

Indigenous Physical Culture of Bengal During the British Regime

Dr. Subhabrata Kar

=====
Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 13:6 June 2013
=====

Abstract

During the British regime, Bengal was ahead in all types of revolutionary activity, much influenced by different components of the then Bengali society. Those components were the influence of some great philosophers or thinkers, influence of akhra, bratachari and revolutionary movements, influence of indigenous rural games, great clubs and other physical activities of Bengal regarding physical culture of the Bengali people. Obviously, Bengali physical culture was very much influenced by revolutionary activities of akhras or clubs and at the same time it is proper to mention that in rural Bengal there was a great storage of indigenous minor and folk games. In British India Bengali people were very much fond of indigenous rural games and sports as well as bratachari dance and activities.

Introduction

From the middle of the nineteenth century, there was a growing awareness of the potentiality for a national physical culture that would raise Indian individuals and society from the degeneracy into which they were perceived to be sunk. For example, from the 1850s until at least the 1930s the nationalistic Bengali Hindu elite “strove to overcome its supposed degeneracy through the pursuit of physical culture.” The struggle to define an Indian form of body discipline was rendered ambivalent by the acceptance of certain core ideological values of a Western, and ultimately imperialist, discourse on manliness and the body.

The ‘akhara’ and the ‘Hindu mela’ worked alongside (and sometimes squarely within) the current of colonial education reform and “indigenous” physical culture movements maintained a permeability to Western influence, based on a deep appreciation of the cultural and political potential of the nationalistic gymnastic movements of Europe. Indeed, even in the schools and gurukuls of the Arya Samaj, that most ardently “swadeshi” of the Indian Samajs and “perhaps the greatest indigenous educational agency,” the students would rise before dawn and immediately perform “dumbbell exercises and calisthenics,” a regime clearly borrowed from the methods of physical culture in vogue in Europe at the time and widely disseminated throughout India. It was through experiments such as these that physical culture became “a central part of the educational programme” in India. Physically fit, healthy citizens of good character dedicating them to the betterment of Mother India thereby became “important symbols of a strong and vibrant nation in an age when Hindus felt that they lacked ‘manliness,’ were ‘weak,’ ‘lacking in courage,’ and were a ‘lethargic race’.”

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 13:6 June 2013

Dr. Subhabrata Kar

Indigenous Physical Culture of Bengal During the British Regime

Games and Sports Culture in West Bengal

The games and sports as culture traits particularly in West Bengal have certain specific elements. One of these is the utilization of leisure which had its origin and growth in the cradle of the agrarian economy of pre-British India. The informal folk games in the rural culture were marked by lack of institutionalization communication. These indigenous folk games as pastime recreation have been played around the Bengali communities within the narrow cultural circles of the then rural societies of West Bengal for a long time. The spirit of those traditional games was mere satisfaction of recreational activities, where participants only got the pleasure while in general there was no special role for recreation leaders and spectators, and therefore, it worked as a method without reciprocation or encouragement.

The British came to India with their new form of economic, educational, and cultural norms. The British came to India with their new mode of economic, educational, and cultural norms. In Bengal, an important urban center like Calcutta was purposely selected by them for trade and commerce. The new city Calcutta in Bengal as introduced by the British had its impact on the traditional pattern of recreation including games, sports and allied activities. This may be defined as a new type of induced institutionalized games that altered to a large extent the passive non-induced games and sports of the earlier era.

Nationalist Physical Culture of Bengal

Last two decades of the nineteenth century saw the development of the nationalist movement and the struggle to free the motherland from British rule was gaining gradual acceptance among the people. But, a number of eminent personalities of Bengal made remarkable contributions towards the development of physical culture, sports and games in Bengal as well as the whole of India.

Philosophers of Bengal and Their Contribution

Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838-1894)



Bankim Chandra Chatterjee

Courtesy: <http://infinitelinkz.com/national-symbols-of-india/national-song-of-india/>

Bankim Chandra Chatterji's novel *Anandamath*, published in the early 1880s amid a growing nationalist fervor in India, did much to popularize the ideal of the patriotic Hindu *sanyasin* fighting against the foreign tormenter and trying to promote the ideal of a national physical culture.

