

**Discuss the role of play in your own life experience with reference to Huizinga's observations  
about the role of play in culture**

Fundamentally, the text 'Homo Ludens', written by Johan Huizinga in 1938, discusses the fundamental importance of the play element in culture, and in society. Throughout the play, Huizinga suggests that play is an essential part of culture, and a primary part of culture.

To begin with, Huizinga comments on the play concept as expressed in different languages. One of the things I was intrigued by was the possible meanings of the word play in different contexts, he specifically mentions the application of it being either in "serious strife" (Huizinga 43) or having "erotic applications" (Huizinga 43). This intrigued me because this was a different case in the other languages I had learnt in both high-school and my native languages. To play in English could mean a variety of things as shown by Huizinga, but to play in Hindi has very restricted, and different meanings. In Hindi play means entertainment, for example going to an amusement park, to play athletics, to play a drama, to play a character, to stimulate, or in some contexts you could even refer it to the weather. This is very different when compared to English as in essence it doesn't have "erotic applications" or even serious applications, you can't play to kill someone in Hindi. In addition, in Thai to play also has a very different meaning. It could be used in terms of entertainment, to amuse oneself, to act, to take part, to perform, and to compete, which is more similar to the English meaning.

Comparing it with the translations of the meanings of to play in German, I was able to observe that the German language actually has a broader range of words that mean to play, and so the definition of what Huizinga means sometimes might not be the same as the definition for us. Also, being exposed to the Hebrew language in college, I have found it quite surprising that one of his

observations in his book were incorrect, the word “sahaq” (Huizinga 35) actually doesn’t have the meaning of both “language” and “playing”, and the word for playing is actually “sachaq”, and for laughing is “tza-chaq”. They are confused because they sound very similar when said, and it would have been harder for Huizinga to check this as they didn’t have the modern translation tools we have today. However, this makes the question the reliability of his other data, and the conclusion he takes on language.

On the other hand, Huizinga also makes a close connection between the concepts of play and ritual. He suggests that because play involves special kind of behavior, which is governed by rules, all types of play could potentially be a type of ritual, or have elements of rituals in it. Yet, Huizinga doesn’t go to say that all ritual is play, but he says that ritual does not always have to include play. This is a point I agree with, and disagree with. Being exposed to two religions both Hinduism, and Buddhism, I have gone experienced many different types of rituals, all which include a certain element of play in them. Firstly, during Songkran - the Thai New Year’s Day, on the surface it is a celebration where you throw water, and to pray and give food to monks. On the surface it may seem serious when you pray and give food to the monks, however the playful element is still present in all of these activities, and therefore I disagree with his notion of the fact that ritual does not always have to include play.

Likewise, in Hinduism the festival Diwali is known as the “festival of lights”, and it is the time of transition from darkness unto light. There is a lot of prayer involved, and a lot of rituals within the festival itself, and the rituals have a lot of play like elements involved, and I also have to consider the fact that there might be a personal bias to my own religion. The rituals take place during night, and in the day where we first read stories involving god, and how this religion was to come into play, and this is very engaging to individuals such as myself, and also my family.

Moreover, Huizinga links play to American politics. He refers to American politics being the whole “apparatus of elections” (Huizinga 207). I found this quite interesting and something that I could link in with my life. In politics we are able to see the significance of play, and politics is very much linked in with our culture. Society sees politics as something of competitive nature and this competitive nature allows playfulness to exist in the mind frames of the parties that stand in the elections. They simply want to defeat the other party, one way or another using different types of tactics, and are willing to break the rules if necessary. In addition, Huizinga also comments on it being like a “natural sport” (Huizinga 207), and personally I would agree with this statement as in my own experiences of being in a family that has had support in one political party throughout and have stood for this party. In India there is a party called the “Bharatiya Janta Party”, or “BJP” for short. My family has been avid supporters of this party, and in my childhood I have seen a lot of events transpire could have been said to be an act of spoilsport, but required to defeat the other party. In one scenario the party explicitly paid people who live on the streets to vote for them, and made them voting cards, which is wrong on many moral levels.

However, the more intensified scenario I have encountered was overhearing individuals in a part discussing their future plans of blackmail people in many villages to vote for them for their lives, and this is something very unrighteous during an election. But I’ve realized that in politics if one group starts to do actions in this sense the other does as well, so there’s a nature of in a way playfulness of this back and forth of who can do the most daring challenge, and it is also like a sport. If we take the metaphor of American football one team has the ball and they have a certain amount of tries to score before the other team gets a go, and this is almost the same scenario that happens here.

In addition, I believe this is also like a sport as elections usually get telecasted and are globally watched and sponsored by. Through the elections, the Federal government gets a revenue from reaching as big of an audience as they can, and find as many sponsors as they can. Moreover, the sport like element of elections also adds a play-like element. If we also consider the audiences of the elections, we are able to develop this argument further - the fact that the audiences are also engaged like they would in a sporting event.

In conclusion, Huizinga helps me to consider the amount of links I have between my own personal experiences and play with his different and wide ranging explicit examples. However, there are disagreements between his theories and my personal opinions of culture, and also in his characteristics of play.

#### *Cited Work*

Huizinga, Johan. "Johan Huizinga." Amazon.com: : Books, Biography, Blog, Audiobooks, Kindle.

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