
Old Games in New Garb: Challenges in Musealisation of Ancient Indian Games

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Abstract: The musealisation of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) has seen considerable activity in the last few years, as museums redefine themselves as inclusive, performative spaces. The authors have been looking to apply the learnings of ICH to board games, a part of Indian culture relatively neglected as a discipline within museology. Our attempts take a two-part approach. The first includes documentation of literary, archival, oral and archaeological sources to create a basic knowledge pool of nearly 100 Indian games, while the second includes attempts to educate the general public and thereby revive fading traditions of playing board games, in the face of challenges posed by video games and other electronic forms of entertainment. Doing so, we have created standardised rules and boards for games including *Aṣṭāpada*, *Ashtachamma*, *Mōkṣapaṭam*, *Navakankari*, *Pachīsī*, *Tiger-and-Goat*, *Baghchal*, *Tablan*, *Sāgar-gōṭē*, *Kāchāpāni*, *Viti-Dandu*, *Laghōrī* and *Pallānguzhi* using everyday materials. Our experiments encourage us to believe that game musealisation is socially sustainable.

Keywords: Musealisation, Ancient Games, Everyday Materials, Revival, Intangible Heritage, Ludic Heritage, Board Game Studies

Introduction: Games as Intangible Heritage

The definition of fun changes with time, but few will deny that play is not a part of it, whether physical, sedentary or as is the most common form observed today, virtual. Play, psychologists tell us, is a critical part of human existence (Gray 2008). Play is critical to the muscular and mental development of children, and relevant for mental and physical relaxation among adults. It implies therefore that play has been a critical part of the human condition, even before humanity itself existed, in its current form as *Homo sapiens*.

Both physical (field) and sedentary (board and card) games have been devised in many civilisations often as teaching aids for strategic, moral, mental, social, physical, reflexive, probabilistic, calculative, arithmetic, geometric, alphabetic, imaginative, military, tactical, religious, spiritual and other forms of training and education. They

can play a stellar role in organisational development, whether at school, college or workplace level, with suitable adaptations, acting not only as ice-breakers, but also in work-stress relief, confidence building, team building and personality assessments (Sidhartha 2019; Parthasarathy & Sidhartha 2019). While a number of sports may be attested from the earliest periods of human existence, sedentary games of skill and calculation go way into the past too, perhaps even before humanity learned to write. Board games can also be used as instructional aids for problem-solving and strategy-making, a role played by games like chess for centuries.

Ignoring board games in the study of a community, through sociological and anthropological lenses would be an avoidable fallacy. Explaining the role of games in mirroring social values, anthropologist Peter J. Claus writes, *"In analysing games we rightly place their play in the context of the cultures in which we find them. Games draw meaning from analogous social actions. They often consist of limited and highly generalized metaphors of other sets of activities in a culture. When a game further becomes imbedded in tales and rituals, it becomes at once a reference to the game as played in ordinary life as well as a metaphor in its own right explicitly linking various action sets to a moral order. Thus, in pursuing the process of the transformation of a game into a ritual metaphor we delve deeper and deeper into the specific framework of a culture's symbolic system and the particular expressions of a people's feelings and motivations"* (Claus 1987).

Among the earliest known forms of evidence are game pieces in the form of 39 small stones, carved in various shapes including animals, discs, pyramids and bullets discovered by the Başur Höyük Archaeological Project at an Early Bronze Age site in Turkey, otherwise known for child sacrifice (Sağlamtimur & Massimino 2018). The oldest known recognisable dice (singular: *die*) in the world were recovered from Shahr-i-Sokhta. Dice found in Mesopotamia have been found to be made of turtle shells, wood, painted stones, and knuckle-bones (Attia 2016). Cubical six-faced dice have been unearthed from various sites of the Harappan Culture (Marshall 1931). Roman dice are known in marble, glass and ivory alongside brass and copper (Attia 2016).

The earliest evidence for board games in India has been in the form of terracotta dice and brick boards excavated from several Harappan sites. There are plentiful references to board games in literature as well as in sculpture and painting; indeed, you can find game boards scratched into the floors of many old temples and caves, especially in South India. The medieval writer Giridhara, author of the *Gaṇjīphākhēlanam* (गञ्जीफाखेलनम्) wrote that, *"...it is perfectly all right to play games, especially if pleasure or happiness is derived from it, just as we respect a lotus, even if it is born out of mud"* (Wakankar 1979-80).

