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Indian Traditional Games: A Potent Cultural Heritage for Promoting Recreational Leisure among Children

Nita Bandyopadhyay[1]*, Suvra Mondal[1]

[1]Department of Physical Education and Sports Science, University of Kalyani, Kalyani, India

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***Corresponding author:** Nita Bandyopadhyay
Department of Physical Education and Sports Science, University of Kalyani, Kalyani, India

Abstract

Leisure time is an important aspect of daily life that contributes greatly to people's mental well-being and quality of life. Traditional games, often considered as the conventional recreational leisure activities of children and youth, have historically played an important role in cultural transmission and holistic development. However, due to technological developments, urbanization, and the development of visual media, outdoor games and other traditional means of leisure have declined significantly. Despite this shift, Indian traditional games continue to offer substantial benefits, including physical growth, cognitive enhancement, creativity, cultural literacy, and social cohesion. The study aims to explore and document a few common prevailing Indian traditional games, with an emphasis on their structure, cultural significance, and potential developmental contribution to children. Employing a descriptive thematic research design, data were collected via extensive review of literature, including academic publications, books, websites, and digital repositories. Based on the available data collected from sources, it was observed that throughout history, traditional games and sports have served as fundamental expressions of human creativity, spontaneity, amusement, motor learning, community bonding, leadership, and emphasized physical and mental health benefits. Traditional games, often seen as unique to specific regions, reveal striking similarities across cultures. Many games are played globally under different names, shaped by local customs but maintaining core mechanics. The modern generation prefers technology-based games over indigenous ones; consequently, some traditional games are on the verge of extinction, while others have been transformed into mainstream sports, and a few still exist in their original form, predominantly practiced by rural and semi-urban children. Additionally, certain traditional games have been preserved as part of cultural heritage and are performed during religious festivals. The research also highlights the role of traditional games in advancing inclusivity and sustainability, as they require minimal resources such as simple, low-cost, lightweight tools; utilize local surroundings as play areas; and follow unwritten, simple, and flexible rules, thereby promoting enjoyment and participation beyond competition, making them easily accessible. In conclusion, Indian traditional games are an important, sustainable, and culturally rich means of having fun in a manner which is beneficial for the holistic development of children. Furthermore, it was observed that various Indian traditional games, ranging from physical skill, strategy, memory, rhythmic, and verbal skills, have an important impact on developing the minds, cognitive and motor skills, leadership qualities, cooperativeness, and cultural awareness of children. Their revitalization through parental engagement, community initiatives, school curricula, governmental support, and inclusive sports policies can position them as meaningful, recreational, value-based alternatives to digital leisure.

Keywords: Traditional games, child development, cultural heritage, leisure activities, inclusivity.

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INTRODUCTION

Leisure time is an integral aspect of human lives and provides opportunities for relaxation, recreation, socialization, enjoyment, and personal development. In children, leisure is more vital because childhood is a crucial phase of rapid growth and development in physical, cognitive, emotional, and social areas (Mohamed & Tajuddin, 2019). Play-based leisure allows children to discover things around them, solve problems, develop relationships, and learn skills through enjoyable activities (Gul, 2023). Therefore, leisure during childhood should not be considered merely as unoccupied time between educational and domestic responsibilities but as an important component of healthy development. Children constitute a large portion of the world's population and are significant contributors to the future growth of families, communities, and societies.

Hence, investing in the health of children is an essential social investment (Gultom *et al.,* 2022). The experiences that the child goes through in the initial stages of development will influence the child's physical ability, mental abilities, emotions, socialization, self-confidence, and ability to interact successfully with other people (Melianasari & Suparno, 2018). The World Health Organization (WHO) recognizes play, games, sports, recreation, physical education, and planned exercise as important domains of physical activity for children, adolescents and recommends that those aged 5–17 years undertake an average of at least 60 minutes of moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activity per day across the week (Chaput *et al.,* 2020; *WHO*, 2020). It is therefore imperative to ensure that children are exposed to enjoyable and safe recreation opportunities.

However, the nature of leisure activities among children has been greatly changed due to urbanization, technological innovations, changes in family lifestyle, and digital entertainment. Mobile phones, tablets, computers, television, and electronic games have been gaining more popularity and bringing new forms of entertainment into children's daily routine (Bandyopadhyay & Das, 2025; Gul, 2023). Although digital technologies can provide opportunities for education, communication, creativity, and entertainment, excessive recreational screen-based activity may displace opportunities for physically active and socially interactive forms of leisure. Previous literature suggests that higher levels of sedentary behaviours, including screen-based leisure, are linked with poorer physical fitness, cardiometabolic well-being, sleep, and certain aspects of mental health and behavior among children and adolescents (Chaput *et al.,* 2020; Krishnaveni & Ahmed, 2022). UNICEF's recent global evidence on play also emphasizes that play is an important part of children's learning, development, nurturing, and connecting, and children need time, support, safe places, and available materials to play (UNICEF, 2026).

