





# CHAPTER SEVEN

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## TRADITIONAL SPORT AND CHILDREN GAMES

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## Wrestling

Wrestling is one of the ancient forms of sport, which has been described in many written sources as well as oral traditions. Among Tajik people there two forms of traditional wrestling known namely free wrestling (widespread in the southeastern regions) and national. The latter is also known as *kurash* or “Fergana style” wrestling.

Wrestling events and competitions in

Tajikistan is organized for occasions of traditional festivals such as Navruz, Mehrigon and state official holidays. Wrestling parties take place in the fields and attract a big number of wrestlers from around the country.

At first the wrestlers come out to the ring and walk around it to sort of introduce themselves to the audience. Than the wrestler who wants to throw a challenge comes forward and sits in the





middle. The respondent would come and take a sit next to him. The chief of the event, usually elderly gentlemen will than give them blessing and they will begin to wrestle. Prior to start to wrestle the wrestlers will together make a round the ring with a dance movements and come to the middle to greet one another only after this they wrestle. The party who has been thrown flat at his back is considered defeated and the winner gets some presents and prize.

The judges for the traditional wrestling events are the crowd and usually the audience determines who has been defeated or not.

There are many traditional mechanisms of wrestling employed among Tajik wrestlers such as “dastpech”, “surun”, “tob”, “koki” (kokma), “popech”, and “duk”.

Nowadays the wrestlers train in special gyms and learn and practice different types of wrestling. The best wrestlers also participate in regional and international competitions as well.





## Archery

Archery is one of the famous national types of sports with long and ancient history. The main instrument for this type of sport is bow and arrow. The bow is made from tree branches and strings can be from hard silk or animal intestines.

Bow and arrow among Tajiks were primarily used for two purposes: hunting and warfare. Particularly hunting was important as majority of inhabitants of mountainous regions need to learn how to aim with precision and shot animals in a distance.

There are also traditional games and festivals involving archery competitions. Of type of such competition is called *zarbuzi* when the archer in kneeling position would shot to get the arrow to a designated aim. Another form is called *saraspā* when archer has to reach the aim while riding on the horse.

In the military context, there are infantry and cavalry. The infantry soldiers would use larger bow as he could aim by kneeling on ground and they used longer arrows as well; the cavalry bows were smaller and lighter in weight. The infantry bow could reach the distance of up to 200 meters.

In modern condition hunting with bow and arrows is not practiced as this type of weapon has been replaced by mechanic or automatic guns.





*Archery competition. Artist S. Imodinova*





## Chavgonbozi – Polo

*Chavgonbozi* or polo is one of the ancient types of the sports practiced among Tajiks. On this type of sport there are abundant literary and historical sources, for example “Shahnameh” of Firdawsi provides plenty of examples and narrative report about polo as central sport event. According to the “History of Sistan” in Registan Square, in Samarkand once a polo game was organized in which 12,000 horse riders have participated. Among Tajik people two type of polo is known: polo played on horseback and on foot. The polo mallet is 120 cm long and the ball made from wood, wool or fabric but wrapped and coated with leather.

Polo players on a horseback will form a team of four players and line up facing each

other in the square and each team would attempt with a mallet to score a goal by heating the ball into the opposite team’s gate. In recent history it has been recorded that polo game was organized for major traditional festivals and significant cultural events such as Navruz, Mehrgan including weddings where the game would have taken place between team from different villages or towns.

Polo on foot is played by teams of six players and follows the same rules as polo played on the horseback.

In our days polo game played on horseback is played professionally in Sughd province and foot-polo, too is developing and being played in various regions of the country.





## Buzkashi

*Buzkashi*, which literally translated means “goat grabbing” is the national sport of Tajikistan. Many historians believe that Buzkashi began with the Turkic-Mongol people, and it is indigenously shared by the people of Central Asian region, including Northern Afghanistan.

In *Buzkashi*, a headless carcass is placed in the center of a circle and surrounded by the players of two opposing teams. The object of the game is to get control of the carcass and bring it to the scoring area.

Although it seems like a simple task, it is not. Only the most masterful players, (called *chapandoz*) ever even get close to the carcass. The competition is fierce, and the winner of a match receives prizes that have been donated by a sponsor. These prizes range from money, to finer and more expensive prizes. In order for someone to become a *chapandoz*, one must undergo a tremendous amount of difficult training.

