

INDIA'S ESPORTS ODYSSEY

"Hey bro, let's catch today's Valorant tournament final." That's how it always begins—one message, one ping, and just like that, the evening transforms.

It's 6:45 PM, and I'm racing home through Mumbai traffic, one eye on the road, the other on my notifications. My group chat is already buzzing: "GE OP!"... "S8UL gonna smoke them today!"... "Clutch master SkRossi for the win!" The finals are tonight, and the hype is real.

As I step into my room, the vibe changes instantly. RGB lights flick on, my custom keyboard glows like a runway, and Discord boots up. My best bud Aadi's already online.

"Snacks ready?" he asks through voice chat.

"Chips, popcorn, and Red Bull, bro. I am so game today."

We're not alone. More friends pile into the server. Some from Bengaluru, others from Hyderabad, and one guy, Anirudh, who's watching from his college hostel in Manipal with a projector and half his dorm.

The official stream goes live in ten minutes. The casters are already talking about strategies and pre-match drama. The chat explodes with emojis and we're all screaming into our headsets as if GE and S8UL can hear us through the fiber optic cables.

On stream, the camera pans across the LAN arena. Bright lights. Roaring crowds. A sea of banners, jerseys,

and LED signs spelling out "S8UL SQUAD" and "GE DOMINATES." You'd think this was a cricket match with the way the crowd's going off.

This isn't just a game night. This is the night.

Welcome to the world of Indian esports. Over the past few years, esports in India have transformed from a niche hobby into a mainstream phenomenon, captivating audiences and redefining entertainment.

Five years ago, gaming in India was a casual affair—bootleg headsets, unstable internet connections, and more rage quits than actual victories. Most players were just in it for the fun, often met with confused stares and dismissive remarks from parents. "Wasting time," they would say. "Kya karega game khel ke?" But something began to shift.

Esports tournaments have become increasingly popular online, attracting thousands of viewers and attracting major brands. The Indian online gaming industry has expanded to 488 million in 2024, with 33 million new gamers added. The Indian esports market is valued at USD 200.7 million and is projected to grow more than fivefold by 2033. The number of esports enthusiasts in India is expected to reach nearly 148 million by 2029. This surge in revenue is not just in revenue, but also in user numbers, with Statista projecting user numbers to reach 147.9 million by 2029, up from 9.0% in 2025 to an anticipated 9.8% by 2029.

India's Esports growth and achievements:

Silver medal in Tekken 8 at BRICS Esports Championship 2024.

Bronze in eFootball at Asian Esports Games 2024.

Steady growth backed by skill and dedication, not luck.

Team and player highlights:

Team Velocity Gaming and Global Esports excelled in Valorant South Asian qualifiers.

S8UL Esports won Esports Award 2022, 2023 and 2024 for Content Group of the Year.

Indian teams qualifying for global tournaments like PMGC (BGMI/PUBG Mobile).

Team Orangutan impressed in Valorant Challengers South Asia 2023.

SkRossi became a leading figure in Indian Valorant.

Global Esports first Indian team in Riot Games' franchised VCT circuit.

FIFA player Sarangchandra "Sarang" V qualified for international competitions.

Turning points and global recognition:

Hosting major events: DreamHack India, BGMS on prime-time TV, Skyesports' international LANs.

2024 Newzoo report: India among top 5 countries in esports viewership growth (CAGR > 18%).

Market and job forecast:

2025 Dentsu India report: Over 11,000 direct and indirect esports jobs expected by 2027.

Esports-related market (streaming, merchandising, events) projected to exceed INR 1,100 crore by 2027.

India is entering its golden era of esports. India is not just competing but winning.

Riot Games powering Indian esports ➡

Five years ago, India's gaming scene was on the cusp of something big. Mobile gaming had already exploded, but the world of competitive, team-based PC gaming—the kind that fuels global esports dynasties—was still finding its feet. Then came VALORANT.

When Riot Games launched VALORANT in 2020, it did more than introduce a tactical shooter to Indian players. It sparked a cultural shift.

For many Indian gamers, Riot Games became more than just a developer—it symbolized the potential of competitive gaming when fueled by respect, passion, and long-term vision. Through compelling storytelling, elite esports pathways, and community-first focus, Riot brought legitimacy and aspiration to India's esports scene.

