INTRODUCTION

For man, life is in not just living. In living it fully and wholesomely, recreations like sports and pastimes are essential ingredients. The pragmatism of this concept is as ancient as man. But, surprisingly, no study has ever been undertaken to bring out detailed and systematic accounts of the sports and pastimes in ancient India. This project has, therefore, been taken up to cull, collate and interpret the available information scattered in various sources: literary, archaeological, numismatic, epigraphic, foreign accounts, etc. in order to present a comprehensive and detailed review of the sports and pastimes in the ancient period.

The word "sport" implies activity that is done in a group and includes or physical experience like wrestling, dancing etc. Sports point to a recreation that is primarily a group endeavour and suggests competition.

"Pastime" is close to hobby, that which amuses and serves to make time pass agreeably. By implication, the word suggests activity of little intrinsic worth. It does suggest pleasure giving relaxation.

From the aforesaid meanings of the terms sport and pastime, it can be inferred that sport is a recreation that involves group participation, whereas, pastime is a recreation limited to a personal level. Sports are spontaneous expressions of life. They develop the natural capacity of an individual. Most of the people seem to have a fallacy that sports are concerned only with body-
building and muscular power. The fact is that sports evoke mental, social and emotional responses of the participants and contribute substantially towards the development of intellect. They lead to an overall amelioration of the personality.

Sports and pastimes are closely linked with the social life of people. Nevertheless, sports establish close relationship between different sections of a society. They bring closer the individuals of common interests and choices and serve them to pass their time agreeably with great amount of mirth and merriment.

Thus, it can be asserted with considerable amount of certainty that sports and pastimes are indispensable means for the development of balanced personalities and for the benefit of social welfare. In short, sports and pastimes have their physical, mental, social, emotional and moral benefits.

An effort has been made in this thesis to present a comprehensive accounts of "Sports and Pastimes in Ancient India (from Pre-historic times to circa 650 A.D.)" i.e. till the age of Hārṣa. The account has been presented in six chapters; (i) Pre and Proto-historic period, (ii) Vedic and Later-Vedic period, (iii) From the Age of Buddha to the Mauryas, (iv) The Šuṅga-Kuśāna period, (v) The Gupta period, and (vi) The Hārṣa Age.

Hunting, wrestling, acrobating, dicing, archery, fights with animals, chariot-race, horse-race, salabhaṇjikā, swimming, water-sports and swinging have been studied under sports. Whereas, dance
and music, games of the children, taming of pets, drinking, picnicking, fairs and merriments, magic, animal fights, racing, snake charming, story-telling, animal riding, bird playing, gos̱thī painting, celebration of birds, plants and creepers have been studied under pastimes. However, in the first chapter, i.e., Pre-historic and Proto-historic period dancing has been studied under sports because during that period dancing was actively associated with hunting. It was more or less like a sport. Dancing ceremonies helped to turn normally fearful and individualistic hunters into a skilful hunting party. Dancing was done either before going for a hunting spree or after.

The above scheme of chapterization is based on chronology. It will help in presenting an analytico-synthetic review of the education and developments of the concepts, skills and techniques in sports & pastimes over those periods. This will be a factual presentation with futuristic projections.