CHAPTER-I
INTRODUCTION

History is a mirror which gives us a development of the past events on the basis of scientific evidences. It passes the knowledge of the past to the present generations, which helps in societal development in every area. Sports and games also came in to modern shape with this societal evolution.

The history of games and sports is as old as the history of mankind. If we peep through the old civilizations, various sports, games and amusements were organized by the various cultural organizations such as Athenians, Spartans and Romans. The culmination came with the organization of the first Ancient Olympic Games of 776 B.C. in Greece. Sports today have cut a cross all the physical barriers. History is a face of evidences as to how Kings, Maharajas and Rulers patronized sports and sportsmen in order to establish high tradition of sports culture and through these had achieved deep social impact on population of that era. (Bhullar, 2006).

Wrestling is one of the ancient sports. More than four thousand years ago at the dawn of civilization, we found that wrestling was a highly developed combative sport in India and Egypt. During the Mahabharat period, due to fusion of Brain and Brawn, Bhim could kill Hidimba and Bakasur while Balram and Krishan could kill Kansa and Shalya. Several modes of wrestling and ways of keeping fit, healthy, strong and supple were quite useful and popular from prince to people. The art of wrestling seems to had been the most popular at the time of Ramayan and Mahabharat. (Khan 1964)

Wrestling in Egypt enjoyed a special respect. The most ancient depiction was found in a sculpture from the Fifth Dynasty (2470-2320 B.C.) with drawings of six pairs of children. This fresco is the first historical evidence of wrestling between children which we know about and, given its artistic value, exceeds all other Egyptian samples. The 400 drawings from the tomb of Beni-Hassan, the 219 drawings from the tomb of Bahti III and drawings from the tomb of Sethi, show that wrestling in ancient Egypt was characterized by varied techniques of ground wrestling and rules close to those of contemporary pro-wrestling. (Sanga and Yadav, 2002)
“Carvings and drawings (which are 15000 to 20000 years old) were found in caves in France” illustrated wrestlers in hold and leverage positions. A bronze statue of wrestlers, dated 2600 B.C. was unearthed in the ruins of Khajaf near Baghdad” (Grolies, Vol. 29, 1829).

Guru Angad Dev, the second Guru of the Sikhs had great affection for wrestlers. He was greatly fond of watching wrestling bout. Therefore, he had an arena set up for wrestlers in Khadur Sahib. The spot, where Guru Ji had his followers mastering the skill of wrestling, house the shrine called Mall Akhara Sahib these days. Even today, the wrestlers dig up an arena and wrestle at that place. It is said that there was a renowned and strong wrestler named Maskinia who enjoyed Guru’s love and blessings. He was as pure and gentle of heart as he was physically strong. A hymn recorded in guru’s word is said to be about him.

“माहें मुझे भमवीला शाप हियवति उठे || चब्बे चब्बे भर्तवीला तरुच गावदिव गाले ||
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“The humble Maskinia abide in peace, subduing egotism, they are meek. The very proud and arrogant persons, O Nanak are consumed by their own pride” (Singh 2006).

Though the tradition of wrestling in India is centuries old yet, Master Nuruddin is regarded as the founder of modern wrestling who was born in Lahore city. The Master’s father was a famous general in the army of Mughal emperor Shah Jehan. His grandfather was the holder of a land grant in Kashmir province. Master Nuruddin was the first wrestler in India who had perfected 361 tactics of wrestling. It is believed that no wrestler has been able to add single maneuvers to these tactics to this day” (Kanwal, 1969).

Master Nuruddin the great wrestler having lived a long life left this world. Since then, India has produced many great wrestlers who are the great disciples of the great master, such as, Rustam-e-Hind Kalu, Rustam-e-Amar Singh, Rustam-e-Jaman Sultan, Rustam-e-Hind Buta Mall, Sitara-e-Hind Gama, Rustam-e-Hind Kalu, the armless, Rustam-e-Hind Rukna, Rustam-e-Hind Sandhu, Rustam-e-Hind Mughlo, Rustam-e Jaman Mohammed
BakshDand, Rustam-e-Hind Wahabuddin etc. Maharaja Ranjit Singh too had great respect for Master Nuruddin." (Kanwal, 1969).

