

## Educational Importance of Indian Home and Street Games and Toys

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### Abstract

India has great history of games and toys which the children enjoyed during their childhood. While some of the games such as kabaddi and kho-kho have made their place at the national and international level, most of these are at the verge of extinction. These games kept the players attached with the mother earth, ground, soil and mud which led to their physical development in natural surroundings thus developing immunity. Children learnt many desirable social values through these games and their emotional and social development was taken care of through play way method. As aim of education is holistic development of the learner. It would be great if the Indian home and street games and toys are brought back as these have great educational value. It would reduce mental stress which present system of education is putting on children due to its total examination and result orientation.

### Introduction:

"Children's traditional games (also called folk games) are those that are passed from child to child, generation to generation, informally by word of mouth," and most children's games include at least two of the following six features in different proportion: physical skill, strategy, chance, repetition of patterns, creativity, and vertigo.

India has great history of games and toys which the children enjoyed during their childhood. While some of the games such as kabaddi and kho-kho have made their place at the national and international level most of these are at the verge of extinction. Most of these games kept the players attached with the mother earth, ground, soil and mud which led to their physical development in natural surroundings thus developing immunity. Allergies and depressions were unheard of few years back when children played outdoor games. Digital games were not heard of. Children did not have poor eyesight problems. Most of outdoor games were group and team games thus leading to social, emotional and spiritual development in the form of development of desirable values to be good human beings. Sports and games instil punctuality, patience, discipline, team work, dedication, honesty and confidence in the players informally without any lectures, sermons and moral preaching. As the home and street games were played with friends and relatives such as cousins from the joint family, family and social relations became stronger, leading to love and support as relations and friendships made in childhood are for life.

This also helped in physical exercise of children every evening, meeting the friends, having fun, getting angry charging others of cheating, agreeing again, thus learning cooperation, value of team spirit and being honest during play also otherwise other friends will not include them in next game. Many such values are learnt indirectly and formed into habits which are valuable and helpful throughout life.

We as parents and teachers must do something to revive the forgotten games as these were cheap and best, eco-friendly and great source of holistic development of children which is the most important aim of education being totally ignored in the present system of education which is totally examination oriented leading to only mental development that too partially.

The present paper discusses the Indian games which were played by children in and around their homes with peers till few years back especially in the period from 1960 to 1990. It also throws light on their important role in the physical, social, emotional, cognitive and spiritual development which helped them to be academically sound. This article is nostalgic in nature as the writer visited her childhood through writing it and realized educational importance of these games and toys even in the present system of education.

**Children's Wealth:** During our childhood in 1960s and 70s children's wealth was some colourful glass marbles known as kanche, some marble or wooden pieces known as gitte, some broken earthen ware pieces rubbed on ground and made into beautiful shapes for playing shatapu or hotchscope, one odd rubber ball, small and big wooden sticks, one old bicycle tyre, one lattu or spinning top as it is called in English, one skipping rope, one family or community carom board and one ludo or snake and ladder game jointly possessed by few neighbourhood children. Some girls used to possess home-made dolls and left over pieces of cloth and beads which they used to dress those dolls thus learning hand crafts, socializing with friends and community values and traditions.

#### **Following games were usually played by children at home or in streets:**

**Ball Games:** Ball is perhaps the first toy in a child's life which is social in nature. Before that in infancy children only enjoy colours, sounds and movements of toys. When a child starts walking ball communicates with the child, it invites the child to catch it, to play with it, to have fun, to be happy, to be physically active like its own nature of always moving, always in action on slightest loving touch. Small children love colourful balls. Balls are made of rubber, plastic, leather and wood. A few decades back children in rural areas used to make their own balls using cloth. These were eco-friendly, non-hurting even if children got hit with it. Not only children, people of all ages have been playing many games and sports with balls since times immemorial. Ball games are very popular all over the world. From as simple games as throwing and catching ball to base ball, basket ball, hand ball, foot ball etc. all are played for fun and even competitions. Some games are ball based such as hockey, tennis; both lawn tennis and table tennis and cricket which are not only nationally but internationally popular with crazy lot of fans. Humble ball has gone a long way to make it entry in the world Cups, Asiads and Olympics.

