

## **Influence of Western Sports on Indigenous Games in India**

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### **Abstract**

Every civilization has evolved and developed its own indigenous modes of physical endeavour and healthy social interaction through a variety of games and sports forms and events. Apart from being a means of physical exercise and fitness, sports and games have been a medium of entertainment, the generation of a spirit of healthy competition, bonding and pride in the community, and an avenue of constructive preoccupation for active young people. Sports play an important role in most countries, and India is no different. India is home to several traditional sports which originated in the country and continue to remain fairly popular. These include Archery, *Atyapatya*, Ball badminton, Hockey, *kabaddi*, *kho kho*, *Mallakamba*, Shuttle Badminton and Wrestling. One of the main reasons for the lack of popularity of the indigenous games is the dearth of support from the government quarters, especially in contrast to the support and promotion given to the western games like cricket by the government. As a result, these indigenous sports persons face a lot of economic and social problems. One striking difference between the present generation and that of the previous generation is the lack of interest towards the Indian or native games. Till the previous generation, people used to play a variety of indoor and outdoor games that were the games of the soil. Hence, only a handful people are interested in indigenous games like *Kabaddi*, *Goli* or *Ghilli*. These games represent a rich culture and heritage and were instrumental in passing these values and some ancestral knowledge from one generation to the other. They also sharpen our observational, mathematical, analytical and memory skills. Thus, the study is an attempt to understand the popularity of the western games and consequently the less popularity of the indigenous games. Further, the article also looks into measures which can enhance the popularity of indigenous games. No doubt, India has to safeguard, encourage and develop the indigenous games in collaboration with State Sports Boards through creating academies and take urgent measures to improve the status of indigenous games.

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**Keywords:** Traditional Sports, Sports Culture, Indigenous Sports, Sports Festival

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### **Introduction**

Every civilization has evolved and developed its own indigenous modes of physical endeavour and healthy social interaction through a variety of games and sports forms and events. Apart from being a means of physical exercise and fitness, sports and games have been a medium of entertainment, the generation of a spirit of healthy competition, bonding and pride in the community, and an avenue of constructive preoccupation for active young people.<sup>1</sup>

1 Working Group Report on *Sports And Physical Education* for 11th Five Year Plan (2007-2012) Government of India Planning Commission, New Delhi.

Traditional sports and games (TSG) can form the backbone of a community. It is our responsibility to protect and promote these sports to further community spirit, bring peoples together and install a sense of pride in a society's cultural roots. Traditional sports and games are part of intangible heritage and a symbol of the cultural diversity of our societies. They are also an efficient means to convey values of solidarity, diversity, inclusiveness and cultural awareness. Sports and games perpetuate culture and society by transmitting a socio-culture heritage to each new generation. They help the new generation adjust to the requirements of that heritage. We have to preserve, promote and develop TSG, and to ensure that they form an integral part of national and development strategies. These will all enhance our end-goal of sport for peace and development. In the Declaration of *Punta del Este*, adopted by the third International Conference of Ministers and Senior Officials in charge of Physical Education and Sport (MINEPS III), held in December 1999, Uruguay, ministers emphasized the preservation and the appraisal of traditional and indigenous sports from different regional and national cultural heritages, including the establishment of a World Heritage List of Traditional Games and Sports. Moreover, traditional games and sports reflect on different cultural expressions, and create a bridge between cultures for a better mutual comprehension.

Most of the traditional games and sports, expressions of indigenous cultures and ways of life contributing to the common identity of humanity, have already disappeared and those that are surviving are threatened of imminent disappearance and extinction under the combined effect of globalization and harmonization of the rich diversity of world sport heritage. Traditional Games and Sports then added value in terms of cultural comprehension and mutual tolerance both within the community of nations and between them, and therefore contribute to the edification of a culture of Peace. Tests reveal that sports and games fairly successful in passing on the acknowledged wisdom and culture, it leads people to live more effectively. Sports and games not only pass on culture, transmit knowledge, and influence behaviour but also teach ethical behaviour through commitment and responsibility.<sup>2</sup> The historians have discovered the plastic arts of Ancient India which represented in carvings or paintings of ancient game organised as a sacred rite, gradually loses some of its nobility as social life evolves and becomes more complicated. When the game moves out of the religious environment, it strips itself more and more of its mystery, its secret, and enters the everyday world, it still preserves some degree of symbolism and is still practiced in a deeply serious spirit characteristic of the real and spontaneous spirit of the game. There are very few representations of games in Indian art and this fact will limit our excursion into the past, but even so it will not be without interest.<sup>3</sup>

2 M. Barrow Harold and P. Brown Janie, *Man and Movement: Principal of Physical Education*, Lea & Febiger Philadelphia, 1988.

