



Cover Page



HISTORY OF SPORTS IN INDIA AND THE RISE OF ESPORTS AS A MODERN FORM OF SPORTS

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Abstract

Sports in India have evolved significantly, from traditional games and events in ancient times to the modern era with global recognition in many disciplines. India's sports history continues to grow with increasing success in international competitions, fostering pride, unity, and an ever-expanding sports culture across the country.

The rapid growth of esports has transformed competitive gaming into a mainstream phenomenon, attracting global attention from players, fans, sponsors, and media alike. Esports, defined as organized, multiplayer video game competitions, especially between professional players, teams, and organizations, is increasingly being recognized as a legitimate form of sport. This paper explores the factors that have contributed to the rise of esports as a modern sport, its socio-cultural implications, economic impact, and its comparison with traditional sports. The research aims to examine how esports has evolved, its current status in the global sports landscape, and the potential for its future growth. This paper outlines the evolution and impact of esports in the modern sports ecosystem and anticipates its future trajectory within the competitive gaming and sports landscape.

Sources – The source such as Archaeological remains, Literatures both indigenous and foreign or secular and religious like Brahminical and Buddhist sources helps us reconstruct History of sports. Therefore, the Neolithic Rock Art, artistic evidences on the ancient potteries and figurines helps reconstruct the History of sports. The epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata, texts like Vedic Literature provides insights into Chariot races, wrestling, Chess, martial arts, etc.

Key words – Games, Competitions, Legitimate, Players, Teams, Combat, Gymnastics, Olympics, Medals, Tournaments, etc.

Introduction

The history of sports in India is rich and diverse, spanning thousands of years, influenced by the country's cultural, social, and political development. Here's a brief overview of the history of sports in India:

Esports, or electronic sports, has seen a meteoric rise over the past two decades. What began as informal tournaments among gamers has now evolved into a billion-dollar industry, drawing



Cover Page



millions of viewers worldwide. Professional players, teams, and tournaments have garnered attention similar to traditional sports, with large-scale competitions broadcasted across multiple platforms, attracting sponsorships from leading brands, and being supported by international governing bodies.

The objective of this research is to assess how esports have become increasingly integrated into the global sports culture and to understand its cultural, technological, and economic implications.

Sports During Ancient and Medieval Periods

1. Early Beginnings:

- **Chaturanga** (4th-6th century CE) is one of the earliest known games, believed to have originated in ancient India. It is the precursor to modern chess.
- **Polo** also has its roots in ancient India, specifically in Persia and regions like Kashmir.
- **Malla-yuddha** (ancient Indian wrestling), a form of combat sport, was practiced by kings and soldiers.

2. Traditional Sports:

- **Kabbadi, Kho-Kho, and Vallam Kali** (boat races) were traditional rural sports.
- **Mallakhamba**, a gymnastics sport involving a wooden pole, was another traditional sport practiced by Indian wrestlers.

Colonial Period (British Era)

1. British Influence:

- During the British colonial rule (1858-1947), the introduction of Western sports like **cricket, football, and hockey** took root in India.
- **Cricket** became especially popular among the Indian elite, and the first recorded cricket match in India was played in 1721. By the 19th century, cricket became a central part of Indian sport.
- **Field Hockey** also gained prominence, with the British military and Indian princely states adopting the sport.

2. Rise of National Sport:

- **Field Hockey** was particularly successful for India during the early 20th century, as the country dominated Olympic hockey from the 1920s to the 1950s, winning multiple Olympic gold medals.
- Indian athletes began to compete in international competitions such as the Olympics, and sports like **tennis, badminton, and athletics** began to see growth.

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Cover Page



Post-Independence Era (1947 - Present)

1. Olympic Success:

- **India's first Olympic medal** was won in **1900** by Norman Pritchard in athletics (though born in India, he represented Britain).
- The country's most famous Olympic achievement came in **field hockey**. India won **eight Olympic gold medals** in the sport between 1928 and 1980, dominating the early years of the Games.
- **India's first individual Olympic gold medal** was won by **Abhinav Bindra** in 2008 (shooting), marking a turning point for individual sports.

2. Cricket:

- Cricket grew in stature and importance after independence. The **Indian national cricket team** won the **1970s' Cricket World Cup** (in 1983) under the captaincy of Kapil Dev, which helped establish the sport as a national obsession.
- In the 2000s, the rise of the **Indian Premier League (IPL)** revolutionized cricket and brought in a new era of commercialization and celebrity culture.

3. Other Sports:

- **Football** has remained popular in regions like **West Bengal, Kerala, and Goa**. India's national football team has had some success but has not achieved significant international triumphs.
- **Badminton** and **Wrestling** have also seen significant success at the international level in recent years, with athletes like **P.V. Sindhu** (badminton) and **Sushil Kumar** (wrestling) earning global recognition.

4. International Success in Other Fields:

- In the **1980s and 1990s**, India started emerging as a force in **badminton**, with players like **Prakash Padukone** and **P.V. Sindhu** winning international titles.
- **Tennis** saw the rise of stars like **Leander Paes, Mahesh Bhupathi, and Sania Mirza** achieving global success.
- **Wrestling** and **Boxing** have also gained importance, with athletes like **Mary Kom** (boxing) and **Sakshi Malik** (wrestling) winning medals at the **Olympic Games** and other international tournaments.

5. New Age Sports:

- **Kabaddi** saw a resurgence in the **Pro Kabaddi League**, while **e-sports** and **MMA** (Mixed Martial Arts) have gained a following among the younger generation.
- **Hockey**, while not as dominant as in the mid-20th century, continues to hold a place in the hearts of many.