Balls are even liked and played by pet animals such as dogs. They can be easily trained in catching and fetching ball thrown by you. A few years back we used to see elephants playing foot ball in a circus team. Ball has been a good friend of all age groups and will remain to be so. So get your children a ball and let them play with it indoors and outdoors. Teachers can use ball games to teach many concepts in science, social science and mathematics.

**Playing with Glass-marbles (Kanche-Goli):** Playing with little, colourful glass balls has been a favourite game among Indian boys since long time especially in north Indian towns and village. In every street and open ground boys could be found playing with little wonders. They would softly strike one with the other first using both hands making a musical sound of tick-tick, then hit one of many placed on the ground to which the game partner has asked to hit. If the right strike takes place, the hitting boy will win the one he has hit, continuing the game thus till he has tried to hit all, winning some and losing on some. It needed concentration for right hitting, improvement in eye-sight, development of psycho-motor skills and physical exercise of course took place. As children played in the katcha ground making little pits with their hands and fingers, touch of earth took place which was also considered good. At the end of game, one child will be wealthier than the other by few marbles. Socializing with friends in reality lead the values of sharing, caring, cooperation, tolerance and team spirit.



**Gitte:** Gitte means little wooden blocks or small cube shaped marbles. While boys played kanchas, girls used to play with colourful readymade gittas or carefully picked up marble cubes. This is also played with hands. Most of the hot days of long summer vacations in north Indian homes were spent in playing few rounds of game of gittas in one of the neighbourhood houses. At least two girls played together. The game is played in many ways using hands and fingers, sitting on the bare floor without any mat or sheet. It leads to lot of hand and finger exercises, improving grip, concentration as the marbles have to be brought from palm to the back of hand trying not to drop any of five then from back of the hand to grip again after little throw in the air and catching all five. Dropping any one will lead to less winning points, dropping all means losing and the next player will take over. In another type of game, one gate is formed keeping left hand thumb and index finger on the floor. Then with right hand gittas are spread on the floor in front of the gate and one gitta is flown into the air, in the mean time another one on the floor has to be passed through the gate and the simultaneously catching the one flown into the air. It needed concentration, speed and accuracy. Really amazing game developing cognitive ability along with other benefits mentioned in other games such as spending quality time with friends.



**Shatapu or hopscotch:** Shatapu is played both by boys and girls but girls play if more. A drawing of rectangular shape is drawn on the kutchra ground or it can be drawn on pucca floor also using chalk. It is divided into few rows and columns depending upon the type of shatapu children are playing on a particular day. It needs a lot of hopping and bending leading to full body exercise. Apart from physical strength it helps in maintaining body balance, mental and social development. Children play in their angans or in the streets in front of their



houses and even in school during recess and free time.

**Poshan-Pa:** Both boys and girls used to play this game by two children holding each other's hands and forming a gate type structure through which other children had to cross entering from one side to exit from other. The two children forming gate sang a song in Hindi which goes like this

“Poshan-Pa bhai poshan pa, dakiye ne kya kiya, sau rupe ki ghari churahi, ab to jail me jana parege, jail ki roti khani padegi, jail ka pani peena padega, ab to jail me aana padega.”

When the song ended, gate was closed, trapping one or two children inside the jail they formed by dropping the gate. These children were considered out of game. Then the game started again till last child was trapped. Last was the winner of the game.

This game gives message that stealing is a crime for which one has to go to prison as punishment.



**Skipping Rope:** The cheap and best form of full body exercise, even practiced today by national and international players for fitness. Humble skipping rope has been giving company as a friend to children as well as grownups in homes, streets and play grounds since times immemorial. Skipping rope can be made of jute, plastic or rubber. It can be played by a single player as well as in group. It is real fun to watch players skipping rope in various styles.



