



Research Paper

Revival and Resurgence: Exploring Indigenous Sports among the Halam Community in Tripura

H Theresa Darlong

Assistant Professor,
Department of Sociology,
Maharaja Bir Bikram College, Agartala

Abstract

This study explores the revival of traditional sports among the Halam group in Tripura, India. Indigenous sports have seen a resurgence despite the obstacles presented by modernization and cultural changes, acting as a cultural cornerstone and promoting communal solidarity. This research explores the socio-cultural importance, historical background, and current trends of indigenous sports in the Halam community. The study investigates the motivations, practices, and impacts of indigenous sports revivalism using qualitative research methods such as interviews, participant observation, and archival analysis. The return of indigenous sports is vital for maintaining cultural legacy, fostering physical well-being, and establishing social relationships among the Halam people. The text discusses the implications for cultural preservation, community development, and policy interventions.

Keywords

Indigenous sports, Halam community, Tripura, cultural resurgence, community cohesiveness, socio-cultural relevance.

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I. Introduction

The Halam community, native to the Tripura region of India, has a cultural legacy that is closely connected to traditional customs, such as indigenous sports. Singh (1996) the Halam communities of Tripura are ethnically part of the Kuki-Chin tribes, which belong to the Tibeto-Burmese ethnic group. Their language is quite akin to the Tibeto-Burman family. Halams are commonly referred to as Mila Kuki, despite significant differences in language, culture, and lifestyle. Halams are divided into several sub-clans which is referred as "Barki-Halam". Major sub-clans of Halams are (1) Kaloi, (2) Korbong, (3) Kaipeng, (4) Bong, (5) Sakachep, (6) Thangachep, (7) Dab or Nabin (8) Bongcher (9) Molsom, (10) Rupini, (11) Rang howl, (12) Chorai, (13) Lankai, (14) Kaireng (15) Ranglong (16) Marchafang & (17) Saihmar. As per 2011 Census their total population is 57,210 and distributed throughout the State.

Over time, socio-economic developments, urbanization, and external pressures have jeopardized the survival of these ancient sports. In recent years, there has been a significant increase in interest and involvement in indigenous sports among the Halam population. This study seeks to investigate the motivations behind the resurgence of indigenous sports in Tripura, its impact on community identity and togetherness, and the overall importance of indigenous sports in Tripura's cultural environment.

Since the dawn of humanity and the establishment of civilizations, individuals have created their own forms of leisure and educational activities, leading to the discovery and development of sports with unique playing styles. Sports is universally beloved and participated in by individuals of all ages, races, and ethnicities. The evolution of sports due to modern technologies has significantly altered the original form of play, resulting in the transformation of numerous sports into their current iterations.

Indigenous sports, some of the oldest and still existing, are today rare and played uniquely on various occasions. The Riam's of Tripura, an indigenous group of the state, continue to preserve and maintain their ethnic and traditional games despite the widespread availability of modern sports. The resurgence of native sports among the Kaipeng tribe, a subset of the Halam community in Tripura, India, reflects a larger effort within the Halam community to revive and support ancient cultural customs. The Kaipeng tribe, along with

other Halam sub-tribes, have a diverse cultural legacy defined by distinct customs, language, and traditions, which include native sports.

The Kaipeng tribe is making efforts to resuscitate indigenous sports to retain cultural identity, increase communal cohesion, and enhance physical well-being. These endeavors typically entail a blend of grassroots campaigns, community involvement, and backing from cultural institutions and community figures.

The Kaipeng tribe enjoys playing the ancient game "Zawngtuilut," which showcases strength, agility, and coordination via friendly competition. The game involves two teams or people competing against each other by trying to jump over a long wooden pole or bamboo without touching it. Zawngtuilut is culturally significant for the Kaipeng community and is frequently performed at festivals, gatherings, or special occasions.

Efforts are being made to resuscitate indigenous sports like Zawngtuilut among the Kaipeng people through various preservation initiatives. These initiatives may involve arranging events or tournaments to promote participation and interest in traditional games, recording oral histories and cultural practices related to indigenous sports, and aiding in the transfer of knowledge from older generations to younger ones.

