

PP 10

A study on the utilization of Sri Lankan folk games for release from mental stress

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Mental depression is a contemporary problem spread widely not only in Sri Lanka but also all over the world. As shown by many scientists the life style of the present day human has greatly influenced this issue. When we study the ancient Sri Lankan people in their cultural and social background we realize

that they enjoyed a great mental freedom. We can find evidence for this on ancient literary works on literature, religion and folk life. Historical sources of Sri Lanka can be traced back to the Rawana era. From that period upto 1500 AD the Sri Lankan economy, Art, Architecture and irrigation technology have amazed scientists all over the world. Few examples for these are ancient herbal gardens, the Parakrama Samudraya, Seegiriya and the stone sculpture of Polonnaruwa. In order to show forth such abilities the people should have been healthy both physically and mentally. When researching on the Sri Lankan folk life a variety of information can be found. Games. Diverse experiments have proved that games bring order and clarity to both body and mind. Plato shows that both body and mind impact life. To build personality body and mind must work together. It is his opinion that in order to build personality, games are a boon. John Dewey shows that games provide an education. He believes that education is not a preparation for life but it is "lining". Accordingly it can be concluded that games can be a great asset to bring mental balance. This study concentrates on the indoor folk games and among them games which develop the mind and the intellect. As found in books such as the treatment of mental illnesses used methods for providing mental happiness and comfort. (Shorma 1083) These methods are described under Satvavagaya. These main procedures are described here.

1. Bring to realization and understanding through reasoning and logic.
2. Use of methodology for a broad understanding.
3. Bring about mental balance.

In this treatment procedure it is possible to use games. There is evidence that indoor games were used in our traditional treatment of mental illnesses. This study has undertaken to gather data and do an evaluation on the utilization of these games in the treatment of mental depression as well as justifying the same.

Aims and objective

- 1) Identifying traditional games which are very useful for mental health.
- 2) Clarifying how they may be use to create stress reducing condition.
- 3) Providing opportunities to use these games as solution for mental stress.

Material and methods

I have made a very thorough study of the literary materials in Sinhala, Sanskrit and Pali texts, comparing them systemically with the classical Ayurveda Samhitas. In arranging the subject, help has also been taken from Visuddi Magga. (AD380-440). Special attention is paid to the facts included in books such as Butsarna, Epigraphya Ceylanika, Dhampiya Atuwa Gatapadaya, Poojavalaya, Vesaturuda Sannaya. In this study the temple of the Mavatura which is the place where psychological problems were treated is mainly observed to collect the facts deeply.

Results and discussion

In this study on folk games Chaturanga Keliya takes a special place. The history of the game named Chaturanga Keliya goes as far back as the Rawana era. It has been mentioned that princess Seetha who was kidnapped by king Rawana played this game with the ladies of the harem provided for her protection.(Adagama p. 2001) This game can be referred to as a special game which can be used in the treatment of mental depression. Both Charaka Samhita and Ashtangahradaya Samhita acknowledge separation from loved ones as a reason for the break down of mental balance. According to these facts it is well justified to reach the conclusion that princess Seetha who was separated from prince Rama must have been

suffering from a deep mental depression. It will be exceedingly productive to introduce and circulate this game in order to decrease mental depression.

In the same manner the game named Olinda Keliya seems to have been used for mental health. Even though this game is known among the present day population it is not a popular game. Among the games found in the building separated for the ladies of the harem in the royal palace in Kandy this game was also found. This is proof that this game was provided for the ladies of the harems of Sri Lankan kings. Undoubtedly these women suffered from boredom and mental depression. Even though they enjoyed luxuries due to royalty they had no claim to a wife. It may be that they were forced to leave their loved ones and parents to come to the royal palace. According to these facts we can conclude that this game was utilized to care for the mental health of these ladies. According to written documents and popular belief the princesses used pearls to play this game. Because of this the tool was named as Muthu(pearl) Poruwa. The common people used Olinda seeds to play this game. 56 or 57 pearls or Olinda seeds were used. It can be assumed that the game generated happiness and eliminated boredom. It is even referred to as a game of the gods.

Several more group games can be introduced. Dolaha petha and Paneha Petha are two of them. In this case cowries are used. Four, six, eight or twelve people could participate in it. According to documents carved on stone there were special houses built to play these. (Epigraphia Ceylanika) These inscriptions also mention that special gardens were made for these games. Consequently it can be concluded that ancient king promoted these game.

The Meditation Box found in Kandy museum can also be named as tool used to attain mental balance. It is important that these tools be introduced to the modern society and it is equally important to recognize what can be achieved through them. According to the nature of these tools and games it can be

deduced that through such games mental depression can be reduced.

There is an evidence that another special game called Nerenchi was popular among the people. Two people are needed to play it and it this game. Sath Diviyan Keliya is another remarkable game. While two players are necessary to play this game it can be compared to chess.

Seeya Keliya can be cited as another special game. Seven players are needed to play it. It is interesting to note that these game boards were designed in various and different ways. In ancient Sri Lanka Shelters called Ambdan were built on main roadways for travelers to rest and spend the night. In the Dawulagala Ambalama these game board can be seen on the slabs provided for sitting.

Very often the monotonous and competitive nature of life brings about mental stress to human. It would seen that these games are suitable to evict monotony. The nature of these games is such that the mind has to be trained methodically. Another asset is that this can be done at home with friends and relatives. It is equally noteworthy that these games have their origin in the nations' tradition. While a large financial input is not needed in the fabrication the equipment will be long lasting.

These games are not repetitive as computer games. They relax the mind. There is a certain amount of confusion in the search of an effective method to overcome the current crisis of mental stress. Therefore it is timely to identify methods such as these. It can be seen that today games and sports depend on money, competition and fame. For these reasons mental stress will advance and not decline. Therefore it is profitable to take action in this matter with appropriate awareness.

In ancient Sri Lanka centres for treating mental illnesses were situated near

Buddhist Viharas. In these centres both minor and major cases of mental illnesses have been treated. In the observation of the tools used in the treatment the above mentioned games have been noticed. Accordingly it can be concluded that in the treatment of mental illnesses games have been used. It will surely be highly productive to make a deep study of these matters and to add them to the treatment.

Conclusion

Mental depression is a contemporary problem all over the world. When we study the ancient Sri Lankans, we realized that they enjoyed a great mental freedom. Accordingly this deep study it can be concluded that games can be a great asset to bring mental balance. It will be more productive if these are made more relevant to the young generation. If this brings some comfort to this problem, it will surely be a blessing.

References

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