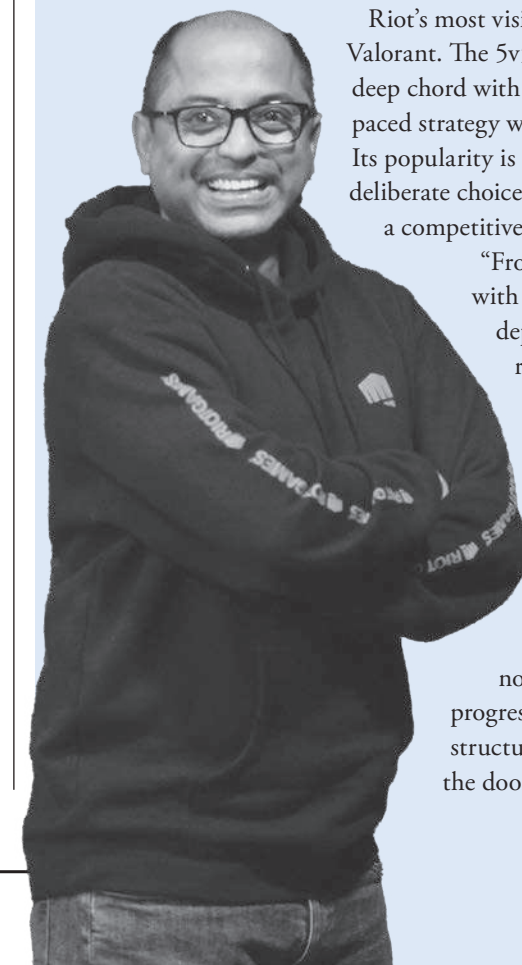
At the heart of this change is Arun Rajappa, Country Manager for Riot Games India & South Asia. "Our vision is to build a player-first ecosystem that empowers communities, celebrates competition, and nurtures local talent," he says. "We're not just here to publish games—we're here to grow a vibrant, sustainable gaming culture."

Valorant surge in India

Riot's most visible success in the region has been Valorant. The 5v5 tactical shooter has struck a deep chord with Indian gamers, combining fast-paced strategy with culturally resonant characters. Its popularity is no accident; it's the result of deliberate choices that blend gameplay appeal with a competitive structure tailored for South Asia.

"From the start, Valorant clicked with Indian gamers. The tactical depth, strong team dynamics, and relatable agents created an instant connection," Arun explains. "But what truly powered its rise is the ecosystem we've built around it."

That ecosystem includes initiatives like VALORANT Challengers South Asia, which Arun calls a "game-changer." It's not just about playing—it's about progression. Through open qualifiers and structured tournaments, Riot has opened the door for grassroots talent to climb all



the way to VCT Ascension, a global competitive platform. “It’s about giving every player a shot, amplifying regional voices, and laying the foundation for South Asia to thrive on the global esports stage,” Arun notes.

Balancing global consistency and local flavor

For a global company like Riot Games, balancing its international brand identity with regional relevance is essential. In India, this means more than translating content—it’s about crafting experiences that speak to the heart of the community.

“Riot has a strong global brand rooted in being player-first, and that philosophy guides everything we do, whether in Los Angeles or Lucknow,” Arun says. “But great experiences are local at heart.”

Riot’s commitment to localization was evident with the launch of Harbor, Valorant’s Indian-origin agent. From his Mumbai-based backstory to music collaborations with local rapper Tienas—tracks like “Raja” and “Gotcha Back”—Harbor struck a chord both in India and globally.

“Working with Tienas helped Valorant showcase India’s vibrant music scene and bring an authentic voice that truly resonates,” Arun shares.

Riot invests in India’s esports by fostering grassroots talent through college partnerships, tournaments, and creators.

“To nurture grassroots talent, we must build a holistic, sustainable ecosystem beyond just competitions,” Arun explains.

Riot promotes South Asian gaming via collegiate tournaments, community circuits, scouting, and collaborations with content creators.

“They are the community’s beacons, bringing Valorant to life, driving conversations, and building relatability,” Arun adds.

The cultural layer

Gaming today is about more than gameplay—it’s culture. Riot Games blends music, art, and narrative to deepen player connections.

“We focus on bringing local musical talent into Valorant, creating unique moments that build loyalty,” Arun explains.

From global acts like Coldplay to India-specific initiatives, Riot fosters lasting communities, not just fandoms.

With Indian teams rising on the global stage, Riot sees huge potential for India in Valorant esports.

