Sports in tribal society- a sociological analysis

People worldwide increasingly talk about sports—at work, at home, in bars, on campuses, at dinner tables, in school, with friends, and even with strangers at bus stops, airports, and other public places. Relationships often revolve around sports. People identify with teams and athletes so closely that the outcomes of games influence their moods, identities, and sense of well-being. In a general sense, sports create opportunities for conversations that enable people to form and nurture relationships and even enhance their personal status as they describe and critique athletes, games, teams, coaching decisions, and media commentaries. When people use sports this way, they often broaden their social networks related to work, politics, education, and other spheres of their lives. This increases their social capital, that is, the social resources that link them positively to social worlds (Harvey, Levesque and Donnelly, 2007). When people play sports, their experiences are often remembered as special and important in their lives. The emotional intensity, group camaraderie, and sense of accomplishment that often occur in sports make sport participation more memorable than many other activities.

India is home to about 700 tribal groups with a population of 104 million, as per 2011 census. These indigenous people constitute the second largest tribal population in the world after Africa. As industries encroached upon their lands, many communities were displaced and some continued to wage a struggle to either protect their homes or demand a fair compensation.

By taking away forest lands for industries and plantation forestry instead of preserving natural species that provide livelihood to these people, the government was depriving them of the basic means of livelihood. This narrative is a long standing one with little to merge change, through out the passage of time. It seems as if the world has been spinning a little faster and yet the stories/ biographies of these indigenous people stand still.

The battle for Niyamgiri may be won by Odisha’s Dongria Kondhs and the Baiga tribe of Madhya Pradesh may have become the first indigenous people to get habitat rights in India after a century-long struggle, but these developments don’t dwarf the challenge that lies in promotion and protection of indigenous people’s rights. Challenges seems to become a part of the existence of indigenous lives which looks inevitable. The research embarks upon and looks at these indigenous society through the lens of sports and understand the impact and significance of sports in the lives of tribal people. The study would be carried out in the states of Jharkhand and Orissa. The rationale of choosing these states lies in the fact that these two states were a part of the chotanagpur plataue.

Before we engage with the socio-political debates, understanding the meaning of contemporary sports is essential. To begin with, it is crucial to understand what is sports. According to widely used definitions, sports are physical activities that involve challenges or competitive contests[[1]](#footnote-1). Sports includes all forms of physical activity focusing at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental wellbeing. It also builds up social relationships. Sports are organised so that the participants can assess their performances. These performances are then compared with other performances or to their own performances later in times or even compare their performances in various different situations.

Allen Guttman sees seven defining characteristics of modern sports in his seminal work From Ritual to Record (1978). He contrasted these characteristics of modern sports with the primitive sporting events. These distinguished characteristics are:

* secularism
* equality
* specialization
* rationalization
* bureaucratization
* quantification
* records

he compared the Greek games and contests (between 1000 BC and 100 AD) and modern sport (from 1800 on) runs as follows.

In terms of the first key feature of modern sport, secularism, he observes that in the cultures of the Greek polis, or city-state, the activities we associate with sport were almost invariably bound up with religious rituals and ceremonies. The games held at Olympia, Delphi, Corinth, Nemea and elsewhere had more in common with those found in the ‘primitive’ cultures of the agrarian societies of the day than with the nineteenth-century European reconstruction of the Olympics: ‘the relative familiarity of Greek culture and the revival of specific track and field sports in our own time act to obscure fundamental similarities between the sports of the Athenians and those of the Apaches and Aztecs. Olympia’s ancient games were rooted in religion.

It is important to note that these characteristics of sports are present in many sports played in India, like hockey, cricket, football, archery, boxing and athletics. To illustrate this to Indian context, we would like to look at the sports of Hockey, which is also our national games.

This research proposal aims to study the role or function of sports in tribal societies. The tribal societies have been experiencing displacement, systematic oppression and poor life chances. A study published recently by Sama Resource Group for Women and Health (2018), titled ‘From the Margins to the Centre‘ focuses on the health inequities among the tribal communities in selected districts of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Odisha’. It was supported by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and emphatically highlights the link between the poor health status of tribal communities and their marginalised location in the socio-economic and political contexts.[[2]](#footnote-2) Land alienation, loss of access and control over forests, enforced displacement due to development projects and lack of proper rehabilitation, and indebtedness have been some of the key reasons for the marginalisation of Adivasis[[3]](#footnote-3). Displacement of tribes is caused by large projects which results in a transfer of resources from the weaker sections of society to the more privileged ones. Mega dams, in particular, create victims of development - mainly tribals who never share the gains of development. It can be said that the bigger the development project, the greater the centralised control over it. This centralisation has a bias in favour of large landholders, rich farmers, engineers, bureaucrats and politicians.

Dams are the biggest agents of displacement. India has the largest number of river valley projects in the world. Dus to these projects the tribal regions and tribal population is being adversely affected, since they live in resource rich regions. Tribal areas produce most of the country’s coal, mica, bauxite and other minerals. An example of Orissa can further illustrate the picture to give us a clear understanding.