Wrestlers like Gama, Kikar Singh, Karim Bux, Ghulam and Gabar etc. may be remembered as some of the best wrestlers. During those days all the wrestlers used to be heavy weights and there were no different weight categories or set rules of wrestling. But wrestling and wrestlers were patronized by “Maharajas” and “Rajas” (Sanga and Yadav 2002).

Wrestling became a part of the Ancient Olympic programme as an independent discipline. It became a central sport of the Ancient Olympic Games. At the Ancient Olympiad in 708 B.C., it was part of the pentathlon. (Sanga and Yadav, 2002.)

The revival of the Olympic Games opened up attractive perspectives on amateurism, but only five wrestlers took part in the first Olympic wrestling competition in 1896 at Athens. At that time, proper rules were not framed and only Greco Roman wrestling was organized. A Greco–Roman fight lasted until a win, even if it required the match to be broken and continued the next day. In 1904 at St. Louis Olympic Games Free style wrestling was added. The first Greco Roman World Wrestling Championship was held at Vienna in 1910, followed by Vienna again in 1920, Helsinki in 1921 and Stockholm in 1922. After a long break it was revived in 1950 at Stockholm. In 1951 at Helsinki the first World Championship in free style wrestling was held. In the following years, championships for the two styles were conducted after every two years. Beginning in 1961 at Yokohama, championships for both styles were held every year except the Olympic year. The number of weight categories was one in 1896 and seven in 1904, dropping to five and progressively stabilizing at 7 from 1924 to 1936. The weight categories were increased to 8 in 1940 and remained so till 1968. In the year 1969 the weight categories were increased to 10 which continued up to 1996 and again dropped to 8 weight categories from 1st January, 1997 and 7 weight categories from 2002 which is applicable now. (Lal 1992)

In 1931, the first official rule book was printed in Helsinki by Victor Smeds. In 1937 there was a new addition of the rules book featuring almost
exclusively the Hungarian system of scoring. Subsequently the rules were discussed at the 1948 Olympic Games and thereafter at a special meeting in Amsterdam in 1949 and were finally adopted in the General body meeting of FILA in Stockholm in 1950 (Sanga and Yadav 2002).

There are various forms of wrestling currently in the world. These forms developed according to social attitudes in different countries, although Turkey, Persia, Afghanistan and India each claims to have originated the grappling art. It is clear that the styles of wrestling have existed in the Islamic Belt of the world. From Morocco to Mongolia, as it travelled eastwards, the art of wrestling became better evolved. It is quite significant that it assumed the aspect of scientific wrestling in Turkey till it was perfectly developed in India, particularly Punjab, but further east as in Turkeystan and Mongolia, it resumed a barbarous form of a fight- unto-death till it again recovered in Chinese wrestling and the modern Japanese Judo (Muzumdar 1942).

Akhara : a form, amphi-theatre, a place where dramas are enacted (played), a ring formed by spectators around a wrestling bout, a battle, field assemblage of saints, a group of religious preachers following the order of nirmala sadhus (Nabha 2004).

In India there are thousands of arenas of soil where Indian style wrestling is being practiced with old rules and the wrestlers are least careful about wrestling mat. Due to hot climate, Indian Wrestlers prefer to practice in oiled soil arena and have the competitions in the country organized throughout the year with old traditions and conventions and the winner wrestlers are honoured with prize and cash.