Educational institutions, cultural organizations, and community leaders are crucial in fostering the resurgence of traditional sports among the Kaipeng people. These stakeholders help preserve and promote Kaipeng cultural heritage by integrating traditional games into school curricula, organizing cultural workshops and seminars, and supporting community-led projects.

The resurgence of indigenous sports within the Kaipeng tribe reflects a larger effort within the Halam community to restore and honor ancient cultural customs. The Kaipeng tribe is preserving and promoting its distinct cultural identity by revitalizing indigenous sports with the help of grassroots efforts, community engagement, and assistance from many partners.

The methodology will use a qualitative approach, including participant observation, interviews with community members and elders, and archive examination of historical documents and cultural artifacts. Ethical considerations related to consent and cultural sensitivity will be discussed.

The section will outline the research findings, focusing on the reasons for the resurgence of indigenous sports among the Halam community, the involvement of traditional institutions and community leaders, and the effects of revival initiatives on social unity and cultural heritage. Among the tribes, there are numerous indigenous sports, but only a select handful are chosen.

1. Ro-Rwnon

Ro-rwnon is one of the most commonly played games by the Riam tribes and almost whole of Northeast Indigenous tribes. Here in the picture the Bongcher's of Tripura are displaying their skill and strength during the competition. The game ro-rwnon rule is very simple; the participants(s) can be one on one or in groups. The competitors will be given a bamboo pole of 3-4ft long and he competitors will be given their side to choose their positions. Once the referee calls out or after the whistle is blown, the competitors will need to push each other with all their strength and ability. The competitor(s) who can push their opponent is or are declared as winner.



2. Kek-Andai and Sakorke Antan

The Ranglong tribe is an indigenous tribe of Tripura, a state located in northeastern India. The Ranglong tribe is classified as a sub-tribe of the Halam ethnic group. The Ranglongs possess unique cultural customs, language, and traditions within the larger Halam ethnic group. They frequently have similarities with other Halam sub-tribes but may also possess distinct rituals and traditions particular to their subgroup. They reside in different areas of Tripura, especially in rural communities located in the hilly sections of the state.

Ranglong communities can also be found in adjacent regions of Assam and Mizoram. The Ranglongs, like to other native tribes in Tripura, possess a unique cultural identity, language, and ancient customs that enrich the richness of the region's ethnic fabric.

KEK-ANDAI



SAKORKE ANTAN



The Ranglongs, along with other Halam sub-tribes, have enriched Tripura's cultural diversity with their distinct legacy, which includes traditional games such as Kek-andai and Sakorke Antan. Their cultural history is abundant, encompassing traditional sports and games that have been transmitted across centuries. The Ranglong tribe plays two traditional games called Kek-andai and Sakorke Antan.

Kek-andai is a traditional game that entails tossing a small wooden ball to a target, whereas Sakorke Antan is a type of wrestling. Both games are commonly played during Ranglong festivals and cultural events, especially in rural villages located in the highlands where the Ranglong community lives.

The traditional sports are culturally essential to the Ranglong tribe, playing a key role in preserving their past and building a strong feeling of community and identity. The games offer chances for socializing and leisure activities within the community.

The Ranglong tribe has made efforts to maintain traditional sports as a crucial aspect of their cultural traditions, even in the face of industrialization and external cultural influences. To perpetuate these games, efforts involve transferring information and abilities from older individuals to younger generations and arranging events and competitions to encourage participation and interest in these ancient activities.

Examining the Kek-andai and Sakorke Antan games of the Ranglong tribe offers valuable insights into indigenous cultures, the importance of traditional sports in upholding cultural identity, and tribes' endeavors to save their history in the face of evolving socioeconomic dynamics. This research can enhance the overall comprehension of cultural conservation and the significance of traditional sports in various cultural settings.

3. Akei Vokla

"Akei Vokla" is a traditional game commonly performed by the Halam tribes. The game's simplicity and physical challenge can attract enthusiastic participation from young men in these areas.

Akei Vokla aims for one participant to hoist the other while holding a precise posture called the "Bow Pose." Participants in Akei Vokla usually consist of only two robust and nimble young guys at a time. One person lifts while the other person does the Bow Pose. During the Bow Pose, the individual lies on their stomach with arms extended forward and legs stretched out behind them. The position mirrors the form of a bow, hence earning the title "Bow Pose." The lifter, sometimes referred to as the participant, positions themselves behind the individual performing the Bow Pose. The lifter raises the opponent by inserting their hands through the opponent's hands and gripping them securely. The game presents physical challenges to both players. The lifter needs strength and balance to raise the opponent, while the person in the Bow Pose must sustain their stance and balance while being lifted.