3 J. Auboyer, *Some Games In Ancient India*, East and West, Vol. 6, No. 2 (JULY 1955), pp. 123-137

The history of sports in India dates back to the Vedic era. There is a fascinating link between Greece and India, which stretches back to 975 B.C. It is more than likely that many of today's Olympic disciplines are sophisticated versions of the games of strength and speed, that flourished in ancient India and Greece. Chess, wrestling, polo, archery and hockey (possibly a fall-out from polo) are some of the games that have originated in India.

Activities relating to sports are essential components for human resource development. It helps to promote good health, comradeship and a spirit of friendly competition, which in turn, has positive impact on the overall development of personality. This leadership can guide India towards a greater achievement. Similarly, excellence in sports enhances the sense of achievement, national pride and patriotism. Sports also provide benefits like, recreations, improve productivity and foster social and cultural harmony and discipline.

### **Traditional Indian Games**

Traditional Indian games like chess and Kabaddi have been played in India since time unknown. Let's take a look at some of these games.

#### *Shatranj or Chess*

Chess is perhaps India's oldest and most loved board indoor game. Chess was born in India and has been played in India through centuries. It is revered as an indication of a human intelligence and strategic capabilities. A chess set can be found in almost every Indian home. Many of India's folktales are littered with stories of kings and emperors and their chess games. In fact, even the Mahabharata has a crucial episode which involves chess. Chess is excellent for overall mental development. Many schools encourage children to pick up chess.<sup>4</sup> Chess has a very positive effect on both children and adults.

#### *Kho-Kho*

*Kho-Kho* is an immensely popular sport in India. In some parts of India it is even played on a professional level. *Kho-kho* is very popular with children and is often part of the games class in schools.

In *Kho-Kho*, one team kneels on the ground in a line, but with alternate persons facing opposite directions. The other team sends in one or more members, who have to avoid being touched by the chaser. He is allowed to dodge by running through the line of squatters, but the chaser can only run in one direction and cannot pass between

4 URL: <http://www.indiaparenting.com/intelligentchild/data/052.shtml>. Accessed on 10.09.2013.

the squatters. He however can pass the turn to any of his team mates who are half kneeling on the ground.

This game is very quick, requires good fitness levels and is excellent for overall development of the child. It is a quick and exciting game and can be played for hours together. Besides, it does not need any training or equipment and can be played by almost anyone!

### *Kabaddi*

*Kabaddi* too is an indigenous Indian game. It is a team sport and has been played in India since ages. It requires players to be strong and agile, and does not require any equipment or training.

In *kabaddi*, two teams occupy separate halves of the ground. Then one team sends one player into the other half to try and 'tag' any member of that team. The other team is supposed to capture that player and prevent him from getting back into his territory. This goes on until each team member is caught or escapes. Further, the team member is not supposed to take a breath until he returns to his side. This is done by reciting '*kabaddi*' over and over so the referee knows when s/he takes a breath. The game has gained popularity over the years in other parts of Asia as well. It is played in many parts of the Indian sub-continent as well as China and Japan.

### *Gilli Danda or Lippa*

*Gilli Danda* or *Guli Danda* is a very popular game among the children of India. It is played all over the country and can be enjoyed for hours together. Most Indian adults would remember having played *gillidanda* with their friends in the neighbourhood. To play this game, you need a long stick, and a short stick with tapered ends. The long stick is used to flick the short *gilli* into the air, and then hit to travel to a maximum distance. The opposing team here has to try and catch the *gilli*. That gets the hitter out, and also, if the hitter misses the *gilli* thrice, he loses. The hitter's score is measured by the distance from the place where he hit the *gilli* and the place it landed, measured by the *danda*.

