

# THE BUSINESS STANDARD

## How traditional games play a role in connecting children to their culture, identity and self

Brac's Humanitarian Play Lab has helped Rohingya children cope with trauma, and contributed to improving their mental and physical health. Should such measures be replicated in our national schools?

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20 June, 2022, 11:45 am



**Various studies on child development show that the development of infants starts from the time of being in the womb. The social and cultural environment plays a special role in ensuring the healthy, smooth, and resilient development of the human child.**

Sport is a cultural phenomenon and it plays an important role in a child's development as a 'social person', and in his or her survival in society. This means that play is an essential cultural aspect of human socialisation, healthy development, and the acquisition of life skills.

But nowadays, sports is losing its heritage day by day due to urbanisation. The various traditional games in Bangalee culture seem to be getting lost somewhere in the digital world based on mobile, internet, and online games.

Under the pressure of books and institutional structures, tired children go to school in the early hours with their sleepy eyes wide open. Some parents keep their children happy by promising to let them play games on mobile phones or tablets. This is a very common scene in urban life. Has there been a change in sports in the villages too? The answer does not require much research, just a little conscious observation.

There are various reasons for a change in the scope of sports in rural life. Like in urban areas, consumerist aspiration generates motivation for a "mainstream" culture in rural areas by eradicating the vernacular cultural heritage. The current market-based socio-economic and political realities drive people towards a "mainstream" culture.



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A glance at the influential media and its market development goals in the current 'mainstream culture' will show you how international sports is getting popular at the local level and how rural sports are being cornered by the influence of media, education system and human development scales. The vernacular cultural atmosphere is being shadowed by the dense mixture of social economy and politics of globalisation.

For example Ha-Du-Du, our national game, and the other rural games like dang-guli, kanamachi, gollachut, daria bandha, phul-toka, swimming, tree climbing, marble, kite, etching-beeching were popular in rural life when TV, cable network, the internet, and other digital gadgets were not only less available but also less capable of replacing the vernacular sports' attraction. But at present, the strong flow of globalisation of international sports has cornered these traditional sports.

The cultural attraction for international sports (that emerged from the womb of colonial nations) is an aspect of colonial history. The modern neo-colonial market economy is

exerting a force which generates dependency of the developing and underdeveloped nations to imitate the developed nations.

With the evolution of time, we have been underestimating traditional rural sports by using linguistic political tags like 'Geyo' or 'Grameen' or indigenous. But the role of sports is vital for the healthy development of children in many ways.

Pre-primary education has been introduced in government primary schools for several years now. In recent times, it has been reported in the media that there will be no examinations for children up to the third grade and children will learn through a joyful environment.

My question is whether we will include our indigenous sports in the process of learning through play. Or will we also replace our traditional sports with western ideology or culture or the so-called 'global' cultural atmosphere? We need to realise the importance of sport in early childhood development and think about a play-based curriculum in child education. There needs to be intensive research on how vernacular sports from time immemorial in our culture can play a role in early childhood development (physical, social, cultural, mental, etc).

In Cox's Bazar of Bangladesh, millions of Rohingya children are growing up as refugees in a completely different reality. The Bangladesh government, humanitarian and development agencies, and organisations providing services to the Rohingya camps have come up with their own initiatives to help these children develop properly and find a safe place.



Photo: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

One of BRAC's initiatives is the Humanitarian Play Lab (HPL), which in the Rohingya language is called 'Khelakhana'. It is working in tandem with UNICEF's Model Child-

Friendly Space to ensure the development and safety of children. The HPL model combines child development and learning outcomes, along with mental health and healing outcomes, all based on the tenet of cultural preservation.

BRAC HPL is working for the healthy development of the children through the 'local' sports which have emerged from within the 'Rohingya culture', taking into account the context of the Rohingya culture and its relation to the children.

BRAC's "Humanitarian Play Lab" has added a new dimension to the psychological, social, psychosocial, and physical development of the Rohingya children in the camp. The inclusion of the values and attachments of the Rohingya culture in the project does not only enhance the project's gravity, but also its impact extends to the psychological range of the refugee Rohingya population, i.e. children, and their parents.

The integration of cultural components into the project design provides a cultural atmosphere where they find their own identity. It especially positively impacts the psychosocial sphere of the children in the adverse context of the Rohingya camps.

While the Myanmar government denies nationality to the Rohingya, giving importance to the Rohingya culture and ethnicity in project design is a kind of recognition of their culture.



Children try to adapt themselves to their realities in the midst of difficulties. Under dilapidated conditions, they get amused whenever they get the opportunity to participate in their traditional sports. In the various corners of the camp, children are also exposed to various games and sports, some of which may seem meaningless to outsiders. But they play a huge role in protecting the minds of children from the ravages of horrible memories. It contributes to the physical, intellectual, mental, social, and cultural development of children. In addition, it plays a role in adapting to the realities of inhumane socio-economic and cultural life in the camps.

And the biggest thing that caught my eye is the horror that the Rohingya children have gone through, and how they cope with their current identity, which is growing up in the camps. But they also have a kind of understanding. They subconsciously get a touch of

their own culture in their spatial sports, which basically helps them to create a cultural environment of their own and a link between the individual child and the Rohingya culture.

In the end, it plays a role in making them more aware of their identity. As a result, BRAC's Humanitarian Play Lab adds a new dimension to humanitarian support. However, there is a need for more research on the critical side. The author is a Development Researcher at BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD), BRAC University.

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