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Traditional games and sports of rural areas in West Bengal

Dr. Radha Rani Ghosh

Abstract

Traditional games and sports can form the backbone of a community which is the part of intangible heritage and a symbol of the cultural diversity of our societies. They reflect on different cultural expressions, and create a bridge between cultures for a better mutual comprehension. We recollect with happiness our childhood games and gadget free days. The purpose of the present study is to explore how the children and youths, especially in rural areas of West Bengal, an economically poor but culturally rich state of India, enjoy their leisure with limited resources available to them. The study also identifies the traditional games and sports of rural areas of West Bengal. Thus in this paper we outline the traditional games and sports of rural areas in West Bengal such as Lathie-Chhora, Dangulli, Kit-Kit, Luko-Churi(Hide and seek), Goli(Marbles or Glass Balls), Lattu(Top), Ghuri(Kite Flying), Rumal Churi(Hanky Thief), Pittu etc.

Keywords: Traditional games and sports, rural areas, West Bengal

Introduction

In the rural areas of West Bengal have quite a number of traditional games and sports which are played mostly by the children and youths? These traditional games and sports are far less formal than modern urban games. The rules of them are relatively simple, unwritten and legitimated by custom, and sometimes revised to fit the circumstances of the moment. The names and rules prevalent in one locality or village often differed sharply from those with another. Those patterns are passed from player to other player in almost pure oral tradition with no reference whatever to print and probably with negligible guidance from trainers, parents, or recreation leaders. No bureaucracies or referees supervision is required.

West Bengal, state of India, located in the eastern part of the country. It is bounded to the north by the state of Sikkim, 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. The majority of West Bengal 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 three-fourths of the population. Most of the remainder is Muslim. Throughout the state, Buddhists, Christians, Jains, and Sikhs constitute small minority communities.

Objectives

To find out the traditional games and sports of rural areas in West Bengal to archive these in this globalization era.

Methodology

For this study, data has been collected from the rural areas of North 24 Parganas, Birbhum and Bankura in West Bengal one after another. Furthermore, for collecting records, the textual data from the printed materials like books, magazines, newspapers, internet-sources, etc. have also been utilized.

Discussion

Parents of rural areas in West Bengal, just like any other parents, no matter how uneducated

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In-charge, Department of Physical Education. State Aided College Teacher-I, Rishi Bankim Chandra College, Naihati, North 24 Parganas, West Bengal, India they might be, also realize that games and physical exercises are essential for the growth of their children. In hot or cold climate, in open space or crowded parks, in streets or playgrounds children jump, run, hide, chase each other, sing and laugh whole heartedly. Information about these games is gathered from field visits and personal childhood experience. The following described games are chosen from those which are most popular among the children and youths of rural areas in West Bengal.

Kit-Kit: The game is very popular among the girls and 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. The first player stands before the starting line and tosses her stone 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 stone, hops over square one and comes out. She continues playing by tossing the stone in square number two, and so on till the sixth square. 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 stone has been placed. A player is declared out if the stone 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 stone, or puts her other hand or foot down or steps into the square into which the stone has been tossed



Fig 1: Show the game of kit-kit

Lukochuri (hide and seek): Children start playing this game at a very early age. Three-to-four-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.



Fig 2: Show the hide and seek

Goli (marbles): This game is played with glass balls or marbles. It is played mostly by boys. One can buy cheap beautiful coloured marbles. 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. The latter then waits for his turn to strike his peer's goli. Whoever is the first to get all the golis into the hole, is the winner of all the golis.



Fig 3: This game is played with glass balls or marbles

Dariabandha: Dariabandha is another popular game of 8-12 years old kind of rural areas of West Bengal. It is not only a game but also an examination of physical power, fitness, strength and confidential balance where the opposite team could misbalance. In this game a field is equally divided with lines keeping equal distance from each other. Players are divided into two equal teams. One team stands in the starting line outside the field and each of the players of the other team stands on each vertical black line facing at least on opponent player. This player can move towards the horizontal line at a limited range. Players standing outside enter into the field one

by one and try to pass across the field to the finishing point and have to return to the starting position. Thus the team wins the game. If any player in the opposite team touches anybody then the game reversed.



Fig 4: Dariabandha is another popular game of 8-12 years old kind of rural areas of West Bengal

Lattoo (top): When a boy grows up slightly, he learns the skill of the spinning lattoo (top). 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, turned around the round surface of the top, with a hard jerk and releasing onto a hard surface to spin. The boy whose lattoo moves the longest wins the game and gets a chance to spin the lattoo of the loser. This is a game which can also be enjoyed alone for hours. Girls do not play this game.



