



ISSN: 2278 – 0211 (Online)

Traditional Sports And Martial Arts Of Meghalaya

Dr. S. Ranjit Singh

Associate Professor, Department Of Physical Education, Health Education & Sports, D.M. College Of Science, Imphal, Manipur. Kakching Paji Leikai (Makha Lou)

N. Sunderlal Singh

Research Scholar, School Of Social Science, Manipur University. Kakching Paji Leikai (Makha Lou)

Abstract:

The main purpose of the study was to find out the traditional sports and martial arts of Meghalaya tribal's of India, and selected aspects of social and cultural life. This study gave a high significance to the heritage, culture, traditions, customs activities and way of life of Meghalaya state. Data collection was made by using questionnaire and visitation technique. Authentic information was collected through interviews with the grand masters, masters, players and eminent scholars, and also from those who have a fairly good knowledge about the activities of tribal people of Meghalaya. The information thus collected was sorted out and classified under two different heads: 1. Traditional Sports and 2. Martial Arts. The people of Meghalaya play different types of recreational activities. They are: 1. Wa Pong Sala. 2. Katsucao. 3. Resu Dena. 4. Wa Pong Pikusao. 5. Ro-ong Dea. 6. Archery. 7. Peg-top-spinning 8. Bamboo Climbing. 9. Wapong Sika. It is observed that the people of Meghalaya used different types of weapons for various purposes like hunting, fishing, attacking and defending themselves from the enemies. The Garo of Meghalaya has keen interest in Garo traditional wrestling of which rules and regulations are different from those international or Indian wrestling.

1.Introduction

Social behavior in a sense is social heritage because people are born into a particular culture and their behavior from that point on is inexorably guided and in most cases dictated by cultural values, rules and codes that have been set by its customs, mosaic, folkways and laws. Humankind have no more choice in the kind of cultural heritage into which they are born than in the kind of cultural heritage into which they are born than in their biological heritage.ⁱ Each society, each nation has its own traditions and customs. As these traditions are accepted by the new generations, they become their social heritage.ⁱⁱ Devid and Kenneth, expressed their opinion that wrestling was one of the oldest sporting activities. Its development can be traced back to primitive human beings. Since early man had no weapons, he had to learn hand to hand combat techniques, not only to battle the wild beasts but also to struggle against man's worst enemy, man himself. Man, however, continued in the art of hand to hand combat fighting to satisfy his natural urge to engage a fellow man in combat. This change of emphasis probably established wrestling as an activity for sporting purpose. Furthermore, the early cultures of the Babylonians, Egyptians and Indians used wrestling as an educational tool to instruct their young in offensive techniques for battle.ⁱⁱⁱ Now a day's various traditional sports and martial arts are very popular throughout the country. Some of the north-eastern state tribes have keen interest in traditional sports and martial arts because they are very essential for every individual for development of the body and mind fit for self-defence from the early period of life. So the researcher wanted to collect about the traditional sports and martial arts of Meghalaya state.

2.Methodology

In order to undertake study the researcher collects the data pertaining to the traditional sports and martial arts of Meghalaya. The data were for different primary and secondary sources of data: Traditional books and written document, Interviews, Visitations, and Questionnaire. Number of responses that were received by the researcher is presented in table below.

Name of state	Questionnaire sent by mail no.	Responses received no.	Responses received after first follow-up no.	Responses received after second follow-up no.	Total number of responses	percentage
Meghalaya	450	109	71	33	265	58.89%

Table 1

Apart from questionnaire technique, the information regarding traditional sports, martial arts and the institutions imparting training in sports and martial arts was also collected by using interview technique. 52 persons were interviewed whom connected with such sports and the institution of the Meghalaya state.

