

THE REASONS FOR TRADITIONAL GAMES LOSING POPULARITY: A CASE STUDY OF SKHY (CALF) IN NIHAGDARA, KP (PAKISTAN)

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Abstract

Traditional games including Kabaddi, Chilli, and Skhy etc., played in Nihagdara (District Dir Upper) have been under pressure for the last two decades due to the advent of modern games such as cricket, volleyball, and video games. The fervor for modern games seems to be cultural than concerns about health, psychological wellbeing, and social interaction. Skhy (Calf), which was so popular in Nihagdara, has particularly suffered over the last years. This study explores the reasons for the downfall of traditional games with special focus on Skhy in Jatgram, Rambial, and Maskari. Using the case study method, the research collected data from both adults and youngsters through interviews and focus group discussion. Data was analyzed through descriptive statistics (Frequency Distribution) to make sense of how and why Skhy became unpopular. The results show that cultural onslaught has been the main reason for downfall of traditional games including Skhy in addition to the apathy of local community in preserving its traditions and sports.

Key words: Traditional games, Skhy, Culture, Physical Health

Introduction

Human beings, by nature and nurture, engage themselves in many different physical activities for various purposes including building strength, increasing efficiency, getting entertainment, losing weight, and even just to be active. The journey to modern-day sports begins with man's need for developing skills for hunting but now people are mostly engaged for recreation and healthcare. Traditional games, therefore,

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appear to be more hunting-oriented than recreation. As men shifted from one form of occupation/source of living to another, they changed their sports activities accordingly. Every generation discovers and develops its own ways of recreation and physical exertion and discards many others depending on their peculiar circumstances. Games may be discarded because they may (a) be physically demanding (b) require more resources (c) not be entertaining (d) have cultural inhibitions, (e) and most importantly, may not be in tune with the existing living styles of a community.

Skhy (Calf) is one of the traditional games which was popular in many parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) in general and in District Dir in particular but has now been replaced by other games such as cricket, volley ball, and video games. This study attempts to explore the peculiar socio-cultural conditions in which Skhy was so popular and the reasons for its abandonment. The study is interesting in that it adds to our understanding of how and why games are introduced, promoted, and ultimately discarded. In other words, the study helps us comprehend the dynamics of life cycle through which a game goes through from its birth to death. Moreover, the study results are a useful guide in reviving some traditional games which may have gone out of fashion for cultural reasons but may be otherwise very useful for socialization, recreation, and health. The dominant reason that respondents cited for their involvement in a particular game including Skhy was to improve their health. Other reasons included relaxation, having fun, and improving fitness.

Problem Statement

The study in question aims at exploring the reasons of why Skhy (the calf game) has become unpopular in District Dir despite the fact that it enjoyed overwhelming participation by the public both as players and spectators. One can now find very few (if at all) individuals attracted to this game in villages. The youngsters, by and large, enthusiastically participate in such games as cricket, volley ball, and tennis. Traditional games like Kabadi, Guli Danda, and Skhy have gone out of fashion. This study has attempted to examine the factors that have led to the downfall and in some cases the demise of traditional games with particular focus on Skhy as a case in point.

Study Objectives

The study has attempted to achieve the following objectives:

1. To know the conditions in which Skhy emerged as a popular game in District Dir, especially in Nihagdara
2. To Understand the individual motivation of people for playing the Skhy game or observing it as spectators
3. To know the reasons for the gradual downfall of Skhy in Nihagdara
4. To explore whether Skhy can be revived or not

Significance of the Study

Through the years, games have been known to affect different cultures and societies. The sports and stories related with them help us understand such complex issues as human rights, character building, fairness, standards of health, and child development etc. Sports of various types have been popular across the world due to their role in social integration and advancement. It, therefore, becomes very important to understand different sports and the underlying reasons for their birth, growth, and demise.

This study has focused on Skhy which was so popular a few decades back in Nihagdara and many other parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (formerly known as North West Frontier Province). The study has important theoretical and practical contribution. Theoretically, it enriches our understanding of why people tend to start a particular game and how it goes through different stages from birth to death. Practically, results of the study might be useful for reviving traditional games like Skhy which may be beneficial for recreation and health but may have lost to the fashion of modern times. The policy makers may learn about the importance of traditional games through this study and may take measures to promote and develop some of the dead games for the benefit of society particularly in rural areas where space and financial constraints may prevent modern games to flourish.