Indian traditional games may also possess benefits for recreational activity, as many of them are organized through the use of easily available and inexpensive materials and spaces (Luchoro-Parrilla *et al.,* 2024). Generally, traditional games are played informally with minimal equipment and are learned through interaction with other children (Bandyopadhyay, 2023). A study on traditional games conducted by Santoso et al. (2024) identified diverse categories of games, including physical-skill, strategy, memory, chance, rhythm, simulation, and verbal games, and stated that such types of games could contribute to physical development, amusement, creativity, cultural transmission, peer interaction, cooperation, and socialization (Gulia & Dhauta, 2019; Santoso *et al.,* 2024). Such characteristics may make traditional games particularly relevant to inclusive recreational opportunities in communities where access to expensive sporting facilities or commercially produced recreational equipment is limited.

Accordingly, the developmental and cultural significance of individual traditional games varies, and claims concerning their benefits should be grounded in available empirical evidence rather than assumed solely from their traditional status. Therefore, documenting the characteristics, cultural significance, recreational features, and potential developmental contributions of traditional games can help clarify their contemporary relevance. The present study aims to explore and document selected traditional games prevalent in India, with particular emphasis on their structure, cultural significance, recreational characteristics, and potential contributions to children's physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and cultural development. By examining traditional games as both recreational practices and forms of cultural heritage, the study seeks to contribute to the understanding of their potential role in contemporary childhood leisure and to identify possibilities for their preservation and revitalization through families, communities, schools, and other relevant institutions.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

For the current study, a descriptive thematic review methodology was employed to summarize the available evidence related to traditional games, with a specific focus on Indian traditional games and their cultural, recreational importance and contribution to the physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and cultural development of children.

Literature Search Strategy

The data and information regarding traditional games (TG) were collected through secondary sources, which included books, websites, and peer-reviewed journals. A thorough literature search was conducted using different electronic databases and scholarly platforms, including Google Scholar, ResearchGate, Academia, Scopus, and SPORTDiscus. Relevant studies were identified using combinations of the major search terms such as "traditional games", "indigenous games", "traditional sports", combined with "children's leisure", "recreational activity", "children's health", "physical activity". Boolean operators (AND/OR) were used where appropriate to combine search terms and retrieve relevant studies.

Study Selection and Screening

The identification and selection of literature for the present review were conducted using a systematic and transparent screening process in accordance with the PRISMA 2020 guidelines (Bandyopadhyay, 2026; Page *et al.,* 2021) which is depicted in Figure 1. The search and screening process was conducted through three stages, which include identification, screening, and inclusion. The identification process included a total of 72 records, consisting of 52 articles from academic

journals, eight records from books, and 12 records from traditional and sports websites. 24 duplicates were eliminated prior to the screening phase, thus remaining 48 distinct records for further evaluation. After title and abstract screening, a total of 19 reports were removed. Consequently, 29 reports were considered potentially relevant and were assessed for eligibility. In the process of conducting the eligibility assessment, out of the 29 reports, nine were excluded. Thus, 20 sources were found relevant for the review, including 20 academic journal articles, of which five were experimental studies and five were review articles; eight were books; and 12 were traditional and sports websites.