Odisha occupies a unique position among the Indian states due to a large tribal population. The tribal population of the state, according to 2011 census, is 22.85 percent of the state’s total population. The state has the third largest concentration of tribals in the country. There are as many as 62 tribal communities including 13 primitive tribal groups. About 44.70 percent of the state’s geographical area is known as Scheduled Areas which extends over 118 out of 314 Blocks in 12districts. Majority of scheduled tribes live in hilly and forest regions which are mostly inaccessible and isolated. The tribal economy is largely subsistence oriented, unstructured and non-specialized.

Ever since the implementation of the First Five-Year Plan several development projects have been initiated in the country. These projects displaced large number of people and tribals constitute a sizeable proportion of the total displaced people. Forest and life, people, livelihood, religion and culture of tribal people are inextricably blended. Acquisition of forest land for development projects directly leads to uprooting of tribals from their home and hearth. Between 1951 and 1995, as high as 713449.24 acres of forest land were acquired for different development projects and 44.34 percent were acquired only for dam project.

India has one of the highest development-induced displacements in the world. Studies show that a total of about 60 million people were displaced between 1947 and 2000. (Fernandes, 2006) As the tribals live in the forest and hilly areas, construction of dams immediately submerged the tribal villages. Obviously, a large number of tribals were displaced consequent upon the construction of dams and irrigation projects. In some of the projects like Bodhghat dam project in Madhya Pradesh, Icha, Chandil and Koelkaro in Bihar, Mahi Bajaj Sagar in Rajastjan, Inchampalli in Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra etc the percentage of tribal displacement was more than 70 percent. The Narmada Valley Development Project affected as many as 25 million people, majority of which were tribals.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Dams/hydraulic projects and large and medium irrigation projects have displaced and affected many tribals in the state of Odisha. Flood, cyclone in coastal belt and drought in the western part is the general feature of Odisha. In the western part of Odisha, particularly the districts of Kalahandi, Bolangir, Sambalpur severe drought occur frequently which leads to poverty, hunger, out-migration, outbreak of serious diseases etc.( Samal, 1998) Therefore, construction of irrigation and dam projects received priority at different points of time. The construction of multipurpose dams in Odisha is for flood control, in addition to irrigation and power generation. Most of the major dams are in the tribal districts. ( Fernandes, 1996) It has caused great damage to the indigenous people. A significant number of those displaced are tribals and other economically marginal rural populations who have historically, depended on the natural resource base, particularly the common property resources for their subsistence. Out of the total of 52,584 families displaced by 7 multipurpose dam projects, 10,498 families are scheduled tribes which come to 20 percent of the total families displaced. In undivided Koraput district, with 58 percent of tribal population displaced comes to 6 percent of the total population of the district. The land taken over includes, 4,00,000 acres of forests on which the tribal have depended for their sustenance.

Consequences of the development induced displacement of scheduled tribes are numerous but distinct. The displaced tribals have been affected by different risks, such as landlessness, joblessness, marginalization, homelessness, food insecurity, loss of access to common property resources (water, forest, grazing land) etc. Their quality of life and potential for physical and emotional growth is dormant; family and community life is almost totally destroyed; the opportunity for cultural activity hardly exists and the right of movement is highly restricted. Those living in camps, especially women, have to endure outrageous invasions of their privacy. Basic health care for all and education of children are virtually non-existent. An successful story of tribal displacement has been found to have impoverished them. In Rawlsian sense, this kind of displacement creates inequality at a different level where the tribals are not only deprived of income, but also of social goods such as liberty, opportunity and social respect. (Drydyk, 1999) In the light of Rawls’s concept of justice it can be said that the problems encountered by the oustees are injustices and the displacements undertaken in Odisha for the construction of dam and irrigation projects have been unjust. Injustice has been done to the tribals since the projects have not benefitted all. (Rawls, 1971) Such consequences lead to the requirement of legislations that address not only the issue of compensation but also of resettlement, rehabilitation and participation in negotiation. Because of their unique socio-economic and cultural traits, tribal displaced families should get special treatment. To address their impoverishment effectively, the relocation and rehabilitation measures for tribal displaced families should also be different and distinct. Economic analysis of the projects should adopt specific compensation mechanisms for each project.

In addition to direct displacement, mining activities also affect the livelihood of thousands, as water tables get disrupted, an excess burden is dumped on fertile agricultural land and forests are cut. [[5]](#footnote-5)

Land alienation, displacement and systematic oppression, has made it very challenging for the tribal societies and communities to develop and prosper. For any society to develop and grow, stability and peaceful environment is essential. Struggling and fighting against unlawful encroachment, being displaced from the home land, and to begin a livelihood in a displaced land has become an integral part of tribal narrative and history.