That said, finding the earliest evidence of any particular game is a tricky question, as most traditional game boards are ephemeral. They are carried around in human heads, and etched, chalked, drawn or painted onto a suitable surface at the start of play, and abandoned soon after. The same applies to rules: the best and longest lasting games

have the simplest rules that can yet lead to complex and engaging play for hours. The play pieces and dice themselves are resistant to such mentalisation, but can be improvised on the spot using pebbles, sticks, shells, coins and fragments of pottery. If the *Brahmajāla Sutta* is to be believed, Tathagata's contemporaries played a game of *ākāsa* (*Dīgha Nikāya: Brahmajāla Sutta: Majjhimasīla*), in which board, pieces, dice and moves were all played imagined in the air between players, the entire game narrative being held in the mind alone.

Although, it is truly hard to tell whether a certain figurine unearthed from an archaeological excavation is a religious idol or simply a child's toy. Aspects of play and religion often intersect; perhaps this led to the old Tamil saying, *Children and Gods are like one* (In Tamil: குழந்தையும் தெய்வமும் ஒன்று. Tamil culture has it that the Gods need to be made much fuss of, like children, and given rich foods to eat and dressed and made up in fancy fashion). Games are therefore an integral, if neglected, part of our intangible social heritage, and have also contributed in a small way to the heritage of decorative arts and crafts. Academic study of the games from the past, both in terms of their material remains and literary references, is scant. The scholar SY Wakankar (1979-80) lamented that,

It is a matter of great surprise that Sanskrit scholars hardly pay due attention to the Sanskrit literature other than the Vedic and Classical... many an educated and learned scholar might not be aware of the fact that India has the distinctive credit of the inventions of the games such as Chess (Chaturāṅga), Ganjipha (Playing Cards), the concept of zero and Magic Squares etc.

Most games are abstract, often created as a miniature model of conflict. The anthropologist Thomas M. Malaby writes, "*Games, the author argues, are domains of contrived contingency, capable of generating emergent practices and interpretations, and are intimately connected with everyday life to a degree heretofore poorly understood*" (Malaby 2007). Examples range from two armies facing off each other (Chess), soldiers storming a fort (Alquerque), and predators hunting prey (Diviyan Keliya), or humans on the path of life to mōkṣa (Mōkṣapaṭam).

Accordingly, the pieces used for play are often named 'men' (and so, Nine Men's Morris or chessmen). The ancient Greeks used the word 'dogs' for their play-pieces, and so do the people of modern South India. Among herders, pieces are often named 'cows' or 'sheep'. Although board games played by the rich and powerful in the past (now under glass in museums around the world) often had pieces of wood, ivory, precious metals or gemstones made to resemble animals and men (Finkel 2006), ordinary folk made do with round pebbles (*guti*) of two or more colours. They're easy to find, and provoke no tears if lost. In the same way, the time-honoured method of making a game board is to etch it in the dust, to be as ephemeral as the game played on it. For a rainy day, a sharp knife or hoe was enough to generate a board on a temple floor, leaving behind for the archaeologist a rich hoard of cultural information centuries later (Sali 2019). On the other hand, boards of the aristocracy could be as

richly embellished as money could buy. For example, the Royal Game of Ur, found in a Mesopotamian tomb (Woolley, Hall & Legrain 1934) was made of wood and its surface inlaid with precious stones. Similar boards in neighbouring civilisations have been made of ivory, wood and terracotta.

Musealising the Everyday

Schärer (2008) defines musealisation as follows:

Musealization is the preservation of the ideal values of things as signs. Basically, objects can be collected and preserved for their utilitarian function and/or for their ascribed values. The collection and preservation of objects based on ascribed ideal values is motivated by heuristic, aesthetic, symbolic or remembrance reasons.

Do museums primarily collect information? Yes, museums are collectors of signs. The process of musealization – saving cultural assets from the natural decay of the material world – is a specific appropriation of reality through setting apart, e.g., decontextualization. Objects are physically collected in order to be saved and preserved, but it is actually the specific man-thing relationship, a sign, (information, meaning, process) that is being musealized.

Critics of musealisation (Espacio Visual Europa 2015) have pointed out that traditional approaches have led to decontextualisation, with the museum display bereft of context, and disruptive of the man-thing relationship embodied by the object. The musealisation of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) presents multiple challenges with reference to units of intangible heritage such as dance, games or food; where performance (in terms of dance movements, play or preparation) and the consumption of the performance by the experiencer are key to the realisation of the entity. Nevertheless, means must be found to overcome such challenges in order that these 'systems of living human treasure' can be transmitted to future generations:

"UNESCO's 25th Session (1989) emphasized "Folk Culture is a form of expression of culture should be preserved, maintained and for the benefits of the group of people". Session 142 (1993), UNESCO proposed to set up "System of living humane treasure" [sic] to protect and honor the holder of culture, an important force for the conservation, protection, dissemination and transference ICH" (Nguyen 2016).