The players are not the only ones who undergo arduous training; the horses that participate in *buz-*



*kashi* must train for five years before ever making it to the playing field. *Buzkashi*, is indeed a dangerous sport, but intensive training and excellent communication between the horse and rider can help minimize the risk of injury.

In *buzkashi* games up to 300 horse riders – or *chapandoz* will gather to play to make it most competitive game.

In Tajikistan, *buzkashi* is played in a variety of ways. The most common iteration is a free-form game, often played in a mountain valley or other

natural arena, in which each player competes individually to seize the *buz* that is the goat and carry it to a goal. Forming unofficial teams or alliances does occur, but is discouraged in favor of individual play. Often, dozens of riders will compete against one another simultaneously, making the scrum to retrieve a fallen *buz* a chaotic affair. Tajik *buzkashi* games typically consist of many short matches, with a prize being awarded to each player who successfully scores a point.



## Kite flying

Flying kite (*bodbarak*) is one of the children's games known from the ancient times. Kite is made from cardboard of 45x65 size attached to a wood sticks, a piece fabric, called «tail» which is to support kite's balance and can be 2 to 3 meter; and a long piece of string of flying and holding the kite. Kites are flown when there is wind with desirable speed. Children hold to their kits by one hand and hold the string by another

and run against the wind flow and as soon as the kite «catches' the wind it is let to fly and no need to run but hold the string and navigate the kite, which can go up as high as 40 or 50 meters.

There is a type of kite called «stork» and is popular in Khujand and Istaravshan cities. During the Navruz celebration in Istaravshan a competition called «flying storks» is held from the heel where the Mugh fortress is. Young



adults from the surrounding areas come together to compete in kite flying i.e. «stork flying». This festive competition is hosted by the branch of the Ministry of Culture of the Istaravshan city and the winners are given prize.

In Khujand the stork (a local name *laylak*) and kite flying is believed to be symbol of the arrival of the spring and Nawruz. Local beliefs state that stork (*laylak* or *laklak*) is a holy bird and when it comes and makes nest, lays egg and its chicken comes out is considered to be sign of productive, peaceful and abundance year. It is also known that in past day people would organize kite flying in Navruz and at night time they would attach a candle into their kites and flown at night it would give a pleasant site.