One has witnessed a wave of Adivasi struggles and resistance in the colonial and post-independence eras over issues of jal, jungle and jameen (water,forest and land). Some of the notable social movements have been the birsa munda movement, the kol movement, tilka majhi movement, sidhu kahnu movement , koel karo movement and so on. The nature of many of these protest has been marked with violence and chaos, where as few protests have been carried out on papers and on grass root levels. In these protests, certain cultural symbols have become dominant and popularised during the process of resistance. For instance, in the pathalgadi movement, huge stone slabs are erected. The erected stones can be used for various purpose , from educational purpose to spreading legal awareness like carving the contituion or carving the customary laws on these erected stones. If one looks back in history, it would be interesting to note that the Munda tribe first used these pathalgadi in certain religious rites especially for burying their dead, to demarcate a land, as well as perform other social and cultural rituals.

The meaning of the term “pathalgadi’ means “erecting a stone slab”. The first part ‘pathal” means stone and ‘gadi” means to erect of to fix. To answer the first question, “what is pathalgadi movement?”, one needs to understand what is pathalgadi in the tribal culture. Pathalgadi is an erected stone slab which is practised by the entire village community. It is a symbol of Adivasi customary rights, practices, beliefs, and culture of the tribal community. The practice of Pathalgadi is carried out in various rituals like burying the dead, remembering the existence and contributions of the ancestors, demarcating the village boundary, to spread information of any village settlement, their customary laws and land rights as well as it is also practised for general awareness or educational purpose. According to Virginius Xaxa, this custom is more frequently practiced among the tribes of Mundas and khasis, who have Austro-Asiatic linguistic family. According to this custom, the Adivasi community display messages on large stones, locally known as Pathalgadi, that are panted green and measures around 15ft by 4ft. Since the PESA( Panchayat…. )1996 , Pathalgadi symbolises the sovereignty of Gramsabha over all laws. Eva Davidsdottir, in her article Our rights are carved in stone: the case of the Pathalgadi movement in Simdega, Jharkhand portrays the Pathalgadi movement through historical and geopolitical perspective of the struggle and resistance of the Munda tribe of Jharkhand. The Birsa Munda movement during 1885-1900, marks the hero as celebrated freedom fighter against the British colonial rule. The tribal movements fighting for the land rights and forest, have asserted their rights through the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act (CNT act 1908), and Santhal Pargana Tenancy Act (SPT Act 1876). Anjana Singh describes this movement as a Multifaceted movement due to political , ethnic and ecological implications. The movement upholds the customary practise and conforms to their indigenous manki-munda or parha Pnachayat system. Singh also echos the indigenous system of village governance is soveriengn , “making gram sabhas the supreme authority”(Singh 2019). This idea of self-rule and autonomy is associated with a memory where there is no fear of dispossession or alienation from their ancestral land or negation of their ideologies regarding governance and development.

What are the underlying factors that has caused this movement?

The grounds for this movement was laid when the government of Jharkhand organised a global investors’ summit called , “Momentum Jharkahnd” in Ranchi in February 2017. Its aim was to make the state, a hub of investment in mining and other industrial ventures. A number of memoranda of understanding were also signed. Tata Steel growth shop, Usha Martin Group, RSB group are some of the names of the interested investors. The “land bank” policy was initiated by the government where thousands of acres of non-cultivable land were to be given away to the companies for developmental purpose. Given that Adivasi people had experienced land alienation and displacement at the hands of the colonial and Indian Government, they viewed these announcements as renewed attempts to take away their land. Prior to 2017, there was an attempt by the Jharkhand government to abolish the Chotanagpur tenancy Act ( 1908). The government set to amend the laws to ease the process of transferring land from tribals to non-tribals, in 2016. These suggested revisions in the CNT and SPT act where met with huge resistance across the state. Several villagers erected Pathalgadis with the details of laws that protect their rights.

Studying this movement as an act of resistance against the Jharkhand government as Davidsdottir has pointed out through her analysis, portrays a very obscured picture. I would argue that this makes a very simplistic understanding and does not engage into deeper discourse to understand the power play between the gram sabha and the state government. Singh on the other hand brings out the dialogue between the gram sabha and the state’s response very articulately. While discussing the powers of the gram sabha, Singh has emphasised on PESA Panchayat (Extension to scheduled Areas) Act (PESA)which was passed on 24th december , 1996. This act empowers the gram sabhas with command over natural resources in a village, which includes, minor minerals, water bodies and minor forest produce, as well as power to control money lending. She also goes on to discuss that the panchayats in the fifth schedule areas are to conform with the customary laws, social and religious practices, and traditional practice of managing community resources. It is also mandotary to make prior consultations with the gram sabha before any acquisition of land in the village. It is significant fact that the pathalgadi movement tends to empower the gram Sabha through PESA (Singh ,2019)

The state government and the administration argues that the vast steches of land within the pathalgadi area is used for opium cultivation and this constitutes the main reason behind building the movement. The tradition of pathalgadi is used as a shield to restrict the surveillance of the police and law enforcement agencies. To respond to this, the Adivasi organisations like Adivasi Mahasabha, argue that the movement is aimed at bringing awareness amongst the Adivasis about the rights that have been misinterpreted by the government.

