An Anthropological Study of Folk Plays and Games with Focus on Fooman Town in Gilan Province

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Abstract: *Play and Game are considered as the oldest cultural behaviors as the universal elements of human culture in all communities and groups. Gilan province in Iran, especially their villages, has a unique folklore especially its local games and plays. Nevertheless, it is necessary to document and analyze the immense information about the folklore in these villages before it vanishes in the sea of socio-cultural change. The main purpose in this paper is To Anthropological Study of local games and plays with the focus on Fooman town ship in Gilan province. This article is based on quality and tools of data collection is documental, Informal – in depth interviews and participant observations. It is mention in the theoretical framework the present research for its analysis of data, is based on Structural Functionalism theory.*

Keywords: *anthropology, Gilan province, structural functionalism, local plays, games.*

Introduction

Plays and Games are considered as the oldest cultural behaviors as the universal elements of human culture in all communities and groups. The drawings and graphic paintings on ancient pottery and on the wall of caves as the living place of the Neanderthals show the movement and dance rituals based on magical beliefs. Moreover, these rites and rituals of the present natives in some parts of the world which are left alone far from the general flow of culture and civilization and other dramatic elements in ancient cultures and their continuation to the present time reveal the fact that local play and game have a history as long as the life of human culture and as wide as life. Regarding the needs and circumstances of place and time, play has had a varied growth and has been presented not as an art but as part of life and part of the ritual and ceremony in society culture. Nowadays, what is called traditional and folk plays is the persistence of that play in its old meaning and has more or less the same effect and role with some differences.

Human play is also, of course, distinctive in being culturally molded or expressed, varying from society to society in accord with a complex set of cultural variables that includes social organization, technology, and attitudes and values. Gilan province in Iran, especially their villages, due to a varied landscape consisting of alteration of mountain ranges, deep valleys and unique folklore especially its local game and play has always been suitable place for local beliefs to continue and remain un-adulterated by virtue of its isolation that inhibits rapid changes. Nevertheless, it is necessary to document and analyze the immense information about the folklore in these villages before it vanishes in the sea of socio-cultural change.

Justification of the Study
In the contemporary society, we are constantly struggling to go back to our own roots and to maintain our ethnic identities. 'Who am I?' is a question that is scrutinized by us in diverse forms in our lives. As

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a matter of fact, we are living in such an unpredictable position where we are enforced to rethink, redefine and elucidate our identities to different social institutions. Many communities are persistently debating on the concept of ethnic cleansing and ethnic assertion but when we are asked about the elements that constitute this very ethnicity, we do not have answer to give. Folklore studies may facilitate us to discover the roots of distinctive communities, the past, the commonality of varied cultures and of course our ethnic identities. Although, Iran is very rich regarding the folklore sources Including Games and plays, but many of the traditions had been forgotten and changed due to modernity and structural changes which have taken place quickly in the community. If no project and program are conducted to gather them, many of these national treasures will be lost soon.

Therefore, the task is to identify, to compile and to collect different Iranian ethnic folklores to encourage and develop positive functions and cohesive effects in the community to prevent it from being forgotten.

Functions and Benefits of Play
Play has varying effects and benefits to human development. There has been an abundance of research on the effects of different forms of play and how they influence various areas of a person's life whether it is a child or an adult. These benefits of play can have cognitive, social and emotional or motivational effects on a person's life or development.

Cognitive Development
Physical play: Various forms of play, whether it is physical or mental, have influenced cognitive abilities in individuals. As little as ten minutes of exercise (including physical play), can improve cognitive abilities (Gao & Mandryk: 2012). These researchers did a study and have developed an "exergame" which is a game that incorporates some physical movement but is by no means formal exercise. These games increase one's heart rate to the level of aerobics exercise and have proven to result in recognizable improvements in mental faculties. In this study they use play in a way that incorporates physical activity that creates physical excursions. The results of the study had statistical significance. There were improvements in math by 3.4% and general improvements in recall memory by 4% among the participants of the study (Gao & Mandryk: 2012).

Social development and play: Play can also influence one's social development and social interactions. Much of the research focuses on the influence play has on child social development. There are different forms of play that have been noted to influence child social development. One study conducted by (Sullivan, 2003) explores the influence of playing styles with mothers versus playing styles with fathers and how it influences child social development. This article explains that "integral to positive development is the child's social competence or, more precisely, the ability to regulate their own emotions and behaviors in the social contexts of early childhood to support the effective accomplishment of relevant developmental tasks (Sinclair: 1995).