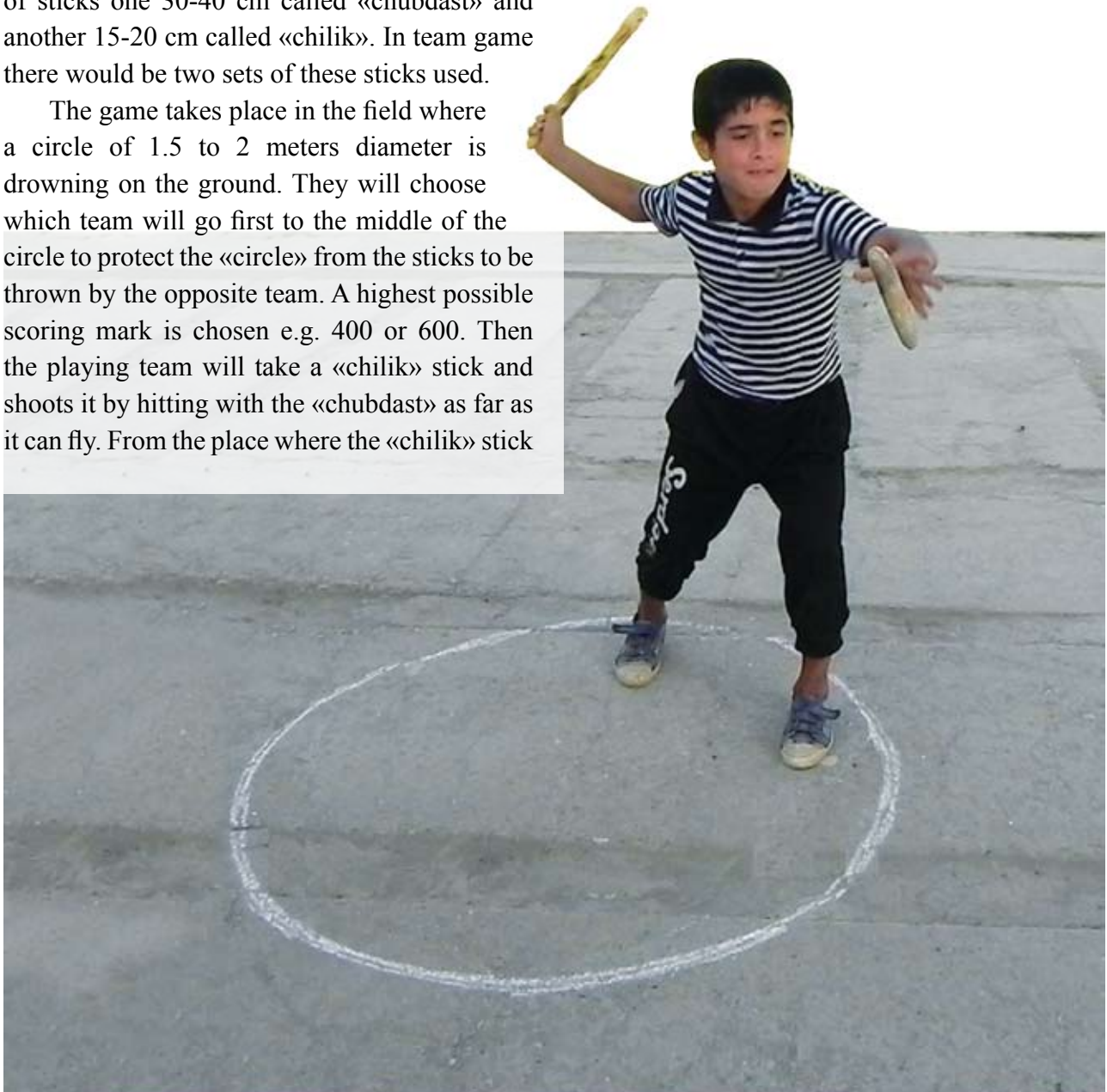
## Chilikbozi - Finger game

Chilikbozi is a popular children and youth game that in some of the regions of Tajikistan is also known as *chilik-dangal*, *chilik-pilik*, *alaki-momoki*, *likakbozi*, *lashkuv*, *lashbekht* and so on. It is particularly popular among those of 6 to 16 years old and it is usually played during the spring especially during the Navruz festival season.

This game can be played in teams or individual. The object of the game are two pieces of sticks one 30-40 cm called «chubdast» and another 15-20 cm called «chilik». In team game there would be two sets of these sticks used.

The game takes place in the field where a circle of 1.5 to 2 meters diameter is drawn on the ground. They will choose which team will go first to the middle of the circle to protect the «circle» from the sticks to be thrown by the opposite team. A highest possible scoring mark is chosen e.g. 400 or 600. Then the playing team will take a «chilik» stick and shoots it by hitting with the «chubdast» as far as it can fly. From the place where the «chilik» stick

has fallen the competing team will try to throw it back to the circle and the player standing in the middle of the circle has to hit it back. Once the «chilik» stick has been shot away the person takes his «chubdast» and measures the distance between the circle where he stood and where the «chilik» stick has fallen. For example he measures 25 «chubdast» lengths from the circle to the place where the «chilik» stick has fallen





and that is counted as 25 score and so on.

The person in the middle of the circle changes only if the competing team gets the «chilik» stick thrown back into the circle. And the game restarts.

During the game the teams keep record of the scores each team makes in every round in order to determine the winner. In case if the «chilik» stick is caught by the opposite group before it hits the ground, any scores made by the team that shot it will be annulled. Any team that scores the pre-determined highest score will win the game.

The winners of the game will impose a penalty to the team that lost the game. It is usually that the winner team will nominate a distance which the defeated team has to run and while running have to say «zu-u-u». In Maschoh region instead of saying «zu» and running they ask the defeated team to leap with one leg from the distance to the circle. In Shughnon region the defeated team has to carry the winner team on their backs to the circle.





