

Revitalizing Indigenous Sports in India: Preserving Cultural Heritage and Strengthening Tribal Identity

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Abstract

Indigenous communities in India have historically developed unique physical cultures, including traditional sports and martial arts, that are deeply embedded in their cultural identity. However, modernization, globalization, and commercialization have led to the decline of indigenous sports, threatening the cultural heritage of these communities. This paper explores the significance of indigenous sports in preserving tribal identity in modern India. It discusses the historical roots of these sports, their socio-cultural relevance, and the challenges posed by contemporary developments. Furthermore, the paper examines governmental and non-governmental efforts to revive and promote traditional games, drawing insights from case studies of sports like Kalaripayattu, Thang-Ta, and tribal wrestling. Finally, it proposes policy recommendations to integrate indigenous sports into India's broader sports ecosystem while

ensuring the empowerment and representation of tribal communities. The study underscores the need for a balanced approach that respects tribal autonomy while leveraging modern resources for preservation and promotion.

Keywords: *Indigenous sports, tribal identity, cultural heritage, modernization, traditional games, India*

Introduction

Sports and physical activities have played a crucial role in human civilization, serving not only as a means of recreation but also as tools for social cohesion, identity formation, and the transmission of cultural heritage. Indigenous communities worldwide have developed unique sporting traditions that reflect their histories, beliefs, and survival skills. In India, which is home to over 700 officially recognized tribal groups, traditional sports and games have been an intrinsic part of their cultural expression, symbolizing their connection with nature, spirituality, and community values (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2020). However, the rapid modernization of society, urbanization, and the increasing dominance of commercialized global sports such as cricket and football have led to a decline in the practice and recognition of indigenous sports. This poses a significant threat to the cultural identity of tribal communities, as these sports are deeply interwoven with their traditions, folklore, and rituals (Pathak & Sah, 2021).

Indigenous sports in India include martial arts like **Kalaripayattu** from Kerala and **Thang-Ta** from Manipur, tribal wrestling styles such as **Mukna**, and traditional games like archery, which are widely practiced among communities in Jharkhand and Arunachal Pradesh. These sports were not merely recreational but often held spiritual significance and were integral to rites of passage, warrior training, and conflict resolution within tribes (Bhardwaj, 2019). Despite their historical importance, indigenous sports today face challenges ranging from lack of institutional support and infrastructural neglect to commercialization and cultural appropriation. Additionally, younger generations from tribal communities are increasingly migrating to urban areas in pursuit of education and employment, leading to a disconnection from traditional practices, including indigenous sports (Sen & Mohanty, 2021).

In recent years, there have been efforts by both governmental and non-governmental organizations to revive and promote indigenous games, recognizing their potential to foster community pride and preserve cultural diversity. The *Khelo*

India program, for instance, has begun incorporating certain indigenous sports into its framework, and regional festivals continue to highlight traditional games as a form of cultural celebration (Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, 2022). However, these efforts remain fragmented, and a more comprehensive, policy-driven approach is necessary to ensure that indigenous sports are not only preserved but also given due recognition within India's broader sports ecosystem.

This research paper aims to explore the significance of indigenous sports in preserving tribal identity in modern India. It seeks to examine their historical and cultural relevance, assess the challenges they face in contemporary society, and evaluate the impact of governmental and grassroots efforts in their preservation. Furthermore, the study proposes actionable recommendations to integrate indigenous sports into mainstream sports policies while ensuring that tribal communities remain central to their revival and promotion. By addressing these concerns, the paper underscores the importance of maintaining a balance between modernization and cultural preservation, ensuring that India's diverse indigenous heritage continues to thrive in the contemporary world.

Historical and Cultural Significance of Indigenous Sports

Indigenous sports have been an integral part of tribal and rural societies in India for centuries, serving purposes far beyond mere physical exercise. These games and martial traditions were developed as tools for survival, self-defense, social bonding, and spiritual discipline. Unlike modern commercialized sports, which are often pursued for entertainment and professional competition, indigenous sports carry deep cultural meanings, embodying the traditions, beliefs, and social structures of the communities that practice them (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2020).

