



ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY ON THE SPORT OF ZURKHANA IN ILAM PROVINCE (IRAN) ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY ON THE SPORT OF ZURKHANA IN ILAM PROVINCE (IRAN)

Omid Mohammad Zadeh¹ Hemmatullah Bastami² Homayun Bastami³
Ahmad Bazayr⁴ Jalal Jafarpour⁵

¹Faculty Member, PayamNour University.

²Faculty Member, PayamNour University, Corresponding Author

³MA Sociology

⁴Faculty Member, PayamNour University.

⁵PhD Anthropology

⁶ It literally means ‘the house of strength’ and is the name for old gymnasiums where the sport of bastani was practiced.

⁷ Bastani is a Persian term that means ‘ancient’

Abstract :- *Zurkhana*⁶ was reorganized approximately 700 years ago by Puryaye Vali in the form we see nowadays; but what made its sport develop, become sustainable, and turn into a constitution, is the deep influence that Islamic culture, especially Shiite culture, has had on it; so much so that after centuries, the greatest characteristics of this sport are still those very values which are in accordance with ethics of freedom, theosophy, sacrifice, forgiveness and chivalry that rise from the precious teachings of the great religion of Islam, the rich Shiite culture and the school of the leader of believers, Ali (PBUH). Methodology in this research is qualitative and anthropological i.e. through entering the research field; and for recording and conserving the data of the study, we applied interview, observation and photography. The present study was carried out with the objective of identifying the customs and traditions related to *zurkhana*, identifying the utilized equipments and tools in *zurkhanas*, and identifying the influence of customs and rituals of *bastani* a sport on the moralities of the athletes. Results of the study show that anthropology of sports not only helps understand and identify sports in the pre-historical eras and in the contemporary world, but it also includes identifying the social and cultural dynamism of sports and the way of utilizing this identification in solving real problems as well. There are cultural and even social origins and outstanding symbols in the society and even in other countries which are rooted in the ancient culture of this sport from different aspects. Tools such as *kabbade* which is named *kaman* in the Iranian culture have been some of the early tools human beings used for defending themselves and to make their livings. These symbols and their customs and traditions show that this sport has been part of daily or social affairs of the society during the recent centuries. Since the beginning of history so far, all social behaviors of human beings have had disciplines and traditions which were based on cultural, religious, social and even economic roots. As the name suggests, because this ancient sport (*bastani*⁷) originates from the culture of the Iranian nation, it has its own specific customs and traditions which are mainly educative, instructive and religious.

Key Words:- Anthropological, Sports, *Zurkhana*, *Ilam*.

INTRODUCTION

Zurkhana is a specific place for doing sport exercises where tools and equipments similar to war equipments are utilized. But in the present definitions, *zurkhana* is a specific place for sports and *bastani wrestling*,

which because of the holiness originated from the old customs and traditions, is known as the place of cognition where the athlete attains virtuous manners, good behaviors and chivalry. *Bastani* is the most well-known sport in the country which has a specific popularity in most cities, districts and some of the regions. It has been a popular sport from long ago. *Bastani* has a deep background in our country. Its origin goes back to the pre-Islamic eras, and because of convergence and correspondence with the elevated Islamic teachings and criteria, and because of accordance with religious instructions as well as religious leaders, it gradually gained more popularity and validity. This sport has survived the ages because of deep attention to religious tendencies and interests in it.

Although we do not have identified records about its pre-Islamic background, there are several evidences and proofs which can approve existence of this background, as mentioned below: similarity of athletic tools and equipments like *Meeland Kabbadehto* club and bow, and *Zarbthat* could symbolize drum which was applied by Iranians in wars. On the other hand, Persian terminology of the exercises, athletic tools, even the word *zurkhana* (gymnasium or the house of strength), the word *kabbadeh* which was a Sereh Persian word meaning 'soft and hard bow' used for practicing how to stretch a bow, or part of the war terminology in wrestling as wrestling itself was one of the techniques of war in ancient Iran, all are proofs to this fact.

With the popularity of Islamic theosophy after introduction of Islam to Iran, the sport of *zurkhana* was integrated with Sufism. It is wrong to believe that customs and traditions of Sufism entered *zurkhanas* in the Safavid period, because part of them existed in the *zurkhana* sports prior to Safavid period. Some of these customs are "chivalry", the name "*morshed*", the title "*Sardam*" and some of the behaviors like skills, tolerance, *rokh sat* (asking permission), and more importantly, some of the elders and theosophists of Sufism like Mahmood Puryaye Vali and other pioneers and famous figures of *bastani* existed before Safavid period.

