



Role and Contribution of Janjati Communities in Sports in Shaping the History of Bharat

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DOI - 10.5281/zenodo.17663964

India, also known as Bharat, has a rich tradition of physical culture, games, and indigenous sports that are deeply rooted in its diverse communities. Among these, the janjati (tribal) communities have played a vital role in preserving, practicing, and promoting traditional forms of sports and physical activities. Their contribution not only shaped the cultural identity of Bharat but also laid the foundation for several modern sports disciplines.

Keywords: *Janjati Communities, Indigenous Sports, Bharat, Tribal Athletes, Archery, Hockey, Kabaddi, Kho-Kho, Cultural Heritage, Freedom Struggle, Social Transformation, Traditional Games.*

Traditional Tribal Sports and Physical Culture:

Janjati communities across India have long celebrated physical strength, endurance, and skill through their indigenous games. Sports like khokho, kabaddi, archery, wrestling, stick fighting (lathi khel), gilli-danda, and mallakhamb have their origins in community traditions. Archery, for instance, is a skill embedded in the lives of tribes such as the Santhals, Gonds, and Nagas, both as a hunting technique and as a competitive sport. Similarly, wrestling and martial art forms practiced by tribes of central and northern India highlight the physical culture that contributed to India's reputation as a land of warriors.

Role in Freedom Struggle and Nationalism:

Sports and physical training among tribal groups were not merely recreational but were linked with survival, defense, and

collective pride. During the colonial period, British authorities often viewed tribal communities with suspicion due to their martial traditions. Many tribal youth, trained in indigenous games, became part of local militias and resistance movements. For example, the Birsa Munda movement and other tribal uprisings reflected not only political resistance but also the disciplined physical culture that sports instilled. This spirit of unity and courage, nurtured through sports, indirectly strengthened the freedom struggle.

Contribution to Modern Indian Sports:

With the growth of organized sports in independent India, athletes from tribal backgrounds have brought glory to the nation. Particularly in athletics, hockey, football, archery, and weightlifting, tribal players have consistently excelled.

In hockey, tribal players from Jharkhand and Odisha, such as Jaipal Singh

Munda (captain of the 1928 Olympic gold-winning team), have left a lasting legacy.

In archery, tribal athletes like Limba Ram and Deepika Kumari have represented India on the global stage.

The Northeast, with its tribal-dominated states, has become a hub of football talent, with players contributing to India's national football team.

Social Transformation Through Sports:

For many tribal youth, sports have become a medium of empowerment and social mobility. Participation in national and international competitions has provided recognition, education, and employment opportunities. Government schemes and sports academies in tribal regions are nurturing this talent further, ensuring that indigenous sporting traditions continue to flourish alongside modern sports.

Cultural Significance:

Beyond medals and tournaments, the tribal contribution to sports lies in their holistic approach. Games are integrated with festivals, music, and rituals, symbolizing harmony between body, mind, and community. This cultural dimension of sports has enriched the larger sporting culture of Bharat, reminding us

that physical activity is not merely competition but also a way of life.

Conclusion:

The history of sports in Bharat is incomplete without acknowledging the vital role of janjati communities. From preserving indigenous games to producing world-class athletes, their contribution has shaped not only India's sporting identity but also its cultural and national spirit. As Bharat continues to evolve as a sporting nation, the legacy of tribal communities stands as a source of pride and inspiration, reflecting resilience, strength, and unity.

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