School to School

# Sports and games in India

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## 1- The right to play and the values of sport

What does it mean, “to play”? Games are an essential part of everyone’s personal development. From the age of infants we learn through playing, experimenting with the things surrounding us in the world: a spoon that makes a noise upon falling (we love it!), tangling mom’s hair, touching rays of light, or the jingling of a rattle. Playing isn’t having toys. Playing is spontaneous, a response to the desire to learn and grow. This also happens in India, and in every part of the world! From a very young age we learn without realizing it, just by playing. We are programmed to play. If we’re taught something at school through a game, it’s more fun. And if we discover things while playing we become wiser people. As we get older we forget to play so much, which is too bad, because playing makes us happy. It’s a good thing that not all adults forget; it’s very important to keep that desire to play alive forever. Do you like the people that play with you? Why? Playing is the way in which we learn to interact with other people, to make friends, to think, to invent, to solve problems, to find peace, to give peace, and most importantly, to have fun. What is your favourite game?

Playing is a fundamental right in childhood, just as it’s made clear in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Despite being a fundamental right, there are still many children that don’t have the time to play because they have to take care of tasks not suited for their age.

Playing certainly must be important: it has its own international holiday, the 28th of May, which celebrates the superpower of playing in children’s lives.

Apart from playing, you probably like to do sport. Sport is a physical activity that can be done individually or in a group, and which has some established rules that must be followed. Sport allows for the teaching and learning of values such as justice, teamwork, equality, inclusion, solidarity, perseverance and respect. In games and in sport, not everybody has to be as strong as each other to participate and add to the team! What’s more, sport teaches us to peacefully solve conflicts and cooperate in a team! Think of when you play basketball, for example. Isn’t it fun when you all play together and work as a team to make a basket?

In addition, sport also helps us to lead a healthy lifestyle and improve our health. That's why it's very important to do sport, either at school (like in PE class), in extracurricular activities (in the community or sports associations), or in the street, with your neighbourhood friends.

As you can see, games and sports are a way to achieve other rights, such as education or health. That's why they're so important in our lives.

The best thing about playing is that we all know how to play, right? Plus, there are many games and sports that are the same in any part of the world, although some are specific to a place or country that we can learn how to play. How about we get to know some from India?

## 2- Sports and games popular in India

In India there are many cultures, peoples and tribes. What's more, the country has had throughout its history many different influences, from Persian and Arab to Mughal and British, which are reflected in the different sports of the country.

On one hand there are sports rooted in the British colonial period, notably field hockey. In this sport the Indians have already surpassed their British mentors, and they have one of the best teams of the world in this sport: the Indian men's team has won several Olympic gold medals.

Another sport passed down from the British is cricket, the most popular sport in India. The games are very popular, to the point that the players are looked up to as stars. Who do you think are the sports stars in Spain? In our country footballers achieve great fame, but in other places around the world, such as India, football isn't the most followed sport. Do you know how field hockey or cricket are played?

There are also other sports that emerged in India itself, and which the British took back to England in the nineteenth century, such as polo or badminton.

Additionally, there are other sports and games specific to India. They're mainly combat sports, such as:

- *Kho kho* or tag is one of the most popular games. It consists of chasing somebody and trying not to get tagged by members of the opposing team.

- *Mallakhamb*, a traditional sport in which a person carries out movements and poses on a tall wooden post after which the sport is named.

- Kite flying, in which thousands of kites are flown from rooftops. Participants try to bring down the other kites. This game has generated some debate because it can cause accidents and put other people or birds in danger and it can also cause power outages when the kites get tangled up in electric cables.

- *Kabaddi.* Have you ever heard about how kabaddi is played? It's said that this sport is very, very old, going back about 4,000 years, starting out as a hobby in rural areas of India. *Kabaddi* is played by two teams of seven people each, on a court that's about half the size of a basketball court.