## Stone game

Stone game (donakbozi) a children game involving stones from drupe is played during the summer by children of 8-12 years of age. This game is also called «dulbozi», «kandakbozi» and «kharakbozi». To play this game a small pit of 5-6 cm deep is dug with a diameter of 10 cm X 10 cm and this pit is called *dul*. The main game object is either four apricot stones or four small rocks of the apricot stone size. The players will draw a line in 1,5 meter distance from the pit and by standing behind the line they throw their stones into a pit. Whoever gets one stone into a pit get title of «donkey», whoever two «horse», whoever three «vizier» and whoever four «shah». Each of the player according to his title earned by throwing the stones than can demand certain things, for example «vizier» can ride on the back of a player who got «donkey»

title whereas «shah» can ride on the «horse». There can be five players in this game and the fifth player determines how long the others can reserve their titles.

If happens that the fifth player get only one or two stones into the pit than the «vizier» or «shah» will change their «donkey» or «horse» accordingly. In case when no stone is got to the pit by a player he get chance to repeat throwing and than the game restarts and those who in the first round got certain titles will also start playing again when «donkey» may attain «horse» title or «shah». It is a fun game when children playing it will share anecdotes or sing humorous songs about «donkey», «horse» or a «shah» who turned into a «donkey» by bringing grass and straw to the «donkey» and «horse» or bowing to the «shah» and «vizier».



## «What a garden» game

This game is popular among children of nursery age or elementary school. The players will stand in a semicircle (horseshoe) order. The players will hold one hand stretched and waving. The game commander stands in the middle and with a loud voice will say «what a garden full of grapes and raisings and wow a hornet came and bite me!». In saying these words the game commander will touch one of his body parts e.g. nose, ear or hand etc; and the players standing has to follow by holding the same part of their body. This game is similar to that popular «Simon says» game known in Europe or elsewhere. The player or players who will not repeat the gestures of the game commander or are slow will be losing the game. For those who lose the game will be a penalty imposed and they should bring some treats such as dried fruits or nuts etc.



## «Quail flew»

This game also popular among children and youth is played during the summer in the fields or outdoors. Players in this game sit in circle close to one another with their legs stretched towards the center. While sitting the players hold one of their hands in their back. A game commander is chosen who will announce that «quail flew» and will raise either of his hands and the players have to repeat the same action. In occasion of both hands are raised the players may fall in their back. If the players fall or raise the wrong hand it is considered to be losing the game.

Although the name of the game is called «quail flew» the game commander may call another bird. The other name for this game is «par-par» that is «fly-fly».



## Gachabozi

In «gachabozi» game players stand in circle and choose a leader. The object of the game is a small rock or a button which is called «gacha». The game commander passes the «gacha» to one of the players and with the command of «one, two, three» he asks them to raise their hands and than puts them in their back. After this he asks «who got the gacha?» the players in once voice will reply «I got the gacha. In which hand am I

holding it?». At the same time the person who initially had «gacha» in his hands will be pass it discreetly to another player. Player must not betray who has the «gacha» and the game commander will be searching it by guessing. In whoever's hand the «gacha» is found he will be the game commander next. This game greatly contributes to team building and fast reaction of the children.



## Kaduduzak

*Kaduduzak*, which verbatim means «stealing pumpkin» is a children game played by boys of 8 to 14 age. It is played outdoors in the fields. A group of boy will gather and bring several rocks of varied size and weight and put them around the field to be a pretend pumpkin. One of the players is chosen as a guard and others will be robbers. The guard will pretend as if he is working in his pumpkin field making the ground soft and enjoying to see his pumpkins grow. After getting tired he pretends to fall asleep and this instance the

robbers come.

The game aims in speed and intuition. As the «robbers» tries to get the pumpkins the guard tries to protect them and the one get a rock and runs and guard cannot catch wins the game. The «robber» who is caught by the guard will be playing the «guard» role in the next round of the game.

In the case when the «robbers» manage to steal al the pumpkins the same player will play the guard's role again.



## Palabarak

*Palabarak* is children's team game. In old days in villages this game was played on the rooftops nowadays it is played on the grounds and fields. The game is simple and fun.

