

## **Educational Implications of Naga Indigenous Games**

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### **Abstract**

The study investigates the significance of indigenous games in education among the Nagas, an indigenous community inhabiting in North-Eastern region of India. Through primary and secondary sources, the paper discusses how the indigenous games are knotted with education among Naga context. The results and findings of the study is discussed based on the literature review and interaction with the elders of the Naga society who are well versed with the methods and importance of indigenous games in the Naga society. The paper reflects the role of indigenous games and its implications in education preserving and transmitting cultures across generations. It explores the importance and value of indigenous games in teaching and learning various life skills and knowledge in different areas. Indigenous games have always been a part and parcel of the Naga society and is deeply rooted in the cultural practices of the Nagas. Indigenous games in the Naga society are not only a form of entertainment and fun but also used to focus on the personal growth focusing on the development of physical fitness, agility, social skills and community engagement. The paper discusses the role of indigenous games in the educational context exploring the different pedagogical importance.

*Keywords:* Nagas, Nagaland, Indigenous games, educational implications, NEP 2020

### **Introduction**

The Nagas, belonging to tribal community resides in Nagaland, a home to seventeen (17) major tribes and sixteen (16) districts located in the North-Eastern region of India bordered by Assam in the east, Manipur in the south, Arunachal Pradesh in the north and Myanmar in the east. Nagas have a rich history which dates back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Each Naga tribe has distinct character with regard to customs, dress and language. Nagas are known for its fascinating culture, vibrant

festivals and traditional songs, dances and games. Their diverse culture, identity, unique traditional practices, folklore and rituals makes them unique from the rest of the people of the country. The topography of Nagaland marked by hills and valleys plays a substantial role in influencing their cultural practices and lifestyle. This exceptional practice which have been passed down from generations is a testament of their diverse and unique heritage. Among all practices, indigenous games have been an integral and distinct part of their culture serving not only for entertainment purpose but also as reflections of their skills, strength, unity and spirit of cooperation. The antiquity of indigenous games among the Nagas has been there since time immemorial. Ancient activities inherited from ancestors symbolize a rich tapestry of varied cultures and their commitment to the community and not as pastimes (Shimray, 2024).

One of the prominent features of Naga culture is its abundance and richness of indigenous games some of which are recognized globally. Indigenous games which are different from mainstream sports and which has its origin from a particular community, cultural group or people are recreational activities with no international regulated rules rather determined according to own customs and traditions. Indigenous games preserve the stories and old-age traditions of a particular community as it signifies the imperative part of people's culture and heritage (Ndiko,2018). These games, mostly played during festivals and celebrations serve not just as a source of entertainment and gaiety but also portrays the dedication of the Naga community in preserving and transmitting its culture and heritage. Indigenous games not only teach skills which are valuable but also improve physical and mental well-being of a person. Through these games, Nagas take part in physical and mental activities which simultaneously transmit skills, stories and values from one generation to the other. To preserve this unique tradition and heritage the Nagas have very recently incorporated indigenous games in education and in this regard the SCERT (State Council of Education Research and Training) Nagaland has developed handbooks on indigenous games and toys of Nagaland with the aim to provide contextual educational resources which can enhance the curiosity, critical thinking and creativity of the students and at the same time make learners understand the importance of indigenous games.

UNESCO has recognized the significance and preservation of traditional games and sports to cultural heritage. The latest educational policy NEP 2020 in its document also highlighted the importance of sports in education .Para 4.8 of NEP 2020 states “ sports integration is another cross

curricular pedagogical approach that utilized physical activities including indigenous sports, in pedagogical practices to help in developing skills such as collaboration, self-initiative, self-integrated learning will be undertaken in classroom transactions to help students adopt fitness as a lifelong attitude and to achieve related life skills along with the level of fitness as envisaged in fit India movement. The need to integrate sports education is well recognized as it serves to foster holistic development by promoting physical and psychological well-being while Indigenous games stimulate and enhances communication, creativity, motor skills, problem solving and many more as it involves not only the mind but also heart, eyes and hands. It also strengthens culture and personify values of learners that is conducive for learner's development as well as for the society (Kerhuo,2023). Indigenous games which are exclusive to any culture or community acts as a socialization tool. "Our dialect, the cloths we wear, and sports we play make our identity and we should be proud of it and promote them." (BP Acharya,2017). Although studies on indigenous games by researchers from all over the world has highlighted its impact on education, physical and mental health and socialization, yet, it has been found that over the years, most of the indigenous games once played by forefathers which portray the rich culture of Naga heritage are disappearing and are on the verge of extinction. "We (Nagas) ought to take pride in playing indigenous games and also teach the younger generation to learn all before all it is lost." (Niekha,2018).

