

ANCIENT INDIAN SPORTS: A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

The paper aims to provide the basic information and research in the sports and physical activities in ancient India since the Indus valley period up to early medieval period. The physical and sports have remained a good passion and outdoor and indoor activities as revealed through the archeological and written records during different historical periods. The study also gives the evidences of military and yoga related activities in ancient India. The sports culture started from Indus Valley civilization and comes up to today's modern sports through various ancient ages like:- Vedic age, Epic age, Jainism & Buddhism, Mauryan Period, Post-Mauryan Era. Ancient Indian history was rich with the knowledge of sports and physical activities. Therefore the sports have the history of the history of human civilization.

KEYWORDS: Sports, Indoor and Outdoor Games, Epics, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Chaturanga, Horse Riding, Ashtapada, Run and Hide etc

INTRODUCTION

India has the long recorded history of civilization. The history of India can be traced back to the starting of Human Civilization. The history of sports in India dates back to the Harappan period. Physical culture in ancient India was fed by a powerful fuel, the religious rites. In early India, games and sports were very much concerned about the development of the physique and for the art of offence and defense. Games like polo, martial art of judo, chess was originated in India and it was transmitted to foreign countries. Knowledge was given to their pupil by using oral method of teaching. Fortunately India has a rich heritage of these activities as can be found in the archaeological excavations of Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa, the Vedic literature, The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, the *Puranas*, Kautilya's *Arthashastra* and works of Kalidasa, Panini and Dandin as well as a whole lot of Buddhist and Jaina literature. The archaeological evidence like coins, inscriptions and monumental carvings also support our support this.

A Brief history of the sports culture in ancient India can be discussed in the following periods:-

INDUS VALLEY CIVILIZATION

VEDIC PERIOD

EPIC AGE (AGE OF THE RAMAYANA and THE MAHABHARATA)

JAIN AND BUDDHIST PERIOD

MAURYAN PERIOD and

POST-MAURYAN ERA

Indus Valley Civilization

The Indus valley Civilization, also known as Harappan Civilization, grew up around the Indus Valley, Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro. Excavations at Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro confirm that during the Indus valley civilization (2500 - 1700 B.C) the weapons involved in war and hunting exercises included the bow and arrow, the dagger, the axe and the mace. These weapons of war, for instance, the javelin (*toran*) and the discus (*chakra*), were also, frequently used in the sports arena. The Harappan society enjoyed a settled and sedentary life, playing music, singing and dancing were common. A statuette found from the Mohenjo-Daro of a dancer, points out that the important pastime of the people was dancing and singing. The other important game was swimming which has strong evidence as to the presence of the "Great Bath" which is analogous to the present day modern swimming pool. Marbles, balls and dice were used played different games. Lots of dices have been unearthed. Evidence of dice found from Harappan sites. Besides, a type of board game resembling the modern chess was also prevalent. Chess was originally called *Ashtapada* (sixty-four squares). In *Ashtapada* there were no light and dark squares like we see in today's chess board for 1,000 years. Later this game came to be known as *Chaturanga*. The Sanskrit name *Chaturanga* means 'quadripartite' — the four *angas* (divided into four parts). The earliest known form of chess is two-handed *Chaturanga*, in Sanskrit for "the 4 branches of the army." *Chaturanga* was played on an authentic cloth game surface by 2, 3 or 4 players, *Chaturanga* combines the basic strategy of chess with the dynamic challenge of chance as each move is determined by the random roll of wooden dice. A cylindrical gamesman resembling the present-day game of Draught has also been excavated at Harappa. Hunting was the other important game. Seals showing men using bows and arrows for killing wild boars and deers have been found. Punching or boxing was also played. A number of toys of children made of clay have been found which shows that children engaged themselves in lots of games.

Vedic Period

The Vedic period was named so as it was associated with the development of Vedas. During the era of the Rig-Veda, Ramayana and Mahabharata, men of a certain stature were expected to be well - versed in chariot - racing, archery, military games, swimming, wrestling and hunting. The Vedic women received a fair share of masculine attention in physical and military training. The Rig-Veda tells us that many women joined the army in those days.

