

Traditional Games of Swabi

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Introduction

District Swabi is located at 34° 24' N, 72° 45' E (Khan M B 2003: Arch Map) raising about 1200 ft. above the sea and covering the area of 471 square miles (Figure 1) (NWFP Gazetteer 1931: t 6). The district presently consists of four tehsils - Swabi, Topi, Lahore and Radzar. Since 1937 Swabi remained a tehsil of the district Mardan till it was granted the status of a district headquarter in 1988 (DCR 2000: 1 & 6).

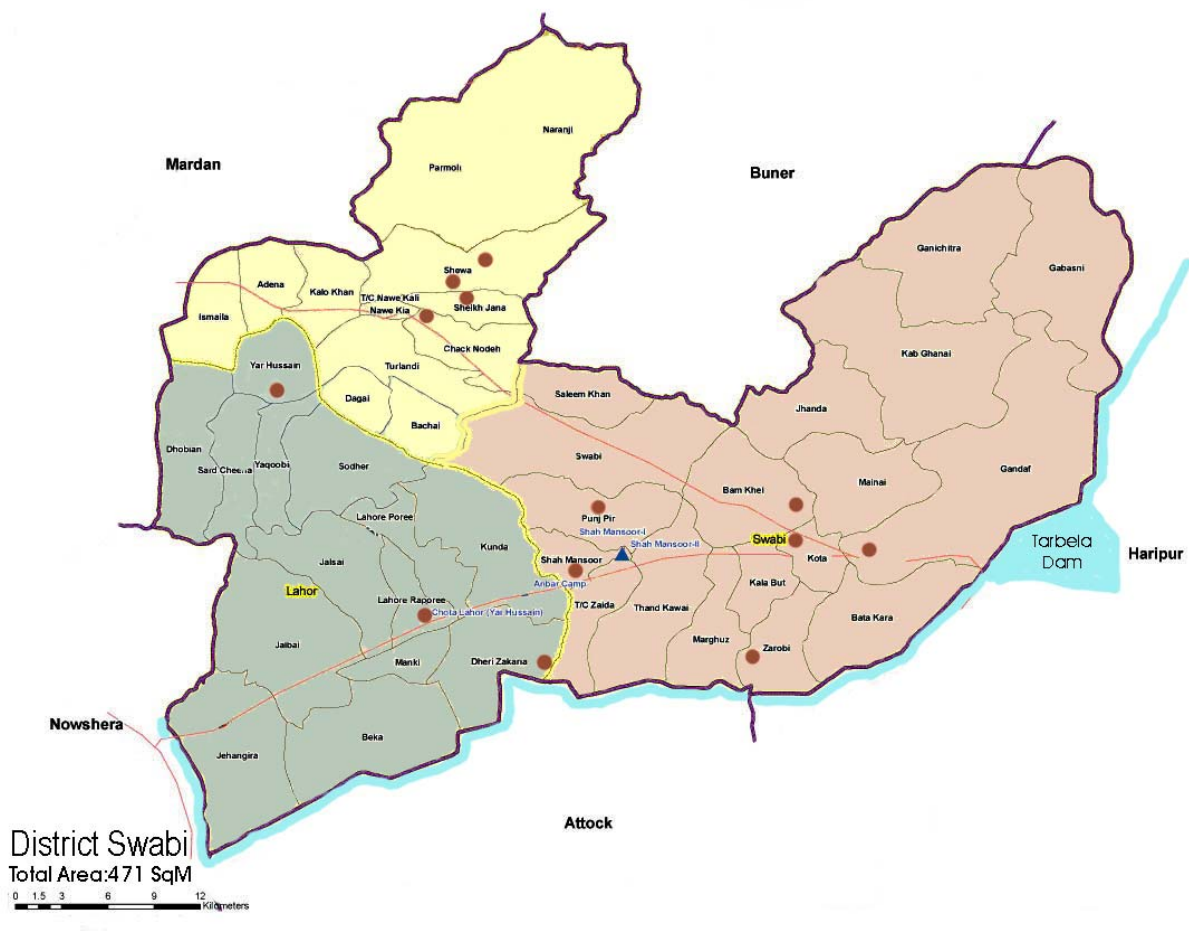


Figure 1. Mape of Swabi District

Swabi is an important district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. This small piece of land in the shape of a heart is surrounded by rivers and hills. The region is known for its friendly and devout people. Swabi has remained a treasury of tangible and intangible cultural heritage, which strengthens its importance in the region. One of the noteworthy intangible assets of Swabi is traditional sports and games.

