
The Importance Of Games And Sports In Vedic Period

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Abstract

Sport is a universal in nature. It does not discriminate on colour, caste, creed, sex or race and so on. Participation in sports not only focuses on health but also the overall development. The history of sports in India dates back to the Vedic era. Physical culture in ancient India was fed by a powerful fuel--religious rites. There were some well-defined values like the *mantra* in the *Atharva-Veda*, saying, "Duty is in my right hand and the fruits of victory in my left". In terms of an ideal, these words hold the same sentiments as the traditional Olympic oath: ".....For the Honour of my Country and the Glory of Sport." The founders of the Olympic idea had India very much in mind when they were deciding on the various disciplines. 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 believed to have originated in India.

Keywords : - The Importance Of Games, Sports, Vedic Period, health and overall development.

Introduction

Begun as exciting games, dances and hunting in ancient times, the domain of physical education of modern times has become time-tested and well-established field aiming at physical, mental, social and psychological development of an individual. From survival in ancient period as basic objective behind physical education, all-round development of individual has become the motto of physical education and sports. However, this transition in the outlook and objective of physical education and sports from ancient to modern through medieval period has traversed various stages of growth.

In India, *dehveda* or the body-way is defined as "one of the ways to full realization." In the day and age of the *Rig-Veda*, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* men of stature and circumstance were expected to be competent in chariot-racing, archery, horsemanship, military tactics, wrestling, weight-lifting, swimming and hunting

The *guru-shishya* (teacher-pupil) relationship has always been an integral part of Indian sport from time immemorial. Physical perfection has been an integral part of Hinduism. One of the means to fully realize one's Self is defined as the body - way or *dehvada*. Salvation was to be gained through physical perfection or *kaya sadhana*, possible only through perfect understanding of the body and its functions. The capstone of *Hatha Yoga* is strength, stamina and supreme control of the body functions. The zenith of the whole experience is the fusion of meditation and physical movement. Practice of yoga was recommended for the development of spiritual strength.

Suryanamaskara, the origin of which dates back to Vedic period was performed more as a religious duty than today a mere physical exercise or training. Now this has developed into a very popular exercise for health. The practice of pranayama was another important development which took place during this period. It was considered beneficial for the lungs and as means of prolonged life. Military training was also popular during this period, because Aryans were engaged in subjugating non-aryans and establishing their supremacy. As it demanded physical strength, vigor and martial skill they were involved in hand wrestling, chariot racing, hunting, elephant riding and boxing were also needed in battle. The 'eight - fold method' encompasses techniques associated with breathing control or *pranayama*, body posture or *asanas*, and withdrawal of the senses or *pratyahara*. Religious rites provided the needed impetus to physical culture in ancient India. Many of the present day Olympic disciplines are sophisticated versions of the games involving strength and speed that were common in ancient India and Greece.

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 stratagems, swimming, wrestling and hunting. Excavations at Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro confirm that during the Indus valley civilization (2500 - 1550 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. Lord Krishna wielded an impressive discus or *Sudarshan chakra*. Arjuna and Bhima, two of the mighty Pandavas, excelled in archery and weightlifting respectively. Bhimsen, Hanuman, Jamvant, Jarasandha were some of the great champion wrestlers of yore.

Women, too, excelled in sport and the art of self - defense, and were active participants in games like cock - fighting, quail - fighting and ram - fighting. Earlier day's men used to participate in most of the games, sports and athletics, women faces many constraints such as physical, mental, family, social, cultural, religious and so on later they also started active participation in all events. Ancient India,

especially in Rig-Vedic period, women enjoyed equal status with men. They had an honorable place in the society. They were not isolated from men and freely participated in public life. They attended great assemblies and state occasions. They studied the Vedas and composed hymns. They also distinguished themselves in science and learning at their times. They were considered intellectual companies of their husbands, as the friends and loving helpers in the journey of life of their partners, in their religious duties and the Centre of their domestic bliss. In Vedic times, women were not treated as inferior or subordinate but equal to men in all matters of life. They were given education and had a voice in the selection of their husband. In the religious field, women enjoyed all rights and regularly participated in religious ceremonies. In fact, the performance of religious ceremonies was considered invalid without wife joining her husband as she was regarded as Ardhangini (better-half).

Ball games were in practice during this period and were played by men as well as women. Game with ball seems to have been the chief outdoor physical exercise. Playing of dice had become very popular. It was played by the young as well as the old. The art of the boxing was known to the Aryans and it was used in battles for defeating the enemies.

Hunting as a sport was also prevalent. Music and dancing was well known. Birds and animal fighting was also popular pastime. Fights were organized in the fair and festivals for amusements. Great emphasis was placed on the culture of physique and strength during the Vedic period. Physical strength was emphasized greater than academic learning.

Several games now familiar across the world owe their origins in India, particularly, the games of chess, ludo (including ladders and snake), and playing cards. The famous epic Mahabharata narrates an incidence where a game called Chaturang was played between two groups of warring cousins.

The age when epic Mahabharata was written is variously dated around 800 BC to 1000 BC. In some form or the other, the game continued till it evolved into chess. Thus this game was known in India nearly 3000 years ago. It is the view of some historians that this game was also used in the allocation of land among different members of a clan when a new settlement was being established.

Chess originated in ancient India and was known as *Chatur-Anga* - Meaning 4 bodied, as it was played by 4 players. From this name we have its current name *Shatranj*. One such instance is in the Mahabharata when Pandavas and Kauravas play this game. Yudhistira the eldest of the Pandavas places his bets on his kingdom, his wife Draupadi and all other material possessions.

Ancient India was the birthplace of the game of playing cards and has since spawned a plethora of card based games which are played the world over. The game of playing cards was one of the favorite pastimes of Indians in ancient times. This game was patronized especially by the royalty and nobility. This game was known in ancient times as Kridapatram, in the middle ages, it was known as Ganjifa. Some scholars are of the opinion that this game was in fact introduced into India by the Mughals. But according to Abul Fazal author of the Ain-e-Akbari, the game of cards was of Indian origin and that it was a very popular pastime in the Indian (Hindu) courts when the Muslims came into India.

Cards were known as *Krida-patram* in ancient India. These cards were made of cloth and depicted motifs from the Ramayana, Mahabharata, etc. A tradition carried on today with floral motifs and natural scenery.

Ancient India claims to have been the origin of Judo and Karate. Something similar to karate, it was called *Kalaripayate*. Excavations at Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro confirm that during the Indus valley civilization (2500 - 1550 B.C) the weapons involved in war and hunting exercises included the bow and arrow, the dagger, the axe and the mace.

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