

Traditional Sports and Games Culture Around West Bengal

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Abstract: This article aims at exploring how children, particularly in rural areas of West Bengal, an economically poor but culturally rich state of India, enjoy their leisure with limited resources available to them. Broken bangles, tamarind seeds, old clothes and even hard covers of old notebooks become sports equipment and a source of enjoyment for them, especially for those who cannot afford buying expensive goods.

Keywords: West Bengal, India, traditional games, limited resources, oral tradition.

1. INTRODUCTION

A game is a situation that involves two or more players, and in which each player faces a choice between, at least, two behavioral options and strives to achieve the greatest payoff possible (Michener 2000). It is a natural consequence of what it means to be human. Through games, we express ourselves (Hyland 1990; Mead 1962).

All games have certain criteria such as a goal, chance, competition, common experiences, equality, freedom and no impact on reality, and depending on the game, people are engaged in some activities, such as thinking, planning, decision-making, concentrating, timing their minds and gaining knowledge. In addition, in all the games, some or all of the players have fully or partially opposing interests, which causes the behaviour of players to be proactive and strategic. Thus, all the games become sources of moderate exercise, either physical or mental or even both, and the exercise is essential for all of us. The benefits of games are twofold. Firstly, the health-improving impact, which results from moderate exercise, and secondly, the relaxation for a few minutes or a few hours enables us to forget the outside world of today completely (Tunis 1944).

2. WEST BENGAL: LAND AND PEOPLE

West Bengal, state of India, located in the eastern part of the country. It is bounded to the north by the state of Sikkim and the country of Bhutan, to the northeast by the state of Assam, to the east by the country of Bangladesh, to the south by the Bay of Bengal, to the southwest by the state of Orissa, to the west by the states of Jharkhand and Bihar, and to the northwest by the country of Nepal.

People:

The majority of West Bengal's people live in rural villages. Of those living in urban areas, more than half reside in greater Kolkata. Of the different religions, Hinduism claims the adherence of more than three-fourths of the population. Most of the remainder is Muslim. Throughout the state, Buddhists, Christians, Jains, and Sikhs constitute small minority communities.

3. CHILDREN OF WEST BENGAL AND THEIR GAMES

Parents in West Bengal, just like any other parents, no matter how uneducated they might be, also realise that games and physical exercises are essential for the growth of their children. They try to organise activities pertaining to games within

International Journal of Novel Research in Humanity and Social Sciences

Vol. 2, Issue 3, pp: (1-5), Month: May - June 2015, Available at: www.noveltyjournals.com

very limited resources. Inability to provide expensive gadgets makes them fall back to traditional games. Parents insist on their children's playing outside home. Though it is not institutionalised, it is customary that evening hours (5 p.m. to 7 p.m.) remain game-hours for each child. In hot or cold climate, in open space or crowded parks, in cities or villages, in streets or playgrounds children jump, run, hide, chase each other, and sing and laugh whole heartedly.

Some games require a group of boys and girls whereas others are played either by girls or boys only. Irrespective of the location chosen for playing – school or home or elsewhere – games are designed to provide fun and entertainment. In addition, games help to inculcate physical and mental control among the participants.

Information about these games was gathered from field visits and personal childhood experience. The described games are chosen from those which are most popular among children. It should be noted that some of these games are also played in other parts of India with minor alterations in the format and a few of these games are played by adults as well.

LATHIE-CHHORA (THROW STICK):

When a boys grow to the ten or older then they played this game. the boys also can climb the tree. four or five boys played, one of them are victim. All the boys climb up the tree and one boy throw the stick away from the tree. the victim collect the stick and come to the tree and touch the tree. After that the boys jump the ground before touch the victim. If the victim touch, the boy out and he will be the next victim.

