

## Importance of Sport and Festivals for Social Health In Ancient and Modern India

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### **Outlook towards life in Ancient Texts**

When we read the ancient Indian texts such as Puranas, Mahabharata, Ramayana, Kamasutra, texts on Ayurveda and Kautilya Artha Sastra etc, we find that they all advocate a balanced attitude towards life. When we see the text of Dharma Sastra esp. Manusmriti a major source for implementing the various laws and customs, duties and practices for different member of the society; in order to keep the order in the society. The ancient lawmakers have given the guidelines about how to lead the human life. The objectives given in these Dharmasastras are known as Purusartha. They are : Dharma(duty), Artha ( money ) kama ( desire) and Moksha (liberation from birth-death-birth cycle). V gives importance to first two and suggests that after fulfilling them, a human being who is desirous should follow the path of pleasure according to KS. He says a man should divide the full span of life into interconnected periods for acquiring these three ends so that here is perfect harmony. For V, Kama is the celebration of life. Kama is expression of sensuality through arts, sports, festivals, beauty treatments and other activities such as social gatherings, family get-togethers, sports and sacrifices etc. These texts give emphasis on appropriate life-style, disease free body, good conduct and ethics at the same time Charaka and Vatsyana are against the suppression of desires and natural urges.

### **Various Sports discussed in Ancient Texts**

#### **Vedic time sports**

Rig Veda mentions to horse riding and Mushti Yuddha( fighting with fists). The sport persons were respected and honored by the people. They wanted to have children like the wrestlers, with strong arms and strengths, esp for fighting with enemy of the country. The sports were called as Samana in which archers competed for prizes and chariot and horse races were held . in later period martial sports became popular such as Mallay Uddha ( wrestling) and other were also practiced such as polo, heavy exercises (vyama), yogic practices, krida( sports for recreation), swimming and ball games as well as gymnastics or acrobatics.

In Puranic age, people of all cast practiced wrestling and their bouts were arranged. There is mention of sport arena, seating arrangements and stadiums and spectacles. During the period of the great poet Bhasa(3-4 C.BC) these spectacles were attended by Kings. in Jatakas there is a reference to Mandapum/ sport pavilion.

### **Mahabharat time sports**

Dronacharya the Guru of Kuru clan trained young Pandavas and kauravas in many sports such as Wrestling, archery, swordsmanship. After their training , a dramatic illustration of closed circle sport was organized to showcase the strength, learning, bravery and the superiority in one field.

Lord Krishna killed kamsa and Bheem killed Jarasandha and Keechaka and later Duryodhana in wrestling and Gada Yudda.

The book Mallapurana is devoted to art, practice and techniques of wrestling. It says “wresting is considered to be joyful. It develops enthusiasm ad removes sorrow. The king should be always present for such matches.

### **Sports In Vatsyanaya's Kamasutra**

Various sports as simple as plucking of flowers, preparing garlands, building toy houses, play of dolls, preparing rice and drink out of clay and sand are mentioned for a small girl or boy. For little grown ups playing dice, games of palms, fists, of little fingers, identifying the middle figure and the game of grabbing six pebbles are advised. One can play the other games such as the eyes shut tight, the start, the salt-lane, striking the wind, heaps of wheat and striking by tips of fingers to get and continuous the friendship. Playing with ball with colourful strips which one can set rolling and looks like kaleidoscope, making dolls or puppets of wood and run by threads or showing magic was regarded as a sport activity. These sports were used to please the friend, to woo a girl and make someone fall in love. For youth sports like, diving, playing in water, the new leaves, making tattoos are referred.

The games for grow ups are divided into two types mental and physical. In type a) the games like: decoding code words, memory enhance games, capability of repeating the stanza immediately after hearing it, making stanza out of unconnected words, knowledge of lexicography, prosody are mentioned. Making the rams, cocks and partridges fight was also a popular game. Gambling and games of dice as well as athletics is also mentioned.

Some interesting community sports are mentioned in Kamasutra, such as goblin-night, full moon vigils, spring festival and group games such as plucking mango, eating roasted grains, eating lotus stems, playing with new leaves, playing silk-cotton- tree , mock fighting with red orange flowers are

mentioned. Arranging the discussions and conducting small parties on poetry and art according to capability. Organizing garden festivals, trips to lakes, and spending an entire day at a beautiful picnic spot were means of entertain oneself, one's partner and friends.

### **Sports under Islamic rulers**

Akbar Nama and Ain-I-Akbari text written by Abu Fazal give vivid account of sports and entertainment during the regime of Akbar. The Indoor games such as chess, cards, chapur ( game of the dice), ludo were quiet popular even in harem. The outdoor games such as polo, ishqbazi( pigeon flying) and hunting were popular among nobles. Polo known as Chaugan was played in Persia and in Central Asian countries. During Babar's regime the camel and elephant fights used to take place. The sport of hunting(shikar) which was very popular during Akbar' s time, it was an event in itself. The thousands of drum beaters used to bring the wild animals in a particular circle where they were hunted by brow and arrow.