Swabi has remained at the crossroads of different influences and cultures since the time of Alexander the Great till Durrani period. Invaders and kings, generals and traders, missionaries and pilgrims, travelers and historians used to come here before crossing the Indus River at Hund, at Tarbela and at Attock. Numerous successive dynasties left their footprints here through art and culture. This Cross-cultural integration influenced the local traditions. Many cultural activities, which became traditional to the area, have been brought to Swabi from outside, with the passage of time they took roots and some of them survived up to present day.

Obviously, the traditional games are many centuries old. During the recent past they have suffered decline due to increasing popularity of cricket, hockey and football, but they are still well known and often played. The best known and most often mentioned sports and games of Swabi are bull and horse racing, dog fighting, cock fighting, *mukha*, *kabaddi*, marbles and *chinjo*.

The past of Swabi

Numerous historical records, accounts, memoirs and travelogues mention Swabi. Notes of Greek, Chinese, Arab and local travelers as well as court records of various rulers and dynasties refer to this area.

Famous Greek historian Herodotus wrote about Swabi in 4th century BC (Khan, M B 2003: 4), while another Greek historian Diodoros Siculus provided accounts of Alexander's invasion and his thirty days stay in this area (Mc Rindle 1992: 272).

The Chinese traveler Xuan Zang visited the area in 630 AD and noted that Panini, the Sanskrit grammarian, was a dweller of *Salatura*, the present Chota Lahore (Beal 1958: 163). He further mentioned that *U-to-kia-han-cha*, the present Hund, was one of the most

prosperous towns of Gandhara (Ali 2003: 42). When Arab historians Mas'udi and Muqaddasi visited India in 10th century AD, they also left written record regarding many ancient villages of Swabi (Jaffar 1945: 44).

The scholars refer the earliest human activity in Swabi to the prehistoric time. However, our knowledge about this period remains vague. Alia Jawad dated the Karamar rock carvings of Swabi to Paleolithic period (2 million years BP - 27000 years BP) (Jawad A 2006: 16). However, this dating can perhaps be attributed to their location in close vicinity of two famous prehistoric caves i.e. Sanghao cave in district Mardan and Khan Pur cave in district Haripur. Speaking realistically, it is difficult to determine the precise time when Karamar carvings were created due to their poor condition.

After its establishment in 1993, the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa conducted excavation under the directorship of Prof. Farid Khan at Adina at the foothills of Karamar mountain. The excavation produced materials identified as belonging to Gandhara grave culture dating back to 2nd millennium BC (Khan 1993: 165; Jawad 2006: 16).

Swabi was also an arena of major historical events of the subcontinent, including a succession of foreign invasions. Historical records and archaeological findings suggest that Swabi remained under the Achaemenid administration from 558 BC till 326 BC (Khan 2003: 4). The Greek accounts stated that Alexander the Great with his army reached to the present Hund in 326 BC. He stayed here for thirty days, built a bridge of boats and crossed the Indus (Mc Rindle 1992: 272; Ali 2003: 36). After a short Greek control Swabi came under the Mauryans as the occupation of this area by the Mauryans is confirmed by world famous Jamal Ghari stupa and Ashoka rock edict at Shehbaz Garhi situated not far away.

In 2004 the regular excavations by the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa at Aziz Dheri site yielded the coins of Indo- Greek kings Eucradites and Menander dating to 2nd century BC, thus proving the Indo-Greek rule over this region. Scythian and Parthian strata were also reported from the same site. Kushan invaded India in 1st century A D. Their gold and copper coins were reported from Aziz Dheri and Hund in

large numbers. Numismatic findings tell us that after the Kushan this region was ruled by the dynasties known as the Kidarites and the Hephthalites. The only indisputable evidence of their presence is the coins from the above mentioned two sites.