The apparent thing is that with the decision of Shiites in Iran, the Shiite Sufis regard the leader of the pious, leader of believers, Ali, as the pioneer of the chivalrous in the world, and since then, sports in *zurkhanas* start with the blessed name of his holiness and end with that very name (*Malek Muhammadi*, 1985, 15).

Zurkhana was reorganized almost 700 years ago by Puryaye Vali in the present form, and beyond doubt, what existed before that, could have an old history. What made this sport change, become sustainable and turn into a tradition, is the deep influence that Islamic culture, and especially Shiite culture had on it, so much that the greatest features of this sport are the very values of liberty, theosophy, sacrifice, forgiveness and chivalry originated from the precious civilization and elevated teachings of Islam, from the rich Shiite culture, and from the school of the leader of believers, Ali (PBUH), the pioneer of all Sufis and lovers (Golanbari, 2010: 12).

Herodotus writes: "the first things Iranians taught to their children were truthfulness, archery, horse riding and swimming. Iranians in the ancient times always regarded heroism equal to the specific sport of wrestling, because heroes were great wrestlers who had developed moral virtues and sensual values within themselves and were well-structured wrestlers who reached heroism through completion of their moralities. In addition to athletic bodies, they revealed their virtues, and their moral virtues, and elevated behaviors triumphed over their physical strength. A lot of them own moral values and despite lacking very much physical strength, were still called heroes or regarded as owning heroic values; because people obviously saw moral virtues in them (Husseini, 2007: 6).

The studies show that lots of heroic customs and traditions in *zurkhanas* are related to the religion of *Mehr-worshipping*. This religion, which belongs to the Ashkanian era, is one of the old Indo-Iranian religions that has found its way through Iran to Europe as well. *Zurkhanas* are very similar to Mehr temples which were located underground and had stairs and short doors which let little light inside. There are bells found in the Mehri temples, which are believed to be brought out in the praying rituals, like the bells of *zurkhanas*. The similarity of *gawd* (pit) and the platform around it for spectators to sit, with the structure of Mehri temples is very much (Bahar, 1998: 49).

It is said that because strength, heroic activities and becoming a hero brought selfishness and pride, and this was against the ethics of Sufis and the people of *khanghah* who are very honest and down-to-earth kind of people, they built short doors and maintained them as a necessary means to destroy fame and selfishness of heroes; because everyone who came to *zurkhana* had to bend and pass through that door (Tehranchi, qt. from Beizae, 1985: 78).

The structure of *zurkhana*: the structure of traditional *zurkhanas* is mostly hexagonal or octagonal, every dimension of which has a room. These rooms were used either for spectators or athletic activities like *sang giri* (stone taking), *mosht mali* (massaging) and *lebaskani* (taking off clothes), etc. The ceiling of *zurkhana* is oval and directly below it, there is the *gawd*. *Gawd* is a circular pit or a pit with some dimensions of approximately 80 cm depth. Its diameter depends on the area of *zurkhana* and is variable between 6 and 10 meters. It is not exactly known when *gawd* became popular in *zurkhanas*, but what is clear is that in the past, for wrestling, they dug the ground in circular form, sieved the soil and softened it carefully which was known as wrestling soil. Later, this pit became *gawd*. On the other side, until hundred years ago when wrestling was not still popular, they used to wrestle in *zurkhanas*. Because of this, they spread hay on the floor before preparing it and covered it with soft soil or clay mud so that it would be soft for stepping on and wrestling; but nowadays, this is no longer practiced, and they cover the floor with ordinary floor covers of buildings (ibid, 80).

Heroism in the West of Iran

Because of the geographical conditions in the west of Iran, and existence of simple and primary conditions without presence of technology, the people of this area had huge bodies with tough and powerful muscles and extraordinary strength. For instance, to prepare the land for farming, they used ploughs in those days. They harvested their crops with sharp and piercing sickles, which needed a lot of physical power and strength. The mills also were either windmills or watermills. The miller fed the mill with his hands. If the bulky, long and heavy mill timber had come off, there was no device to fix it again and the miller had to fix it back alone. This required extraordinary physical strength. That is why people of the west were big and strong. Also regarding the specific historical conditions, this region was invaded many times by the outsiders. People had to defend their lands, their dignity and properties; hence, they had to fight. In fact, the whole lives of people were body building exercises and strengthening. They neither knew technology, nor modern methods of sports; but their only resort was their bodies (Kazerouni, 1995: 22).