Since times immemorial, the Akharas of wrestlers have been divided into two categories. One, where wrestlers take exercise as a matter of routine, the other is formed in fairs or tournaments. Though both kinds of Akharas have physical strength as motive force, yet one may discern profound difference between them. The main motive of domestic Akhara is to strengthen wrestlers and to train them in tactics of the game of wrestling. Wrestlers take first lesson in fundamentals of wrestling in these Akharas and scale supreme heights in their careers. Since these akhara are related to
sweet-sour memories of their boyhood and youth, the wrestlers develop a sort of personal bond as well as a longing for these spots. When a wrestler attains fame, his arena naturally gets a name. The Akharas are named after their founders; holy men or wrestlers. It is here that a wrestler imbibes the ethics of the game and learns how to respect elders where-by he gets an opportunity to elicit some strategy from senior wrestlers.

This stands a wrestler in good stead to refine or polish his style, wrestlers from the some akhara do not indulge in a bout in fair arena because they consider themselves as fellow disciples of the same teacher (ustad). Many ideas sprout up in the minds of the wrestlers to bring laurels to their akhara because they have personal bonds with domestic akhara

The other kinds of arena come into being at the time of fairs or tournaments. These are not meant for practice but for a struggle of life and death. These are formed for the only purpose of testing strength or prowess of the wrestlers. It becomes a matter of joy for the victorious wrestlers and his akhara and a matter of humiliation for the vanquished one. But, at the same time, it inspires the defeated wrestler to gain more power and skill (Sekhon 2007).

In olden days, the akharas were earthen only. These were made on a patch of dug up and leveled surface, and, there were no standard dimensions. Rather, these were dug up as per requirement. Even in present days, the use of such akhara in a general way can be seen during domestic practice, or village fairs or tournaments.

These akharas, which comprise a drummer, a referee, a commentator, wrestlers and spectators blended harmoniously, have their own distinct identity in a fair. There are two kinds of wrestling in these akharas – noora and patka. The former was a kind of fixed bout while the latter was a matter of life and death. The kind of game played in these akharas was termed as earthen or indigenous wrestling.

Wrestlers playing this kind of game enter the akhara after giving oil massage to their bodies. There was no fixed duration of the bout. The bout
was carried on till it was decided or one of the wrestlers was defeated. Sometimes a long drawn match remained undecided and declared a drawn game. In the arena, the drummer beat the drum in a high or low pitch according to the rhythm and the movements of the game which the spectators enjoy to the hilt. The highest prize fight was accorded prominence in such akharas. During this kind of a bout, every one exerted themselves, be it the wrestler, spectators, the drummer or the commentator. In big fairs and tournaments, such games were fought for the mace as a prize. In a well thronged akharas, many strong and skilful persons, besides the wrestlers, put up a show of their potential and prowess to win applause and get financial gains.

In the past, there used to be only dug-up akharas whereas in the present times, akharas are of two types - dug-up as well as of mattresses. Whereas arenas of mattresses have brought about much changes. The tradition of dug-up arena is centuries old except minor changes. An arena was used to be dug-up as per its requirement having no standards or norms regarding its size and dimensions. Wrestlers used to give their bodies a through oil-massage so that an adversary’s hands might slip from one’s body. Now, no wrestler can enter an arena applying any kind of greasy substance on his body. If anyone practices this, he is declared ineligible, while his rival is declared the winner. And these norms are enforced strictly.

In olden days, an akhara was dug up in a villages at such a secluded place which was not much frequented by women folks. They were forbidden to move about near an akhara. The akharas were used to be dug up in open space. But these days, no such consideration is taken into account while digging up an akhara. Even wrestling competitions are conducted on matterress as per specifications laid down by international wrestling federation (FILA). Women are no longer forbidden to visit these places. Even international/national competitions are also being conducted for women wrestlers.

Wrestling was classified, according to the nature of tricks used by the different wrestlers as advocated by renowned wrestling teachers/arenas
(known Khalefas/Akharas). These Akharas/arenas were known after the name of the teachers/Khalefas or religious leaders:

1. Bhimsene Wrestling: The types of holds requiring strength and power used by Bhimsene such as lifting the opponent above the shoulder level and throwing him down, waist back press, neck press etc.

