

CHILDREN'S GAME FOLKLORE AND THE CULTURAL PERCEPTION OF THE CALENDAR

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20666207>

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Abstract

This article examines the relationship between children's game folklore and the cultural perception of the calendar. It argues that children's games, chants, songs, seasonal performances, and ritualized play are not merely forms of entertainment but symbolic mechanisms through which children internalize collective ideas of time, nature, seasonality, social order, and ritual transition. Drawing on folklore studies, anthropology of play, calendar-ritual theory, and Uzbek children's folklore, the article analyzes how calendar-related play encodes seasonal cycles, agricultural rhythms, lunar and solar temporal systems, religious holidays, and communal values. Special attention is given to Uzbek children's seasonal game folklore, including spring songs, Navruz-related performances, Ramadan chants, rain-invoking songs, sun and moon motifs, and household-visiting practices. The article concludes that children's game folklore functions as a living "calendar of culture": it transforms abstract temporal categories into embodied actions, rhythm, movement, song, competition, imitation, and communal participation.

Keywords

children's folklore, game folklore, calendar rituals, seasonal songs, Uzbek folklore, ritual play, Navruz, Ramadan chants, cultural time, folk pedagogy.

Introduction. In traditional societies, the calendar is not only a system for measuring days, months, and years. It is also a cultural code that organizes work, rest, celebration, ritual obligation, memory, and social identity. Within this system, children's game folklore occupies a special place because children learn time not only through formal explanation but through repeated participation in songs, games, seasonal rituals, and festive performances.

Children's folklore includes lullabies, counting-out rhymes, riddles, teasing songs, play songs, ritual chants, seasonal songs, and game formulas. In Uzbek tradition, children's folklore contains play songs, riddles, tongue twisters, fairy tales, teasing formulas, caressing songs, and other genres adapted to children's speech, movement, imagination, and social experience. Research on Uzbek children's folklore also shows that game songs and seasonal-ritual songs form an important part of the broader folk tradition.

The central thesis of this article is that children's game folklore creates a bridge between **cosmic time** and **social time**. Cosmic time refers to natural cycles such as day and night, winter and spring, rain and drought, the appearance of the moon, or the renewal of vegetation. Social time refers to culturally organized moments such as Navruz, Ramadan, Eid, harvest periods, weddings, and household rituals. Children's games convert these temporal structures into playful forms: running, singing, calling, visiting houses, imitating animals, asking for rain, welcoming spring, or blessing households.

Theoretical framework: play, ritual, and calendar time – the study of children's game folklore requires an interdisciplinary approach. Folklore studies explain oral transmission and traditional forms; anthropology explains ritual and social function; play theory explains the symbolic logic of games; and cultural semiotics explains how signs of time are encoded in words, gestures, and performances.

Johan Huizinga's theory of play is especially relevant because he argues that culture itself contains a fundamental play element. In *Homo Ludens*, Huizinga connects play with ritual, law, poetry, art, and social order, suggesting that play is not secondary to culture but one of its formative forces. This idea helps us understand why children's calendar games are culturally serious despite their playful appearance.

Roger Caillois further developed the theory of play by classifying games according to dominant principles such as competition, chance, simulation, and vertigo. His distinction between free improvisational play and rule-governed games is useful for analyzing children's seasonal folklore, because many calendar games combine spontaneous children's creativity with inherited ritual structures.

Brian Sutton-Smith's work is also important because he emphasized that children's folklore should not be reduced to simple amusement or adult imitation. *Children's Folklore: A Source Book* presents children's folklore as a complex and artistic field of child-to-child cultural transmission, challenging the idea that childhood culture is merely primitive or derivative.

From the perspective of ritual theory, Arnold van Gennep's concept of rites of passage is useful. Although his theory mainly concerns life-cycle rituals, its three-part structure – separation, transition, and incorporation – can also be applied to calendar rituals. Seasonal games often mark the movement from one temporal condition to another: winter to spring, fasting to feast, drought to rain, old year to new year.