Having argued a case for treating board games as intangible heritage, we are faced with the twin objectives of preserving and presenting ancient South Asian games (from India, Sri Lanka and Nepal) to the lay public in an accessible manner. In this paper, we list learnings since October 2017 in preservation and presentation, with a focus on education and dissemination. Documentation of the remains of ancient games has been covered elsewhere (INSTUCEN Trust Consortium 2019). Considering the enormous diversity of ancient games in South Asia, successful musealisation presents several challenges.

Circumstances have limited us to urban spaces, interacting with urban students. Yet that is of utility, as "[a] city's heritage is a valuable and diverse aspect of human activity. In

recent years it has been particularly prone to fragmentation and degradation because of the dynamics of urban processes, social and economic changes and migrations of peoples.” (Berendt 2017). Much of our effort has been supported by our affiliate institution, the India Study Centre (INSTUCEN) Trust, Mumbai, an organisation dedicated to studying the tangible and intangible heritage of India, and to supporting scholarship in anthropology, archaeology, geology, biodiversity and allied fields (See www.instucen.org). INSTUCEN Trust has supported us in conducting various exhibitions and workshop to familiarise school students, teachers and laypersons with the rich legacy of over a hundred different kinds of board games played across South Asia. We have divided these into three broad fields of action.

Enquiry: Various approaches have been used to study board games in India. We briefly list a few approaches:

Anthropological: The Asiatic Society of Bengal was active in recording games played by people in different parts of India during colonial times (Ray & Ghosh 1999). After a hiatus of several decades, The Anthropological Survey of India carried out the Indian Board Game Survey (Bhattacharya, Finkel and Soni 2011), while Balambal V (2005) recorded several folk games from Tamil Nadu, India.

Art Historical: A different approach has been followed by art historians documenting late medieval board game components (boards, pawns, dice) from museum collections. Alongside several papers, the *Art of Play* edited by Andrew Topsfield (2006) is an excellent catalogue of such an approach.

Archaeological: Various authors are engaged in documenting ancient games, scratched as graffiti on the floors of monuments including caves, palaces, temples, forts, and even private homes, including Ramsons Kala Pratishtana in southern Karnataka (Singh, Dharmendra & Gowda, 2016), Dr. Deme Raja Reddy in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh (Reddy & Deme 2015) and Pankaj Bhosale in western Maharashtra (Bhosale 2019).

INSTUCEN Trust’s efforts include documentation of games from ancient monuments, survey of historical literature and interviews with people (Kamath 2019) to document which games form part of their culture. Much of this is conducted by the INSTUCEN Trust under the rubric of ‘Project Khēliya’ (INSTUCEN Trust Consortium 2019). Volunteers of the Trust have explored several monuments in Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra and Karnataka. Some of these explorations have been documented in papers presented at the 6th Explorations in Maharashtra Workshop, 18 August, 2019 at the University of Mumbai (Sali 2019, Rane 2019). The project also invites voluntary contributions from people when they observe games in monuments that they visit as tourists (Figure 1).

Education: This phase includes re-popularisation of ancient games among laypeople, who are beginning to lose this aspect of their own intangible history due to the rapid incursion of video games (Joshi and Aatreya 2019). Toward this objective, we at

INSTUCEN Trust have created standardised rules and boards for these games on the basis of both academic and internet (blog) literature; archaeological images; interviews with elderly people; and oral histories. We have also successfully trained over two dozen college-going volunteers in these games.