The name *zurkhanahas* experienced a lot of changes in the history. It has been known as the house, anchorage, worshipping house and the house of sports. *Bastani* and heroic wrestling have been popular in Ilam from long ago. It is one of the early forms of sports that informally attracted lots of people. According to historical records and regarding the opinions of veterans, this sport has been popular in the center of Ilam in the past hundred years in the Qajari period; and there were wrestlers in this region that participated in these heroic wrestling events of the capital and won some events. One of these heroes is late Ghorbani. The first *zurkhana* in Ilam was in the old building of the governor's center. In 1949, a sports-loving person called "lieutenant Tabalian" took permission from the governor of that time to use that place. The fans of this sport do *bastani* in this place for one year, and by transference of Mr. *Tabalian*, activities of this *zurkhana* were stopped. In 1951, with the requests of some other *bastani* athletes, this sport was reorganized by the efforts of "Morshed Javad Brojerdi". This time, one of the present veterans, namely Ali Hussein Khosravi Pour, took the responsibility. He continued to train the youth until 1955 (Choolaki, 2008, 22).

The Popular Terminology in Zurkhana Sport

Veteran Cavalier (Morshed):

Morshed means guide. It is a subjective adjective from *irshad* which means guidance. *Morsheds* were called "veteran cavaliers" until the early years of *Qajari* dynasty. Their responsibility was to train the athletes. Nowadays they are called coaches.

Veteran:

The term *pishkesvat* literally means 'clothes', and in theosophical terminology, it means the 'clothes of poverty'. Because most of the customs, traditions and terms of *zurkhana* are originated from heroism, this was the popular title in *zurkhanas*. But out of *zurkhana*, it refers to a person who has experience and priority in something.

Pioneer:

(*pishghadam*) this is a synonym to veteran and is one of the terms in heroism which is *kabeer*, *sheikh*, *maghdom*, *ghaed*, and *ras-ul-harb* in Arabic, but Persian speakers define it as pioneer.

Crown of Poverty:

(*tajefaghr*) was a hat that wrestlers gained permission from their elders and masters to wear when they reached the rank of heroism.

Pupil:

(*nocheh*) referred to young wrestlers who were under training in *zurkhana*. They are pupils of heroes.

Crowned Hero:

(*pahlavan sahib taj*) refers to wrestlers who, after succeeding to the position of a hero, are allowed by the elders and veterans to wear the crown of poverty, the Turkish *pishwarifelt* hat.

Man of Straw:

(*pahlavan panbe*) is an ironic term given to physically large but unskilled athletes.

Well-done to the Alive Hero:

(*pahlavane zendehraeshghast*) this slogan, which was created specifically for heroes in *zurkhana* and now is popular

in the public, refers to the fact which is unfortunately common in our country and perhaps in other places where people think like us, that an artist or a scientist is ignored when he/she is alive, and is respected and complimented in different ways after his/her death.

Tonkeh:

are the specific pants of zurkhanasport and wrestling in the holy gawd.

House of Sports:

zurkhana, varzeshkhana, the holy *gawd* (GolAnbari, 2010: 81).

Pit:

(*gawd*) is the place for doing athletic activities which is based lower than the floor of zurkhana saloon. It is designed in octagonal shape with approximately 70 cm depth.

Sardam:

is the place of *morshed* in zurkhana. It is an elevated platform near the entrance of zurkhana which is similar to the pulpit in mosques.

Bell:

(*zang*) is a bell that *morshed* rings to allow entrance and exit of athletes and authorities, and to announce beginning and ending of athletic exercises.

Bastani exercises:

are series of specific exercises done traditionally in zurkhana; the objective of doing these exercises is to warm up and the strengthen flexibility in order to avoid sport injuries.

Stone taking:

(*sang gereftan*) *sang* is a wide heavy wooden plate like shields in wars. It is in square or rectangular form with different weights and dimensions and an arch at the top. It has a handle in the middle.

Stepping:

(*Paizadan*) is doing rhythmic movements of legs and arms along with skipping and brief and rapid turning around. It is practiced in different styles.

Push-up:

is an exercise in which the athletes press their bodies up and down when they are lying their face downwards. This movement is usually done on the push-up board. Push-up board is a wooden device that is 75 cm long and has two short legs.

Meel taking:

meel is a cone-shaped piece of wood in different weights. Every athlete takes a pair of *meels* according to his own strength. He initially puts them on his shoulders; and then, moves them harmoniously along with other people with the rhythm of *zarb* (beats) and with the poems read by *morshed*.