A form of chariot race was one of the games most popular during the Vedic period. People were fond of swinging. Ball games were in vogue in those days by both men and women. Apart from this, a number of courtyard games like "Hide and seek" and "Run and catch" were also played by the girls. Playing with dice became a popular activity. The dices were apparently made of *Vibhidaka* nuts. From the Rig-Veda, it appears that the Vedic Aryans knew the art of boxing. History also reveals that there were sports festivals during vedic times, these sports festivals were called *samana*, archery, horse riding and chariots were conducted for the sake of prizes. In the later Vedic and post -Vedic age, yoga had been an integral part of the ancient civilization.

In the Epic Age

Aryans also gave India two historic epics called Ramayana and Mahabharata, in which chariot-racing, archery, horsemanship, military tactics, wrestling, weight-lifting, swimming and hunting are mentioned.

The Ramayana

People took much interest in games during this period. Ayodhya, Kiskindha and Lanka the three great places related to this period were centres of many games and sports. Chariot -riding and horse- riding were popular. Hunting was taken as a royal sport. Swimming was also popular and it is learnt that Ravana had a beautiful swimming pool in Asoka Vatika where he used to enjoy swimming. Other one more famous character of Hanuman in Ramayan, who was well known for his immense strength, that further occupies a pride place of *akharas* in India. Gambling with dices was also well known. Chaturang or chess as we call it today developed during this period and India is proud to be called the homeland of this great sport. Ball games were popular with the women.

The Mahabharata

Special mention has been made of games and gymnastics during this period. Jumping, arms contracting, wrestling, playing with balls, hide and seek, chasing animals were some of the games prevalent during this period. Ball games were popular and it is said that Lord Krishna played ball-games with maidens on the banks of the Yamuna." Iti-Danda "or "Gullidanda" was also one of the games played and it involves one long and one short stick. There is also a mention of the Kauravas and the Pandavas playing Gulli Danda in the Mahabharata. Yudhishthira had a great liking for dicing and it is known that he lost his whole kingdom, his brothers and his wife in this game to his opponents. People also enjoyed water sports. Bhima was a great swimmer. Duryodhana was an expert in swimming. Mahabharata mentions Pandava and Kaurava Princes, on the invitation of Duryodhana, went to the Ganges for some water games. Popular game of cards was also played by the ancient Indian, cards were earlier known as *Krida-patram*. Krida-patram (cards) was made from cloth.

During the Buddhist Period

With the flowering of Buddhism in the country, Indian sports reached the very peak of excellence. Gautama Buddha himself is said to have been an ace at archery, chariot - racing, equitation and hammer - throwing. Buddha himself reveals in the terrain of yoga. Swimming, sword - fighting (fencing, as we know it today), running, wrestling and ball games were immensely popular among the students of Nalanda and Taxila. The idea that man enters into harmony with the five elements, through the science of breathing, is to be found in the most ancient records of Indian history. A Buddhist monk from India, introduced Kalari into China and Japan in the 5th century. He taught this art in a temple. This temple is today known as the Shaolin temple. In Jainism, there is *Tri-Ratna* and *Angas* who gives us many stories related to sports. People were playing some games like; Archery, Dice, Chess, Swimming, Horse riding, Fencing & some ball games also. Women were interested in singing, dancing & some another games.

Mauryan Period

The Mauryan Empire established by Chandragupta Maurya later flourished by "Aśoka the great" ruled throughout large part of India. Kautilya composed the Arthśāstra. According to this text, the king Chandragupta had biggest military that was near about 6 lacs. They were given physical training for their fitness. In his Arthśāstra Kautilya mentions about the swimming, archery, horse-riding, fencing, chariot-racing, javelin and wrestling. Children played toys made of wood and clay.

Post Mauryan Era

Mahabhashya, tells us about *Yog-sutras* written by “Patanjali”. This text mentions about *Yog-Sutras*. The term Sutra means a thread. The *Yog-Sutra* has four *padas*, they are *Samadhi Pada*, (On being absorbed in spirit), *Sadhana Pada* (On being immersed in spirit), *Vibhuti Pada* (On supernatural abilities and gifts) and *Kaivalya Pada* (On absolute freedom). The *Bhagawad Gita* itself is considered as a great *Yogaśastra*. Yoga is as old as human being’s history. In India *yoga* has been practiced by people for more than 4000 years ago.

CONCLUSIONS

At last, the ancient Indian history concludes that the sports culture started from Indus Valley civilization and comes up to today’s modern sports through various ancient ages like:- Vedic age, Epic age, Jainism & Buddhism, Mauryan Period, Post-Mauryan Era. Ancient Indian history was rich with the knowledge of sports and physical activities.

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