

# Traditional Games and the Sri Lankan Culture; Reflection of Traditional Games as a Component of Implicit Culture of Sri Lanka

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## Abstract:

Traditional games are still preserved in Sri Lankan context since it acts as a major role in Sinhala new-year season. However, the vicinity of the traditional games such as Eluwan keema (catching of goats/Goats Play) or Gudu paneema (Tip-cat game) are gradually declining due to the inception of new games for the Sinhala New Year festival by unanimous people for different objectives. Traditional games has been so far identified as a reflection of explicit culture and therefore, the main aim of the study was to understand the relationship between traditional games and culture and to reveal whether the said is a sub-section of implicit culture with the use of prevailing literature. The main concentration of this research was given to present the cultural background of traditional games created by the mindsets of our forefathers and to understand the blend of implicit and explicit cultural knowledge that guided such activities. Thorough observations of traditional games played by different parties were also observed by the researcher to narrate the implicit cultural values embedded in such games. Literature reveals that playing a game is explicit but molding a game is part of the implicit culture. Traditional games are evolved throughout the years from their inception and had changed the basics from time to time. Changes include the costumes of the participants, the equipment used, and the objective of playing such games. In-depth interviews were conducted with fifteen elderly villages. The results of this study synthesized through observation, interviews, and secondary data review established that it can be treated that the traditional games of Sri Lanka as the reflection of components of implicit and explicit culture.

**Keywords:** Implicit Culture, Explicit culture, traditional games, Sinhala New Year festival, Interviews

## Introduction

Culture is a reflection of a territory which can be used as a tool to distinguish one country from another. Cultural activities and rituals, beliefs and values of people along with manmade materials goods are components of culture. Understanding the culture from which the individuals are from is important to understand the persons really well. Traditional games are treated as equally important when elaborating of a culture of a specific country. Traditional games are known as a form of game and or sporting activity that develops from a certain community habit (Marlina & Pransiska, 2018). Along with the successive developments, the traditional game is frequently referred to as a type of game that has characteristics of the original regional and reformed to local cultural traditions (Marlina & Pransiska, 2018). Sri Lanka is a culturally heritage country with a written history of more than 2500 years. The traditions, customs and rituals of Sri Lanka were influenced by foreign invasions including South Indian, Portuguese, Dutch and British. Food and clothing, language, behaviors and art of living of people were highly influenced by such invasions and games and sports are also a vulnerable component under this category.

Traditional or Indigenous games in the Sri Lanka are games commonly played by children, usually using native materials or instruments. (E.g.: pancha demeema which is an indoor game played in two groups, using five small shells, a coconut shell and a game board). Sri Lankans in general called these games as jana

kreeda, and perceive that these games are mostly paid during New year season. These games are not played in international arena which stresses the uniqueness of such games to a specific culture. Therefore, these games are not exhibited in competition but are played for joy and fun. Even with in the island, some of these games are played differently in different provinces.

Culture in broader sense is defined by an English anthropologist Edward B. Tylor in his book, ‘Primitive Culture’, published in 1871 as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society". Most anthropologists would define culture as the shared set of (implicit and explicit) values, ideas, concepts, and rules of behaviour that allow a social group to function and perpetuate itself (Hudelson, 2004).

Culture of a territory can be categorized as implicit and explicit. Explicit characteristics of culture are the observable behaviours, rituals, symbols and heroes of a culture. These include the way people dress, the kind of food they eat, music, dance, the things that are considered beautiful and/or ugly (Lanzer, 2017). It is the Social knowledge that people can perceive and talk about. The implicit characteristics of a culture are the underlying values, the unwritten norms of behaviour that guide people regarding which behaviours are considered appropriate or inappropriate (Lanzer, 2017).

The uniqueness of Sri Lankan culture is less explained and much detailed. Hence an overall analysis considering a wider spectrum Sri Lankan Culture was articulated to provide an overall idea about the country domain. The architecture of the residential buildings other than the heritage buildings and condominiums vary widely according to the socioeconomic status of their inhabitants. There is a huge impact of social status of individuals on food they consume. Sri Lanka's staple food is rice. There is some ethnic variation in foods and customs, as well as food taboos. As seen in many Asian cultures, Extended family units still can be seen and the father/husband is considered as the head of the family. The position of the females in family units is also an important condition to learn about culture. In earlier decades females were more dependent upon father, brother and husband. Still the remain are found in many families. Traditional games are also an indicator/reflection of a culture.

Traditional games are unique to tribes in a society, and there can be different inherited games for different tribes of a single country. Traditional games leads develop physical activity and also cognitive and social abilities (Suparno, 2018).

When considering the Sri Lankan milieu, Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim communities’ process traditional games which have unique features separately. The present study considered the traditional games played during the Sinhala and Tamil New year.

The traditional games played during New Year are designed to suit and meet the needs of the peasantry whose objective is to achieve the mental comfort and relief after hard and tedious work in agriculture and allied areas (Jayasinghe, 2019). Few Traditional games played in Sri Lanka has been extracted from the Daily Mirror paper written by Jayasinghe (2019), for further identification of key components of such games which is exhibited in Table 2.

