

Traditional Sports and Games: A Cultural Saga of Indian Soil

Dr. Rajnish Chandra Tripathi

Sr. Assistant Professor in Physical Education, Government Girls' Degree College, DLW, Varanasi

ABSTRACT

Sports have always been a part of the common life in India since ages. There are several pieces of evidence of the existence of vibrant sports activities in India. Our epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata are full of incidences of sports such as archery, wrestling, horse-riding, chariot-racing. For instance, wrestling has been a highly popular sport even during the times of Mahabharata. Indigenous traditional sports and games were playing the important role to develop motor skill, sensory skill, hand-eye coordination and much more for proper growth of children.

Key words: Traditional Sports, skill, growth and development

INTRODUCTION

A Collective Consultation on the promotion of Traditional Sports and Games (TSG) was held in Tehran (Islamic Republic of Iran) from 16 to 20 January 2009, during which experts notably developed the following definitional framework "Traditional sport and games are motor activities of leisure and recreation which can have a ritual character. They are part of the universal heritage diversity. They are practiced in an individual or collective manner, deriving from regional or local identity. They are based on rules accepted by a group that organizes competitive or non-competitive activities. Traditional sport and games dispose of a popular character in their practice and in their organization, yet if turned into sport tend to be uniform and institutionalized. The practice of traditional sport and games promotes global health."

Playing games are the important characteristic of children's behaviour (Fromberg & Bergen, 2006; Mayall, 2002) and the natural learning tool for them (Anning & Edwards, 2006). Playing can provide a context where children achieve deep learning through the integration of intellectual, physical, moral, and spiritual values and can give them the opportunity to commit themselves to learning, development, and growth (Kolb & Kolb, 2010). The entertaining interactions that children have with other children or adults while playing games constantly stimulate them in different developmental areas. For instance, games have important contributions to children's cognitive development (Piaget, 1962; Vygotsky, 1966, 1997) and psychosocial development (Elkind, 2007). As Vygotsky (1978, p.102) notes, "a child in play acts as though he was a head taller than himself play contains all developmental tendencies in a condensed form and is itself a major source of development". Because playing games is a key defining feature and an expression of spirit in childhood (Fromberg & Bergen, 2006; Mayall, 2002), a form of play exists for virtually every aspect of children's development. Playing games is crucial to children's development and quality of life (Foley, 2008).

UNESCO's agenda 2030 for sustainable development establishes respect for the environment and sustainability education as key elements for the challenges of society in the coming years. In the educational context, physical education can have a vital role in sustainability education, through Traditional Sporting Games (TSG). Almost 20 years ago, UNESCO (2003) defined intangible cultural heritage as "The 'intangible cultural heritage' means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts, and cultural spaces associated therewith that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage." According to this definition, Traditional Sporting Games (TSG) constitutes a cultural heritage, since they are manifestations that are expressed through body language, that is, motor actions (Caillois, 2001; Sutton-Smith, 2001; Huizinga, 2010).

According to Singer, Golinkoff, and Hirsh-Pasek (2006), playing is learning. Some of the primary characteristics of playing games are entertainment and having a good time (Smith & Pellegrini, 2013). Therefore, games are very important tool to enable learning in an 'interesting' or novel way. While playing games, children learn a wide range

of social skills such as sharing, understanding other perspectives, and taking turns (DeVries, 2006). In addition to being contexts in which most of children's life related learning can occur, games also provide children with contexts to learn about their own cultures. In other words, games can be effective and important tools for children's cultural learning. This is because a large proportion of people's interactions with one another are affected by the cultural contexts in which they live (Neuliep, 2012). This is related to individuals' thinking, feeling, behaving, and forming their own realities through their own cultures (Shweder, 1991).

Traditional Sporting Games are generally considered to come from survival activities (like hunting), specific life ways or military activities (such as archery, riding a horse, fencing, etc.). Activities pursued for pleasure have become sport that usually demands the players' strength, speed and other motor skills particularly if played under regulated conditions, on a pre-defined field or track, or according to pre-determined rules. Major differences occur when the performance is timed, measured and recorded and winning is the goal. In contrast, in Traditional Sporting Games the best performances are preserved in local legends, but never in a statistical form, and thus they can alter and change according to recollection in the course of time.

Culture provides individuals with information about their identity and what is meaningful, whereas it also presents them with the necessary symbols to interact socially and manage their environment. In essence, people use culture to make sense of the world (Kim & Park, 2006). Because people sharing the same culture tend to have more similar attitudes, values, thoughts, and behaviours compared to those with different cultures. Research endorses that play is the best form of physical activity for children to learn about the rules and values of their culture through traditional game playing. Playing is only considered relevant to the curriculum and still it has not received a secure place in delivering the curriculum (Bruce, 2004).