3.Classification

According to Das (1986:5-6), the state of Meghalaya comes into existence in January 1972. It consists of three districts, namely Garo, Khasi and Jaintia hills which had previously formed a part of Assam. Although there is uncertainty regarding the origin of the khasi and jainties, they are believed to be a remnant of one of the early population movements into India from Indo-China and their language belongs to the non-khmer family of languages of that region, and the garo who inhabit the western segment of the state are a part of the Bodo race- the tibeto-burman family, with a matriarchal society as in the case of the khasis and jainties. They still practice shifting cultivation and their staple food is rice.^{iv} Meghalaya currently has 11 districts. Jaintia Hills; 1. West Jaintia Hills (Jowai), 2. East Jaintia hills (Khliehriat); Khasi Hills division: 1. East Khasi Hills (Shillong), 2. West Khasi Hills (Nongstoin), 3. South West Khasi Hills (Mawkyrwat) and 4. Ri – Bhoi (Nongpoh); Garo hills division: 1. North Garo Hills (Resubelpara), 2. East Garo Hills (Williamnagar), 3. South Garo Hills (Baghmara), 4. West Garo Hills (Tura) and 5. South West Garo Hills (Ampati). The research scholar has visited the state for the collection of data regarding traditional martial arts and traditional sports of Meghalaya. It is understood that the people of Meghalaya indulge in different types of activities according to tribes under different names e.g. Khasis are expert in archery from the early period. In fact Khasis main sport activity was archery. While the Garo performed and are performing different types of activities, Jaintia people performed Jaintia Football. The following information is based on Interview report as well as on

replies to the Researcher's Questionnaire. The collected data can be classified as under:

Traditional sports and martial arts divided in two major groups:

Individual sports and

Martial arts.

3.1. Sports

The People Of Meghalaya Play Different Types Of Recreational Activities. They Are:

Wa Pong Sala (Garos)

Katsucaos (Garos)

Resu Dena (Garos)

Wa Pong Piksusao (Garos)

Ro-Ong Dea (Garos)

Archery (Khasi)

Peg-Top-Spinning

Bamboo Climbing

Wapong Sika

3.1.1. Wa Pong Sala (Measure Of Strength)

It is an ancient recreational activity of the Garos. It is performed by two players at a time. In this activity pulling strength of a player is put to test. It is an activity of youths and adults. The two competitors sit facing each other on the ground with their legs stretched out. Between them there is a strong bamboo to support their legs. The bamboo can be called as a danger line. When the activity starts, both the players pull each other holding each other's hand. The player who succeeds in pulling his rival from the ground wins the game. Selected people from the village act as judges who announce the result. The game is played during Wangala festival. (Interview report and information derive from Questionnaire).

3.1.2. Katsucaos (Race Or Running)

The game is very much like modern running – race. It is observed that any number of players can take part in this activity. There is no limit as regards the number of participants in this activity. A plain land or village field is chosen for the competition. All players stand on the starting line and at the shout of “start” from the referee, they

start running as fast as they can. One who runs faster and takes a lead is the winner. Three prizes one to each is given in honour of the first three winners.

The races generally take place at the end of Wangala festival of Garo. They are also held during village meetings and gathering, to provide entertainment. (Interview report and information derive from Questionnaire).

3.1.3. Resu Dena (Banana Plant Cutting)

According to information, for the activity of “Resu Dena” of Garos, any number of competitors can take part in competition. The competitors gather in a field where two or more banana plants are put or tied together. Each competitor is equipped with a big knif called “ATTHI” in Garo. The player has to cut the plant with “ATTHI” at one stroke. No other stroke is allowed. He who cuts a greater number of banana plants in one stroke each becomes the champion or winner. The competition takes place mainly during Wangala festival of Garo. (Interview report and information derive from Questionnaire).

3.1.4. Wapong Piksusao (Uprooting Bamboo Plant)

This type of activity has been performed by the Garos so Meghalaya since early period. In this activity the competitor has to uproot bamboo plants. The use of tools like a spade etc. is strictly prohibited. The plant is to be uprooted by the player with his hands, applying all his physical strength. There is no fixed number of participants. The competition takes place where bamboo plants are amply found. First their branches and leaves are plucked off and then two or three feet of the upper part are cut off. Then the competitors are asked to pull out the bamboos with the roots from the ground. They are given sufficient time for uprooting. The player who can uproot the largest number of bamboos is the winner. The competition is held during harvest seasons for enjoyment or during group hunting for recreation and relaxation. (Interview report and information derive from Questionnaire).

3.1.5. Roong Dea (Heavy Stone Lifting)

According to various experts of this activity it is more or less like modern weight lifting, only in a somewhat crude form. A smooth round stone weighing about 100 kg. or more is placed among the spectators who have gathered to see the activity. There is full freedom for anyone of the spectators to come forward and try his strength in lifting the

stone. One by one, the participants lift it as high as possible; the player, who lifts it highest, is the winner and is deemed to be the strongest man in the village. The activity takes place during Wangala festival or village gatherings of Garos of Meghalaya. (Interview report and information derive from Questionnaire).