“India is poised to be a major force, fueled by passion and talent,” Arun says.

In 2–3 years, Riot will strengthen infrastructure, encourage cross-border scrimms, and showcase Indian players worldwide through local league investments.

“Our vision: build an ecosystem where Indian talent competes and succeeds at the highest global level,” Arun affirms.

Beyond Valorant

While Valorant remains Riot’s flagship in India, the company’s ambitions extend far beyond a single IP. Riot is actively exploring new titles and entertainment avenues that can deepen its relationship with Indian players.

“India is an exciting, dynamic market, and we are continuously exploring ways to expand our presence across multiple entertainment verticals,” says Arun. “We see huge potential for franchises like League of Legends and Teamfight Tactics.”

As India becomes an increasingly important part of Riot’s global roadmap, players can expect more localized events, deeper integration with regional pop culture, and innovations in how games are delivered and experienced.

“Our focus will remain on community-driven growth, ensuring that Indian players have the opportunity to connect, compete, and engage with Riot Games in ways that are meaningful and culturally relevant,” Arun concludes.

Riot Games isn’t just launching titles in India—it’s igniting a movement.

For them, VALORANT isn’t just a game. It’s a gateway to possibility.

And for Riot Games, India isn’t just a region. It’s the future.

As Arun Rajappa puts it, “The journey is just getting started.”

age group has grown nearly 97% between 2021 and 2025, showing strong retention.

While India lacks a central esports framework, Nandy highlights growing state support.

“Our partnerships with Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Bihar, and Rajasthan prove state governments are beginning to recognize esports,” he says. “Events like the Chennai Esports Global Championship show how India can host global-scale tournaments.”

Localization is key to Skyesports’ success. “Publishers treat India as one market, but it’s more diverse than all of Europe combined,” says Nandy. “Genres vary by region—MOBAs thrive in the Northeast, while FPS dominates in the South.”

Skyesports also understands that **esports is as much about culture as it is about competition**.

“In today’s attention-deficit world, gaming is prime entertainment,” says Nandy.

From rapper Karma performing live with Mortal at Skyesports Masters to influencer-led content and in-game storytelling, Skyesports is blending gaming with pop culture to deepen fan engagement.

Monetization is evolving too. While sponsorships remain key, Skyesports also capitalizes on **media and data rights**.

“We build tournaments from the ground up, then bring in sponsors. That ensures community-first experiences and better ROI.”

With original formats like the ‘Smash Rule’ keeping viewers hooked and initiatives like **Path to Pro** empowering talent, innovation remains at the core. Though a 2023 subscription model had some traction, Nandy admits it limited reach.

“Ticketing and merchandise are still early, but we see strong long-term promise.”

Looking ahead, Skyesports aims to evolve into a full-fledged **gaming and media platform**—expanding into content, talent management, and storytelling.

“We’ll bring the world’s best to India—and take India’s best to the world,” says Nandy. “From the Asian Games to the Olympics, we want Indian players to win. That means international scrimms, global exposure, and creating real pathways to succeed.”

“We’re connecting grassroots to global, and competition to culture. This is just the beginning.” ●

Shiva Nandy’s quest to make Indian esports a global glory ➡



Skyesports **Founder and CEO Shiva Nandy** shares his vision for a sustainable, inclusive, and globally competitive esports industry rooted in Indian identity.

In just five years, Indian esports has transformed from a niche community to a thriving industry—and at the heart of this evolution stands **Shiva Nandy**, Founder and CEO of **Skyesports**. Since launching in 2018, Skyesports has championed localized IPs, grassroots tournaments, and government partnerships to build an inclusive, sustainable, and globally

competitive esports ecosystem rooted in Indian identity.

“The face of Indian esports is unrecognizable from five years ago,” says Nandy. “Homegrown IPs are growing, and that vision started with Skyesports.”

Skyesports is betting big on **Bharat**—India’s Tier 2 and 3 cities—where smartphone access and affordable data have unlocked new gamer communities.

“This is where the next wave of growth is coming from,” Nandy explains. “Players here can now buy phones that can run top esports titles. Mobile tech has truly transformed Indian esports.”

Contrary to the belief that mobile gaming is a gateway, Nandy sees it as the core of Indian esports.

“If it were just about affordability, people would switch to PC or console as incomes rise. But they’re not. They stay for the experience.”

The data backs him. BGMI viewership in the 25–34