2. Hanumati Wrestling: The hold full of tricks and tactics used by Hanuman such as leg hold and throw, cross buttock, leg hook and throw, arm and leg throw flying mare etc.

3. Jamwanti Wrestling: The holds full of locks used by Jamwanti wrestling e.g. neck lock, ankle lock, arm lock etc.

4. Jarasandhi wrestling: Limb breaking hold used by Jarasandh, such as shoulder lock with flying mare, hand full and wrist lock on the back, strange hold and wrist breaking etc.

Generally, wrestlers and villagers who have enough strength make full use of Bhimsene wrestling, where as Hanumanti wrestling has the advantage to beat even a stronger opponent by applying tricks and skilled holds. In Jamvanti wrestling by use of locks, a wrestler is able to bring his opponent under his control and can make him feel exhausted. And in Jarasandhi wrestling by means of limb breaking holds, a wrestler can harm the opponent (Sanga and Yadav, 2002).

In the past, the traditional training means of the wrestlers used to be different from the ones modern. During olden days the wrestlers used to develop strength by way of digging the arenas and other activities making the arenas fit for practice. These days, new equipment and techniques are used to develop the strength of the wrestlers.

Wrestling a very famous and popular sport in the present era is being practiced/played and organized throughout the globe. The competitions in wrestling are conducted in different age and weight categories irrespective of gender. These competitions are conducted in different techniques/styles in the official national and international competitions.
Sports and games provide an opportunity to every nation to shine/show their might at international level through the medium of competitions. The sports persons have to undergo scientific and rigorous training for excelling or to achieve victory in these competitions. In case of wrestling all the motor abilities and scientific training play a vital role in making a wrestler champion.

The Chhinjh:

Punjabi language has such words in abundance as are derived from other languages – Chhinjh is one of them. There exist many synonyms of chhinj e.g. mall yudh (a fight between wrestlers), mall-akhara (arena for wrestlers), ghol (wrestling) kushti (wrestling) and the word wrestling itself. Chhinjh is basically of Sanskrit language.

Chhinjh: “wrestling tournament to arrange, hold, conduct”. (Joshi, Gill, 2002)

In olden days, the term chhinjh had a wider scope of meaning. We get well acquainted with this from its basic and original meaning. Chhinjh was also used for the word connoting an assemblage of noisy people in a state of overjoyed as well as for games which were played amidst much fanfare. At that time, it had a much broader meaning. With the passage of time, its meaning went on contracting. Now, its usage has been confined to wrestling bouts being played in arenas of fairs /sports- fairs. Its meaning has contracted like that of many other Punjabi words.

Chhinjh means a wrestling tournament, on a fixed day an assemblage of spectators was collected through advertisement at a fixed place. Many wrestlers are invited to participate in it. Prize money was earmarked for the winners as well as the losers (Gill, 2004).

People have been holding fairs on the mausoleums of holymen and graves of saints for a long time. During these fairs, wrestling tournaments used to be held in arenas amidst throngs of spectators. The term chhinjh does not refer to wrestling bouts among ordinary wrestlers, rather, it includes such tournaments in which renowned wrestlers happen to be locked in bouts. It is only during a chhinjh that the effects of wholesome diet and exercise taken in routine come to the fore. Challenge bout is fought and decided
between two equal wrestlers amidst beating of drum and with much fanfare in the presence of a huge crowd of spectators. The victorious wrestler brings fame not only to himself and his region but also was entitled to the prize money. He did not receive this money in charity, rather, he claims it by virtue of emerging as a champion on account of his daring, strength, diet and hard work. The winning wrestler takes a round of the arena and spectators offer him whatever they can afford. The narration of great tournaments becomes discussion of the folk for days and months.