Children gather on the field and divide it by drawing a line in the middle. One side of the field is called «pal» and the other side «chal». The aim is that players in the «pal» side of the field must break through and get into the

«chal» side. The opposite team guarding the «chal» side will be pushing them or holding them and bringing them to the «pal» side.

The game starts similarly to the rugby when the teams will stand in the middle where the line is facing each other. Once the referee gives the command they will begin pushing one another to the sides.



## Jambul-jambul

*Jambul-jambul* is one of the recently recorded children's game played by both girls and boys of 7 to 15 years of age.

To play first a rectangle is drawn on the ground with each side 1 meter. Then this rectangle is divided into another 4 squares of equal size and in the middle of the rectangle a circle is drawn which is called «jambul».

Six piece rocks of the same size (round and to the size of a tennis ball) is chosen and a put in the middle of the circle on top of one another. Then players chose a distance and from the chosen distance will aim to hit the rocks with a small ball. One of the players is chosen to be

a «jambul» guard. When the ball hits the rocks and they fell down the next task is for the players quickly to spread them in those squares. The «guard's» task is to protect the “jambul» so that players wont be able to spread the rocks into the squares and in doing so he will be throwing the ball to them and whoever gets hit by the ball is out of the game. If it happens that the ball rolls away far and by the time the «guard» gets it back the players putt the rocks into the entire square the game restarts.

*Jambul-jambul* is played also in teams when one team competes against another. It is also possible to draw triangles instead of rectangle etc.



## Walnut game

Walnut game is a popular children, mainly boys, game played in the fall when the walnuts are harvested. Usually this game is played by children of 7 to 18 years old. In some ways this game is similar to knucklebone game and sometimes can be played in mix with shagai bones. The game is played in different way in different parts of Tajikistan, for example in Darvoz and Rash region there are «walnut game» known as «chorpai» and «zangul» and these types are played in mix with shagai.

In «chorpai» game boys draw a line on the ground and each player puts one walnut on the line. Than they throw shagai on the ground and depending on which side the shagai lands they chose who plays first. Whoever's shagai lands on the «horse» side he goes first to attempt to shoot the walnuts with his shagai from a chosen distance. The walnuts that roll further from the line where they were put are «lost» that is the player wins them. The «zangul» type of the walnut game is played in similar manner.

In Istaravshan and Ghonchi regions walnut game is played in the following manner; players draw two parallel lines on the ground and leave a 4-5 centimeters distance between them. Than they put walnuts between these two lines and each player tries to heat him or her from the 2-4 meter distance with another walnut. The player who succeeds to heat two or more walnuts and they roll out from the lines continues the game and the players take turn after one another. The winner gets the walnuts he hits and rolls out from the line.

In Hisar region this game is played by kicking the walnuts over the ground. The first player will kick his walnuts and the next has to aim the first player's walnut and hit it with his walnut by kicking it.

This way each player will be attempting to hit each other's walnuts. The player who manages to strike the previous player's walnut wins that walnut and this way the game goes on. If the game takes place by the brook and the player's walnut falls into the stream he takes it out and he called it «obash» and leaves it away from the brook to dry before it can be played with it again.

Another type of walnut game is called «ghelon», which is played by 2 persons. In this game players take their walnuts and role them along the steep and whoever's walnut hits the other is than considered to win.

There is yet another type of the walnut game called «davarabozi». In this game players will draw a circle everyone will put their walnuts in the middle of the circle. They than determine a distance from which one by one will shoot at the walnuts. Whoever manages to hit the walnuts and bring it out of the circle wins the game.





## Hide-and-seek

Hide-and-seek is a popular children's game in which any number of players (ideally at least three) conceal themselves in the environment, to be found by one or more seekers. The game is played by one player chosen (designated as being «it») closing their eyes and counting to a predetermined number while the other players hide. After reaching this number, the player who is «it» calls «Ready or not, here I come!» and then attempts to locate all concealed players.

The game can end in one of several ways. In the most common variation of the game, the

player chosen as «it» locates all players as the players are not allowed to move; the player found last is the winner and is chosen to be «it» in the next game.

The same way you play tag; another common variation has the seeker counting at «home base»; the hiders can either remain hidden or they can come out of hiding to race to home base; once they touch it, they are «safe» and cannot be tagged.

