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**LEISURE ACTIVITIES OF CHILDREN :
A COMPARATIVE STUDY IN ANGANWADI
SCHOOLS OF DIBRUGARH, ASSAM**

I

Dibrugarh is an easternmost city situated in the banks of the river Brahmaputra. Dibrugarh District is located between 27°5'38" North to 27°42'30" North latitude and 94°33'46" East to 95°29'8" East longitude. It is surrounded on the South-East by Tirap District of Arunachal, on the north by Dhemaji District, on the east by Tinsukia District, and on the North and South West by the Sivasagar District. Dibrugarh District of Assam is divided into seven development blocks under DRDA (District Rural Development Agency) Viz. Barboruah, Khowang, Lahowal, Tingkhong, Joypur, Panitola and Tengakhat. It has ninety three (93) Gaon Panchayats (GPs), with Seven numbers of Anchalik Parishads and one number of Jila Parishad. It has 1392 numbers of villagers and 114 numbers of Tea gardens.

Dibrugarh has the highest number of tea gardens in Assam, giving it the status of 'Tea Capital of Assam.' Though tea is a big industry, the children of the tea garden community do not get adequate facility of good education, health and leisure facilities. There are Anganwadi Schools in the tea garden areas which look after the mental, physical and emotional development of children between the age of 0-6 years.

Anganwadi schools in Dibrugarh are under the District Social Welfare office, Dibrugarh which was established in 1964. Since then the department in the Dibrugarh district has been running lot of welfare schemes for the general public. The total population of the district is 12,76,094 (till May 2014) and the schemes presently running by the department is as follows: Mukhaya Mantrir Jibon Jyoti Bima Achoni (Chief Minister's Life Insurance Scheme), Health Care for aged person scheme, Rehabilitation Grants to physically handicapped person, Scholarship to the physically handicapped student, unemployment allowances to persons with disabilities, Allowances to family with disabled children, Unmarried and unemployed single women and widow, Financial incentive for girls belonging to BPL (Below Property Line) families,

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who marry after the age of 20 years, Mukhya Mantrir Mahila Samridhi Achoni (Chief Minister's Women Endowment Scheme), Identity card to physically challenged persons, District Child Protection Unit, Domestic Violence Act. 2005 and Integrated Child Development Service (ICDS) Scheme.

Anganwadi Centers (Schools) are the focal point in Integrated Child Development Service (ICDS) Scheme. There are total 2050 numbers of Anganwadi Centers (Schools) in Dibrugarh district. There are 8 (eight) ICDS projects in Dibrugarh District which are:

Khawang ICDS Project (341 numbers), Borbaruah ICDS Project (276 numbers), Lahowal ICDS Project (202 numbers), Panitola ICDS Project (238 numbers), Tengakhat ICDS Project (418 numbers), Tingkhong ICDS Project (202 numbers), Joypur ICDS Project (260 numbers) and Dibrugarh Urban ICDS Project (133 numbers).

The Scheme is mainly beneficial to the children below 6 (Six) years, Expectant and Nursing Mothers, mothers (15-45 years) and adolescent girls. The main packages of Service provided in the Anganwadi Schools are : Supplementary Nutrition, Health Check up, Referral Service, Health and Nutrition Education, Immunization and Non-formal pre-school education.

In 1976, Integrated Child Development Service (ICDS) scheme was set up in India. This programme integrated nutritional, health and educational Services to pre-school children, pregnant and lactating women and non formal education to all women in the age –group of 15-45 years. These services are delivered through Anganwadi Centres (AWCs), located in each village of 1000 populations by an Anganwadi worker (AWW) and an Anganwadi Helper (AWH).

After defining Anganwadi School and related terms, let us discuss the other key terms like Leisure, Tea Garden Community and Children.

Marshall (1994:288) writes “ Leisure generally involves withdrawal from routine activities such as work, and involvement instead in a pleasurable activity, highly valued by the individual. It may or may not be productive but it does not involve the social responsibilities attached to one's other social roles. Playing of games is an obvious example....”

Mishra (2005:1) mentioned that “Family life and childhood traditions are now threatened with destruction in an environment that is essentially hostile to child development. Crowded cities, suburbs, and schools; the lack of safe play spaces and fresh air; and TV addiction conspire to destroy the spirit of spontaneous play and the culture of Childhood.”