Akei Vokla demonstrates the participants' strength, agility, and endurance. Executing the moves effectively demands not just physical strength but also coordination and concentration. Cultural Importance: Akei Vokla, similar to other traditional games in indigenous communities, carries cultural value that goes beyond simply amusement. It frequently acts as a demonstration of power and skill within the society, promoting solidarity and a competitive attitude among those involved. Preservation efforts are undertaken to conserve traditional games such as Akei Vokla, as they are viewed as a crucial component of the cultural heritage of indigenous communities. Organizations and cultural groups may host events or competitions to uphold and perpetuate these ancient games for future generations.

Akei Vokla is a physical game and cultural practice that embodies the values and identity of the indigenous tribes involved. Due to its simplicity and physical demands, it remains a beloved and preferred activity in Halam.



4. Saiha Rakai

Saiha Rakai is a traditional game played by both men and women in specific Halam tribes. This game is culturally significant in these societies and is commonly played during festivals or other communal events. Here are specific facets of the game suitable for scholarly analysis:

In Saiha Rakai, the goal is for one participant to use bamboo poles to pull their opponent while demonstrating balance and power. The contestant who successfully pulls their opponent is announced as the victor. The game is usually played in a one-on-one format, where one participant competes against another. Saiha Rakai allows participation from both genders, demonstrating its inclusive community spirit. Participants are given two bamboo poles—one to grip and one to place between their thighs. The bamboo poles function as a tool for dragging the opponent and as a method for keeping balance during the game.

The rules of Saiha Rakai are straightforward. Participants are required to utilize the bamboo poles to pull their opponent towards them while simultaneously guarding against being dragged in the opposite direction. Success in the game relies heavily on the utilization of physical power, agility, and strategy.

Saiha Rakai bears profound cultural significance for the indigenous tribes who participate in it, going beyond mere recreation. The game promotes camaraderie and competition among community members while also conserving traditional rituals and values. Saiha Rakai stands out for including both male and female players. This demonstrates the egalitarian principles of indigenous cultures, where gender does not limit involvement in traditional activities. Saiha Rakai not only focuses on competition but also fosters social interaction and camaraderie among community members. It offers a chance for people to gather, exchange experiences, and honor their cultural heritage.

Preservation efforts are being made to protect traditional games like Saiha Rakai from the effects of industrialization and foreign influences. Cultural organizations, educational institutions, and community leaders can host events and tournaments to encourage and maintain traditional games among younger individuals. Saiha Rakai offers valuable insights on the cultural history, social dynamics, and values of the indigenous tribes of Halam and adjacent regions of northeastern India. It highlights the significance of conserving traditional games to uphold cultural identity and promote communal harmony.

SAIHA RAKAI



5. Zawngtuilut

Zawngtuilut is a traditional game popular among The Kaipeng community, especially in Kaipeng state in northeastern India. Here is some data regarding Zawngtuilut: The goal of Zawngtuilut is to demonstrate strength, agility, and coordination via friendly competition. The game usually consists of two teams or people battling against each other.

The main equipment for playing Zawngtuilut is a long wooden pole or bamboo. The pole's length may vary based on local customs and choices. The game commences with individuals or teams positioned at a specified distance from each other. One participant holds the pole horizontally at shoulder level, while the other individual or team tries to jump over the pole without making contact with it. The pole's height increases gradually with each successful jump, making the game increasingly tough with time.

Zawngtuilut scoring does not always adhere to a conventional scoring system. Participants or teams strive to successfully jump over taller poles, with each jump demonstrating their ability and agility. Zawngtuilut is not just a form of recreation but it carries cultural importance for the Mizo community. It is commonly performed at festivals, gatherings, or special events, acting as entertainment and a way to uphold ancient customs and beliefs. Zawngtuilut promotes community engagement and fellowship by uniting individuals to honor their cultural heritage and demonstrate their abilities. It offers a chance for people of all ages to join in and appreciate the celebrations. Zawngtuilut is being preserved to ensure its continuity for future generations, like many other traditional games and cultural traditions. Cultural organizations, educational institutions, and community leaders may host events or tournaments to encourage and maintain traditional games such as Zawngtuilut.