The religious and political descriptions of *Anandamath* inspired many young nationalists to enter into a violent struggle against British rule in the name of a timeless and unchanging Hindu religious protocol: the *sanatana* dharma. This religious code transcends intra-Hindu sectarian divisions.

It was Bankim Chandra who defined for physical education both its precise location in the larger movement which is called, in textbook histories, "socio-religious reform" in Bengal, as well as the exact nature of the regimen it described. At the core of the program lay the notion of *anushilam* and its locus was the (bourgeois, Hindu) male body.

Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902)



Swami Vivekananda

Swami Vivekananda was a symbol of courage, vitality and dynamic personality. He appealed to the Bengali youth to be educated - physically, mentally and morally. Being a philosopher, preacher he indicated that one may be nearer to heaven by playing football than through the study of religious books like 'Gita'. The members of the various revolutionary groups, physical culture, physical activity, clubs (*akhra*) were also influenced by Swami Vivekananda.

While Vivekananda scorned the practices of *haṭha* yoga ("a method utilizing physical exercises to control the body and attain union of the self with the Supreme Being" <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/hatha+yoga?s=t>) and did not seem to have made the link between *asana* and physical culture, the same equation of bodily strength and spiritual merit that we see here was to become central to the merger between the physical culture movement and *haṭha* yoga itself. Vivekananda, along with associates like Sarala Debi and Sister Nivedita, was instrumental in pushing forward the physical culture agenda among the nationalist youth of the country, and it is clear to see that a close relationship continued from the start between the ideological milieu in which modern yoga had its beginning and the militant nationalist physical culture movement.

We might also note in this regard that the men trained at Debi's gymnasium often collaborated with Aurobindo Ghosh, the vociferous pamphleteer, radical extremist, and future modern yoga guru, who was himself inspired to translate Bankim's novel in 1909. This is one more example of the atmosphere of nationalist physical culture from which modern yoga would emerge.

Vivekananda, in his scheme of education, meticulously includes all those studies, which are necessary for the all-around development of the body, mind and soul of the individual. These studies can be brought under the broad heads of physical culture, aesthetics, classics, language, religion, science and technology. According to Swamiji, the culture values of the country should form an integral part of the curriculum of education. The culture of India has its roots in her spiritual values. The time-tested values are to be imbibed in the thoughts and lives of the students through the study of the classics like Ramayana, Mahabharata, Gita, Vedas and Upanishads. This will keep the perennial flow of our spiritual values into the world of culture.

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941)



Rabindranath Tagore

Nobel laureate Rabindranath was among the leading personalities of Bengal Renaissance. He was earlier involved in the 'Hindu Mela' for spreading nationalist awareness. He composed the tune of the famous Bengali patriotic song, 'Bandemataram', written by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay. At Santiniketan, established by Tagore himself in 1901, he introduced various programmes of physical activity as part of total development of personality. He developed a movement called Brati Balak, in which young boys of rural Bengal used to exhibit various forms of physical culture.

Sarala Debi Ghosal (1873-1945):



Sarala Debi Ghosal

One key figure in this physical culture revival was Sarala Debi Ghosal (1872–1946), a niece of Rabindranath Tagore who, as well as being an keen supporter of women’s rights and one-time Brahma Samaj member, gained prominence from 1905 as an extremist leader and campaigner for a militant nationalist physical culture. Debi was galvanized by the example of Bankim’s heroine Shanti, to organize a physical culture campaign and exhorted young men to undertake martial training for their own defence “and for the defence of their women against molestation by British soldiers.” She organized parades of “physical prowess,” opened an academy of martial arts at her father’s house in Calcutta in 1902 (under one Professor Murtaza), and was an influential presence behind the establishment of similar centres across Bengal. She started various movements like Shivaji utsab, Pratapaditya utsab, Udayaditya utsab and Birastami brata - where the main emphasis was on celebrating a strong and powerful body.