Social benefits of play have been measured using basic interpersonal values such as getting along with peers (Sullivan: 2003). One of the social benefits that this researcher has uncovered is that play with parents has proven to reduce anxiety in children. Having play time with parents that involves socially acceptable behavior makes it easier for children to relate to be more socially adjusted to peers at school or at play(Sullivan:2003). Social development involving child interaction with peers is thus an area of influence for playful interactions with parents and peers.

Aims and objectives of the study:
- To anthropological study of folk- local plays and games with the focus on Fooman towns ship.
- To study relationship between folk- local plays and games with culture.
- To study types of folk- local Gilani plays and games and its importance.
- To understand and analyse of anthropology of folk- local plays and games from the point of functional structuralism theory.

Methodology Consideration

In Anthropological research one of the important aspects is the amount of attention devoted to methodology. The methodological aspects are the most concern in the research. The main methodological concerns are with the nature of knowledge and understanding their relationship (Ellen, 1984).

In anthropological, "Methods" are *ways of studying* people from an anthropological perspective. They are the various approaches anthropologists take to learn about a given people or culture. They include such general things as "participant observation" (a key method of study in cultural anthropology), as well as including more specific things such as survey research, archival research, and more. The following is a brief list of such methods:

- Participant observation;
- Cross-cultural Comparison;
- Survey research;
- Interviews;
- Archival research;
- Media analysis;
- Historical analysis.

This article is based on quality method and tools of data collection are Informal interviews and participant observations comprise the methods of data collection. The qualitative data has been collected with the help of:

- Informal, In-depth and open ended Interviews with the help of an interview guide.
- Participant, Empirical observations Structuralism theory.

Process of Data Collection in Selected Villages:

Selection of Gilan Province: Gilan has a strong culinary tradition, from which several dishes have come to be adopted across Iran. This richness derives in part from the climate, which allows for a wide variety of fruit, vegetables and nuts to be grown in the province.
Gilan province with variety and unique folklore such as; material and oral tradition (musical instruments, Handicrafts, Folk tale, Folk Songs and Lullabies,) and also behavior tradition (Life cycle, Local Plays, Games and Sports.

Location of the Study

All the research villages - Maclawan, Masule, Jirdeh, Seyed-Abad and Lolman, are located In Fooman region in Gilan province in Iran. Gilan Province: Gilan Province is one of the 31 provinces of Iran. It lies along the Caspian, in Iran's Region 3, west of the province of Mazandaran, east of the province of Ardabil, and north of the provinces of Zanjan and Qazvin. It also borders the Republic of Azerbaijan in the north, as well as Russia across the Caspian Sea.
The northern part of the province is part of territory of South (Iranian) Talysh. At the centre of the province is the main city of Rasht. Other towns in the province include Astara, Astaneh-e, Ashrafiyyeh, Lahijan, Langrud, Masule, Manjil, Rudbar, Roudsar, Shaft, Talesh, Soumahe Sara and fooman (Wikipedia).

Fooman Township: Fuman is a beautiful city to the west of Gilan. It is located on the slopes of Alborz Mountain and surrounded by Rasht, Somesara, and Masal. Rice has been cultivated in this region for many years, where some indigenous cultivars (landrace) were conventionally bred by farmers. The ancient city of Masule and Roudkhan Castle are located in Fooman, which experiences a moderate Caspian weather. Fooman is also known as the city of statues. There are many statues in various spots, which symbolize local traditions, customs and culture. For example, the statue of four girls is a symbol of endeavours of rural women.

Fooman's hospitable people speak in Gilaki and Taleshi dialects. The gardens and farms surrounding Fooman lend an enchanting ambience to the region. The city also boasts of numerous springs. In addition to cultivation of rice, tobacco and tea, the occupations of Fooman's residents include animal husbandry, poultry breeding and production of traditional handicrafts (Pandi, 2006).

Theoretical Framework
It is mention in the theoretical framework the present research for its analysis of data, is based on Structural functionalism.