DANGULLI:

This game is very popular among children in rural areas. *Gulli* is a three-four inches long piece of wood cylindrical in shape. Its diameter is approximately one inch. It is sharpened from both ends like a lead pencil. *Dan* is a wooden stick(DANDA). The length of the *danda* is approximately twenty-four inches. A small pit is dug into the ground. The length of this pit is about four inches. Two or many boys can play this game. The first player places the *gulli* across the pit and puts his *danda* into the pit under the *gulli* and holds.. He then pushes the *gulli* off. The other player tries to catch the *gulli*; if he succeeds in catching it, the first player is out and the second player gets a chance to push the *gulli* in a similar way. But if the other player fails to catch the *gulli*, the first player places the *danda* on the pit and the one of them (others) player throws the *gulli* on to the *danda* from the point where the *gulli* had landed. Even if he succeeds in hitting the *danda*, the first player is out and it will be the second player's turn to play. If the throw misses the target, the first player places the *gulli* on the ground but not on the pit and bounces it slightly by hitting one of its ends with his *danda*; while the *gulli* is still in the air, he tries to hit it hard with his *danda* as far as he can, away from the pit. The others player tries to catch it again. Even if the first player misses the chance to hit the *gulli* while in the air, the first player is out. The distance between the pit and the place where the *gulli* falls is measured by the length of the *gulli* and the player gets points correspondingly.

KIT-KIT:

It is played with a *GUTI*: a broken piece of an earthen pot, about an inch-and-a-half in diameter, or a round flat stone. A rectangle about three yards long and two yards wide is drawn. This rectangle is divided into six squares each about a foot wide. The fourth and the sixth squares are each subdivided into two and these are crossed diagonally from side to side.(have many other format)

The first player stands before the starting line and tosses her *guti* into the first square. Then she skips the first square, hopping to square number two and continues hopping up to square six. Then she turns around and hops back. She stops in square number two, picks up the *guti*, hops over square one and comes out. She continues playing by tossing the *guti* in square number two, three, four and so on in subsequent steps. All the hopping is done on one foot, except for those squares that are divided into two and drawn side by side. She puts both her feet down into the two squares with one foot in each of them. The player must hop over or skip the square where the *guti* has been placed.

A player is declared OUT if the *guti* fails to land in the appropriate (progressively higher) square, or the player steps on a line, or loses her balance while bending to pick up the *guti*, or puts her other hand or foot down or steps into the square.

This game is popular among girls. They play this game during recess at school.

GOLI (MARBLES OR GLASS BALLS):

This game is played with glass balls or marbles. One can buy beautiful colored marbles from shops. The game is so intoxicating that boys often deserve a thrashing from their parents for spending too much of their time playing it.

Each player has to have a *goli*. On even ground, a little hole is dug with the heel of the foot. The players position themselves about two yards away from the hole. Then they kneel down and try to send the marble into the hole. The marble is held tightly with the forefinger of the left hand. The finger is stretched back like a bow-string by the pressure of the forefinger and thumb of the right hand. When the finger is released, the *goli* goes forward, often overshooting the hole. One has to strike out of the way the *golis* thrown by the other boys or, with a gentle blow from one's *goli*, push the other *golis*, so that they drift into the hole. Whoever is the first to get all the *golis* (balls) into the hole, is the winner of all the *golis*.

LUKO-CHURI(HIDE AND SEEK) :

Children start playing this game at a very early age. Two-to-three-year-old children play this game with their mothers, grandmothers or elder sisters. A child is asked to close their eyes with the palms of their hands and the mother hides somewhere. Then she calls the child to come and find her. The child runs here and there and everywhere in search of the mother. If the child finds the mother within a limited time, they laugh; if not, they burst into tears. When the mothers sees the child crying, she comes out, or sometimes when she senses restlessness in the child she partly reveals herself so that it becomes easy for the child to find her.

When a child grows up, they find that this game requires more skills when played with a group of their peers. They can be so clever at hiding themselves that the finder roams about, trying to locate the others, following the sounds they make but does not succeed. It is because by the time the finder reaches the place where the shout appeared to have come from, the one hiding has already moved to another place. The child who covers the eyes of the finder keeps the palms tightly on the finder's eyes, until everyone has gone hiding. Usually the youngest child is chosen to find the older ones.

LATTU (TOP):

When a boy grows to be ten or older, he learns the skill of the spinning *lattu*. Boys save their pocket money to buy a beautiful pear-shaped top made of wood, with a pin at the bottom. This is set into motion by aid of a string with a hard jerk and released onto a hard surface to spin. The boy whose *lattu* moves the longest wins the game and gets a chance to spin the *lattu* of the loser. Small kids with no pocket money to buy a *lattu* take a glass-shaped wooden reel with a hole in the centre and fix a small pencil into the hole. Thus, a home-made *lattu* is ready for playing. Girls do not play this game.