Rotation:

is one of the individual arts and one of the most attractive athletic exercises in zurkhana in which the athletes rotate their bodies in harmonious and rhythmic styles.

Kabbadeh:

is a bow of iron in different weights. Its cord has iron loops and scales.

Praying:

is one of the main activities in *bastani*. It is practiced at the end to give thanks to and acknowledge the athletic servants (Husseini, 2008: 13).

Long:

is a piece of cotton cloth that is approximately two meters long or more. It is used for drying the body, used as a towel and a shoulder cloth, etc.

Nat'ee: (leather *tonkeh*) is a piece of leather tied as an apron on the wrestling pants.

Double push-up: while doing push-up, the legs are paired and brought together.

Stretched push-up: is doing push-up by taking head and shoulder ahead of the board.

Turning push-up: is another form of push-up with the legs paired in which the body is turned right and left.

Training stick: is a long stick usually made of cane. The veteran cavalier carries it for warning and guiding athletes (Naderpur, ? : 29).

The Function of Bastani

The athletic tools and devices that are popular and common nowadays are *long, push-up board, meel, kabbadeh* and some other devices as well which had been popular until almost forty years ago such as *takhteshilang* that is specified for a movement called *shilang*. The athletic exercises popular nowadays are *stone taking, push-up, meel taking, meel-playing, wheel striking, paizadan, kabbadeh striking, wrestling and mosht mali* (massaging).

Now, we define each one of these tools and equipments and explain the athletic exercises respectively; we will mention *shilangzadan* which has been abandoned as well as other activities called *shirinkari* at the end of this article.

• **Stone:** the tool nowadays known as *sang* in *zurkhana* is a bulky piece of wooden board shaped as old shoe heels which is square at the top and curved at the bottom, and in the middle of each board there is a hole and a handle. This equipment was called *horseshoe, horseshoe stone* and *power stone* in the past. Nowadays, in the *AranKashan* region which is one of the oldest areas in this region, it is called *horseshoe stone*.

• **Push-up:** push-up in *zurkhana* has for styles: *korsipush-up, arms and legs acrossed push-up, do shallaghe push-up, and turning push-up*.

Push-up does not have a limit and depends on the physical strength of the athlete; but as long as *meidandar* (the middle one) keeps doing it, others follow him, and if some of them get tired, for each two or three push-ups of the *meidandar*, they repeat only once.

• **Meel taking:** as it is popular, *meel* of *zurkhana* is like a club used in wars in the past. *Meels* gradually changed from iron *meelsto woodmeels*. They lost the shape of club and became what they are nowadays. The purpose of *meel* taking was to get the hands adjusted to club. *Zurkhana meels* are in two forms now; one is made of heavy wood for doing the sport, and the other one is made of light white wood in smaller sizes for playing and *shirinkari*. Handles of these *meels* are longer so that playing, rotating, throwing, taking and letting them go could be easier. *Meel* taking is done to strengthen muscles and shoulders. No counting is common for *meel* taking, *morshed* of *zurkhana* lets the athletes keep doing it with the beats of *zarb* and reading poems, and as soon as *meidandar* brought *meel* off his shoulders, others also follow him and bring *meels* off.

• **Meel playing:** refers to games played with *meels* which do not have any specific rules and every athlete demonstrates different games according to his taste.

• **Gurega:** this word which is pronounced like *fesordeh* has become popular in recent years specifically in Tehran instead of *meel* of *zurkhana*, whereas, *guergataking* is a type of *meel* taking when the athlete speeds up his performance to the maximum level and in technical terminology 'takes *sarmoch*'. *Morshed* plays special rhythm on this occasion. This rhythm is called *guerga* from old times. The word *guerg* or *guerga* is a Mongolian term that refers to a type of drum or kettledrum which was beaten in wars with a specific rhythm.

• **Charkhzadan:** (rotation) this sport which is one of the beautiful and difficult movements of *bastani* is common only in Iran. It is a difficult movement which is performed in different styles that have no specific names. In every region, they are given some names in the local dialects. The only style that has a recognized name is *charkhjangali* in which the athletes jump while they are turning around.