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Cover Page



2. Defining Esports

Esports refers to organized, multiplayer video game competitions, particularly between professional players, teams, and organizations. Unlike casual gaming, esports involves competitive play with specific rules, tournaments, rankings, and prize money. These competitions are typically centered around popular video games like *League of Legends*, *Dota 2*, *Counter-Strike: Global Offensive*, and *Fortnite*.

3. Historical Development of Esports

Esports began to take shape in the late 1990s with games like *StarCraft* and *Quake*, where players participated in informal LAN (Local Area Network) competitions. Early tournaments were smaller-scale events, primarily held at conventions or dedicated gaming centers. However, with the rise of the internet and the development of online multiplayer games, esports began its transition into a global industry in the early 2000s.

The creation of major tournaments like the *World Cyber Games* (2000) and the *Electronic Sports World Cup* (2003) marked the beginning of esports' recognition on the global stage. By the 2010s, platforms such as Twitch (2011) and YouTube Gaming provided streaming services that significantly contributed to esports' growth, allowing players and fans to connect and follow competitive gaming remotely.

4. Factors Contributing to the Rise of Esports

1. Technological Advancements

The development of high-speed internet, better gaming consoles, and advanced computing power has enabled competitive gaming to thrive. Streaming platforms like Twitch and YouTube allow for live broadcasts of events, while social media platforms offer a space for esports personalities to grow their followings. Innovations in VR/AR technologies and cloud gaming platforms such as Google Stadia and Nvidia GeForce Now are also expanding the potential reach of esports.

2. Globalization of Esports

Esports has transcended national borders. The internet allows gamers from all over the world to participate in events and tournaments, uniting cultures around a shared passion. International competitions like *The International* (Dota 2) and *League of Legends World Championship* attract players and fans from diverse countries, creating a sense of global community.

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Cover Page



3. Cultural Shifts

Video games have increasingly become a part of popular culture, with younger generations viewing esports in a similar light to traditional sports. The rise of professional gamers as influencers, streamers, and media personalities has helped to increase the visibility of esports. Furthermore, many esports events now take place in major sports arenas and are broadcast live on television, blurring the lines between traditional sports and esports.

4. Institutional Support

Major corporations and investors are seeing the financial potential of esports. Brands such as Coca-Cola, Intel, and Red Bull sponsor teams, players, and tournaments, bringing in a wave of legitimacy and commercial backing. Esports organizations are also beginning to operate on the same scale as traditional sports franchises, with their own training facilities, management teams, and media rights deals.

5. Recognition by Traditional Sports Bodies

Esports is gaining recognition from traditional sports bodies. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has discussed the potential inclusion of esports in the Olympic Games, though debates over its definition as "sport" persist. The creation of global governing bodies, like the Esports Integrity Commission (ESIC), further legitimizes competitive gaming.

5. Socio-Cultural Implications of Esports

Esports has reshaped social interactions, particularly among younger generations. Online platforms enable fans to follow players and teams, interact with communities, and attend live-streamed events. These platforms facilitate a sense of belonging, especially for those who might not feel connected through traditional sports.

However, there are concerns surrounding issues like screen addiction, health risks associated with prolonged gaming, and the need for greater inclusivity, particularly in terms of gender diversity within esports.

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Cover Page



6. Economic Impact of Esports

The economic significance of esports is immense. According to recent reports, the global esports industry was expected to surpass \$1 billion in revenue in 2020, primarily driven by media rights, sponsorships, merchandise, and ticket sales. Professional esports players can earn significant salaries, while team organizations are also seeing a rise in investment and valuation.

Broadcast rights, merchandise, game sales, and in-game microtransactions provide revenue for developers and publishers. Esports tourism is also booming, with large tournaments bringing tens of thousands of spectators to host cities, creating a significant economic footprint.

7. Comparison with Traditional Sports - Esports shares several similarities with traditional sports:

- **Professionalism:** Esports players train rigorously, develop specific strategies, and compete in organized leagues.
- **Competitive Structure:** Esports has a well-defined structure with rankings, championships, and tournaments like traditional sports.
- **Global Audience:** Like football or basketball, esports events attract large global audiences both in person and through broadcasting.

However, esports differs in significant ways from traditional sports:

- **Physicality:** While traditional sports involve a high degree of physical activity, esports is more intellectually and strategically demanding, relying on quick reflexes and cognitive skill rather than physical endurance.
- **Cultural Perception:** Esports still faces skepticism from some traditional sports enthusiasts, who may not consider gaming as a "real" sport due to its lack of physical exertion.

8. Challenges Facing Esports- Despite its growth, esports faces several challenges:

1. **Player Well-being:** The intense pressure to perform can lead to burnout, mental health issues, and even physical strain such as repetitive stress injuries.
2. **Regulation:** The lack of uniform regulation across tournaments and organizations can lead to issues with player contracts, cheating, and doping.
3. **Inclusivity:** Esports faces challenges regarding the participation of women and other underrepresented groups, with gender stereotypes and toxic online cultures deterring many potential players and fans.

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Cover Page



9. The Future of Esports

As esports continues to grow, it is likely to gain further recognition from both fans and official bodies. It is expected that esports will continue to develop into a more structured industry, with professional leagues, expanded sponsorships, and increasing integration into mainstream sports media.

The future may also see esports integrated into traditional sports events or even recognized as an Olympic sport. As technology advances, the lines between traditional and esports may continue to blur, with potential innovations in virtual and augmented reality gaming offering new opportunities for the industry.

10. Conclusion

Esports has firmly established itself as a modern form of sport. It offers both players and fans a unique blend of entertainment, competition, and community. The ongoing growth of esports represents a shift in how sports are viewed in the 21st century, with gaming becoming as integral to modern sports culture as traditional athletic pursuits. While challenges remain, the future of esports looks bright, with further innovation and expansion anticipated in the years to come.

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