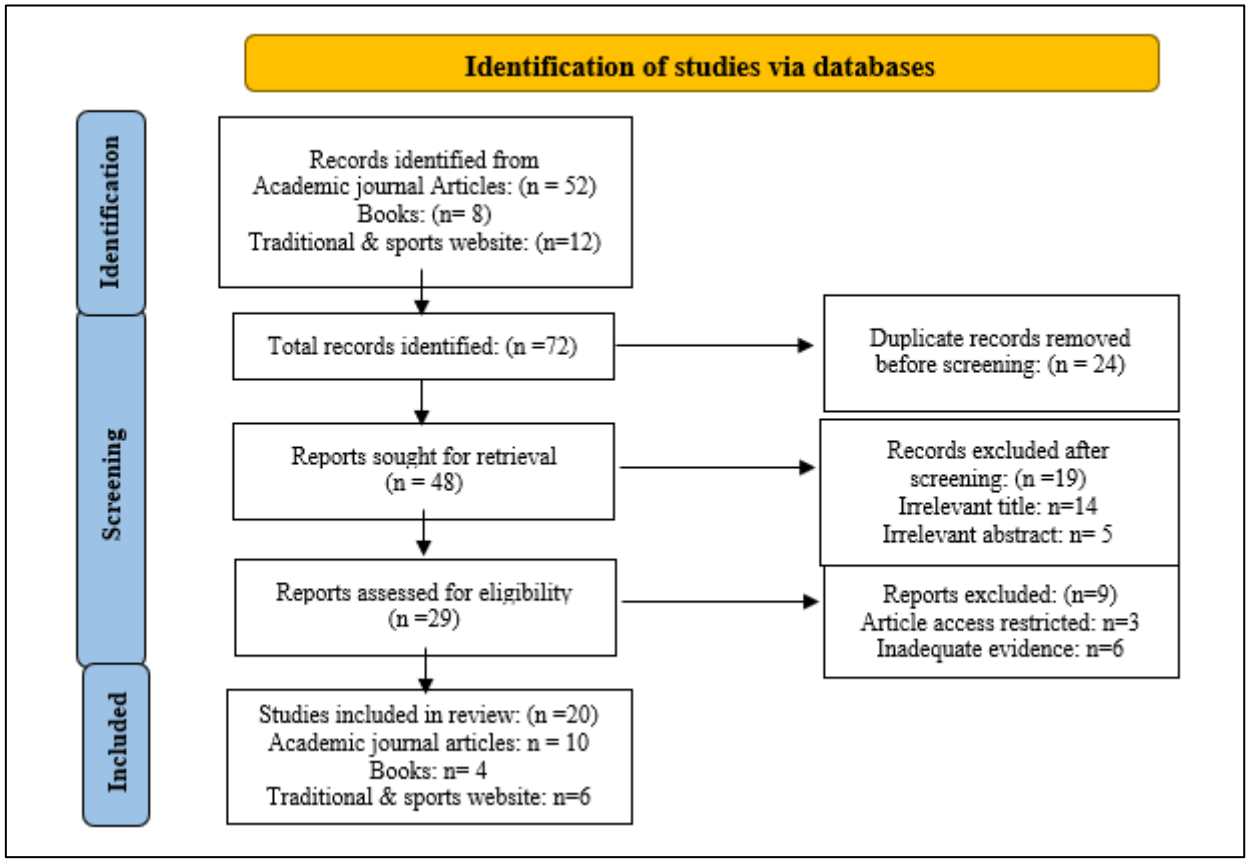


Fig. 1: PRISMA Flowchart of the search process

Different Traditional Games of India

India, a land steeped in history and culture, has been the birthplace of numerous ancient traditions and practices. Among these traditional games are activities that entertained, educated and engaged its people for centuries. These games transcended their entertainment value, acting as tools for physical fitness, mental agility and even spiritual growth (Pramanik & Bhattacharya, 2018). Many of these games laid the foundation for modern sports and boards games enjoyed worldwide today (Tripathi, 2026). In India, traditional games such as Kabaddi, Kho-Kho, Stone-pile game, Hopscotch, Hide-and-Seek, Five Stones, Marbles, and Tipcat are deeply embedded in the social cultural contexts of Indian society, reflecting the country's diverse heritage (Gulia & Dhauta, 2019; Kumar, 2018). Some games such as Bow and Arrow (Archery), Kusthi (wrestling), Mallakhamb (pole gymnastics), Kalaripayattu (martial arts), Ha-du-du (Kabaddi), Kho-Kho, and Chaturanga (Chess) have evolved into organized competitive sports, whereas others continue primarily as informal recreational activities or are associated with particular communities, festivals, and cultural practices like Kite flying, Boat race, bull-taming, etc. (Bandyopadhyay, 2021; Praveen, 2023).

The selected literature provided information on a range of traditional games, from which the following games were identified and descriptively documented according to their playing procedures, geographical prevalence, cultural characteristics, and recreational features.

Tipcat

This game is very popular among children in rural areas and can be played by two teams using a large wooden stick called danda, two to three feet long and a smaller stick called a gilli three to six inches long, tapered at both ends. Among two teams one bats and the other fields. The batter places the gilli on the ground horizontally across the pit and using the danda the batter hits one of the tapered ends of the gilli, causing it to lift high in the air. While the gilli is still in the air, he attempts to hit it forcefully with the danda, sending it as

far away from the pit as possible. If he fails at first, he gets another turn (Periwal & Poovaiah, 2015; Roy, 2023). If the fielder catches the gilli before it touches the ground, the batsman is out and the second player tries to hit the gilli. If the gilli is not caught, the distance from the hole to the place where the gilli falls is measured with the danda. Each danda equals one point. The game continues till all batsmen are out. The teams change sides and continues the same way (Kumar, 2018; Praveen, 2023).



Hopscotch

The game is played mostly by the girls alone or with more participants using a guti, which may be a broken piece of an earthen pot approximately one and a half inches in diameter or a small, round, flat stone. It is a famous individual game that can be played with several players or alone. This game was known as Kunte Bille, Ekka Dokka, Kit Kit, Paandi, Stapu, Langdi, and Sazalong in different places in India (Periwal & Poovaiah, 2015). A rectangle measuring approximately three yards in length and two yards in width is drawn on the ground and divided into six squares, each approximately one foot wide. The fourth and sixth squares are further subdivided into two sections, with diagonal lines drawn from one side to the other. The first player stands behind the starting line and throws the guti into the first square. She then skips the first square and hops into the second, third, fourth, and subsequent squares in sequence. All hopping is performed on one foot, except in the squares that are divided into two sections side by side, where the player places both feet down, with one foot in each section. The player must hop over or skip the square containing the guti. A player is declared out if the guti fails to land in the appropriate square, if she steps on a boundary line, or if she loses her balance while bending down to pick up the guti. She is also declared out if she places her other hand or foot on the ground or steps into the square containing the guti (Praveen, 2023).



