A BRIEF SOCIAL HISTORY OF FOLK - GAMES OF BENGAL

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Abstract: There are some games which have no institutional recognitions or we can say that some games which are played basically in the rural areas without following any copy book rules and regulations. The daily livelihood of the people of a society are reflected through these games which are known as folk- games. These games contain a very long historical background and gradually have turned to be a kind of tradition in Bengal culture. People invented these games on basis of their daily need. These games spread gradually from one place to another. From the time of prehistoric period, people have been facing various problems for their existence in this earth. At very earliest time, people went to deep forest unitedly to collect food because at that time they did not know how to produce food for their own need. They always went unitedly because this system helped them to save their lives from the attack of ferocious beasts and this scenario reflected in folk-games in various ways. Sometimes a group of people attacked other clans for expanding their authority or to establish their superiority and on the basis of this, some folk-games has grown up. Such various aspects of human nature have a direct or indirect influence on folk-games. Though we are in the ultra-modern era, the tradition of human past has always remained intact in our society in various ways and folk-games play very significant roles among them. These are not merely the games, some story of struggle of human society are reflected through these games which have enormous importance in the field of social science history and I have tried to discuss this in the present article.

Key Words- *Hadudu, Dariabanda, Gollachhut, Bagbandhi*, Folk- Games, *Lok- krira*

Introduction: Few of the games are trained in institutions and these have no conventions of being trained outside the institutional spheres. The achievement of skill and its presentation is completely encircled through the discipline of the institute. The learners of these games need to be under the care and supervision of a particular coach or trainer and thus they gradually show perfection in their acquired skills. The games in which the learners cannot have the mastery of the proper technique without particular coaches are Football, Cricket, Badminton, shooting, Hockey, Baseball and such. Inspite of these few games are practiced in many countries where the necessity of institutions, coaches or clubs are relatively minimal. The development of skills in these games depends on the customs and conventions of the society related to it. Learners need not go through a bulk amount of monetary investment for all the practice of these games. They can automatically perform well in such games like *Hadudu, Dariabanda, Gollachhut, Bagbandhi* and *Chinichampa* or *Champa-champi*. Most of these games are played in the villages though the popularity for it sometimes merges boundary between the rural and urban areas. In the maximum way the poor people and others having leisure time to spend participate in these games which altogether in a broader sense is known as 'Lok- krira', the English terminology of which

may be assumed as 'Folk- Games' or popular games or traditional games. Various folk lyrists have said the definition of folk-games in a number of ways through countless discussions and observations.[1]

Definition of Folk-Games: Contradictions are marked prominently among the researchers regarding the definition and identification mark of Folk-Games. Defining Folk-Games is sooth to say tough task for them. Prior to the analysis of the word Folk-Games another complementary matter about what non-Folk-Game is comes to the fore front prominently. The solution of this question is a mandatory for forming a definition of Folk-Games. It should be very logical to have the primal idea about Folk in the word pair Folk-Games.

In generalized perspective a community of people living together in a particular area having concordance in behaviour, spoken language, thought process, professions and in relation on issues may be regarded as the Folk. The games which get popularity among the folk community will be commonly taken as Folk-Games. All kinds of games which become popular among them are certainly not to be considered as Folk-Games. Only those which have been played in traditional ways for generations are called Folk-Games. These are not invented on a sudden occasion because Folk-Games have been being practiced and performed from a distant past. These are similar to inherited properties and history of origin of such games are almost obscure. As the inhabitants of the then contemporary society people get instinctive advantages in acquiring knowledge and skill in the games.[2]

Researchers who have made significant discussions on the public game of Bengal are Mr. Ashutosh Bhattacharya, Sankar Sengupta, Pallab Sengupta, Barun Kumar Chakrabarty, Asim Das and Subrata Mukhapadhayay. Vivid discussions on the popular games of Nadia and many other districts of West Bengal have been made in the article 'Lok- Kriya: Social Impact' which published in a special edition of the magazine 'Lok- Sanskriti' edited by Dulal Chowdhuri and in 'Bangiya Lok- Sanskriti Kosh' a book published by Mr. Barun kumar Chakrabarty. Most of the episodes written by the authors are descriptive and therefore are providing no actual definition of 'Lok- Krira'.[3]

Sankar Sengupta is like the pole star in the firmament of discussion regarding popular traditional games of Bengal. He published 'Bangalir Kheladhula' in 1976 from Indian Publication published even from both the Bengals about the games and sports of the Bengalis. Profuse number of games in Bengal have been kept in focus in the book though the descriptions are in abridged format. In view of that this book may have the fame of a complete collection of Bengal games and sports. Sankar Sengupta also has not given any description of folk-games. As an introduction to the games of Bengal, his discussion serves the purpose of foundation stone.

