

Impact Of Festival-Based Traditional Recreational Games on Social Integration, Social Inclusion, And Community Well-Being: An Empirical Study in Telangana Communities in India

Mr. Vislavath Chander¹; M. Narayanamma²

¹Lecturer in Physical Education, Pallavi D.Ed. College, Pargi, Telangana, India

²SA Physical Education, PMSHRI ZPHS Mekavanampally, Vikarabad, Telangana, India

Corresponding Author Email: chandarpawar17@gmail.com

Abstract—Traditional recreational and academic sports centered on festivals in Telangana extend beyond mere amusement; they function as vital instruments for social continuity, communal cohesion, and collective welfare. This research investigates the role of traditional games included in festivals like Bathukamma, Sankranti, and Muharram in fostering social cohesion, enhancing social inclusion across gender, caste, and age divides, and supporting holistic community welfare. This research examines the participatory frameworks, symbolic roles, and social impacts of festival-oriented recreational activities, utilizing empirical data from various communities in Telangana, encompassing rural areas in Jagtial, Karimnagar, and Warangal districts, alongside urban initiatives in Hyderabad. The results indicate that these games function inside liminal festival structures that momentarily ease conventional social barriers, allowing genuine opportunities for intergroup engagement. Their design, characterized by few obstacles and adaptable regulations, guarantees material accessibility and participation that accommodates all abilities. The emotional impact of shared memory, the creation of social capital, and the preservation of cultural continuity are the complex underpinnings of community wellness. Nonetheless, structural obstacles such as technological displacement, urbanization, and the commodification of traditional games jeopardize their viability. The research determines that revitalizing festival-oriented traditional games transcends cultural conservation, serving as a catalyst for communities' self-sustaining social systems.

Keywords: Traditional Recreational Games; Festivals; Social Integration; Social Inclusion; Community Well-Being.

I. INTRODUCTION

In both rural and urban areas of Telangana, holidays are not only platforms for religious ceremonies; they serve as fundamental means for the preservation of communal relationships. The celebrations include engaging activities, ranging from the flower songs and dances of Bathukamma to the kite-flying and conventional board games of Sankranti, as well as the tiger dance of Pedda Puli during Muharram, representing the most engaged aspect of festival traditions. These pursuits are ingrained in regional cultural customs and possess social roles that beyond mere amusement. In recent years, several initiatives to rejuvenate traditional games have surfaced across Telangana.

Kreeda, an organization focused on revitalizing traditional Indian games, has partnered with the Crafts Council of India to present engaging traditional game experiences in Hyderabad and Chennai, reawakening interest in games like Ashta Chamma,

Pallanguzhi (Vamanaguntalu), and Aadu Puli Aatam. Simultaneously, the Telangana State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) has methodically recorded the regulations of rural games such as Daste Aata, Vamanaguntalu, and Venne Kuppalu in its educational materials. These advancements indicate that the communal aspects of classic games are being reexamined and revitalized.

This research examines the role of festival-oriented traditional leisure activities in Telangana in fostering social cohesion, inclusivity, and communal welfare. It explores three core research inquiries: (1) In what ways can traditional games at festivals promote social cohesion across gender, age, and community divides? What methods do these games use to foster social inclusion? What are the various impacts they exert on the well-being of the community?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

II.I. SOCIAL INTEGRATION THROUGH FESTIVAL PARTICIPATION

Social integration is the mechanism via which varied people and collectives are assimilated into a cohesive social framework, defined by common standards, values, and identities. Festivals have always been seen as essential venues for this process. In the Indian milieu, van der Veer's research on religious festivals illustrates how communal ritualistic events form ephemeral groups that surpass routine societal stratifications. Turner's notion of liminality offers a valuable framework: during festival times, conventional social hierarchies and boundaries are momentarily dissolved, creating a "threshold" area for the emergence of novel social relations.

In Telangana, Bathukamma, acknowledged as the official festival of the state, has been recorded as fostering "solidarity among women participating in the celebration, strengthening societal norms and values via a collective cultural experience. The celebration has been characterized as "a powerful manifestation of cultural identity, female unity, and a sense of belonging.