French psychiatrist, Eric Smadja says that laughter has its place in the natural history of facial mimicry, which first appeared in mammals. He

feels that infantile play and laughable events have three similar functions which are 1) Children use laughter to develop social behavior, 2) Infants use play to reproduce and master anxiety stimuli and 3) Kids laugh because it gives them pleasure.

Sadovnik and others (1987:492-493) opined that “.....Creative life, which is to say a vitally experienced and satisfying life, is not led easily or safely. It is demanding, challenging, stressful ... Leisure is sometimes conceptualized commonsensically as the antithesis of stress, as a respite from the burdens of demanding work, home life, and other responsibilities.

Here in this paper we will try to highlight the leisure activities, educational programmes, health and nutrition of the pre-school children of the age group 3 to 6 years enrolled in Anganwadi School in Dibrugarh. These children belong to different communities like from tea garden community whose parents were the workers in Tea Garden, Assamese community, Bengali Community, Tribal and Schedule Caste, Nepali, Bihari and other Hindi Speaking Community.

II

Children live in a somewhat narrow world of personal contacts. They know their own well-being, or that of their family and friends. Things hardly come within their experience unless they touch. Their world is a world of persons with their personal interests, rather than a realm of facts and laws. Affection and sympathy is their main aspect. In this backdrop we try to focus different activities undertaken in the Anganwadi Schools in Dibrugarh.

In this study we have chosen 15(fifty) numbers of Anganwadi Schools/ Centres purposively. Out of which, 5 (five) numbers from Dibrugarh Urban ICDS Project namely, Pathan Patty-I (in ward no. 4), Mizabag-I (in ward no. 8), Kalibari Road Area No.1 (in ward no.9), Lohar Patty (in ward no. 10) and Santipara no.1 (in ward no.12). Rest of the 10 (ten) Anganwadi Schools were chosen from Tea Garden and Village areas of Borbaruah ICDS Project.

Behating TE (Tea Estate), Jamira TE, Lepetkata TE, 1 No. Sessa TE and Ghurania TE were the Anganwadi Schools located in Tea Garden area whereas Chiring Gaon, Dainijan, Chengalijan, Japra Gaon and Laluka Gaon Anganwadi Schools are located in village areas nearby Dibrugarh Town.

Thus efforts were taken to represent Urban, village as well as Tea garden population in their different Anganwadi Schools. It helps us to draw a comparison between these different population. Altogether 15 (fifteen) numbers of Anganwadi workers, 15 (fifteen) numbers of Anganwadi helpers, 5 (five) numbers of supervisors, 2 (two) numbers of Child Development Project Officer (CDPO), 30 (thirty) numbers of parents, 1 (one) District Social Welfare Officer and 15 (fifteen) numbers of senior citizens of different localities were

interviewed . The total respondents of the study is 83 (eighty three) numbers.

In this paper we try to focus mainly on the children of age group 3 to 6 years who were enrolled in these chosen Anganwadi Schools. It is a fact that Anganwadi Schools also take care of the children of 0 to 3 age group by providing food (rice, dal and oil etc.) and their mothers as well as expectant mothers and adolescent girls. Anganwadi Schools with the Anganwadi worker and helper, Accredited Social Health Activities (ASHA) workers render health related service such as Immunization, Antenatal checkups (ANC) , Postnatal Checkups (PNC) etc., Escort /Accompany pregnant women and children requiring treatment/admission to the nearest pre-identified health facility, to provide primary medical care for minor ailments such s diarrhea, fever and first aid for minor injuries and disseminate information of healthy, lifestyle issues. But in this study we basically limit our aspect only on pre-school children of Anganwadi Schools.

The paper intends to deal with the following objectives:-

1. To study the pre-school educational activities imparted through Anganwadi Schools
2. To highlight leisure activities of Anganwadi School children.
3. To compare the leisure activities of children of Tea Garden Community and other groups in Anganwadi Schools.