Although NEP 2020 emphasized integration of indigenous games in education for holistic development, yet, very less exploration with regard to indigenous games has been carried out in Nagaland and is still yet to receive the needed attention from the community of researchers. Therefore, there is an urgent need to study the implications of traditional games among the Nagas in order to invigorate the games once played by their forefathers which will also eventually receive the needed attention from the world and will be recognized globally.

### **Literature review**

Indigenous games are a part of cultural heritage which echoes the history, values and beliefs of the communities in which they originated. Researchers from all over the globe has deliberated extensively on indigenous games in order to know its significance and evolution. Zhiu-Zu (2015) comprehensively studied the impact of social changes on memory and heritage of traditional martial arts in Cangzhou where data were collected through in-depth interviews, literature reviews and field surveys. The findings showed that Cangzhou martial arts evolution is a consequence of

modernization and change in culture. Boro, Daimary and Narzaree (2015) investigated the significance of traditional games and sports among Bodo people, keeping in mind their vital role in the community since ancient times. The study exhibited that the diverse games and sports of Bodo people are tailored to different groups of people both young and old. It showed their indebtedness for recreation and its role in preserving social unity. Badiger (2020) highlights the benefits and accessibility and inclusivity of traditional Indian games like kho-kho, kabaddi, langadi, sagar kote (5 stones) which requires minimal cost and easy to organize. The investigator stressed the benefits of promoting team work and social communication among children which also plays a dynamic role in their development. Matsekolong, Mapotse and Gumbo (2022) conducted “The role of indigenous games in education: a technology and environmental education perspective” and found that integration of indigenous games into the activities of learners made learning applicable to their cultural knowledge and worldviews. It also enabled the teachers to overcome issues on resource limitations while enabling them to modify the content and techniques in teaching. Shimray (2024) investigated on cultural significance of traditional games and sports among Tangkhul Nagas using mixed methods approach by collecting data from primary and secondary source. The findings revealed that traditional games of Tangkhul Nagas like liho-laho, phala, kori (hide and seek), thingreira khangakhun (tug of war), lanzu-kapru (high jump) etc. reflects their values, beliefs and historical narratives which shape their identities. It also serves as recreational activities and at the same time act as a social catalyst by removing hinderances and promoting sense of identity among Tangkhul Nagas. Lukong and Mbuwir (2024) investigated “Imperativeness of indigenous games on the development for African learners and learning: pedagogic implications for Cameroon adolescents” using ethnographic and correlational research design. The findings revealed that indigenous games impact the cognitive skills of learners and integration of indigenous games into the educational system improved its relevance.

**Methodology of the study**

The study is qualitative in nature and data is based on both primary and secondary sources. 30 elders belonging to different Naga tribes having sufficient knowledge and experience on indigenous games were identified as samples for the study. The researchers constructed questionnaires with 40 open-ended questions where respondents were interviewed through

structured and unstructured interviews. For secondary source, the researchers reviewed related books and articles, periodicals and journals on indigenous games.

### **Result and findings**

Nagas has a rich cultural heritage and tradition. The tradition is passed on through folktales, festivals, dances, folksongs, weaving and craft works and sports and games. Local indigenous games were always a part of the Naga society. The games were not only a form of entertainment but also a way of preserving the culture and tradition of the Naga society. The games were normally played to develop agility, control, balance, coordination, intuition, strategy, problem solving, decision making etc. All these indigenous games teach skills merging physical development and mental and emotional wellbeing. These indigenous games help in developing different competencies, knowledge and skills.

Based on the interviews and interaction, some of the indigenous games in the Naga society are discussed as follows:

#### **1. Go karting (Naga culture of traditional wooden wheel race)**

**Method:** Go-karting is an indigenous game played mostly by children and by youths among the Naga tribes. It is a cart made of wood having three wheels, two at the back and one in the front; and a basic structure is built for racing. Usually, the race starts with one person pushing from the back and the other person sits on the car and steers it.