**Playing with Cycle Tyre:** Playing, running with discarded cycle tyre was a favourite game for children. Running is a good exercise. Whenever parents asked children to bring anything from nearby shop, children picked up their single tyre eco-friendly motor and ran to the shop, running errand within minutes.



**Gilli-Danda:** Danda is around two feet wooden stick and gilli is around six inches piece of wood tapered on both sides. It is kept on the ground where a small pit has been made on which it is placed. Then it is stroke hard on one end to make it fly into the air. Then in the air it is stroke to send it as far as possible. The strong the strike, the longer the distance it would travel just like a sixer in the cricket game. Then the distance would be measured by the players from the point where it was kept to the point where it fell. Sometimes the fielder boy would catch gilli in the air, declaring the striking player as out. So this is a sort of desi version of cricket. Once it was very popular in villages and towns. Now hardly any boys are seen playing gilli-danda. It developed sense of distance and direction, needed concentration and attention. Lead to lot of exercise through running, catching, striking, sitting and



standing while measuring distances. Teachers can make use of this traditional game to teach mathematics measurements, distances, time, speed etc. It would be fun as well as learning.

**Kho-Kho:** Kho-kho is a team game which involves lot of running, sitting and running again around a queue of sitting game partners. It needs lot of attention as just uttering of kho and pat on the back of sitting payer can lead to catching of player standing in front of or near the sitting player who has been asked to perform runner and catcher now. The game has lot of fun. Great team spirit, cooperation, coordination and energy is needed for playing kho-kho. It needs only ground to play. Kho-kho is played in most of the schools in India and inter- school, district, state and national level competitions are also organised.



**Kabaddi:** Kabaddi is an ancient Indian game. It has been considered a rural game most of the time but of late it is gaining popularity at national and even international level. It is a game of physical strength as well as mental alertness. It is also played in two teams. Leading player of one team challenges the players of the opposite team by uttering “kabaddi, kabaddi” repeatedly and tries to touch one of them. The opposite team members try to save themselves, at the same time try to pull and put him down.



**Hide and Seek:** Hide and seek is another interesting game which is played indoors or outdoors. Children play this game in a small group. While a child on duty counts numbers up to say 50 and declares that he or she is coming to look for those who by that time have hid somewhere behind the door, under the bed, in some dark corner or any other unsuspected place. The child on duty has to be very vigilant in locating the hidden members or the hidden child will come out from behind and make him out by touching him/her. If the child on duty finds one of the hidden children, the next duty is of the first caught child. It involves lot of running around, looking for places where others could hide, thus a lot of fun is there in hide and seek.



**Running and Catching or pakdan pakrai:** It has been a popular game for several years with young boys and girls of all ages in childhood. The child on duty has to run after, touch and out any other in the group. The child who is touched or caught hold of is on the next duty and the game continues leading to lot of physical exercise and fun. Sometimes children fall also and get hurt but after some time they start playing again thus managing their pains themselves.



**Pithu-Garam:** This is very simple, yet very vigorous game involving lot of running around and time management skills. There are around ten pieces of flat stones or broken earthen pots. These are arranged one upon the other in a sort of tower form. The players are divided into two teams. One player from first team has to break the tower by striking it with ball and run to bring the ball back. The other team members have to make the tower again by arranging it. But when they come to arrange the pieces again, they have to be careful, that the striking member may not come back with ball and hit them while arranging it, so they have to arrange it in very short time. Turn by turn the game continues till the players get tired and say bye for the day. It has all the fun and physical exercise. In the rural areas, children are seen it playing with a ball made of cloth pieces made into ball. It does not hurt even if by mistake it is struck hard.



**Dog and the bone:** Drawing an enclosure, round in shape, two players with a handkerchief kept in the middle, try to take it away, the other player tries to prevent the opponent from taking it.

