

References

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■ CHILDREN AND THEIR PASTIMES IN ASIA

Nepal

Gokul Prasad Pokhrel

Many of the privately managed schools have become too commercial and cram children into hired premises. The children are encouraged to learn by rote, especially English conversation drills which make the parents happy. Heaps of books are prescribed indiscriminately, without assessing the capacity of children to cope with the burden. Very few schools provide physical facilities for sports, outdoor games and other cultural arts which are often beyond the reach of children.

About 60% of the school-going age group find their way to formal school education, but the rest are denied the opportunity. Of those 60%, the school-going children of the urban areas do less homework and show less aptitude for reading. It is due to over-exposure to television programmes which the children view along with the parents for longer hours in the evening. While TV exposure has helped broaden perceptions about external environment, the input of reading textbooks has drastically decreased. However, no reliable studies have been made on the adverse effects of television programmes on the school-going age-group children. Neither is there any action to alert parents to the harmful effects of TV and entertainment programmes.

Boys in schools like to participate in outdoor games and sports while girls prefer cultural arts, singing and dancing and indoor games. The children are also fond of reading comics and illustrated stories when available. The intrusions of video games and electronic comics are yet to make their debut in Nepal.

Pakistan

Ahmad Faraz

Children of today are the nation builders of tomorrow. It is the obligation of every parent and teacher to find ways and means to make their children physically fit and mentally strong. The children of Pakistan, like those of other countries, have their own characteristics and identities. Our culture is reflected in their pastimes, in their behaviour and attitudes, which they learn through trial and error and through different ways and means.



The pastimes of our children differ from class to class and from place to place. The activities of children residing in urban areas are mostly computer, video games, watching cartoon films, playing badminton, tennis, cricket, kite flying, snooker and of course reading books including comics, horror stories, folk tales, jokes, riddles, etc.

The children residing in rural areas are physically much stronger as they take an active part in helping their parents in agricultural work. The nature of agricultural work is laborious, hard and time-consuming. Their life style is very different to that of the children residing in urban areas. The children of rural areas, despite their tough life style, find time for their traditional games, which make them physically strong—the games include wrestling, kabadi, swimming in canals and ponds, hockey, volleyball and football. Library facilities are almost non-existent in the rural areas, so the studies of children there are confined to school subjects.



Philippines

Neni Sta. Romana-Cruz

What's with Filipino children these days?

Even with the lure of technology, there is nothing like old-fashioned pleasures such as climbing trees and enjoying fruits picked from the backyard.

The illustration on the left is based on a traditional story where a bug guava fruit turns out to be an evil character from Philippine folklore believed to be capable of assuming different forms. When the big guava is picked, it turns into a python who swallows the scampering children whole!

The retelling of tales such as this is another favourite preoccupation.

Illustration by Lyra Abueg Garcellano

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■ HANDCLAPPING GAMES

Gwenda Beed Davey and Graham Seal

Gwenda Davey and Graham Seal have submitted to the publishers Simon and Schuster (Sydney) the manuscript of their *Dictionary of Australian Folklore*, which is due for publication in 2003. The following entry for Handclapping rhymes and games is one of the many references to children's folklore in the Dictionary.

Hand-clapping games are one of the most popular of children's traditional games, usually played by girls. They can mostly be observed in the primary school play-ground, but will often be played to pass the time out of school hours. The games involve rhythmical hand movements including clapping and almost always a verbal chant such as the very old rhyme:

*Mary Mack, dressed in black
Silver buttons her back.
She likes coffee,
She likes tea,
She likes sitting
On a black man's knee.*

Some of the chants accompanying hand-clapping games are very long, such as the life-cycle chant When Suzy was a baby, which ranges from Suzy's babyhood to death and status as a ghost/angel. Hand-clapping games are usually played by two girls, though sometimes larger numbers may be involved, perhaps in a circle of up to ten players. Lindsay and Palmer (1981) gave detailed descriptions of twenty-five different clapping games in Brisbane primary schools during the 1970s, and the Australian Children's Folklore Collection at Museum Victoria includes many dozens more. One of the most well-known hand-clapping games is A Sailor Went to Sea:

*A sailor went to sea, sea, sea,
To see what he could see, see, see;
But all that he could see, see, see
Was the bottom of the deep blue sea, sea, sea.*

The rhymes may have some variations in the text although they are surprisingly stable over time and place. Many hand-clapping games popular in Australia are also found in other English-speaking countries, and in foreign-language versions elsewhere.

Reference

P.L. Lindsay & D. Palmer, *Playground Game Characteristics of Brisbane Primary School Children*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1981.





Designing modern childhoods

One of the editors of *Play & Folklore*, June Factor, presented a paper at an unusually diverse conference at the University of California at Berkeley in May. The conference, titled 'Designing modern childhoods: landscapes, buildings and material culture', brought together historians, anthropologists, sociologists, architects, folklorists, geographers, landscape designers, planners and educators. In the words of the organisers, the work presented over the very busy two days of the conference incorporated 'comparative, cross-cultural research, uses of new analytical tools to scrutinise the place that schools, parks, playgrounds, and other settings take in children's daily life, historically and in the present day, and bringing to light children's points of view.'

It was children's points of view which were the focus of Dr Factor's paper, 'Tree stumps, manhole covers and rubbish bins: the invisible play-lines of a primary school playground'. The experience, understandings and attitudes of Australian children in school playgrounds over a period of 50 years – including the findings of the pioneer American scholar, Dr Dorothy Howard, during her 10 months in Australia in 1954-1955 – aroused considerable interest and discussion at the conference.

A number of the papers presented at the conference, including 'Tree stumps...', are to be published. For further information, contact Dr Marta Gutman at Berkeley [mgutman@uclink4.berkeley.edu].



Book Feature: HISTORY OF CHILDHOOD

The current interest in the history of childhood is evident in a flurry of conferences and journal articles. Now a British social historian, Colin Heywood, has added to the literature with his scholarly and accessible book, *A History of Childhood* (Polity Press/Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, 2001, 231pp, 14.99 pounds). While the title is somewhat misleading (the book focuses on Europe, and later North America, from the Middle Ages to the early 20th century – a vast period, to be sure, but omitting most of the world's children), it is none the less a valuable attempt 'to highlight key issues in the history of childhood and children'.

In the next issue of *Play & Folklore* we hope to offer a considered review of the book.



Websites

For those with the time and equipment, some interesting websites.

- A site that looks at children's games and people's uses of them:
<http://www.firebirdtrust.sagenet.co.uk/explorer.htm>
- The site of the English organisation, London Play:
<http://www.londonplay.org.uk>
- A new online magazine of Australian social history and folklore:
<http://simplyaustralia.mountaintracks.com.au>
- Folklore Australia - an online resource base for those interested in all aspects of folklore and folklife:
<http://members.iinet.net.au/~cknow/>

