

Khel: A playground experience of the games of the Indian Subcontinent

Dr Chaitanya Solanki, Associate Professor
College of Architecture Trivandrum
PhD, Indian Institute of Technology, Hyderabad
md19resch01001@iith.ac.in, cs.collarc@gmail.com

The world is comfortably digital, and most interactions around the globe occur digitally. Keeping that in mind, this workshop is intentionally designed to take a step back so that the participants experience the games and interactions that mimic the feeling of a playground and still feel informed of something more.

An experiential workshop on the ancient games of the Indian subcontinent holds significant importance as it serves as a cultural bridge connecting the past with the present, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation for the region's rich heritage. These traditional games, such as Gulli-danda and Pachisi, are not merely recreational activities but carry profound historical, social, and philosophical dimensions, which will be described and explored during this event.

The workshop will provide a unique opportunity for participants to engage in physical activities practised for centuries, offering a hands-on experience beyond theoretical knowledge. By actively participating in these games, individuals will be able to grasp the cultural nuances, strategic elements, and values embedded in them, fostering a more profound connection to the roots of this subcontinental culture.

Workshop, play-by-play

This workshop is designed to be a hands-on, participatory-styled experience, miming the feeling of a playground. The workshop will begin with a short introduction to the different kinds of games originating from the Indian subcontinent. The introductory session will run for around 30 minutes, providing insights into how these games came to be and which of the games belong where geographically. Later, the workshop will open itself into more of a play-to-learn experience where the participants will come across different games set up in other parts of the hall, and they will be free to explore any of the games they would like to play. Guided instruction will be provided to every participant. They will also be informed about the origins and the indigenous context of how and when the game is supposed to be played. Some games that require space for playing, like Gilli Danda and Sitolia, will be showcased to the entire group collectively, preferably in an open space, and teams will be made so that people can experience them as intended.

Images of the chosen games for this workshop are depicted below from Figs. 1-9. This is a working list, as more games may be added upon the approval of the workshop.



Fig.1 The hand-embroidered game of Chaupar / Pachisi



Fig. 2 Pallanguzhi, a strategy-based game played on handcrafted containers

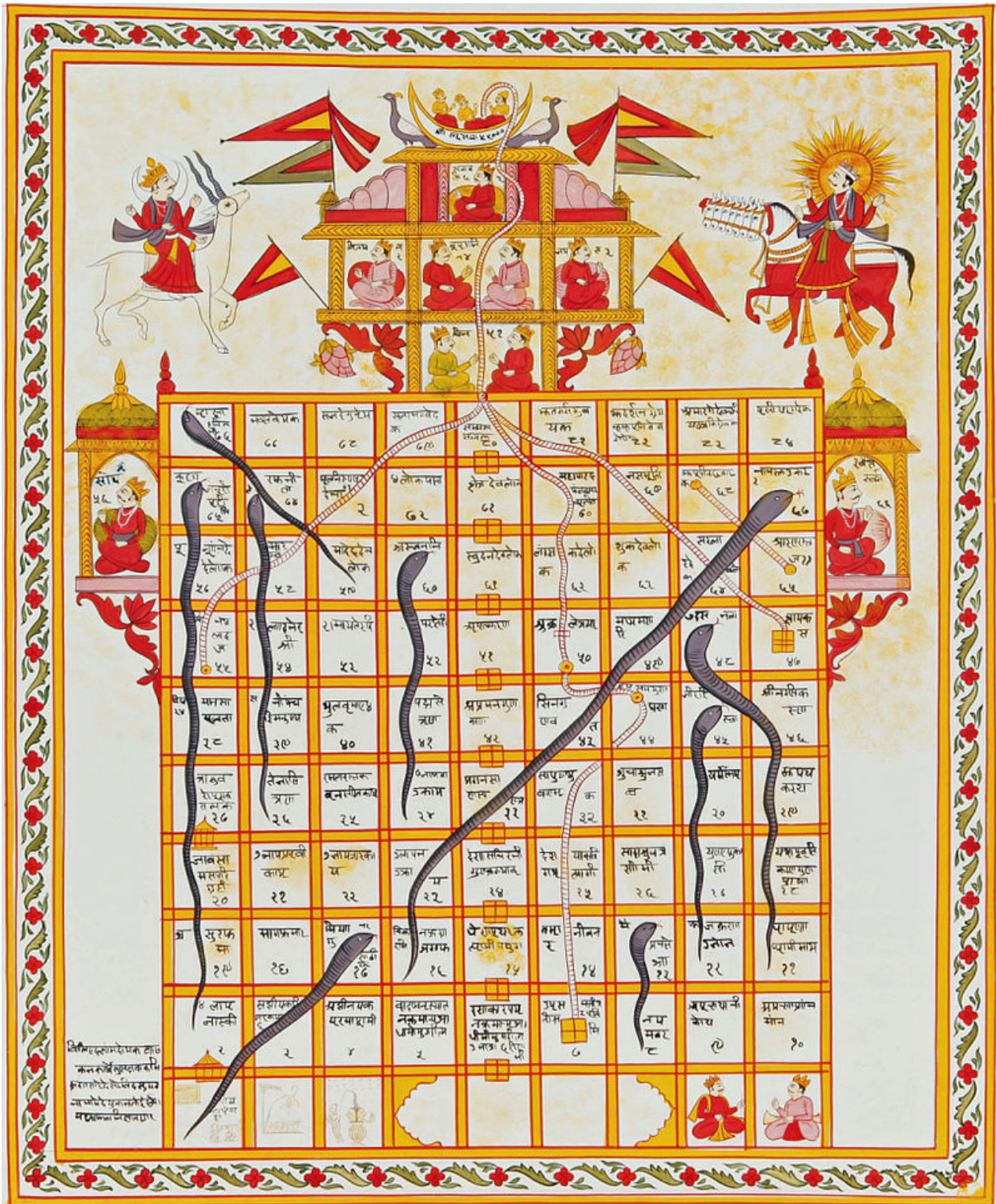


Fig. 3 The forefather of Snakes and Ladders and a game for inducing Vedic learning, Moksha Pattam