  The teams take turns sending a "raider" to the other team's area, with the aim of "capturing" players from the opposing team, before going back to their own area. The "captured" team members have to leave the court. The attacker mustn't breathe during the attack, and must sing the whole time as proof of not

breathing. That's where the name of the game comes from: *kabaddi* means "song" in India. Normally the best players keep the singing going ("*kabaddi, kabaddi, kabaddi*") for intervals of more than 40 seconds. The "raider" is out if he or she stops singing or makes a mistake saying the word, which means the judges have to pay close attention and listen very well. The team with the most points at the end wins the game.

Would you like to research the rules of sports such as kabaddi, kho kho, cricket, or one of the other sports we've explained, and play it at breaktime or in PE class?

Many boys and girls in India do yoga to start their day. Yoga is a practice that connects body, mind and emotions using breathing techniques. It was originated in India. Have you ever practiced it? It is very good for stretching the body, relaxing, disconnecting and recharging energy. It is an exercise that helps to eliminate the stress caused by the rhythm of life that we have. You just have to sit on a mat, close your eyes, breathe deeply and follow specific body poses.

## 3- Board games

Starting in childhood, we spend more and more time inside. We don't play as we used to, in the street, with friends, traditional games that don't need anything special… just some chalk, stones, sticks or marbles. What games do you play at home? Many of you are probably videogame kings and queens. Maybe you are as well with games such as The Game of the Goose, ludo, chess, checkers… Situations like the one caused by the coronavirus pandemic, when we had to stay at home with no choice, made us really want to see our friends again, which can lead to the most fun games and the most unforgettable and enriching moments of our lives.

Did you know that board games have many benefits and advantages? Board games are perfect for those rainy afternoons when you can't play outside. They're very fun games that help us develop patience, concentration, logic, an understanding of other people, learning to not get angry, and knowing how to accept a loss in fair play. As mentioned before, games are an important part of education, in order to learn.

There are many traditional board games in India. You probably know some, and others will come as a surprise.

One of these games is pagade, or what we know as "parcheesi", and it's the national board game of India. This traditional board game is, without a doubt, one of the most famous and oldest in the world. Parcheesi became popular among the working classes, who used a painted or embroidered cloth as a board, little multi-coloured stones as pieces, and cowrie shells as dice. You've most likely already played some time. The game builds a spirit of overcoming.

Another game popular in India and that you'll surely know is chess. According to legend, the origin of chess goes

back to the fifth century when a Hindu king, after losing one of his sons in battle, succumbed to a deep sadness that prevented him from doing anything. Many people tried to cure the king's great sorrow but nobody was able to, until one day a Brahman gave the king a checkered board, divided into 64 black and white spaces upon which differently-shaped pieces move around the board in certain ways. The king found it to be a very entertaining game and he was fascinated by the similarities of the pieces to a king and his people, given that the most powerful pieces were powerless on their own, their strength laying in the teamwork along with the people.

Carrom is another very widespread board game in India and is similar to billiards, in which two or four players take each other on. Carrom is played on a square wooden board with holes in each of its four corners. A red piece or "queen" is used, along with nine white pieces and nine black ones, similar to those used in checkers. Each player uses a cue and the objective of the game is to get all of your pieces in the corner holes faster than your rival or rivals.

Other board games that originated in India are ludo, which is like parcheesi, chess, and snakes and ladders. Would you like to play any of these games?

## 4- Breaktime games

Do you like breaktime? I'm sure it's your favourite subject! Kids in India also love breaktime!

You don't need to buy toys in order to play: sometimes with some sticks, stones, some chalk, and most importantly, with imagination, there are many fun ways to play. Breaktime must receive special importance in the school day because it's a time for sharing many things and learning a lot. To achieve this, it's important to take advantage of the different spaces you have in your schoolyard, mixing with people who aren't in the same class and playing, learning many interesting things and adventuring reely.

The schoolyard has to be a special place where everyone can play what they want, with who they want, in the open air, always respecting others. But sometimes adults forget how important it is to play, and all the things we learn while playing, like how to share, cooperate with others, explore different places, get to know and observe new things, to release tension… And that's why sometimes we don't give breaktime the importance it deserves and we don't prepare the schoolyard to be the best place in the school.