3.1.6. Archery Of Khasi (Siatkham)

According to Gurdon^v, the Khasis involve themselves in many recreational activities but their principle game is archery. This may be said to be the national game and is a very popular form of recreation. The sport is played by them from the beginning of January to the end of May each year. The following is the description of Khasi Archery meet as is given by Gurdon: By way of introduction it should be stated that the Khasis opine the arrow shooting originated at the beginning of creation. The Khasis Eve (Ka mei – ka – nanghukum) had two sons whom she taught the toxophilite art. At the same time she warned them never to lose their temper over the games. At the present day villages have regular archery meetings, the men of one village challenging those of another. There are men on both sides called Nong Kham Khanam (lit. he who stops arrow). This man uttering spells and reciting the short comings of the opposite side is supposed to possess the power of preventing the arrow of the opposing party hitting the mark. These men also to some extent may be said to perform the duties of umpires. They may be styled umpires for the sake of convenience in this account. Before the match commences conditions are laid down by the umpires of both sides such as

The day on which the contest is to take place;

The place of the meeting;

The number of arrows to be shot by each archer;

The distinguishing marks to be given to the arrows of either side;

The amount of stakes on each side;

The number of times the competitors are to shoot on the day of the archery meeting and many other conditions, too numerous to mention here. The targets are generally small bundles of grass called “U skum” about one foot long with four inches diameter fastened on a small pole. Sometime targets are made from the root of a plant called “Ka – soh – polung”. The distance from the point, where the marksmen stand, to the target is some 40 to 50 yards. Each side has its own target, the different targets being placed in a line and the competitor taking up their positions in a straight line at right angle to the line of fire

and facing the target early in the morning of the day fixed for the contest. The umpire of each side sits in front of his target with a hollow bamboo full of water in his hand, the bows and arrows being laid on the ground alongside the targets. The umpire then repeats all the conditions of the contest, invokes the aid of primeval women (Ka – mei – ka – Nong hokum) goes through certain incantation freely referring to the many faults of the opposite side and pour water at intervals from the bamboo in front of the target. This business lasts about two hours. Then they exhort the competitors of their respective sides and match commences amidst loud shouts. Every time there is a hit, there are loud cheers, the competitors leaping high in the air and the umpires muttering their incantations all the while. At the end of each turn the numbers of hits are counted by the representatives of both sides. At the close of the day the side with the greatest number of hits wins the match, the successfully party returning home dancing and shouting. The young women admirers of both sides assemble and dispense refreshment of the competitors. Frequently large wagers are made on either side. In the Khadar Blang Portion of the Mongkhem state as much as 500 are occasionally wagered on either side. In Jawai the practice is also to bet a lumpsum, the amount being raised by subscription from amongst the competitors. More usual bets are however about one anna a head. The nong kang khuam and the men who prepare the targets receive considerable distance and arrow shot over 180 yards being within the personal knowledge of the writher. It is believed that khasi bows wielded by experts carry upto 200 yards. The average range may be said however to be 150 to 180 yards. According to collected data from the state and description in various books of Meghalaya state history, it is known that archery is the main traditional sport of Khashi of Meghalaya.

3.1.7. Peg – Top – Spinning (Lattum)

Gurdon^{vi} says that Yule mentions peg –top – spinning amongst Khasi children as being indigenous and not an importation, but Biyar thinks that the game is of foreign introduction. Gurdon, however, is inclined to agree with Yule that peg – top – spinning is indigenous inasmuch as this game could not have been copied from the Sylhetis or the Assamees of the plains who do not indulge in it. As the British had only recently established themselves in the hills when Yule wrote, they would scarcely have had time opportunity to introduce English and children's game.

3.1.8. Bamboo Climbing (Kiewseij)

The activity of bamboo climbing is also one of the recreational, traditional sports activities of Khasi. A very tall thick bamboo is planted in the ground and oiled well. A silver ornament or a few rupees placed at the top serves as an incentive for the successful climber. According to information from the state, this type of activity is also performed by the other tribes of Meghalaya on different occasions. (Interview report and information derive from Questionnaire).