The Role of Indigenous Sports in Traditional Society

The origins of indigenous sports in India can be traced back to ancient times when they were essential for hunting, warfare, and community engagement. Many of these sports were designed to enhance physical endurance, agility, and coordination – skills necessary for survival in harsh environments. Some, like archery and spear-throwing, were honed for hunting and self-defense, while others, like wrestling and stick-fighting, were used in combat training and as a means of resolving disputes within the community (Bhardwaj, 2019).

In tribal societies, sports were often embedded in religious and social customs. Many indigenous games were associated with seasonal festivals and community

gatherings, where participation was seen as a rite of passage into adulthood. Competitions were held during harvest celebrations, weddings, and religious ceremonies, reinforcing communal ties and ensuring the transmission of cultural values from one generation to the next (Sen & Mohanty, 2021).

Moreover, indigenous sports have historically played a role in the governance and justice systems of tribal communities. In some cases, conflicts between individuals or groups were settled through sporting contests rather than through violent confrontations. Wrestling matches, for example, were often used as a means of dispute resolution among tribal leaders in regions like Manipur and Jharkhand (Devi, 2022).

Prominent Indigenous Sports and Their Cultural Significance

Each region of India has developed its own unique set of indigenous sports, shaped by local geography, traditions, and societal needs. Some of the most prominent indigenous sports include:

Kalaripayattu (Kerala)

Regarded as one of the oldest martial arts in the world, **Kalaripayattu** is deeply rooted in the cultural and spiritual traditions of Kerala. Historically practiced by warriors and royalty, it involves a combination of strikes, kicks, grappling, weaponry, and healing techniques. Beyond its combat applications, Kalaripayattu is closely linked to Ayurveda and yoga, emphasizing the holistic development of the body and mind (Zarrilli, 2019).

In modern times, Kalaripayattu has been commercialized and adapted for stage performances and cinematic fight choreography, often losing its original spiritual and cultural essence. However, efforts are being made to revive its traditional practice through specialized training centers in Kerala.

Thang-Ta (Manipur)

The martial art of **Thang-Ta** originated among the Meitei people of Manipur and was historically practiced by Manipuri warriors. It combines sword fighting, spear combat, and unarmed techniques with elements of meditation and dance. Thang-Ta is more than just a combat system—it is a performance art, often showcased during religious and cultural festivals in Manipur (Singh, 2020).

Mukna (Manipur and Northeast India)

A traditional form of wrestling practiced in Manipur, **Mukna** has been a part of Manipuri culture for centuries. Wrestlers engage in rigorous physical training, and

competitions are held during important festivals, such as the Lai Haraoba festival, which celebrates the myths and deities of the Meitei people (Devi, 2022).

Mukna is a symbol of masculinity and strength in the region, and its practice fosters discipline, endurance, and community pride. Although it remains popular in rural areas, it has received limited institutional recognition at the national level.

Archery Competitions (Jharkhand, Arunachal Pradesh, and Other Tribal Regions)

Archery has been a traditional sport among various tribal communities in India, particularly among the **Santhals, Gonds, and Apatanis**. Historically, archery was not only a sport but also a crucial survival skill for hunting and warfare. Today, archery competitions continue to be held during tribal festivals, reinforcing traditional knowledge and skills among younger generations (Sharma, 2021).

Despite its deep roots in tribal culture, indigenous archery has largely been overshadowed by modern competitive archery. However, efforts are being made to integrate traditional archery techniques into India's national sports training programs.12.2.5 Yubi Lakpi (Manipur)

A unique sport similar to modern rugby, **Yubi Lakpi** is played using a coconut instead of a ball. The game, which has religious significance, is associated with ceremonies dedicated to Lord Krishna. It is believed that playing YubiLakpi brings good fortune and spiritual merit to participants (Lal, 2020).

While the sport remains an important cultural tradition, its recognition at a national level has been minimal, and there have been calls to preserve and promote it through state-sponsored initiatives.

Indigenous Sports as a Medium for Cultural Identity and Social Cohesion

Indigenous sports play a crucial role in preserving tribal identity and fostering social cohesion. Unlike modern sports, which are often commercialized and individualistic, traditional games emphasize collective participation, storytelling, and ritualistic elements (Sen & Mohanty, 2021).

