



## International Journal of Current Research and Academic Review

ISSN: 2347-3215 Volume 4 Number 11 (November-2016) pp 34-40

Journal home page: <http://www.ijcrar.com>

doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.20546/ijcrar.2016.411.006>



### Cock Fight: A Symbolic View of Social Status

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#### KEYWORDS

Cock Pit;  
Nurturing of the  
Fighting Cock;  
Fighting Day;  
Participator of the  
Cock-fight;  
Symbolic View.

#### A B S T R A C T

Cockfighting is an ancient sport that has deep roots in rural parts of the world as well as India and West Bengal. The bloody and dangerous sports of cockfighting as practiced by the Santals people of Foringdanga, Paschim Medinipur, West Bengal, India. Most of the fights were held in an inn that was specially prepared or in a cockpit. The Cock-fighters selects two types of fighting cock—one is called Desi Morog and another variety is called PahariMorog. Only Santal males are participation in this game. Sometimes santal male child also participating with their fighting cock but Santal female cannot participate in this bloody game. It also has great symbolic significance to its practitioners and aficionados as an affirmation of high status identity in an increasingly complex and diverse santal society. Although the activity is illegal in most jurisdictions, it continues, generally in a covert setting. Because cockfighting is subject to criminal sanction and informal social disapproval, cock-fighters have developed rationalizations which they use among themselves. Due to the illegal status of cockfighting in many jurisdictions and to basic ethical considerations which preclude becoming overtly participative in research, I developed a conscious stance of "observer-participant," reversing the traditional, participant-observer role of the ethnographic investigator in the field. Therefore, the present paper aims to study in participating in Cockfight as a symbolic role and that symbolic role presents a high status of santal society.

#### Introduction

The sport was popular in ancient times in India, China, Persia, and other Eastern countries and was early introduced into Ancient Greece in the time of Themistocles

(c. 524–460 BC). The significance of the original name of Mohenjo-daro inferring that the city was "the city of the cock" takes on great significance if taking into account

that it has been claimed that the chicken was domesticated in India in 6000 BC. However, according to a recent study, "it is not known whether these birds made much contribution to the modern domestic fowl. Chickens from the Harappan culture of the Indus Valley (2500-2100 BC) may have been the main source of diffusion throughout the world." "Within the Indus Valley, indications are that chickens were used for sport and not for food (Zeuner, 1963)" and that by 1000 BC they had assumed "religious significance".

In many countries cockfighting is illegal and forbidden, like India, Indonesia, Bangladesh, etc. But not everywhere! Many countries have developed their own breeds for cockfighting.

Clifford Geertz's "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight" is one of the most recognized modern literature on cockfighting. Geertz's use of thick description to analyze the motives behind the actions of Balinese cock fighters is an important methodological approach in understanding cock fighting around the world. Geertz's essay, although crucial in its pioneering use of thick description, cannot be used as a universal source on cock fights. Geertz continued by explaining that the relationship between Balinese men and their gamecocks was not just metaphorical.

They spent large amounts of time with their gamecocks which led to an even stronger identification between the two. Cock fighters in the Midwest identified just as much with their gamecocks as the Balinese did but they also emphasized the importance of breeding and as a result stressed the significance of hens. In the Midwest, cock fighting was more than just a cultural practice.

Cockfighting can be said to have a mythos centered on the purported behavior and

character of the gamecock itself. Cocks are seen as symbols of bravery and resistance in the face of insurmountable odds. This is not devalued as vainglorious but is seen as a trait to be emulated. In fact, boys are frequently exhorted to follow the example of the gamecock in protecting his "turf" and family constellation. Paradoxically, while cockpits are violent and loud, and at times, bloody places, fighting between human male competitors or gamblers is taboo. Violators of this sanction (and those obviously intoxicated, always potential trouble-makers) are usually summarily ejected from the pit and banned from many others. This is done to enhance group solidarity and to maintain a low profile. As one senior cock-fighter said, "we don't have any disputes that call for the law [to become involved]. we take care of our own business." One only one occasion did I see a fight between human players begin to coalesce. In the cockpit one fighter cock would not continue to fight after a lengthy and arduous derby. Several cockpit operators indicated that local law enforcement agencies allowed them to operate as long as they did not attract a "rough crowd," become a locus for other form of crime, or otherwise become a "disorderly place." Historical examples of ancient generals using the gamecock as examples for their troops abound (Hawley, 1982).