GHURI (KITE FLYING):

Ghuri is children's most beloved game and the onlookers also utterly enjoy it. It looks great when the sky is covered with colourful kites and a cool breeze takes them higher and higher. Another kite flyer, who is trying to bring the kite down, entangles his kite with yours, and an exciting kite fight starts. It is exciting not only up in the sky but also on the ground, when kite looters run along with the kite without caring what they are doing or where they are going.

Every year kites are flown with great enthusiasm on September 18 (Viswakarma puja). The sky is filled with colourful kites and it is a scene worth watching. The atmosphere is charged. Girls do not fly kites but enjoy watching it. Sometimes they would hold the spool while their brothers fly the kite.

RUMAL CHURI (HANKY THIEF):

Rumal churi is an outdoor game but it can also be played inside if one has enough room to run around. This game can be played with as many members as present. Out of whom one is the *chor* (thief). The members playing the game sit in a circle with their eyes closed. The players sing this song three or four times and within this period the *chor* leaves his hanky (or a small piece of cloth) behind one of the sitting players. When the singing ends, everybody opens their eyes and looks for the *rumal* behind them. The one who finds the *rumal* runs after the *chor* to catch him. The *chor* runs around in circle and tries to save himself from being caught and take the vacant seat of the person chasing him or her (with the

rumal); if they are caught by the person with the *rumal* before grabbing the vacant seat, they switch roles. The game turns more interesting when it is played at a fast pace and involves all the participants, so that every time the *rumal* is dropped behind a new player.

PITTU:

Children divide themselves into two teams. Both the teams stand at a distance of several yards from each other with seven or nine or eleven stones placed midway on a spot and piled up in the shape of a pyramid. A member of the first team takes a ball and tries to strike the stones to topple the pile. The player has to be given three chances to hit the pile. If the member of the first team fails to do so, the second team gets the ball to try. If the first team member manages to hit the pile but any member of the second team catches the ball before it bounces back to the ground, the ball will again be passed on to the second team for continuing the game. If the members of the second team fail to catch the ball, their aim is to stop the members of the first team from assembling the stones to form a 'pyramid' again. To prevent the first team members from doing so, the members of the second team try to hit the members of the other team with the ball. The members of the first team try to avoid contact with the ball. If the first team manages to re-pile the stones without any of its members being hit by the ball, they again retrieve the ball to strike the stones, or else the ball is given to the second team to take their chance. This game inculcates team spirit among the players. It is more popular among girls; however, boys and girls play this game together as well.

4. CONCLUSION

It is observed that there are some games associated with lifecycle. It includes all the sports of physical movements. So, nine games can be grouped into these four broad categories: (1) running games: *luko-churi*, *rumal-chori*, *pittu*; (2) jumping games: *Kit-kit*; (3) skill-demonstrating games: *goli*, *lattu*, *ghuri*, *danguli*; (4) throwing games: *lathi chhora*. A four category of games appears necessary to be included here.

In addition to these games, there are many other traditional games which children play at different stages of their childhood.

Children play a variety of indoor and outdoor games. These games have a rich cultural and heritage value. They are an important vehicle for passing on some ancestral knowledge to the posterity. According to Edgardo Civallero (2006), "a people's intangible heritage is composed by the non-material part of its culture: tales and narratives, games and songs, music and all the knowledge usually transmitted by oral or sound means, in traditional societies as well as in urban westernized ones". Parents know it well that playing games is necessary for the physical as well as mental growth of their children. They insist that their children go out in the evening and play. Poor children enjoy their leisure, using whatever things available to them. Girls use broken bangles, tamarind seeds and old clothes in their games and resort to their imagination. This way they spend some quality time with their children. This strengthens the family bonds and develops a sense of family.

Thus, we see that games become a source of moderate exercise, either physical or mental or even both, for children, and are essential for their health and development; on the other hand, they constitute a source that develops group and family sense necessary for their social well-being. Poverty does not deter the children of Bihar from playing games and enjoying their leisure.

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International Journal of Novel Research in Humanity and Social SciencesVol. 2, Issue 3, pp: (1-5), Month: May - June 2015, Available at: www.noveltyjournals.com

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