Structural Functionalism
Definition and Characteristics: In the social sciences specifically sociology and socio-cultural anthropology, functionalism also functional analysis, is a sociological and anthropological philosophy that originally attempted to explain social institutions as collective means to fill individual biological needs. Later it came to focus on the ways social institutions fill social needs, especially social solidarity. Functionalism is associated with Emile Durkheim and more recently with Talcott Parsons (Marshall 1994: 190). Since functional analysis studies the contributions made by socio-cultural phenomena to the socio-cultural systems of which they are a part many functionalists argue that social institutions are functionally integrated to form a stable system and that a change in one institution will precipitate a change in other institutions; expressed by Durkheim and others as an organic analogy. Functionalism, originating as an alternative to historical explanations, was one of the first twentieth century anthropological theories, until it was superseded by structural-functional analysis or structural-functionalism.

Structural-functionalism takes the view that society consists of parts (e.g. police, hospitals, schools, and farms), each of which have their own functions and work together to promote social stability. Structural-functionalism was the dominant perspective of cultural anthropologists and rural sociologists between World War II and the Vietnam War. Along with conflict theory and interactions functionalism is one of the three major sociological traditions. A social function is, "the contribution made by any phenomenon to a larger system of which the phenomenon is a part." (Hoult, 1969: 139) This technical usage is not the same as the popular idea of a function as an "event/occasion" or a duty, responsibility, or occupation. A distinction, first made by Robert K. Merton, is made between manifest and latent functions (Marshal, 1994: 191) and also between functions with positive (functional or positively functional) and negative (dysfunctional) effects "Any statement explaining an institution as being 'functional or 'dysfunctional' for men [sic] could readily be translated with no loss of meaning into one that said it was 'rewarding' or 'punishing' " (Homans, 1962).

Functional alternative (also functional equivalent or functional substitute) indicates that, "just as the same item may have multiple functions, so may the same function be diversely fulfilled by alternative items." (Merton, 1957: 33-4) The concept may serve as an antidote to "the gratuitous assumption of the functional indispensability of particular social structures" (ibid, 52). In the 1960s, functionalism was criticized for being unable to account for social change or structuralism contradictions and conflict and thus often called consensus theory. However, Durkheim used a radical form of guild socialism along with functionalist explanations, Marxism acknowledges social contradictions and uses functionalist explanations, and Parsons evolutionary theory describes the differentiation and reintegration systems and subsystems and thus at least temporary conflict before reintegration (ibid). "The fact that functional analysis can be seen by some as inherently conservative and by others as inherently radical suggests that it may be inherently neither one nor the other " (Merton, 1957: 39).

Structural–Functional Model: Merton criticized what he saw as the three basic postulates of Functional analysis as it was developed by anthropologists such as Malinowski and Radcliffe – Brown. The first is the postulate of the Functional unity of society. This postulate holds that all standardized social and cultural beliefs and practices are functional for society as a whole as well as for individuals in society. This view implies that the various parts of a social system must show a high level of integration.

However, Merton maintained that although it may be true of small, primitive societies, this generalization cannot be extended to larger, more complex societies.

Universal Functionalism is the second postulated. That is, it is argued that all standardized social and cultural forms and structural have positive functions. It is clear that not every structural, custom, idea, belief, and so forth, has positive function. For example, rabid nationalism can be highly dysfunctional in a world of proliferating nuclear arms. Third is the postulate of indispensability. The argument here is that all standardized aspects of society not only have positive functions but also represent indispensable parts of the working whole. This postulate leads to the idea that all structural and functions are functionally necessary for society. No other structural and functional could work quite as well as s those that are currently found within society. Merton's criticism, following Parsons, was that we must at least be willing to admit that there are various structural and functional alternatives to be found within society. Merton's position was that all these functional postulates rely on non-empirical assertions based on abstract, theoretical systems. At a minimum, it is the responsibility of the sociologist to examine each empirically. Merton's belief that empirical test, not theoretical assertions, are crucial to functional analysis led him to develop his 'paradigm' of functional analysis as a guide to the integration of theory and research. Merton made it clear from the outset that structural - functional analysis focuses on groups, organization, societies, and culture. He state that any object that can be subject to structural - functional analysis must "represent a standardized (that is, patterned and repetitive) item". He had in mind such things as "social, institutional patterns, social processes, cultural patterns, culturally pattern emotions, social norms, group organization, social structure, devices for social control etc." (Merton, 1968: 104).