III

In Pathan Patty-I School there are 18 numbers of Pre-School Children, Mizabag –I School there are 15 numbers of pre-school children, Kalibari Road Area No.-1 School there are 25 numbers of pre-school children, Lohar Patty-1 School there are 20 numbers of pre-school children, Santipara No.1 School there are 25 numbers of pre-school children, Beheating TE School there are 44 numbers of pre-school children, Jamira TE School there are 60 numbers of pre-school children, Lepetkata TE School there are 55 numbers of pre-school children, Sessa TE No-1 School there are 45 numbers of pre-school children, Ghurania TE school there are 48 numbers of pre-school children, Chiring Gaon School there are 25 numbers of pre-school children, Dainijan School there are 35 numbers of pre-school children, Chengalijan School there are 20 numbers of pre-school children, Japra Gaon school there are 18 numbers of pre-school children and in Laluka Gaon school there are 30 numbers of pre-school children.

It was found that in the five tea-estates where the Anganwadi Schools are operating, the number of enrollment of pre-school children are maximum ranging from 44 to 60 numbers. Whereas it is lowest in the Urban Anganwadi Schools ranging from 15 to 25 numbers. Again in Suburb/Rural area the enrollment of pre-school children in the Anganwadi Schools range from 18 to 35 numbers. 75 numbers (90.36%) of the respondents of the study opined that

the low enrollment in Urban and Rural/Suburban Anganwadi Schools area due to the availability of other pre-schools in the Urban area. People take the option of sending their children to other Urban pre-schools instead of sending to Anganwadi Schools only. 12 numbers (14.46%) of the respondents also opined that due to their affluent status some parents send their children to different pre-schools other than Anganwadi Schools. But in case of Tea Estates the parents who are basically Tea Garden labourers cannot afford to send them to other pre-schools which are at a distance and opt for the only option of Anganwadi Schools.

It has been observed that out of 133 numbers of Anganwadi Schools in Dibrugarh Urban area, 131 numbers of them are functioning from rented premises and only two of them are located in government L.P. (Lower Primary) Schools. The fixation of the rent amount has not been completed yet and the Anganwadi Schools in urban setting are facing problems due to this. Also in Urban setting there is lack of land for purchase and hence government cannot acquire land just like in rural/suburban and in Tea Estates where sufficient land is available with minimum price. In case of rural/suburb and Tea Estate, Anganwadi Schools are located at Government L.P. (Lower Primary) Schools. Thus children get ample space to play and learn and carry on different leisure activities.

While interviewing the parents in different Anganwadi Schools of Dibrugarh along with the Anganwadi Workers, helpers, supervisors etc., we found that in Tea Garden Anganwadi Schools most of the parents are labourers of Tea Gardens. In case of Urban Anganwadi Schools there is a mixed population of parents from different communities and economic backgrounds. Their occupations are Carpenter, Driver, Mason, Black-Smith, Petty businessmen and Governmental employees of lower and middle grade. Similarly in rural/suburb, parents of those pre-school children are mainly farmers and small businessmen and other semi-skill workers.

All the Anganwadi Workers, helpers, supervisors have informed us that early childhood learning experiences and opportunities to explore and learn enhances the development process of a child. They provide care in an integrated and holistic manner. Physical care of the children which include food, rest and exercise is provided in these schools along with education. The Anganwadi Education is a child centered program for children of 3 to 6 years where playway activity is adopted by using inexpensive toys, play equipments of indigenous origin. They encourage interaction with the environment and active participation in group activities.

The Anganwadi Schools open from morning 8 am till 12noon. The Anganwadi workers with the help of play, songs and dances try to give education to the children. Each school has two sections of pre primary children. The higher preprimary section and a lower section caters to two different age

groups. Every centre is run by an Anganwadi worker and a helper, and then there is a supervisor and Child Development Project Officer (CDPO) in Block, District Social Welfare Officer in District level and Director in the State level.

The Anganwadi Schools follow a thematic approach of education and systematically covers different themes. This method is very effective in exposing children to numerous areas/ subjects which satisfies children's eagerness and curiosity. There are various themes followed in the time span of a year. A sample theme based chart is given below in table 1.1.

65 numbers (78.31%) of the respondents pointed out that selection of a theme is done very carefully. Children's age, etc are considered while choosing a theme to deal with simple to complex and know to Unknown matters.

25 numbers (83.33%) of Anganwadi workers and helpers opined that the theme is used to develop a particular concept and then it is noted what the children are able to do or say by acquiring that knowledge. Table 1.2 reflects the theme, concept and development of idea in children by thematic approach.