In contemporary times, the Pathalgadi movement in Jharkhand, in this sense, is a reminder of the renewed struggle of the Adivasis to assert their authority over their landscape. The research problem that can be identified as a dichotomy between the state law and the customary laws, as the tribal history is marked with land alienation form their ancestral land and mass displacement in the name of development. Thus, it is crucial to consider that the Adivasi communities in Jharkhand have an intricate history of dominion and resistance, since the colonial to post-colonial times. After the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA) was enacted in 1996, this ancient tradition was adopted by its proponents in some areas of Jharkhand, and many villages inscribed the provisions of the Act in stone as a means to raise awareness of rights. In the current political climate, the tradition has again been appropriated to symbolise Adivasi rights with over 100 villages in the district of Khunti and Simdega declaring their right to govern as per the existing legislations of decentralisation. The official narrative of what has now become known as the Pathalgadi movement is that it is a radical movement that aims for autonomy in governance and self-rule.

Similar protest has been seen in Netrahat for field firing range. The tribal communities in the area that had been protesting artillery training by the army for over three decades. The then-undivided Bihar government in 1954 gave 8 square kilometres in seven revenue villages of the Netarhat plateau to the Army for cannon firing. The land was given to the army under Section 9 of the Army Manoeuvres Field Firing Artillery Act, 1938 and regular artillery exercises were carried out in the area from 1964 to 1994[[6]](#footnote-6).

The government had increased the space and length of the range in 1991-92 through a gazette notification. With this change, over 1,470 square kilometres of land across 245 villages in districts of Latehar and Gumla were notified, which was extended till 2022. The notification was extended in 1999 till May 11, 2022.

It was from 1964 through 1970 that the army set up their cantonment areas as well as extensively practised firing cannons. The tribal communities living in the areas of the districts have alleged atrocities by soldiers who are practising in the range.

These protests have been led by Jan Sangharsh Samiti. It is this organisation that is leading the protest against the firing range. it is among the few non-violent movements in Independent India that have continued for over three decades. The Netrahat firing range area comes under the Fifth Schedule Area and thus governed under the Panchayats Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act, 1996, which says gram sabhas have the right to decide on community resources in these areas. The Panchayat system was brought in very late in Jharkhand, so the implementation of PESA is weak in the state. However, there has been a large-scale awareness among the masses about their specific constitutional protection.

The Chief Minister of Jharkhand, Hemant Soren finally broke this cycle by deciding not to notify the firing range. Soren’s party, Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, has often raised the issue in Parliament. Concerning this issue, a letter by the deputy commissioner of Latehar district was issued to the principal secretary of the Jharkhand government dated June 4, 2022, where the lists the reasons for not extending has been mentioned.

When we talk about tribal narrative and tribal history, we seldom forget to notice their presence in the larger context or in other social institutions. One needs to understand the presence of tribes and tribal contributions towards sustainability of environment, for example, Simon Oraon who is the waterman of Jharkhand, plants 1000 plants every year for water conservation and prevention of soil erosion. Apart from environmanet and conservation, we have to look at political domain. Here the presence of tribal movements, political demands and assertion can be seen through the Jharkhand movement, the constitutional speech of Jaipal Singh Munda, Ram Dayal Munda and Draupadi Murmu. Of the above names mentioned, it is very interesting to note that Jaipal Singh Munda and his contributions for India has never been celeberated nor has it been recognised. Jaipal Singh Munda was the captain of the Indian hockey team which brought India her first gold medal in Olympics. He was the captain of the 1928 Amsterdam Olympics team which won India's first hockey gold. Jaipal Singh is also known to be a contributor towards the establishment of Mohun Bagan's hockey team. The presence of tribal sportsmen in Indian sports has been present for a long time yet little recognition or no recognition is given to these players.

Sports as an institution is an important aspect of every society. One may find the presence of sports in every form of society, whether it were ancient Greek or the modern states. Most sports are governed today are governed Hobbesian war-of-all-against-all notion of competition. Games on the other hand captures the spirit of most informal, unorganized youth sports. There are also many recreational sports played with friends and strangers alike and what might be called “folk games.” Those activities, though highly organized and institutionalized, are not commercialized and, therefore, do not offer the participants the promise of a professional career.

Thomas Hobbes described the natural state of humans in his classic work Leviathan, first published in 1651 (Hobbes, 1907). His deduction was that the natural state of man is a state of conflict, which he referred to as a “state of war.” He believed the alternative to the state of war and the means to peace between individuals could be found in adherence to what he termed the “laws of Nature.” the laws of Nature identified by Hobbes will be applied to the sporting environment in an effort to illustrate how one may compete in sport and contribute to the creation of a wholesome and positive competitive environment. If, indeed, the lessons learned on the playing field are preparation for life, one may consider applying Hobbes’ laws of Nature in the competitive sports environment as a means to making the world a better place within which to live. Human Beings Naturally Live in a State of War Because people are inclined to serve their own needs and desires, they contemplate and engage in actions that create conflict, thus alienating themselves from others. This, according to Hobbes (1907), results in their experiencing a perpetual state of conflict, which he referred to as a “state of war.” Hobbes believed that human beings experience conflict and live within this war-state with others for three reasons, “first, competition; secondly, diffidence; thirdly, glory” (Hobbes, 1907, p. 80). All are existing within the sporting environment.