1. Preserving Oral Traditions and Mythology

Many indigenous sports are linked to local myths and folklore. The movements, techniques, and rules of these games are often derived from stories of gods, warriors, and ancestors, ensuring the continuation of oral traditions (Zarrilli, 2019).

2. Promoting Intergenerational Knowledge Transfer

Tribal elders play a crucial role in teaching younger generations traditional games, ensuring that indigenous knowledge and practices are passed down (Sharma, 2021). This transmission of knowledge strengthens community bonds and instills a sense of pride and continuity.

3. Building a Collective Identity

Participating in indigenous sports fosters a sense of belonging and identity among tribal groups. By engaging in traditional games, individuals reaffirm their cultural heritage and resist the homogenizing forces of modernity (Pathak & Sah, 2021).

4. Spiritual and Ritualistic Importance

Many indigenous sports are deeply connected to spiritual practices. For instance, martial arts like Kalaripayattu and Thang-Ta incorporate meditation and yogic breathing techniques, emphasizing the development of both physical and mental discipline (Singh, 2020).

Decline and Marginalization of Indigenous Sports

Despite their historical significance, indigenous sports have faced neglect and decline due to several factors:

- **The dominance of Western and commercialized sports** has led to the marginalization of traditional games.
- **Lack of institutional support and funding** has made it difficult for indigenous sports to compete with mainstream sports like cricket and football.
- **Urban migration and changing lifestyles** have reduced participation in traditional games, particularly among younger generations (Sen & Mohanty, 2021).

Reviving Indigenous Sports: A Cultural Imperative

Given their deep-rooted significance, it is essential to protect and promote indigenous sports as part of India's cultural heritage. Revitalization efforts should focus on:

- **Incorporating indigenous sports into school and university curriculums** to ensure younger generations remain connected to their heritage.
- **Providing governmental and institutional support** to develop infrastructure, organize tournaments, and offer financial assistance to traditional sports practitioners.

- **Raising awareness through media representation**, documentaries, and exhibitions that showcase the cultural value of indigenous games.

Indigenous sports in India are more than just recreational activities; they are deeply woven into the cultural, spiritual, and social fabric of tribal communities. Their historical significance, from self-defense training to cultural storytelling, highlights their importance in preserving tribal identity. However, modernization has led to their decline, necessitating urgent revival efforts. By integrating these sports into national and state-level policies, India can protect its diverse indigenous heritage while fostering inclusivity in its sporting landscape.

Challenges to the Survival of Indigenous Sports

Despite their historical and cultural significance, indigenous sports in India are facing rapid decline due to multiple socio-economic, institutional, and cultural challenges. The dominance of globalized and commercialized sports, lack of government recognition, and changing lifestyles have all contributed to the marginalization of traditional games. This section explores the key challenges that threaten the survival of indigenous sports in modern India.

Lack of Institutional Support and Policy Recognition

One of the most significant challenges to the survival of indigenous sports is the **lack of formal institutional support**. Unlike mainstream sports such as cricket, football, or athletics, indigenous games do not receive adequate attention from national sports bodies such as the Sports Authority of India (SAI) or the Indian Olympic Association (Pathak & Sah, 2021).

1. Absence of Structured Policies

- The Indian government has taken steps to promote indigenous sports through initiatives like *Khelo India*, but these efforts remain sporadic and lack a well-defined long-term policy framework.
- Many indigenous sports are not officially recognized by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, making them ineligible for financial aid, training programs, and sports infrastructure development (Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, 2022).

2. Limited Representation in National and International Sports Events

- While some traditional sports, like Kabaddi, have gained national and international recognition, many others, such as Thang-Ta (Manipur) and Mallakhamb (Maharashtra), remain largely regional in scope.
- The absence of these sports from major competitions such as the Asian Games and the Olympics further discourages young athletes from taking them up as a viable career path (Bhardwaj, 2019).