These are some of the games which have been a part of Indian history and culture and still hold much relevance today. Traditional Games were not just games; they were designed in such a way that one can develop lot of skills like logical thinking, building strategy, concentration, basic mathematics, aiming, and lot more. Nowadays these skills are develop by paying money to centres that conduct personal development courses.

Traditional Games act as learning aids. They teach many things like learning to win and lose, develop sensory skills, count, add, improve motor skills, identify colour, improve hand-eye co-ordination and finally to have fun, as naturally as one plays or watches a game to have fun. The values gained by playing these games are more probably more when compared to the games played nowadays. Some of the values gained are that they are environment friendly, socializes into culture and history, and it is suitable for all ages, thereby increasing the interaction between generations. Many modern games played around the world have their origin in these traditional games.

The present indigenous games *Atya-Patya*, Archery, Chess, Hockey, *Kabaddi*, *Kho-Kho*, *Mallakambha*, Shuttle Badminton and Wrestling are declining. The present study was intended to find out the reasons for these games losing their importance at school and college levels. At the school and college levels the indigenous games were neglected as to strengthen the western games. In India though many love to take advantage from these sports, they are not given equal importance. 80% percent of the youths from school and colleges in India are from rural area and till now the encouragement and facilities are limited only to urban areas. The study makes an attempt to understand the reason behind the lack of interest in promoting these games and to suggest the measures to safeguard and to make plans to improve the indigenous games.

Thongutum and Chantachon study on "The Co-Operation, Conservation and Development of Indigenous Sports and Games for Strengthening Community's Health in Bangkok." The cooperation on conservation and development of indigenous sports and games for strengthening community's health in Bangkok Metropolitan areas include promoting and revitalizing 25 selected local indigenous sports.<sup>5</sup> Support from the central government in funds, equipment and promotion to include and organize indigenous sports competitions in villages, sub-districts, districts, cities and provinces throughout the country. It emphasized that local indigenous sports should also be taught and learned by children in local schools and included as a curriculum so that Thai's can understand and enjoy their cultural heritage.

The size of the play yard and the number of the pieces of play equipment are positively related to the size of the family income and there is a corresponding relationship between the activity level and socio-economic conditions. It is to be realized that more and more data has been emerging from studies carried out in this area related to the comparative fitness of children within various socio-economic groups.

5 Thongutum, Kittithat and Chantachon, Songkoon. "The Co-Operation, Conservation and Development of Indigenous Sports and Games for Strengthening Community's Health in Bangkok Metropolitan." *European Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol.10 (3), p. 396, 2009.

## Reason for the popularity of Western Games

The reason for the popularity of the western games are the inventions of new techniques in western games like in Cricket, business, job opportunit, adequate infrastructure, adequate funds, media coverage and also some short comings of indigenous games.

Survey regarding the Indigenous games shows that reason for the unpopularity of Indigenous Games are many. The lack of facilities, negligence of government, lack of academies to train the players. Insufficient infrastructure and number of coaches affects the performance of the trainees. The diet is uneatable, the instruments are old fashioned, the boarding facilities are inadequate, and the coach per student ratio is negligible.<sup>6</sup>

Indians have a bias towards making the comment *eat cricket, sleep cricket and talk cricket* all time. It has probably something to do with the traditional games having almost become extinct in the context of expensive games like cricket and football.

Most from small cities or large, would have seen groups of youngsters playing in public parks or playgrounds all over the place and most of the time they play India's favourite game, cricket or football. There is lesser chance to see them playing *kabbadi* or *kho-kho* or *gulli-danda* in our society parks. Worse still mentioning *kabbadi* or *kho-kho* or *gulli-danda* to any of them, they would look at you in bewilderment or say "I've seen one of them in a Hindi movie."

Traditional games of India<sup>7</sup> are inexpensive and require minimum of resources. A stretch of levelled land is basically all you require, other than the players. But the games require a lot of stamina, strength and alertness. In short, to play them one must be physically and mentally sound. Playing these games, one can grow stronger, physically and mentally. At the same time, these games promote good human traits. *Kabbadi* actually places emphasis on developing qualities like self-defence, discipline and teamwork. To add to this, these games are highly enjoyable, full of thrill and excitement. Different states of India have their own games - like *dhopkhel* in Assam, *gella-chutt* in Tripura, *kangshanaba* in Manipur and *kirip* in Nicobar. Even martial arts could belong to the same category as traditional Indian games.