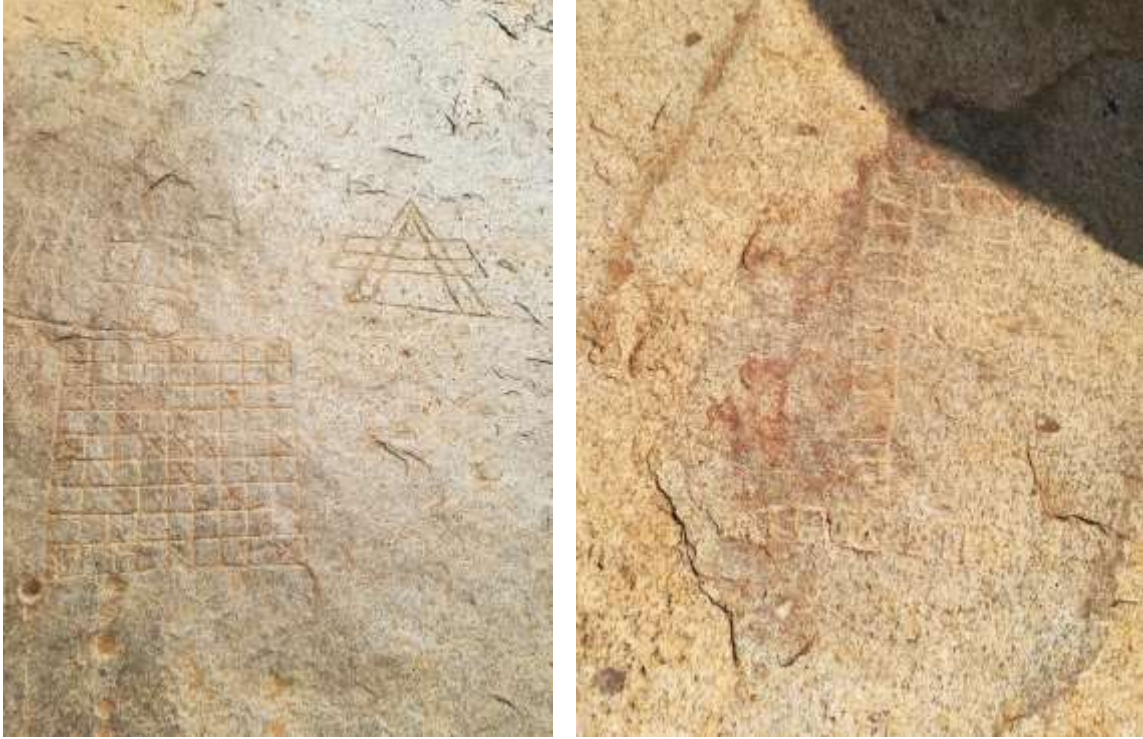


Figure 1: The games of Diviyan Keliya, Aṣṭāpada and proto-Pancha Keliya documented at Krishna's Butterball, Mahabalipuram. Image © Mr. Hasanka Padukka and Dr. Indrachapa Gunasekara, reproduced with permission.

Dissemination: Our trained associates have been conducting workshops and other events with the aim of teaching the games to as many people as possible. So far, we have conducted workshops in Mumbai, Maharashtra and Pilani, Rajasthan. Typically, each workshop consists of the following stages:

- Learning the history and the basic rules and playing the games
- Learning to make games with the simplest of materials
- Touching and feeling heirloom games to get a sense of their past
- Viewing a small display gallery of game board images collected from various monuments highlighting their past

Games we have revived and popularised include Aṣṭacamma, Aṣṭāpada, Bāghcāl, Campā, Caupar, Diviyan Keliya, Ganj, Ganjīphā, Kāchāpāni, Laghōrī, Mōkṣapaṭam, Nau-Kāṭā-Kāṭī, Navakankari, Paccīsī, Pallānguzhi, Sāgargōṭē, Tablan, Vītī-Dāndu and many more. Our efforts began with a pilot stall of ancient games at the annual mega-exhibition of archaeology and geology at the University of Mumbai, in December 2017. The popularity of the stall led us to organise 'Ancient Games Weekend' on Saturday,

June 16th and Sunday, June 17th, 2018, the first of its kind in Mumbai. We also organised 'Playing with the Past', India's first conference on ancient and medieval Indian board games on Saturday June 1st and Sunday June 2nd, 2019. This conference brought professional and amateur scholars on the same platform, as also manufacturers and popularisers of games. Further workshops have been organised with the Mumbai Press Club, the Birla Education Trust (Pilani, Rajasthan), The Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan's Zonal Institute of Education and Training (ZIET; Mumbai), the A. B. Goregaonkar Education Society's school (Mumbai), The Bal Jallosh Children's Fest, Mumbai and the Ramnarain Ruia College of Arts, Science & Commerce, Mumbai.



Figure 2: A 'fossil' game similar to Pancha Keliya found commonly in the Vijayanagara ruins, Hampi, Karnataka. Left: Aparna Joshi; Right: Shashank Sawant. Although it can be played by the rules of Modern Sri Lankan Pancha Keliya, its actual rules are now forgotten.