**Statue-release:** Your friend uttering the word “statue” and you act a statue. Moving, speaking or even closing or opening of eyes will lead to out, generally the denner would say release very late. It was fun to see the statue in various body forms in which s/he got caught to be statue.

**Red Letter:** Jumping every time the denner says red letter, missing one jump and one is out of the game.

**Doll Homes:** Girls used to play doll home with their friends and younger brothers and sisters in which one would act as father and the other as mother and another usually youngest one as child. The leader would create dialogues to be spoken by the other actors and direct them what to do. They had some material which was decorated as household items. Some children had kitchen set or some dolls, some had toy sofa and chair tables or even dressing table.



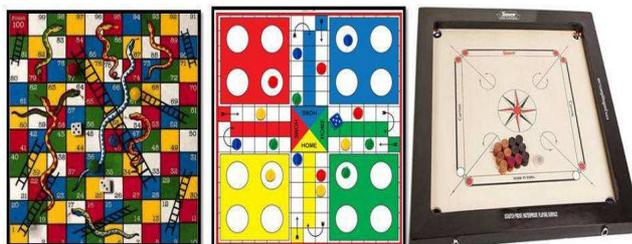
Apart from playing family, School-School was also played in which there would be a principal, teacher and students playing perfect school and classroom scenes. Teacher and principal usually carried cane or scale. Proper attendance was taken. Some dolls were also made to sit as students.



Then there was doctor-doctor game in which doctor always had stethoscope to check the patient. Patients were usually given fake injections and some medicines which was usually sugar wrapped up in pieces of paper.

Children learnt life skills of adjustment, communication, bonding, cooperation, sharing etc. through these games.

**Ludo, Snake and Ladder and Carom:** Usually every home had these cheap and best game equipments which was played every evening by the family members making their bonding loving and strong. These were good pass time during summer vacation days when it was not very hot outside. These are still part of many families in India. These games are inclusive in nature. Those who are not able to move out for outdoor games can have fun playing these games with family members and friends at home and even in class rooms.



**Chess:** Chess is a good game for mental development. It needs a lot of thinking, alertness and concentration. It has become a popular game at international level. Even if it needs lot of sitting, physical fitness needs to be maintained by the players as “Healthy mind resides in a healthy body” is a popular saying.



**Spinning Top or Lattu:** Spinning top is a small toy made of wood but now plastic tops are also available. It is cone shaped having a nail or pipe sort of nearly two inches attached in the centre on one side. At this nail, a thin rope is wrapped. When rope is pulled, the top is left on the ground to swirl. It goes round and round for some time, generally for two to three minutes. During its swirl, some children pick it up gently and make it to swirl on their palms. If you want to go ga-ga make it swirl on your belly. There cannot be anything more funny than this to make you laugh for long time thus having full body exercise both externally as well as of internal organs through loud laughter as laughter is the best immunity booster.



**Wooden Baby Walker:** A child’s first gadi, which helped to child to stand on his/her feet and learn to walk.

**Making houses in wet sand and toys with clay:** These were fun filled activities which children enjoyed. This was a common scene at the beach areas. But in other areas also, whenever sand came for any construction work, children used to make homes sitting on sand and using their hands and feet to make beautiful sand homes. Even dogs enjoyed chasing each other on sand.



Making clay toys was also common during our childhood. We got this as holiday home-work to make birds and animals out of clay, dry and colour



these. It was so creative work using hands, fingers, eyes and mind. Children got completely absorbed in doing this activity, showing their best. It was so eco-friendly and child friendly.

Teachers must encourage children to use pure clay now also in schools instead of synthetic one which is toxic and costly. Making colourful beads out of clay to learn counting and multiplication tables and other concepts of mathematics such as addition and subtraction, division etc. can be easily done through these.