Commercialization and the Popularity of Mainstream Sports

Modern sports, particularly cricket, football, and badminton, dominate the Indian sports landscape due to extensive media coverage, corporate sponsorship, and professional opportunities. As a result, indigenous sports have struggled to attract funding, media attention, and participation.

1. Influence of Western and Commercialized Sports

- Global sports leagues, like the Indian Premier League (IPL) in cricket and the Indian Super League (ISL) in football, have created a significant shift in sports culture, making it difficult for traditional games to compete for attention (Sen & Mohanty, 2021).
- Schools and universities often prioritize Western sports in their physical education programs, sidelining indigenous sports that were once an essential part of community life.

2. Lack of Sponsorship and Financial Incentives

- The majority of indigenous sports do not have corporate sponsorship, limiting their growth and visibility. In contrast, cricket and football receive massive financial backing from brands and media houses (Devi, 2022).
- Athletes specializing in indigenous sports rarely receive scholarships, employment opportunities, or government incentives, discouraging younger generations from pursuing them professionally.

Urbanization and Changing Lifestyles

With rapid urbanization and changing socio-economic dynamics, indigenous sports are struggling to retain their relevance among younger generations. Migration to cities for education and employment has weakened the connection between youth and their traditional games.

1. Decline in Traditional Knowledge Transmission

- Indigenous sports are traditionally passed down through generations within tribal and rural communities. However, due to increased

migration and the influence of digital entertainment, fewer children are learning these traditional practices from their elders (Sharma, 2021).

- The absence of structured training academies for indigenous sports means that they largely depend on oral traditions, which are vulnerable to disruption over time.

2. Space Constraints and Modern Infrastructure Development

- Many traditional sports require open spaces, forests, or specific natural terrains for practice. The expansion of urban infrastructure, deforestation, and loss of traditional grounds have made it difficult for communities to continue practicing these sports (Lal, 2020).
- For example, archery competitions among Jharkhand's tribal communities have declined due to the disappearance of traditional hunting grounds and the encroachment of urban development.

Cultural Erosion and the Influence of Digital Entertainment

In addition to economic and structural challenges, the growing influence of technology and digital entertainment has played a significant role in diverting attention away from indigenous sports.

1. Shift Towards Screen-Based Entertainment

- The rise of mobile gaming, social media, and esports has significantly reduced interest in physical outdoor activities among children and teenagers. Traditional outdoor games are now being replaced by virtual alternatives, reducing the number of participants in indigenous sports (Sen & Mohanty, 2021).
- The cultural storytelling and ritualistic elements associated with indigenous sports are being lost as youth are more drawn to digital media content rather than participating in traditional practices.

2. Westernization and Cultural Homogenization

- Western sports, fashion, and entertainment have influenced younger generations to adopt globalized lifestyles, often at the expense of traditional practices (Bhardwaj, 2019).
- Schools and urban societies increasingly view indigenous sports as outdated, reinforcing a sense of inferiority among tribal youth who might otherwise have taken pride in their ancestral games.

Gender Disparities in Indigenous Sports

Another critical challenge is the gender imbalance in indigenous sports. While some traditional sports, like Mallakhamb and Thang-Ta, have seen increased female participation, many others remain male-dominated.

1. Limited Opportunities for Women in Traditional Sports

- Historically, some indigenous sports were restricted to male participants, limiting female involvement and recognition.
- Even when women engage in these sports, they face societal barriers, lack of financial support, and fewer training opportunities compared to male athletes (Sharma, 2021).

2. Safety and Social Restrictions

- In some tribal societies, conservative norms discourage women from participating in physically intensive sports.
- Women who do take up indigenous sports often struggle to gain community support and recognition at larger sporting events.

Lack of Documentation and Media Representation

Indigenous sports suffer from inadequate documentation and limited media representation, which has contributed to their gradual decline.

1. Absence of Historical Records and Written Documentation

- Many indigenous sports are passed down through oral traditions, leading to a lack of official records, coaching manuals, or formalized rules (Singh, 2020).
- The absence of structured documentation makes it difficult for these sports to be included in academic curricula or policy frameworks.

