

Why playing chess can sharpen minds

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In an effort to improve students' cognitive skills, memory, concentration and develop strategic decision-making skills, Tamil Nadu government has taken a cue from Gujarat and decided to introduce chess in the curriculum of state schools. The unique initiative, to be launched in the next academic year, aims to teach students the rudiments of the game.

Parents and chess enthusiasts laud this move and believe that it will infuse critical thinking skills in young minds. "Like Mathematics, the game of chess makes you think. This will induce logical thinking among students and help them visualise in a more refined way," says Madhvi Sharma, a mother of two. The whole idea is not to cultivate a brigade of grandmasters by introducing chess to students, but to create thinking and evolving minds, says life coach Yoogi D. Panday. "Why are we not satisfied being an amoeba or a hydra? The prime reason is the fact that the mind is constantly trying to better itself. So for the evolution to happen both at physical and psychological level, it is imperative that we are able to exercise our mental faculties along with the physical. Encouraging students to play chess in schools is a step forward in developing their mental faculties," explains Yoogi.

However, others argue that you can't drill skills in kids. They have to be first interested in something to pursue it. Otherwise it will be treated like any other hated subject. "Make chess an interesting activity as opposed to curriculum. Don't force them to play by making it compulsory. Chess is just a game, and giving it too much attention would not do any good," says Ankush Thakur, a freelance copywriter.

Lawyer Sumant Batra too thinks that it is unconstitutional for any state government to make learning or playing of a particular game compulsory. "The state can at best direct that every student must participate in some sport, outdoor or indoor, as a part of the overall development of a student and may offer options to choose from. A student may exercise option based on individual constraints or strengths or even interest. It is almost like saying every student must serve in armed forces for a particular period. Although I acknowledge that chess is one of the best examples of intellectual activity, studies have proved there is no evidence to show correlation between intellectual ability and chess skills," sums up Sumant.