Calendar consciousness in children's game folklore – calendar consciousness means the ability of a community to perceive time as meaningful, cyclical, and value-laden. In children's game folklore, this consciousness appears in several forms.

First, children learn **seasonal difference**. Spring games differ from winter games; rain-invoking songs differ from harvest-related songs; Ramadan chants differ from Navruz songs. Each type of performance belongs to a specific temporal frame.

Second, children learn **ritual order**. They discover that some songs are sung only at certain times, some games are played only during particular seasons, and some forms of visiting or blessing are acceptable only during special calendar periods.

Third, children internalize **social values through time**. Spring games teach renewal and hope; Ramadan chants teach generosity and blessing; rain songs teach dependence on nature; Navruz performances teach community solidarity and intergenerational respect.

Thus, the calendar is not memorized as a list of dates. It is experienced through the body, voice, movement, repetition, and communal interaction.

Uzbek children's game folklore and seasonal time – uzbek children's game folklore is deeply connected with seasonal rituals. Studies on seasonal songs in Uzbek children's game folklore note that such songs often relate to nature, ritual, work, and the emotional education of children. Some songs are linked to ancient views about the sun, moon, rainbow, wind, rain, and other natural phenomena, showing that children's folklore preserves archaic layers of worldview.

This is particularly significant because children's seasonal songs are not isolated literary texts. They are performed in concrete situations: in courtyards, streets, fields, neighborhoods, family gatherings, festive spaces, and ritual processions. Their meaning emerges through performance.

For example, spring-related children's songs often celebrate the awakening of nature, flowers, greenery, water, and sunlight. Songs connected with "Boychechak," "Lola," "Chitti gul," and similar motifs are not only about plants;

they are symbolic expressions of spring's arrival. Through such songs, children participate in the collective recognition of seasonal renewal.

In Uzbek cultural life, Navruz is one of the clearest examples of calendar-related ritual time. UNESCO describes Navruz/Nauryz as a traditional spring festival connected with nature, the sun, and the renewal of life. The celebration includes music, dance, public rituals, traditional sports, gift exchange, visits to relatives and neighbors, and practices that strengthen community solidarity.

Children's participation in Navruz-related games and songs is especially meaningful. They do not merely observe the festival; they enact it. By singing, visiting, playing, competing, and receiving gifts, they become active carriers of the calendar tradition.

Solar, lunar, and natural time in children's play - children's game folklore reflects several models of time.

1) Solar time - solar time is connected with daylight, warmth, spring, vegetation, and agricultural renewal. In children's songs, the sun is often imagined as a life-giving force. Games associated with spring and Navruz belong mainly to this solar-symbolic system.

2) Lunar time - lunar time is especially important in Islamic ritual culture because Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, and other religious dates are determined according to the lunar calendar. In Uzbek children's ritual folklore, Ramadan chants such as "Yo Ramazon" show how children participate in lunar-religious time. Your previously prepared article on Hijri-lunar calendar children's ceremonial songs also emphasizes that Ramadan songs are connected not to a fixed natural season but to sacred religious time.

3) Meteorological time - rain, wind, snow, drought, and heat also shape children's game folklore. Rain-invoking songs and sun-related chants reflect children's symbolic relationship with the environment. These forms preserve traces of ancient animistic and agrarian worldviews, even when their original ritual meaning has weakened.

4) Agricultural time - although children are not always direct agricultural laborers, their folklore often reflects agricultural life. Planting, flowering, ripening, harvest, and abundance appear in symbolic form. Through games and songs, children absorb the agrarian calendar of the community.

The most important feature of Ramadan chants is that they are linked to the **Hijri-lunar calendar**, not to a fixed season. Since the lunar year is shorter than the solar year, Ramadan moves through different seasons over the years. This distinguishes Ramadan chants from spring songs and Navruz games.

Ramadan game folklore teaches children several cultural values:

First, it teaches **generosity**, because householders give sweets, bread, money, or other gifts.

Second, it teaches **blessing speech**, because children learn to express good wishes for prosperity, health, children, and abundance.

Third, it teaches **religious time**, because children experience Ramadan as a special period different from ordinary days.

