

Popguns and peashooters

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ABSTRACT

This article briefly describes and illustrates three types of native ballistic bamboo toys found in Indonesia: popguns, squirt guns, and peashooters.

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Popgun; Squirt gun; Peashooter-1; Peashooter-2; References.

VERSION HISTORY

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This article briefly describes and illustrates three types of native ballistic bamboo toys found in Indonesia: popguns, squirt guns, and peashooters.

Popgun

The Indonesian version of a popgun consists of two pieces: a tube (*tabung*) and a plunger (*pelantak*), and is variously used to shoot fruits, seeds or spitwads. Michael Martens writes:

Uma boys make a toy that sounds like what you describe. They usually shoot the tiny fruits from a certain tree, but spitwads work too. It is 'shot' by quickly forcing in a plunger, not by blowing. My definition, written by an Uma school teacher, is: *pistol-pistolanan mainan anak-anak yg dibuat dari bambu kecil, pelurunya dari buah pohon*. (Michael Martens 2005:p.c.)

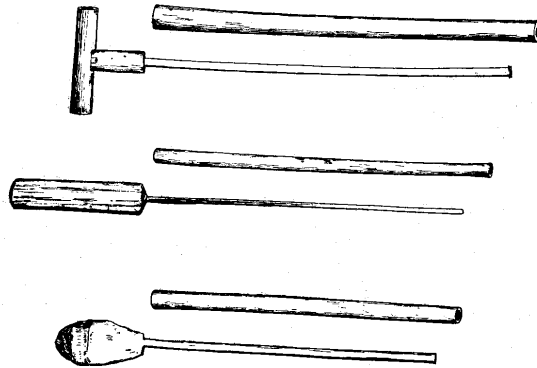


Figure 1. Popguns from Sumatra (from Kaudern 1929:257)

Kamus Besar and Wilkinson (1959:s.v.) support *senapan bambu*, *senapan buluh* and *bedil-bedilan* as Malay names for this toy (where *senapan* < Dutch *snaaphaan* 'flintlock,' and *bedil* < Tamil *veṭil* 'explosion'¹). According to dictionaries available to me, *bedil bambu* and *bedil buluh* are *incorrect* as names for this toy, as these compounds only have

¹ Blust (1973:614) hypothesizes that *bedil* entered Malay after the arrival of Tamil merchants in Malacca in the fifteenth century AD.

the figurative meaning ‘an empty threat.’ Note that English ‘popgun’ is spelled without hyphen.

Squirt gun

Squirt guns of native manufacture are very similar to the popguns, but are used to squirt out a stream of water. The basic apparatus consists of a bamboo tube and another length of bamboo or rattan to serve as piston (*pelocok*, *pelantak*), usually with a rag or corncob affixed to one end. Simple models use the natural constriction near the node to act as a nozzle. More deluxe models may be fitted with a separate nozzle (*mulut semprot*) which is smaller in diameter than the tube itself, in order to increase the force and distance with which the water is expelled.

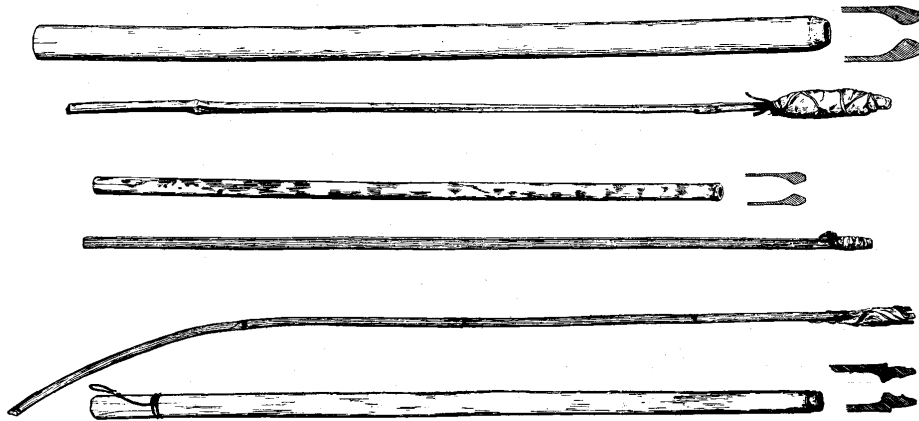


Figure 2. Squirt guns from Sulawesi (from Kaudern 1929:261)

Echols and Shadily translate ‘squirt gun’ as *pistol air*, but this seems to apply better of commercial (plastic) toy squirt guns. Native names for this toy such as Bugis *pana uwae* in Sulawesi and Aoheng *pana toang* in Borneo (Kaudern 1929:260, 263) (*uwae*, *toang* = ‘water’) suggest Indonesian *panah air* as a possible rendition, although one could also call it a *semprot mainan*. A qualifier such as *sj mainan anak-anak untuk menyemprot air* could be added. Note that English ‘squirt gun’ is written with a space.

Peashooter₁

You can think of one kind of peashooter as a kind of straw or ‘minature blowgun’ used for shooting small objects such as peas, seeds or spitwads with a puff of breath. While this matches definitions which you find for ‘peashooter’ in English dictionaries, I’ve never seen this kind of toy mentioned for (or used in) Indonesia. The Indonesian name is unknown to me. A somewhat lengthy Indonesian definition for this kind of peashooter from Salim

(1989:s.v.) runs as follows: *sj mainan berbentuk tabung melalui mana butir-butir kecil dapat ditambahkan [sic → ditembakkan?]*.

Peashooter₂

The second kind of peashooter, which is found in Indonesia, makes use of a piece of bent (tensed) rattan or bamboo as spring which thwacks a pebble or other object out of a bamboo barrel. In some models the spring is released using a catch or trigger (*pelatuk*).

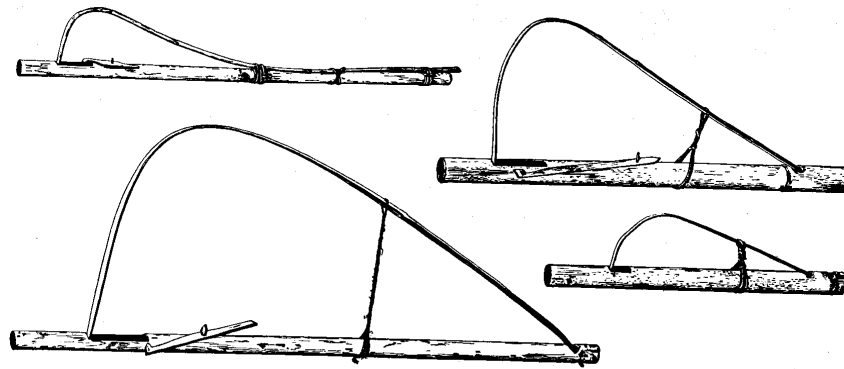


Figure 3. Peashooters from Sulawesi (from Kaudern 1929:267)

Again, the Indonesian term is unknown to me, but the Pamona (Central Sulawesi) term, *panabesi*, perhaps provides a clue: here *besi* must not refer to iron, but rather must equate with Malay *besi*, cf. *Kamus Besar* which defines *membesit* as *menyebat (mencambuk) dng rotan* ‘swipe (whip) with rattan.’ Based on the Pamona, then, we might ‘reconstruct’ the Indonesian term for this type of peashooter as *panah besit*. Note that English ‘peashooter’ is spelled without hyphen.

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