• **Paizadan:** (stepping) after turning around, it is time to *paizadan*. In this time, *meidandar* comes to the middle of *gawd*, and others in order of their standpoint in *gawd*, circle around him and make *jorgeh*. *Morshed* beats a special rhythm for any type of *meidandar*'s *paizadan*. Others coordinate their movements with those of *meidandar*. *Paizadan* has four stages:

1. Left and right leg or the first leg.

2. *Paijangali*

3. First and second *PaiTabrizi*

4. Left and right leg or last leg

• **Kabbadeh:** as recorded in Persian dictionaries, means soft and loose bow that is specified for practicing how to

stretch a bow. Also the word *lizom* (like *hizom*) is recorded with the same meaning. It is believed that primary *kabbadehs* were not like modern *kabbadehs*, because nowadays *kabbadehs* are made of pure iron and also their structures do not have bouncy form so that they could be stretched.

• Old bows in wars were made of bones. They were covered with a special animal ghee so that they get bouncy; this ghee is still called 'bow ghee'. Eventually, it was used for other purposes. Perhaps, old *kabbadehs* were also like them which were later changed into iron.

• *Kabbadeh* striking is in this way that the athlete takes the *kabbadeh* in his left hand and its chain in his right hand, takes it above his head, and moves it to two sides in a way that his arms from elbows to wrists are positioned horizontal above his head.

• *Shilang-takhtehshilang*: this sport is an exercise and introduction to the technique of running (*shateri*). For so many years, this sport has been left aside; but it was practiced in Tehran approximately 40 years ago. There were wooden boards with approximately one and a half or two meters length and 30 cm width which were called *takhtehshilang* in every *zurkhana*. Practically, one side of this board was placed on the floor of *gawd* and the other side on the edge of *gawd* obliquely. Athletes used to put their legs on these boards one by one, first their left legs and then their right legs respectively, and tried to put their feet as high as possible. This was one of the difficult movements in old *zurkhanas*. According to the wrestler Mr. 'BahmanNia' who is one of the masters and pioneers of this sport in Tehran who has done this sport in his youth, even strong athletes were unable to do this more than forty or fifty times (PatovBeizae, 1958: 46).

Customs and Traditions of Zurkhana

It is expected that the behaviors of *bastani* doers in *zurkhana* be according to the principles based on forgiveness, modesty, piety, justice, sincerity and courtesy, as it is popularly said: "*zurkhana* is the place of the pure, the righteous and the chivalrous.

In this way, *bastani*, unlike other sports, has customs and traditions which every athlete has to respect since he steps inside till he leaves (Ensafpur, 2007: 55).

What the writer has seen or heard about the customs and traditions of *zurkhana* areas follows:

1. Doing sports from dawn until a little after sunrise is one of the old traditions of *zurkhana*. Background of this tradition, which was popular until appearance of *pahlavan* Akbar Khurasani in the time of Nasser-ed-Din Shah Qajar, is rooted in the ancient period.

2. Everyone who enters *zurkhana* has to bend down his head and express humbleness.

3. If the enterers are more than one, they should let each other enter first.

4. *Mosrhedhas* to do the followings for everyone who enters or exits *zurkhana* according to their athletic background:

- ❖ If the person is a newcomer or non-athlete, he just says "welcome".
- ❖ If he is an experienced athlete, after saying "welcome", he asks the insiders to send *salawat* for him.
- ❖ If the enterer is a veteran, he says "blessed is your step" and after asking the insiders to send *salawat*, beats the drum twice and rings the bell once.
- ❖ If it is a hero, in addition to the things for the veteran, he rings the bell for him.

5. After entering, the greatest person sits at the highest place of *gawd*. In the past, this highest place was near *sardam*, next to the veteran or *moshed*; nowadays, it is opposite the entrance, facing *sardam*.

6. *Moshtmalchi* (massager) or the servant of *zurkhana* has to go to the athletes immediately after they come and sit and put a multifold long next to them as a sign for taking off clothes (and wearing sports clothes).

7. The athlete gets up and takes permission from the present elder for getting dressed. If he is a fresher or even a non-claimant pioneer, he has to pull up long from between his legs in the front and fix it under his belt. If he is a hero and claimant veteran, he does not pull up long and let it loose and stay hanging.

8. When the person enters *gawd*, he should bend down, touch the ground with the finger of his right hand, put the finger on his lips and kiss it, as a sign of respect to *zurkhana* and courtesy to its elders. In the past, some people kneeled and kissed the floor of *zurkhana* in full succumb.

9. While doing sports, there has to be one person in the middle of *gawdas meidandar* who leads the others according to the rhythmic beats of *moshed* so that everyone coordinates his movements with him; and those who are new, imitate his movements and learn. *Meidandar* should be one of the most experienced athletes.