Girls were also involved in this movement of helping to develop courage and the fighting spirit among the youth. Various forms of competition in physical activity and martial art, sword fighting and fencing were part of the said festivals and the winners were duly appreciated with prizes in these competitions. This movement was very popular in Calcutta and inspired by her leadership a number of clubs/units were established in Calcutta during 1905. Later her club/units were more involved in terrorist and nationalist movements to free the country from British rule.

Debi was in touch with Vivekananda on the topic of nationalist physical culture after his triumphal return from America. The Swami was himself an ardent supporter of the Indian physical culture campaign, and he even reportedly held the view that one can get closer to God through football than through the Bhagavad Gita.

Modern, physical culture *akhra* (“club,” “gymnasium”) of the kind organized by Debi often functioned as centres of a political struggle that self-consciously emulated the militancy of the institutionalized violent yogin. This is not to say that all physical culture clubs across India were nuclei of patriotic terror, or that they were generally patronized by the majority of

Indians. However, just as the “Indian independence movement involved not only Gandhian strategies of non-violent protest and civil disobedience, but also acts and threats of violence by revolutionary groups,” so too the physiological nationalism of the modern politicized akhṛa included both moderate and extremist elements.

Gurusaday Dutta (1882-1941)



Gurusaday Dutta

In 1932, an ICS officer of British India Government, named Mr. Gurusaday Dutta, founded a new folk style physical culture in Bengal. It had been spread in all over Bengal as well as India as ‘Bratachari Movement’. This famous movement created a style of physical exercise with song and dance which created a revolution in the life and activity of young Bengali people against British rule.

Bratachari movement was an indigenious practice of physical activity and culture and Sri Dutta was very close to Rabindranath. So, in all probability, he was influenced by Rabindranath’s ‘Brati balak’ movement. He created different styles of warrior dances like “Raibeshe”, Dhali, Khati etc. and other folk dances like Jari, Jhumur etc. and thousands of Bratachari activity dances.

Table No.-1 Great persons and their contributions at a glance

Name of the Thinker	Contribution	Year	Place
Bankim Chandra Chatterjee	Anandamath & Bandemataram	(1838-1894)	Calcutta
Swami Vivekananda	Hatha Yoga	(1863-1902)	Calcutta
Rabindranath Tagore	Santiniketan, Brati balak	(1861-1941)	West & East Bengal
Srala Devi Ghosal	Shivaji utsab, Pratapaditya utsab,	(1873-1945)	Calcutta

	Udayaditya utsab and Birastami brata		
Gurusaday Dutta:	Bratachari movement	(1882-1941)	All Bengal

Some Great Activists and Their Contributions

The ‘Shivaji’ and ‘Birastami festival’ which were started by Sarala Devi, created much enthusiasm among the Bengali youth and a desire to get rid of the notion that Bengalis were a “non-martial race” – an idea prevalent among the British after the ‘Sepoy Mutiny’ in 1857. At the same time Jatindranath Bandopadhyay (1877-1930), who was very close to the great revolutionary Sri Aurobindo Ghosh (1877-1950), returned to Bengal to start and organise a secret revolutionary group at the initiative of Aurobinda. Jatindranath developed a gymnasium or akhra at 102, Upper Circular Road, Calcutta in 1902, where young men were trained in various indigenous forms of physical activities.

At the same time another famous akhra was established by Satish Chandra Basu (1876-1948), which was the great ‘Anusilan Samity’. ‘Anusilan samity’ established a number of branches in various districts of Bengal to spread their philosophy- the development of physique and strength and the cultivation of physical culture as an essential component of revolutionary activity for the freedom of the country. In these clubs/akhra, along with body building exercises, lathi and sword play, boxing, wrestling, gymnastics, swimming, cycling, horse-riding were also practised by the members.

