Banh Kli / Marble Shooting

Site of Documentation
Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Description

*Banh Kli* is a competitive game that tests a player’s marble shooting skills. Players have to shoot their marbles (known as *kli*) into holes (known as *loo*) and also successfully hit their opponent's marbles if they are to win. Played for bets, children are often motivated by the chance to steal the best marbles from others’ collections or gain small monetary prizes. Also played by older generations, the game is still popular today in both urban and rural areas of Cambodia.

Who Plays?
This game can be played with a group of two or more children, aged between 7 and 15 years old.

Accessories/Equipment
This game requires children to bring their own marbles, usually bought from local shops and markets. Relatively inexpensive and easy to find, marbles are usually made from glass and can range in size, weight, colour and clarity.
Time and Place

A game of *Banh Kli* can last for anything from 10 minutes to 1-2 hours depending on the availability of time, the skill of the players and the amount of marbles (or money) the children have. At school, it is played during recess which limits time and shortens each game. Once school is out, a *Banh Kli* tournament can last much longer. The game requires a large area of smooth, dry ground that is approximately 4 square metres in size. The ground must be soft enough for the children to dig small holes from which they will shoot their marbles. November through April are typically the best months to play, when days are warm and sunny.

Skills, Strategies and Qualities of a Good Player

The game requires the players to have excellent skill when using their fingers to shoot their marbles. Players who are good at judging distance, aiming and shooting the marble with accurate speed, will be the best players.

Popularity

Most popular among boys, the game is usually played during break time in the school playground. Many children also play and practice at home so they can improve their skills and win more bets. The game encourages children to judge distances, formulate strategies and estimate probabilities. A highly competitive game, younger children prefer to play it for punishment, while older children play for marbles or money.

History of the game

The use of marbles in children’s games dates back hundreds of years and is widespread throughout many parts of the world. In Cambodia, *Banh Kli* was played by older generations much in the same way as children play it nowadays.
Preparation

1. To set up the game there need to be at least two players. Each of them needs to have a marble which is usually brought in from home.

2. Next the players dig two holes (Hole A and Hole B) at a distance from each other of around 2-3 metres. Each hole should be around 4 centimetres in diameter.
How is the Game Played?

**Step 1:** Next, the order of play is determined. One player draws a line (about 50 centimetres long) in front of Hole A and a large square, approximately 70 centimetres in front of the line. Everyone shoots their marble from the line to get it as close as possible to the upper line of the square. The player whose marble is closest to the upper line is the first shooter, and the marbles that are furthest away are the last.
Step 2: The first shooter starts the game. There are two levels that each player needs to complete before they can compete with other players.

LEVEL 1

1. First, all the players in the identified order squat down and shoot their marble from Hole A to Hole B. They use a technique that places the thumb of one hand on the edge of the hole, while the marble is placed on the tip of the pulled back index finger, and held in place with the forefinger of the other hand.
2. The player whose marble lands closest to (or inside) Hole B wins and is the new starter. A piece of string or wood can be used to measure distances of several marbles that are in similar positions. Once again, order of play is identified by the distance of the marbles to the hole. Those closest shoot first and those furthest away shoot last. If two or three marbles land in the hole, the last player to get it in becomes the first player to start.
LEVEL 2

1. Next, the first player needs to shoot their marble into Hole B directly from where it sits. They are also allowed to shoot one of the others players' marbles before shooting their own, if they anticipate a low chance of shooting into the hole. They can also hit others’ marbles in order to make their opponent's turn more difficult. After shooting into Hole B, the first player needs to shoot back into Hole A. If their marble was already in Hole B, they must then shoot straight back to Hole A.

2. If the player plans to shoot directly from Hole B to Hole A, they are only allowed one shot. If they fail, it is the next player’s turn. However, if the player aims for and hits any marble belonging to another player before shooting to Hole A, they are allowed to take two shots.

3. Once all players have taken their turn it's time to move onto the final level, the elimination round!

LEVEL 3

1. All players who successfully got their marbles into Hole A, in Level 2 earn a special credit. From now on, if during their turn they shoot and hit any marble belonging to another player, those players will have to leave the game. However, if they are hit by another marble that also has a special credit, they will also be eliminated. The aim of those players now is to try to get as many of the other players out, so they can stay in the game and win prizes! Other players who have not won the special credit have to keep trying to get their marble into Hole A before they are eliminated. After everyone is eliminated, they need to settle the bet or punishment.

2. After settling the bet or being punished, players can begin a new game.
Rules

1. The game must be restarted if:
   a. A player hits two or more marbles belonging to other players.
   b. A player’s marble hits another player’s marble into Hole B.

2. If a player hits any other marble in Level 1, they will shoot first in Level 2.

3. If two marbles land in the hole, the players whose marble fell in second will be the first shooter.

4. The players are allowed to make strategic hits to stop other players’ marbles from reaching the hole.