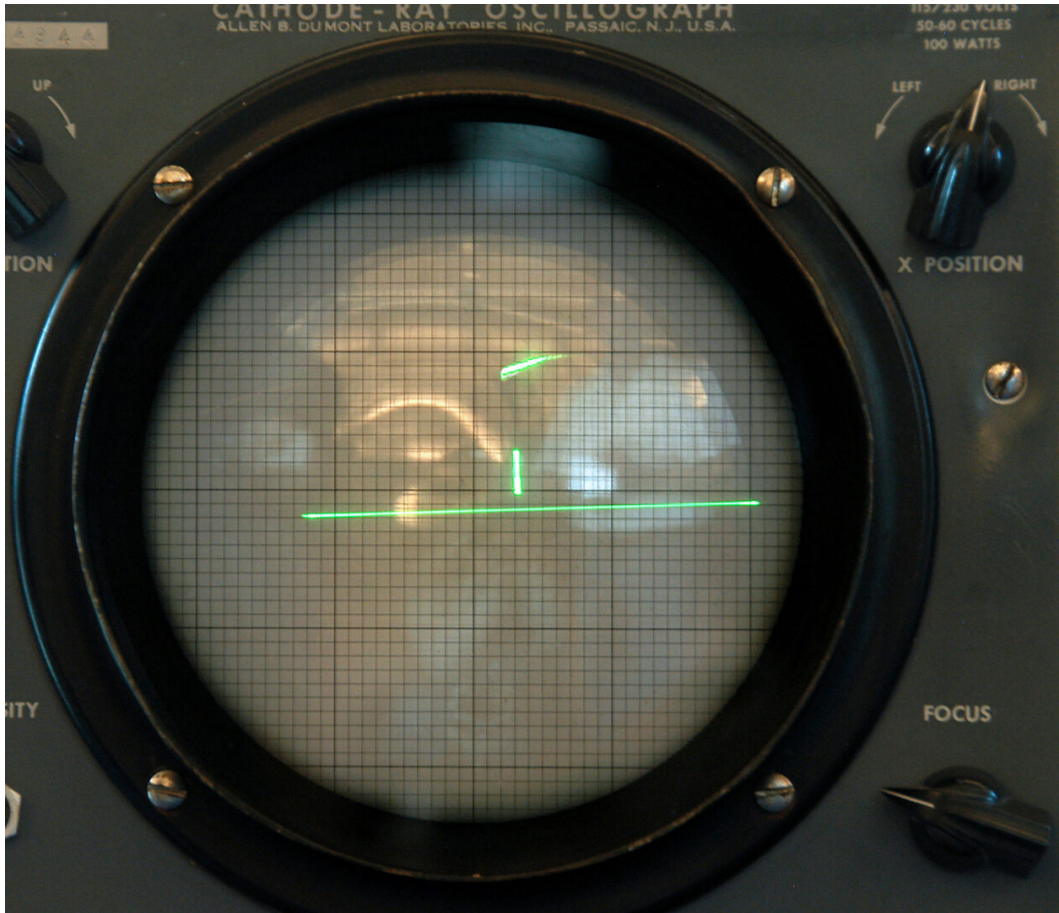


India's Foray Into Gaming

History was made in October 1958 when a physicist, William Higinbotham, created a graphical program which enabled two players to control a virtual paddle, and play ping-pong. The reason behind this? He just wanted a fascinating exhibit for 'Visitors Day' to show off the Instrumentation Department's work at the Brookhaven National Laboratory. It was the first video game ever made, and when the masses viewed this basic yet fascinating project with amusement, little did they anticipate the impact that this creation would have in the future.

Video games have come a long way since 1958. CPUs and GPUs have evolved to be more robust, helping the quality of the games to reach unimaginable levels. Video games have since become a significant source of income for a lot of countries and have [overtaken motion pictures as the major profit makers of the entertainment industry.](#)



The first video game was a game of ping-pong on an oscilloscope using an analog computer. [Image Credits: Brookhaven National Laboratory]

CD Projekt Red and Nintendo are two such examples—both of which are huge companies that produce high-quality video games. They are incredibly valuable to their home countries—Poland and Japan respectively. Gabe Newell, the founder of Valve and the mind behind the popular video game digital distribution service, *Steam*, has a net worth of over a billion dollars and has achieved this by selling and creating video games. *Rockstar*, a gaming company, based in New York City, which produces the massively popular *Grand Theft Auto (GTA)* series [has made over six billion dollars from *GTA V* alone.](#)

The Popularity of Video Games in India

The Indian youth has not been completely isolated from the sphere of video games. Plenty of video game consoles and

titles have been able to penetrate the mainstream youth culture bubble in India. Popular gaming consoles such as PlayStation and Xbox are owned by a sizeable percentage of Indians, apart from the usual desktops and personal computers. Shooting games like *Call of Duty (COD)* and *Counter-Strike 1.6 (CS)* hit their peak during the late 2000s. By the early 2010s, modifying classic games like *GTA Vice City* to give them an “Indian” look and feel, with Indian cars and Indian clothes, became a popular trend. With the advent of regional pricing, people were comfortably able to purchase video games on platforms like Steam. A large chunk of the Indian populace has gotten into mobile gaming, with games like *Candy Crush*, *PUB-G*, *COD Mobile*, and *Clash of Clans* gaining a massive and ever-growing player-base in the country.