This game can be played in large groups as well.





## Playing with stones

*Sangchilik-bozi* refers to a game played with set of small riverbed rocks. It is a game played during the warm seasons in the streets, gardens on in homes by girls of 6 to 15 years old. The game is played with up to 5 or 6 small round and smooth rocks of same size.

The game is played in 6 rounds and each round has its own specific names such as one-by-one, two-by-two etc. or *kappa*, *kulfak*, *arus*, *kaychi*, *boron*, *barf* and *zhola*. The names basically refer to the style of how the game should be played.

*Sangchilik* game is played with one or two hand. It is played on the flat surface e.g. ground, table etc. The players either team as a group or individually play against each other. The player depending on which round it is will through the rocks on the air and tries to collect the rocks on the ground and also catch the rock she throws on air before it heats the ground. In one-by-one round one rock is thrown and the player has

to collect the remaining four rocks one by one before the main rock, which she throw on air heats the ground.

When playing with two hands, with one hand the player makes obstacles and tries to throw one rock on air and collect the other rocks and put them through the obstacle. For example, in «gate» mode the player holds her two fingers on the ground making it the same of arched gate and than by throwing one rock on the air tries to collect the remaining rocks one by one and push them through the «gate». Although she won't lose the game until the rock falls on the ground, but in this mode she has 3 chances only to attempt to get the rocks through the «gate».

When the rock that was thrown on air heats the ground and the player did not manage to collect the rocks on the ground she loses and the turn goes to the next player.

It is a game concentrating on speed, reflex and reaction.

## Puppet play

Playing with puppets is one of the favorite things to do by little girls. Puppets are made by older women in the family i.e. mothers, grandmothers or elder sisters for the young girls. The simple puppet making process is such: two sticks are taken one with 15 or 20 cm and another 8 or 10 cm. These two is than attached together in the form of cross with elongated vertical the short horizontal stick will be puppet's hands. Afterwards a coin or any round object is taken

and placed on the upper part of the stick to form puppets' head. The round object is covered by a piece of white cloth and than with a colorful threads a pattern is made on the face of the puppet by crisscrossing the colorful threads the image will be like two or three rhombus-like mosaic. Than with other pieces of fabric dress and headgear is made.



The puppets are gender distinct and the types of clothing made for them and the thread colors chosen to decorate the puppet's face are signifiers whether the puppet is a «man» or a «woman».

Young girls will make several puppets of different gender and sizes and can 'organize' a puppet family or a neighborhood. In their playtime they will decorate the puppets in varied form of accessories and will play a pretend-wedding game or some sort of social gathering.

Puppets outside the children's games also are significant in theatrical context. There are puppets of different type and size used in big stage theatres or in ordinary playtimes by children in the street. There are puppet's made and used for specific ceremonies for example *Ashaglon*, which is used in rain calling ritual.

The patterns woven on the puppet's face and its structure carry varied symbolic meanings. The rhombus shape patterns with colorful threads are primarily woven on the face of female puppets whether as male puppets will have a much simple pattern with one color. The form of making stick puppets in the shape of the cross is believed to signify the unity between man and women etc.

Historically it is known that handmade puppets had also other functional use rather just being an object for children to play. For example puppets were used amulets to ward off the family from an evil eye or other evil and demonic powers. It was believed that the puppets would take the evil powers and save the household.

There are puppets that are made from clay, which are called *ajuba*. The *ajubas* are made in shapes and forms of imaginary and fantastic





creatures. After the *ajuba* is designed from the clay it is first dried in the sun and then later fired in the oven. The fired *ajubas* are then decorated with colors. *Ajuba* puppets are used as household talismans to protect the family from evil spirits and evildoers.

Historically puppets played an important role in the development of the traditional puppet theatres. For different types of performances different puppets were made e.g. puppets moved by the

strings, puppets worn in hands or large puppets animated by a person wearing it a costume or stick puppets and paper puppets used in shadow performances etc.

The puppet making tradition and the use of puppets in cultural events is still current and there are puppet theatres functioning across the country, which produce and perform traditional plays or academic dramas through puppets for a young audience.