Almost simultaneously a strong revolutionary centre was opened in the town of Midnapore with the initiative of Aurobinda Ghosh, Sister Nivedita, Barin Ghosh etc. This town, about 130 km. away from Calcutta, was a seat of revolutionary activities outside Calcutta. A number of akhras/clubs were also established throughout the district of Midnapore during the time of Janendranath (1870-1949), Satyandranath Bose (1882-1908), Hem Chandra Kanungo (1876-1951), Khudiram Bose (1889-1908) etc. Among the important akhras of Midnapore town were Basantamalati Akhra, Sanatan Samity, Swadesh Samity, Sakti Samity etc. Rakshit Barir Akhra namely ‘matrisadan’ of Tamluk was also very active. In all these akhras body building and physical activities were given prime importance along with other revolutionary work.

Ban of Anusilan Samity and Cessation of Akhra Movement

Anusilan Samity gradually became more involved in political and revolutionary activities which greatly frightened and alarmed the British Government. The panic-stricken British Government introduced the Indian Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1908 under section 15(2) (6) by which the activities of Anusilan Samity were banned. The banned samity closed its door and along with this, activities of many akhras/clubs were stopped. However, they continued their activities secretly.

Table No.-2 Great activists and their main contribution

Name of the activists	Name of the akhras	Year of Establishment	Place
Jatindranath Banerjee	Razabazar akhra	1902	Calcutta
Satish Ch. Basu & Aurobinda Ghosh	Anusilan Samity	1902	Calcutta
Pulin Behari Das	Anusilan Samity (Branch)	1905	Dacca (East Bengal)
Khudiram Bose	Rakshit Barir Akhra namely 'matrisadan'	1905	Tomluk (Midnapore)

Revival of Akhra Movement

From literature review it has been observed that the activities, similar to the nature of akhra movement, were revived around 1926-1930. In Calcutta the famous 'Simla Bayam Samity (Simla Exercise Club)' and some other clubs during Durga Puja (Goddess Durga Festival & Autumn festival) used to celebrate Birastami Brata (worship of the warriors). The famous activist Ananta Singha, in his autobiographical writings, indicates that during the period 1928-1930, a number of clubs for physical culture and martial art were established in Chattagram and the adjoining districts of East Bengal. In these clubs body building, martial art, various forms of defensive art, etc., were practised. Obviously the purpose was to motivate the youths of Bengal to become involved in physical culture and to develop a sound body. Akhra type of movement and activities were also revived in Midnapore district. Dinesh Gupta, a close associate of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, in 1928, developed and formed 'Bengal Volunteers'. Young students and youths were voluntarily associated with 'Bengal Volunteers'. Their main objective was to develop physique along with studies. A number of clubs were established along the line of 'Bengal Volunteers' and they used to participate in marching, fancy drill, lathi (martial art with bamboo stick), sword fighting, wrestling, etc.

Contribution of Three Great Football Clubs of Bengal



It was year 1889. The Indian independence movement against the British rule was spreading rapidly after the uprising of 1857 Sepoy Mutiny. It was a period of growing

political awareness, manifestation of Indian public opinion, and emergence of Indian leadership at the national and provincial levels. The spontaneous and widespread rebellion fired the imagination of the Indian nationalists throughout the country. Under these circumstances, the birth of Mohun Bagan club on 15th August 1889 was not only organizing a football club but a step forward towards promoting a patriotic feeling, an awakening spirit in Bengali hearts. Mohun Bagan is not just a club, it is a national institution.

The pioneer of Mohun Bagan Sporting Club was the then eminent lawyer Bhupendranath Basu, who later on became the president of Indian National Congress. The Basu family, the Mitra family, and the Sen family bestowed equal efforts towards the foundation of the club. The first meeting of the club presided over by Basu himself, was held at his residence at 14, Balaram Ghosh Street of North Kolkata. The Secretary was Jatindranath Basu.

