

Indian Traditional Games: An Intangible Cultural Heritage to Promote Good Life among Children

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Abstract

Culture plays a significant role in the development of the nation. India has rich cultural diversity and plurality, among which traditional game is one that used to occupy much of the leisure time of children and youth. These games are played informally with minimal equipment and infrastructure and with unwritten, simple, and flexible rules. The few popular traditional games in India are Camel Race, Game of Dice, Archery, Bull Race, Buffalo Race, Marbels, Mallakhamb, Kite flying, Hopscotch, Spinning the Top, Boat Race, and Kalaripayattu. Today's fast-paced lifestyle, urbanization, unit families, and popularity of video games are discouraging children from playing outdoor games. Still, these games have enough potential to provide unique opportunities for physical development, amusement, creativity, the transmission of culture, peer group interactions, and overall good life. The purpose of the study was to identify and analyze the different components of traditional games that develop social and motor skills that may lead to a good life among children. For the collection of data, the present study used primary and secondary sources, which included questionnaires, books, websites, and journals. It was observed that rural children largely engage in traditional games, which are locally organized, and safe. It was noted that many types of traditional games, such as games of physical skill, strategy, memory, rhythmic games, simulation, and verbal games, play an important role in the development of children's minds, cognitive ability and motor skills including balance, coordination and can also develop social skills like collaboration, cooperation, communication, mutual respect, cultural exchange, problem-solving, and overall well-being and healthy Life. UNESCO recognized the Traditional Games as a world intangible cultural heritage. The Association for International Sports for All (TAFISA, Germany) and UNESCO are jointly striving hard to safeguard and promote traditional games across the world. TAFISA adopted a mission in 2018 to create a better world through play by 2030.

Keywords: Traditional Games, Cultural Transmission, Socialization, Personal Development, Motor Development, Well-Being.

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INTRODUCTION

The term "culture" encompasses the complexity of civilization, rooted in tradition and religion, reflecting the influence of society and community. It represents the nation's image, including aspects like music, art, games, religion, language, clothing, customs, and attitudes (Bandyopadhyay, 2021; Spencer-Oatey, 2012). Culture significantly shapes children's personalities, and India, with its rich and diverse culture, has many religions, languages, rituals, festivals, food, clothing, dance, music, crafts, and traditional sports (Ramroop, 2022). Play is the most basic instinctive form of expression for children, aiding in the development of fundamental skills, physical and cognitive abilities, emotional stability, and social skills

(Bandyopadhyay, 2023; Ginsburg, 2007; Gulia & Dhauta, 2019).

Cultural heritage extends beyond monuments and collections; it serves as a means to preserve traditions and pass them on to future generations. UNESCO's Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Assets, including India, has recognized 38 items, such as traditional games, on its "list of intangible cultural heritage" (Vaidhyasubramaniam, 2016). These games, mentioned in ancient Indian scriptures, offer enduring value and benefits compared to recent popular games (Bharatan, 2020). Traditional games are environment-friendly, provide insights into culture and history, and promote intergenerational connections (Gultom *et al.*, 2022).

Besides, they fulfill developmental needs, helping children move, gain experiences, develop emotions, and creativity, and activate their senses (Petrovska *et al.*, 2013). Incorporating traditional games addresses the developmental needs of children, preserving culture and enhancing social connections. Despite being cultural assets, traditional games have been neglected due to modern lifestyles and the popularity of electronic screens and gadgets (Gul, 2023; Bharatan, 2020). According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, children spend an average of eight hours per day on electronic screens (Melianasari & Suparno, 2018). Gul (2023) suggests that traditional games serve as learning tools, aiding children's cognitive, verbal, emotional, social, and physical development. The present study aims to identify and analyze the components of traditional games contributing to motor and social skills for achieving a healthy life.

METHODOLOGY

The current study is an ethnographic qualitative study. Data and information regarding TG were collected through primary and secondary sources, including interviews, questionnaires, books, websites, and journals. Whenever possible, interviews were conducted with people aged 18-65 (n=65), and questionnaires were sent to participants in remote areas of India. Finally, a total of 385 responses (N=385) were collected from various parts of India. The open-ended and closed-ended questionnaire consisted of 10 questions seeking information about participants' knowledge and familiarity with TG. Face validity of the

questionnaire was established based on the opinions of three experts. Secondary sources included books (n=3), websites (n=4) and journals (n=20).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the primary and secondary sources, information about the types, characteristics, and benefits of TG was obtained which are discussed below.