After the Hephthalites rulers, Turk Shahi dynasty made Kabul their capital city in 666 AD (Jaffar 1945: 42). Turk Shahi rule over the present Swabi was proved through excavations conducted at Hund by the Department of Archaeology, University of Peshawar, under Dr. Ihsan Ali and Dr. Gul Rahim in 1996-97. M Irshad Khan also confirmed the Turk Shahi rule in this region (Khan 1976: 39). Hindu Shahi dynasty came into power in 822 AD. They made Hund their capital city, which was recorded by Arab historian Mas'udi who visited India in 915 AD (Jaffar 1945: 42). After Pushkalavati (Charsadda) and Peshawar, Hund remained the third capital of Gandhara from 7th century till 10th century AD (Sastri 1924: 56; Ali 2003: 86).

After the years of Hindu rule, Raja Jayapala and then his son Anandapala were defeated by Mahmud of Ghazni. Anandapala fled to the Salt range, leaving the capital and most of Peshawar valley up to the Indus in the hands of Ghazanvids in 1007 AD (Wolseley 1958: 15).

The Ghaznavids were followed by the Ghaurid and Sultanath periods. Sultanat period continued till the arrival of the Mughals who invaded India in 1526; while Peshawar valley was under their control since before 1515. Zaheer ud Din Babur was the first Mughal ruler who remained in conflict with the Yousafzai, Mandar and other tribes of Peshawar valley, including the people of Swabi (Dani 1995: 92-113).

In 1586 Mughal King Akbar (ruled 1556-1605) ordered Raja Man Singh to build a fort in Hund (Khan 1995: 88, Dani 1995: 102) to control the Yousafzai and other tribes of the area, which is now in ruins.

In 1738 Swabi was occupied by Nadir Shah Durrani (Khan 1995: 88). It remained under the Durrani rule till the Sikh invasion. According to Major Raverty, Sikh army under the leadership of Ranjit Sing crossed the Indus in March 1823 (Raverty 1976: 272; Sehrai

1979: 22). Historical records reveal that the Sikh army fought hard for every village until the people of Swabi were conquered despite severe resistance.

The British rule followed the Sikh regime in 1849, when the British occupied what is now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In the war of 1858 the residents of Swabi organized a group of Mujahidin and revolted against the British at the site of the present village of Narinji, but were defeated (Dani 1995: 153). The people of Swabi remained at the forefront in the struggle for Partition. Nawab Azeemullah Khan, an ideologist of the War for Independence, was a resident of Swabi (Bakhtiar 2010: 4).

Traditional Sports and Games

Due to its special place in history Swabi encompasses many customs and traditions which are different from the surrounding areas. These include traditional dress, food, household objects and many other aspects, all of which cannot be possibly explained here in detail, while the primary subject of current research is traditional sports and games, which are still followed by children and adults with great enthusiasm.

Although, with the passage of time these games were altered and modified, yet their features are still well preserved and are in practice for centuries. The history of *Kabaddi* wrestling, for example, goes back to the Buddhist time. Bows and arrows used in *Mukha* are also reflected in Gandhara Buddhist art. The chariot in *Dor* is a simple form of a carriage brought by the British, from which we can presume that this type of racing may have been introduced in Swabi during the British period.

The most popular traditional sports and games of district Swabi are as follows:

1. *Kisan Meela* (Bull Racing)
2. *Dor* (Horse Racing)
3. *Mukha* (Archery)
4. *Kabaddi* (Wrestling)
5. *Khara* (Cockfighting)
6. *Khara* (Dog Fighting)
7. *Bilori* (Marbles)

8. *Guli Danda* (Kit-cat)
9. Chinjo game (Hopscotch)

1. *Kisan Meela* (Bull racing)

Bulls have been used in farming in Swabi since ancient times. In 1881-82 Alexander Cunningham reported several carvings of Panjpir hill of Swabi., one of them representing a humped bull (Figure 2) (Khan 1995: Pl II a & b). It indicates the important role of domesticated bulls and curiosity of ancient people towards this animal. Bull is also considered a sacred animal in Hinduism as well as in Buddhism, both of which greatly influenced Swabi in the past. Bulls were included in various cultural activities as well, and one of them, which survived till present, is bull racing.