Indigenous traditional Sports and Games

Traditional Sporting Games are some of the famous traditional Indian games for kids. These are the part of India's rich heritage, history, and culture. They have been mentioned in many ancient Indian scriptures indicating their existence for many centuries. With the increasing prevalence of video games, online games, and gaming gadgets, these traditional games have lost their importance. However, these games should not be forgotten, and schools may also consider adding them to the curriculum as they include physical exercises and are a lot of fun. They help children improve their motor and social skills. The following indigenous games are popular in our context:

Chaupar or Chausar

One of the oldest indoor games of India invented in the 4th century. It also called Pachisi, this board game was extremely popular in ancient times. Pachisi or Chaupar is a well-known board game since it was the genesis of the Kurukshetra war in Mahabharata. The Mughals were also fond of this game. Pachisi was traditionally played on a symmetrical cross cloth. Played with pawns or shells the dice is rolled and the players strategies the movement of their pawns. Pachisi can be better understood as an older version of the modern-day Ludo. It enhances the cognitive ability

Pallankuzhi

It is one of the famous games which were played in ancient South India. Pallankuzhi is believed to have originated in Tamil Nadu and later spread to other places like Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, and even Malaysia and Sri Lanka. Variations of the game are called Kuzhipara in Malayalam, Ali Guli Mane in Kannada and Vamana Guntalu in Telugu. The game includes a rectangular board, divided into two horizontal rows and seven vertical columns. Thus, there are 14 cups on the board and 146 counters. Usually, cowry shells or tamarind seeds function as counters. Two people can play this game at a time. The game improves mathematical and motor skills.

Gutte/Five Stones

Gutte is a fun game can be played by both adults and kids. It generally requires five pebbles or small stones. There is no limit on the number of players who can play this game at a given time. The player needs to spin a stone up in the air and gather the remaining stones lying on the floor with one hand without allowing the one in the air to fall to the ground. Next, the player has to throw two stones up in the air and collect the rest and so on. The player who finishes eight steps in the minimum number of tries, become the winner.

Lattoo

Spinning top or Lattoo is a popular game in Indian villages even today. This simple game has been in existence since 3500 BC. At the beginning, tops were made of clay. Later, wooden tops began to be used. Today, coloured and designer tops are also available. There is a string which helps to spin the top and also to lift up the spinning Lattoo. Two or more players can play this game. All the players wrap their tops with the string and then unwind it by pulling the string, making the top rotate on the ground. The players need to pick the top with the string as fast as they can. The player whose top spins the longest is declared the winner.

Kancha

One of the exciting childhood games played in India was Kancha. Other names of the game include Golli, Marbles, Goti, and Lakhoti. It began during the Harappan age. The game involves the use of round glass marbles or kanchas. Several people can participate in this game. The objective is aimed to collect the maximum number of marbles by striking the chosen kancha with another one. The winner gets to take home all the marbles of the other players.

Nondi/Hopscotch

This hopping game, also called Stapoo, is a popular outdoor group game. In Tamil Nadu, it is known as the Nondi. The game involves drawing a grid on the ground and numbering it. Players take turns and throw an object, usually a small stone, onto the numbered blocks. They have to hop across the blocks to pick up the object jumping on one/two legs to finish the lap, taking care not to step on the border lines.

Satoliya/Pithoo/Lagori

Satoliya/Pithoo/Lagori is an indigenous game playing with seven stones. It involves a ball and a pile of stones, usually seven. There are two teams of players. One player of the attacking on a team needs to strike the pile of stone with the ball to knock them over in three shots. Then the whole team has to try and restore the pile before being hit by the ball and declared 'out'.

Chain

Chain is another delightful children's game. This game is more fun to play when there are more players. The 'denner' has to catch the other members. When the denner catches someone, he joins hands with the denner to form a chain. Together they try to catch the other remaining members. Thus, the caught members keep joining to form a chain till all the players have been caught.

Kho Kho

Kho Kho is a team game which started in India. It gained popularity in 1935 when its rules were brought out by the *Akhil Maharashtra Shareerika Shikshan Mandal*. It comprises of two teams with nine participants each. Members of the chasing team sit on the ground in a straight row with alternative players positioned in opposite directions. The chasers have to catch the opposing team members before the stipulated time is over.

Chhupam Chhupai/Hide and Seek

The origin of this game is unknown. It is commonly played all over the world under different names. The players hide in a previously decided marked area. The 'denner' has to shut his eyes and announce numbers loudly while the other players get time to hide. Then, the denner has to find the hidden players.

Dog and the Bone

Dog and the Bone is a kids' game contains two teams of 5 or more players each. An object like a handkerchief or stick is designated as the 'bone'. A member of each team steps forward to encircle the bone placed in the middle of the playground. The aim is to retrieve the bone without being caught by the other player.