2. Minimal Media Coverage and Digital Promotion

- Unlike commercialized sports, indigenous sports receive very little coverage in mainstream media. Television, newspapers, and online sports platforms rarely highlight traditional games, further reducing their visibility (Devi, 2022).
- The lack of digital content (e.g., video tutorials, online coaching, and promotional campaigns) prevents these sports from reaching a wider audience.

Encroachment and Cultural Appropriation

While some indigenous sports have gained wider recognition, they often face the risk of cultural appropriation, where they are commercialized without giving due credit to the tribal communities that originated them.

1. Commercialization Without Community Benefit

- Some indigenous martial arts, like Kalaripayattu, have been adapted for Bollywood action choreography and global fitness programs, but these adaptations often strip the art form of its cultural essence (Zarrilli, 2019).
- Tribal communities that originally practiced these sports are rarely compensated or acknowledged in commercial adaptations.

2. Dilution of Traditional Practices

- The modernization of indigenous sports often results in the loss of their ritualistic and cultural components.
- Sports like Kabaddi have been transformed into professional leagues, but the folk elements and traditional values associated with the game have diminished (Bhardwaj, 2019).

Revival and Promotion Efforts

Given the critical challenges faced by indigenous sports, various efforts have been made at governmental, institutional, and community levels to revive and promote them. These initiatives focus on documentation, training, competitions, financial support, and integrating traditional games into modern sports culture.

Government Initiatives and Policy Support

The Government of India, through various agencies and schemes, has taken steps to recognize and promote indigenous sports.

1. Inclusion in the *Khelo India* Program

- The *Khelo India* initiative was launched in 2018 to promote sports culture among youth and has included indigenous games such as Mallakhamb, Gatka, Kalaripayattu, and Thang-Ta (Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, 2022).
- Financial aid, infrastructure support, and coaching programs have been provided to these sports under the scheme.

2. Recognition by the Sports Authority of India (SAI)

- SAI has supported traditional games like Kabaddi and Kho-Kho, integrating them into national sporting events.
- The organization has also established training centers to promote these games, especially in tribal and rural regions.

3. Funding and Grants for Indigenous Sports

- Under the *National Sports Development Fund*, indigenous sports have been allocated financial resources for training and infrastructure development.

- State governments, particularly in Maharashtra, Manipur, and Jharkhand, have initiated schemes to provide financial assistance to traditional sports practitioners (Lal, 2020).

Revival through Local and Community-Based Initiatives

Local communities, NGOs, and tribal organizations have been at the forefront of reviving traditional sports.

1. Community-Led Sporting Events

- Tribal festivals, such as *Hornbill Festival* (Nagaland) and *Adivasi Mahotsav* (Chhattisgarh), have included indigenous sports competitions to encourage participation and preservation.
- Local tournaments in Jharkhand and Odisha have helped sustain traditional sports like Archery and Tug-of-War.

2. Revival of Martial Arts and Combat Sports

- Traditional martial arts like Kalaripayattu (Kerala) and Thang-Ta (Manipur) have gained renewed interest through academies and training programs.
- Schools and cultural centers have started incorporating these martial arts into physical education programs (Sharma, 2021).

Integration into School and University Curricula

Educational institutions have begun integrating indigenous sports into their curriculum to preserve traditional knowledge.

1. Physical Education Programs

- Schools in states like Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal have included Kho-Kho and Kabaddi in their sports programs.
- Universities have established dedicated research programs on indigenous games, ensuring their theoretical and practical study (Pathak & Sah, 2021).

2. Competitions and Scholarships for Indigenous Athletes

- Special scholarships for indigenous athletes have been introduced to encourage youth participation.
- Inter-university sports meets now feature indigenous games, increasing awareness and participation.

Role of Media and Digital Platforms in Promotion

Media representation and digital promotion have played a crucial role in reviving interest in indigenous sports.

1. **Television and Social Media Coverage**

- National broadcasters like Doordarshan and private sports networks have started showcasing indigenous games.
- Social media campaigns and YouTube channels dedicated to traditional sports have gained traction, attracting youth engagement.