There are two types of traditional bull racing run in the villages of Swabi. Both of them are known as *Kisan Meela*. These traditional games are held between various villages or between the bulls of Swabi and Chuch (Attock).



Figure 2. Panjpir carving

In the first type of *Kisan Meela* many bulls take part and show their fastness in an open area. The races are usually held in Tordher and in Chota Lahore area of Swabi. Bulls

run in an open field leading towards a marked spot within given time. Apart from Swabi this kind of bull racing is also arranged in Mansehra region (Iqbal 2002: 339).

The second type of bull racing is mostly held in Merguz, Thandkoi and in Topi area. In this competition the bull runs the Persian wheel (Figure 3). Every bull runs for eight minutes turning the wheel of *Arhat* well. The bull which runs more than the others stands first, and the owner of that bull is considered the winner of the event.



Figure 3. Kisan Mela

2. *Dor* (Horse racing)

Dor is a horse racing competition, popular in the past, but somewhat losing popularity nowadays. According to an unverified tradition reported by Harold, horse racing competitions were introduced in this area by Alexander the Great in 326 BC. There is numismatic evidence confirming it as well. Horse riding and mounted horses are depicted

on the coins of various Indo-Greek rulers - Harmeaus, Menandar and others (Ali I 2005: 1-13, Whitehead 1914: 63-82). Horses often figure in Gandhara Buddhist art carvings. Horses are depicted on many panels from the collection of Peshawar Museum (Figure 4) and other museums of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Ali & Qazi 2008: 41, 57).



Figure 4.

Coming to the area of our interest, historically horses of Swabi were employed for chariots, carts, for agricultural purposes and for traditional race generally known as *Dor*. *Dor* is harness racing – the horses are harnessed with sulkies or carts locally known as ‘*baggi*, which is a simple form of the British period carriage (Figure 5). The races, usually held on Fridays, start from Swabi town and are either run on Swabi - Mardan road or on Swabi - Jehangira road, or occasionally on Swabi - Topi road. The winner is the fastest horse reaching the agreed spot.

Presently due to heavy traffic on all the roads in Swabi this competition is arranged very seldom. Lack of interest of the locals is another factor for the decline of this game.



Figure 5.

3. *Mukha* (Archery)

Mukha is a traditional sport similar to archery, but instead of the arrows with pointed tips, the players shoot arrows with small round plates on the tip trying to hit the target.

Mukha continues the tradition of the wars of the past, when bows and arrows were used. The carvings of bow and arrows appeared for the first time in Gandhara art. One of its best depictions is the Syama Jataka story PM-02712 (Figure 6) exhibited in the Peshawar Museum (Ali & Qazi 2008: 36). Though bow and arrows are replaced now by modern weapons, they still retain their place in cultural activities and *Mukha* tournaments are arranged in Swabi with great enthusiasm (Yousafzai 2009: 40)



Figure 6. Siyama Jataka

Mukha competitions are generally arranged between different villages of Swabi. The competition is usually held in an open area. In this game every team consists of 10 players, every player trying to hit the pointed circle placed at a distance of more than 20m while using an arrow and a bow. In this game a special kind of bow is used which is locally known as *Bajawri Lenda*. Arrows used in this game are longer in size as compared to the ones used in wars in the past and end with a flat round plate at the tip (Figure 7). This game is mostly held in villages Marghuz, Zaida, Thandkhoy, Swabi, Manerai, Serai Charbagh and Kernal Sher Kila.



