

Ancient Knowledge of Body Culture in relation to Traditional Sports.

Abstract :

SURESH DESHPANDE INDIA

Body: Human body in ancient Indian literature is referred to as *<Sharira>* The entire life philosophy is based on the body possessed by the person, being the apparatus for all deeds, duties and achievements in life. Nothing is possible without it. Achieving all our goals in life body is the medium. It is in this context there is most appropriate saying in ancient sanskrit text, I quote: "Shariramādyam khalu dharma sādhanam". Unquote. Meaning *Sharir* *<Body>* is a means for the accomplishment of one's own duties and hence, it should be properly nurtured, made healthy, fit and aesthetically beautiful and proportionate. It seems ancient Indians had clear concept of 'body culture'. The Sanskrit literature of the ancient period contains copious references describing the beauty of fully developed body; the artists, poets or sculptors encased the beauty of ideal physique in their monumental creations. The celebrated author of '*Rāmāyaṇa*' –the great epic, describes various parts of the ideal physique of Rama, the hero of the epic,

In fact, the science of Iconology attributes its origin to the concept of symmetrical and proportionate body development. *Āyurveda* (ancient science of Indian medicine) has gone further deep into it and developed norms and symptoms of ideal body development in relation to its parts, organs, limbs and gender. Thus, the ideal of body development had remained the basis of Indian physical culture. Body development was also linked with the then existing sports like wrestling, boxing, archery, hunting, dancing, horse riding, elephant riding, charioteering, etc. in addition to bodily movements with weapons like mace, sword, heavy bows and arrows. Archaeological evidences are preserved in such sites and also the icons of various gods and goddesses worshiped in temples are testimony of the concept of body culture.

Ancient knowledge of body culture paid equal attention to the acquisition of strength *<Bala>* to make body strong and agile. It is culturing of such a body needed for enduring stress and strain of competitive sports and also war like situation. Without strength and strong muscles, body can not assume proper shape and size. *Bala* (Strength) is synonymous with strength, vigor, power, might or bulkiness of body. Ayurved Texts advocate resorting to regular exercise for acquiring strength.

Thus, the *Bala* was valued as an all-pervading factor in life. The contrary, weakness, was a disqualification and therefore the weak were advised to acquire strength for which physical activities were used precisely and progressively.

Sport: *<Kridā> or < Vihāra>* as per ancient terminology, seemed to have occupied important place in the lives of people, including girls and women. The word "*Kridā*" finds its earliest origin in Vedic literature followed by subsequent literature of consecutive periods of more than one thousand years. Thus, traditional sports and games had formed integral part of their daily life. It is much clear from the said literature that the concept they had formed

about Kridā or Vihāra indicated their inclination towards deriving recreation, fun, enjoyment and pleasure through participation in traditional sports.

Body types are described in Ancient Texts of Āyurveda with special characteristics of each one and they are closely related to sports.

Traditional sports and games (TSG) is the term used by UNESCO, and then commonly followed by different organizations working in the field. In my opinion, TSG seems to have limited scope, instead , if the term “traditional physical culture” is accepted, it has a broad vision of including body culture, traditional systems of physical exercises, sports, games and even folk dances, folk songs with traditional music. This is directly related to human culture. It is in this environment that the process of psycho-somatic culturation carries over from one generation to their successors. Human being is nurtured and cultured in such a civilization.