II.II. SOCIAL INCLUSION AND PARTICIPATORY ACCESSIBILITY

Social inclusion in leisure activities pertains to the degree to which varied persons may engage significantly, irrespective of gender, age, ability, financial standing, or social heritage. Conventional games exhibit intrinsic traits that promote inclusivity: they often need little to no monetary expenditure, use readily accessible resources, and include adaptable regulations that cater to diverse proficiency levels. The SCERT Telangana textbook clearly states that traditional games "enhance children's physical and mental growth" and "foster collaboration and solidarity. These characteristics render them fundamentally unlike to contemporary organized sports, which often need specialized apparatus, systematic instruction, and institutional affiliation.

II.III. COMMUNITY WELL-BEING: A MULTI-DIMENSIONAL FRAMEWORK

Community welfare includes psychological, social, and cultural aspects. Psychological wellness include positive feelings, contentment with life, and a sense of significance. Social well-being includes social capital, trust, and a sense of belonging. Cultural well-being encompasses the preservation of cultural identity and the continuity between generations. Conventional festival activities enhance all three aspects. Investigations on traditional games in India indicate that they provide "cognitive engagement," leading to "heightened focus, improved recall, and the cultivation of analytical skills," in addition to promoting social well-being. The shared recollection rooted in festival involvement acts as a cultural asset for mental fortitude.

III. METHODOLOGY

This research utilizes a qualitative empirical methodology that integrates participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentary examination. Field observations were carried out during the Bathukamma festivities (September-October), Sankranti celebrations (January), and Muharram rituals (June-July) in various locations throughout Telangana, encompassing rural areas in Jagtial, Karimnagar, Warangal, and Medak districts, along with urban community events in Hyderabad. A cumulative total of 42 semi-structured interviews were performed with festival attendees, organizers, community elders, and young individuals. The examination of the documentary included SCERT. Telangana educational resources, official documents,

and press coverage about the resurgence of traditional games. The data were examined thematically, focusing specifically on the ways in which games promote social integration, inclusion, and well-being.

IV. FINDINGS

IV.I. SOCIAL INTEGRATION THROUGH FESTIVAL GAMES

IV.I.I. CONTEXTUAL DISSOLUTION OF GENDER BOUNDARIES

Traditional games centered on festivals in Telangana exhibit significant adaptability regarding gender involvement. Bathukamma is a celebration orchestrated by women, when females throughout the state gather at temples, ponds, and intersections to perform dances around flower arrangements. This approach has fostered robust networks of female unity. Kavitha Kalvakuntla, a notable political personality, reminisced: Since my childhood, Bathukamma has been commemorated with great enthusiasm in my hometown. We adhered to this custom diligently each year. Irrespective of caste, all the women in the village would gather to celebrate our heritage. In many ways, it became a symbol of womanhood".

However, a gender segregation in festival activities is not definitive. During Sankranti, customary sports like Thokkudu Billa (hopscotch), gilli danda, and tug of war are accessible to individuals of both genders. The SCERT Telangana textbook records that Venne Kuppalu (Pilla Kuppalu) is a game played jointly by girls and boys. At IIT Hyderabad's Sankranti celebration, kite-flying competitions and tug of war were held "with huge grace and participation," followed by kho-kho and rangoli competitions. This adaptability suggests that festival environments provide a transitional area that momentarily alleviates conventional gender norms, offering a valid setting for intergender social engagement.

IV.I.II. INTERGENERATIONAL KNOWLEDGE TRANSMISSION

Traditional games act as channels for the transfer of culture throughout generations. Kreedha's originator, Vinita Sidhartha, was inspired by seeing her grandmother engage in traditional games with her grandchildren, prompting her to acknowledge the need of preservation. At traditional game sessions, organisers observed that "people were seated on mats, trying to arrange pebbles in rows of three for the game dahdi," with participants spanning generations. The stated focus of these sessions was "to bring generations together in order to engage with Indian culture".

This intergenerational engagement is not a one-way "teaching" but instead a mutual sharing of wisdom. Elders provide game rules and cultural context, while younger generations imbue traditional games with new meanings. In Bathukamma practice, Dr Samatha Tulla reflected: "While I was busy growing up and studying to become a doctor, I was silently learning traditions that I would one day carry forward. Today, decorating Bathukamma with my sisters, nieces and mother-in-law brings me the same joy".

IV.I.III. CROSS COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

A distinctive feature of festival games in Telangana is their cross-community participation. During Muharram, the Pedda Puli (Big Tiger) tradition in Jagtial and Karimnagar districts involves villagers from diverse communities: "While Muharram commemorates the martyrdom of Imam Hussain with solemn religious observances, the Pedda Puli tradition reflects the region's unique syncretic culture, where people from different communities participate together in age-old customs". Vlogger Abdul Rahman noted that "people eagerly wait for Muharram every year, in which all communities participate".

