

## The Folk Games of Tamilnadu

-Prof. S. Carlos

Richard M. Dorson in his essay, 'Concepts of Folklore and Folk life studies', groups Folklore and Folk life studies under four headings:

a) Under the rubric *Oral literature* fall spoken, sung and voiced form of traditional utterances that show repetitive patterns.

b) In direct contrast to his oral literature is physical folklife generally called *material culture*. How men and women in traditional societies build their homes, make their clothes, prepare their food, farm and fish, fashion their tools and design their furniture and utensils are questions that concern the student of material culture.

c) In between oral literature and material culture lie areas of traditional life facing in both directions. One such area we may call *social folk custom*, where the emphasis is on group interaction rather on individual skills. These customs are closely bound up with deeply held folk beliefs.

The participation of large social units in public performances and entertainment leads to another kind of social folk custom which include certain games and recreations. The festivals and celebrations also come under this social folk custom.

(d) The fourth sector of folklore and folklife may be designed the *performing folk arts* which concern primarily with traditional music, dance and drama.

Folk games come under the third grouping which concern us in this paper. Though a few have attempted on oral literature of Tamilnadu, so far nobody has paid attention to other branches of folklore and folklife.

Western folklorists like Peter and Iona Opie have paid much attention to juvenile rites, pranks and nicknames as well as children's games and calendar customs. Even then, new significance is brought to the study of traditional pastimes with the publication of recent works in the other social sciences notably in Psychology, Sociology and Anthropology. Some of the findings of the above mentioned social sciences are applied to

games by John Huizinga, Jean Piaget, Erick Piaget and Erikson. Sutton Smith and Roberts have examined games of all kinds cross-culturally.

Folk games and recreations in Tamilnadu are collected by Prof. *Dēvanēya Pāvāṇar* in his book *Tamīlnāṭṭu Viḷaiyāṭṭukkaḷ*. In this book the author is more concerned with tracing the antiquity of the game in earlier sources i.e. *Tolkāppiyam* and *Caṅkam* literature. Though this author is ignorant of the theoretical importance of folk games research he should be appreciated for his earlier attempt in this field which is neglected even by folklorists. Due to lack of knowledge in the science of folklore the above mentioned author has corrected the spoken form of folk songs that were sung during the course of those games.

Folk games are divided into three, games of physical skill, games of strategy and games of chance. A perusal of this folk game collection, mentioned above shows that all the three divisions of the games are found in Tamil Nadu also.

The games of physical skill are those in which the physical strength plays the main part. A game called ghost ball, (throwing a tough ball at the back of another boy) reported in the collection of *Pāvāṇar*, is mainly a game of physical skill. Out of about one hundred games collected in this volume most of them are games of skill. They are *Cillāṅkuccu*, *Killittaṅṭu*, *Kiṭṭippul*, *Piḷḷaiyar Pantu*, *Marakkuraṅku*, *Kāyā Paḷamā*, *Kuccu Viḷaiyāṭṭu*, *Vaṅṅāṅṭāḷi*, *Kiḷittaṭṭu* and *Aṅṅirpiḷḷai* etc.

Another type of folk game is the game of strategy. The hide-and-peek type of games reported in this collection under various names *Kaṅṅāmpotti*, *Pukaiyilai Kaṭṭai Uruṭṭal*, *Pukaiyilaikkaṭṭai eṭuttal*, etc. are games of strategy. Some other games viz: *Kulaikulaiyāy*, *Muntirikkāi*, *Mōtiram Vaittal*, *Taṭṭāṅkal*, *Mūṅṅāṅkal*, *Aintāṅkal*, *Ēlāṅkal*, *Palanāḷorukal*, *Paṅṅirukal*, *Palakal* etc., also fall under the name, games of strategy. The games of strategy form the second majority in this collection.

The games of chance are very few in number in this collection. They are *aṭṭāṅkay puṭṭalaṅkāy* and *Utāmaṅi*. In most of the games of physical skill and games of strategy, the first part of the game-that is , dividing the children into two groups, the technique of the

game of chance is used.

There are certain games which can be called games of skill and games of chance e.g.; *Pūkkutirai*. These games have both the techniques of games of skill as well as games of chance.

Earlier researches in the field of games have shown that the games of strategy provide models for analysing decision---as is found in war and in business.

Likewise the games of chance have provided models for analysing statistical outcomes in a wide range of social problems.

These realistic applications of the processes modelled by the games themselves would certainly seem to imply that though games may be fun to players, they are also doing some serious work for the culture of which they are part.

Preliminary cross-cultural surveys conducted by anthropologists show that games emphasizing physical skill and dexterity have a near universal ethnographic distribution. The studies of child development have stressed the importance of such activities in the growth of motor coordination and manipulative skill. The wide distribution of games of all kinds emphasizing the physical skill and dexterity all over Tamil Nadu is also worthy of notice.

The result from the cross cultural study of games of chance show that these games first occur in cultures where there is great uncertainty about basic food supplies or about the conditions of survival. Children in such cultures are made anxious about acting upon their own resources. They are taught to rely on such outside decision making. The paucity of games of chance in Tamil Nadu will throw light upon the darker sides of Tamil Culture and Tamil behaviour.

An exhaustive collection and systematic research of folk games of the Tamils will undoubtedly provide the most important key to the understanding of Tamil Nadu.