**Ill-Effects of digital games:** These days children do not play outdoor games and run enough. On the top of it they eat junk food sitting in front of Television for long hours or playing games on mobile phones leading to weak bones which break on the slightest fall. In the old days there were very few fractures.

Digital games do not allow child to be social, s/he plays in isolation thus social development of the child does not take place. As the child stops going out for outdoor games and sports her/his physical development also hampers. Eye-sight is also negatively affected due to use of computers and mobile phones for long hours. Sitting for long time may lead to bending of spine and permanent deformity. Being too much in virtual world takes children away from reality. They do not understand and realize the importance of communication with real friends, family members. Thus development of desirable values of respecting and obeying elders, loving friends, sharing, cooperation does not take place. Scientists are warning against ill effects of radiations emitted from electronic devices on nervous system of adults also, we can well imagine their effect on tender bodies of children. Very serious psychological problems have been reported when children get addicted to virtual world; it is not easy to take them out of this addiction without taking help from psychologists which may need lot of counselling and even medication. Real world problems and values are learned by playing traditional games, such as how to take victory or loss to their stride, how to empathize with losing friend, not to cheat and get boycotted. Losing or winning from computer is living in the virtual world. Happiness or sadness is in isolation and not shared emotion, does not lead to development of interpersonal skills.

So balance should be maintained between child's use of virtual world and outdoor games. Indian household games never led to addiction, depression and other psychological problems.

**Review of Related Literature:** No research papers were found on the same topic. However interesting articles were found which mentioned of these sweet games and toys. Images of almost all games and toys were found on the internet showing that people do remember these, but nobody is trying to revive these by doing research and trying to convince parents and teachers to leave electronic gadgets for some time and go to play these games outside with their peers.

**Objectives of this Study:** The objectives of this study are as under

- To explore the Indian household and street games and toys which are on the verge of extinction
- To make readers aware about the educational importance of these toys and games
- To find out whether any children play these games and with these toys in cities and villages of India.

- To motivate schools to encourage students to play these games and with these toys in schools as well as at home.

### **Research Questions:**

Q. 1. To find out which street games and toys were popular in India a few decades back

Q. 2 To find out whether children in India still play with household toys and games which were popular a few decades back.

Q. 3 To find out the educational importance of the Indian household toys and street games which children used to play few decades back.

Q. 4. To find possibilities of the reintroduction of old Indian toys and games in the Indian homes and schools.

**Population for the Study:** All children in the age group 3 to 18 years in Indian cities, towns and villages comprise the population of the study as this age group plays with toys at home and starts going out to play in the neighbourhood and streets to play with their peers.

**Sample of the Study:** Sample for the study has been collected from Delhi and Town and Villages of Mahendergarh district of Haryana for comparison if children in big cities or towns or villages play with old Indian toys and street games.

**Tools for the data Collection:** Observation and Interviews were used as tools for data collection in this study.

**Data Analysis:** Data analysis was done using percentages. 500 Children were asked about which games do they play during their free time at home and in school. None of them mentioned about tradition games. Only few about 2% told they play run and catch. Streets, playgrounds and some homes were observed for two months but children were found either watching TV or playing games on mobiles. Village children too were busy with mobiles and watching TV. School principals, parents and teachers were motivated to introduce using traditional games and toys for teaching-learning purpose. They agreed to it with little hesitation. Now further research only will find if they have followed it or not.

**Major finding of the study was that tradition Indian games are not played by children these days in cities, towns and villages as they are too much busy with their studies, competitions and electronic gadgets.**

**Conclusion:** Indian household and street games and toys should be brought back as these were eco-friendly, child friendly, economic and of great educational importance. These helped in the holistic development of children thus achieving overall aim of education. Every school should have reservoir of these games and toys and teachers must make use of these to teach their subjects as far as possible. Home work based on playing these games and with these toys would also be a fun for children. Happy children will grow into healthy adults ready to take up their responsibilities as good citizens and more humane human beings.

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