Famous Traditional Games of India and Its Types

Famous Indian traditional games include Camel Race, Game of Dice, Archery, Bull Race (Jallikattu), Buffalo Race (Kambala), Marbels, Mallakhamb, Kite flying, Hopscotch, Spinning the Top, Boat Race (Vallamkali), and Kalaripayattu (Martial arts). These games contribute to holistic development in various dimensions for a good life. Physical skill games like "Kabaddi," "Kho-Kho," and "Wrestling" enhance motor abilities. Strategic games like "Chess" and "Ludo" develop rational decision-making skills. Games of chance, such as "Dice Games" improve cognitive abilities. Rhythm games like "Jumping games" and "Hopscotch" enhance physical activity, rhythm, and coordination. Verbal games like "Passing Through Trap" and "Touching Finger" enhance linguistic skills and social interaction. Aesthetic games showcase artistic skills. Simulation or mimicry games like "Dumb Charades" improve the guessing power and cognitive skills. The state-wise famous Indian Traditional games (North and South) are depicted in Figure 1 and Figure 2.

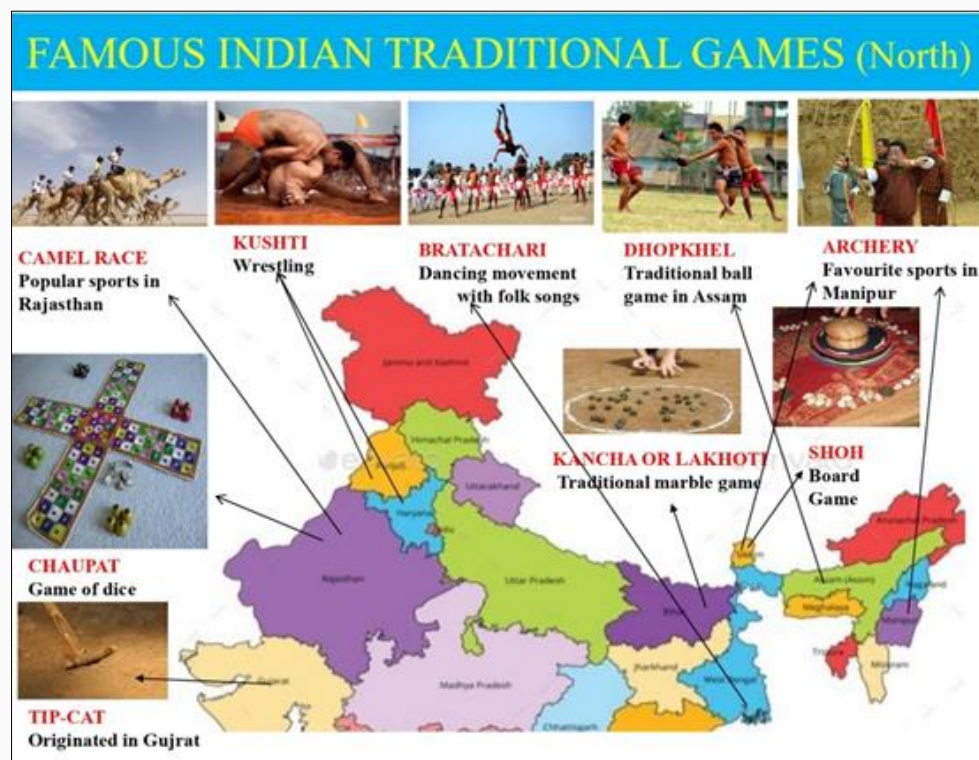


Figure 1: Famous Traditional games of Northern part of India



Figure 2: Famous Traditional games of Southern part of India

Characteristics

Indian traditional games, with characteristics like simplicity, accessibility, and community engagement, are culturally rich and integral to India's heritage. These locally organized games have minimal, straightforward rules and don't rely on expensive equipment, ensuring accessibility across economic strata. Game disputes are typically resolved within the community, emphasizing a sense of trust and cooperation among participants. They are generally safe and do not typically require adult supervision. These games are learned through imitation, provide amusement and reflect community culture. Emphasizing overall well-being and a good life, they encourage intergenerational play, facilitating shared experiences and socialization. These games provide the joy of play to the participants and promote love for the games beyond competition. Governed by community-based approaches, traditional games instill a sense of responsibility and inclusivity.