Literature Review

Traditional games are those games which originated before the industrial era and are mostly found in tribal/traditional societies in rural areas (UNESCO, 2004). The role of traditional games (TGs) for physical,

social, and psychological wellbeing has been universally recognized (Pfister, 1997). People in general in the past involved themselves in traditional sports not only for health and relaxation purposes but also for building perseverance, endurance, and concentration in doing other routine activities (Andersen, 2009). Even today, physicians generally recommend physical exertion (the core characteristic of traditional games) as a strong preventive measure against various physical diseases and psychological disorders (UNESCO, 2004). Engaging in traditional sports has also positive impact on mental development as players have to constantly think about various aspects of the game rules and winning strategies on the spot to compete well against the rival team (Andersen, 2009). According to Parlebas (2003), traditional as well as all outdoor games significantly improve social relations because people learn to live by the set norms and rules of the game besides helping in understanding and adopting the socio-cultural context in which they live. Specifically, traditional games offer the following interpersonal benefits:

- Connect the young to older generation
- Socialize group function and create sense of togetherness
- Integrate friends and families in workplace, neighborhood, and generations.
- Open up the mind to diverse perspectives

On a practical level, traditional games were easy to play and could be easily accessed in addition to fitting into the local climate/topography reflecting the local dress, religion, and traditional imaginative customs (Parlebas, 2003). Such games are still part of a cultural tradition and common heritage. Due to growing alienation and modern lifestyle, traditional games have largely been forgotten and many young individuals do not know anything about them (Andersen, 2009). However, there are some games which have resisted modernity and are still played in different parts of the world (Frank, 2002). According to (Kovačević and Opić, 2014), traditional games are defined and restricted by space, seasons, and environments with people generally playing them in pastures and plains, rivers and streams, meadows, village roads, and courtyards. Some games were supplemented by dance and songs to energize the players.

In the past, play was not reserved for children. Adults equally

participated in games because they were a natural part of life and reflected their desire to add value to holidays, life events, and change in season (Eichberg, 2010). According to Pfister, Niewerth and Steins (1996), one reason for wide participation was that people had enough spare time and traditional games did not require special equipment and physical skills. They were also simple to play as they were based on social manners and general customs

Despite many avowed advantages for health, socialization, and psychological development, traditional games are on the path of extinction. The young generation has turned to virtual games and other modern games (e.g. cricket, hockey, and football) for sporting, entertainment, and use of leisure (Pfister, 2004). Research studies have documented different reasons for the downfall of traditional games. According to Liponski & Jaouen, 2003, it is the cultural onslaught of western countries which has brought about change in the life style and attitudes of people in tribal societies (where traditional games are in mostly in vogue). The advent of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) has also played a pivotal role in dwarfing the importance and charm of traditional games (Pfister, 2004). The youngsters hardly find time for out-door games. They spend most of their leisure time on video games and surfing social media (Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube etc.). Availability of space is also a challenge for traditional games. Some traditional games (e.g. Skhy) require grassy and plain grounds which have mostly vanished as a result of deforestation and infrastructure and housing schemes (Schechner, 1988). The most prominent reason for abandonment of traditional games is cultural. Educated people feel it against their social status to participate and encourage traditional games (Yuzo, 2006). This study focuses on Skhy as a case study which sheds light on the context, dynamics, and general requirements of Skhy in order to gain more and better understanding of why people have turned their backs to traditional games.

Research Design

This study is based on case study method. The basic case study entails the detailed and intensive analysis of a single case. According to Stake (1995), case study research is concerned with the complexity and particular nature of the case in question. A case can be a single

organization, a single location, and person, or a single event. Using this approach, the researcher focuses on the elucidation of the unique features of a single unit of analysis. The case is generally not representative of the entire population of interest and hence suffers from the problem of generalizability (external validity) but it provides a great deal of understanding of a given phenomenon (Knights & McCabe, 1997).

Skhy has been focused on as case study for this research. The most common traditional games in vogue in Nihagdara include (a) Nakhy (b) Kabaddi (c) Skhy (d) Guli-danda (e) Chrindo (f) Chilli (g) Angai (h) Parpatoni, and (i) Manzary. The reasons for selecting Skhy as study are:

1. It used to be a relatively popular game three decades back which is no longer in vogue now.
2. People enthusiastically supported and participated in this game, particularly in the winter season.
3. It involved tough contest in which all players were actively involved and generally involved one-on-one fight
4. Apparently, the game did not suffer from any space or other constraints and still it has been abandoned.

