



INDIGENOUS GAMES IN INDIA: THEN & NOW

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ABSTRACT

Indigenous Games are the Representation of Heritage and Ancestral Legacy of a Nation. They are one of the Main Possessions and Assets of Indigenous People. They Account for Teaching Valuable Skills and Work for Physical And Mental Wellbeing. The History of these Games Goes Back to Ancient India. Some of the Indigenous Games are Played Still Today While Some Have Achieved a Status to be played at National and International Level. With the Course of Time, Indigenous Games have undergone Certain Changes and Transformations. However, Various Initiatives are taken from Time To Time for the Upliftment of These Games. The Present Paper Focuses on Some Indigenous Games of the Country, Their History & Significance and Approaches Taken for their Upliftment. In Addition, Emphasis on how they could be Helpful for Future Generations Is Discussed Underneath

KEYWORDS: *Indigenous, Indigenous games, Significance, Initiatives.*

INTRODUCTION

Games and sports are often understood synonymously however both are entirely different. A game refers to physical activity involving more than one person and a sport refers to an individual's skills and performance, despite team sports. There lies another difference between these two, i.e. the former is based on mental strength whereas the latter on physical energy. Game is often played for fun and entertainment, etc. with a friendly attitude whereas a sport is played with a competitive attitude. It is evident that games and sports have been invented across cultures as a means to reveal skill and physical expertise through social and cultural processes. Sports on one hand involve athletic activities including some degrees of competition whereas same does not apply to a game. Most of the games involve some form of running, throwing and jumping acrobatics, all of which developed from basic hunting skills. Sports and culture cannot be separated from each other. There has been always a desire for recreational play that eventually inspired the codification of early games and invention of the new ones despite many cultures in the world combined religious and political elements in their games.

INDIGENOUS GAMES

Ferriera (2014) states that indigenous games are a part of symbolic patrimonial heritage of the indigenous people. The word indigenous is actually derived from the Latin word '*indigena*' that means '*native*'. Indigenous actually pertains to some specific geographical area that may or may not be huge. That also pertains to the living beings that are born or grow in a place to where they belong actually. When concerned with people, it has a sense of relating to the earliest known inhabitants of a particular place especially that was colonized. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, indigenous applies to something which is not only native but which has never been brought from elsewhere. Hence, indigenous games can be referred to the games that have been invented from any specific place or particular geographical area, i.e. native to a place.

GAMES IN ANCIENT INDIA

India has its own history of games and sports that had been an integral part of the country during ancient times. Some of the ancient games have either disappeared from rural and urban lives while some are played in the country even today. History of games in India dates back to the ancient times of the Indus Valley and Vedic Civilisation. The seals discovered from the Indus Valley sites throw light on the involvement of people of Harappa and Mohenjodaro in some sort of physical activities especially hunting and boxing. Furthermore, evidences from Ramayana and Mahabharata demonstrate that variety of games like hunting, swimming, boating, weight-lifting, wrestling, archery, chariot-racing, horsemanship, games using marbles, dice, balls, etc. were prominently played by the people of those times.

When the accounts of ancient games are concerned, Pali literature is found to be one of the eminent sources of the records of the games in India during the 6th century. In this regard, Upali (2009) in his research found that some of the games of present day have their appearance in Pali literature and are transferred to us in a gradual process of development. Atharva Veda, one of the four Vedic scriptures of Hinduism depicts a mantra which is the main anthem in history of traditional sports. The mantra says that "*Duty is my right hand and the fruits of victory in my left*" and it basically holds the same sentiment of the



traditional Olympic oath. It is a notion that the modern day Olympic Games and disciplines are a sophisticated version of the traditional games originated in ancient India. Some popular sports of today like chess, polo, archery, ludo, cards, Indian martial arts, judo, karate, wrestling, weight-lifting, etc. are believed to be originated in India and hence can be referred to as Indigenous Games of India. Yoga, which has taken a very prominent place worldwide, was an essential component of ancient Indian civilisation and culture. The epics of India elucidate numerous Indian traditional sports like dice, gilli-danda, chariot racing, gymnastics, etc. as well. *Manasollasa* also known as *Abhilashitartha Chintamani*, a Sanskrit text composed by Kalyani Chalukya king, Someshvara III in the early 12th century is structured into five sub-books. In this literature, the fourth sub-book gives description of some sports such as fishing, dog racing, horse racing, elephant racing, archery, wrestling and athletics. In addition, the text also describes some unique team sports, such as a form of Indian polo. It is believed that games like chess, wrestling, polo, archery, hockey, etc. were originated in India (sports.indiapress.com). With the passage of time, some indigenous and traditional games that owe their origin in India became popular and universal whereas many of them got limited to the local traditions. Here are the few indigenous games of India with their characteristic features, origin and traces:

| S.No. | Traditional/indigenous games | Vernacular names | Characteristics | Traces in | Origin Place |
|-------|------------------------------|---|---|--|---|
| 1. | Gatka* | - | It is a type of traditional martial art for self-defence. It is an amalgamation of acrobatics and sword fight and considered as spiritual as well as physical exercise. | 15 th Century | Punjab |
| 2. | Gilli Danda | GulliDanda, Viti Dandu, KittiPul | It is similar to the games of bat and ball like cricket and baseball. Believed to be the origin of Western games like baseball, cricket, and soft ball. It is still played in Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, Cambodia, etc. Similar games to gillidanda are popular among communities of some parts of Europe, North and South America, Russia, South-East Asia, Canada, etc. | About 2500 years ago. | Indian Subcontinent |
| 3. | Jallikattu | Sallikkattu, Eruthazhuvuthal, Mancuvirattu | A bull being released into the crowds of people and multiple participants must attempt to hold the horns and hump of the bull. Celebrated during Pongal in Tamil Nadu. | 400-100 Century BC | Tamil Nadu |
| 4. | Kabaddi | hu-tu-tu, ha-do-do, chedugudu, gudu, theechub | It is played between two teams on opposite half of a court or field. Individual players make turns crossing against other side of the team repeating "kabaddi, kabaddi." | Mahabharata (Indian epic) | India |
| 5. | Kalaripayattu* | Kalari, Kalarippayattu | It is considered among most scientific and one of the oldest martial arts of the world. It is based on Hindu and Ayurveda concepts of medicine and practiced in a special building called <i>kalari</i> . | 3 rd Century AD of Tamil Literature | Malabar Coast, Kerala |
| 6. | Kho kho | - | It is a modern form of Run & Chase. It is among the oldest traditional games of Indian Subcontinent and second most widespread tag game after Kabaddi. | Mahabharata (Indian epic) | Maharashtra |
| 7. | Lagori | Pitto, Pitthu, Sitoliya | It is a team sport that involves a pile of seven stones and a ball. It is played by at least 30 nations across the world. | Bhagwat Purana (about 5000years ago) | Southern parts of the Indian Subcontinent |
| 8. | Mallakhamb* | Mallakhamba or Mallakhamb | It is aerial Gymnastics. It is a combination of Yoga, Gymnastics, and Martial Arts performed in concert with a vertical stationary or else hanging wooden pole, rope or cane. | Manasollasa written by Someshvara III in 1135 A.D. | Indian Subcontinent |
| 9. | Silambam | Chilambam, Chilambattam | It is an ancient weapon based Martial Art. It is closely associated with Kalaripattayuo of Kerela. | Sangam Literature, 2 nd Century BC | Tamilakam, Tamil Nadu |



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|-----|-------------|-----------------|--|--|---------|
| 10. | Thang Ta* | Huyen Lallong | It is one of the two components of huyenlallong. It is the art of sword and spear and a method of safeguarding. | - | Manipur |
| 11. | Vallamkalli | Snake boat race | It is a traditional boat race and a type of canoe racing. Conducted during the harvest season of Onam festival. | First invented in Assyria, in BC 300. Invention also took place at the same time in Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Combdia, Bangkok, Burma, Britain etc. | Kerala |

*Approved by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (MYAS) in December, 2020 for including in Khelo India Youth Games (KIYG), 2021.

SIGNIFICANCE OF INDIGENOUS GAMES

Playing a game is fun, entertainment and amusement but it is also a recreation and a means to be fit and healthy. A nation is known by its indigeneity, knowledge, culture, traditions, etc. and these components are an indispensable part of intangible heritage. Indigenous games form the backbone of any community and a nation as well. Indigenous games are environment friendly, bring people together, reconnect the urban people to the roots of culture, enhance physical and mental health, improve life skills and act as a bridge between generations. They are the symbol of the cultural diversity of our societies and an efficient resource to convey values of harmony, solidarity, unity, diversity, inclusiveness and culture which is a prerequisite for development approaches.

INITIATIVES FOR THE UPLIFTMENT

Various initiatives have been taken from time to time to revive games and sports and their upliftment as well. The Government of India had launched several programmes to encourage youth and sports in the country. A report on evaluation/impact assessment of Rural Sports Programme to the Government of India by Centre for Market Research & Social Development (CMRSD) mentions that there has been a strong tradition of indigenous and traditional games in all parts of the country and indigenous games are being promoted through the schemes related to rural sports in India. However, many parochial and little publicized traditional games and sports have been ignored as most of the efforts concentrated on the mainstream sports. The Sports Authority of India (SAI) has taken various initiatives from time to time to promote indigenous and traditional games in the country through various schemes.

Under the Khelo India scheme, an exclusive component called "Promotion of Rural, Indigenous and Tribal Games" is added for the promotion and development of traditional sports of the country. In addition, Sports Authority of India (SAI) also promotes Indigenous Games and Martial Arts (IGMA) in nine disciplines under National Sports Talent Contest (NSTC) where talented children are selected of 8-14 years of age. Sports Authority of India (SAI) has adopted following indigenous games for the promotion: Kalaripayattu from Kerala, Silambam from Tamil Nadu, Kabaddi from Telangana, Archery from Jharkhand, Gatka from Punjab Mallakhamb from Maharashtra, Thang Ta from Imphal, Mukna from Imphal and Khomlainai from Assam. Of the above listed indigenous games, Kalaripayattu, Gatka, Mallakhamb and Thang Ta (in addition to Yogasana) have been added in Khelo India Youth Games (KIYG) in 2021.

CONCLUSION

Indigenous games have a potential to express cultural heritage of our country. They need to be popularised at global level with high involvement of indigenous people and huge promotions. These games can be adopted and launched with certain modifications to get them spread well. These games can be enhanced and uplifted as they pass on our heritage and do not require an expensive gear to start and set up. It is also required to aware people about significance of these games. Furthermore, the relevance and importance of these games should be a part of educational curriculum of the schools, colleges and universities as children and youth are the core population and backbone of any nation. It is the need of the hour to re-introduce this treasure in their minds which will enable to carry forward this heritage to future generations.



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