2. **Documentaries and Online Content**

- Documentary films on traditional sports, such as *India's Indigenous Games* and *Forgotten Games of India*, have highlighted the cultural and historical significance of these sports.
- Online platforms offer tutorials and coaching sessions, making traditional sports accessible to a wider audience.

Corporate and Private Sector Involvement

Corporate entities and private organizations have also contributed to the promotion of indigenous sports.

1. **Sponsorships and Leagues**

- The *Pro Kabaddi League (PKL)* has brought Kabaddi into mainstream sports culture, providing financial stability for players.
- Similar efforts are being made to professionalize Kho-Kho through the *Ultimate Kho Kho League*.

2. **CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) Initiatives**

- Companies like Tata Steel and ONGC have sponsored indigenous sports tournaments, helping to sustain these traditional games.
- Private funding has also enabled infrastructure development in rural regions.

International Recognition and Exchange Programs

Efforts to gain international recognition for indigenous sports have also contributed to their revival.

1. **Demonstrations at International Sports Events**

- Indigenous sports have been showcased at international forums, such as the Asian Games and the Commonwealth Games cultural programs.
- Thang-Ta and Kalaripayattu have gained interest globally, with foreign students enrolling in Indian training centers.

2. **Collaborations with International Sports Bodies**

- Exchange programs between Indian indigenous sports practitioners and global sports institutions have helped in cross-cultural learning and preservation.

Policy Recommendations

For the sustainable preservation and promotion of indigenous sports, comprehensive policy interventions are needed.

Strengthening Government Support and Policy Framework

1. Inclusion in National Sports Policy

- Indigenous sports should be formally included in India's National Sports Policy with clear guidelines on funding, training, and recognition.
- A separate budget allocation should be made to promote traditional sports at grassroots levels.

2. Recognition in International Sports Bodies

- Efforts should be made to include indigenous sports in international events like the Olympics and Commonwealth Games.
- Diplomatic initiatives should promote Indian indigenous sports on global platforms.

Infrastructure Development and Training Facilities

1. Indigenous Sports Academies

- Establishment of specialized academies dedicated to training athletes in indigenous sports.
- Collaboration with existing sports universities to create structured training programs.

2. Revival of Traditional Playgrounds

- Protection of traditional sporting grounds from urban encroachment.
- Development of rural sports complexes equipped for indigenous sports.

Financial Support and Incentives

3. Scholarships and Grants

- Scholarships for students excelling in indigenous sports.
- Grants for research and documentation of traditional sports.

4. Employment Opportunities for Indigenous Athletes

- Government and private organizations should offer employment opportunities for indigenous sports athletes.
- Indigenous sports professionals should be appointed as trainers in educational institutions.

Education and Awareness Programs

1. Inclusion in School Curricula

- Indigenous sports should be integrated into the national education system under physical education programs.
 - Training workshops for teachers to promote these sports in schools.
2. **Public Awareness Campaigns**
 - Nationwide awareness campaigns on television, social media, and print media to highlight the significance of indigenous sports.
 - Government-sponsored exhibitions and festivals to promote traditional games.

Strengthening Women's Participation

1. **Equal Opportunities for Female Athletes**
 - Policies ensuring gender equality in indigenous sports training programs.
 - Encouraging female participation through targeted scholarships and incentives.
2. **Women-Centric Competitions**
 - Introduction of women's leagues and tournaments in indigenous sports.
 - Community engagement programs to change societal perceptions about women in traditional sports.

Leveraging Digital and Technological Advancements

3. **Creation of Digital Archives and Training Resources**
 - Development of an official indigenous sports database for research and documentation.
 - Online training programs and mobile applications to promote awareness and learning.
4. **Collaboration with Digital Content Creators**
 - Partnerships with social media influencers and content creators to showcase indigenous sports.
 - Use of augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) to create interactive learning experiences.

Conclusion

Indigenous sports are not just a form of physical activity; they are deeply rooted in the history, traditions, and identity of India's diverse tribal and rural communities. These games, shaped by centuries of cultural evolution, embody the wisdom, values, and collective spirit of indigenous societies. However, in the face of rapid modernization, urbanization, and globalization, many of these traditional sports are at risk of fading into obscurity. While significant efforts have been made to revive and promote them, a more holistic and sustained approach is required to ensure their long-term survival.

