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# Means of Amusement and Recreation of Urban Life in Punjab under the Sultan of Delhi

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**Abstract – With the establishment of Delhi Sultanate, the remarkable changes occurred in the various sources of pleasure and recreation, especially in urban life. The Turks were settled in the urban centers so these changes seem to have occurred in the life of urban elite. The amusements and pleasures of the age were strongly influenced by its military characteristics. Military exercise began to occupy a sacred place in their routine life. People used to carry swords like walking sticks and made skilful use of them when occasions arose.[1] The one aspect of the social life of this period was razam or warfare and bazmi or social pleasures which were complementary to one another. Every man was expected to be an active soldier capable of doing military duty in times of war. The people of the Punjab always had to endure the most of the invaders. But during the time of peace, they indulged in pleasure, pastime and recreative sports.[2] The Turks brought the new means of recreations and amusements. The games like chaugan (polo), Shikar and animal fights etc. were the monopoly of the aristocratic and ruling class of the urban milieu of the Punjab while the chess, chaupar, playing card, etc, were popular among the rich and poor alike.[3]**

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The most aristocratic outdoor game was *chaugan* (polo) from where it soon became popular among all classes. This game has been traced as far back as the reign of the Sassanian dynasty in Persia.[4] The Turks in the Punjab introduced it. Qutab-ud-din Aibak was fond of polo. Hasan Nizami says that when he was playing polo, owing to collision of horse, the auspicious Sultan fell on the ground with fatal injuries and died at Lahore.[5] The Turks were fond of the game and one of the emblems of court offices was represented by a polo stick and ball of gold.[6] The popularity of the game continued during the Afghan period. Ahmad Yadgar speaks of the playing of the ball by Sultan Bahlol Lodhi when was of seven years old. It might be football in the same form. Both Sultan Sikander and Bahlol Lodhi were also fond of this game.[7] The wrestling was an ancient Indian game that became popular among the Muslims. Afif refers to wrestling competition on I'd.[8] The famous wrestler of Babur was Sadiq who beat another famous champion named Kalal. The Mughal emperor rewarded him with a gift of 10,000 *tankas*, a fine horse and other articles valued of 3,000 *tankas*. [9]

Archery became another popular game of the period. Ibn Battuta gave reference to manufacturer of pellet-bows and arrows in Multan when one came with a desire to enlist as an archer in the army. He had to pull a bow and salary of the candidate was fixed accordingly to the strength displayed by him in pulling the bow and if he wanted to be enlisted in the cavalry, he had to strike the drum with his lance riding on the horse. If a soldier succeeded in lifting up the ring

hanging on the wall with his lance, he was considered as an excellent equestrian. If one desired to be enlisted as a mounted archer, he had to hit a ball placed on the ground with an arrow while galloping on the horse. His salary was fixed proportionately to his success in striking the ball.[10] In the *qissa* of Mirza and Shahiban, Mirza was depicted as a great archer.[11]

Regarding the means of amusements, hunting was an important source of recreation and amusement among the ruling elites of the Punjab. The Muslims brought all these advanced traditions of the *Sikar* (chase) with them as memories of the Sassanian monarchs who were the famous hunter of the age. *Qamargahs* which were the hunting-rings, formed to enclose games in a grand royal chase, were equally important amusement of the noble class, as the region was full of dense jungles and the game was played in every part of the Punjab. There were well-known hunting ground in the Punjab i.e., Sirhind, Machhiwara, Bajwara, Kahnuwan, Lahore, Lakhhi jungle, Dipalpur, Samana, etc. In many of these sports, women joined their men-folk in multitude.[12] The jungles of Dipalpur and Sarsuti were famous for wild ass, deer and *nilgan* (cow).[13] Deer, *nilgan* and common fowl were easily found while rhinoceros and wolves were found only in the hills of the Punjab. Almost every important monarch from the time of the Qutb-ud-din Aibak to the reign of Akbar was fond of the chase.[14]

Every Sultan had a large establishment which included vast number of trained animals especially for chase. A large area reserved as royal preserves called *Shikarsthan* and *Shikarbak* were full of birds, other ravenous animals and wild beasts.[15] The *Shikar* department was organized under an *amir-i-shikar* who was usually a noble of high rank together with other officials of the same status. Under these senior officers came minor officers for the care and keeping of royal falcons and other hunting animals and birds known respectively. Under them came a numerous staff of *Shikar-i-dars* who carried the animals and birds at the day of chase. Besides, there were other officials like *tabalbaz* (the drummer) and *yuzban* (keepers of panthers and leopards).[16]

Balban was also fond of hunting, he played this game mostly in winter and had ordered his officials to keep ready ten to twenty *Shikargh* and *mugrjars* for the purpose. He used to start early in the morning towards Rewari and return next day at midnight.[18]

Muhammad Tughlaq employed 10,000 falcons who rode on horseback in the chase, 3,000 beats, 3,000 provision dealers and others. Four collapsible doubled stories houses were carried in his train by 200 camels together with tents canopies and a variety of pavilions.[18] Firuz Shah was fond of the chase, Afif writes that he brought the devastation and ruin in the animal kingdom through shooting an arrow, chasing another on horseback and releasing his falcon for the third on its wings.[19] Sikander Lodhi spent most of his time in the chase and game of polo.[20] Babur and his men did not forget the pleasure of the chase even while they were marching towards Lahore.[21]