Hide and Seek

Children play this game in groups with their peers usually with more than five players. This game was also popular as Chhupan Chhupai, Luka Chhupi, Luko Churi in different parts of India. The players begin the game with choosing a denner or seeker while other players act as chor or hider. The seeker closes their eyes at a specified area and counts pre decided numbers loudly, while the hiders hide themselves within the designated area. The seeker moves around in search of the hidden players, often following the sounds they make and after successfully finding every hiders, the hider who was caught first becomes next seeker, however if the seeker fails to find out any of the hiders, then the seeker repeats seeking. It improves the ability of counting, boosts memory, improves observation and searching skills and at the same time hiding in a safe place. (Ghosh, 2015).



Marbles or Glass Ball

Marbles is a traditional game played with glass balls or marbles by two or more players. Across different regions of India, this game is commonly referred to as Kanche, Kancha, Goli, Banta, or Goti, Guli etc. Each player must have a goli. The game is played on the ground, where a small hole is made into the ground. The players position themselves approximately two yards away from the hole and kneel down to attempt to send their marbles into it. To throw the marble, the player holds it firmly with the forefinger of the left hand. The finger is then stretched backward like a bowstring through the pressure applied by the forefinger and thumb of the right hand. When the finger is released, the goli moves forward, often passing beyond the hole. Players may attempt to knock the other players' golis out of the

way or gently strike them with their own goli so that they move toward and eventually enter the hole. The player who is the first to get all of their golis into the hole is declared the winner and wins all the golis used in the game (Ghosh, 2015; Periwal & Poovaiah, 2015).



Hanky Thief

Hanky thief is traditionally played as an outdoor game, although it can also be played indoors if sufficient space is available for running. Hanky thief has been traditionally known by various names, including Rumal Chor or Rumal Chori across India. The game can be played by more than six participants, one of whom is designated as the chor (thief). The remaining participants sit in a circle with their eyes closed. The players sing a song three or four times, during which the chor quietly places a rumal (handkerchief or small piece of cloth) behind one of the seated players (Ghosh, 2015). When the singing ends, all participants open their eyes and check whether the rumal has been placed behind them. The player who finds the rumal gets up and runs after the chor in an attempt to catch them. The chor runs around the circle to avoid being caught and attempts to occupy the vacant seat of the player chasing them. If the chor reaches and occupies the vacant seat before being caught, the roles continue accordingly. However, if the chor is caught by the player carrying the rumal before reaching the vacant seat, the roles are switched. The game becomes more engaging when played at a faster pace with more number of participants and when the rumal is placed behind a different player during each turn, thereby involving all participants (Sharma, 2025).



Spinning Top

Spinning top is a traditional game commonly played by one or more children. Across different regions of India, this game was commonly referred to as pambaram, bhawra (or bhavra), latim, lattoo, buguri, or bongaram. A lattoo is a pear-shaped spinning top made of wood, with a pointed pin at its bottom. It is set into motion with the help of a string, which is wrapped around the top and then pulled with a firm jerk to make it spin on a hard surface. The players compete to keep their lattoo spinning for the longest possible time. The player whose lattoo spins for the longest duration is declared the winner and gets the opportunity to spin the losing player's lattoo (Bharatan, 2020; *Traditional Games Federation of India*, n.d.).



Kite Flying

kite flying is a popular traditional game that can be played by several participants or alone that is also enjoyed by spectators. This traditional activity is also known as Ghuri, Guddi, Patang, or Patenga in various part of India (Ghosh, 2015). The activity is particularly attractive when the sky is filled with colourful kites, which are carried higher by the cool breeze. During kite flying, one participant may attempt to bring down another participant's kite by entangling their kite with it, resulting in an exciting kite-fighting activity. Every year, kite flying is practiced with great enthusiasm during Vishwakarma Puja festival in parts of West Bengal.