 Competition In life, the game that is played is survival of the fittest. Fitness is displayed by the successful conquest. The meat is brought to the table. The mate is taken. Children are propagated and raised to adulthood. The means by which this game is won are irrelevant. What must be done to live, reproduce, and have what one desires must be done without regard for others. On the most basic level, concern for others serves as an impediment to achieving one’s goals.In the competitive situation, individuals are inclined to do anything within their power to achieve their goals, regardless of the impact their actions have upon others. There can be only one victor. Competition, therefore, does not always bring out the best in human behavior. It can illuminate the darker, self-serving side for all to see.

 Diffidence

 In the natural state, timid and powerless individuals seldom find success and happiness. Often the powerful feel entitled to mistreat and abuse the weak as they seek to serve their own interests and desires. The mistreated harbor pain, resentment, and bitterness. Conflict reigns. Attention and riches are lavished upon successful athletes and coaches. In response, they may demonstrate hubris and expect special treatment from others because of their athletic success. Many parade about with a haughty attitude, carrying an informally administered license to engage in self-serving behavior at the expense of others. How many star athletes are allowed to behave badly at practices and in competitive events? How many students have been stuffed into lockers and trashcans by the hands of the athletic elite? How many have suffered the pain and humiliation of hazing governed by athletes? How many successful coaches expect special treatment? How many coaches expect for athletes to be grateful simply to be in their presence and to respond unquestioningly to their every whim? Why do athletes and coaches perpetuate these negative attitudes and behaviors? They do so partly out of tradition, but primarily because they feel entitled to. Who will dare to stop them?

Glory may be afforded individuals as a consequence of fame, wealth and privilege. What harms will individuals spurn in their struggle to achieve wealth, fame and privilege? What unethical and hurtful acts do individuals wholeheartedly committed to athletic victory shun as they seek to obtain or maintain these terrestrial rewards?

Abraham Arden Brill wrote in terms of restrictions of modern life which deprived people of activity, scope, triumphs, claims and celebration. Brill exposed what he took to be a dark truth about human nature; he described the human being as “an animal formed for battle and conquest, for blows and strokes and swiftness, for triumph and applause” (1929: 434)[[7]](#footnote-7).

In Brill’s view, through sports, one resembles their natural state where they could “achieve exaltation, vicarious but real” and be “a better individual, better citizen.” Sports, actually contributed to building a better citizenry for the modern nation state.[[8]](#footnote-8)

What is sports?

Sports are physical activities that involve challenges or competitive contests. They are usually organized so that participants can assess their performances, compare their performances with others or with their own past performances. Defining sport in official terms and choosing specific activities that qualify as sports is an important process in organizations, communities, and societies. Being classified as an official sport gives special status to an activity and is likely to increase participation, funding, community support, and general visibility. Sports involve rules, competition, scoring, winners and losers, schedules and seasons, records, coaches, referees, and governing bodies that set rules and sponsor championships.

Allen Guttman, was influenced by Weber’s analysis of the disenchantment of the world, and the dominance of “instrumental rationality”. He stressed upon the seven characteristics of modern sports which are secularism, equality, rationalization, specialization, bureaucratization, quantification, and the quest of records. It is important to understand the origin and development of modern sports. The transition from medieval to Renaissance sports can be looked upon as ‘the civilizing process’ (Elias, 1969). Medieval sports was quite violent; where as the sports of the Renaissance period did not reflect much violence. Alongside , there was also a shift or a change seen in the emphasis on sports from ‘force to finesse’ (Mehl, 1993: 21). The twelfth-century tournament, which was the aristocracy’s favourite sport, was a loosely organized and poorly regulated fight that took place in open fields and meadowland. It claimed an extraordinary toll in dead and wounded knights. Folk football, the medieval peasantry’s holiday pastime, was similarly violent. It was described by Sir Thomas Elyot from the perspective of a Renaissance gentleman – as ‘beastly fury, and extreme violence’(Guttmann, 1986: 49). Twentieth-century students of Elias characterize the British version of folk football as ‘savage brawls’ engendering ‘excitement akin to that aroused in battle’ (Dunning and Sheard, 1979: 25). Like the medieval tournament, the peasant’s sport usually took place in the countryside.

 In the course of approximately three hundred years, these sports were transformed into strictly regulated contests closer to theatrical performances than to pitched battles. By the late Renaissance, ‘ring tournaments’ were popular and the clash of sword against armour had become a popular sport. By the sixteenth century, the English tournament was ‘a highlight of Elizabethan courtly life, but it was more of a spectacle and a pageant. In Italy, the peasant’s rough version of football was reshaped into the Florentine gentleman’s *calcio*, an urban game played in the Piazza di Sante Croce. The Calcio Storico Fiorentino is a combination of soccer, rugby and big time wrestling originated in 16th century Florence and played today in historical costume.[[9]](#footnote-9) The four teams of the historical neighbourhoods of the city play against each other, first in two semi-finals and then the final match to determine the winner. The four teams are: Santa Croce (Azzurri, or Blues), Santo Spirito (Bianchi, or Whites), Santa Maria Novella (Rossi, or Reds), and San Giovanni (Verdi, or Greens).[[10]](#footnote-10)