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[1] Mondal Anupam Hera, *Lokokrirar Ontorpat*, Abosar, Dhaka, 2011, p16-17.
[2] Mondal Anupam Hera, *Lokokrirar Ontorpat*, Abosar, Dhaka, 2011, p-18
[3] Mondal Anupam Hera, *Lokokrirar Ontorpat*, Abosar, Dhaka, 2011, p-18

Pallab Sengupta authored 'Loksanskritir Simana O Swarup' in 1995 and had made commentary on these games but did not define it.[4]

Finally, in 2001 Barun Kumar Chakrabarty attempted to depict a definition of what folk-games are in his extraordinary creative master piece 'Banglar Lok-Krira'. By the side of a valuable discussion on the episode he conveys his thought on its definition: - "The games with a particular regionalized identity, based on few easily affordable equipment or without any equipment at all which are played indoor or outdoor in association with rhymed verse or unrhymed chartings are called folk-games. The participants need not have traineeship or committed exercise because of the flexibility in rules and restrictions and both the boys and the girls can have physical and intellectual development through the exercise. The minute observations ascertain the facts that these games are set with the life styles and trends of the by gone days and we get the stamp of archeological socio economic and cultural background through the norms of these popular folk-games and sports.[5]

In his book Barun Kumar Chakrabarty has given vent to an idea about folk-games while distinguishing public games from the urban and civilized games and this idea is opposite for an event conception of folk-games. He says – 'The game which are accepted among the common people of society and thus have traditional base compelling the masses to participate are called folk-games. People selflessly achieve boundless pleasure from these games. If we consider the cultural activities of people of lower sections of a society who are major in number and again exploited, as the folk culture then the games and sports of these so called labour class rural people may be regarded as folk-games through the inference'. Subrata Mukhapadhyay has opined that the games played by the labour class rural people entitled as 'folk' are folk popular games.[6]

An elaborated and evident deliberation on folk-games has been focused on the book 'Bangiya-Lokosanskriti Kosh' edited by Barun Kumar Chakrabarty. The author took and attempted of defining folk-game and identifying these properly from other games. He says 'The sports which have been being played for generation in a traditional way and bear no rigid rules and restrictions like the institutional games are called folk-games. Common people enjoy fantasy and spontaneous overflow of joy in profession through their participation in these games.[7]

In view of the previous discussion and opinions a general definition of folk-games can be trace out. The games based on particular region and tradition having flexible and no written rules that have social and archeological impacts and learnt from the instincts of life are called folk-games. The games are played with or without instruments, sometimes in association with rhymes and with the players in most of the circumstance being in uniformed state.

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[4] Sengupta, Shankar, *Bangalir Kheladhula*, Indian Publications, Kolkata, 1976

[5] Chakrabarty, Barun kumar, *Lokokrirar Samajtatwa*, Academy of Folklore, Kolkata, 2003, pristha, p-28-29.
[6] Mukhapadhyay, Subrata, *Simanta Banglar Lokokrira,* Lokosanskriti O Adibasi Sanskriti Kendra, Kolkata, 2001.
[7] Chakrabarty, Barun kumar, *Lokokrirar Samajtatwa*, Academy of Folklore, Kolkata, 2003, pristha, p-32

Folk-Games and Social History: Folk-games are the harvests of livelihood of the particular mass of a society. People invented the games merely for their personal interest and gradually they expanded and propagated it in various places. Imitation of lifestyle of the contemporary people is distinct in the techniques of these games. People from different segments of society intermingled together through the games and float in the stream of entertainment unitedly. Sometimes the faith in religiosity comes up in the front through the practice of the games. Creation of new sports and participating in it is a very common instinctive tendency of human beings. Like other animals' human beings do not play games in an abrupt and awkward manner. They play keeping eye on few styles, rules and restrictions. Human race being creative and rational finds the presence of aesthetic quality in their objects of interest. When this tendency gets transported from personal nourishment to the benefaction of society, it becomes an indispensable part and parcel of the society. That is why folk-games that were initiated by a particular group of people gradually get scattered in society and acts as the media for the continuation of a tradition and the inter relation between folk-games and social saturation is always a subject of critical discussion.