Stone-Pile Game

Stone-Pile game is played outdoors with more than four players in each team, known by different names including Dikori, Pittu, Lagoori, Lingocha, Lingorchya, Satoliya, Satodiya, Yedu Penkulata, Dabba Kali, Ezhu

Kallu, across different parts of India (Bandyopadhyay & Das, 2025; Periwal & Poovaiah, 2015). Children divide themselves into two teams. The two teams stand several yards apart, with seven, nine, or eleven stones placed midway between them and arranged in the shape of a pyramid. A member of the team who won the toss, may accept the opportunity to take a ball and attempt to strike the pile of stones to knock it down. The player is given three chances to hit the pile. If the player fails to knock down the stones, the ball is passed to the second team, which then gets an opportunity to play. If a member of the first team successfully strikes and topples the pile, but a member of the second team catches the ball before it bounces back to the ground, the ball is passed to the second team to continue the game. If the members of the second team fail to catch the ball, they try to prevent the members of the first team from rebuilding the pyramid by rearranging the stones. To prevent the first team from rebuilding the pile, members of the second team attempt to hit them with the ball, while the members of the first team try to avoid being hit. If the first team successfully rebuilds the pyramid without any of its members being hit by the ball, they retrieve the ball and continue their attempt to strike the stones. If a member of the first team is hit by the ball before the pyramid is rebuilt, the ball is given to the second team, which then takes its turn.



Blind Bee

Blind bee is played outdoor or indoor, preferably with more than five participants. This game also named as Kana-machi, does not follow a single fixed set of rules; however, certain commonly practiced rules are generally followed. First, the players select one participant to be the Blind Bee (kana-machi), usually through a toss or another agreed-upon method. The selected player covers and securely ties a cloth over their eyes so that they cannot see their surroundings. The Blind Bee then attempts to catch the other players, while they try to avoid being caught by moving around and reaching a safe location within the designated area. Once the Blind Bee successfully catches another player, the caught player becomes the new Blind Bee, while the former Blind Bee returns to the game as a regular player. The game is usually played within a designated area, and participants are not allowed to move beyond its boundaries. This restriction helps ensure that the Blind Bee can reasonably attempt to locate and catch the other players (Roy & Lama, 2020).



Rescuing the Bride

This game is traditionally played in almost all parts of India. Variations of this game are known by names such as Bou Basanti, Budikapati, Budir Chu, and Bouchhi (Roy & Lama, 2020). This game is traditionally played in almost all parts of India. Rescuing the bride requires two courts to be marked on the ground: one rectangular and the other circular, positioned approximately 25–30 feet apart. The game is played between two teams, with each team consisting of approximately eight to ten players. After the toss, one player from the team that wins the toss takes the role of the Buri (old lady) and remains inside the circular court. The remaining members of the same team stay inside the rectangular court. The objective of the opposing team is to reach the Buri and escort her from the circular court to the rectangular court without being touched. If a player successfully brings the Buri to the rectangular court without being touched, the team earns one point. Any opposing players touched during the attempt are declared out.



Touching Finger

Touching Finger is a traditional children's game played by at least two or more participants preferably in indoor setting. Touching Finger was also known as Ikir Mikir, Akkad Bakkad, Eeni, meeni, miny, moe etc (Periwal & Poovaiah, 2015). The players sit closely together with their hands placed on the ground, palms facing downward and fingers spread apart. One player is designated as the leader and places only one hand on the ground, while all other participants place both hands on the ground. The leader recites the traditional rhyme, beginning with “Ikir mikir cham chikir…” while touching the fingers of the players one by one. The fingers are touched sequentially in a clockwise direction, with one finger being touched for each part of the

recitation. The player whose finger is touched when the recitation ends closes that finger. The game then continues by repeating the same recitation, beginning with the finger immediately next to the closed finger. Closed fingers are skipped and are not counted during subsequent recitations. The process continues until all the fingers of the players have been closed. A player whose five fingers on one hand are completely closed may remove that hand from the game. The player who is the first to have all ten fingers closed is declared the winner. The game continues until all participants have had the opportunity to close all of their fingers.



Elandi London

This game was traditionally popular by the name Statue Game or London Statue and played in outdoor or indoor settings. In Elandi London, two spots are marked on the ground approximately 15 feet apart. One player is designated as the thief and stands at one of the marked spots, while the remaining players stay at the other spot. The thief calls out "Elandi London," while the other players begin moving toward the thief. When the thief finishes calling out the phrase and looks back toward the approaching players, the other players must immediately remain still, like statues. If any player moves while the thief is looking and the thief notices the movement, that player is declared the new thief. The players gradually continue moving toward the thief whenever the thief is not looking. If a player successfully reaches and touches the thief and then reaches the boundary line, the original thief continues in the role of thief. However, if the thief reaches the boundary line before the player who touched them, that player becomes the new thief.



Cat and the Mouse

Cat and the mouse also known as Indur Biral is a traditional group game usually played outdoor by more than eight to ten participants where they designated two players who take the roles of indur (mouse) and biral (cat). The remaining participants form a circle by holding hands. The indur stands inside the circle, while the biral remains outside. The objective of the game is for the indur to move within the circle and attempt to escape through the circle without being caught by the biral. The indur must remain in motion inside the circle. The biral is not permitted to enter the circle but may reach through it to attempt to catch the indur. The players forming the circle assist the indur by allowing them to move in and out of the circle while attempting to prevent the biral from reaching them. They may also block the biral by standing in its way. If the biral successfully catches the indur, the roles change: the captured indur becomes the new biral, the former biral joins the circle, and another participant takes the role of indur.