Piazza Santa Croce, located directly in front of the church Santa Croce, has always been the home to this game, known as “giuoco del calcio fiorentino” or more simply just as Calcio (which means “kick” in Italian). [[11]](#footnote-11)The square is covered in dirt to "return" to those times when it was just a dirt square (today it is covered in stone) and recreate the setting. Of course, today bleachers are also set up so that spectators can better enjoy the game.[[12]](#footnote-12)

 In conducting the Renaissance tournament and the game of calcio, a great deal of attention was paid to the participants’ social status and appearance. The proper presentation of a game of calcio required a similar awareness of social status and appearance.

The fascination with geometrical space that one observes in the game of calcio was even more obvious in the Renaissance fencer’s art. Treatises on the sport emphasized the aesthetic appeal of the fencer’s elegant movements. Camillo Agrippa’s Trattato di Scientia d’Arme (1533) and Girard Thibault’s L’Académie de l’e-spée (1627) were, for instance, illustrated by numerous diagrams of the appropriate positions to take before, during and after a match (Eichberg, 1977, 1978). For his copperplate print The Fencing Hall (1608), Willem Swanenburgh arranged his fencers around a complicated geometrical pattern drawn in the middle of a tiled floor. To be fully effective, demonstrations of proper appearance require spectators to appreciate them.

Not all Renaissance sports were characterized by the shift from force to finesse, by the focus on appearance and decorum. French peasants continued for generations to struggle for possession of a football ‘like dogs battling for a bone’ and the humbler citizens of Venice fought with their fists to seize or defend the bridges that spanned the city’s canals and linked its neighbourhoods. None the less, the sports of the commoner were submitted to the dictates of instrumental rationality. They were more carefully regulated, far more standardized, more frequently marked by technical innovation, and much more ‘civilized’ than medieval sports had been.

The 18th and the 19th century a great deal of the difference between Renaissance and modern sports is suggested by two German terms, ‘Maß’ and ‘Messen’, both translated by the English word ‘measure’. The first term refers to a sense of balance or proportion; the second to numerical measurements. The two terms differ as geometry differs from arithmetic. ‘Maß’ was demonstrated by the fancy equestrian ballets popular during the late Renaissance, in which French or Italian horsemen guided their mounts through a series of pirouettes and other dance steps. In fact, the ‘geometric character’ of equestrian ballet was inspired by and derived from the movements of the pavane and other grave and stately dances. ‘Messen’, in contrast, was strikingly observable in the English passion for horse races, for which the stopwatch was used as early as 1731.

 ‘It is no accident’, wrote Edmund Neuendorff, national leader of the Deutsche Turnerschaft (German Gymnastics Association), that modern sports ‘originated in England, a land without music or metaphysics’ (Neuendorff, 1934: vol. 4: 474). Neuendorff was right about the origins of modern sports (if not about the nullity of English music and metaphysics). Most of the formal-structural characteristics of modern sports (Dunning, 1973; Guttmann, 1978) can be identified in eighteenth-century England (where there was a striking concern for quantification and for records; Kloeren, 1935. The rationalization of sports took many forms. As the passion for sports spread throughout English society, rules were codified. James Broughton, the century’s most famous pugilist, established the rules of his combat sport in 1743 and introduced the use of the glove (for gentlemen amateurs) in 1747 (Brailsford, 1988). The written rules for cricket also date from this period when, for instance, the dimensions of the bat and the pitch were specified and niceties like the leg-before- wicket dismissal were mentioned. The first complete set of cricket rules appeared in 1744, which was also the first year from which we have records of a fully scored match. Rules are useless without a means to enforce them. Two of the most important organizations in the history of modern sports were the Jockey Club (1752) and the Marylebone Cricket Club (1787). Both organizations were initially dominated by members of the aristocracy whose ambitions were national rather than local. To bring order into the sport of thoroughbred racing, James Weatherby, who was the Jockey Club’s secretary, treasurer, solicitor and stake holder, began in 1769 to publish the Racing Calendar (Birley, 1993: 136). Neither organization was able to achieve complete control of its sport until well into the next century, but a change was initiated.

In the eighteenth-century, transportation was inadequate to ‘nationalize’ horse races, most of which remained purely local affairs for farm animals ridden by their owners. In 1836, Lord George Bentinck introduced the horse-drawn van to carry thoroughbreds from venue to venue. Four years later, railroads began to transport them. William Clarke’s cricket team, the All-England Eleven, took to the rails in 1846. Steamboats did for international competition what the railroad did for national. The revolutions in transportation and communication that are a staple of every historical account of the nineteenth century accelerated the formation of national sport organizations. England’s incipiently bureaucratic Football Association (1863) was among the first. It was quickly followed by the Rugby Football Union (1871) and by national organizations for swimming (1874), boxing (1880), track and field (1880), rowing (1882) and cycling (1884). In the United States, the 22-club National Association of Base Ball Players was formed in 1859, only 15 years after Alexander Cartwright established the rules of the game (Seymour, 1960; Goldstein, 1989. The invention of the telegraph made it possible for news of the results to be flashed from city to city. Technological innovations like the lino-type and photogravure enabled newspapers to publicize these results within hours of the end of the contest. Technological advances also transformed the implements with which the game was played.