Mohun Bagan won its first trophy, the Coochbehar Cup in the year 1904 and again in 1905. That same year Mohun Bagan reached the final of the Gladstone Cup, held in Chinsurah. Their opponent in the final was Dalhousie, the winner of that year IFA Shield who had defeated Calcutta Football Club by 4-3 in a thrilling final. Mohun Bagan still managed to win the match 6-1. In 1906, Mohun Bagan got more success. This year the club grabbed the Trades Cup, Gladstone Cup and Coochbehar Cup. These achievements made Mohun Bagan the most prestigious Indian club. In the same year Mohun Bagan participated in Minto Fort Tournament. This tournament was mainly for the British and Army football teams, only Mohun Bagan among the Indian clubs got the invitation to participate in this tournament but their stay was not long. In 1907 Mohun Bagan again won Trades Cup and again in 1908 for a third consecutive time.

Mohun Bagan was the first club in India to win the IFA Shield in 1911 by defeating East Yorkshire Regiment. This match was huge also because Mohun Bagan also became the first Indian club to beat a European club ever. The players of Mohun Bagan played bare-footed against the foreigners, who had proper equipment. It became a turning point in Indian football.

In 1915 Mohun Bagan played their first match in the first division of Calcutta Football League on May 15, 1915 against Calcutta Club. Back then the Calcutta Football League was the number one football league in India. In 1937 Mohun Bagan played its first international match in home country against Englishton Corinthians of England. In 1939 Mohun Bagan became the first ever Indian Calcutta Football League Champions after a long wait of 25 years.

On a humid afternoon on 28 July 1920 Mohun Bagan A.C. was scheduled to clash with Jorabagan in a Coochbehar Cup tie. The latter took the field minus their star halfback Sailesh Bose. Mohun Bagan Club's Vice-President and Industrialist Suresh Chandra Chaudhuri pleaded for Bose's inclusion with the club authorities but to no avail. An annoyed Chaudhuri immediately severed all connections with his old club and formed a new one along with Raja Manmatha Nath Chaudhuri, Ramesh Chandra (Nasha) Sen and Aurobinda Ghosh.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 13:6 June 2013

Dr. Subhabrata Kar

Indigenous Physical Culture of Bengal During the British Regime

The new club established on 1 August 1920 was christened East Bengal FC as the founders hailed from that region of Bengal.



Life started off hard for East Bengal Club as they struggled to win any one championship. Eventually though East Bengal Club came into the limelight and ultimately got the first championship during the IFA Shield, by winning in 1943. The Club again won the IFA Shield and the Calcutta Football League in 1945.

One of the features of Islamic Culture is to have faith in religion (Islam). Therefore, the Muslim community in Calcutta set up a new team to play football even before the setting up of Mohun Bagan A.C. or Aryans. They founded "Jubilee Club" in 1887 under the leadership of Nawbab Aminul Islam. Then this name was changed into "Crescent Club". Crescent club's name again changed into "Hamidia Club". Finally this "Hamidia Club" came to be known as "Mohamedan Sporting Club" in 1891.



After its establishment in 1891, Mohammedan Sporting Club first tasted success when they won the Calcutta Football League in 1934 and then went on to create history by becoming the first Indian club to win the Calcutta Football League continuously for 5 years from 1934 to 1938. Again the club won the league in 1940 and 1941 along with the IFA Shield Championship. It was also the first Indian team to smash the monopoly of the British football teams in the Durand Cup, the oldest football tournament in India, when they became champions in the year 1941.

Other Influences

Indigenous Rural Games

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 13:6 June 2013

Dr. Subhabrata Kar

Indigenous Physical Culture of Bengal During the British Regime

In British India many indigenous games were popular in rural Bengal. Those games were the main source of recreation for many boys and girls as well as adult males and females of rural Bengal. Folk games were popular as well as traditional games, chiefly played in rural areas were passed along from one generation to another. Such games are played for physical exercise and entertainment, at times in a competitive environment. Folk games are divided into three groups based on the environment in which the games were played: land, water and shy.