Maram Pitthi

Maram Pitthi is similar to dodgeball. It comprises of two teams with any number of players. A large area is required to play this game. Players from one team form a circle and hit the opposing team members who enter the circle with a ball. The opposing team players have to try and evade being hit by the ball and those who get hit by the ball are declared 'out'.

Aankh micholi

Aankh micholi is a variation of Chhuppan Chhupai. In this game, the denner is blindfolded, and the other players run around them, calling them out or touching them slightly. If the denner touches one of the players, they are blindfolded next. This game helps develop a child's sensory skills, improve alertness, and exercise their tactical sense.

Gilli danda

The Gilli danda can be compared to baseball and cricket, except that it does not use a traditional bat. In this game, two pieces of wood are used a small piece of wood that is called gilli and a longer piece of wood called danda. The gilli is equivalent to the ball, and the danda is equivalent to the bat. Two teams are required to play this game. Each team can have any number of players. The gilli is placed on the ground. One player from the first team takes the danda in their hand and hits the gilli hard. The aim is to hit it as far as possible. Immediately, the team members of the other team rush to catch it. If they catch it before it hits the ground, they get the chance to bat. Otherwise, another team member from the first team will repeat the process.

These games as Kancha, Lagori, Aankh micholi and Kho Kho are sure to make us nostalgic about our own childhood. It is the time to pass on the magic of these childhood games to our current generation for their proper and healthy development who tends to live in a virtual world due to unavoidable circumstances.

Importance of Traditional Sports and Games for Healthy Development

Sports and games help to build physical and mental strength of the players. However, with traditional games, the biggest advantage is its ad hoc existence. It does not require expensive infrastructure or dedicated coaching. Though the more popular games, such as kabaddi and kho kho do have international tournaments, aside from these the other games are pretty much localized. The flavour of these indigenous games lies in their accessibility and ease of play. Children get together in their free time and form a camaraderie that helps them build social and cultural bonds. These children come from different families, religions and social backgrounds. Traditional games are not necessarily limited to kids alone. Some of the indoor games can be played by families, and are popular with women.

Traditional games in India have a rustic and local flavour to their method and techniques. The styles of playing these games are seeped heavily into the local, regional, and cultural nuances of its surroundings. Hence, these games often become much more than mere time passing games. They become a means of building teams, characters, strategies and a deeper understanding of true core values of sports and games as well as healthy psychological and social developments of children. It is interesting to note that such game has its own unique nature and effect on motor development, cognitive thinking, logical reasoning, spatial understanding and presence of mind. These games are relevant for development of the following skills:

Life skills and Social Relationships

Playing conventional games have always brought kids together encouraging teamwork and social interaction. Most old school games require agility and movements such as swinging of arms and jumping. This boosts exercise and improves eye-hand coordination. Team games like Kabaddi and Kho –Kho require kids to come up with tactics to defeat their opponent in turn helping them to strategies and resolve their differences. There is a great value in playing games, it helps build relationships and strengthens bonds through shared experiences as opposed to common experiences such as watching TV together. Unfortunately, people today need a reason to do anything, even playing; despite there are being enough reasons to play. In fact, one could almost rephrase the parenting idiom as “Families that play together stay together”. In the present time, the pressure on the children to perform and succeed, have added to this burden. Unfortunately, in life, success is not always guaranteed and learning to lose and fail is intrinsic to personal growth. Playing games teaches one to win and lose gracefully.

Making Entertainment and Memories

Children today also face a great deal of stress. Entertainment is a great stress-buster. Spontaneous unstructured play is perhaps one of the greatest sources of entertainment. Children these days have very little leisure time. In this scenario, traditional games provide them an opportunity for entertainment. During childhood, happy memories of playing with friends or family are rare assets of our life. These memories sustain us as we grow older, building a foundation on which to build our lives.

Motor and Sensory skills

Traditional games facilitate the development of motor skill, balancing on coconut shells, rolling a hoop stick or fine motor skills such as picking up and distributing objects like pallanguzhi, or striking objects against each other. A number of games such as the traditional flick-top, marbles, gilli-danda or five stones which requires a child to toss stones up in the air while picking up others are a wonderful way to develop hand-eye co-ordination of a child. Since numerous traditional games are played with natural materials, the child is introduced to textures, weight and shapes of all kinds through seeds, shells and other play material that help us for the development of motor and sensory skills.