**Table 2: Description of traditional games**

| Traditional Game  | Description  |
|---|--|
| <b>Eluwan Kema / Elu Kotu</b> (Goat Fencing/ Catching of Goats/Goats) | It is an outdoor game played mainly by girls. They make their selves into a ring as an enclosure to prevent those outside from getting in. Those who are inside are imaginary goats and those who are outside are goat catchers. Goat catchers recite a line of a verse asking whether they could jump over the fence. The game comes to an end when the outsiders break in. |

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Play)  |   |
| <b>Mewara Keliya</b><br>("Mewaraya" is a woman's jewellery reflected by bangles) | To play the game there need at least 05 players. One of the participant hides bangle in the sand and pretending she has lost it questions the others whether they have found it. It includes a nice musical melody.   |
| <b>Batta Panima</b> (It is a is a form of hopscotch)                             | This game is played during recess on a nine-square grid drawn on a sandy ground or chalked on the floor. Any number of children could take part, but only one could use the grid at a time. It had three single squares, a double square, a single square, and a double square. The first person to start tosses a flat rock into the first square, then hops on single foot right over the first square to the second, and proceeds through the grid following the pattern.  |
| <b>Kanaa Alleema</b> (A game which involves a player with blindfolded)           | Need a circular area. One player is blindfolded. He or she has to catch other players, while others are stay within the circle. If any of players run out of circle play will lose. The last player who without caught wins the game.   |
| <b>Gudu</b> (Tip-cat game)   | Gudu resembles "tip-cat". A propelling stick about to and half feet long and a shorter one, the kuttiya, of about six inches, are the gear. A small hole about 3 inches deep and as wide as the stride stick is dug in the ground and the kuttiya placed across it transversely. The player then inserts the propelling stick in to the hole and propels the short stick as far as he can. The rival fielders attempt to catch the kuttiya while it is in the air. If they fail they throw it back in to the hole while the hurler defends it by striking the kuttiya with his hurling stick. If he misses and if falls so close to the throwing hole that it is less than a hurling stick length away from it the sticker is "out". If he hits it he measures with the stick the distance from the hole to where the short stick has dropped and continuous to propel and strike the kuttiya until he either fails to hit it or is catch out. The side scoring most stick lengths wins and is entitled to penalize the losers. |
| <b>Pancha demeema</b>  | Pancha demeema which is an indoor game played in two groups, using five small shells, a coconut shell and a game board.   |
| <b>Kotta Pora</b> (Pillow Fighting)  | Both players seated, on the same wooden pole/ beam, with one hand on his pillow and the other hand tied behind their back. They fight with pillows and the winner would be the player who will be able to knock the opponent off the pole.  |
| <b>Lessana Gahe negeema</b> (climbing a greased pole)                            | The player who will be able to climb a greased pole and lift the flag held at the top of the pole will become the winner.   |

Source: Adapted from Daily Mirror Web Site - [shorturl.at/mpADT](http://shorturl.at/mpADT) (Jayasinghe, 2019)

### Materials and methods

The study was conducted as a qualitative research study. Data were gathered through interviews, document Review and observations. Observation technique is only only possible during the New Year (Avurudu) season and interviews were conducted with fifteen (15) elders whom were selected on purposive manner to serve the purpose. All the elders selected were more than 55 years of age from different villages who are

more cultural experience. Content analysis including keyword identification was the technique used to identify the main themes to attain the research objectives.

### Results and discussion

The respondents who have participated for the interviewing process followed to the age group of 50-70 years. Respondents were selected vigilantly where there were 10 retired teachers and 5 Retired Grama Niladari (Government officers appointed to serve general public residing in that area).

By observation, document review, and mainly by keyword analysis of interviews it was revealed that the traditional games played during new year season can be categorized as, Games played by male; Games played by female; Games played by children and Games played by all (as a family unit). Simultaneously, there are implicit and explicit cultural characteristics of traditional games played during Sinhala and Tamil New Year. Table 3, depicts the assessment of the Implicit and Explicit cultural nature of traditional games.

**Table 3: Assessment of the Implicit and Explicit cultural nature of traditional games**

| Traditional games played during new year  | Features   | Explicit Culture   | Implicit Culture   |
|---|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lessana Gahe negeema climbing a greased pole)</li> <li>• Kotta Pora (Pillow Fighting)</li> </ul> | Needs energy and power. Only performed by males  | Use of local resources   | Showcase of male dominance of the culture (morale values)  |
| Eluwan keema, Mewara Keliya   | Mainly played by girls. Not much energy needed and eluwan keema and mewara keliya includes musical melodies. | Girls sung either eluwan kannai api awe or “Sarasadisi PetiThora Nelanakala walagiyado mage mewareya (use of language) | Female are considered as dependents and they are not performing any risky activities (morale values) |
| Pancha demeema  | Played by both male and female in collaboration  | Cohesion among family units and social units are exhibited (behavior)  | Shows the morale values  |

*Source: Author Developed*

The traditional games which are with spiritual nature are vigilant in Sri Lanka Culture (Perera, 2020). Panchakeliya or the game of cowries Nerenci, Galketeema, Amba ata Paneema, Kana Mutti bindeema or breaking pots blind folded, Muthu keliya or game of pearls, Sokari, Udakki or the drum which is small in the middle are some of the New Year games connected with religious beliefs and rites. Most of these games are played to please goddess Pattini. Playing on the swing is a game dedicated to the Sun god. The ups and downs of the movements on the swing indicate the sun rise and the sunset respectively.

### Conclusion

Implicit culture includes morale values, learning processes, beliefs and representations. Implicit elements of culture are discrete. In contrast, explicit culture depicts the languages, behavior, knowhow, & institutions which are directly observable & easily recognized through people’s aspects such as type of food, dress and language.

Based on the study reflections, it can be synthesized that the traditional games played during Sinhala and Tamil New Year as the reflection of a component of both implicit and explicit cultural elements of Sri Lanka.

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