Tug of War

Tug of War, regionally known as Vadamvali, Rashi Tanatani, and Hagga Jaggata, is a traditional team game played by two teams, with each team consisting of a maximum of approximately 10–12 players. The game is played on a flat, grassy area. A line, referred to as the centre line, is marked across the playing area, and the rope is positioned so that its centre mark aligns with the centre line on the ground. When the referee blows the whistle, both teams begin pulling the rope toward their respective sides. The objective is for each team to pull the rope, along with the opposing team members, toward its own territory. The team that successfully pulls the opposing team beyond the centre line is declared the winner (Aliriad *et al.,* 2024).



Identifying the Tapper

Identifying the tapper, also known as Golap Tagar, is a traditional team game played by both boys and girls (Roy & Lama, 2020). The game is played between two teams with an equal number of players. Each team has a leader, referred to as the "king." The two teams stand approximately 15–20 feet apart, separated by a boundary line. At the beginning of the game, each king assigns the members of their team names associated with flowers or fruits. The king then blindfolds one player from the opposing team and calls one of their own players using the assigned flower or fruit name, such as "Come, my Rose" or "Come, my Jasmine." The player called by the king approaches the blindfolded player and lightly taps or flicks them on the forehead. The blindfold is then removed, and the player who was touched must identify the person who touched their forehead. If the player correctly identifies the person, they move forward toward the opposing team's side. If the identification is incorrect, the opposing player advances instead. The game continues in this manner until one team succeeds in capturing the territory of the opposing team. At the end of the game, the members of the losing team lift the winning king and carry them across the boundary. In another variation, the members of the losing team carry the winning players on their backs across the boundary.



Passing through Trap

Passing through trap *or* Openti Bioscope is a traditional game mainly played by girls. Two players stand facing each other and join their arms to form an arch. The remaining girls pass one by one beneath the arch while moving in a circular path and reciting a traditional rhyme. The movement continues until the final line of the rhyme, "Amar nam Jadumani, yete habe anekkhani" ("My name is Jadumani, I have to go a long way"), is recited. When the final line is uttered, the two players forming the arch lower their arms around the girl who is passing beneath the arch at that moment. The other participants then lift and carry the captured player while celebrating (Roy & Lama, 2020).



King and the Girl

King and the Girl or Elating Belating is a traditional game mainly played by girls. The participants are divided into two teams, which position themselves along a line marked on the ground and face each other (Das, 2015; Roy, 2023). At the beginning of the game, one team takes two steps forward and recites the first verse of the traditional rhyme, "Elatim, Belatim," before stepping back. The opposing team then takes two steps forward and responds by reciting, "Ki khabar aila?" ("What is the news?"). The exchange continues through successive verses until one team recites the final line, "Niye yao balikake" ("Take away the girl"). Following this, the opposing team attempts to take away one of the players from the other team. The outcome of the game depends on whether the team is able to retain its player or is required to give the player to the opposing team. This game is traditionally played mostly all part of India.



Game of Tag

Game of Tag is a traditional team game that is widely played in different parts of India by both children and adults. Variations of this game are also known as Kabaddi and Ha-du-du (Periwal & Poovaiah, 2015). The game is played between two teams, generally consisting of approximately ten players each. A playing court measuring approximately 20 × 30 feet is marked on the ground, with the two teams positioned on opposite sides of the court. At the beginning of a turn, one player from a team takes a deep breath and continuously recites the traditional sound "Ha-du-du" while entering the opposing team's area. The player attempts to touch as many opposing players as possible without losing their breath or interrupting the continuous utterance. After

touching the opposing players, the player must return safely to their own side of the court. If the player successfully returns to their side while maintaining the continuous utterance, the opposing players who were touched are considered out. The teams take turns sending players into the opposing area, and the team that successfully touches and eliminates the greater number of opposing players is declared the winner (Praveen, 2023).



Jumping Over the Obstacles

Jumping Over the Obstacles Iching-Biching is a traditional game mainly enjoyed by girls and involves energetic physical movements and jumping over obstacles created by human bodies. The game requires two catcher players to sit facing each other to form obstacles using their extended hands and feet touching one another, over which the other participants must jump. In one arrangement, two players sit facing each other with their legs extended and their feet touching one another. While Jumping Over the Obstacles the players recite the traditional rhyme: "Iching biching chiching cha, Projapati ure ja." The catchers increase the jumping height after successful completion of jump to a certain height by each player. If any one fails to clear the height they become the catcher.The game involves repeated jumping movements and requires physical coordination, balance, and agility (Das, 2015).