The Need for a Sustainable Model of Promotion

Sporadic and event-based initiatives, while useful in generating awareness, are insufficient for the sustained growth of indigenous sports. A structured model that integrates traditional games into mainstream sports culture, education, and policy frameworks is essential. This includes:

- Establishing a **national framework** that recognizes and protects indigenous sports as part of India's intangible cultural heritage.
- Encouraging **community-driven efforts** that involve local leaders, elders, and practitioners in the preservation of traditional games.
- Ensuring **long-term financial backing** from both government and private sectors to provide stable infrastructure and training facilities.

Balancing Tradition with Modernization

A critical aspect of reviving indigenous sports is striking a balance between preserving their traditional essence and adapting them to modern contexts. While it is essential to maintain the originality and cultural significance of these games, some level of modernization is necessary to attract youth participation. This includes:

- Standardizing game rules and formats without diluting their traditional essence.
- Utilizing modern technology, such as **digital platforms, online coaching, and virtual simulations**, to enhance accessibility.
- Integrating indigenous games into modern multi-sport events like the **Khelo India Games and National Games**, ensuring greater visibility.

The Role of Education and Awareness

One of the most effective ways to preserve indigenous sports is by incorporating them into educational curricula. Schools and universities can play a pivotal role in passing down knowledge about traditional games by:

- Introducing **physical education programs** that teach indigenous sports alongside modern sports.
- Conducting research and **publishing academic materials** on the historical and cultural significance of traditional sports.
- Organizing inter-school and inter-college competitions featuring indigenous games.

Furthermore, mass awareness through television, documentaries, and social media campaigns can help reintroduce these sports to newer generations. Digital storytelling,

athlete biographies, and showcasing indigenous sports through interactive media can significantly impact public interest.

Indigenous Sports as a Vehicle for Social and Economic Development

Reviving traditional sports can also serve as a means of **social and economic upliftment** for indigenous communities. By providing recognition, sponsorships, and professionalization opportunities, indigenous sports can:

- Create new employment avenues for athletes, trainers, and sports entrepreneurs.
- Foster **community pride and cultural resilience**, strengthening indigenous identity.
- Promote **sports tourism**, as seen in Kerala with Kalaripayattu or in Nagaland with Naga wrestling

Collaborations between the **Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, and private stakeholders** can drive initiatives to economically empower local communities through indigenous sports.

Towards a National and Global Identity for Indigenous Sports

For indigenous sports to thrive, they must not only be preserved within local communities but also recognized on **national and global platforms**. This includes:

- Advocating for the inclusion of Indian indigenous sports in **Asian Games, Commonwealth Games, and the Olympics**.
- Establishing **international exchange programs** to showcase Indian traditional sports abroad.
- Partnering with sports federations to standardize and promote traditional games for global audiences.

With the success of **Pro Kabaddi League (PKL)** and efforts to commercialize Kho-Kho through the **Ultimate Kho Kho League**, it is evident that indigenous sports can find a place in mainstream sports culture. Expanding similar professional leagues for games like Gatka, Thang-Ta, and Pehlwani will ensure sustained interest and recognition.

The Road Ahead: A Collective Responsibility

The preservation and promotion of indigenous sports are not the sole responsibility of one institution or sector; rather, it requires a **collaborative approach** involving the

government, private sector, educational institutions, media, and indigenous communities.

- **Policymakers** must integrate indigenous sports into the National Sports Policy and allocate sufficient resources.
- **Corporate sponsors** should view indigenous sports as an avenue for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and invest in their growth.
- **Educational institutions** should include indigenous sports in their curricula and research initiatives.
- **Communities and practitioners** must actively engage in passing down traditional knowledge and training younger generations.

By recognizing indigenous sports as a **cultural treasure and a viable avenue for athletic and economic growth**, India can ensure that these traditional games continue to thrive in the modern era. With a comprehensive and sustained approach, indigenous sports can evolve from being a relic of the past to a dynamic part of India's sporting future, reflecting the nation's rich heritage on the global stage.

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