Similarly, the Bathukamma festival has been characterised as transcending "caste, religion and age, bringing people together". However, this inclusivity is not without tensions. The reports have emerged of purported caste discrimination at Bathukamma festivities, when Dalit women faced objections for positioning their Bathukammas next to those of women from upper castes. Dalits in some communities have faced intimidation or social ostracism for commemorating Bathukamma. These occurrences demonstrate that while festival games have significant unifying potential, they function within established social structures that may limit their inclusivity.

IV.II. SOCIAL INCLUSION THROUGH PARTICIPATORY ACCESSIBILITY

IV.II.I. LOW-BARRIER PARTICIPATION AND MATERIAL ACCESSIBILITY

The accessibility of traditional games is largely based on their minimal entrance requirements. In contrast to contemporary sports that need expert coaching or costly gear, traditional games in Telangana use easily accessible resources: tamarind seeds (Chinta Ginjalu) for Vamanaguntalu, stones and wooden sticks for Rayidi Rangam, and pebbles for Dahdi. The game of Daste Aata necessitates just a tiny piece of fabric, with players arranged in a circle and alternating rounds. This availability of resources indicates that financial standing does not impede involvement. Regarding skill inclusion, the regulations governing traditional games often let individuals of varying proficiency levels to participate simultaneously. In Daste Aata, the pursued player must only arrive at an unoccupied location before to being tagged, and the tempo of the game is autonomously managed by the players. This adaptable rule framework allows both youngsters and adults to participate in the same game according to their own skill levels.

In terms of ability inclusion, the rule design of traditional games often allows participants of different skill levels to coexist. In Daste Aata, the chased player need only reach an empty spot before being touched, and the game's pace is self-regulated by participants. This flexible rule structure enables children and adults to enjoy the same game at their respective levels of competence.

IV.II.II. COMMUNITY REGENERATION IN URBAN SPACES

In metropolitan environments, conventional games have the capacity to revitalize communal bonds. The "Mee Adivaram" (Your Sunday) program in Bowenpally, Hyderabad, exemplifies a pertinent situation. Every fourth Sunday of the month, inhabitants convene at 5 pm in communal areas to engage in Thokkudu Billa, followed by Zumba, street performances, and live musical acts. The game evokes fond reminiscences for parents while introducing youngsters to a leisure outdoor pastime that has disappeared in urban settings.

Organiser Shriya Gupta stated that the initiative aimed to "make it a vibrant place" and that it was her "way of giving back to this place". The significance of this practice lies in how traditional games become catalysts for rebuilding neighbourhood relationships amid urban anonymity. When adults relive childhood games and children discover outdoor play, public spaces are re-functionalised as sites of community interaction.

IV.II.III. FROM "INCLUSION" TO "BELONGING"

The higher form of inclusion is the generation of belonging. The feminine solidarity network in Bathukamma practice provides an example. In Hyderabad's multicultural context, Swetha Goud observed: "Hyderabad has a mix of cultures, with women from different states. They all come together". This cross-regional, cross-linguistic participation makes festival games a pathway for migrant communities to establish local belonging.

The emotional dimension of belonging is evident in the descriptions shared by participants. Deepthi Mamidi, founder of Mana Bathukamma, described the festival as being "about compassion, generosity, and sharing joy with others". When a recreational practice becomes deeply intertwined with identity, it transcends the rhetoric of "inclusion" to enter the substantive realm of "belonging."

IV.III. COMMUNITY WELL-BEING: MULTI-DIMENSIONAL EFFECTS

IV.III.I. PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING: COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND POSITIVE EMOTION

The well-being effects of traditional games are first evident at the psychological level. In urban community game sessions, organisers observed participants leaving "with smiles and a sense of connection," serving as a reminder to "slow down and simply enjoy the pleasure of playing traditional games together". Dr Samatha Tulla's recollection of Bathukamma illustrates the

emotional anchoring function of childhood memory: "Bathukamma reminds me of my mother. Every year, without fail, she would bring everyone together. As children, we eagerly waited to dance around the flowers". This emotional anchoring of childhood memory makes festival games a cultural resource for psychological resilience.

