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**UPHOLDING THE HEALTH AND CULTURE DURING THE PANDEMIC :
A STUDY ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF
TRADITIONAL AND INDIGENOUS GAMES**

□ Dr. Jayakumar. K.*
Dr. Lekha Pillai**

ABSTRACT

Consequent to the pandemic situations, health as well as wealth of the people all over the world is affected badly. However, when health promotion activities such as sports and regular gym exercises are not available in this pandemic situation, it is very difficult for individuals to meet the general WHO guidelines. Amidst this pandemic-related restriction (home confinements and closed gyms, parks, and fitness centers), how people cope up and find ways to continue their health and physical fitness remains an important question. Traditional / Indigenous games provide a number of invaluable life lessons that are vital for the healthy and holistic development. At this juncture, when one remembers the saying "Health is Wealth", the significance of traditional and indigenous games, which had a lot of positive impacts on all dimensions of the health of the people is once again emphasized.

Keywords : Health, Culture, Pandemic, Traditional, Indigenous, Games

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has made this rapid-moving world to a standstill. The entire world is affected concurrently and struck sturdily in a very short period. The consequences of this pandemic are huge, and the approaches to restrain the fast spread of the virus are to follow social distancing, being healthy and taking care on personal hygiene. The forced lockdown, resulted in the shutting down of all activities, common places, fitness and activity centers, has hindered many facets of the lives of the people as well as regular fitness activities, which in turn affected various psychological problems and serious fitness and health concerns. Recent studies have shown the negative effect of COVID-19 restrictions on social participation, life satisfaction, mental well-being, psychosocial and emotional disorders as well as on sleep quality and employment status.

Traditional games are those played from time immemorial in a society which is transmitted through generations. Both children and adults played these

games. The rules and regulations of such games are orally communicated and had no written rules. It is meant not only for recreation but also for the upkeep of the mental, physical and social health. Like modern games, it never demands special skills or training for the starters.

This paper attempts to analyse the positive impact that the traditional / indigenous games had on the health and environment of the society and how this healthy games played by the masses disappeared and how modern games took its place. In the present paper, the authors focused at understanding the importance of health and the ways through which our traditional / indigenous games can help to attain health during COVID-19.

Importance of Traditional Games

20th century is largely characterised by technological advancements in all fields. Children and adults have become largely addicted to mobile phones and social media. Outdoor and indoor traditional games have given way to video games and play stations which

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had lots of negative impact on both the adults and children. The octopus hands of the new gadgets are so powerful that it had swallowed the entire children community contributing nothing to their overall development. The ancient indigenous games were largely a vital part of their life and not played just for playing. It was actually an indicator of the culture and heritage of the society. These games offer a healthy mental and physical status which help to shape a better personality in kids, keep them in touch with nature and help them develop essential social skills.

Traditional games can develop lot of skills like logical thinking, building strategy, concentration, basic mathematics, aiming and lot more. Nowadays we build up these skills by paying money to centres that conduct personal development courses. Indigenous games teach us many things while playing such as learn to win and lose, develop sensory skills, count, add, improve motor skills, identify colour, improve hand-eye coordination and finally to have fun. History and benefits of certain selected games are given below.

Pallanguzhi

This renowned game, played in primordial South India, originated in Tamil Nadu and later spread to different parts. Pal in Tamil means "many" and kuzhi means "pit" and could literally be translated as many pits. The game is played by two players, with a wooden board that has fourteen pits (seven pits on each player's side). Each pit contains shells / seeds / pebbles, etc. The rules of capture depend on the variant of the game played. Its main benefits are improving the mathematical ability, hand-eye coordination, mental calculation, problem solving and sustained attention.

Nooran Kuchi / Noothankuchi (Pick-up Sticks Game)

This funny and interesting indoor game of South India was played in other countries too. Played with thin wooden sticks or with straws or matches, this game requires a high level of fine skill. The sticks are held in hands and dropped on a table. The sticks should be picked up one by one without moving the other. No other sticks should be disturbed while taking one stick. If there is a slight shake noticed, it will be considered as foul and the next player will start to play. The winner is the one who

scores more points. This game helps to improve eye-hand coordination and concentration power.

Lambs and Tigers

This South Indian originated mind puzzle game needs sharp memory power and keen observation. Also known as Aadu Puli Attam it is a strategic, two-player board game played mostly by men. The game is played in such a way that one player controls three tigers and the other player controls up to fifteen lambs or goats. The aim of the tigers is to capture 5 goats. The objective of the goats is to hem the tigers in so that they cannot move. This game needs, patience, keen observation, and mental calculation to guess what move will block the opponent. Through this game, the players learn the importance of teamwork, how united and well-guided goats can pause the movement of powerful tigers, etc.

Chess

Started in the North part of India during the 7th century the game of Chess spread throughout the world. It is a two-player face to face game with full of strategies. The chess board consists of 64 squares over 8 horizontal ranks and 8 vertical files. Learning and playing chess actually stimulates the growth of dendrites, which in turn increases the speed and improves the quality of neural communication throughout the brain. It improves the ability to think rationally and increase cognitive skills. This game promotes perspectives, deepens focus, elevates creativity, boosts planning skills, increases self-awareness and protects against dementia.

Anchangal (Five Stones)

The game of 5 stones is believed to have originated in Ancient Asia in 1184 B.C. Five stones are played by 2 or more players, using 5 small stones. You need to play a set of eight steps to complete the game. The player who completes all the eight rounds first is the winner. A player loses the turn if fails to complete a step or touches another stone when picking up a stone. Flinging and picking them in perfect rhythm without missing is a skill of excellent hand-eye co-ordination, memory power and concentration.