The game of chess or *shatranj* has remained one of the most popular means of recreation in upper class of the urban area. The Muslims learned the game from Indians. Alberuni refers to the ignorance of the Muslims in this respect. He says that chess is not known among the Muslims.[22] He also refers to the fondness of the Hindus for playing the game of chess. He says that in playing chess, they move the elephant strait on, not to the other sides one square at a time, like the pawn and to the four corners also one square at a time, the queen (*firzan*). These five squares (i.e. the one straight forward and others at the corners) are the places occupied by the trunk and the four feet of the elephant.[23]

The *nard* (*backgammon*) was a popular game among the Sultans and aristocrats which was introduced in India by the Muslims. The traditions mentioned the popular fact that *nard* was brought to India from Persia in return for chess.[24] Alberuni says that if two men play at *nard*, a third one throws the dice between them.[25] This game was played on a wooden board square in shape divided into twenty-four squares of equal size. It was played with thirty pieces in two sets of fifteen each set being of one distinctive color.[26]

The game of cards (*ganijafa*) appears to have been first introduced in India by Babur. Akbar seems to have made certain improvements in the game which became popular during his reign. The old Mughal packs of cards were made up of eight suits, of twelve cards each the queen and jack of the present.[27] The pack replaced by one wazir or premier. The *chauper*, a game played with dice or *cowries* on piece of cloth spread cross is said to have been of the Punjab origin, seems to have found favor with in two common-folk as well as with the aristocracy of the urban centers.[28]

Speaking from the orthodox view point the Muslim life as a whole had a little room for any kind of social festival but Indian environment and tradition were to react, in course of time, on this rigidity of the Muslim rituals. Although, the form of the orthodox religious congregation remained, their nature and purpose underwent a great deal of modification in the environment of India. Other new festivals were super-imposed on the Muslim calendar which was predominantly social and indigenous.[29] The festival of *Shab-i-barat* follows on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of Shaban. It professes to commemorate an appropriate legend of Islam, probably, copied from the Hindu festival of *Shivratri* because the night vigil and fireworks are common elements in both festivals. Some of the religious Muslims spent the whole night in offering special prayers and readings. The distinguishing features of the popular celebration were extensive use of fireworks and the illumination of homes and mosques.[30]

The celebration of the Moharram and I'd-i-Zuha festivals added a new component to the Hindu religious beliefs and practices. The Hindus also participated the Muslim festivals. If Shias sought to recreate the dual between Ali and his adversaries by pouring water under the Tazias, the Hindu masses in the areas where the Shias predominately made watermen do the same. The Hindu children were made to pass under the Tazias as they passed through the streets as a sort of insurance against ill-defined evil spirits.[31] During the reign of Ala-ud-din Khalji, on the occasion of festival of Holi, the Hindus and Muslims were invited together in the palace.[32] Muhammad Tughlaq is said to have participated in the religious festival of the Hindus. He was the first Sultan of Delhi about whom there is definite contemporary evidence of his participation in celebration of Holi.[33] Among other diversions, mention may be made of music as a favorite pastime. Indian music has a history that goes back to the ancient time. Amir Khusrau writes that Indian music is like a fire that lightens the heart and soul, is of a higher order than music of other countries. No foreigner even if he stayed in India for a number of years would be able to grasp its principles thoroughly or even to render a single melody correctly. This music has a peculiar charm not only for human being but for animals also. Deer can be hypnotized and caught by means of music alone.[34] Besides, Amir Khusrau has left behind a permanent contribution to music of Hindustan. He introduced the *Quavaali* mode of singing for the first time. He is also credited

with having introduced several of *rags* like *Zilaph*, *Sazagiri*, *Sarpada* and others.

It may be concluded that a process of social and cultural synthesis in urban milieu of the Punjab began with the Turkish invasions. A new social structure emerged on the basis of property, occupation, and economic status rather than on caste and religion. Urban society was divided into three classes in which *ahl-i-suyuf* and *ahl-i-qalam* constituted the aristocracy. *Ahl-i-suyuf* included military ranks such as *sar-i-khal*, *sipahsalar*, *amir*, *malik* and *khan*. The next class was the men of the pen comprising ethnologists i.e., *ulema* and Brahmins and litterateurs, *mashaiks*, in other words, the class of intelligentsia. *awam-i-khalaq* was the third group of the social composition which included merchants, artisans and other working class. This structural change further promoted the social change that got reflected in the cultural aspects such as food habits and dressing sense, means of amusements and sports, language and literature, art and architecture, etc. The synthesis of Hindu and Muslim cultures became discernable, in food habits Hindu adopted some of the Muslim dishes and Muslims adopted the Hindu habits of taking *kicheri* and *pan*. In literature, Persian became official language and was learnt by both Hindus and Muslims. Further *Hindawi* emerged as a common medium of eloquence. In the architecture, Islamic style mingled with the local forms of architecture in which wooden ornamental and glazed tiles were used and thus emerged an Indo-Islamic style. This process of socio-cultural synthesis continued during the Mughal period.

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