Solidarity Between Diligence and Struggle: Folk-game being an imitation of human life has been prominently reflecting the life style of people for generations. This cultural ingredient is found out in the livelihood of people starting from the primitive aborigines to modern civilized domestic once. Every process of evolution in the folk-games has a deeper connection with historical episode. The rationality in livelihood and centering round it the story of diligence and struggle is one of the fundamental elements of the folk-games. Contemporary social history has a prominent role behind the origin of every folk-game. A number of hidden truths of human civilization are found in the games. It is conceived that the physical activities of the people in the by gone ages had been embodied in the folk-games. In accordance with the scholarly persons these folk-games of the people are basically the miniature of the struggle for existence and the final victory in the process of struggle.[8]

The fighters in the old and middle ages of Bengal used to follow certain strict principles during their self defence or in time of finding out the opponent forces. The defeated armies were never treated inhumanly. All these techniques and principles of war can be traced out distinctly in rules and regulations of the folk-game named as 'Vocca' and that is why this game is assumed to be a transformed image of the old martial reiteration. Tradition of assimilating these local war techniques of feudal times has been abolished now a days but are still practiced through the game in the society of modern Bengal. The game *Bauchi* is actually the practice of defending own member of a team being attacked or kidnapped by other communities. In this game it becomes evident that the women member is being highly protected and defended so that the opponent team can snatch away the lady. The occurrence of women-kidnapping is rare in the modern era, still the unconscious human

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[8] Islam, Samiul, *Bangladeser Gramin Kheladhula*, Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1988, p-9

mind remains to the old remuneration of the episodes through the game. So, this unconsciously bears with it a valuable element of an old social history.[9]

Olden human life in the forests was always in panic and caution of being savagely attacked by ferocious animals like tigers and lions. In reality though the people could not entrap these animals, the desires get fulfilled through the folk-games 'Bagh- Bandi'. The protection of life from the paws and jaws of ferocious animals was an urgent and very difficult task in ancient times. Sometimes they took shelter on the trees, on the high peaks and sometimes on an artificial wooden platform. The skill development in these activities has inseparable part of life. The techniques that have been by the progression of time automatically turned into aestheticism through the public game 'Gachhua Khela' the other local variation of which is 'Champa-Champi' played in Nadia and adjacent districts.[10] These people not only had the fear and danger of animals on land, but also had to get protected from the animals on the water surface. They had to compete with crocodiles, sharks and so many animals in water for the sustenance of life. With those techniques of sustenance on water a great many of folk-games have been invented as a form of mock practice of these. One is the Crocodile game (Kumir Kumir Khela) in which a line on land is drawn to differentiate imaginary water body from the land. A player is disguised as a crocodile and stays seated on the imaginary water surface. When a member from the team tries to have bath in the water the crocodile attacks and the player dies if he cannot save himself from the invasion. Then the turn for the dead player comes to disguise as the crocodile and to take revenge. The same kinds of activity of getting protected from water-based animals are also found in other folk-games like 'In Land and Water' (Jole-e-dangay).[11]

Alike the violent wild animals, a community of people was considered as the enemy of another community. According to the anthropologists having a keen interest in the process of evolution, the transformation and alteration of human life standard is based on the division of labour. The primitive uncivilized people had to overtake few steps to have the glimpse of civilization. In this regard Darwin and few other scientists have given primal importance to labour division for the formation of various standards in social existence and class division such as primitive Barbarian class, wild aboriginal class and the civilized people.[12] These three stages have various sub stage and satisfying every criteria of the stages the primitive men have get in touch with modernity. People have invented various war methods to protect themselves from the shackles of the enemies and these techniques are still on the go with the passage of time through the folk-games. One of the types is *Hadudu* which is played in between two teams. When a member of a team enters the court of the opponent, they forcibly try to attack the player and hold him. This strategies in *Hadudu* is actually the process of self-defense of the ancient people from the oppositional forces. The game pictures the struggle in life through the

[9] Mondal Anupam Hera, *Lokokrirar Ontorpat*, Abosar, Dhaka, 2011, p-57
[10] Chakrabarty, Barun kumar, *Lokokrirar Samajtatwa*, Academy of Folklore, Kolkata, 2003, pristha, p-28-29.
[11] Chakrabarty, Barun kumar, *Lokokrirar Samajtatwa*, Academy of Folklore, Kolkata, 2003, p-29.
[12] Choudhuri, Dulal, *Banglar Lokosanskritir Biswakosh*, Academe of Folklore, Kolkata, 2004, P-404.

collective measures. People had to hunt animal as their food. They had to take great care of the domestic animals and in search of pastures land and grass for the cattle they need to leave one place for another and thus got involved in collision with other communities. They tried to dominate the opponents withal possible efforts. All these images and stories of struggle get reflected in *Hadudu*.[13]