Contribution to Good Life

The physical components of traditional games, involving activities like running, jumping, and hand-eye coordination, contribute to the development of gross and fine motor skills, and improve cardiovascular capacity, enhance neuro-muscular coordination. Games such as 'Tipcat' and 'Kite Flying' specifically enhance fine motor skills through precision and control. Board games like 'Chess' and 'Ludo' promote problem-solving and decision-making ability, promoting cognitive development. Additionally, many traditional games offer emotional expression and stress reduction, with joy and mutual trust contributing to emotional well-

being. Traditional games facilitate social interaction, cooperation, and the development of social skills like teamwork, togetherness, and responsibility (Gelisi & Yazici, 2015; Rusmana *et al.*, 2022). These culturally significant games connect children with their heritage, culture, and history (Pramanik & Bhattacharya, 2018), exposing them to cultural practices, rituals, and values for a deeper understanding of their own culture and a stronger connection with their heritage (Krishnaveni & Ahmed, 2022).

Integrating Traditional Games into a Pedagogical Context

Integrating traditional games into educational settings offers numerous benefits for children's development. Firstly, experiential learning plays a crucial role, as traditional games provide hands-on, immersive experiences that facilitate cognitive and motor skill development (Madondo & Tsikira, 2022). These games must be simple, with few rules, ensuring that children can grasp them easily and engage without excessive complexity (Akbari *et al.*, 2009). Secondly, cultural relevance is a fundamental aspect, as traditional games reflect indigenous knowledge and local heritage, building a sense of identity and belonging (Raval, 2023). Educators can leverage these games to teach history, ethics, and social norms, making learning more meaningful (Saefullah *et al.*, 2024). Thirdly, collaborative learning is emphasized, as many traditional games involve teamwork, negotiation, and cooperation, enhancing communication and social interaction skills (Hartatiti *et al.*, 2018). Additionally, the simplicity of tools and equipment ensures accessibility, as traditional games often require only

minimal, inexpensive, and lightweight materials that can be easily handled by children (Mandic *et al.*, 2012). Moreover, the local surroundings, such as playgrounds, schoolyards, parks, and backyards, should be utilized to provide a safe and familiar environment for children to play (Gustian, 2021). Another essential principle is that games should align with the stages of motor and mental development, ensuring they support progressive skill-building while considering each child's individual physical capacity (Gallahue & Donnelly, 2007). Furthermore, forming homogeneous groups based on age or skill level is important to maintain fairness and encourage meaningful participation (Hartatiti *et al.*, 2018). Lastly, the principle of physical engagement ensures holistic development by promoting movement, coordination, and fitness, which are often overlooked in conventional classroom settings (Mandic *et al.*, 2012). Thus, incorporating traditional games into educational settings not only preserves cultural heritage but also nurtures cognitive, social, and physical development in children while ensuring inclusivity and accessibility in play.

Current Development of TG around the World to Ensure Good Life among Children

Over the past two decades, traditional games (TG) have gained global recognition as vital components of cultural heritage, physical activity, and community identity. International organizations like the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and UNESCO have led efforts to promote and preserve TG, as reflected in UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list. The World Ethno-sport Confederation (2015), and the International Traditional Sports and Games Association (ITSGA) play key roles in the global development and promotion of traditional sports. The Association for International Sport for All (TAFISA, 2009), previously known as the Trim and Fitness International Sport for All Association (1991) aims to create an Active World by promoting access to Sport for All worldwide (The Association for International Sport for All, 2008), TAFISA adopted a mission in 2018 to create a better world with a good life by 2030 through Traditional Games and Play.

CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, the benefits of Indian traditional games are multifaceted, encompassing physical, cognitive, emotional, and cultural dimensions. These games play a crucial role in cultural transmission and contribute to the healthy life and well-being of individuals and communities. In India, the last two decades have witnessed a concerted effort to revive and popularize traditional games. Non-profit organizations, such as the Traditional Sports and Games Federation of India (TSGFI), have been actively involved in promoting traditional games to inculcate healthy lifestyles and good life among children. Both government and non-governmental bodies can further contribute to this revival by integrating traditional

games into grassroots education, local community initiatives, and national sports policies.

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