Appreciating the environment

Traditional games are often played with natural materials: sticks, leaves, fruit, seeds and shells that provided endless material to play. Playing games with these help us to develop an appreciation for nature. The delicate shades and markings on the shells, the texture, weight and contour of the seeds are all important in playing a game. Traditional games expose children to a number of invaluable life lessons and they also develop fond childhood memories that are essential for healthy and holistic development. Both individually and collectively, children exhibit and sharpen cognitive and physical abilities through play. These include (Bruce, 2004): making choices generating decisions negotiating; pursuing their own interests; using their own ideas and imaginations showing independence in thought and action exhibiting intrinsic motivation and persistence; being physically and intellectually active in a sustained way; being confident and prepare for challenges being creative; learning to resolve conflicts; setting their own goals and objectives; learning new behaviour and practicing and consolidating established ones; acquiring new skills and interest; using skills and knowledge already acquired for different purposes; using a range of social and interpersonal skills understanding rules and structures creating new

combinations out of experiences problem solving; acquiring flexibility and empathy towards others and developing cooperative skills.

CONCLUSIONS

The present study provides an understanding of the ethno motor traits of Traditional Sporting Games in India as a way to shape original embodied material culture. Studies showed significant differences in influence in implementing traditional game programs on the development of social behaviour of children. It can be concluded that a traditional game can still play a good role as a fun learning tool especially in this Information and Communication Technology (ICT) era, for healthy development of children and adolescents. Indian traditional games are the activity that does not use technology and excessive costs, but having a "happy" effect. In this scenario, there is dire need to promote traditional games about its benefits, and its pleasure for healthy life through social media (i. e., Facebook, What's Up). It suggests that traditional indigenous games can be an effective tool for fun, entertainment as well as healthy development and quality of life.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Anning, A., & Edwards, A. (2006). Promoting children's learning from birth to five: Developing the new early years professional. *Maidenhead: Open University Press*.
- [2]. Bruce, T. (2004). Developing Learning in Early Childhood. *London: Paul Chapman Publishing* Caillois, R. (2001). Man, play and games. *Illinois: University of Illinois Press*.
- [3]. DeVries, R. (2006). Games with rules. In D.P. Fromberg and D. Bergen (Eds) Play from birth to twelve, 2nd Ed. *Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge*.
- [4]. Elkind, D. (2007). The Power of play: How spontaneous, imaginative activities lead to happier, healthier children. *Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press*.
- [5]. Foley, P. (2008). Introduction In J. Collins and P. Foley (Eds) Promoting children's wellbeing: Policy and practice. *Bristol: Policy Press*.
- [6]. Fromberg, D.P., & Bergen, D. (2006). Introduction. In D.P. Fromberg and D. Bergen (Eds) Play from birth to twelve: Contexts, perspectives and meanings. *New York: Routledge*. Huizinga, J. (2010). Homo ludens. *Madrid: Alianza*.
- [7]. Kim, U., & Park, Y. S. (2006). The scientific foundation of indigenous and cultural psychology: The transactional approach. In U. Kim, K.-S. Yang, & K.-K. Hwang (Eds.), *Indigenous and cultural psychology*:
- [8]. Kolb, A. Y., & Kolb, D. A. (2010). Learning to play, playing to learn: A case study of a ludic learning space. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*,
- [9]. Mayall, B. (2002). Towards a sociology for childhood. *Buckingham: Open University Press*.
- [10]. MINEPS III, Final Report, Annex II, Commission III, *Promotion of sport and physical education*, par. 5.1 (UNESCO) (UNESCO) CIGEPS Working Group on Traditional Sports and Games Report
- [11]. Neuliep, J.W. (2012). Intercultural communication: A contextual approach (5thEd.). *Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications*.
- [12]. Piaget, J. (1962). Play, dreams and imitation in childhood. *New York: W. W. Norton & Company*.
- [13]. Shweder, R.A. (1991). Thinking through cultures - expeditions in cultural psychology. *Cambridge: Harvard University Press*.
- [14]. Singer, D. G., Golinkoff, R. M., & Hirsh-Pasek, K. (2006). Play learning: How play motivates and enhances children's cognitive and social-emotional growth. *New York, NY: Oxford University Press*.
- [15]. Smith, P. K., & Pellegrini, A. (2013). Learning through play. *Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development*, June, 1-6. Retrieved February 5, 2016 from <http://Www.Child-Encyclopedia.Com/Pages/Pdf/Smith-Pellegriniangxp2.Pdf>
- [16]. Sutton-Smith, B. (2001). The ambiguity of play. *Cambridge: Harvard University Press*.
- [17]. Traditional Sports and Games (TSG) was held in Tehran (Islamic Republic of Iran) from 16 to 20 January 2009
- [18]. UNESCO. (2003). Convention for the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage. Available online at: <https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/01852-EN.pdf> (accessed on 07Jan 0107, 2019).
- [19]. Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). Mind in society. *Cambridge, MA: Harvard University* Miscellaneous
- [20]. <https://www.caleidoscope.in/art-culture/traditional-games-of-india>
- [21]. <https://www.kreedon.com/traditional-indian-games/?amp>
- [22]. efaidnbmnnnibpcjpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.mdachennai.com/data/newsletters/1627390840_April_2021%20MDA.pdf