Table No.-3 Indigenous rural games of Bengal at a glance

Indigenous name of games	Activity Characteristics	Participants
<i>Ayanga-ayanga</i>	The tiger and goat game	Boys & girls both.
<i>Baghbandhi</i>	Capturing the tiger	Boys & girls both.
<i>Baucchi, budikapati, baubasanti budir chu</i>	The old Lady	Boys & girls both.
<i>Chikka</i>	Tug and trip	Boys
<i>Chhadar Khela</i>	Rhyming game	Boys & Girls both
<i>Chhi-chhattar</i>	The kite and the cocks	Boys
<i>Chungakhela</i>	The crackers game	Adult men
<i>Danguli, dangbadi, gutbadi, tyamdang, bhya tadanda</i>	Tipcat	Boys
<i>Dariyabanda</i>	Stealing the salt	Boys & Girls both
<i>De Pakhal</i>	Turn him around	Boys & Girls both
<i>Ekka-dokka, satkhela and chiriya, chada, ghunti, dig, khopla</i>	Hopscotch	Girls
<i>Elating Belating</i>	Hello, there!	Girls
<i>Gaigodani</i>	Tending the cows	Cowherds
<i>Ghuntikhela</i>	Game of dice	Girls
<i>Golap-Tagar, baurani, chadan khela (Murshidabad), tukatuki (My mensingh)</i>	Blind game	Boys & Girls both
<i>Gollachhut</i>	Touch and Run	Boys & Girls both

<i>Gulikhela</i>	Game of marbles	Boys
<i>Ha-du-du</i>	Game of Tag	Boys & Girls both
<i>Lukochuri</i>	Hide and seek	Boys & Girls both
<i>Kanamachhi</i>	Blind bee; blind man's buff	Boys & Girls both
<i>Mogalpathan</i>	Draughts	Boys & Girls both
<i>Openti Bioscope</i>	Round game	Girls
<i>Rajar Kotal</i>	king's constable	Boys
<i>Rumalchuri</i>	Stealing the handkerchief	Boys & Girls both
<i>Boat-race</i>	Water game	Boys
<i>Holdug</i>	Tag me in water	Boys
<i>Jhappuri khela</i>		Boys
<i>Lai khela</i>	Find me out	Boys
<i>Flying Kites</i>		Boys & Adults
<i>Flying pigeons</i>		Boys & Adults

Kushti (Wrestling) of Bengal

In recent years, the history of modern Indian wrestling - or kushti - has started receiving scholarly attention. Most accounts agree that the last decades of the nineteenth century saw the rising of the modern form of this ancient Indian sport, with Indian wrestlers emerging from the confines of their akharas and fighting with their Western counterparts. But while there are some scholarly accounts of north Indian wrestling, and Gama in particular, the rest of the country has not fared well. What has also been lacking is a perspective that considers wrestling as one of the many cultures of the body which characterised the nationalist phase in Indian history, dating from roughly the end of the nineteenth century till the third decade of the twentieth. During this time, a kind of muscular nationalism was beginning to gain ground in Bengal.

Fed up of being stigmatised as a 'frail and effeminate' race, Bengalis - both men and women - began to participate in various kinds of physical cultures, ranging from martial arts to gymnastics, trapeze acts to hot-air ballooning. With the rise of the swadeshi movement in the first decade of the twentieth century, akharas or gymnasiums mushroomed all over north Calcutta. Gobar Guho developed his own style of wrestling which took Indian wrestling into newer heights. His style includes his own wrestling holds like dhonka, tibbi, gadhanet, dhak, tang, pat, dhobiya pat and kulla which later became a part and parcel of Indian wrestling. He was famous for his vicious chops known as radda. His achievements and success inspired Bengali Hindus to take up wrestling as a career which was seen as the traditional bastion of Punjabi Muslims. Not only wrestlers but the famous body builders like Manohar Aich and Monotosh Roy were inspired by his successes. His own disciples included his son Manik and his students Banamali Ghosh, Jyotish Charan Ghosh and Dutta Biswanath.