Data was collected from 40 respondents in three villages including Jatgram, Maskari, and Rambial. All these villages have geographical proximity as well as cultural similarity. Respondents who were selected were all male and were in the age range of 20 and 50. The reason for inclusion of both young and adults in the sample was to know the perspectives of diverse groups about traditional games in general and Skhy in particular. Data was collected through interview method followed by focus discussion and was based on the following questions:

- Question 1. What game, in your opinion, was the most popular one when you were in your teens?
- Question 2. Did you ever played any game in your teens?
- Question 3. What was your main motivation for playing a game?
- Question 4. Why have the youth lost interest in traditional games like Skhy, Kabbadi, and Guli-Danda etc.?
- Question 5. What reasons would you cite for youngsters to participate/play Skhy?
- Question 6. If you were to choose between modern and traditional games, which one would you prefer and why?

Question 7. Do you believe traditional games can be revived?

Question 8. What measures would you suggest for reviving Skhy?

Brief description of Skhy
 Skhy was generally played in the open on river beaches or grassy grounds. The winter season was the preferred time for playing this game and had big attraction during the afternoon. The game was generally confined to a locality and there were hardly any inter-village contests. Female never played or participated in Skhy as the players were dressed in Shilwar and it was considered immodest for female to watch someone half-dressed. The rules of Skhy and its composition are as follows:

- i. The game is played by two teams
- ii. Each team comprises 6-8 players, the minimum number is 4
- iii. A particular spot IS specified, called topi (cap), which one team has to defend and the other to touch it through one designated player, called Skhai (she-calf).
- iv. Every player has to hop on one leg and hold the other one tightly in the opposite hand.
- v. The defending team tries to reach out to the Skhai and forces him to unlock his leg.
- vi. The offensive team, on the other hand, keeps fighting with the opposing team to facilitate the Skhai run to the designated spot.
- vii. If the key player fails to reach the spot because of stiff resistance and is somehow forced to let his leg loose by keeping his hands off, his team loses the game and the other team starts its turn.
- viii. If the Skhai manages to reach the spot unbeaten five times in a row, his team wins the game.



FIGURE 1: BOYS STARTING SKHY

Research Findings

The respondents were asked some general questions pertaining to traditional games as well as questions specific to Skhy. The purpose of general questions was to make sense of why have traditional games lost popularity over time and the Skhy-specific questioned were designed as proxy for understanding the big picture of sports in terms of their life cycle. Following is the transcription of questions and responses.

Question 1. What game, in your opinion, was the most popular one when you were in your teens?

Table: 1 *Game Popularity (N= 40)*

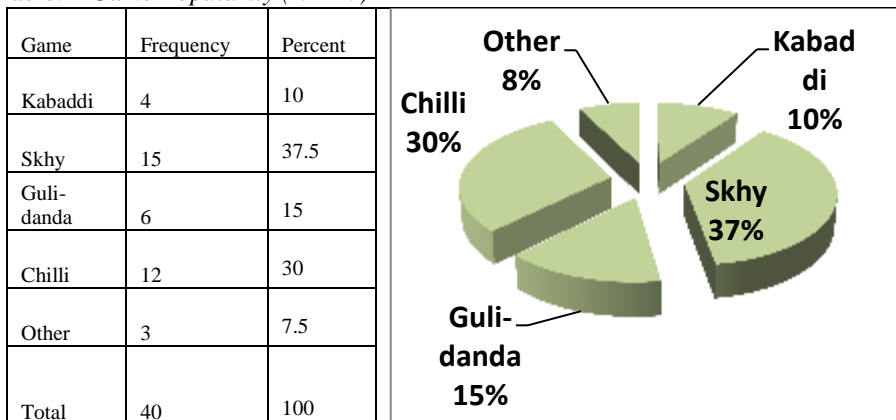


Figure 2: Game Popularity

The responses given above show that Skhy was the most popular game (37.5%) followed by Chilli (30%). It means people in general enjoyed participating and playing Skhi more than other games.

Question 2. Did you ever play any game in your teens?

Table 2 Statistics about game in Teens (N= 40)

Yes	No	Total
26	14	40
65%	35%	100%

The pie chart displays the distribution of responses to the question 'Did you ever play any game in your teens?'. The 'Yes' category is represented by a large black slice, accounting for 65% of the total. The 'No' category is represented by a smaller blue slice, accounting for 35% of the total.