Figure 7. People enjoying the Mukha

4. *Kabaddi* (Wrestling)

Kabaddi is a traditional sport widely popular all over Swabi. In Swabi this game is also known as *kath kabaddi*, while in DI Khan area it is known as *kath kath* (Iqbal J 2002: 377). It is a contest of physical strength between the players of two teams with the style varying from region to region (Yousafzai 2009: 37-8).

This game is a lot like wrestling and its history goes almost two thousand years back. Due to its cultural significance for the whole Gandhara region, a wrestling scene is now exhibited in Peshawar museum PM-02738 (Figure 8) (Ali & Qazi 2008: 73).

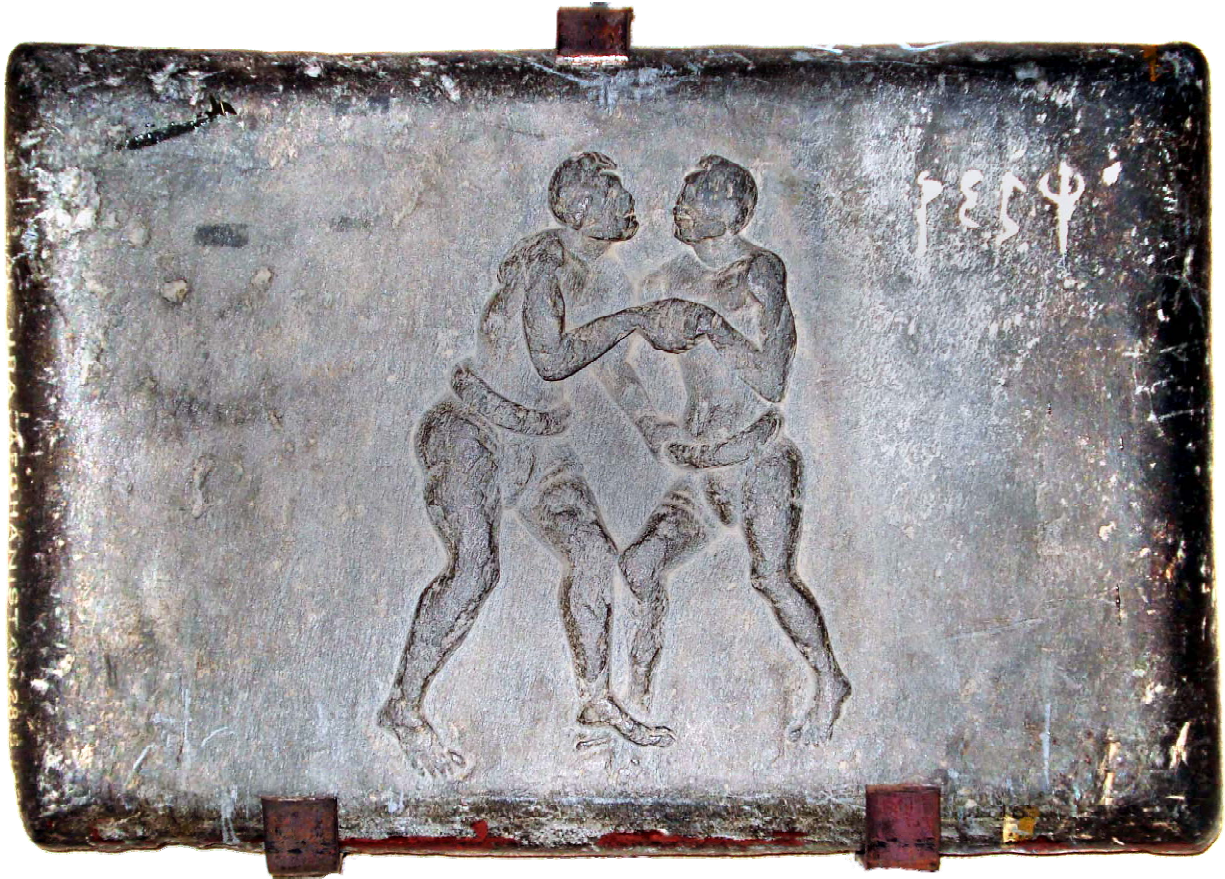


Figure 8. Wrestling Scene

Teams from different villages take part and fight against each other. Every team comes with a crowd of supporters, who come to see the game and also to cheer and support their wrestlers (Figure 9). *Kabaddi* competitions are mostly held between the large villages/towns of this district like Topi, Zaida, Thandkhai, Kotha, Marghuz, Baja, Swabi, Manerai and Lahore.