Body Building Culture of Bengal

It is often considered that the British Rule in India started a period of decline in Physical Culture and general health amongst the Indian population. In 1905 there was a revival of interest, mainly in strand pulling. This was due to a great extent to Sandow's highly successful visit to India in 1904. Muscle Control was introduced to India in the 1920s by Chit Tun, a Burmese man who settled in Calcutta. Despite the influence of Sandow and others 'Western' style bodybuilding did not take off in a big way until the 1930s. The most important instructor at that time was Prof. K.V. Iyer, who founded the Hercules Gymnasium in Bangalore. He also started India's first postal course in Bodybuilding. B.C. Ghosh credits Chit Tun with inspiring him to take up Muscle Control and he and his partner K.C. Sen Gupta opened a Gymnasium in Calcutta in the 1930s. Ghosh & Sengupta were credited with the early training of both Monotosh Roy and Monohar Aich, both World Class bodybuilders in the 50s.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Bengal during the British regime was ahead in all types of revolutionary activities in comparison to other provinces of India. Such revolutionary activities were very much influenced by different components of the then Bengali society. Those components were the influence of some great philosophers or thinkers, influence of akhra, bratachari and revolutionary movements, influence of indigenous rural games, great clubs and other physical activities of Bengal regarding physical culture of the Bengali people.

It is to be noted that a number of eminent personalities of Bengal made remarkable contributions towards the development of physical culture and sports and games in Bengal as well as the whole of India. The struggle to define an Indian form of body discipline was rendered ambivalent by the acceptance of certain core ideological values of a Western, and ultimately imperialist, discourse on manliness and the body.

The 'akhra' and the 'Hindu mela' worked alongside (and sometimes squarely within) the current of colonial education reform and "indigenous" physical culture movements maintained a permeability to Western influence, based on a deep appreciation of the cultural and political potential of the nationalistic gymnastic movements of Europe.

The games and sports as culture traits particularly in West Bengal have certain specific elements. One of these is the utilization of leisure which had its origin and growth in the cradle of agrarian economy of the pre-British India. In British India many indigenous games were popular in rural Bengal. Those games were the main source of recreation for many boys and girls as well as adult males and females of rural Bengal. Mainly three great clubs of Bengal, Mohun Bagun AC, East Bengal and Mohammadan Sporting Club contributed greatly to modify the physical culture of Bengali people and increase the revolutionary activity of India.

During this time, a kind of muscular nationalism was beginning to gain ground in Bengal. Fed up of being stigmatised as a 'frail and effeminate' race, Bengalis - both men and women - began to participate in various kinds of physical cultures, ranging from martial arts to gymnastics, trapeze acts to hot-air ballooning. Obviously, Bengali physical culture was very much influenced by revolutionary activities of akhras or clubs and at the same time one can see that in rural Bengal there was a great storage of indigenous minor and folk games. In British India Bengali people were very much fond of indigenous rural games and sports as well as bratachari dance and activities.

References

1. Bagal, J.C. (1946), Jati Baira Ba Amader Desatmobodt, Viswa Bharati Patrika Vol.-VI, p.166.

2. Choudhury, S.N. (1980), Bangalir Nabajagarane sarir aachstchar Bhumika: Viswa-Bharati Journal of Research, Vol-III, Part-I, Santiniketan: Viswa-Bharati Research Publications Committee, pp.63-98.
3. Das, S.N. (1985), Physical Education Games and Recreation in early India: Aminabad, Lucknow: The Upper India Publication House Pvt. Ltd.,p.4.
4. General Report on Public Instruction in Bengal for 1889-1890 in General(edn.), November 1890, Proceeding Nos. 19-22, File-5.
5. Halder, J. (1965), Banglar Prasiddha Anusilan Samitir Sankipta Itihas, Culcutta: Sakti Press, March.
6. Hashour, B. (2913), Modern Indian Physical Culture: Degeneracy and Experimentation: International Journal of the History of Sports, March-13
7. Mukhopadhyay, J. (1946), Biplabi Jibaner Smriti, pp.62-116.
8. Saha, A. (1991), Banglar Laukik Kridar Samajik Utsa (Social Origins of the Folk Games of Bengal), Pustak Bipani, Kolkata.

=====

Dr. Subhabrata Kar
Assistant Professor
Department of Physical Education
Union Christian Training College
Berhampore 742101
District: Murshidabad
West Bengal
India
skarrana@gmail.com