Hadudu, *Lathikhela* and few others games of the sort portray life of people in coterie. Such a game is 'koya-koyikhela' which is played in ponds and lakes. An image of fish hunting in union gets prominent through the game. Another game known by various name in different parts of West Bengal can be remembered in this respect. The game is 'Golap-Tagarkhela' which is played in between two teams having a leader in each. The players of both the teams sit facing each other and the leader of one team goes to player of the opponent and closed the opponent players' eyes. The captain then calls one member of his own team in a pseudo name and asks to put mild stroke on the forehead of the closed-eye player and go back to his own place. The eyes are then opened and he is to identify the opponent member who gave him the stroke. In his failure, he is exempted from the team and in success the team jumps one step forward to the opponent. In this way the team which crossed the middle line first is taken as the winner.[14]

These games endeavor to convey the necessity of agglomeration in the ways of life. From the tendency of a group of people to be in a secret and hidden state being chased and attacked by another, the origin of the games come in to being the secret names of the players is a proof to the fact. 'Pata-sara-khela' is another folk-game of Bengal in which the concatenated state of human existence gets focused in the game. One player is supposed to be as guilty and other player is asked by him to bring the leaf of a certain tree. They immediately run on one leg to bring it. If any player moves on both the legs and the convicted player touches him, then it becomes the turn of the new player to play the role of the convicted. If everybody brings leaves successfully, the present player keeps eyes closed and others hide their leaves inside their allotted circle, digging up soil with an oyster shell. The convicted is given a certain time to find out the hidden leaf. In this way, the game continues. Lifestyles of the hunters are clear through the exercise of this game. The necessity of collecting food in a united manner is the motto of the game. The leader inspires other members of the community to go united and the other members bring food in their own shelter for the nourishment of the rest.[15]

Pishogue centered around Husbandry and Resilience for Fecundity: Primitive people had great wonders about the regularly occurred natural phenomena. Scorching heat of sun, storms, excessive rain, volcanoes, landslides, thunder and lightning, wildfires and such were quite unexplainable to them and thought these to be the conspiracy of some unknown gigantic power. To satisfy these life-threatening powers they commenced ceremonials and rites which gradually took the form of folk-games. So, it might be apposite to think that behind few folk- games the religious faith and customs of the ancient people had a logical responsibility. The

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[13] Mondal Anupam Hera, *Lokokrirar Ontorpat*, Abosar, Dhaka, 2011, p-59
[14] Mondal Anupam Hera, *Lokokrirar Ontorpat*, Abosar, Dhaka, 2011, p.62
[15] Mondal Anupam Hera, *Lokokrirar Ontorpat*, Abosar, Dhaka, 2011, p-62

farming at that time was completely dependent on the natural issues like rain, sunlight and wind, when these essential ingredients were insufficient and harmed the process of cultivation, people thought it to be due to the wrath of that indomitable power and started worshipping their power keeping themselves shrouded in clays and soil. From this pedantic thought the folk-game known as 'kadamati khele' has come into existence.[16]

In ancient era when the civilization was merely based on cultivation, the yielding power of land use to be compared with the reproductive power of women and thus women and land, both were worshipped adequately. The cultivation procedures have few similarities with sexual activities of human beings. From this concept the 'Dang-guli khela' or the 'Tara-tik khela' become prominent among the people. In this game 'Dang' is compared with male reproductive organ and the hole mode on earth is alike the female reproductive organ. 'Guli' is kept across the while and is flung away with the 'Dang' being inserted into the whole. This 'Guli' is the miniature format of 'Dang' and is attributed as the 'son' of this in the field and it has a similarity with the birth of a boy.[17] This analogy has a close proximity with the psycho-sexual analysis of Sigmund Freud or any other writings. Again, the mother giving birth to a son is an identification mark of patriarchic domination in the society where male member were thought to be the initial earning member who earns the means of livelihood through hereditary cultivation.[18]

