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"Intersections Of Culture And Physicality: Documenting The Indigenous Sports Of Nagaland"

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Abstract:

Indigenous sports play a significant role in Naga society as it is extremely embedded in cultural practices towards survival skill as well as physical ability. Nagaland is a habitat for many Naga tribes, has an interesting wealth of colorful festival and traditions, norms and values, different forms of indigenous games and sports-played by the local populace. These indigenous games and sports are played during different festivals or community celebrations, more than mere entertainment; they are symbolic of the values, courage, unity and respect for tradition of the Naga. By Incorporating indigenous sport into education, Nagaland has the potential to foster a more integrative and culturally attuned model of learning, for which physical, emotional and social development is important for children. In the last few years, there has been renewed interest in indigenous sports, with attempts at integrating them into contemporary sporting festivals such that they will be enjoyed by future generations. The paper examines the value of indigenous sports of Nagaland residing in North-Eastern region of India. The paper brings out the functionality of indigenous sports and significance while maintaining and conveying cultures from generations to generations.

Keywords: Nagaland, Indigenous Sports, Tribe, Naga.

Methodology

The methodology used is that of Qualitative Analysis of data and information collected from secondary sources such as newspapers, journals, websites to study and gain a deeper understanding of the indigenous sports of Nagaland

Introduction

The Naga belong to the Mongolian race tribal community of Nagaland, inhabitants of seventeen (17) major tribes and sixteen (16) districts located in the Northeast region of India. Nagaland is bounded by the States of Arunachal Pradesh on the north, Manipur on the south, Assam on the West and International border with Myanmar (Burma) on the east China on the north and Bangladesh on the West. Each Naga tribes are known for its vibrant dresses, languages, festivals, traditional songs, dance and sports. Their diverse traditional and cultural practices make the nagas unique from the rest of the country. Among all the practices, indigenous sports that are not only integral part of their cultural identity but also play a significant role in promoting physical fitness, community bonding and social cohesion. Which mostly played during festivals to portray the dedication of Naga community in preserving and transmitting its culture and heritage to the offspring. Those indigenous sports are passed down through generations symbolize a rich tapestry of varied culture and commitment to the community and not as pastimes.

“We (Nagas) ought to take pride in playing indigenous games and also teach the younger generation to learn all before all it is lost” (Niekha,2018). Indigenous sports are pedagogically very important, as they offer significant knowledge about cultural customs, community values, and comprehensive learning. Indigenous sports, which have been transmitted across generations, are a part of indigenous cultures, developing physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. Incorporating indigenous sports into pedagogy makes education more enriching, honoring cultural diversity, and contributing to the development of a more inclusive and sustainable future. Some of the indigenous sports of Naga tribes are discussed below:

1. Naga wrestling (kene): The Naga wrestling is the most popular indigenous sports among the naga community, this sport existed since time of forefathers. In the days of yore, wrestling was a means for conflicts or resolution. The sport is played on a circular field, participants wear a belt around their waist which is used for ‘takedowns’. This game requires a combination of strength and strategy skill. The objective of the game is to bring down the opponent’s body above the knee to the ground.

Pedagogical importance: This indigenous game holds educational values as it help in preserving the cultural, community engagement and build brotherhood. It also aids to physical strength, physical fitness and skill. It’s a dynamic tool for education that goes beyond the classroom, fostering both personal growth and cultural continuity.

2. Traditional fire making: Fire making is one of the indigenous sports of many Naga tribes in Nagaland in which men participated. In this sport no modern chemical or flammable Substances are used, instead the participants use dried wood, finely stripped bamboo, dry leaves or any other materials which can be burned easily. The participants place the dry wood under his foot and holds the ends of the bamboo strip in each hand. He pulls the thin bamboo strip back and front until the friction ignites the wood.

Pedagogical Importance: “This develops one of the earliest science knowledge areas that friction causes fire” (vivi et al.,2025). It also develops precision and concentration skills. It is one of the effective medium to impart the educational values and to promote cultural heritage, environmental awareness, personality development, social interaction and community service.

3. Stilt bamboo walk/race: Stilt bamboo walk/race is one of the most popular and existing indigenous sports among Naga tribes. It is played and enjoyed by most of the tribes in Nagaland and is known and called by different name and terms according to their own dialect. It is a game to determine one's

ability, agility, flexibility and technique. In this game, the participants compete by walking/racing with two bamboo poles as legs.

Pedagogical Importance: it is a pedagogical tool that promotes physical health, cognitive development, cultural preservation and social cohesion. Integration of this traditional activity into the education framework helps to raise people who lead a balanced life are physically active and socially responsible.