King Minister Thief Soldier

King Minister Thief Soldier or Raja Mantri Chor Sipahi, traditional game mainly popular as leisure time activity for children. The game begins with making 4 chits namely Raja (king -1000 points), Mantri (minister-800 points), Chor (thief- 0 points) and Sipahi (Soldiers-500 points). Each chit is folded-shuffled and tossed among 4 players. Each player picks one chit. The player with the chit containing Raja orders Mantri to identify the 'Chor' from the other two remaining players. If the Mantri guesses correctly, then he/she achieves the point mentioned on that particular chit and Chor & Sipahi score zero. If Mantri fails to identify correctly, then Mantri scores Zero & Chor, Sipahi score the allotted points. Several rounds are played. At the end, total points are counted for each player & the player with the highest score wins the game (Periwal & Poovaiah, 2015).



DISCUSSION

Traditional games represent an important form of recreational leisure that has been transmitted across generations and embedded within local cultures. Traditional games involve some kind of activities which are related to skilful actions, strategies, memory, rhythm, speaking, imitation, coordination and cooperation (Muhaimin *et al.,* 2024). Their value extends beyond amusement because, while playing the game, people get an opportunity to do physical exercise, cognitive tasks, communicate, cooperate, innovate, make decisions and interact socially (Luchoro-Parrilla *et al.,* 2024). A recent study of traditional child games reported improvements in social-emotional skills, communication, and social interaction among children participating in culturally relevant games (Aliriad *et al.,* 2024; Ashar *et al.,* 2024; Ismoyo *et al.,* 2024). Such findings suggest that traditional games can provide a multidimensional recreational experience rather than functioning solely as physical entertainment (Dese *et al.,* 2023; Melianasari & Suparno, 2018).

Nature of the Traditional Game

By critically analysing the procedure of the games, the evidence reveals that Indian traditional games are extremely varied in terms of their nature, structure, physical participation level, mental involvement, interaction, and resource requirement. On the basis of the playing environment, the aforementioned games may be grouped into categories of outdoor games, indoor games, and those which can be played both outside and inside.

Games like Tipcat, Game of Tag, Tug of War, Rescuing the Bride, and Stone-Pile game usually need open grounds since they require running, throwing, chasing, jumping, or team movements. In contrast, games like Touching Finger and King Minister Thief Soldier do not need much space for their conduct. Games like Hanky Thief (Rumal Churi) can either be played indoors or outdoors if there is enough space for them.

Due to the major movements and skill requirements, several games can be termed as physical-skill games (Hassani & Afazeli, 2024; Iswanto *et al.,* 2024; Muhaimin *et al.,* 2024). Tipcat includes hitting, hand-eye coordination, timing, and the control of force; Jumping game includes jumping, balance, coordination, and agility; Elandi London involve running and fast movement transitions; while Tug of War involves muscular exertion of the whole body (Praveen, 2023). Game of Tag includes running, dodging, breathing control, agility, and physical engagement. The same applies to the Stone-Pile game (Pittu) as it involves throwing, running, dodging, and quick reconstruction of the stone formation. Previous experimental study on Indian pre-adolescents engaged in a structured folk games regimen (e.g., Rumal-Chukna, Peecho) revealed that the dynamic, multidirectional movements embedded in these games significantly optimized the children's agility, muscular endurance, and cardiorespiratory health (Singh *et al.,* 2018).

Apart from requiring physical skills to play these games, other skills such as prediction, planning, observation, and decision-making become imperative in order to succeed in playing some particular game (Bandyopadhyay & Das, 2025). In Stone Pile game, the players need to make predictions about when and how to hit and rebuild the stone formation without being hit by the other team. The Rescuing the Bride game needs tactical planning to rescue the marked person while in Touch and Run, the players need to make correct decisions regarding the correct time to move towards the objective without being predicted by the opponent. King Minister Thief Soldier also requires observation, inference, memory, and decision-making because the Minister should predict the correct person with the chit.

In addition, several games are also characterised by rhythmic, timing, and coordination-based activities (Ismoyo *et al.,* 2024). Hopscotch involves the controlled use of hopping, balance, and placing the playing piece correctly. In the jumping game (Iching-Biching), there is a repetition of jumping movements together with the use of rhyme. Similarly, in the Touching Finger game, there is a combination of rhyming with the use of finger identification. Similarly, in Openti Bioscope, there is a mixture of movement, timing, and coordination along with rhyming.

There is another set of games that includes neurocognitive and sensory attention. Hide and Seek uses spatial cognition, memory for hiding places, auditory attention, and anticipation. Blind Bee is very dependent on auditory and spatial perception since the blindfolded person has to search for other players in absence of visual cues. Identifying the Tapper (Golap Tagar) entails recognition, memory, attention, and identification of another player using sensory inputs. King Minister Thief Soldier involves recall, deduction, observation, and decision-making (Petrovska *et al.,* 2013). The traditional game also includes verbal, imaginative, and cultural expressions of games that use words and rhymes in their processes of gameplay (Pramanik & Bhattacharya, 2018). They give children the chance to learn the culture-specific vocabulary, expressions, rhythms, and stories. The game of Kite Flying does not involve running but requires imagination, skills, environment awareness, and interaction among players. Thus, the traditional game is different from the usual game in its combination of body movement with verbal communication, imagination, music, rhythm, storytelling, and interaction (Ismoyo *et al.,* 2024).