Hockey is the only ancient game that has managed to survive today and gain the status of national game. It was born in Asia but it's not a game native to India. The British introduced the game in India and developed modern hockey. *Kabbadi* is another game, which has retained its position somewhat. The All India *Kabbadi* Federation was

6 Working Group Report on *Sports And Physical Education* For 11th Five Year Plan (2007-2012) Government of India Planning Commission, New Delhi.

7 URL: <http://indianews.merines.com>, accessed on 11.09.2013.

established in 1950. *Kabbadi* is included in the list of the Asian games too. Various international tournaments are being held for promoting the game globally. A *Kabbadi* World Cup is being organised every year since 2004. It has attracted a lot of attention in European countries. Organisations like the England *Kabbadi* Association and the Iran *Kabbadi* Federation have come into being.

But the sad side of the story is the scenario prevailing in urban India. These games are confined to rural India. Tournaments and competitions for games like *kabbadi* and *kho-kho* are arranged at this level, though not on a scale similar to hockey or football, forget cricket! It is a matter of concern that in urban India they are almost absent. Partly due to influence of Westernization and urbanisation some of the traditional attributes have undergone changes and saving these ancient games should help to stop such corrosion.

Survey shows that trainers are not available for Indigenous Games and even when sports trainers are available, they are not accessible to the sports persons. Even in Uttar Pradesh where all the officials said that there are trainers for all the sports disciplines, hardly anybody among the sports persons met shared that view. This indicates that accessibility of sports persons to trainers is lowest in Uttar Pradesh. The study indicates that accessibility is far from happening. Within the states, more sports persons in Manipur, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh have received training than the other states. However, in totality, it can be surmised that the training provided is very inadequate in nurturing sports talent. Sports persons were asked about the facilities which are available to them after selection. A dismal trend emerges. Only about a third (35%) said that sports kit was available, while the rest (65%) said that it was not available.<sup>8</sup> This is the case with special coaching as well as allotment in sports hostels as well as monthly compensation. This indicates that essential facilities for development of the sports persons and of games are not accessible. Without adequate infrastructure the talents cannot bloom and without national/international standard infrastructure, the talents cannot compete at a higher level. Though government has taken some measures for the development of Indigenous Games but there is still lack of awareness among the people about the availability of adequate facilities and infrastructure. The study found that there are not enough financial resources for the development of sports as a whole. This includes infrastructure development, training, incentives to the sports person as well as for mobilisation of talent.

### **Measures taken to promote Indigenous Games**

In the National Sports Policy 2001, high priority is accorded to the development of sports in the rural areas to harness the available unknown talents and potential of

8 A Report on Evaluation / Impact Assessment of "Rural Sports Programme" submitted to the "Planning Commission, Government of India".

the indigenous games. In this context, the Village Panchayats/Gram Sabhas as well as rural youth and sports clubs could be mobilised to facilitate development of the requisite infrastructure, for promotion of Indigenous Games and for the identification of talent through an appropriately competitive structure in the rural areas as also in the disadvantaged and remote parts of the country which appear to merit special consideration under various schemes including for the North East.

There has been a strong tradition of indigenous and traditional games in practically all parts of the country through ages. Indigenous games are being promoted through schemes related to rural sports & Northeast Sports Festival. The rural population of India, comprising about 70 per cent of the country's total population with a higher level of physical fitness, physiological and morphological status with respect to the others seem to be a pillar of strength in the Country's sports arena. For safeguarding of Indigenous games and to tap hidden talents for participation in sports events at the national and international levels, the government started giving adequate attention by introducing several schemes.

Rural Sports Programme was launched by the Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports, Government of India, in the year 1970-71 with a view to broad base indigenous games and sports and to tap the hidden talents in the rural areas. The North-east Sports Festival (NSF) scheme was launched in the year 1986-87 to broad-base games and sports in the North-eastern states and to tap the hidden talents in the area. The states covered under the scheme are Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. Under the component, North East sports festival is organised involving sports persons from the North-East states every year. The sports disciplines and the Indigenous games which are very popular in the region are included in the festival. This is an open tournament and broad-basing is readily observed.