**Pedagogical importance:** This game goes beyond the thrill of racing. It develops balance, control of speed and coordination. It also improves reflexes and develops situational awareness, making the players to make quick decisions while playing the game, leading to developing the decision-making skills. This decision making in situations lead to fostering problem-solving skills as the players must learn to change and adapt to the changing courses and conditions in the process of the game. Playing this game involves communication between the players, they learn to communicate effectively for coordinating strategies for safety while playing the game, thus enhancing coordination and team work among the players. Since, it is a physical activity game, it helps improve the stamina and enhances motor skills and the overall physical development. This game also helps to calculate speed and distances making them learn numbers and calculations, developing their math knowledge.

#### **2. Traditional fire making**

**Method:** Traditional fire making is a part of the Naga culture. It is the Naga indigenous way of making fire without the use of modern tools. The materials used for traditional fire making are dry wood and fibre, bamboo, wooden dust, straw and hay etc. The wooden dust is placed in between small gaps made in the wooden log, a long fibre is then rapidly pulled to and fro to create a friction until enough heat is generated to create fire, where the saw dust is used as a fuel. This game and method not only validate the inventiveness and resourcefulness of the forefathers of the Nagas but it is also a way of preserving the Naga culture.

**Pedagogical importance:** This develops one of the earliest science knowledge area that friction causes fire. It also develops precision and concentration skills.

### **3. Grease Bamboo pole climbing**

**Method:** Grease bamboo climbing is a popular indigenous game among the Naga tribes. A tall bamboo is planted on the ground and the bamboo is greased with fats to make it greased and oily to make the climbing difficult. It can be played individually or in teams. A prize is tied at the top for the winner who reaches the top. The prize usually consists of cash and large piece of meat. The prize is shared among the team members. It demonstrates the participants' physical strength and fighting spirit.

**Pedagogical importance:** It contributes to physical development and team work. It also develops the attitude of overcoming the hurdles and striving to reach a goal.

### **4. Ejupta (Cock fight)**

**Method:** This indigenous game involves each of the players holding one of the legs with his hand and hop and try to shoulder out the opponents from a given area to displace them. The game of cockfighting is rooted in the traditions and cultural practices of the Naga people.

**Pedagogical importance:** This game contributes to the development of physical strength, coordination, balance, critical thinking and strategy. It also develops social skills and community engagement.

### **5. Akhetsu Kukakeu (Top spinning)**

**Method:** The material required for this game is top made of hard wood. The top has a pointed end in the bottom for spinning and a wider middle portion, the top part of the 'top' is used to hold the rope used for spinning, with the help of a stout thin rope. It is played individually or in a group. Each player takes turn to spin the 'top' to accomplish the longest spin. Apart from ensuring the

longest spin, the players also strike their opponent's spinning 'top'. The player who manages to spin the 'top' for the longest duration becomes the winner.

**Pedagogical importance:** This game is a test of skill that helps players to be accurate and precise in enabling the spin. It develops the concentration skill and develops the team spirit.

#### **6. Aki kiti (Kick fighting)**

**Method:** This game is an indigenous combat sport, involving kicking and blocking the kicks using only the soles of the feet. The kicks are directed to waist, sides and other parts except groin of the opponent. The use of hands to catch or hit is prohibited. The main aim of this game is to promote physical fitness. It is played inside a circular area between two fighters. The objective of the game is to make the opponent fall on their knee, touch the ground or step outside the playing area. This game demands outstanding strength and agility, speed and awesome leg work.

**Pedagogical importance:**

The game develops physical strength, agility, strategy and balance.

#### **7. Pcheda (Throw of bamboo sticks):**

**Method:** Pcheda is an indigenous game where a player throws or slides a thin bamboo stick from a distance on a solid mud platform. The player who throws or slides the bamboo sticks farthest becomes the winner. It is a game played by men.

**Pedagogical Importance:** The game improves the players' physical development since it is a game of muscle reflex and technique. It also improves the concentration, discipline, practice and strategy. It also enhances the math skill as it involves the distance and scorings.

#### **8. Seven stones**

**Method:** It is a game played in two teams. The requirement of the game is a ball and some flat stones. One team will knock the pile of stones stacked on top of one another and will try to restore the blocks of flat stones, while the other team will throw the ball at the opposite team trying to build the blocks. If the ball touches the feet of any member of the team, the member will be out from the game and the remaining members will try to finish the game.

**Pedagogical importance:** It helps in developing team spirit; to work in teams and cooperate with one another, it also increases the concentration and helps develop motor skills, counting numbers and develops alertness in them. It also develops mathematical skills with counting.

#### **9. Tug of war**



**Method:** Tug of war is a rope pulling game that is played by two groups or teams against each other to test their strength. Tug of war in Naga style is also another indigenous games which is played by all age group. This is a game which fosters community feeling among the people as this game is played during the festivals of the Naga tribes.