The other indigenous games lists are as follows:

KAIPENG

1. Zawngtuilut
2. Sakorke
3. Mairahip
4. Tuililut
5. Reng ramu radai
6. Poi radai
7. Kitkitte
8. Tuiliurasit
9. Septum rasit
10. Sumpum dom
11. Rokol poi
12. Sartang lawn
13. Zawngtui rawp
14. Kumpui Ruthur
15. Ar'ial
16. Sarel kar
17. Redy radai
18. Kabadi(dudu)
19. Artaun rasit
20. Puantumbu vir
21. Rui rel
22. Suanrakual rawvik reltir
23. The hem
24. Tuaikum zuang
25. Saphi meivel
26. Marpuantom
27. Tuililut rasit
28. Kong rakul te
29. Buka pheibang lames
30. Kutlet kuarman
31. Saiha rakai
32. Kholrei rapot
33. kelchal raki raher
34. Zawng nau nei
35. Rulpui ding
36. Avom ranu nek

37. Kut lam se
38. Uichok rapuak
39. Raw rahel
40. Nardon liak
41. Tak raser
42. Nawmphl lak
44. Sawmka sawmnika
45. Sarel rathou
46. Kut rabuan
47. Ban rakhiak
48. Va'ak Rahom
59. Pheidompa
60. Sarel ratawk
61. Dingbar rathou
62. Saiha rakai
63. Meichi khela
64. Chi ngin nghin
65. Kut lawn
66. Ban tule
67. Taichum bilip
68. Anu maw adi apa, phir phang
69. Kaza duza
70. Rumui choi

Ranglong

1. Sakorke t̄an
2. Besut ankei
3. M̄ai anthupte
4. Aberakite
5. Rotuon ans̄on
6. Saipui ri'nnuk
7. Reisong anher
8. Tuong anl̄am
9. Kamsa s̄ot
10. Besut anl̄om
11. Ri'nkei
12. Saili k̄ap
13. Sumpuk andom
14. Masui anbuon
15. Anbuon
16. Nga le Ser̄am
17. K̄amkoi sal̄ak
18. Ārkh̄ong antuk
19. Puontethor

In addition to games and sports, indigenous people engage in hunting and gathering activities. The elderly man of the family participates in hunting expeditions with a group in the forest. After the hunters catch their game, they distribute the meat evenly to every household in the hamlet. Hunting and gathering activities may still occur, but the equal distribution of meat among people has disappeared owing to economic factors.

The revivalism of indigenous sports among the Halam community in Tripura, India, signifies a resurgence of traditional games and a reaffirmation of cultural identity and history. The Halam people have shown a tremendous dedication to preserve their ancestral customs and traditions by promoting and participating in indigenous sports, despite facing obstacles from modernization and foreign influences.

This study utilized qualitative research methods including interviews, participant observation, and archival analysis to explore the socio-cultural significance, historical context, and contemporary patterns of indigenous sports in the Halam community. The study has examined the reasons for the resurgence of these traditional activities, emphasizing their importance in creating community unity, preserving cultural heritage, and enhancing physical health among the Halam people.

The examples, including Ro-rwnon, Kek-andai, Sakorke Antan, Akei Vokla, Saiha Rakai, and Zawngtuilut, showcase the variety of indigenous games played by the Halam and nearby tribes. These games function as sources of entertainment and also as platforms for social interaction, showcasing skills, and passing on cultural values between generations.

The preservation efforts of the Halam community, involving traditional institutions, community leaders, and cultural groups, highlight the importance of indigenous sports in Tripura's cultural heritage. These endeavors not only maintain the legacy of traditional games but also enhance the community's development by promoting feelings of pride, belonging, and solidarity among its members.

The revival of traditional sports within the Halam group demonstrates the enduring nature of cultural traditions despite contemporary obstacles. The Halam people are reclaiming their cultural heritage and establishing their unique identity within Indian culture by embracing and renewing their traditional sports. The promotion and preservation of indigenous sports have significant consequences for cultural conservation, community development, and policy interventions to protect India's tribal heritage diversity.

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