain recognition and legitimacy. Institutions and sports federations are also exploring

the possibility of incorporating these games into the Asian Games or Commonwealth Games, similar to other countries' traditional sports like Muay Thai and Pencak Silat.

5. **Preservation Efforts for *Bhāratīya Khel* by Developmental Organizations:** NGOs, cultural groups, community-based organisation, and sports federations are working to revive traditional games through preservation projects, rural community engagement, and by encouraging local youth to participate in indigenous games. Some organizations are developing training centers dedicated to these games, helping to create a standardized approach to instruction, which can ensure that techniques and rules are preserved accurately for future generations. Additionally, traditional sports events and festivals are organized in different states to celebrate and spread awareness about these games, which also fosters tourism and local economies.
6. **Interdisciplinary Academic Research for *Bhāratīya Khel*:** Universities and research institutions are examining *Bhāratīya* traditional games from interdisciplinary perspectives, including anthropology, tribal studies, social work, folklore, sports science, and cultural studies. These studies explore the socio-cultural impact of these games, their role in ancient Indian societies, and their philosophical significance, such as in the martial and meditative aspects of Malla khamb. Research is also looking into ways to adapt and modify these games for urban settings without compromising their cultural essence, which is essential for integrating them into contemporary lifestyles and Policy Support Government initiatives and funding from programs such as the *Khelo India scheme* are fostering the preservation and promotion of traditional games across states. Policies aimed at the rural development of sports facilities and support for training coaches in indigenous sports indicate a long-term commitment to these games. Future policies may further encourage the integration of *Bhāratīya Khel* in national sports infrastructure, supporting grassroots training, developing sports centers, and promoting competitive platforms.
7. **Collaboration and Cross-Cultural Exchanges to revive *Bhāratīya Khel*:** Traditional Indian games offer valuable perspectives for international sports research and collaborations. Cross-cultural exchanges, such as

joint training camps or exhibitions with countries that also have strong indigenous sports traditions (like Japan's Sumo wrestling or Mongolia's Bökḥ wrestling), could further promote Bhāratīya Khel. International collaborations can lead to a broader appreciation of these games and open avenues for cross-cultural learning in sports and physical education.

Traditional games have promising future prospects, thanks to ongoing research, educational integration, government support, and global outreach. Their revival not only enhances physical health and cultural identity but also provides valuable insights for sustainable, community-centered sports practices worldwide.

9. Conclusion

Bhāratīya Khel, are more than just historical pastimes; they are vital to understanding India's cultural heritage and values. Their revival in modern India will reflect the importance of physical fitness, intellectual development, and cultural preservation, maintaining relevance across generations. The history of Bhāratīya Khel is a testament to the rich cultural tapestry of India. These games not only provide entertainment but also play a vital role in education, social cohesion, and cultural identity. Efforts to preserve and promote these games are crucial in maintaining this aspect of heritage for future generations. There is greater need of intra and interventional approach to increase the *Bhāratīya* Khel knowledge in the newer generation of India. The efforts must be taken from the inside and outside both to have global level of recognition.

Indigenous Indian games like Kabaddi, Kho-Kho, and Pachisi are more than sports; they are cultural legacies that encapsulate India's historical resilience and diverse traditions. In preserving these games, India not only safeguards its cultural identity but also promotes a unique form of social cohesion and physical fitness. The revival of Bhāratīya Khel is not merely a nostalgic pursuit; it is a step toward reconnecting with India's ancient knowledge systems, which prioritized holistic health, community bonding, and intellectual development. For Bhāratīya Khel, collaborating with countries like Japan and Mongolia could create platforms for exhibitions, where traditional Indian sports such as Kushti (Indian wrestling) or Kabaddi could be introduced alongside Sumo and Bökḥ. Such initiatives would foster a global community of indigenous sports, potentially attracting more international interest and appreciation for these cultural heritage sports.

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