

Dogor: The Round Stone Game

Dogor (རྟོག་ལྷན་) literally means round stone, and refers to an outdoor game played by men across Bhutan. It is a Bhutanese boule game which can be played impromptu as it requires no prefabricated equipment, gear, preparation or training. Although similar to European boule games, the Bhutanese do not use round balls but stone discs that are not rolled but rather thrown at a target.

Each player carries a pair of stone discs, which are generally collected from the ground or from a river bed before the game starts. The stones usually weigh two to four kilograms in weight depending on what the player prefers to throw. A lighter stone can be thrown and controlled easily whereas a larger stone, if it lands near the target, cannot be pushed out easily but it can push out the opponent's stone. The stone is chipped to form a smooth round shape and thick enough to be fitted between the palm and thumb for easy control. The edges are made smooth so that it can be released easily without bruising the hand. A hard stone is preferred over a soft one as the stone can break when hit by others.

The range for throwing the stones can be between 15-20 meters depending on the area. At either end of the range, two spots are marked with targets which are either small visible stones or pegs in the ground. The area around the target is cleared to have an incline towards the player so that the target is visible and stone would land comfortably. The players are divided into two teams in equal numbers and each team is associated with one of the targets. A line is often drawn near the target as a point from where to throw the stones. The players of each team form a sequence and two players, one from each team, throw their stones alternately. The person who is associated with the target throws first. Thus, if the person from team A throws first at target 1, then person from team B throws first at target 2. The one who throws first has the advantage of occupying the empty space near the target but the one who throws later has the advantage of not having someone to push his stone out if it is already near the target.

The main strategy of the game is to place one's stones or the stones of one's team member close to the target and obstruct the stones of opposing team from the target or push them away from the target.

Thus, young and average players in a team are made to throw their stones before the more senior and experienced players who are able to push the opponents' stones away from the target. If the target is not fixed, they may aim to push the target away from the opponent's stone. For scoring points, the stone must be within a specific distance, often a handspan (touched by the tips of the thumb and middle finger), from the target.

Team mates cheer the players and guide them as to where they should aim their stones. The game has a jovial culture with some specific terminologies used to refer to the position of the stone and the mode of throwing. For example, *charo* (ཚམས་གསལ་), or companion, refers to an invitation to place the stone next to a teammate's stone, which is close to the target, without disturbing it. On the other hand, *thöpa* (ཚོད་པ་), or skull, is to crack the skull by hitting hard at the opponent's stone, which is near the target, in order to displace it. One point is scored for every stone which is within such distance and closer to the target than the opponent's stone. If a stone close to the target is hit hard and fragmented but the team decides to count the point, the player must play with the largest fragment of the stone at least three times.

A game may be set at eleven, thirteen or fifteen points and whichever team reaches such point first wins a game. If a team does not score even a single point and the opponent wins the game, the team is said to be rotten and stinking. The players may agree to have three to five games and the team which wins the majority wins the match and the agreed bet. The *dogor* game is often played by men during holidays such as traditional new year and the concluding days of a local festival. The bet is often a festival meal in the evening. The winner may provide the rice while the losing team may be asked to supply more rare and expensive items such as meat, butter and cheese. Today, most *dogor* matches are played for cash, which is used to buy the resources.

As an entertaining and an easy game to play, *dogor* is still popular in rural parts of Bhutan. It is a common game that men play during picnics and holidays.

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