Interview data reveal that high school coaches occasionally have been known to inspire the flagging spirits of their teams with cockfights - this was routine practice at a summer football camp for boys in a mid-western state during the early 1960s, according to one unwitting participant. Similar reports from informants were noted from Mississippi, and from other rural states. In these situations, the connection between the bird's behavior and that expected of young athletes was made quite clear. In football and life, as in the cockpit,

one cannot run away, but must stand his ground (virtually all cock fighters are men or boys) in spite of overwhelming odds or certain defeat. A cock who "chickens out" is derisively referred to as a "dunghill" rooster (i.e., one of common, low breeding), suitable only for stews, gumbos, and chicken and dumplings. Similarly, cock-fighters use this metaphor to derogate individuals and groups with whom they may differ. Many cockers have adopted the gamecock as a totem. At cockfighting venues one may expect to see men with caps displaying the cock in a combative or terrifying aspect. In the homes of some cockers, what appear to be shrines devoted to the glorification of the gamecock or of one particular bird of great repute. On several occasions, cock-fighters waxed long and emotionally over their departed champions while standing in front of these "shrines."

The linkage between man and bird is, therefore, somewhat blurred. Rather than anthropomorphizing attributes of the gamecock, human beings and their petty limitations pale by comparison to the much-beloved bird. The cock-fighter may raise the cock from a chick, feed and work with the cock every day for months; and yet may not relate to the bird other than as a fighter or, if the bird lacks requisite combative qualities, a meal. Clearly, the cock-fighter views the bird on several levels: bird as totem, emblem of bravery, sexual potency, and perhaps symbolic sacrifice.

### **Work Procedure**

For the purpose of present study the Santals residing in a village named Foringdanga under Kotwali police station of Paschim Medinipur district were selected since the Santals are well known for their participation in cock fighting anywhere they live. However, since the caste Hindu people play some definite role during the cock

fighting therefore they have also considered for data collection related to the present work.

For the collection of data standard anthropological methods like house-hold census survey, participation observation method, interview with the structure and unstructured questionnaire, panel discussion, case history method were adopted.

### **Nurturing of the Fighting Cock**

The Cock-fighters selects two types of fighting cock—one is called *DesiMorog* and another variety is called *PahariMorog*. The fighting cocks are purchased from the market of Jhargram and Panshkura. Sometimes some of the cock fighter selects fighting cock from their own poultry.

The training of a fighting cock is very interesting. A cock fighter with his cock came in the fighting area, in every Sporting day before participating in fight. Here before participating means when a cock fighter bought fighting cock (or maybe he select his own poultry) for the fight at that time the owner of the cock come in the arena of cock fight for gaining experience for the fighting cock. And owner of the cock will "drive" his cock. The cock runs near at the fighting area and makes a pair with the other fighting cock. After this the pair of the cocks becomes aggressive against each other.

### **Day for the Cock Fight**

The occurrence of the fight held two days in a week. The days are Thurs day and Sun day. Others wise there have some special days for cock fight. The types of special day of cock fighting are two types. The types divided on basis of special events. Like Doljatra, Holi, Saraswati puja where day is changed in every year but another type basis on some special day. Like May Day, Good

Friday, ChoitroSangkranti where day remains unchanged in every year.

### **Participator of the Cock-fight:**

The cock fighter should be a member of santal tribal community. May be and may not be the participator lives in Foringdanga village or out sider of this village, that's not a condition for the participating in the cock fight. But audiences or viewers come from the various community and various religious in fighting area. Near of cock pit have a committee. The members of the committee are commonly santal tribal people. The committee has a role before starting the cock fight i.e. the committee enrolled or register name of the participators who are santals. The name enrolled fees are 50 rupees for each fighter cock. At that time the members marking of the fighter cocks. Here marking means colour painted on legs of the fighter cock. And every participator have own fighter cock, who had no fighter cock; he could not participate the bloody game. Sometime some of santal children came in arena of cock fight with their fighting cock but these children could not attend the fight. At the time some young adult or aged people participate in the game and those people participated as subsidy of children. But those children came with their fighting cock in arena of cock fight for the reasons of their family have no adult person who participate the game. If the children with their fighting cock could not take a part of the game then their family status will be low rank in their society. Because their society has a myth that is if those families who could not attend the bloody game as a result those families will be low rank in their society. Here low ranked means low position of social status or they are back warded from the other members of their society, especially those members who attend the cock fight. So, I say that, there have some of criteria for the

participator who attend the game with their fighting cock. The criteria are given bellow:

- i. The participator should be must santals people.
- ii. Age of the participator not less than 15 and not greater than 60.
- iii. The participators have at list one fighter cock.
- iv. They must enroll their name.
- v. If the fighter cock not paired with others fighter cock then the fighter cock could not attend in the fight.
- vi. The paired of the fighter cock should be same type of weight because small fighter cock could not tight fight with the bigger fighter cock.
- vii. Every cock matched, shall fight as he is first showed in the Pit, without cutting any feathers afterwards to a disadvantage, without the Consent of both Parties who made the Match.
- viii. When a Fight shall come to setting too, and both Cocks refuse to fight ten times, according to the law of the organizing committee set to each Cock; and if one fight and the other refuse then the fighting Cock to win the Fight, but if both fight or both refuse, there to be a drawn Fight.

All Betts made either within or without the Pitt, shall stand good; and that one cannot go off without consent of the rule of the organizing committee and all Betts undemanded before the next Battle fights, to be lost.

### **Symbolic View**

Most of the cock fighters in Foringdanga have adopted that the participating in the cock fight as symbolic view because if they participating in the bloody game then their social status are high. Where, cockfighting is illegal game in India and as well as West Bengal. However, it even became a sport, the fighter cock was regarded as an admirable animal, drawing respect from men of the Santal community. Although forbidden game openly organize where the bloody game had a social value of the Santal society in Foringdanga. May be or may not be local governments do worry about the social disruption about the game. Some of the santal participators are well educated and they are working on different government institutions. But they also participated in this forbidden bloody game for the reasons behind social value. Despite being an illegal

sport, the cruel and inhuman sport of cock fighting has become one of the favourite past times in India's eastern part as well as West Bengal state's Midnapore district. Frequently I have seen cock fighters with misty eyes leaving the pit cradling their limp, winged champions. However nostalgic the cocker may feel about his fighter cocks, I have never noted a theme of fighter cock as friend or companion among mature cock fighters, foreign or domestic. The cock fighters may raise the cock from a chick, feed and work with the cock every day for months; and yet may not relate to the fighter cock other than as a fighter or, if the fighter cock lacks vital aggressive abilities, a meal. Clearly, the cock fighter views the fighter cock on several levels: fighter cock as totem, and perhaps symbolic sacrifice. Where cock fight as a social myths as well as a symbolic status.

**Fig.1** Committee members enrolled the name of the participators



**Fig.2** Committee members are marking the fighter cocks



### **Conclusion**

Cockfighting (Sandi Topor in Santali) is a favourite sport of people living in the Foringdanga, Medinipur, West Bengal i.e. eastern part of India. A cockfight is a blood sport between two fighter cocks and a cockfight consists of several rounds of putting weight-matched pairs of specially reared fighter cocks against each other in arena of fighting ground. All of the people involved in cockfighting are men, although there are some women are indirectly involved in cock fighting in terms of either rearing of cock or ownership of the fighting cock. But woman cannot participate as a cock fighter nor is she allowed to carry her fighting cock near the arena of cock fighting even before a fight the cock is not allowed to touch by any woman. For the reasons behind they believe that women are untouchable and such touches are regarded as a premature death judgment. Three - or four-inch blades (Kath in Santali) are

attached to the cocks' legs. Knockout fights to the death are widely practiced in Medinipur but in this research, researcher especially focuses in Foringdanga. The winner is decided after three or four rounds. People watch with intense interest surrounding the cocks. The sport has gradually become a betting sport. Illegal cockfights are held in cockpits every week at the fighting seasons that is winter seasons. The cockfight, or more accurately expressed the secular cockfight, is an intense sports, recreation, myth of social value while to others, the cockfight remains an forbidden bloody game. Cockfighting can be said to have a mythos centered on the purported behavior and character of the fighter cocks itself. Cocks are seen as emblems of bravery and resistance in the face of insurmountable odds. In fact, boys are frequently exhorted to follow the example of the fighter cock in protecting his turf' and family constellation. While cockpits are violent and loud, and at times, bloody places, fighting between

human male competitors or gamblers is taboo. Most of the cock fighters had been adopted the fight as a myth of social value. Cock fighters value of status and their traditional interpretation carries with it a certain credibility and at least in the eyes of the cockfighting fraternity. Cock fight has an important tradition role or status in many Santals family in Foringdanga village at Medinipur.

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### How to cite this article:

Parikshit Chakraborty and Falguni Chakrabarty. 2016. Cock Fight: A Symbolic View of Social Status. *Int.J.Curr.Res.Aca.Rev.4(11): 34-40*.  
doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.20546/ijcrar.2016.411.006>