10. Every part of *gawdis* for a specific position and everyone should stand in his own position. *Meidandar* stands in the middle facing *moshed*. The second position *aftermeidandaris* in front of him under *sardam*. In this place, initially, the elders (*sadat*) stand in order according to their experiences, from the most experienced to the least experienced ones "al-ahomfil-ahom", one after another.

11. Doing sports in the *gawd* with ordinary clothes was considered vulgar and is forbidden according to the customs of chivalry. The athlete should be wearing wrestling pants and tie a *long* at the top.

12. It is also forbidden for the youngsters who haven't grown beard to do sports. In the past, they used to say that the

person should have enough beard so the comb get stuck in it.

13. It is customary that athletes kiss the push-up board and the handle of *kabbadehchain* before using them.

14. *Meidandar* has to take permission from the eldest present person, from *morshed* or from the spectators before he comes to the middle of *gawd*. Then, he should invite -as a sign of respect- each and every one of the experienced athletes to be *meidandar*.

15. Joking, vituperation, pranks, laughing loudly, backbiting, drunkenness and smoking are forbidden in *zurkhana*.

16. Taking push-up board and *meel* and putting them back after doing sports should be started by the oldest ones and end to the youngest ones, but using *kabbadeh* like wheel, is an exception and should start from the youngest and end to the oldest (Ensafpur, 2007: 176).

In doing *Bastanior zurkhanasports*, like the customs of holy places, people should enter with *wudhu* and without shoes on. This cleanliness and keeping *wudhu* is one of the axial principles to enter *gawd* and all veterans, heroes, athletes and pioneers are well-aware of it and respect it all the time. Different people work inside *zurkhana*. Among these people, we can mention the group of veterans which includes individuals who have made a lot of efforts for *bastanisport* and have given the society valuable services. These veterans are respected a lot and have high positions in *zurkhanas*, and the priority of people to enter *gawd* is according to their heroic positions respectively, regarding their backgrounds (ibid: 178).

Principles of Entrance to and Exit from *Zurkhana*

The athlete can enter *gawd* of *zurkhana* by saluting the present people and *morshed*, kneeling on the right leg (soil kissing) and taking permission from *morshed*. *Morshed* says in reply: “*rokhsat* (permission granted) ya Ali (PBUH)”. While entering and leaving *zurkhana*, priority of *adat* and those who have the highest ranks down to those with lowest ranks is one of the substantial and important points which has to be considered. While entering and leaving in groups, respect to guests and those who are heroes and champions is very important; and the entrance is managed to be short so that people bend down and enter so that it brings modesty in them. In the ancient times, because people were not familiar with the culture of bow and respect, and also because some people were not ready to bow before kings and sultans, the entrances of palaces were built with a little height. One of the points that drew attention of people in *zurkhanas* was the poems and recordings which teach people lessons of moralities and modesty. Examples of them in *zurkhana* of Puriaye Vali in the city of Ilam are as follows:

1. Salam

2. Kneeling should not be complete (half kneel)

3. *Rokhsat* (permission) from *morshed* and he says *rokhsatya Ali* (PBUH), standing before *morshed*, taking *rokhsat* and entering *gawd*

4. Entering *gawd* with right leg, kneeling on the right leg, touching the floor with the right hand and placing the right hand on the left hand (while kneeling)

5. Exiting *gawd* by taking *rokhsat* from *morshed*, with half-kneeling, with the left leg, movements of athletes from right side

Among the people with equal experiences, respect is based on age and traditional customs, or on customs and traditions of *bastanisport*, or those of *zurkhana*.

Saloon of Exercises in *Zurkhana* of Puriaye Vali in the City of Ilam

It is a saloon with the dimensions of 15×20 meters designed for the following exercises:

-*Meel* playing in circular lines which is usually common in the matches. The first circle is 2 meters and the second circle is 1 meter.

-*Sang* (stone): in the competitions is on the basis of age and weight as mentioned below:

Morshed counts stone taking of athletes to 117 or 114; these numbers have been holy numbers for *bastani* doers. 117 refers to a hundred and seventeen follower of *Maula* and 114 refers to a hundred and fourteen Suras of the Quran.

Kabbadeh: means soft bow which was for practicing how to stretch a bow. In the past, rotation started by the *adat* and elders, but now it is popular that youngsters start it. *Kabbadeh* is played in two ways, in front and above head; the latter one is popular nowadays. This movement is also according to age and weight of doers.

-Wrestling: wrestling is also performed according to the age and weight.