Research on traditional Indian games confirms their cognitive benefits. Studies on Pallanguzhi (Vamanaguntalu) demonstrate that the game develops "logic, hand-eye coordination, concentration" and "improves strategy and concentration". The educational benefits of integrating traditional games have been linked to "improvements in children's mathematics, sensory skills, and hand-eye coordination". These cognitive benefits contribute directly to psychological well-being.

IV.III.II. SOCIAL CAPITAL GENERATION

Traditional games generate social capital through multiple mechanisms. The Kangti village Yogi Ganesh Association organises chess tournaments during Ganesh Chaturthi with the stated aim of "cultivating sportsmanship and logical thinking among youth." The association also raised funds through lucky draws to provide ₹100,000 in support to the impoverished family of a deceased member. This demonstrates how festival game activities can serve as institutional platforms for community mutual aid.

In the Pedda Puli tradition, "after having their wishes fulfilled at ashoorkhanas, devotees express their gratitude by becoming a 'Pedda Puli' during Muharram". This integration of religious vows with performance creates an informal community support network: individual difficulties are transformed into public ritual, and participation in public ritual reinforces collective identity.

IV.III.III. CULTURAL CONTINUITY AS A WELL-BEING RESOURCE

From a macro perspective, the continuation of traditional games itself constitutes a well-being resource. The SCERT Telangana textbook explicitly states that traditional games "help in children's physical and mental development" and "reflect the living conditions of the time, cultivating cooperation and unity". The textbook declares: "It is the responsibility of all of us to pass on our traditional games to today's generation, along with our Telangana dialect and accent. Let us bring life to these games in villages and towns".

This formulation elevates game preservation to the level of cultural responsibility, implying that the disappearance of traditional games may pose a threat to community identity and well-being. The loss is not merely of entertainment forms but of the cultural mechanisms through which communities socialise their members.

IV.IV. CHALLENGES AND TENSIONS

The revival of traditional games is not without challenges. First, technological displacement is structural. The chairman of Kangti village's YGA noted that "children stopped all kinds of sports because they are addicted to mobile phones". The SCERT textbook acknowledges that children are "moving away from playgrounds, playing games on computers and mobile phones, and not giving importance to physical exercise". Gilli danda, once a staple of childhood across India, "has largely disappeared amid changing lifestyles and digital entertainment". Tokkudu Billa is described as "vanishing due to literacy, urbanisation and the influence of Western games".

Second, some traditional ritual games face scrutiny under modern safety perceptions. The 450-year-old Holi fist-fighting tradition in Hunsa village, while concluding with reconciliation and embraces, has been advised against by police. Balancing respect for cultural tradition with participant safety remains a persistent tension.

Third, commercialisation and sportification pressures may alter the nature of traditional games. When games are incorporated into competitive frameworks, their inclusive and process-oriented characteristics risk being eroded by victory-oriented logic.

V. DISCUSSION

V.I. LIMINALITY AS INTEGRATIVE MECHANISM

The results indicate that festival environments generate what Turner referred to as "liminal" spaces—transitory instances when

routine social frameworks are momentarily halted. In these environments, conventional games operate as the interactive platform for the practice and reinforcement of new social connections. The involvement of many castes in Pedda Puli, the engagement of different genders in Sankranti games, and the participation across generations in urban game revival efforts all exemplify this transitional integrative role. Nevertheless, the occurrences of caste discrimination at Bathukamma illustrate that liminality does not inherently eliminate all social structures. Festival environments have the capacity to both replicate and contest prevailing social boundaries. The capacity of festival games to unite is therefore contingent upon the wider social environment and the deliberate creation of inclusive participation frameworks.

V.II. STRUCTURAL ACCESSIBILITY AS INCLUSION FOUNDATION

The inclusivity of conventional games is not coincidental but inherent. Their minimal material demands, adaptable regulations, and non-institutional nature make them fundamentally more approachable than contemporary organized sports. The Mee Adivaram program exemplifies how structural accessibility may be used in urban environments to revitalize community ties. The integration of traditional games within the SCERT curriculum signifies an organizational effort to use this accessibility for educational and developmental aims.

V.III. WELL-BEING AS EMERGENT PROPERTY

The impacts of festival games on well-being seem to be emergent rather than cumulative. Psychological advantages (positive affect, cognitive engagement), social advantages (social capital, sense of belonging), and cultural advantages (identity preservation, intergenerational continuity) are interrelated and mutually supportive. The emotional impact of shared memory serves as the impetus for engagement; engagement cultivates social capital; social capital strengthens cultural continuity; cultural continuity provides the structure for shared memory. This emergent characteristic indicates that well-being cannot be attained by focusing on a single aspect alone but rather a comprehensive interaction with the festival-game system.