## Nard game

Nard is a tables-style board game for two players in which the playing pieces are moved according to rolls of dice. It is similar to backgammon in that it uses the same board, but it has different initial positions and rules.

According to “Shahname” nard was invented in Persia during the reign of the king Nuširvan by his vizier Buzurgmehr. The setup and movement are the same as in regular backgammon. Each player starts with two checkers on the opponent's one-point, five checkers on the opponent's twelve-point, three checkers on their own eight-point, and five checkers on their own six points.

The object of the game is to move all of your checkers into your own home board and then bear them off. The first player to bear off all his checkers wins the game. The first player to bear off all fifteen checkers wins the game. If the losing player has borne off at least one checker, he loses only one point. If the losing player has not borne off any checkers, he loses two points.



The roll of the dice indicates how many points, or pips, the player is to move his checkers. The following rules apply: a checker may be moved only to an open point, one that is not occupied by two or more opposing checkers. The numbers on the two dice constitute separate moves. For example, if a player rolls 5 and 3, he may move one checker five spaces to an open point and another checker three spaces to an open point, or he may move the one checker a total of eight spaces to an open point, but only if the intermediate point (either three or five spaces from the starting point) is also open. Doubles are played twice. For example, a roll of 6-6 means the player has four sixes to use. You must use both numbers of a roll if possible, or all four numbers in the case of doubles.



## Bujulbozi - Knucklebone game

Knucklebones or in Tajik bujul refers to the astragalus of the ankle of a sheep or goat. The bones are collected and used for traditional games among children and youth. It is also used for fortune telling and divination.

Bujulbozi may also be referred to by the name of the bones that are used in the game. They may be painted bright colors. Such bones have been used throughout history, and are thought to be the first forms of dice. It is believed that it was played in ancient Babylonia and other Ancient near Eastern cultures. In Turkic nomadic cultures knucklebone was perceived as a symbol of pastoralism and used also for protective charms.

Certainly there are abundant mentions of the knucklebones in Tajik folk stories and ancient beliefs, which may be indicative of its prevalence among the Tajik people for the long time. As Sadriddin Ayni wrote during the festival of «Sairi Darveshabad» knucklebone game was organized. Tajik knucklebone game is similar to that of «saqqa» and «chormaghzbozi» games.

There are various ways to play knucklebone and most popular among Tajik children and youth is called as «chuk and puk». When the knucklebone dice is thrown on the ground, the rolled knucklebone generally land on one of four sides: horse, camel, sheep or goat. A fifth side, cow, is possible on uneven ground. The player



whose knucklebone lands on horse normally will have right to start shooting other player's knucklebone. Each player has 3 chances and they take turn in playing.

The winner of the knucklebones either takes the knucklebone dices he won or there may be other compensations, such as among children is that the party which loses has to carry the winner in his back for certain distance etc.





## Egg knocking

Egg knocking in Tajik called *tukhmbozi* is a traditional game popular among children during the Navruz festival, and religious holidays of Ramadan and Qurban. On holidays children would go from house to house to congratulate and receive gifts. Often on holidays households will boil eggs to give to children. So, once children gather eggs they begin game among themselves.

The rule of the game is simple. One holds a hard-boiled egg and taps the egg of another participant with one's own egg intending to break the other's, without breaking one's own. As with any other game, it has been a subject of cheating; eggs with cement, alabaster, and even marble cores have been reported.



## Rope pulling

Rope pulling is one of the traditional sport games popular among Tajik people. Rope pulling is a sport that directly puts two teams against each other in a test of strength: teams pull on opposite ends of a rope, with the goal being to bring the rope a certain distance in one direction against the force of the opposing team's pull. The game is played in any flat ground not necessarily stadiums and can be played both professionally and just for fun.

Two teams of eight, whose total mass must not exceed a maximum weight as determined for the class, align themselves at the end of a

rope approximately 11 to 14 centimeters in circumference. The rope is marked with a «center line» and two markings 4 or 6 meters either side of the center line.

The teams start with the rope's center line directly above a line marked on the ground, and once the contest (the «pull») has commenced, attempt to pull the other team such that the marking on the rope closest to their opponent crosses the center line, or the opponents commit a foul (such as a team member sitting or falling down). Whichever team that pulls the other side over the marked line wins.



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