Generally, the most powerful wrestler hangs the mali (Prize-money) atop a pole in the arena which serves as an open invitation / challenge to wrestlers present in the arena. If any wrestler touches the mali (Prize-money) in acceptance of the challenge or enters the arena in response to the challenge, he has to bout with the challenger. In this kind of bout, a fabulous sum is offered as prize- money which is given to the winner. Many great wrestlers sometimes announce that whosoever enters the arena to answer their challenge will also be rewarded suitably. By making such a declaration the great wrestlers succeed in establishing superiority of their strength in the arena.

Of course, Indian traditional wrestling is not very much similar to modern Olympic styles of wrestling. But contribution of traditional wrestlers in achieving medals in modern wrestling is great. The Indian wrestlers have been very popular in mud wrestling (Akhara) but at the same time they have been good performers at International level too.

The popularity of wrestling among the Indian people is from the ancient times. The wrestling is being practiced and enjoyed by the Indian people, which can be gauged from the medals won by Indian wrestlers in the international competitions. These laurels were possible by the combined efforts of wrestlers, their coaches, promoters, Government and social organizations. No systematic research has been conducted in the area of wrestling which can bring it to limelight the responsible factors for these achievements. Therefore it was the endeavour of the research scholars to highlight the facts which contributes to the promotion of wrestling in India.
STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

The problem was stated as “CONTRIBUTION OF AKHARAS IN THE PROMOTION OF WRESTLING IN INDIA – A CASE STUDY”

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

1. It was to find out the contribution and achievements of different wrestling Akharas of Punjab towards promotion of wrestling in India.
2. It was to examine the various aspects of wrestling Akharas of Punjab i.e., facilities, organization, administrative set-up, training programmes and incentives given to wrestlers.
3. It was to prepare a valid document of the past that would reveal historical perspectives to the future generations in the field of wrestling.

DELIMITATIONS:

1. The study was confined to the wrestling Akharas of Punjab only.

LIMITATIONS:

The research scholar was depended on the interview with the Akhara organizers, selected contemporaries of prominent wrestlers and players by using questionnaire which was considered as a limitation for this study. Researcher also toiled hard to get required information from different textbooks, magazines, newspapers etc., but paucity of related literature might be a limitation of the study.

Definition of the Terms Used in the study

SPORTS: - “Organized play that is accompanied by physical exertion guided by formal structure, organized within the context of formal and explicit rules of behaviour and procedures, and observed by spectators”.

Mark et al (1991)

Contribution: Something that you do or give to help, produce or achieve something together with other people or to help make something successful

Advance Learner’s Dictionary (2005)
Case Study: A case study is a comprehensive study of a social unit – be that unit a person, a group, a social institution, a district or a community.

Young (1956)

Pehalwan: Wrestler, champion, fig a hefty person.

Joshi and Gill (2002)

Mall: Wrestler, a stout and strong man.

Joshi and Gill (2002)

Wrestling: Wrestling res’ling, a sport in which two opponents grapple for supremacy according to prescribed rules, Origination in antiquity wrestling is the oldest and most basic form of recreational combat. Modern amateur wrestling is essentially a refinement of ancient techniques”.

Encyclopedia Americana International (1829)

Akhara: A form, amphi-theatre, a place where dramas are enacted (played), a ring formed by spectators around a wrestling bout, a battlefield, assemblage of saints, group of religious preachers following the order of nirmala sadhus.

Nabha (2004)

Chhinjh: Arena of wrestling, a bout of wrestling, ghol, kushti, an assembly of spectators watching a wrestling bout.

Nabha (2004)

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study would be a great source of inspiration to the present and future wrestlers, promoters, educational institutions and wrestling organizers to develop new guidelines, to improve existing facilities, organizational and administrative set-up pattern on the basis of present scientific work. It would serve to promote wrestling consciousness among the people. It would be a valuable addition to the professional literature in wrestling in India. Further it would be helpful in providing leads for conducting research studies in similar directions for other indigenous games.