Challenges to Preservation of Board Games

'Fossilisation' of Games: Although game boards may be etched on the stone floors of monuments and thus become 'permanent', the rules to play the game cannot be preserved in any means known to archaeology, except as oral traditions passed over generations. Therefore, if the rules are forgotten by the community that lives among the monument, the game is extinct; like the mineralised remains of an ancient animal or plant, the board too is a 'fossil'. A case in point is the game described as 'proto-Pancha Keliya', documented by Hasanka Padukka and Indrachapa Gunasekara from

Mahabalipuram, Tamil Nadu, India. Although the game seems similar to the modern game of Pancha Keliya played in Sri Lanka, it is distinct from that game in having a shorter track and a closed loop. As no such game is played in Tamil Nadu currently, this is effectively a 'fossil'. Examples of similarly fossilised games were found at the Vijayanagara ruins (Hampi, Karnataka) by our associates Aparna Joshi and Shashank Sawant (Figure 2).

Nevertheless, in the case the rules can be found in some ancient manuscript or tablet, the game might still be reconstructed, if not revived completely. A well-known case is that of the Royal Game of Ur, known to be widespread in West, Central and perhaps South Asia in the Bronze Age (Frenez 2018). The rules of the game remained a mystery – in spite of attempts by board game enthusiasts, professional and amateur to reconstruct it – until the discovery of a Babylonian tablet in the collection of the British Museum, which bore the rules, incised in cuneiform (Finkel 2007).

'Jirṇōddhāra': This is a threat particular to South Asia. Games etched on the floors of places of worship can come under threat due to the custom of repairing, renovating and reconstructing (collectively labelled by the Sanskrit term '*Jirṇōddhāra*') such places in the belief that doing so bring merit ('punya'). '*Jirṇōddhāra*' is a religious belief not only among Hindus, Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs, but is also followed among subcontinental Jewish, Islamic & Christian communities. Unfortunately, many historical sculptures, architectural decorations etc. are lost post *Jirṇōddhāra*. Although sculptures and structural elements may be saved by placing them in museums, intangible items like paintings, graffiti and board games are lost forever. This is particularly acute when the floors of temples, churches, mosques etc are covered by granite or marble slabs as part of decorative renovations or embellishments, even if complete *Jirṇōddhāra* is not undertaken.

Improper Conservation: The threat of being cemented over also persists at monuments such as caves and forts that are now visited solely for tourist purposes. At monuments like the Kanheri and Mahākālī caves in Mumbai, we have observed that the original rock-cut floors have been cemented over by the authorities, in an attempt to smoothen the floor and reinforce the monument. Unless the games on the floors have been documented previously (of which we find scant evidence), we are bound to lose all evidence of them.

Modern Board and Video Games: These pose the most potent threat of all. Modern board games, manufactured commercially on a large scale, are marketed aggressively in attractive packaging by corporations, and attract the attention of children. On the other hand, virtual games are now accessible to a wider section of the population than ever before, due to the widespread availability of both cheap mobile phones as well as cheap 4G data. With a concurrent decrease in the amount of time spent by children in the presence of their parents and grandparent, opportunities for transmission of traditional board games are also dimming.

These challenges are largely insurmountable, given that they stem from larger cultural attitudes within society. In the religious-minded societies of South Asia, practices such as 'Jirṇōddhāra' cannot be stopped or even curbed. Nor can one stem the oncoming tide of technology. In the light of the above challenges, INSTUCEN Trust has formulated an approach considering games as 'living' heritage, as opposed to traditional approaches of musealisation which trap objects in glass cases, or otherwise seek to stop the march of time.

Museum displays are commendable methods for the preservation and presentation of game-related artefacts. In the necessary interest of the preservation of fragile objects, such as a medieval cloth board or ivory pieces, the 'gameness' of the object is stripped away as an unfortunate consequence, reducing it to art historical curiosity. Even as museums continue to play their role in the collection, conservation and display of gameboards and pieces as silent witnesses to history, we have taken the approach of education and dissemination of the rules and quirks of the games, the intangible aspects that indeed bring life to what would otherwise be strange patterns on cloth paired with otherwise meaningless pieces of ivory or wood. In doing so, we focus on the conservation of ancient games by disseminating them in contemporary popular culture, even when actual game boards are vulnerable to destruction.

