



The Rising Popularity of Chess in India

Why in News?

Chess, once considered a niche game, is now **gaining immense popularity in India**. With a rising number of ardent fans and exceptional players, the sport is making waves on the global stage.

- Recently, **GM Arjun Erigaisi won the Sharjah master's International Chess Championship 2023**.

Note:

- Sharjah master's International Chess Championship is an **annual chess tournament** that is held at the **Sharjah Cultural and Chess Club in Sharjah, UAE**.
- It aims to promote **chess as a sport and a cultural activity in Sharjah** and the region, and to provide an opportunity for chess players to compete and improve their skills.

What are the Factors Driving the Popularity of Chess in India?

- **Exceptional Indian Players:**
 - D. Gukesh (World No. 18), Arjun Erigaisi (World No. 37), R. Praggnanandhaa (World No. 47), and Nihal Sarin (World No. 64) are highly talented young chess players from India.
 - **India is ranked No. 2 in the world in international chess**, showcasing the country's strong presence in the game.
 - **Viswanathan Anand, a five-time World champion**, acts as a mentor to the next generation of Indian players.
- **Success on the Global Stage:**
 - Indian chess players' impressive performance on the international level has contributed to the sport's popularity in the country.
 - The presence of gifted teenagers and the emergence of talented players have further fueled interest in the game.
 - The [44th Chess Olympiad](#) was held in Chennai in 2022. The prestigious competition, which has been organized **since 1927**, is being **hosted in India for the first time and in Asia after 30 years**.
- **Development of Chess Academies:**
 - The establishment of the **WestBridge Anand Chess Academy** has played a crucial role in nurturing young talents and providing them with guidance.
 - Viswanathan Anand's involvement in mentoring promising players has helped elevate the standards of Indian chess.
 - Chess academies and training programs have created opportunities for young enthusiasts to hone their skills.
- **Increasing Media Coverage and Spectator Engagement:**
 - Major chess events like the **Chess Olympiad and Tata Steel Chess India** have gained significant media attention in recent times.
 - Spectator **participation and fan engagement have grown**, with thousands of people

attending live chess tournaments.

- Enhanced **media coverage and online streaming** have made chess more accessible to a wider audience.

- **All India Chess Federation (AICF):**

- It was founded in 1951 and is affiliated to **Fédération Internationale des Échecs (FIDE)**, the world body for chess.
- **Role of AICF:**
 - Organizing **national-level tournaments**.
 - Supporting player development and training.
 - **Representing India in international chess organizations**.
 - Identifying and nurturing young talent.
 - **Facilitating participation in international tournaments**.
 - Advocating for chess inclusion in school curricula.

What Challenges Exist in Promoting Chess in India?

- **Limited mainstream attention** compared to other sports.
- Lack of **corporate sponsorships and investment** in elite tournaments.
- Need for **greater emphasis on women's chess and talent identification**.

World Titles Won by Indians

- **Viswanathan Anand:**

- The most successful Indian chess player, who won the **FIDE World Chess Championship in 2000, 2007, 2008, 2010 and 2012**.
- He also won the **World Rapid Chess Championship in 2003 and 2017**, and the **World Blitz Chess Championship in 2000 and 2017**. He is the only player to have won the world title in all three formats of chess.

- **Koneru Humpy:**

- The highest rated Indian female chess player, who won the **Women's World Rapid Chess Championship in 2019**.
- She also won the **Women's Grand Prix series in 2019-2020**.

- **Harika Dronavalli:**

- The second highest rated Indian female chess player, who won the **bronze medal** at the **Women's World Chess Championship in 2012, 2015 and 2017**. She also won the FIDE Women's Grand Prix event in Chengdu in 2016.

- **R Praggnanandhaa:**

- The **youngest Indian grandmaster** and one of the most promising talents in world chess, who won the **World Youth Chess Championship (under-18)** in 2019. He also won the **Asian Continental Chess Championship (open)** in 2021.

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q. Consider the following statements in respect of the 44th Chess Olympiad, 2022:

1. It was the first time that Chess Olympiad was held in India.
2. The official mascot was named Thambi'.
3. The trophy for the winning team in the open section is the Vera Menchik Cup.
4. The trophy for the winning team in the women's section is the Hamilton-Russell Cup.

How many of the statements given above are correct?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) Only three
- (d) All four

Ans:

Exp: (b)

- The first official Olympiad held in London in 1927 at Westminster Central Hall was then known as the 'Tournament of Nations'. This is the first time the Chess Olympiad was held in the place of origin of chess, India. It is coming to Asia for the first time in 3 decades. It has the highest ever number of countries participating. It has the highest ever number of teams participating. It has the highest number of entries in the women's section. **Hence, statement 1 is Correct.**
- **The Official Mascot of 44th Chess Olympiad is 'Thambi'**. The word 'Thambi' in Tamil language means - little or younger brother. **Hence, statement 2 is correct.**
- The trophy for the winning team in the open section is the Hamilton-Russell Cup, which was offered by the English magnate Frederick Hamilton-Russell as a prize for the 1st Olympiad (London 1927). **Hence, statement 3 is NOT correct.**
- The trophy for the winning women's team is known as the Vera Menchik Cup in honour of the first Women's World Chess Champion. **Hence, statement 4 is NOT correct.**

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