The Anganwadi workers and helpers of the study highlighted that they follow non formal education without any proper curriculum and syllabus. The mood, and the interest of the children is the basis of education and no force is imposed on them. Although 45 numbers (54.21%) of the respondents opined that they follow a flexible time table including activities like receiving children and conducting prayers, checking personal cleanliness, physical exercise, conversation practices, activities for cognitive development (sorting/matching objects, counting and serializations etc), Break time, language development (Language Activities like picture reading and describing objects and naming and identification of pictures etc), Activities for finer muscle development, outdoor game, training for good toilet habits, making the children ready for supplementary nutrition and then distribution of food.

27 numbers (90%) of the Anganwadi workers and helpers of the study opined that they provide wooden building blocks of different sizes, books, country frames, paints, brushes and coloured chalk sticks, beating drum, indigenous play materials as per their cultural practice, puppets, dolls house, flash cards for storytelling, models of animals, fruits, vegetables etc. and different puzzles. They also provide blocks from card board, charts, stuffed dolls, different drums made out of waste tin boxes, rattles, from soda water lids etc., colour, number and alphabets matching cards from card board. Apart from that they use natural objects from nature like leaves from plants, fruits, flowers, stones etc for educational; and play purpose.

In case of outdoor equipments they use simple swings made from locally available ropes, cycle types etc, sand kits to play in sand, rings and throw balls with net, skipping ropes etc.

The children in Anganwadi Schools are engaged in group activities

for cultivating social skills and sharing habits. It was observed that the participatory behaviour help in developing better communication, good vocabulary and getting rid of hesitation.

72 numbers (86.74%) of the respondent of the study informed that during the Anganwadi School hours (4 hours) the children pass their time with several activities like storytelling, counting, free conversation, singing, dancing, playing music with drums, and indoor and outdoor games specified above.

25 numbers (30.12%) of the respondents opined that in urban Anganwadi Schools, due to congested space children cannot play outdoor games. Even in some urban Anganwadi Schools toilets & kitchens are not adequate. Most of the urban Anganwadi Schools are running from rented single room accommodation which do not have the infrastructure to carry the activities properly. Lack of space for keeping books, play material etc. is also observed. Only some of the affluent parents who have lot of leisure time afford to take their children to different parks and other amusement places for their recreation. But the majority of the children were deprived of outdoor play and other recreational activities and mainly devote time in watching television and in their studies and other household affairs.

On the other hand in case of rural/suburb and Tea garden Anganwadi Schools which are located in government L.P. School (Lower Primary School) building (Unlike the Urban Anganwadi Schools located in rented house) have sufficient place for outdoor games. So children play both indoor and outdoor games and pass their time. 10 numbers (33.33%) of the Anganwadi workers and helpers mentioned that in the tea garden Anganwadi Schools, ABITA (Assam Branch India Tea Association) has provided lot of other play items like football, rings, cricket bat and balls etc for the children of those Anganwadi Schools. They also informed us that after the children depart from their school they enter their respective houses and by that time their parents also reach home for lunch break at 1 pm in Tea Garden. Then their children start passing their time with their parents. They do lot of household work, they study and also play with their play mates in playground as well as in Tea Gardens. They help their parents in collecting wood for cooking from the tea garden area. 4 numbers (13.33%) of the Anganwadi workers and helpers reported that some of the schools dropouts were even engaged as labourer in industrial estates in Barbaruah block.

Similarly, In case of rural Anganwadi School children, as opined by 6 numbers (20%) of the Anganwadi workers and helpers, were very active in outdoor games and even participated in petty agricultural work with their parents. They pass their time with lot of adventurous activities like fishing, swimming in natural pond, playing with pets, roaming in the jungles etc and give time to their studies. Nevertheless the children of tea-garden community as well as rural community also watch television and listen to radio

programmes but comparatively less hours than the urban counterpart. 26 numbers (86.66%) of the Anganwadi workers and helpers informed that parents of rural/suburb and Tea Garden Anganwadi Schools participate more when their co-operation is required than the parents of the urban Anganwadi Schools.

60 per cent of the Anganwadi workers and helpers believed that there is improvement in the nutritional and health status of children of age group 3 to 6 years within their respective schools. Their health status is improved due to the mid-day meals provided by the schools and with their services like growth monitoring, immunization, nutrition and health education and their referral services for the severely mal-nutrient children.

For a Comprehensive idea of staff and official, and pre-school children of Anganwadi schools in Dibrugarh District of assam, India, we are using two tables 1.3 and 1.4. These tables highlight the scenario of pre-school Education through Anganwadi Schools in Dibrugarh.