Gaming tournaments have become a regular feature in colleges and schools across the country in the last decade. Games like *DOTA 2* and *CS: GO* have allowed teams from India to compete internationally in E-sport events. E-sport teams from India such as *Brutality* and *Nova Godlike* have managed to battle against the odds and do well in multiple tournaments held abroad. According to top E-sports magazines, elite E-sporting teams can earn up to \$50,000 from a single match. One such group is [SIGNIFY](#), which is ranked 77th in over 700 DOTA teams worldwide and is the top-ranked DOTA team in India. They earn approximately \$70,000 from their matches. There are also many E-sports tournaments organised in India such as *Ultimate Battles* and *ESL India Premiership*. Despite the infinite potential that gamers in the country can tap into, every professional video gamer in the country has a similar narrative of little support and often having to prove a lot of people wrong before they make it big.

Why hasn't India offered support to the Gaming Industry?

Gaming, in an academically oriented country like India, is not

seen as an alternative source of entertainment, but as a distraction by the majority of people. To the naysayers, video games steal valuable time which can otherwise be invested in other productive ventures. Shooting games like Counter-Strike and Call Of Duty are viewed as games that might lead a person to glorify violence, while other titles like Animal Crossing are deemed immature. Ironically, a large subset of the population marvels at great motion pictures and animated movies. They do not realise that gaming is an incredible source of entertainment that allows them to be involved in the story with a first-person perspective. Video games like *God of War*, which is an entire game set in Greek and Norse mythology, is an inexplicable experience in itself and it does not feel like a history lesson even after multiple anecdotes being taken from Greek mythology.

Currently, high prices, the low-quality of local indie games, and an orthodox mindset plague the Indian audiences. Gaming is viewed as a luxurious enterprise, with only a select few being able to afford the equipment and the time to play and understand a game. The recent 3000-series RTX graphics cards announced by Nvidia, which start off at Rs 51,000, are just one component out of the many which are needed to enable a person to have an immersive gaming experience.



[The RTX 3080 costs \\$699 in the USA. In India, it costs around Rs. 75k minus taxes. \[Image Credits: NVidia\]](#)

The high costs are due to a hefty import tax on these products. The gaming audience in India is tiny, and manufacturers don't see much profit in providing excellent services in the country. Even consoles, which are supposed to be a cheaper route to play quality video games, is a pricey and indulgent affair in India. A competent gaming PC or laptop which can effortlessly run games that need high processing speeds cost anywhere between Rs 60,000 to Rs 1,20,000. Due to these high prices on the products, potential gamers choose to steer clear of the investment.

Progress in the Indian Gaming Industry

With history and mythology oriented games reaching unmatched levels of success, Indian game developers have a large pool of potential games waiting to be made. India has some great stories and epics from its past, which have been successfully adapted into TV shows and books. They can easily be converted into a game format which will allow more people around the world to appreciate the culture because of the immersive

environment a video game offers.

Since the rise of games such as *God of War* based in Greece, *Ghosts of Tsushima* based in Japan, and *Red Dead Redemption* based in the USA, many small indie studios are popping up across the country. They are trying to utilise Indian history for their video game concepts. *Assassins Creed*, a top-rated gaming series by Ubisoft, has already based one of its games in India and saw a massive rise in sales in the country. The game shows the war between the East India Company and the Sikh Empire, and the vivid details, like the local language spoken by the extras, the graphics, and the gameplay are an incredible sight to behold. Games like these can put India on the gaming map and can massively increase the country's soft power in the industry.



Assassin's Creed has a game based on India [Image Credits: Ubisoft]

Recently, Nodding Heads, a video game company based in Pune, released their debut title, *Raji: An Ancient Epic* on the Nintendo Switch platform. The game was met with positive reviews on sites such as Steam, and Nodding Heads is probably

one of the first Indian studios to ever sell a game on a platform as popular as Nintendo Switch. In a Reddit Q&A session, Nodding Head studios proclaimed that their major roadblock was finding a publisher.

As many companies see mobile phones as the primary platform, they are usually apprehensive when it comes to funding local Indie studios. Piracy leads to the loss of a large chunk of income for the publishers, who know that a majority of the country will prefer a cheap knockoff over the original title. Game publishing is just as important as developing the game, and it will take time and effort for the Indian audience to appreciate video games and the effort behind them. However, professional gaming is gradually breaking through barriers. It is establishing itself as a career option because of the enormous sums of money involved in tournaments in India and around the world.

Critics have acknowledged the efforts of the developers of *Raji: An Ancient Epic* in constructing a virtual world with ancient India in mind. Recently, a small studio named nCore Games developed its own Battle Royale game—*FAU-G*. The initiative aligns with the Make in India campaign and will donate 20 per-cent of the net revenue it generates to the *Bharat Ke Veer* trust.

Video Gaming is an intricate mixture of technology and the art of story-telling. India has shown promising signs for future game developers to be optimistic about the rise of the industry on a larger scale. Video games are slowly becoming an art form, a way to connect and educate people, and India seems to be adopting this profitable venture. Developers are slowly breaking the age-old notion that gaming only serves as a distraction. The road for India to produce internationally-acclaimed titles is long and bumpy, but with appropriate motivation and hard work, it indeed can be achieved.

Featured Image Credits: Nodding Head Studios