Ellu Kallu (Seven Stones)

It is another traditional Indian game spread over a wide region even today. It involves a ball and a pile of

seven flat stones. Member of one team throws the ball at the pile of stones to knock them over and then rebuild it before getting hit by one of the opponent. The team which scores seven points first will be the winner. The skills involved are running, observation, speed, body flexibility, team co-ordination, reflex action, spatial ability, aim, concentration, coordination and teamwork.

Dhayan (Ludo)

The game of ludo originated in India way back in 3300 BC which was played as Pachisi during the 6th century. It is played by 2 to 4 persons at a time. The dice values are our fate and we manage to move all the coins to a destiny with our mind without losing the coins to others. This game enhances mathematical skills, memory, analytical skills, dynamic thinking, planning ability, rapid decision making and observation power.

Kalaripayattu

Kalaripayattu originated in the southwest of India (Kerala and parts of Tamilnadu) is often believed to be the "Mother of Martial Arts, with deep roots in Indian mythology. It has a tradition of "Art of War". It is believed that Kalaripayattu-related medical and physical practice integrates a complete way of living in harmony and balance within the self and in relation to the outside world, which is achieved through physical effort, meditation and character building exercises. The exercises learned in the Kalari right from the basic are all intended to give strength to the lowest point in the vertebral column. Kalaripayattu exercises involve the usage of different body parts like hands, feet, elbow, knee and head which are synchronised with breathing rhythm.

Gilli Danda

Gilli Danda, an older format of modern Cricket or Baseball, was played in the rural areas and small towns of India around 2500 years ago. "It calls for skills, focus and perspective to hit the target. It keeps kids physically active, burns calories and improves blood circulation." The game is played with two sticks, a large one called a 'danda', which is used to hit a smaller one, the 'gilli'. Gilli Danda enhances the qualities like eye-hand coordination, team work and concentration.

Nondi

It is a popular hopping outdoor game. The game

involves drawing a grid on the ground and numbering. This game helps to improve the analytical thinking, the body balance, the eye-hand-leg coordination and the increased leg muscle movements.

Values of Traditional / Indigenous Games

While comparing the values that we attain by playing traditional / indigenous games are more than that of the games of today. Since, we all are aware that during this pandemic period everyone has to give importance for taking care of immunity and health. By revisiting to these games, which are less expensive as well as good for the development of physical / mental / social health, we can fight against the pandemic to a certain extent. "The Survival of the Fittest" theory is very much applicable in these circumstances. Let us have a close look on some of the values of the traditional games.

Builds Life Skills

Traditional games provide life related learning to children by encouraging teamwork and social interaction. Most of such games require agility and movements such as swinging of arms and jumping which boost exercise and improve eye-hand coordination. Children develop responsibility and obligation to keep their things and requisites and to understand and accept the established rules of the games. One of the most important contributions of game to socio-cultural development of a child is language development. In many games, speech, tongue twisters, song and other elements effect the language development positively. They are also effective in enriching vocabulary, expressing emotions and thoughts properly, speaking in front of public in a relaxed way, tone of voice, adjusting the stress of words, as well as listening and understanding others. The problem solving capacity of a child earned through playing games helps the development of reasoning, curiosity, creative thinking, perception, understanding skills and cognitive skills.

Social Values

By playing traditional games the children learn to communicate, share, cooperate, help each other and solve problems together. Children learn to know about the social rules and ethics such as respecting others, protecting each others' rights, decision making and

cooperating. Socio-dramatic and rough-and-tumble play offer children opportunities to test out who they are and who they might become; to negotiate turn taking; to self-regulate behaviours; to feel the heady power of groups working in harmony, and to reconcile differences when conflict arises and to take risks and feel strong emotions.

Physical and Mental Health

Through these games children become active in all seasons. They provide children joy, a feeling of happiness and satisfaction, a favourable effect of the sun's rays as well as durability and immunity. Besides, the activities during the games support the small muscles such as finger and hand, and also big ones such as arm and leg. Especially through these games respiratory, circulatory, digestive and excretory systems of the children work regularly. Many of the mental health parameters can be regulated through actively participating in traditional / indigenous activities.

Understanding Environment and Heritage

The traditional games allow people to learn about the heritage and culture of a place and even its environment. One can learn about the ecosystem of a place based on the materials used for the games. It is equally important to teach our kids about our culture and tradition as it is to teach them new age concepts. By playing Indian traditional games, children can connect with their heritage through sports and this has a deep lifelong positive impact on them. They are specimens of nation's cultural richness that has great value to be passed on to children as the next generation. We inherit these games from our ancestors and are obliged to preserve since they contain local wisdom and values. These games grow and develop in a certain region, which is full of cultural values and the community's life values and are taught from one generation to the next generation.

Conclusion

Unstructured play has a vital role in developing various aspects of children's growth, behaviour and interpersonal skills therefore, the need to re-establish traditional play in children's lives. The traditional games for children in each region and society are shaped by the local culture and local environment. Physical space, available materials and seasons can determine where and

when they are played, the props used, and the form of the game needed. Social and cultural norms, expressions and attitudes may be reflected in who is playing, how the game is played or what the game goals are. Traditional children's games often incorporate the knowledge, values, and cultural skills that have emerged over time from reciprocity between the particular community and the environment it provides.

Traditional games are closely related to people's lives and are an important part of childhood in rural areas as the poverty and simple conditions of people living in the area are get affected. Children use the natural environment as they play and use imaginative solutions, they can play freely and happily.

Quite simply, traditional games **stimulate children's growth**, physically as well as intellectually, and help them to make friends. Resurrection of different kinds of traditional games, which have almost completely been lost to the current generation, will be of great help during this period.

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