IV

Pre-School Education for children is of utmost importance as the child's mental and physical development takes place during these early years. In India children form a significant percentage in its population and more than half of it belongs to the under privileged category. The Anganwadi schools use providing the necessary free pre-school education and nutrition to all and mostly to the needy.

Different fun learning methods are incorporated in these Anganwadi Schools with non formal flexible education system. Lot of play things are used for overall learning experience along with fun activities in group like dancing, singing, story-telling, painting, puzzle solving and so on. In this way a balance is created in indoor and outdoor activities that provide physical, mental and cognitive developmental education.

Both on the Anganwadi School and off the Anganwadi School (In home and neighborhood), children continue with different leisure activities. In urban setting due to constraints of space outdoor leisure activities are mostly hampered but in tea garden areas and rural and suburbs these are opportunities for various outdoor leisure activities including adventurous nature inspired tasks. Watching television and listening to radio is also a common leisure activity among the pre-school children. The children also spend a considerable amount of time in assisting the elders in household and outdoor works that prove to be good learning experience for the children of pre-school stage.

Table 1.1
Yearly Theme based chart of Anganwadi Schools

January-March	April-June	July-September	October-December
Domestic animals	Birds	Food	Bank
Plants	Wild animals	Dress	Post Office
Fruits	Water	House	Season
Vegetables	Rain	Forest	Hospital
Flowers	Insects	Mountains/Hills	Market
Days and Months of the year	Body parts	Sky	Family

Table 1.2
Theme, Concept and Idea Development

Theme	Concept	What children Should be able to do/say
Flowers	Colour, Size, Smell	Knowing names, identifying perennial/ seasonal flowers, uses of flowers
Vegetables	Colour, Size, taste	Knowing names, identifying different vegetables, perennial/seasonal vegetables, how vegetables are important for us, how we eat them.
Fruits	Colour, size, taste, smell	Identifying different fruits, knowing names, perennial seasonal fruits; how fruits are useful
Animals	Size, colour	Identifying different animals, knowing names, where they live, how animals are useful to human beings, we should be kind to the animals.
Plants	Size, how it grows	Knowing different types of plants: trees, bushes, shrubs, creepers; identifying commonly grown plants, knowing names of different types of plants; names of different parts of a plants: how plants grow, care needed by plants

Table 1.3
Pre-School Education in Anganwadi Schools in Dibrugarh District
Pre School Education

Name of Project	Girls	Boys	Total
Khowang	3485	3443	6928
Barbaruah	8687	7921	16608
Lahowal	3492	3232	6724
Panitola	4395	4061	8456
Tengakhāt	3198	3231	6429
Tingkhong	3268	3183	6451
Joypur	3356	3231	6587
Dibrugarh Urban	1705	1502	3207
Total	31586	29804	61390

****[The matter of this page— Table no 1.4 is at the end of the paper]

Table 1.4
Staff Position in ICDS Project of Dibrugarh District

Name of the Project	Nos. of AWC		No of CDPO		No of SA		Nos. of Supervisor		Nos. of AWW		Nos. of AWH	
	Sanc- tion	Posi- tion	Sanc- tion	Posi- tion	Sanc- tion	Posi- tion	Sanc- tion	Posi- tion	Sanc- tion	Posi- tion	Sanc- tion	Posi- tion
Khowang	341	321	1	1	1	1	15	14	341	315	341	305
Borbaruah	302	276	1	1	1	1	10	10	302	276	271	266
Lahowal	202	202	1	1	1	1	7	7	202	197	195	192
Panitola	253	238	1	1	1	1	8	7	253	231	224	221
Tengakhat	418	418	1	1	1	1	17	11	418	405	389	379
Tingkhong	202	202	1	1	1	1	6	6	202	202	185	184
Joypur	262	260	1	1	1	1	11	8	262	260	230	230
Dibrugarh U	133	133	1	1	1	0	5	4	133	120	133	124
Total	2113	2050	8	8	8	7	79	63	2113	2006	1968	1901

ICDS- Integrated Child Development Service Scheme

AWC – Anganwadi Centre (School)

CDPO- Child Development Project Officer

SA- Senior Assistant

AWW- Anganwadi Worker

AWH- Anganwadi Helper

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