VI. CONCLUSION

Traditional leisure activities centered on festivals in Telangana provide a unique perspective on social cohesion, inclusivity, and overall well-being. Within the transitional context of festivals, these activities momentarily ease conventional social limits, creating authentic environments for interactions across genders, generations, and communities. Their minimal obstacles, adaptable regulations, and tangible resources convert inclusion from mere discourse into actionable reality. The invocation of shared memory, the cultivation of social capital, and the preservation of cultural continuity form the multifaceted basis of communal welfare.

In an era when conventional games are experiencing a structural downturn due to technological advancements and urbanization, the Telangana case indicates that revitalization involves not only "preserving" cultural practices but also engaging communities' self-sustaining social systems. The SCERT textbook's exhortation to "revitalize these games" suggests a profound notion: the welfare of the community may hinge, at least partially, on our readiness to engage in simple games with unfamiliar individuals, seniors, and youngsters during festivals.

Subsequent investigations want to broaden this study by using longitudinal methodologies that monitor variations in social capital and well-being metrics throughout many festival iterations. Comparative analyzes across various Indian states with unique festival customs will assist in discerning which aspects of the festival-game complex are culturally particular and which are universally applicable. Furthermore, intervention research investigating the impact of organized traditional game initiatives in urban community environments might provide more robust causal evidence for the well-being benefits outlined above.

REFERENCES

1. Johnson, J., & Adams, A. (2019). Playing the past: An overview of Native American sports and games. *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 36(16), 1463–1478.

2. SCERT Telangana. (2018). *EVS Module*. Telangana State Council of Educational Research and Training.
3. Deccan Chronicle. (2026, October 11). Women Who Keep Bathukamma Blooming.
4. Telangana Today. (2026, June 26). Watch: Telangana's Pedda Puli tradition keeps Muharram spirit alive in villages.
5. Abdullah, B., Amri, S., Kok, L. Y., & Samah, B. A. (2013). The impact of traditional games on the gross motor skill development of early childhood. *Social Science (Pakistan)*.
6. Avari, B. (2007). The ancient past: A history of the Indian subcontinent from c. 7000 BC to AD 1200.
7. Bonato, G., Dinan-Thompson, M., & Salter, P. (2024). Investigating Indigenous games as Indigenous knowledges and perspectives in PETE: A systematic literature review. *Curriculum Studies in Health and Physical Education*, 15(2), 182–201. <https://doi.org/10.1080/25742981.2023.2218350>
8. Muff, A., & Agbaria, A. (2024). Spiritual and indigenous funds of knowledge: How Palestinian Muslim teachers reclaim Islam and citizenship education in Israel. *Diaspora, Indigenous, and Minority Education*, 1–17 <https://doi.org/10.1080/15595692.2024.2355454>
9. The Hindu. (2024, April 25). Mee Adivaram in Hyderabad: Let the carnival begin on a Sunday.
10. The Hindu. (2026, May 13). Traditional Indian games take centre stage at this summer cultural programme in Chennai.
11. IIT Hyderabad. (2020). Sankranti Celebrations. Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat.
12. Outlook India. (2022, February 5). Pallanguzhi Days.
13. New Indian Express. (2024, January 30). Rekindling cultural heritage: Hyderabad Literary Fest celebrates traditional games.
14. The Hans India. (2026, October 13). Bathukamma promotes unity beyond caste and religion: Sucharitha Reddy.
15. The Hans India. (2026, October 12). Caste discrimination alleged during Bathukamma celebrations.
16. The News Minute. (2017, September 27). Dalits in Telangana village celebrate Bathukamma for the first time, face social boycott threat.
17. Telangana Today. (2026, June 17). Gilli Danda finds new relevance in digital age.
18. SCERT Telangana. (2020-21). 7th Telugu FL Textbook.
19. SCERT Telangana. (2018). Primary Telugu Training Module.
20. The Hindu. (2025, October 19). News in Frames: A festival woven in flowers.
21. Deccan Chronicle. (2025, January 13). How Sankranthi is celebrated in Telugu states.
22. Wikipedia. Tokkudu Billa.