4. **Hekko:** Hekko is an indigenous game played by the natives of changki village under Mokokchung district. Hekko is a game of competition usually played among the youngsters at the village to socially identity or recognize the “Heroes” among the youths. Two opposite teams are engaged to play Hekko. One team is called “Akho” means “tiger” and the other “Ami” means “man”. The team Ami should always be within the demarcated circle by making a human chain and the Akhos stay outside the circle. When Akho is caught by the Amis, he is not released till he says “Joko” means “surrender”.

Pedagogical Importance: In modern education Hekko can be integrated into physical education curricula and experiential learning modules. They promote active learning, where students learn through experience rather than passive instruction.

5. **Top spinning:** Top spinning is played almost by all the inhabitants tribes of Nagaland. The top is made out of hard wood and the spinning rope is made of sliced string from a small plant. It is played individual or in group, each player takes turn to spin the top, when the first person/ group spin their tops, second tries to hit the opponent’s top.

Pedagogical Importance: This game is a test of skill that helps players to be accurate and precise in enabling the spin. It develops the concentration skill and develops the team spirit. It is a dynamic educational tool that fosters cognitive development, cultural preservation and social integration

6. **Akikiti:** Aki kiti is also known as sumi kick fighting, is a semi-contact combat sport involving kicking and blocking with soles of the feet. It is played inside the circular area between two fighters and using of hand to catch or push is restricted in this game. The main aim of this game is to promote physical fitness, physical strength and strong leg work.

Pedagogical Importance: it is a dynamic educational tool which encompasses physical health, cognitive development, cultural awareness and social skills. Integrating Akikiti into the pedagogical framework allows educators to create a balanced learning environment that places equal value on academic knowledge and cultural heritage in order to prepare students for being confident, culturally rooted and socially responsible.

7. **Greased bamboo poles climbing:** Indigenous sports of the nagas greased bamboo poles climbing is played not just for amusement but also to determine the ability, technique and skill of an individual. A long bamboo poles is erected and greased (animal's fats) is applied and number of young men from different morung participate in this game. However, most of the time a group of men work together by helping each other to claim the reward. This working together indicates that unity is strength and to demonstrate the participants physical strength and fighting skills.

Pedagogical Importance: This game holds significant contributing to both the physical and cognitive development of individuals within the community. It also develops the attitude of overcoming the hurdles and striving to reach a goal.

8. Pcheda (throwing a bamboo stick): Pcheda is a traditional indigenous sport of the Naga people. This traditional game is deeply rooted in the cultural heritage of the southern Angami community and is often played during festivals, celebrations and community gatherings. Pcheda is an indigenous game where a player throws or slides a thin bamboo stick from a distance on a solid mud platform. Traditionally, it was also used as a training activity for young men, preparing them for warfare and community defense.

Pedagogical Importance: The game improves the players physical development since it is a game of muscle reflex and technique. Also, improves concentration, discipline, practice and strategy.

9. Go karting (Naga culture of traditional wooden wheel race): The traditional wooden wheel races in Naga culture are a fascinating blend of craftsmanship, community spirit and competition. The carts are made from strong wood, wheels are large with wooden spokes. The cart's body is simple yet sturdy, designed to hold a driver and additional passenger to push from back. This event symbolizes resilience, teamwork and the spirit of competition without the need for modern machinery.

Pedagogical importance: This game goes beyond the thrill of racing. It develops balance, control of speed and coordination, situational awareness, making the players to make quick decisions while playing the game. This game also helps to calculate speed and distances making them learn numbers and calculations, developing their math knowledge.

10. Tug-of-war: Tug-of-war is also one of the major indigenous sports of the Nagas. In this game, two teams would pit against each other in a test of strength, endurance and coordination of the participants. It is played between two groups, khel, village, community, peer groups etc... At the signal the two opposing team pull the rope from opposite side until one team drags the other beyond the demarcated line is declared the winner.

Pedagogical importance: This game can be a valuable tool for several educational implications. Its main importance is the recognition and development of team work and collaboration towards a common goal. It also enhances the physical development of the players and the social skill as participating in the game helps the player develop sportsmanship and learns to compete opponent in a healthy way enhancing motivation among players.

Conclusion

Indigenous sports of Nagaland are vital part of the state's cultural heritage which help in reflecting the history, traditions, and values of the Naga people. The traditional sports and games have been instrumental in encouraging physical fitness, community bonding and social cohesion among the communities of Nagaland. Due to modernization, poor infrastructure, financial constraints and western sports have been posing a great threat to the survival and relevance of indigenous sports. Therefore, we need to make efforts to document, preserve and promote these traditional sports and games so that they may continue to be there in the modern Naga society. However, to preserve and promote the indigenous sports in the land of Nagaland, there is a necessity of multi-faceted approach which includes government initiatives, community engagements and academic research. Together we can contribute to the continuation of the traditional sports and games, a vital connection to the cultural heritage and traditions of the Naga people.

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