Every modern sport, from skiing to roller skating, experienced this transformation. Cycling is a perfect example of this process. The sport began in 1817, when Karl Freiherr von Drais, an eccentric German nobleman, invented a simple two-wheeled device propelled by alternate thrusts of the foot against the ground. By mid-century, propulsion came by means of pedals attached to the axel of a large front wheel. In 1880, the Tangent and Coventry Tricycle Company introduced the chain drive.

A year later, Erneste Michaux built a factory to mass produce bicycles for a booming market. John Boyd Dunlop invented a pneumatic tire in 1888 and the brothers Michelin outdid him, in 1891, with one that was tubeless and easily detachable. By this time, the dangerously unstable ‘high wheeler’ was replaced by the ‘safety bike’, which had two wheels of equal size (McGurn, 1987; Vigarello, 1988: 15–18). Rowing was similarly transformed by rapid nineteenth-century invention. The clumsy oaken boats in which London’s eighteenth- century ferrymen competed for Thomas Doggett’s Coat and Badge (1715) became the lightweight modern scull.

Among the specialized roles of modern sports is that of the sports physiologist. As preparation for sports participation became increasingly scientific, physiologists began to study athletes’ bodies in order to explain their superior performances. By the end of the century, they were able to use the results of their study to guide athletes to still better performances (Hoberman, 1992). Journalists began to refer to athletes as ‘perfected machines’ (upon which coaches and trainers were expected to work in the spirit of mechanical engineers). Discussions of strategy and tactics resembled the time and motion studies of FredrickWinslow Taylor.

Time and space were measured with increasing precision and they were both reconceptualized. The duration of the game of folk football was determined, more often than not, by the time it took to establish a winner. While this remains true in many modern sports, like tennis and golf, modern team games typically last for a predetermined number of minutes. Nineteenth-century players could interrupt the flow of time with a ‘time out’, but there was an inexorable clock that stopped the game even if it was a scoreless tie. Many premodern sports occurred in a space of their own, which was often considered sacred. Antiquity’s Olympic Games and the sacrificial ballgames of the Aztec and Mayan cultures are two examples of this. Other sports, like the footraces that took place on the occasion of a medieval fair, took place wherever a suitable ground was to be found. Modern sports are almost invariably played in a specially designated and designed space that is poorly adapted to any other activity. In some cases, the site is either a natural one, as in surfing, or one that has been constructed in imitation of nature, as in golf. In most cases, however, the modern ‘field’ of play is a geometrically designed artefact. The Football Association determined that soccer be played on a rectangular ground. The vertical goalpost bar was added in 1875, the sidelines seven years later.

The spatial separation of the players on the field and the specialization of their roles facilitated the accumulation of accurate individual and team statistics. The numerical aspects of the game –three strikes, four balls, three outs, four bases, nine innings, 154 games – provided the opportunity for infinitely varied arithmetical calculations. Nineteenth-century newspapers responded eagerly to the passion for statistical data and quickly introduced ‘box scores’ of individual games and a won–lost matrix indicating the position of each team on any given day of the season (Seymour, 1960).

Modern sports

Throughout the twentieth century, modern sports have experienced an acceleration of change without a fundamental shift in direction. The measurement of times and distances has become increasingly precise. Hand-held stopwatches have been replaced by digital clocks, and tape-measures by electronic scanners. At the Olympic Games celebrated in Munich (1972), swimmers were timed to the thousandth of a second in a pool where lanes differed in length by no more than half a centimetre. In team games, the quantification of achievement has progressed to the point where multifactor regression formulae can be used to calculate the ‘productivity’ of each player. The quantification of modern sports is an ideal basis for computer games based on statistical probabilities.

The rationalization of facilities and equipment has also continued. Nineteenth-century runners were content to race on cinder tracks, the first of which was constructed in London in 1867, but their descendants compete on scientifically designed artificial surfaces.

Technological innovation has continued to produce new sports. Bicycles were followed by automobiles and airplanes, which meant, inevitably, races to see which automobile was the fastest, which airplane was able to fly faster, higher or farther.

Athletes are now ‘engineered’ as intensely as their facilities and equipment. The scientific study of the human body and its movements is rightly thought to be an essential part of the quest for the most efficient athletic performance (Hoberman, 1992). Trial and error have been replaced by systematic study. German scientists led the way in the scientific selection and training of potential champions.

As early as 1894, steamships, the Atlantic cable and a cosmopolitan spirit enabled Pierre de Coubertin to found the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and plan successfully for the first Olympic Games of the modern era. By then, international industrial-commercial fairs, like London’s 1851 Crystal Palace Exhibition, were common (and two of the first three modern Olympics took lace, to their detriment, as constituent parts of a world fair).The IOC was hardly a modern bureaucratic organization.