Figure 9. The game of Kubaddi

5. *Khara* (Cock fighting)

Cockfighting is more common in Swabi than in the other districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The participants, who are usually professionals, are well connected with each other. Competitions are conducted with great zeal and attention in Thursday bazaar of Swabi or in Saturday bazaar of Kernal Sher Kila. These single day bazaars are locally known as *meela*. Specially trained for fighting cocks are called *kulangi* (Figure 10). The preparations start several days before the event, after which the birds are brought to *meela*. In the course of the fight the beaten cock may lose its eye, leg or even its life.



Figure 10. Cock Fighting

Another type of cockfighting is quail fighting (Figure 11). It is usually held in Lahore tehsil, where a large number of professionals train the quails for such fights. The duration of quail fighting is very short.



Figure 11. Quail Fighting

6. *Khara* (Dog fighting)

Khara or dog fighting is another sport of Swabi (Figure 12). It is a blood sport which can be traced back to ancient times. As compared to Kohat and Bannu districts, dog fighting, locally known as *khara*, is held in Swabi on a smaller scale. Usually, though not too frequently, dog fighting is arranged in Lahore and Radzar tehsils of Swabi.



Figure 12. Dog Fighting

7. *Bilori* (Marbles)

Marbles game is known in Swabi as *bilori*. It is difficult to say when and where the game of marbles was introduced. Unearthing of clay marbles or sling balls of the same size from various Buddhist sites suggests that probably the game of marbles was known here since ancient times.

Two types of this game are played.

First game is played by people of all ages (Figure 13). There is no limit on how many players can participate. A hole in the ground of about two inches deep and about six to twelve inches in diameter is dug. It is considered to be the target point of the game. All the players give their marbles (usually made of glass, stone or clay) to one player who throws them out of the hole several meters away. The leading player starts the game by pointing at and targeting the other marbles, and after they have been knocked out, they are thrown to the hole and the player gets the marbles or already declared amount from those who lost.



Figure 13. Marbles

The second game is known as *mirgati* and is usually played by children (Figure 14). Two to four players take part and use four small marbles, usually made of stone. Every player must complete several steps of the game and if a mistake is made, he or she loses the number. Steps of this game are called yaka, doka, tikka and bisharat. When a player passes all the steps, he or she is considered the winner.



Figure 14.

8. *Guli Danda* (Kit-cat)

This is a traditional game played by the children not only in Swabi, but also in district Mansehra (Iqbal J 2002: 339) and in nearly all parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Kit-cat is locally known as *guli danda*. In this game a batter hits a guli (small piece of stick) placed over a shallow oblong pit with a danda (about one meter long stick) (Figure 15). A fielder throws back the small piece to the pit and tries to hit the long stick.



Figure 15. *Guli Danda*

9. *Chinjo* game (Hopscotch)

Chinjo is also known as *chindo* or *chindhro*. It is a simple and entertaining traditional game played by children in Swabi. More than two players can take part.

A simple rectangle about 2x4m in size is marked on the ground. Then it is further divided into five smaller rectangles. This game is played with a marker, usually a roundish clay piece. The marker is tossed into the first rectangle and then by hopping and kicking it, it is moved to another rectangle while avoiding the line between them. The second leg must be bent to back side and held by one hand. The marker is kicked from one rectangle to

another till it is kicked out of the main rectangle (Figure 16). Players who lost take the winner on their shoulders and carry her to the agreed spot.



Figure 16. Chinjo

Other traditional games well known in Swabi are *shalgati*, *kottanai*, *patpatonai*, and *banrichagh*. These are simple games, but they are played by children with great passion and amusement.

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