Thus, evaluation of the above mentioned schemes were of utmost importance because this caters the rural areas and north-eastern part of the country. A broad study has been made to assess the extent to which the programme has succeeded in developing sports consciousness and mass participation in sports in rural areas, assess the extent to which the Programme has succeeded in strengthening sports at grassroots level and to gauge its resultant impact, assess the effectiveness of the level of opportunity provided to rural as well as north-eastern youth to get noticed for further nurturing, evaluate the extent to which the programme has succeeded in encouraging sports in the rural as well as North-eastern region and analyse the findings and recommend strategies/ Action Plans for improving the impact of rural sports program as well as North Eastern Region Festival.<sup>9</sup> Both secondary and primary research were

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*



undertaken to generate required information and develop an understanding of both the programmes. Rural Sports Programme & North-Eastern Sports Festival. A total of six states such as Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Manipur, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Kerala were selected for the purpose of the study. A total of 1296 respondents were interviewed for the study. Among them the general public (people) consisted of 960 respondents, sports persons consisting of 192 respondents, 96 opinion leaders and 48 sports officials. The study also identified state specific mechanisms for the promotion of rural sports. The study found that in Punjab, the nodal office is the Directorate of Sports who organises such sports events. In Andhra Pradesh, the Sports Authority of Andhra Pradesh (SAAP) is an apex body of the Government of Andhra Pradesh to promote sports in the state. In Maharashtra, the sports department is still with education department which organises rural sports meet. In Uttar Pradesh, the Sports Directorate is the apex body to control and promote the sports activities in the state. In Manipur, the Department of Youth Affairs and Sports (DYAS) is the nodal agency for implementation of youth welfare programmes and promotion of games and sports in Manipur while in Kerala, Kerala Sports Association is in charge for promotion and organisation of rural sports meets.

It is recognised that scholarship and stipend are necessary to attract and retain talent in the sport. Sometimes, due to fragile socio-economic condition of the players, they have to leave the sports in the midway. This is also mandated by the GOI guidelines. The study however found that the vast majority of sports persons have not received any scholarship or stipend. Less than one fifth (12%) said that they have received scholarship. Thus scholarship is given only to a very few of the sports persons. Among the states, it is found that sports persons in Manipur, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh had received scholarships. This indicates that the support for the programme in these states is relatively better than other states. Sports persons, those, who have received scholarship, were further asked about the source of that and everyone said that it was the state government which provides the scholarship. The sports disciplines covered under the scheme for scholarships are under the Sports Directorate. There is no separate assistance for distributing prizes at the Block, District and State level tournaments. For National level tournaments, assistance of ₹ 75,000/- for each group is given to SAI for some specific purposes for distributing Gold Medals, Medals to team and Merit certificate.

The need of the hour is greater enlightenment of the young generation about these games and their usefulness in a segment. Competitions can be organised in our own neighbourhood. Given the depleting health condition of youth, these games can be really useful in their physical development. Instead of watching the TV or computer screens, playing the violence-laden video and computer games children are to be

motivated to take to healthier outdoor games. It will not only promote both physical and mental health but also pass on good moral values by way of bonus.

### **Recommendations**

On the basis of the findings and conclusions of the study the following recommendations are made. Like other countries, India should also safeguard the indigenous games to encourage in collaboration with State Sports Boards through formulating academies immediately. Indigenous sports competitions should be played in all villages, taluks, districts, and provincial level in every region throughout the year.<sup>10</sup> The indigenous sports should also be taught and made to learn by children in local schools and colleges. Popular local indigenous sports that are favoured in the community should be supported by the community leaders and they should be provided with the utilities such as, equipment and area to play their favourite sports. The community or local indigenous sports group should find and arrange for an expert indigenous sports trainer to teach youths in the community on the special techniques and fund ways to play. Leading to the recognition of their achievements should create an incentive for children and youths to participate in local indigenous sports during their cultural celebrations and activities. There should be support from the government budget. The government should also organize local indigenous sports competitions in villages, sub districts, districts, and provincial level in every region throughout the year. Preserving and protecting the Indigenous Games through support from the corporate sector. Empowering various sport and recreation associations and federations with sport administration skills. Facilitating sustainable sport development and infrastructure and encouraging active and healthy lifestyles. There should be an equal status and recognition for the players taking to the indigenous games like other players while recognizing for awards and cash prizes.