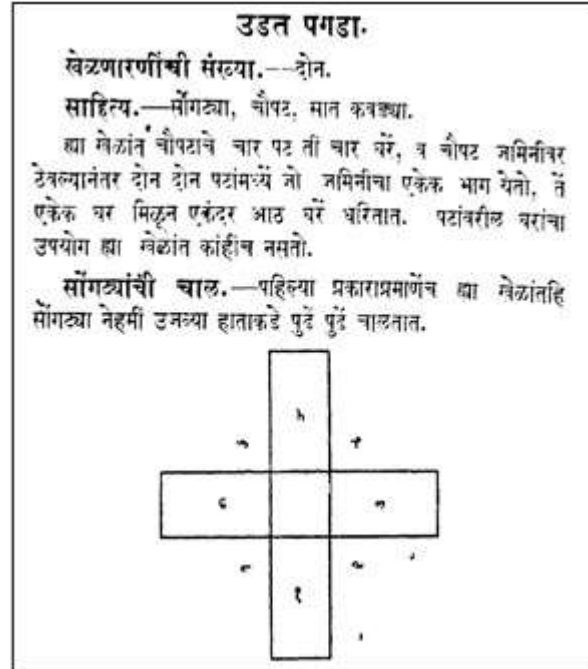


Figure 3: Left: Uḍat Pagḍā at Nasik Caves. Image © Sojwal Sali; reproduced with permission. Right: Page 371 of A. B. Deodhar's *Sachitra Marathi Khelanche Pustak*, describing the game of Uḍat Pagḍā.

Case Study: Revival of Uḍat Pagḍā

Under the aegis of Project Khēḷiya, one of our volunteers, Mr. Sojwal Sali has documented several games on the floors of the Tiraśmī Caves (Pāṇḍava Lēṇī) at Nasik

(Sali 2019). One of those included the pattern seen in Figure 3, which at the time of discovery, was a game unknown to us. It seemed too simple to be a board of the Caupar family of games, which is very popular across South Asia and is played in many forms. We even wondered whether it may not be a game at all.

Serendipitously, we stumbled upon its diagram in a book called *“Marathi Khelanche Pustak”* by A. B. Deodhar (1905). This book, published in 1905, came to our attention as part of our attempts to survey the literature on traditional board games of South Asia. Turning the pages, we came across a diagram identical to that reported by Mr. Sali, accompanying the chapter pertaining to a game called Uḍat Pagḍā. As a description of rules was given alongside the diagram, we could be certain that the pattern etched at the Triraśmī Caves was indeed a playable game. We must adduce two caveats:

- We cannot rule out completely any competing, non-game related claims as to its nature.
- Although we can claim revival of the game now, we can never be sure that the game etched in the Triraśmī Caves was played according to the same rules as those given by Deodhar.



Figure 4: Creating and decorating Uḍat Pagḍā from chart paper. Lecture-demonstration at Birla Education Trust, Pilani by Dnyaneshwari Kamath. Image © Aparna Joshi; reproduced with permission.

Nevertheless, as a part of the intangible heritage of our country, we may be able to say that the game is no longer a 'fossil'. Our find also enables us to establish the antiquity of Uḍat Paḡḡā between ancient & medieval times, going by the contention that the earliest date a game may have been played at a site may coincide with the earliest date of the site itself (Dalal 2019). The game of Uḍat Paḡḡā is now used regularly in or workshops to demonstrate how an ancient game may be revived and popularised (Figure 4).

