

From *Rabīndra Saṅgīt* to *Doraemon*: The Inheritance and Globalization of Children's Leisure Culture in Kolkata

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Summary

This article looks at some aspects of the contemporary leisure culture of middle-class children in Kolkata, based on interviews conducted with the current generation of children and two older cohorts — in the main their parents and grandparents. It argues that although this leisure culture has been influenced by globalization — particularly by the so-called “mediatization” of childhood — the historical context of a region is crucial to understanding the contemporary leisure culture. The article attempts to substantiate this assumption of specific historical contexts informing contemporary children's cultures by exploring the present landscape of popular children's culture in West Bengal, and thereafter relating it to some of the values that are integral to a “good childhood” in the Bhadrakalok imagination. Against this backdrop, the relationship between a leisure culture and the changing contours of childhood is also addressed.

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Introduction

The act of reminiscing about earlier leisure cultures of children is invariably accompanied by the recalling of images of children's games, which are sometimes untidily juxtaposed with each other within the framing of a past that is ambiguous. The Flemish painter Pieter Bruegel¹ provides one of the most detailed images of leisure activities of children in 16th century Flanders — or, perhaps more importantly, of the way one thinks about earlier leisure activities — with his documenting of many games and artefacts that no longer appear in the worlds of contemporary children. Like with his painting *Children's Games*,² which although abstruse is meticulous in its details, turning attention to the idea of a leisure culture for children in the past

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1 Also known as Pieter Bruegel the Elder (1525/30–1569).

2 This painting depicts over eighty different children's games. The work is considered a reflection of Bruegel's “thinking in images” (Snow 1997), rather than as just an inventory of children's leisure activities. The analysis of this work by Edward Snow will be discussed further at the end of the article.