

# Folk Games in Learning

Salai Selvam

As a child, I grew up playing folk games happily. I am sure these games shaped my personality and added happiness to my life. I still play these folk games with the children around me. In Tamil society, folk games are a part of people's daily life. *Sangam* literature also speaks of countless folk games for children that they played for hours without getting tired; of childhood spent singing, climbing trees, running, hiding, jumping, blindfolding, rule setting and planning for games. Some of these interesting games in Tamil are, *kula kulaiyan mundirika, samngili pungili, tic tic, kannaa muuchi re re, pallaanguzhi, tri tri bandham, ottaiya rettaiya, chungik ka, kabaddi and daayam.*

I witnessed the active involvement of parents in folk games when the Pebble Library (Koolangal Children's Library, Madurai) organised a folk games festival for urban children and their parents. Parents seemed very happy in teaching these to their children. As a teacher, I used these games in different forms with my primary school students.

The guiding principles of the National Curriculum Framework 2005, such as connecting knowledge to life, ensuring that learning shifts away from rote

methods, enriching the curriculum so that it goes beyond textbooks, and overall, promoting joyful learning, especially in the primary classes, are aligned to use of games in learning. I am sharing my experiences in using folk games in the learning process of the Tamil language.

## Folk games for teachers

The District Institute,<sup>i</sup> Puducherry, organised a 'Folk Games Festival' for our Voluntary Teacher's Forum (VTF)<sup>ii</sup>. As a part of it, we created a space where teachers could play folk games of their childhood, such as *thayam, gundu, kitty, nondi, pallaanguzhi, kolakolaya mudhinrika, sangkili pungili kathava thora, colour-colour* etc. Materials, like *goli gundu, dhayakattai, Kattam* and stones for *kallaangal* were used for playing these games. These games involve a lot of conversations and songs.

The festival began in the morning and each game was initially played for around 30 to 60 minutes. After that, the teachers chose the games that they liked. Some continued to play the same game over and over; others tried out various games. Soon they formed their own groups. The post-lunch session was for experience-sharing.



### Teachers' reactions

- They felt nostalgic. These games took them back to their childhood.
- They were unwilling to stop playing because they were enjoying themselves.
- They recollected the manner and rules of playing the games.
- They felt sad for the current generation who have lost these folk games.

### Experience-sharing by teachers

Teachers were excited to share their experiences and learnings in the VTF which created cross-learning. In trying to cover the syllabus, they had not realised that these games could add value to their teaching-learning process. This sharing helped them to link their teaching processes with these games.

In addition, the Physical Education (PE) teacher shared and requested primary teachers to allow the primary-school children to play regularly not only for their happiness also for the development of their fine motor skills. After class V, students have systematic sports and games, dedicated periods for these and district level competitions etc., but primary classes do not have these. He also added that folk games which they play on their own will support the students in the development of life skills like working in a group, leading a team, taking decisions and will ensure the development of multi-talents and intelligence naturally.

Teachers excitedly shared their experiences and borrowed books on folk games and collected

materials for games, such as *pallanguzhi*, *dhayakaddai*, sticks for *kitti* from our Teacher Resource Centre. After this workshop, we received the following responses from teachers:

- I used the *kallangal* game for observing rules.
- I conducted a folk game festival in my school.
- We allotted a period for a week to play a folk game in my class. Children are busy with those games.
- We did a project to collect folk game songs.

### Language acquisition through folk games

We also organized a session on games in language teaching and learning for teachers. In this session, we took the folk game of *kabaddi*, which is a traditional game of Tamil Nadu, to demonstrate language acquisition through games. Teachers happily shared their experiences of playing *kabaddi* and tried to connect the game with language teaching. They prepared sample plans for their classrooms, such as:

- Collecting *kabaddi* songs from their local areas
- Giving students these songs to read and sing
- Playing *kabaddi* in school (to focus on experience and dialogue)
- Compiling rules of the game
- Compiling experiences of the game with parents and neighbours
- Drawing scenes of the game
- Adding new lines to the existing songs
- Presenting all these activities in the classroom, school and to parents and community



Bringing children's life experiences into the classroom is a significant step forward in the teaching-learning process. We were able to involve the community in addition to language learning in the classroom. Focusing on this game motivated the teachers who were able to plan children's adaptive activities in the language class and take them to the classroom so that every game the children played could be modified for the classroom.

#### *Use of folk games in the classroom*

Folk games can be used for:

- Language development (conversations, rule setting etc.).
- Development of mathematics skills (games like *thayam*, *pallaanguzhi*, etc.).
- Classroom management: For example, a game like *kulakkulaiyaa mundrika*, which is played by children in the age group of 4 to 10 years all over the state. Children sit in the circle, sing a song together, observe the person to catch, and then run. Up to 20 children can sit in a circle and play this game. This game can be used in many ways for classroom management, like creating a fear-free environment for learning.
- Creating a friendly environment in the school by allowing children to play folk games that they play in their community in school too.
- Helping children learn to create lists and make plans.
- Creating fear-free learning by scheduling time for playing such games.

#### **In summary**

Generally, I have conversations with children on

which games they play and which they enjoy most. The children feel very happy sharing the details of where and when, who won the game, how he/she cheated, the rules, what their 'useless' leader did etc. These informal discussions support their personality, especially helping a child to get into a team, supporting them to learn a particular skill. I tell them to play as much as they want. But I also explain to them why they should play the games which they do not like, and also why they should play with those they do not like. I tell them to take time out to read stories because stories are like games with many interesting things to learn and explore. I extend learning through games or dialogues on games because games help in developing children's Multiple Intelligences (MI), as suggested by Howard Gardner.

As a teacher educator, I suggest that teachers choose games that students enjoy, and which are suitable to their local context. Teachers can allow students to play a few games in the classroom before or after lessons or when they finish some difficult tasks or just to create a happy mood.

I am sure we can use folk games as the focal point of elementary school learning activities for happy, natural learning; respecting children's social experiences and; learning through play. What is needed today is for teachers to discover that children's playing experiences include all the hidden mathematical functions, elements of language skills and elements of personality. We can foresee this idea of folk games in classrooms dovetail in achieving early numeracy and literacy.

#### **Endnotes**

- i District Institute (DI): The aim of Azim Premji Foundation DIs is to improve the learning levels of children by focusing on building professional capacities of teachers, head teachers and functionaries. This is facilitated through multi-modal engagements - informal learning groups, short discussions, Teacher Learning Centres (TLCs), workshops, school visits, exposure visits etc. Teachers are provided with access to resources like books, teaching and learning materials, computers and internet connection, laboratory equipment and material through a wide network of TLCs.
- ii Voluntary Teachers' Forum (VTF): Building teacher capacity through continuous professional development is at the centre of this initiative of the Azim Premji Foundation. The VTFs are an integral part of its multi-modal and integrated approach towards continuous teacher professional development.



**Salai Selvam** is a Resource Person at Azim Premji Foundation's Puducherry District Institute. She is engaged in the capacity-building of teachers, with particular emphasis on language development. She is also an author, translator and has been the editor of a children's magazine. As an Educationist, she has been involved in experiments like SSA's reading book project for classroom libraries and was a member of Tamil Nadu's syllabus textbook committee. She is a member of Tamil Nadu's Women Co-ordination Forum and the Founder of Madurai's Women Readers' Forum (2006) among many other such initiatives for women's empowerment. She may be contacted at [salai.selvam@azimpremjifoundation.org](mailto:salai.selvam@azimpremjifoundation.org)