Cultural Significance and Heritage Value

Traditional games are an important part of cultural heritage, because they transmit local traditions, language, values, practices, and memory from one generation to another (Ambretti *et al.,* 2019). Traditional games like Touching Finger, jumping game, *Passing through Trap* and Elating Belating also involve traditional rhymes and oral expressions thus helping in preserving oral traditions. Games like Kite flying are also linked with cultural and religious events and thus show the link between playtime and community events. Moreover, there are some team games like Hanky Thief, Stone-Pile game, Game of Tag, and Tug of War that provide opportunities for interacting, cooperating, leading and participating among children. These features are consistent with Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which emphasises learning through social interaction and cultural contexts, and with the New Sociology of Childhood, which views children as active participants in their social and cultural environments (James & Prout, 2003; Muhaimin *et al.,* 2024). Therefore, traditional games serve not only as forms of entertainment but also as a medium of culture transmission, socialization, and children's active participation in community life (Gultom *et al.,* 2022).

Potential Health and Development Contributions

The varying features of traditional games make it possible for children to have an impact on the development of the physical, mental, cognitive, socio-emotional, and motor skills of children (Aliriad *et al.,* 2024; Hassani & Afazeli, 2024). Supporting this evidence, a previous review reported that traditional games such as gobak sodor and benteng can enhance physical fitness, particularly cardiovascular endurance, muscular strength, and flexibility. The review also highlighted their psychological and social benefits,

including stress reduction and the promotion of social interaction (Muhaimin *et al.,* 2024). Physical games such as Game of Tag, Stone-Pile game, Jumping, and Tug of War require movements such as running, jumping, dodging, balancing, throwing, and muscular actions that could contribute to motor coordination, agility, balance, and fitness. The games King Minister Thief Soldier, *Identifying the Tapper*, Blind Bee, and Hide and Seek involve attention, memory, observation, decision-making, and problem-solving. Group games also help in encouraging interactions, cooperation, leadership, and peer interactions (Nur *et al.,* 2020). Another advantage that comes from traditional games is that they are made using cheap and easily available materials and are played in open areas. Nevertheless, all these advantages could only be considered as potential contributions because the current research only identifies and synthesises game features rather than directly measuring health outcomes.

Overall, the findings suggest that traditional games can be viewed as a convergence of recreation, cultural heritage, and child development (Kumar, 2018). Their contemporary relevance is particularly important in the context of changing patterns of childhood leisure. Rather than positioning traditional games as complete replacements for modern forms of entertainment, they can be considered complementary recreational opportunities that provide active, social, low-resource, and culturally meaningful forms of play. Therefore, schools, families, community groups, and local authorities may document and organise traditional games within recreational programmes appropriate for different age groups (Gultom *et al.,* 2022).

National and international initiatives for promoting and safeguarding traditional games

The contemporary relevance of traditional games is also considered a valuable form of living intangible cultural heritage and contributes to the transmission of culture from generation to generation (UNESCO, 2003, 2022). In this context, various International non-profit, non-governmental organisations such as the International Council of Traditional Sports and Games (ICTSG) and The Association for International Sport for All (TAFISA) work collaboratively to safeguard, promote, and revitalize traditional sports and games via documentation, awareness, cultural exchange, and intergenerational transmission (The Association for International Sport for All, 2008). TAFISA's Mission 2030: For a Better World Through Sport for All further emphasises traditional sports and games within the global Sport for All movement (TAFISA, 2017). Also, organisations such as the European Traditional Sports & Games Association (ETSGA), the Institute for the Development of Sports & Education (IRSiE), Poland, and the Traditional Games and Ethno Sport Federation of Russia (TGEFR) contribute to the preservation, promotion, documentation, and revitalization of traditional games and sports as important elements of cultural heritage. Also, Sportimonium is an NGO in Belgium working on safeguarding the heritage of TSG. In India, the Khelo India programme similarly supports the promotion of rural, indigenous, and tribal games, contributing to their preservation and wider participation, while the Traditional Sports and Games Federation India (TSGFI) promotes and develops traditional sports through national and international networks (ICTSG, n.d.).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, traditional Indian games are a valuable form of leisure activity connecting culture with children's holistic development. Different physical, mental, rhythmic, social, and cognitive aspects of such games offer the chance for active participation, fun, social interaction, and culture learning. Besides, the simplicity of materials needed and adaptability make this type of game even more accessible for recreation. Therefore, appropriate preservation and revitalisation, through families, schools, communities, cultural institutions, and sports policy may allow sustaining these living traditions and offering alternative leisure options to children. Future research should be conducted on specific benefits associated with traditional Indian games.

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