-Push-up board and its symbol: push-up board is the symbol of “sword” in the past and the push-up programs are as follows:

1. *Sarnavazior chaharzarbeh* (four beats)

2. *Taksheno*

3. *Shallaghi* (*tanehkar*)

4. *Shenopich*

Another form of push-up was popular in the past which is called push-up of prayers but is no longer practiced. The person read the following prayers and did push-up: “*La ilahaila Hu Hua Hu la ilahaila Hu*” while the top of the person doing push-up turns.

Exercises: specific exercises of *zurkhana* are very sensitive.

Movements of legs that include:

a. Two feet: the athletes stand on the toes of their two feet and step their feet on left and right frequently.

b. Tabrizi movements: first, the right leg comes on the left leg with the toes downwards in a way that the weight of body is on the toes, and then the left leg is put vice versa.

c. Jangali movements: are the same as Tabrizi movements. The athlete stands on his toes and, with the rhythm of *morshed's* beats, once puts the weight of body on the left leg and throws the right leg forward, and the second time, stands on the right toes and throws left leg forward.

d.

The Importance of Cleanliness, Wudhu, Saying Prayers and Hierarchy of Athletes When They Are in Zurkhana

After washing themselves, making *wudhu* and saying prayers, the athletes can enter *zurkhana*. Each athlete can enter the *gawd* by asking *rokhsat* from *morshed* and all veterans, respectively veteran cavalier (veteran here means old and experienced athlete), pioneers, hero, national champion, provincial champion, then those with ten years of experience and then those with five years experience can enter the *gawd*. Now that they have entered the *gawd*, they start running *gabargaei* (slow running) in the *gawd* in the previously mentioned order; and, they take push-up boards in the same order. At this time, *morshed* starts reading poems about *maula* Ali (PBUH), the family of the prophet, heroes and famous characters of the past. Now with the *rokhsator* permission of *morshed* that of veteran cavalier, *meidandar* selects *takhtehshenoor* push-up board and by doing ta'arof to others and taking *rokhsat* from the present people or from veterans, starts push-up or sheno. Before starting, *morshed* does *sarnavazi* and sends salavat, then, the 'four-beat' or 'lash' push-up starts which includes at least 50 to 100 push-ups. Again *morshed* starts the beats for single push-ups (does it a few times) by pointing and saying “Allah is one”; at this moment, *morshed* reads single-line poems and starts by saying “Allah is not two” and double push-ups (*doshenaee*) start, then “cause of all causes” (triple, *se shenaee*), etc. and it goes on. After *shirinkari*, lash push-up starts (fast and rapid push-up), after lash push-up, with the pointing of *meidandar*, push-up ends and it is time for specific warm-up exercises of *zurkhana*. Some of these exercises are *parvaneh*, sitting down and getting up, movements of neck and *pichakhar* push-up.

After *meidandar*, *sadat* and veterans put aside push-up boards, operations of push-up ends and the next exercise is *meel* taking. At this time, if they formally follow the traditions, first *meelbaz* starts playing with *meels*. He starts showing *meelbazi* by throwing two, three, four and five *meels* in the air. Then the big heavy *meelis* taken by selection of *morshed* and one of the athletes starts doing single movements, after that, he starts doing fast *sardast* movements (fast and frequently). After this stage, *morshed* selects heroes and adroit individuals who have athletic bodies, and they start doing leg movements. The most popular leg movement in the country is *pai Tabrizi* which is famous and after that, *pai jangali* or *kermanshahi* are performed. It is possible that *meidandar* selects another form like *pai Yazdi* or *Mshhadi*. It is usually the tradition that in Mashhad, *pai Mashhadi* is used; and at the end, *paikhari*. e. the same rapid *paiis* practiced which is for catching one's breath. After that, no one has the right to turn around.

Importance of Prayers at the End of Sports in Zurkhana

After the sports end, prayers which have the utmost importance are performed. At this moment, no athlete has the right to exit *gawd*. *Miandar* of *pa* performs some samples of prayers; he may pass this to *morshed*, veteran cavalier or a pioneer. The special long of prayers is placed on the shoulder of the person saying the prayers. Praying person takes *rokhsat* from the others and reads prayers from up downwards by asking blessing for the first and the last of heroes. The athletes and the present people also pray by saying 'amen' and giving kiss to the floor of *gawd*.

Conclusion

Anthropology of sports, not only deals with understanding and identifying pre-historical and contemporary

sports, but also includes social and cultural dynamics of sports and the way they are applied to solve the real problems. From this perspective, one of the important components of anthropology of sports is its applied component. It is assumed that anthropology of sports can help anthropology be influential in solving real problems of human beings. According to Shultz and Lavand (1910-1990), applied anthropology is a branch that, by applying the achieved information of other subdivisions, tries to solve intercultural practical problems (Blanchard, 2009: 383).