Figure 3: Statistics about Game in Teens

Table 2 shows that most people (65%) in the sample have participated in traditional games. Those who have not participated appear to be the youngsters who play modern games including cricket, volleyball, and virtual games.

Question 3. What was your main motivation for playing a game?

Table 3: Statistics Game’s Motivation (N= 40)

Main motivation	Frequency
Maintaining health	10 (25%)
Recreation	20 (50%)
Socialization	6 (15%)
Other	4 (10%)

The bar chart illustrates the primary motivations for playing a game. The y-axis represents the frequency of responses, ranging from 0 to 25. The x-axis lists four categories: Health, Recreation, Socialization, and Other. The bars show the following frequencies: Health (10), Recreation (20), Socialization (6), and Other (4).

Figure 4 Statistics Game’s Motivation

The responses given in table 3 depict a difference between why people in the past engaged in sports and why they do it today. The main reason for people to play a traditional game was recreation. They either did not know about the physical impact of sports or they did not care much about health. Sports provided them with opportunity to use their leisure time for relaxation.

Question 4. Why have the youth lost interest in traditional games like Skhy, Kabbadi, and Guli-Danda etc.?

Table 4: Statistics about Reasons Behind Interest Lost in Games (N= 40)

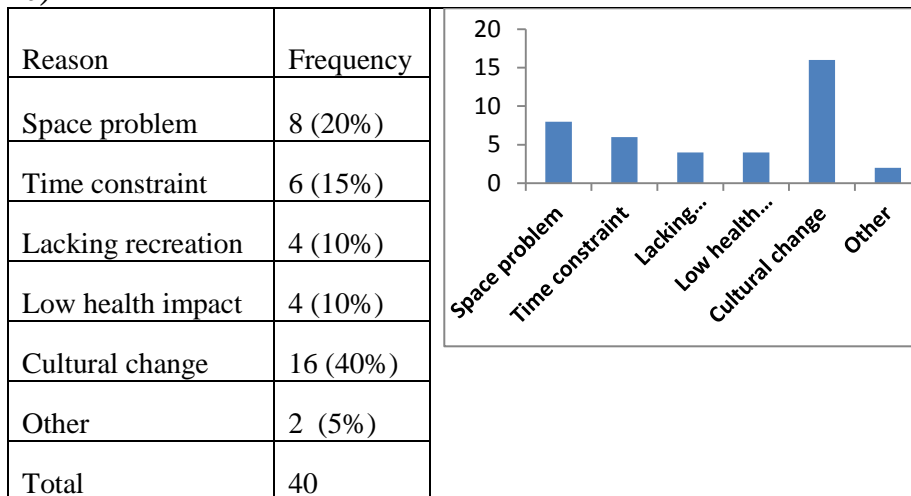
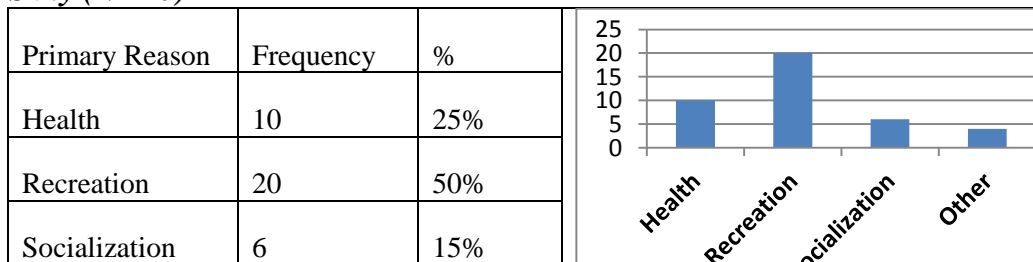


Figure 5: Statistics about Reasons behind Interest Lost in Games

Table 4 given above indicates that people have lost interest in traditional games mainly because of change in culture. The emergence of new games and their promotion in electronic and print media have brought about attitudinal change towards games people played in the past. Virtual games, for example, may have low recreation and health value but the modern generation is engrossed in them due to change in culture.

Question 5. What reasons would you cite for youngsters to participate/play Skhy?