Reminiscent of consumerism and Deprivation: The ancestors of human civilization had to wade through the ways shrouded with difficult confrontations and hindrances to advance to the state of modernity. The strife between the powerful and the working people starting from the prehistoric times has taken recourse to the components of human cultural activities. These incidents again have got implemented in the folk-games in a very natural and symbolic manner. The folk-games "Golla- Chhut" is a perfect example of that. Here "Golla" is actually a slave who is continuously tortured by his master. It is the representation of the slave system in which the masters hurled rains of oppression upon them. In the same way the history of deprivation on the life of a woman during the Middle Ages blooms in the folk-play "Openti Bioscope". Through a pathetic but rhythmic chanting the game depicts the unknown history of women exploitation in the brothels.[19] Another popular game is "Elating Belating Khela" in which the girls of a village assemble together and being separated in two groups they continue the game in presence of a rhyme. This is a significant record of the consumerism of the feudal kings or sultans who used to buy girls for purpose of their illegal sexual satisfaction or for making them their maid- servants. This pathetic social history is still sustaining through this 'Elating Bleating' folk-game. Another bright example of women kidnapping and sexual exploitation on the basic of muscle and mass power is found in the game "Bouchi" or "Bou-Basanti" or "Burichi". This game indicates about the command of having pedophilic or carnal power over the kidnapped women. The folk- games thus establish the glaring

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[16] Chakrabarty, Barun kumar, *Banglar Lokokrira*, Pustak Bipani, Kolkata, 2001, P-63
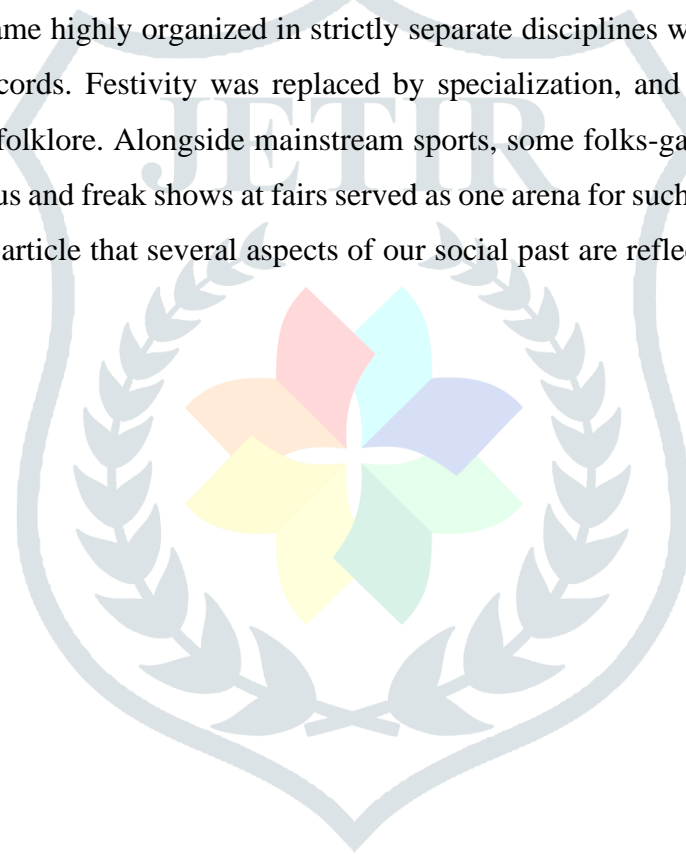
[17] ibid., p.64

[18] Islam, Samiul, *Bangladesher Gramin Kheladhula*, Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1988, P-67

[19] Chakrabarty, Barun kumar, *Bangiya Lokosanskriti Kosh*, Pustak Bipani, Kolkata, 2004, P- 497-498.

truths of preterite times and its doleful history. On the folk-games the team of player that becomes the convicted is regarded as cobbler, thief or the rotten man. It is as historical evidence of the miserable life lead by the downtrodden and repressed labour class community of people in the by gone period. Social existence and position of these people were never a bit pleasant at all. The libellee characters in the games are the obvious proof of that. Therefore, the *Golla* in "Gollachut" *Sonamoni* in "Openti Bioscope" or *Soi* in "Elating-Belating" represents a particular time by itself and the imaginary impersonation of unfilled dreams.[20]

Conclusion: Modern sport, as it developed mostly in the Western world started in our country with advent of the British. Besides this in some extent some modern sports in our country developed based on folk-games. But these modern sports gradually marginalized traditional games. Modern sport brought a new sense of discipline and code of conducts which have created a new relation in our society. What in the previous time was a folk-game, now became highly organized in strictly separate disciplines which aimed at systematizing results and maintaining records. Festivity was replaced by specialization, and many old folk-games were abandoned or relegated to folklore. Alongside mainstream sports, some folks-games persisted or reappeared in different forms. The circus and freak shows at fairs served as one arena for such events. It may not be wrong if we say at the end of this article that several aspects of our social past are reflected vividly through various folk-games to some extent.

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[20] Islam, Majharul, Folklore Parichit o Pathon-Pathan, Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1993, p- 21.

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