Jahangir continued this sport activity and it is said that he himself killed around 17,000 animals. Although many people did not approve the hunting, Abu Fazal remarked for Emperor Akbar, the hunting expeditions were means of acquisition of knowledge, inquire about condition of people, without prior notice. It was used for political benefit and to impress the might of the Emperor.

### **Sports Under British Raj**

The first British came in 1615, during Jahangir's regime. Then slowly East-India Company established on Indian territory. The British brought their games to India esp. the cricket. They used to play other sports like badminton, squash, billiards, rugby and golf even rowing was practiced in the rivers of Calcutta and in Pune as well as in Ooty. They established different clubs all over India such as Golf Club, Cricket club even Turf club in Mumbai for horse racing. Before British Indian people were playing indigenous games such as Kabbadi, Kho-KHo, wrestling( Kusti) etc. but slowly the popularity of british games started to increase and now cricket has become billion dollar business. In last 5 years we see some positive changes as the other sports are getting financial support and media coverage. The kabbadi league, football league and badminton league are getting viewership on television.

### **Festivals during Vedic Period**

During vedic period, people used to worship natural forces such as Sun, wind, rain. So we find many shlokas ( ruchas) devoted to their worship. The Idol worship ( Murti Pooja) and concept of God is later development. The Rishis had symbolic representation of these forces and sacrifices (Yagnya) were performed for their boon and prayers were said to pacify them.

**Festivals during Post Vedic Period**

Ram is an incarnation of God Visnu as per Vishnu Purana. Varahemir has mentioned how to make Idol of Rama and other Gods. 1) The festival of Ramlila started around 13 th century. It has become a huge celebration in last 100 years.2) Ramjanma and Hanuman Jayanti Festival has also become an occasion of gathering of devotees, with devotional songs and cultural activities.

3) Dolotastv- placing the decorated idols of Goddess Parvati or Lord Visnu on the swing and performing rituals of Pooja is mentioned in Devipurana and Niryanmrut. Alberuni has narrated the pictures account of festival which was celebrated in the temples of Ayodhya, Mathura, Vridavan,4) Gangotsv or Dhasahara- the legend of Raja Bhagarith bringing the holy river Ganga to earth is well known, in this festival , people take a dip in river Ganga and say prayers and donate the goods to poor. It is said in Skandh Purana the the wrong doings of a person are washed away by this dip and one becomes pure. We see this festival in North India. this festival signifies the importance of perseverance and hard work of King Bhagirath and his devotion.

5) Nagpanchmi ( festival for Kobras/Snakes)- there is mention of this festival in VisnuPurana. There was constant conflict between Aryans and Nagas, finally they decided that Nagas should not harm Aryans with their poison/poisonous weapons and Aryans should not kill them and to show and remember this truce this festival was started.

6) Navratri/ DurgaPooja- the greatness of Goddess are mentioned in Devi( Devi Mahatmya) in Markendaya Purana the ladies in entire India celebrate this festival, the Garba dance of Gujrat and Katewad attracts people from all walks of life. Ladies sing traditional and devotional songs around the decorated mud pot with oil lamp in it.10) Dashahara-marks the tenth day after Navratri. It is to celebrate the day when lord Rams started his endeavor to concur Ravana and to bring back Sita. It also marks the pooja of the new crop, weapons, machinery. There are various legends associated with this festival. People dance, sing arrange music festival on this day. It is consider as auspicious day to start new project.

**Festivals mentioned in Kamasutra**

Very elaborate description of varies social gathering and Gosthi (circle ) is done in Kamasutra. It included festivities and presentation of various performances like dance, music, plays etc. .Gathering in town hall like structure with dancers, actors and citizens who were converted in to ideal audience was called as Samaja. Some important festival mentioned are:

A) Yaksaratri- it was celebrated on the day of dipawali, Amavasya of kartik month. Dice and gambling were played on the occasion

- a) Kaumudijagara- it was celebrated on full moon day of Ashvin month. Sports like swing and gambling went on entire night.
- b) Suvasantaka or Madanotsva- is a festival of love. It was marked by dances, music, playing instruments. Worship of kamadeva ( God of Love) was a special event.
- c) Udakaksvedika ( holi) it was celebrated by sprinkling water through the syringes made of bamboo.

### Conclusion

Ancient texts present a comprehensive view of life. The cycle of human life is not complete without the realisation of all the three ends of life (Purusharthas): Dharma Artha and kama. The fulfilment of Kama Purushartha is very important for an individual, his family and intern for society. To lead a happy and meaningful life is the objective of everyone. To achieve this interpersonal relation, good communication at all levels, social order, peace and progress at personal, social and national level are some indispensable things

Sports and festivals are integral part of this endeavor. They play key role to create harmony among various section of society. Physical fitness, improvement of mental capacity, concentration, balanced attitude, tolerance, time and people management, skill development, recreation and enjoyment are some benefits of sports and festivals. The tournaments of various sports and celebration of different festivals in ancient and modern India have shown us that: how they can bring entire nation together, tell us the importance of rajasharya( wealthy individuals) and lokasharya( support and participation of public) for popularization and in some cases existence of some sport or festival, nurture the spirit of nationalism and inspire people to respect and to preserve our age old culture and imbibe the core values by which an individual and indirectly the society should lead the life.

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