The Rural Sports Programme (RSP) seeks to tap hidden talents for participation in sports events at the national and international levels. After almost three decades, the program requires adequate attention and stocktaking on the part of the government. Respondents were asked about any specific modifications that they would like to see in order to make the program more effective. The modifications in the program suggested by the people included giving emphasis to the availability of more funds. A large proportion of the people talked about the need for having playgrounds in and around the village as well as upgrading of infrastructure. This was also given primacy by the sports officials across all the states studied for the purpose. Apart from suggestions on increasing funds and upgrading the infrastructure, people specifically also talked about the need for a creating a sports promotion network at the grass roots level and setting up sports training institutes. Their task should be to localise the program, and make infrastructure easily accessible to the people who need it.

10 Kallayya R. Sthavaramata, *Graameena Kridegalu*, Gulbarga, Vaibhava Prakashana, 2006.

In the international scene there are countries still very much attached to their traditional games like the baseball, which is synonymous with our own *gulli-danda*, the rugby and many more. Even they are ready to accept some of the traditional Indian games. According to a report a research project has been undertaken in South Africa to get to know more about Indian games like *Kabbadi* and *kho-kho*.<sup>11</sup>

## **Conclusion**

From the research it is inferred that *Kabaddi*, *Kho-Kho*, *Mallakambha* and Wrestling are the indigenous games have influenced more than other games. It was also found that the players had been playing indigenous games for long years. The players selected faced financial problem and lack of facilities. As compared to westernized games the indigenous games are not famous due to reason of type of play, barefoot game and rural area game. The facilities availed to indigenous games are not satisfactory. From the research it was also found that players opined that more audiences were interested in viewing indigenous games and middle class players were keen on participating in the games due to their greater interest in the games. The identity of the indigenous games as compared to other games is very low. The reasons being lack of dress code, attractive play grounds and branding as a rural game. There is no attractive play kits for indigenous games, barefoot game and the small grounds are major reasons for not attracting international level attention. More players opined that if the indigenous games are made as an indoor game it will attract more countries. Sponsors, play ground and dress codes are the main reason for low level of progress in the development of indigenous game.

Since the inception of the programme by the government of India, there has been no systematic attempt undertaken, on the part of the government, to evaluate the impact of Rural Sports Programme as well as North Eastern Sports Festival. Hence there was a need to re-look into the programme's effectiveness and its resultant impact since the day of inception. If we look at the awareness of the various disciplines among the respondents, however, the findings reveal that the awareness levels are low. More people identified sports like, Football, Volleyball, *Kho Kho*, and Athletics as sports. A lesser number of people identified sports like Archery, Judo, Tug-of-war, weightlifting and wrestling. The National Sports Policy 2001 set out the framework for the action plan, on the eve of launch of Xth Plan wherein promotion of indigenous games was one of the agendas and the Policy for the appropriate legislation for guiding all matters involving national and inter-state jurisdiction was pursued. The main features of the Scheme in the Eleventh Plan also proposed that the competitions would be multi-sport events, with a certain number of Olympic disciplines being made mandatory

11 URL: <http://www.merineews.com/article/are-traditional-indian-games-dying-a-slow-death/130789.shtml#sthash.a3qa1tbj.dpuf>, accessed on 11.09.2013.

and some indigenous disciplines could be selected on an optional basis. Accordingly higher priority needs were given to the development of sports in the rural areas by mobilizing village panchayats/gaonsabhas as well as rural youth and sports clubs - (i) to facilitate development of the requisite infrastructure; and (ii) to harness the available talent and potential through an appropriate competition structure in rural areas as also in the disadvantaged and remote parts of the country.<sup>12</sup>

12 Working Group Report on *Sports And Physical Education* For 11th Five Year Plan (2007-2012) Government of India Planning Commission, New Delhi.