Fourth, it teaches **social communication**, because children must approach households, sing collectively, receive responses, and follow behavioral norms.

In this sense, Ramadan chants are not only songs but also miniature social dramas. Children become symbolic messengers of sacred time.

The pedagogical function of calendar game folklore – calendar-related children's games perform an important educational function. They teach children without formal instruction. Through participation, children learn:

- a) the names and meanings of seasons;
- b) the difference between ordinary and festive time;
- c) respect for elders and neighbors;
- d) formulas of blessing and gratitude;
- e) collective discipline;
- f) oral memory;
- g) musical rhythm;
- h) cultural identity;
- g) moral values such as generosity, patience, renewal, and solidarity.

This is why children's calendar folklore can be understood as a form of **folk pedagogy**. It educates through experience rather than explanation. The child does not simply hear that Navruz means renewal or that Ramadan means generosity; the child performs renewal and generosity through ritualized play.

Symbolic opposition in calendar games – calendar games often operate through symbolic oppositions:

Opposition	Meaning in children's game folklore
Winter / Spring	death and sleep / renewal and life
Drought / Rain	lack / abundance
Darkness / Light	uncertainty / hope
Old year / New year	ending / beginning
Hunger / Feast	restraint / joy
Silence / Song	ordinary time / ritual time

Opposition	Meaning in children's game folklore
Individual / Group	private experience / communal identity

These oppositions are not taught abstractly. They are embodied through songs, gestures, competitions, visiting, and collective performance.

Transformation in modern contexts – modernization, urbanization, schooling, migration, digital media, and changing family structures have transformed children's calendar game folklore.

In rural areas, many seasonal and ritual games may still be connected with neighborhood life, courtyards, fields, and collective celebrations. In urban environments, however, some practices have moved into schools, kindergartens, cultural centers, staged performances, television programs, and social media.

This transformation has both positive and negative aspects. On the one hand, staged and digital forms help preserve songs that might otherwise disappear. On the other hand, when a game is removed from its natural performance context, it may lose some of its ritual spontaneity and communal function.

For example, a Ramadan chant performed by children in a classroom has educational value, but it differs from a chant performed while visiting households during Ramadan. Similarly, a Navruz song on stage differs from a spring game played in a courtyard. The text may remain, but the social energy of performance changes.

Nevertheless, folklore is not static. It survives through adaptation. Children's game folklore continues to change because children themselves are creative performers. They shorten texts, add new lines, imitate media, mix old and new melodies, and adapt games to contemporary spaces.

Discussion. The relationship between children's game folklore and the calendar reveals that time is culturally produced. Children do not receive the calendar as a neutral system; they experience it as a sequence of meaningful events, emotions, movements, songs, prohibitions, permissions, and expectations.

In Uzbek children's folklore, calendar consciousness appears in at least three major forms:

First, **seasonal-natural consciousness**, seen in spring songs, flower motifs, rain-invoking chants, and games connected with natural renewal.

Second, **religious-lunar consciousness**, seen in Ramadan chants, Eid-related children's greetings, and blessing formulas.

Third, **communal-festive consciousness**, seen in Navruz games, visiting customs, gift exchange, and neighborhood performances.

These three forms often overlap. A single children's performance may contain natural symbolism, religious language, social exchange, and playful improvisation at the same time.

Conclusion. Children's game folklore is one of the most important cultural mechanisms through which children learn the calendar. It turns abstract time into lived experience. Through games, chants, songs, processions, and festive play, children understand when spring begins, why rain matters, why Ramadan is sacred, why Navruz symbolizes renewal, and why community celebration requires participation.

The calendar in children's folklore is not only chronological but symbolic. It is heard in rhythm, seen in movement, felt in collective joy, and remembered through repetition. Therefore, children's game folklore may be described as a living calendar of the people.

In Uzbek tradition, this living calendar is especially rich because it combines solar, lunar, agricultural, religious, and seasonal forms of time. Spring songs, Navruz games, Ramadan chants, rain songs, and blessing formulas all show that children are not passive recipients of tradition. They are performers, transmitters, and creative interpreters of cultural time.

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