In the course of the twentieth century, similar organizations were established for dozens of other modern sports. The most important of them were those created to govern Association football (soccer), swimming and diving, and track and field: the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (1904), the Fédération Internationale de Natation (1908) and the International Amateur Athletic Federation (1912). The French, who led the way in global acceptance of the metric system, were also leaders in the establishment of the International Olympic Committee and the various international sports federations. England’s insular and arrogant Football Association rejected membership in FIFA when the soccer federation was founded and withdrew twice when FIFA took positions unpopular in Great Britain.

The prerequisite for FIFA and every other international sports federation was the nineteenth-century diffusion of modern sports from England to the entire world (Bottenburg, 1994; Guttmann, 1994). Wherever British military men, colonial adminstrators, missionaries, educators, settlers, or entrepreneurs went, they carried with them their enthusiasm for cricket, soccer, rugby and the entire gamut of modern sports. Where the British exercised political control, as they did in India and through most of Africa, they tended to impose their games upon the people whom they ruled. Where the British were merely a dominant economic presence, which was the case in South America, their sports tended to be spread by the process of emulation; the sons of the local elite wanted to play British games.

Sports in India

Looking at the Indian context, there are many sportsmen who hail from humble background, having little or no means of livelihood. For example- in hockey, we can look at the Dilip tirkey who hails from Orissa but went to become a celebrated person in Indian sports arena, especially in Hockey. In contemporary times, we should also look at other players like M.S Dhoni, Suresh Raina, Irfan Pathan, Yusuf Pathan, Rinku Singh in the IPL. Women cricket team also sheds light in this context.

In the same spirit, I want to look at how sports has impacted the lives of tribal / Adivasi communities in India, especially in the tribal region of Orissa and Jharkhand. These tribal states have presented many notable sportsperson (both sportsmen and sportswomen) like Jaipal Singh Munda, Ignius Kujur, Dilip Tirkey, Nilam Sanjeep Xess, Birendra lakra, as well as deep grace ekka, salima tete, Lazraus Barla (Olympian) are some of the women who have made effective contributions to the Indian Sports. Nikki Pradhan, who was named a member of the Indian women’s hockey squad which will travel to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil for the upcoming Olympic Games, has become the first female hockey player from the state to participate in the international sporting event. Nikki Pradhan, India midfielder and the first female player from Jharkhand to represent the country in Olympics, spoke favourably about Jaipal Singh’s contributions.

“Growing up, we heard about Jaipal Singh Munda, because of the game they used to hold to commemorate his birth anniversary on the 3rd of January every year. As the years went by, we learnt what a big leader he was and what he had done for us,” she said during an interview.

Savitri Purty, who represented the country from 1983 to 1990, saw Munda as a huge inspiration and reminisced how she dreamt of becoming like him. But there was more to that dream. “It wasn’t just to become like him on the hockey pitch. That was just a small part of it. The dream was to become someone who can inspire people outside of it,” she was quoted as saying.

With the regions of Jharkhand producing one stalwart after another, it was, however, surprising to see that the Indian women’s contingent for the 2022 Glasgow Commonwealth Games comprised not one player from the state. This was a first since 1983.

Being from tribal India, Purty spoke about why tribal women are suitable for sports. "Tribal women have athletic body structures due to long kilometres of walking for their daily needs. The game also proved an escape for us from our hardship. I started playing with a bamboo hockey stick and slippers," she said in an interview with Hindustan Times.

Such is the quality of hockey in Jharkhand that in June this year, five female players were selected for a sports and cultural exchange programme in the United States. They were selected as part of the East India Hockey Project, which works towards the empowerment of youth as well as the development in young female residents of Jharkhand.

Odisha, the host of the 2023 World Cup, is another Indian state famous for producing gems in the sport. Arguably, the most famous name is that of former Indian captain Dilip Tirkey, also known as ‘The Wall of Indian Hockey’.

Amit Rohidas, who comes from the Saunamara village in Sundergarh, the same as Tirkey, called him an ‘engineer of change’.

In an international career spanning 15 years, Tirkey experienced many firsts. He was the first player from Odisha to represent India in the Olympics (1996). He was also the first player from the state to captain an Indian hockey team. Furthermore, he is the only Adivasi player to have led India in three Olympic events, three World Cups and three Asian Games.

Dilip Tirkey’s father, Vincent Tirkey, was a state-level hockey player himself and responsible for the future India captain taking up the sport. His entry into the SAI hostel in Sundergarh (1989) changed not only Dilip’s fate but India’s as a whole.

In addition to Rohidas, many young hockey players in India admire Tirkey and aspire to achieve the same kind of legacy if not better. Dilip played a total of 412 matches for India before calling it a day. It is a record achievement for any Indian hockey player to this day.

Prabodh Tirkey, Lazarus Birla, Ignace Tirkey, Sunita Lakra, and Birendra Lakra are just some of the many names to come out of the tribal lands of Odisha in field hockey. And these won’t be the last.

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5 tribal women hockey players return from US to Jharkhand

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