

HEALTH AND WELLNESS THROUGH INDIGENOUS GAMES

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“A healthy mind resides in a healthy body”

- Ancient Roman Proverb

Bernarr Macfadden, often labelled as the “father of physical culture” championed the belief that one should cultivate a healthy physique instead of a healthy mind because the route to mental toughness begins with an energetic body. His own life was an example to this belief as he grew up in poverty in the eastern Ozark Mountains of Missouri and spent his entire life fighting early death and overcoming physical challenges.

Ancient people from Mesopotamia, Persia and Babylon had uncommon energy and strength. It is with the help of these mountain people that Egyptian kings had built roads in impregnable areas and pyramids of wonder. They did not get trained in nor had well equipped gyms to acquire physical wellbeing. All they had was their rugged nature and strenuous training in the adversities of nature. They were agile mentally and strong physically.

Ever wondered how Jamichholong, the legendary folk hero acquired his unmatched strength? Or how Naithokbi, the ordinary girl could emerge as a great warrior? Well, the answer lies in the tremendous physical activity the indigenous youth were engaged in their communities. These activities not only include traditional games and ceremonial dances, but also subsistence activities, such as hunting, fishing, gathering and preparation of their own foods. The involvement of ancient indigenous youth in physical and recreational activities impacted upon their holistic development. Thus, indigenous games may be looked upon as an important indicator for the health and wellness of an individual.

Since time immemorial, ancient communities had been engaged in recreational activities like running, racing, weightlifting, wrestling, hunting that were culture specific. In case of the indigenous communities of Tripura too, recreational sports were widely played. Some of these are mentioned along with their modern versions of the games such as *Harimai* (a form of Chasing game), *Huijakmai* (a form of Hide and seek game), *Sohlaimung* (a form of Wrestling), *Wa dumlaimung & Dwkhwi Solaimung* (forms of Tug of War), *Togla tanlao* (a form of Cock

fight), Dari thwngmung, Kaldong or Kadong, Longoi Chokmung, Muphuk Sagwnang, Musta Seklaio, etc. One of the most popular activities among the indigenous communities was hunting for food by shooting wild animals. The skills accumulated through indigenous games provide the youth with potential strength to perform in mainstream sports.



Sohlaimung. *Courtesy: Tripura Online*



Dwkhwi Solaimung. *Courtesy: Tripura Online*



Wa Dumlaimung. *Courtesy: Tripura Online*



Togla Tanlaio. *Courtesy: Tripura Online*

These games not only involved the individuals in building interpersonal relationships amongst themselves but it also helped them acquire survival skills. Traditional games are played mainly

for entertainment purpose and are lower in cost compared to the mainstream games. It does not strictly adhere to the maintenance of rules but rather promotes cooperation and reconciliation among the players. It is usually group based and not individual. Majority of the Indigenous games require the engagement of motor fitness components like muscular strength and muscular endurance for optimal performance. Each of these games require muscle strength to attack the opponent as well as use muscle endurance to prolong this attack for a long period. The activity involved therein develops the physical strength and endurance of individuals that are helpful for health and wellness of individuals.

Studies have revealed that physical activity through movement and expenditure of energy has numerous psychosocial, physiological and developmental benefits for young people. Its impact on the holistic development of young people has also been established by several researchers. The games played in mainstream sports are nothing but the traditional games that have evolved throughout the centuries. It is unfortunate that indigenous games are rarely played in the recent times except during indigenous festivities like “Rai Balma Panda”, “Garia Ter” and “Hojagiri” to name a few. It is also rare to find an indigenous games event being organised although the government has taken initiative to promote it. One can find it only in the remote areas of the state where only a few would be actually playing it as a pastime activity.

The world had recently witnessed a dramatic change due to the onset of COVID-19 pandemic affecting billions and infecting millions. Besides crippling the world economy and civil societies, it had drastically changed the demography at large. Indigenous population was barely affected by it due to its consistent involvement in physical activity and exercise. Several studies have revealed that exercise keeps the body fit and strong. A healthy body and healthy mind is equipped to face the challenges of life. The worst to be hit by the pandemic were the physically weak or the ones who were least involved in physical activity. When the whole world was locked down to contain the spread of the deadly virus, man was compelled to resort to nature and natural ways of building immunity. One had to exercise in the private domains of one’s home in the form of hard labour and strenuous physical chores just like the way the indigenous communities had been doing. “Nothing causes as much damage to our body as long physical inactivity” was rightly said Aristotle, the great philosopher. Therefore, indigenous games should be promoted by the society and also form a part of the curriculum of educational institutions.

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