3.1.9. Wapong Sika

As in Mizoram, this activity is commonly seen in Meghalaya also. The activity is called in Garo language “Wapong Sika”. Two players participate in the activity at a time. A strong neat bamboo piece about one or two meters long is the only requirement in this activity. The two players hold the ends of the bamboo on either side. When the activity starts, each player tries to push his rival back. The player who succeeds in doing so is declared winner. The activity puts the strength of the players to test. One whose strength is pushing exceeds is bound to win the activity. The senior people among the spectators play the role of a referee. The activity is played during gatherings and festival. (Interview report and information derive from Questionnaire).

3.2. *Martial Arts*

From the reliable information, it seems that the traditional martial arts of the state may be classified into two types, viz., Martial arts with weapon and martial arts without weapon.

3.2.1. Martial Arts With Weapons

It is observed that the people of Meghalaya used different types of weapons for various purposes like hunting, fishing, attacking and defending themselves from the enemies. In various books mention is found regarding different types of weapons which were used in the early days of Meghalaya by the different tribes there under different names.

Sen^{vii}, states that the weapons, Garo use are the sword, spear and bow. They have the shield for defence. Shri Das^{viii}, also states that the Garos had an institution called “Nokpante” which was a dormitory for all unmarried men and boys of village. They used to have various types of practices in this dormitory. It is found in some part of Garo hills even today. This Garo institution is like Mizos “Zambuk”. Sen^{ix}, again expressed that the

Khasis also use swords (WAIT) spears (SUM) bows and arrows as weapons and carry shields for their defence. They know how to make gunpowder. “Ka ryntich (the bow)” is their favourite weapon. “Ki Pling” (a barded head arrow) is used for hunting and “Sop” (a plain head arrow) is used for archery which is their tribal sport. Shree Das^x, refers to the Mizos institution called “Zambuk” which is a type of dormitory for all unmarried men and boys of village where they practice different types of activities. The Garos also have similar institution called Nokpante, which flourishes in some parts of Garo hills even today. The unmarried men and boys of Garos practice different types of activities in this dormitory. In the training system of above weapons the juniors get training and practice from the seniors.

3.2.2. Martial Arts without Weapon

Apart from the use of weapons, the Garos also perform the activity of individual fight without weapons. According to information, the Garo of Meghalaya have keen interest in Garo traditional wrestling of which rules and regulations are different from those of international or Indian wrestling. The wrestling is called “Gando Makhhal Pala” in Garos language. This activity has come down since ancient times and is in vogue even now in Meghalaya. Two competitors participate in this activity at a time. The spectators form a circle leaving sufficient space for a bout that is to take place. Any person from the spectators can come forward in space of bout and challenge anybody to come and wrestle with him. If he does not accept the challenge, any other man can come forward. But if nobody comes within fixed time, the challenger is declared winner. Though the activity is like wrestling, it is not a free – style one and has to be played observing certain rules set for the activity. The player will try to knock his rival down but the rules do not allow inflicting injury on the player by his rival. The wrestler who can knock down his rival number of times becomes the winner. A referee from the spectators is selected to supervise the activity and announce the result. The activity is generally played during “Wangala” festival. (Interview report and information derive from Questionnaire).

4.Reference

1. H.M. barrow, Man and Movement Principles of Physical Education (Washington: Lea and Febiger, 1983) P. 201.
2. M.L. Kamlesh and S.M. Sangral, Principles and History of Physical Education (Ludhiana: Prakash Brothers, 1988) P. 80.
3. David N. Chamalone and Kenneth Tillman, Teaching and Coaching Wrestling (New York : John Willy and Son Inc., 1980)
4. S.T. Das, Tribal Life of North-Eastern India (Delhi: Gian Publising House, 1986) Pp.5-6.
5. R.R. Grudon, The Khasis (Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1987) Pp. 54-56.
6. Ibid. p. 57
7. Sipra Sen, Tribes of Meghalaya (Delhi: Publications Tittal, 1992) P. 2.
8. S.T. Das, Tribal Life of North-Eastern India (Delhi: Gian Publising House, 1986) P. 8.
9. Opcit. Pp. 70-71.
10. Opcit. P. 8.