# Snakes and Ladders since Ancient Times

Satya Bhushan*

The board game popularly known as 'Snakes and Ladders' originated in ancient India, where it was known by the name *Mokshapat* or *Moksha Patamu.* Known by different regional names, the game was, usually, played in most North Indian regions as *gyan caupar* (*chaupar* of knowledge or gnosis) or *gyan baazi* (game knowledge), in Nepal as *nagapasa* (snake dice), and in Maharashtra as *moksapata* (cloth or board of liberation).

Also known as 'Chutes and Ladders', Snakes and Ladders is based on an ancient Indian game that was designed to teach morality. Initially, the game was designed to teach the principles of virtue, represented by ladders, and evil, represented by snakes.

It is worth mentioning about two late-nineteenth-century references to *gyan caupar* that have come to light — from a Brahmin author at Aurangabad in Maharashtra and a British magistrate at Saharanpur in Uttar Pradesh. These are the first descriptions of the game. The earlier of the two descriptions appear as *Kridakausalya* (Skill of Playing) of 1871 by Harikrishna, son of Venkataramana. In his discussion of the popular games of Maharashtra, Harikrishna devotes a short passage to *jnanapatta,* meaning 'the board of knowledge'.
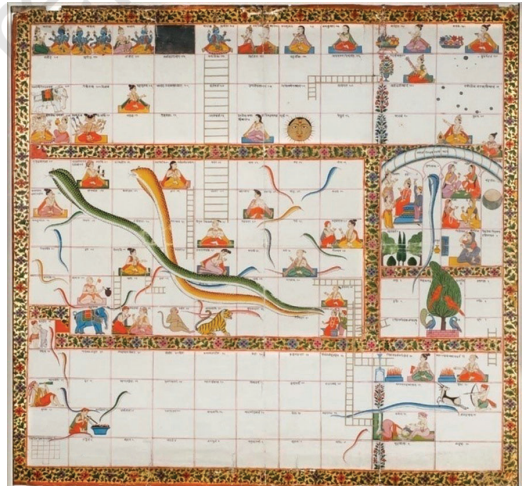
Snakes and Ladders, c.1800
(Head Cat. 051.001)

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* *Assistant Professor*, Education Survey Division and International Relations Division, NCERT, New Delhi.

It is perhaps no surprise that the game 'Snakes and Ladders' develops mathematical skills like counting, one-to-one correspondence, numeral recognition, sequential numbers and mathematical language in students. The interesting point to be noted is that Snakes and Ladders not only develops counting skills in students but also basic addition skills. Besides, children learn the basic sequence and pattern of numbers. Instead of using one dice, the children are required to combine the added total of two dice. By performing this complex skill within the confines of the game, they have the opportunity to engage in more complex multiplication sequences.

Snakes and Ladders can also be used as a language arts activity. The game helps the children develop social and language skills. Concepts, such as behind/in front/up/down and under/over, and time and mathematical concepts like before/after, first, second, third, etc., can be taught with this game.

Researchers have suggested that Snakes and Ladders should be used as a medium of learning. It is beneficial for students with learning difficulties and helps in their cognitive development. Through this game, teachers are able to make the teaching–learning process more interesting, effective and meaningful, ensuring active participation of students in learning activities.

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