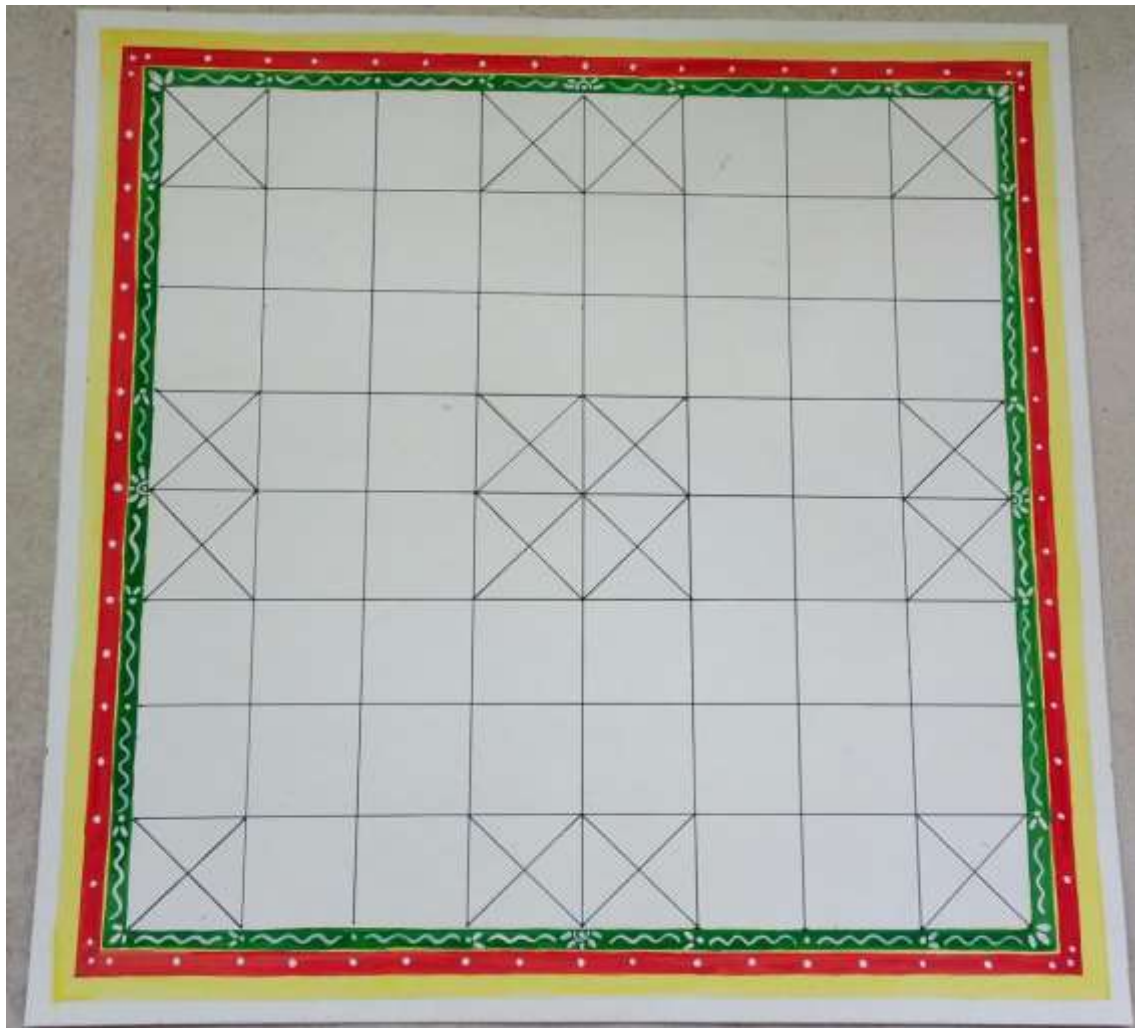


Figure 5: Aṣṭāpada, Laminated paper. Drawn and coloured by Dnyaneshwari Kamath

Musealisation of Traditional South Asian Games

Our approach to musealisation is based on methods that aim to preserve the performative aspect of traditional games, while attempting to provide as much context as is possible through narration. We remain conscious that the playing of games in urban settings, and for purely ludic purposes, is a compromise; nevertheless, games can and do escape boundaries of culture (e.g. chess, now played worldwide, even though it is based on a miniaturisation of the early historic Indian army (*Chaturāṅga*), with its cavalry, elephants, footmen and chariots), if only because their chief intent is

the relieving of tedium. We have nevertheless tried to retain some of the aspects that have been handed from time immemorial, such as:

- 'Make and play' from ordinary materials,
- Storytelling that seeks to pass on myths, histories, lore and traditions associated with games,
- Apply the game rules with a light touch, allowing players to invent their own rules, without having to be bound by the complexities of the traditional rules.

We have divided our musealisation effort into three parallel, co-evolving streams as follows:

Game Materials

Our experience across workshops has shown that using fancier material (i.e. material that looks expensive), such as commercially available games wherein the boards are printed on canvas or embroidered on silk can be inhibitory to students and adults from less-privileged economic strata. Instead, operating on the basis that the material of the game board is immaterial to its progress (as long as its geometry is conserved), we at INSTUCEN Trust have taken the 'cheap and cheerful' route of using everyday materials. This enables us to make the workshops accessible for students of all economic strata. We fabricate boards from affordable easily available materials such as chart paper (Figure 5), flex (Figure 6), and stone slabs (Figure 7), while game tokens are created using wooden beads, glass marbles or betel nuts that can be painted in multiple colours and themes. Plastic bottlecaps provide versatile gamesmen that are available in several colours and sizes, though we try not to encourage their use in the interest of environmental sustainability.