**Pedagogical importance:** This game can be a valuable tool for several educational implications. Its main importance is the recognition and development of team work and collaboration towards a common aim. It also enhances the physical development of the players. It develops the social skills as participating in the game helps the players develop sportsmanship and the players learn to compete in a healthy way enhancing motivation among the players.

#### **10. Games of stones:**

**Method:** The game involves drawing a grid of boxes on the ground with a chalk. The grid typically consists of numbered squares, though the pattern of grid may differ. The players require a small flat stone and the grid boxes. The game is usually played by girls of young age. The players start by throwing the flat stone inside the square box, and hops through the squared boxes landing on both feet on double squares. The player turns back around and moves back to pick the stone from the box. The step continues by throwing the stone in the next box. The player will lose the chance if she fails to throw the stone in the required box or if they lose their balance while hoping through the boxes. The player who can successfully move the stone through the entire grid without losing balance and putting the stone in the right box wins the game.

**Pedagogical importance:** This indigenous game helps to improve develop coordination, balance and physical strength. It also imparts social skills among the children.

#### **11. Wrestling**

**Method:** Wrestling game of Nagas is a blend of cultural celebration and tradition and sport, celebrating the community spirit of Naga people. The game is played on a circular field, participants wear a belt around their waist which is used for 'takedowns'. This game requires a combination of strength and strategy skill. The objective of the game is to bring down the opponent's body above the knee to the ground.

**Pedagogical importance:** This game holds educational value as it helps preserve the culture and community engagement, promoting indigenous games. It also aids in the physical fitness as it



emphasises physical strength and endurance, which leads the players to a healthy lifestyle. It also instills discipline and teamwork and respect for opponents and builds brotherhood.

### **Discussion**

The indigenous games have always been deeply rooted in the culture and tradition of the Nagas. The games not only are a form of fun and entertainment but also depicts the way of the Naga society which have a rich cultural significance. The games often involve symbolic meanings that reflect the community's practices and beliefs. Every game bargain a different background for cultural significance, skill development, social interaction, physical fitness and community engagement. From traditional fire making, grease bamboo climbing to the strategic intricacies of go-karting and kick fights and cock fights. Almost all the indigenous game in the Naga society involves physical activity emphasizing on physical fitness, agility and physical strength. Games such as wrestling, aki kithi (kick fight), Ejupta (cock fight), Grease bamboo climbing, tug of war etc promote physical fitness. It will help improve strength and endurance. It will also increase the motivation and engagement among the players. It also creates and improves social skills enabling better community development. The games also develop critical thinking skills and precision and decision making while playing games such as aki kithi (kick fight), go karting, fire making, top spinning. The rules of each games develop the discipline among the players and respect for one another leading to a healthy competition among the players leading to the development of community belonging. Since most of the games are played outdoors, these games bring the community together, allowing the community members to gather and spend time together, enhancing the social interactions and maintaining social unity.

Naga indigenous games are more than just a game, it is a reflection of rich Naga cultural. Integrating indigenous games in the educational programs will provide insights into the rich cultural tradition and history of the Naga society and also help preserve the traditions. Understanding the culture will help students appreciate the culture. Incorporating indigenous games improves learners' creativity and imagination. The results of the study specify that players can interpret, adapt and link the indigenous knowledge of the games with different pedagogical importance such problem solving, critical thinking, group work, discussion, cooperative and coordination etc. It also teaches various life skills and pedagogical knowledge and concepts when indigenous knowledge is incorporated.

**Conclusion**

The Nagas considers indigenous games not only as a means to connect with their ancestries or to preserve the rich cultural heritage or inculcate spirit of community but also as learning method so that learners learn and enjoy the games and at the same time learn concepts and ideas through indigenous games. Through indigenous games learners will develop spirit of inquiry and curiosity and at the same time imbibe the values of indigenous games. It will also help them retain memory for a longer period as it is a way of learning by doing. This low-cost teaching method will impact teaching and learning in numerous ways. Indigenous games and sports were part of the Naga culture and heritage. It has been practiced and enjoyed by everyone since the times of the forefathers. These games are crucial for continuing the many customs of the Naga people and maintaining stronger ties within the community. Whether played as part of consistent leisure time or on festive occasions, each game depicts culture fabric of Nagaland.

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Received on Jan 05, 2025

Accepted on Feb 25, 2025

Published on April 01, 2025

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