

Dhivehi Games

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INTRODUCTION

This paper presents a number of traditional games in the Maldives, and describes the customary situations in which they are played. The paper also looks at the changing social contexts that effect and sustain the situations in which these games are played. Included in this paper are traditional children's games as well as festival and carnival games. Urbanisation and the movement of populations from island communities to the capital, changes in everyday life and living situations, as well as growing influence of religious extremism has affected play and traditional play contexts in the country. This paper describes and reflects on this changing landscape of games, play, and play contexts.

The paper looks at historical texts and documentation of games and play situations in Dhivehi literature as well as games, play and festivities today. One of the main articles used in this paper is "Dhivehi muskulhiehge angathelhun" (The chatter of an old Maldivian) (Saeed, 1996) which lists and describes examples of games played in the Maldives. They consist of indoor and outdoor games traditionally played by children in their neighbourhoods and homes. Home life and street life has changed so fast and so dramatically during the last 50 years, especially in the capital Malé. Factors such as changes in the sizes and architecture of houses, the kinds of family groups that live together, interactions among neighbours all effect the games and kinds of play children can participate in. Rapid urbanisation and population growth in the capital has changed the street life in the city effecting the ability to play in public space. This paper describes the games from the texts and the situations in which they were played, and looks at how the games and these contexts are changing or have sometimes disappeared.

There are a number of carnival-like festivals that are held for religious holidays like the different Eid days, and during different seasons. This paper looks at how they are described in a number of historical stories, including "Bodu Thakurufaanu Vaahaka" (The story of Bodu Thakurufaanu) This paper also considers how these play events and games themselves have traditionally been extremely significant social occasions held in every Dhivehi island community. Each of these festivals includes traditional games played together by everyone on the island, regardless of social standing or age. Some significant games like the Koadi game, pit all the women in the island against all the men, both using their strength and wits to capture the hidden "Koadi", a sculpture woven in coconut leaves. Other games involve parades, or putting water on each other. Although the main games are the same, the way these games are played sometimes differ from

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island to island. This paper will give examples of a number of these games and describe the occasions.

These festival games have not been played in the capital Malé for decades, but have continued in other islands. People also travel to certain islands for the games and festival activities. This paper will describe how these traditional play activities are changing rapidly, or being discarded as many island communities adapt their lifestyles towards more restrictive versions of Islam, affecting the interactions between, for example different genders, and attitudes towards bodies and play. In this regard, this paper will also consider what the factors are that sustain these traditional festivities and allow games to continue being played.

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