Figure 6: Aṣṭāpada in play; flex-printed board with cowry shells and coloured glass pebbles



Figure 7: Tiger and Goat, scratched on a stone slab, with painted betel nut tigers and shell goats

Drawing and colouring a game board on paper and laminating it with plastic helps to produce a sufficiently long-lasting board, which can be paired with cowries or dice. Furthermore, we have emphasised the use of local art forms in the decoration of game boards and pieces, in order to draw closer links between games and arts. In our opinion, at a time when traditional board games are not 'traditional' to the students who have grown up playing video games or commercial games such as Ludo, linkages with art and craft create a closer cultural bond. Not only does this replicate traditional ways of making board games, but also evokes the 'IKEA Effect' – in which a sense of ownership increases because of the aesthetic and physical labour involved in creating the games (Norton, Mochon and Ariely 2011).

Game Rules

However, these attempts at creating 'living museums' of games, where visitors and other participants can interact with the game materials can succeed only when trained volunteers are at hand to explain the rules. It is transmission of the rules between generations that makes the difference between a living game and a game fossil. Nevertheless, we have gleaned a few training insights from our workshops, which we list as follows:

- A handy reference book is useful for volunteers to use as a ready-reckoner.
- Volunteers have the burden of learning a large number of rules that may not always come into play for a specific game.
- Volunteers happy to lose to children and other first-time players turn out to be better communicators of the game; this statement nevertheless requires statistical analysis.

A special instruction that we pass to our volunteers is to listen to players; often players have informed us of regional variations of a game such as Aṣṭacamma, often with undocumented names and traditions. Volunteers are advised to promptly record these.

Game Stories

Walter Fisher, the noted communications theorist, suggested that *Homo sapiens* should ideally be called *Homo narrans* – the storytelling human:

...the homo narrans metaphor is an incorporation and extension of Burke's definition of "man" as the "symbol-using (symbol-making, symbol-misusing) animal"... The idea of human beings as storytellers indicates the generic form of all symbol composition; it holds that symbols are created and communicated ultimately as stories meant to give order to human experience and to induce others to dwell in them to establish ways of living in common, in communities in which there is sanction for the story that constitutes one's life. And one's life is, as suggested by Burke, a story that participates in the stories of those who have lived, who live now, and who will live in the future (Fisher 1986).

We realise that a game, bereft of context and drama, in effect bereft of a story, is merely an entertainment that lasts until human attention wanes. For it to be treated as heritage, it needs to mesh with other aspects of heritage – religion, rituals and relationships. Our efforts therefore include extensive survey and collection of legends, myths, lore, rituals and traditions associated with the games, which are communicated to the players. These may range from simple legends, such as how chess was invented, to long-held traditions, such as those that surround the playing of Cenne in Tulu Nadu (Claus 1987).

We religiously narrate, to those whom we teach Chaturaṅga, a story that the well-known grandmaster Vishwanathan Anand says he learned from his grandmother, that Ravana invented chess to amuse his chief wife Mandodari, who mastered the game well-enough to defeat its inventor (Chessbase 2008). Similar legends attribute to Sita the invention of a single-player variant of Mancala known as 'Sitata', which she created to make her imprisonment in Lanka bearable (Claus 1987). In the same paper, Claus also refers to a number of traditions surrounding Cenne, such as sisters being forbidden to play with each other, because of a folktale in which rivalry in the game between sisters Abbaga and Daraga led to fatal consequences. Attaching such stories to games reinforces their value as a parcel of heritage, and thus not only to be savoured as a game but as an inheritance to feel pride in.

Conclusion

The musealisation of traditional games in South Asia presents several challenges. Conventional approaches followed by museums, especially in India, in placing antiquities under glass are inadequate when it comes to games. Although the antiquity is preserved correctly, its gameness is somehow lost. On the other hand, many game boards etched on the floors of monuments and places of worship retain their gameness,

i.e. it is possible to play the game there (if its rules have not been forgotten). However, they face different kinds of threats to their preservation, placing their long-term viability in question.

At INSTUCEN Trust, our approach has been to preserve the intangible aspects of the game, by an emphasis on learning and teaching the rules and strategies of game-play, coupled with the use of everyday material so that every game can be disseminated to everyone regardless of economic status, and given context by narrating rituals and stories that surround the games in their journeys over centuries. Ongoing experiments have also attempted to shatter distinctions of boys' games versus girls' games, scepticism regarding the educational value of games, or their relevance in a society increasingly addicted to electronic forms of entertainment including gaming. We believe that a game is best musealised when it is a part of culture at large rather than just a precious artefact.

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