Fig. 4 Chaturanga, later known to the world as Chess



Fig. 5 Chaturaji, an ancient four-player spin on Chaturanga



Fig. 6 The dextrous game of Gutte

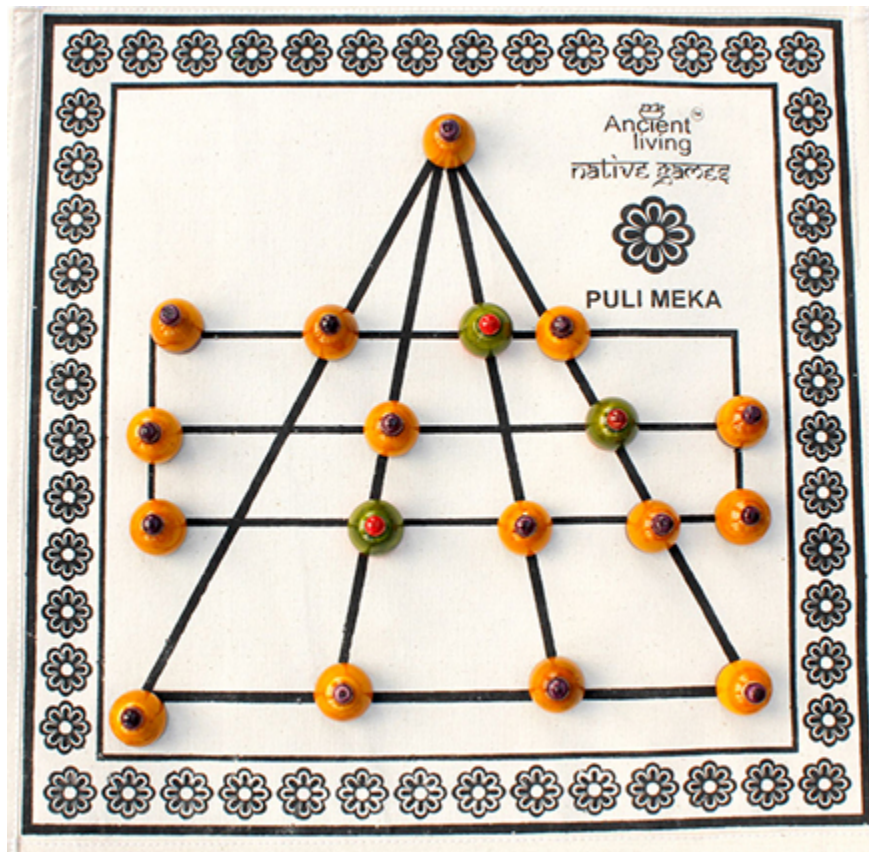


Fig. 7 Puli Meka, the game of fifteen lambs and three tigers



Fig. 8 Gulli Danda, exported to the world as the game Tipcat



Fig. 9 The high-adrenaline, high-movement game of Sitolia / Pitthu

Organising an experiential workshop on these games at DiGRA contributes to preserving the cultural heritage of ancient gaming interactions because traditional practices risk fading into obscurity as modernisation and globalisation advance. By actively engaging in and promoting these ancient games, this gaming community can ensure the transmission of cultural knowledge from one set of people to another, thereby safeguarding a piece of identity.

Finally, it is felt that an experiential workshop on the ancient games of the Indian subcontinent is crucial for fostering cultural awareness, preserving heritage, and promoting a holistic understanding of the socio-cultural fabric of the region. It will allow participants to immerse themselves in the living history of these games, gaining insights into the values and traditions that continue to shape the identity of this subcontinent.

Participants and duration

This workshop is intended to be an inclusive experience. Therefore, the exclusion criteria are only that the participants are willing to play the games laid out in front of them.

The workshop should easily take up to 40-60 participants, given that the hall/room can accommodate them. According to the reception, the workshop can actively be conducted for 3 hours, and the hall can then be left accessible for the next 3 hours if participants would like to stream in and play later during the day.

Background of the organiser

Chaitanya Solanki, the intended organiser of this workshop, is currently working as an associate professor at the College of Architecture, Trivandrum, and has gotten his Ph.D. from IIT Hyderabad. Chaitanya has conducted several workshops before, with the recent one being 'Gamification of Everything', conducted at ICoRD'23 hosted at IISc, Bangalore, the top-ranked institute of India.

Having attended, presented, and chaired at DiGRA multiple times, the author understands what the audience of this conference expects from such a prestigious event. He, therefore, hypothesises that this edition, which concerns itself with the theme of 'playgrounds', will be a perfect fit for such a workshop proposal.

The participants of this conference are generally very proactive and excited to delve into the different worlds of games; however, the workshops are often conducted only through verbal interaction and presentations. That is the reason why the organiser feels that a workshop where the participants get to learn about the content and experience it firsthand with all its intended vigour will be a great addition to DiGRA Guadalajara.

Image References:

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