Folk / Local Plays and Games of the Villages Selected for the Research
There are different forms of traditional plays and Games in selected villages; in its general sense means all behaviors that somehow have dramatic aspects. Dramatic rituals or plays such as seeking rain, Pirbabo, dumb play and types of puppet show like "Ahochehreh" and "Ayeneh Takam" and puppet are of this kind. However, play in its particular meaning means imitation which slowly makes its own way from popular culture and as finds an artistic nature. Primarily, it has been practiced in the mountainous regions of some of selected villages performed in almost all traditional weddings until two decades ago and still it is practiced more or less in some remote areas. The theme of these shows or plays is taken from the realities of people's lives mixed with satires and jokes often explicitly. The themes include the relationship between the master and peasant, chief and shepherds, peasants and client's daughter, irrigation of farms, disputes about water and local conflicts, tillage and so on. Some of them are as follow:

Folk / Local Plays
'Ahochehreh' (Face and Deer)
Ahochehreh group consists of three people, Aho, the singer and the Tobrehkesh (porter) the characters. Aho was the central character. Something like deer or goat's head with horns was made by various means. Flowers and greenery had to be added to the horns. Glass beads were used for the eyes. A bell was hung to it and put it on a wooden stick. Aho (Deer) actress had to wear a sack or cloth bag over her head so that it covered her whole body and take stick or the deer head from inside as it she appeared as an animal and she could turn and stick move her head by that stick. The second actor had to recite poems and manage the show with the help of the wooden stick in his hand. The third actor was Tobrehkesh. (Porter) All the three had to go to visit villagers door to door. They played the show in such a way, sang and took something as gift from each house.

"Ahochehreh, Ahochehreh, look how good it grasses,
My Deer comes from garden, grasses and comes chubby,
My Deer eats eggs, does not eat less than one hundred."

When the show reached this point, the deer would faint. She was not feel good until she took some eggs or something else from the landlord.

Ayeneh Takam

Until a couple of decades ago in Selected villages, "Ayeneh Takam"(takam, means mirror) players were among the messengers of 'Nowruz'(new year) Their work was a kind of ritualistic puppet show called "Takam" and played in tune with 'Nowruzi' welcoming songs and dances. The "Takam" was formed like a goat around the size of two palms and made of wood so that its legs could move and turn. Two small mirrors glued on both sides and decorated with a piece of fabric and colored feathers and beads. It was also called "Ayeneh Takam" since mirror was used in it. Takam was moved by wooden stick about half a meter long that was attached under the body. This wooden stick passed through a hole in the middle of a circle wood about an inch which its surface was colored. The Takam player had to move the stick up and down and turn it by his hand and the doll moved quickly controlled by Takam player. The show was accompanied by music and related songs. Takam players had artistic skills to rotate, turn and play the Takam.

Taziyeh

It refers to another traditional show in selected villages. Taziyeh is a type of memorial or lament ceremony is held for Imam (Third Shia imam) In fact, the content of Taziyeh includes blaming and cursing the oppressors and emphasizing on the legitimacy of the oppressed against the oppressors. In other words, the content of this dramatic ritual is of justice and humanity. Taziyeh has to be effective and pleasant to penetrate into the heart of believers via dramatizing the incident of Karbala (a city in Iraq) to strengthen the foundations of the faith in Imam Hussein through making the events of Karbala united. The show must go through the harrowing and provoke emotions and religious motifs. Fortunately, unlike Ayeneh Takam and Ahochehreh as the traditional folk shows which are forgotten, Taziyeh is still running and performing in selected villages.

Folk Games

Local games of people of selected villages which were practiced in the past include:

Lapebazi, Ghashbazy, Arusbazy, Bijbij, Bizeh, Suksuk, Avizan, Lab Goud, Khoreshbazy, Gad Gad, Jot Tak, Eshkel, Vorfbazy, Aparbazy, Dobna, Tab Bandy, Hesabbaleh. At present, local common games of selected villages can be mentioned as follows: Arusbazy, Yeghol Doghol, Ghashbazi, Giŝa (or Arusbazy), Viza (playing with walnuts), Apar (playing with stones), Jekhas (or hide and seek), Bijbij, Golmeshta and Petigalah which some of them are discussed in the following briefly.