It can be stated about anthropology and its real concept that anthropology is looking for and requiring the real cultures of societies, and is not a factor to change them. In fact, this field is a cultural and researching field in the reality of the cultures of nations in present and ancient societies, so that in this way, it can fulfill the needs and desires of societies by finding the cultural and social origins in the far and near past. About anthropological analysis of *bastani* sport and other ancient sports, it can be said that anthropology of sports helps shed light on them and culturally organize them on the basis of ordered principles. It can have practical results and consequences at any time.

There are some cultural and even social roots, practical consequences and outstanding symbols in the society which have roots in the ancient culture of this sport in different aspects in the Iranian society and even in the nations beyond its borders. Tools like *kabbadeh* which is mentioned as “bow” in the Iranian culture have been some of the tools for human beings to defend themselves and earn their livings. These symbols and their customs and traditions show that during the last centuries, this sport has been part of the daily or social issues in the society. From the beginning of history until now, all social behaviors of human beings have had orders and customs that were based on cultural, religious, social and even economic foundations. Because the Old Iranian sport, as the name is suggestive (*bastani* sport) has roots in the culture of Iranian nation, it has specific customs and traditions of its own which are mainly educative and religiously instructive. In this sport, positions of all people in terms of social class, human understanding and human rights are the same; since the origin of *zurkhana* sport calls for changes in the attitudes and perspectives of people, it propagates modesty and chivalry among the societies, and individuals all are equal in the eyes of each other; but the more modesty and people-loving backgrounds they have, the more they are valued in terms of experience and veteran position. In other words, as dervishes and heroes, they are placed in higher social positions in the public point of view. This depends on their actions and behaviors and only on their actions and behaviors. Pattern and authenticity of this old sport points to customs and traditions of a nation who, before introduction of Islam to them, lived with the slogan of “good deeds, good words and good thoughts”; and after the entrance of Islam, this slogan turned into a fixed and permanent culture among the Iranians and perhaps in the world. This reveals that *zurkhana* sport is a way of preaching religious and ethical schools of Iranians as well as Islamic principles. Also, spread of this sport and its foundations mark a historical background which satisfies the fact that existence of this sport in other countries is originated from and addressed by *bastani* sport of Iran. This sport has a great position among the Iranians and the people of Ilam; so much so that people call the community of *bastani* athletes as “heroes”. This term has a historical, religious, social, fictional and mythical origin among the Iranian people. Hero has had a national and ethnic position among the contemporary Iranians and the Iranians of the past, and the importance and necessity of respect to this class of athletes is greatly valued and honored by a society which is reliant on its traditions as well as on its civilization.

References

1. Ensafpur, Gholam Reza (2007). *History and Culture of Zurkhana and the Zurkhana-going Social Groups*. First print. Tehran: Akhtaran Press.
2. Bahar, Mehrdad (2008). *From Myth to History*. First print. Tehran: Cheshmeh Press.
3. Partov Beizae, Hussein (1958). *History of Bastani Sport in Iran (Zurkhana)*. Press? Print?
4. Tehranchi, Muhammad Mahdi (1985). *A Survey on Zurkhana Sports*. First print. Tehran: Heidari.
5. Cholaki, Arsalan (2008). *History of Wrestling in Ilam Province*. First print. Ilam: Andishe Asr Press.
6. Hussein, Amir (2008). *Zurkhana Sport and Studying Its Role in the Social and Globalizing Parameters*. First print. Tehran: Bamdad Ketab Press.
7. Kazerouni, Jafar (1995). *Heroes- History of Heroism in Kermanshah in the Last Two Centuries*.
8. Gol Anbari, Siavash (2010). *The Institution of Heroism, the Secrets and Mysteries of Life*. First print. Tehran: Parnian Press.
9. Lanchard, Kendal (2008). *Anthropology of Sports*. Trans. Alireza Hassan Zadeh and Hamid Reza Ghorbani. First print. Tehran: The Institute of Cultural Heritage, Handicraft and Tourism.
10. Malek Mohammadi, Abdul-Hussein (1985). *Traditional and Ethnic Sports*. Tehran: The Iranian National Committee of Olympics. Erfan Press.
11. Naderpur, Ali (?). *Introduction to the World Oldest Sports Organization*. Tehran: The Physical Education Organization of Ministry of Culture and Education.