Table 5: Reasons Behind Suggestion to Play Skhy (N= 40)



Other	4	10%
Total	40	100%

Figure 6: *Reasons Behind Suggestion to Play Skhy*

The reason for participating (playing or watching) in Skhy is no different from the primary motivation for participation in any other traditional game. Most people (50%) reported to have played Skhy during their teenage mainly for recreation purposes. Skhy attracted people as it involved one-on-one intense fight in addition to its quick outcome.

Question 6. If you were to choose between modern and traditional games, which one would you prefer and why?

Table 6: *Statistics behind Preference of Games (N= 40)*

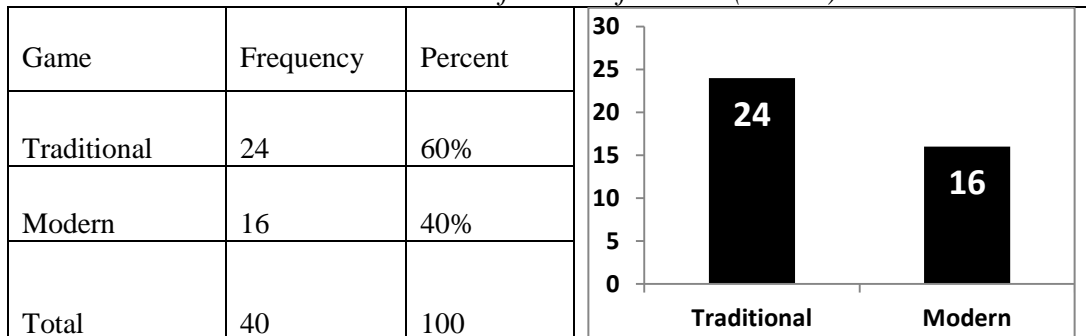


Figure 8: *Statistics behind Preference of Games*

Responses to the question of preference for either traditional or modern games show that most people prefer the traditional games. This attitude may have two reasons: One, majority of respondents in the sample are adults and they may have never played modern games and hence may have no liking for them; Two, the adults may feel nostalgia for traditional games. Old traditions generally feel good simply due to nostalgic impact.

Question 7. Do you believe traditional games can be revived?

Table 7: Statistics about the Possibility of Revival of Traditional Games (N= 40)

Revival possibility	Frequency	Percent
Yes	22	55
No	18	45
Total	40	100

Figure 8: Statistics about the Possibility of Revival Traditional Games

The possibility of reviving traditional games, according to the data in Table 1.8, is not very high. 55% respondents believe the traditional games can be revived whereas 45% believe otherwise. The reason for low possibility may be the impact of media and lack of government interest in reviving traditional games.

Question 8. What measures would you suggest for reviving Skhy?

Table 8: Statistics about the Possibility of Revival of Traditional Games (N= 40)

Measures for revival	Frequency
Govt. Support (GS)	20
Elders' Encouragement (EE)	6
Media Promotion (MP)	10
Others	4
Total	40

Figure 9: Statistics about the Possibility of Revival of Traditional Games
 Table 8 indicates that most of the respondents (50%) believe that government can revive Skhy by giving financial and logistic support. In

addition to providing space (playgrounds), the government should encourage youngsters to compete in Skhy game by making it part of the sports events in schools and colleges. Media can also be mobilized to highlight the positive aspects of traditional games.

Discussion and Conclusion

According to UNESCO Report (2004), “the UN agency will encourage the promotion and development of traditional games and sports by an international charter as elements of sport for all and an expression of the world’s rich and diverse cultural heritage.”

Traditional games have mainly lost to modern games not because they are in any way inferior. Cultural change, as a result of globalization, has played a pivotal role in pushing traditional games out of fashion. Skhy, which was one of the most popular games in Nihagdara and was played in winter season with great pomp and show, has lost charm over the last three two decades. It influenced the mental development as players had to think about various problems and came up with solutions in order to win the game. Moreover, the game significantly improved social relations as people learnt to live by set norms and rules of the game besides helping in understanding the social context in which people lived. Skhy has been replaced by modern games such as cricket, volleyball, and video games. The game was popular because it encouraged one-to-one contest, ended relatively quick, and created a culture of social cohesion. The adults generally turned out in great numbers to watch their children playing Skhy.

The results of this study, in general, show that traditional games, including Skhy, can be revived through deliberate efforts by government, local elders, and media to make them part of local events and school sports contests. It is, however, important to note that some traditional games happened to be very risky and most often caused tribal conflicts.

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