Pigalebazy

This game is a male-oriented game which is often performed by men in the spring season. Initially, participants are divided into two equal groups. Then a small hole is digged in the origin as the first destination. Then, two pieces of wood sticks of 20 cm length and of 5 cm diameter and the other of one meter length and the same diameter will be provided. To start the game, they make use of toss (wet or dry) by using a small flat stone. One who won the turn remains on the well and the other group stands apart in 20 to 30 meters distance. The starting team begins the game by placing a small piece of wood called "gale" horizontally on the well by a stick called Pit. When the small gale goes towards the other team members, they try touch and take it or throw it away with their own stick before landing. If they are able to do so, the starting group is a loser and this is the turn of the next group. However, if they were not able to do that, they try to throw it away by their hand sticks longer. At this moment, the person who started the game has to say "Ali, Ali" loudly in one breathes from the starting base to the point of falling gale. If the loud voice is cut down before the fall of the gale, he is lost otherwise won and play again. This work is ongoing until the loser members of a team is more than the other. In the end, the team was losing has to carry the won team on the back from the starting point to the end in the field. This game represents a symbol of individual's breathing power, agility and dexterity.

Arusbazy

Bride playing is a game for those between 7 to10 year old boys and girls. The game will be held by two or three persons with five round rubbles (as big as a sugar cube). The players put them in their hollow of their hands and throw them up and try to take the greater number of them on the back of their hands.

Everyone here who has the most number of stones will be the starter of the game and the others will place in the following ranks according to their number of token stones. To start the game, one of them has to be handed at first and throw it up and try to take them one by one at first, two by two next, to three by three in third stage. Moreover, all four stones have to be taken together in the fourth stage.

Bijbij

The game is performed by making use of some eggs practiced by 7 to12 year old boys in the New Year ceremony. In this game, each player has to bring one or more eggs to the playing place which is usually in rural areas where people gathered. The egg has to be placed under the thumb and others want to strike and break the egg with their eggs. Everyone who his egg was broken has to give a healthy egg to the contrary person. The purpose of this program, in addition to entertainment and variety, is to gather others' eggs and more nimble and more experienced persons will bring more eggs to their homes.

Ghashbazi

The game is one of men's games that are held by 12 to 35 year old individuals in spring. To run the game, people are divided into two equal groups including 4 to7 members. Then, a circle with a diameter of 2 to 4 meters (depends on the number of participants per team) has to divide the land. According to the dry or wet toss, a team begins the game from outside the circle and the other from inside. When the situation of teams in terms of the situation became clear, the team inside the circle gives each of its members a belt locally called "Ghash". They will bring the "Ghashes" or belts into the circle and place it in such a way that one end is placed in the middle of the circle and the other end on the edge of the circle. The outside players try to grab one or more belts in the circle while defending their way. If they are able to do so, they will hit the players inside the circle by the grabbed belts and try to take other belts as well.

Golmeshta

"Golmeshta" or "goal or empty" is a game often played in the winter nights in this area. This game can be played by both women and men and most of participants aged between 7 to 40 years old. To start the game, people are divided into two equal groups. Each group has a supervisor whose job is to coordinate and to divide players and to hide the goal from the rest. Then, he/she will pick a pea or gravel or any small object. A person from the leadership of the team sales it to the opposing team in this way. For example, says goal or number five? Goal or number six? However, when it was recognized that the goal has to be in hand of which group, the leader of that group will use various ways and try to confuse the players of the opponent team not to find it. He has to hide the flower in hand of one of the members of his team.
Then, he will ask the opponents to guess and find the hidden flower. The opponent team makes use of various techniques to find it. Finally, they will open a number of individuals' hands as vacant and empty and leave the rest untouched. If they ask someone to open both of his hands but both the goal is beside him, they will lose one point and if one asks the goal from the proper hand, one point will be added to his team. Finally, if a team obtains 21 points first, it will win the game.

Epilogue

As it was mentioned, in the theoretical frame work, the present research for its analysis of data, are based on function - structuralism theory, this school consider the components of the system as well as the entire system in an equilibrium state where the transformation of a component leads to the transformation of other components. That transformation of a component may be in tuning with of other components as if no change has occurred in the whole system. But if this balance is not established, the entire system will be changed. This is also true about the structure of culture and folklore.

Many of function - structuralism folklore scholars have mentioned many functions for folklore. Regarding this school, these scholars believe that the negative outcomes may occur in the other structures of society by the creation of changes in folklore or the vanishing of its role in society. They refer to the positive underlying functions of folklore. As it was mentioned Folk game and play of Gilan are part of folklore since it represents the type of thoughts, feelings and behavior of Gilanian People.

Nowadays, some Gilani Folk game and play are on the verge of 'getting forgotten' The problem is not only the loss of a kind of game and play but it is feared that this change will cause another change in thinking and behavior, Therefore, the task is to identify, document and analyze Gilani folk game and play.

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