During breaktime in India they play *lattu*, a game that uses a spinning top, as well as *nondi*, or hopscotch, in which a grid is drawn on the ground and the player jumps to complete his turn without stepping on the edge. They also play *kho kho* or tag, jump rope, play with a ball, *kabaddi*… just like here, during breaktime laughs can be heard as the children enjoy breaktime with great joy.

## 5- Sport to make the world a better place

There's something really great about sport: it makes people feel like we're part of the same team and differences disappear, since everyone is contributing something different to the team. Isn't it true that you can play football with someone who speaks German, even if you don't understand that language? That's great!

Sport also helps people who were born with fewer opportunities. There are many examples in India of people who have changed their lives thanks to sport. Today we'd like you to get to know the story of Kullayamma, an example of a determined person who's made a great effort to change their fate and achieved their dreams through sport. Do you want to hear her story?

Kullayamma was born with an intellectual disability in a village called Kottapalli, where she lived with her grandmother, her mother and her brother, who worked as day labourers in the fields. When she was little she would often stay at home all day while her family worked, until one day she was signed up to study at a school run by the Vicente Ferrer Foundation in India for children with learning disabilities. While there, little by little she began to play sports such as badminton, handball, or ping pong. She also learned how to make crafts and went to school. She began to feel more and more sure of herself playing sports and became so good that she was chosen to participate in competitions in India, the Americas and Australia. She even won a gold medal! Her family feels very proud of her and she's built a lot of self-confidence. Everyone treats her with respect and she no longer feels excluded.

In Spain we also have some examples of people with disabilities who have managed to overcome inequality through sport, like the swimmer Teresa Perales. Can you think of anyone else?

What's more, the world of sports is a place to build confidence and promote equality among all people. Do you think that in our country more boys or more girls play sports? Do you think they're equally appreciated? For example, in the case of football, the men's league is much more appreciated and more well-known.

There are female athletes in India who have stood out in different sports, such as Saine Nehwal and Pursala Sindho, winners in Olympic badminton, Dipa Karmakar, the first Indian artistic gymnast to represent the country in the Olympics. In tennis, Sania Mirza stands out, and is in fact the most well-known tennis player in the country. Sania is a great example of determination, given that when she started playing tennis, she was pressured to give it up, out of fear that nobody would want to marry her. She persisted with her passion, becoming not only one of the best players in the country but also a role model for children and teens.

Do you think there are different sports for boys and girls or that everyone can play the same sports? Mixed teams, with boys and girls, are a fantastic idea because we all bring something to the table. In India, just like

here, there are mixed teams, and they work wonderfully.

How about we use sport to eliminate differences and feel equal, whether we're boys or girls? No matter where we're from, our age, our characteristics or our language. Isn't that a great idea?

## 6- The transformative power of sport

In this topic we've learned that sport teaches us many things. It can change people's lives and has had a very important role throughout history. The practice of sport is good for our health and wellbeing and is a powerful tool in order to feel that we belong to the same team and to teach us values as important as respect, solidarity, diversity, equality or trusting others. Do you know what all of these values mean?

Respect is fundamental to living in a society and is very important in sport because the rules of the game and the opposing team must be respected. Booing at and insulting referees has no place in sport, and neither does placing winning above respect for people. The important thing is to participate and have fun, right?

Sport brings us closer to other people and removes barriers. When everyone shares the same objective, differences disappear. In addition, the playing field is a space for coexisting and comradeship.

Throughout history not everyone has had the same opportunities to play sports, such as women and girls. It's very important to keep in mind that everyone has the right to play sports, whatever our gender is.

Sport improves self-esteem, self-confidence, and perseverance. When you finish a race or a game, or when you go on a hike and get to the top of a mountain, it feels good, right? Sport has great rewards and gives us confidence to overcome obstacles and meet challenges.

As we saw at the beginning, games in all their shapes and forms are fundamental for our development as well as our physical and emotional health: it helps us develop creativity, curiosity and self-confidence, learn how to interact with other people, respect rules, organise and make decisions. Playing is a necessity, a fundamental childhood right, but also for adults. Don't we all have the right to have fun, laugh and enjoy?

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