Fig 5: When a boy grows up slightly, he learns the skill of the spinning lattoo (top)

Rumal Chor (hanky thief): Rumal chor can be played with as many members as present. It is an outdoor game but it can also be played inside if one has enough room to run around. One of them is decided to be the chor (thief). The rest sit facing one another in a circle with their eyes closed or open for some time. Within this period the chor runs behind his friends and suddenly leaves his rumal (hanky) behind one of the sitting players. On some signal from the chor everybody starts looking for the rumal behind them. The one who finds it 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 the chor is caught by the person with the rumal, he again becomes the chor; in this way the game continues.



Fig 6: Rumal chor can be played with as many members as present

Ghuri (Kite Flying): Ghuri is children's most beloved game and the onlookers also enjoy it. It looks great when the sky is covered with colourful kites. 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). Girls do not fly kites but enjoy watching it. Sometimes they would hold the spool while their brothers fly the kite.



Fig 7: Ghuri is children's most beloved game and the onlookers also enjoy it

Pitto (lagori): 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. The boys and girls play this game together as well.



Fig 8: 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

Gulli Danda (two sticks): It is played with a danda (stick) usually about two feet in length and a smaller piece of stick called gulli, which is about four inches. A groove is made in the ground in which is the gulli is kept at an angle. Often a circle is made on the mud around where the gulli is kept. The gulli is hit with a stick and while it is in the air, the striker has to hit it with the danda. If the gulli is caught by the opponents in the air, then the player is out, otherwise the player and his team gets the points which are equal to the measurement of the distance traversed by the gulli as measured with the danda. While the gulli is in the air, the player can also attempt to toss it a few times with the danda before finally hitting it away. This is a great skill and enables the player to get the points as a multiple of the times he tosses the gulli.



Fig 9: It is played with a danda (stick) usually about two feet in length and a smaller piece of stick called gulli, which is about four inches

Kanamachi (blind fly): This game is more popular among the children in school life. A number of children stand in a circle. One of them becomes the Kanamachchi. He/She is called so because a piece of cloth is tied over his eyes and he/she cannot see. The children then gradually increase the circle, and the kanamachi runs after the others trying to touch one of them, as if buzzing around haphazardly like a fly. The children shout out the rhyme 'kana machi bho bho, jake pabi take chho'. The person who is touched has to be identified by name. If correctly identified, he/she becomes the new Kanamachchi, and it goes on.



Fig 10: This game is more popular among the children in school life. A number of children stand in a circle. One of them becomes the Kanamachchi. He/She is called so because a piece of cloth is tied over his eyes and he/she cannot see

Langdi tang or Langdi (Crippled leg): It is played amongst a group of children. They divided themselves into two teams of equal number of players. In a defined area one person from the first team hops on one leg (langdi tang) and tries to touch/catch as many players of the second team as possible. After that, a person from the second team tries to do the same to the first team. As a player is touched, he/she has to sit or wait outside. Whichever team loses all its players first loses the game.



Fig 11: It is played amongst a group of children. They divided themselves into two teams of equal number of players

Raja-Mantri-Chor-Sipahi (King-Minister-Thief-Soldier): In this game Paper Chits are made for raja (1000 points), mantri (500 points), chor (0 points) and sipahi (100 points). These paper chits are then thrown in the middle and four players pick one each. The one who gets the paper chit with 'raja' written in it then exclaims 'Who is my mantri?' The mantri responds, and he/she is then asked by the raja to identify the chor from the remaining two players. If the mantri guesses correctly, then he/she retains the points; else, the points are surrendered to the chor. Each round continues like this. The player with the highest points wins in the end.





Fig 12: In this game Paper Chits are made for raja (1000 points), mantri (500 points), chor (0 points) and sipahi (100 points).

Conclusion

Traditional games and sports are played a vital role for the growth and development of every child. The rural areas of West Bengal has very good traditional culture of playing various games and sports which do not required any expensive equipment nor uniforms, shoes and accessories but only require is people and free space to play. Such games are always helps to bring kids together encouraging teamwork and social interaction. These are just some of the more popular ones. There is no end to the number of these types of games and each can have its own variations. Children like to run, play, laugh and enjoy themselves. Hence, playing games comes naturally to them, and they should be proactively motivated to go outside and play, instead of being indoors all the time. Games involving much movement and running satisfy younger and older children's need to move and so develop their skills. The Children of rural areas in West Bengal play a variety of indoor and outdoor games. These games also have a rich cultural and heritage value. They are an important vehicle for passing on some ancestral knowledge to posterity. 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 rural areas in West Bengal from playing games and enjoying their leisure.

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