



Original Article

Exploration of ancient board games at Khanderi Fort, Alibag, Maharashtra

Pankaj Bhosale¹, Ketaki Patil²

^{1,2} Art of playing, Aapla Katta Sanstha, Navi Mumbai

Manuscript ID:
RIGJAAR-2025-020716

ISSN: 2998-4459
Volume 2
Issue 7
Pp.75-80
July 2025

Submitted: 07 June 2025
Revised: 21 June 2025
Accepted: 11 July 2025
Published: 31 July 2025

Correspondence Address:
Pankaj Bhosale
Aapla Katta Sanstha, Navi
Mumbai, Art of playing
Email:
artofplaying@rediffmail.com

Quick Response Code:



Web: <https://rlgjaar.com>



DOI:
10.5281/zenodo.17036215

DOI Link:
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17036215>



Creative Commons



Abstract

This research paper reports the carved graffiti Games which are found on the fortification walls of Khanderi fort. There are two types of games one is Mancala and another is Goats and Tigers which have been found on these walls. Khanderi Fort which was built in the 16th century during the Maratha period, it has become easier to date this type of game which was hard to do so. The infantry soldiers, warrior troops who were protecting these forts, used to play these board games as a way to develop strategic thinking, war planning and mental skills. These Indigenous Board games found in various places in and around Maharashtra are indicating oldest forms of our Culture. These Games played an important role in Social interaction of the society. Graffiti of mancala and Goats- tigers board game states that these war games were popular in 16th-17th century Maratha Era. Game boards found on Khanderi fort has put further development in our research as we can come to know these games and their types as and when it may have been evolved in due course of time. Race games or War games were being played to develop the strategy which was a part of the warfare tactics. These Strategic Games were a part of warfare training skills. Mancala Game which played a important role in developing arithmetical skills was also a famous board game in that era. The exploration was done in order to convey the significance of board games. Observations were noted from intact fortification walls. There may be possibility of more such carved games on the walls which have fallen apart.

Keywords: Sea Fort, Khanderi fort, Board games, Mancala, Tiger & Goats, Aduhuli, Baghchal, Strategic Games

Introduction

Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj who is called the Father of Indian Navy had secured his territory from the invaders coming from the sea like the Siddhis, the Mughals, the Portuguese and the Britishers. (Gaikwad, 2024). They were a hurdle in the Expansion of Konkan. Shivaji Maharaj and his army was always resisted by the English men's. They were aware of the consequences as once they had to face the Marathas when they (Britishers) supported Adilshahi Sultanate. East India Company's Rajapur Warehouse was raided and plundered by Shivaji Maharaj. English at Mumbai use to help the Siddhis and allow them to anchor his Ships in the Bombay Harbour. In the First Sack of Surat which was a major trade hub of Mughals these Britishers were the first to resist Shivaji Maharaj. Siddhi use to hover around the Konkan coast for frequent invasion in the Maratha Coast. Britishers policy was to help the weak Siddhi against Chattapati Shivaji Maharaj. To Counter the Britishers and Siddhi's Shivaji Maharaj decided to build a fort on the Khanderi Island so as to secure hid territory from this invader. In the year 1672 Shivaji Maharaj occupied Khanderi Island and started the fortification, in 1679 the English spotted the Marathas while they were trying to fortify Khanderi Island. According to the Surat Presidency "Khanderi in the hands of Shivaji was a Dagger pointed to Bombay" (English Records on Shivaji, 1931). Maynak Bhandari with the help of 150 Maratha's was deployed the Fortify this Island. The English and the Siddhi's first opposed him but later withdrew following a few unsuccessful naval encounters.

Khanderi Fort which is located 5 km away from the coast of Thal near Alibaug is in Raigad District. It is 13.5 nautical miles from Mumbai Coast. Another fort nearby which was built by Siddhi is Underi Fort.

Creative Commons (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

This is an open access journal, and articles are distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International Public License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/), which allows others to remix, tweak, and build upon the work noncommercially, as long as appropriate credit is given and the new creations are licensed under the identical terms.

How to cite this article:

Bhosale, P., & Patil, K. (2025). Exploration of ancient board games at Khanderi Fort, Alibag, Maharashtra. *Royal International Global Journal of Advance and Applied Research*, 2(7), 75-80. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17036215>

Forts nearby Khanderi are Korlai and Revdanda which is located to its south. Whereas Janjira which is a Strong hold of Siddhi's is also located at Murud which is nearby Alibaug. To counter and keep a watch on the invaders and their ships Chatrapati Shivaji Maharaj has built a sea fort on Kasa island which is called as 'Padmadurg'. The fort of Colaba, the Sarkhel Khanaji Angre stronghold, is just five miles and a half from Khanderi. The channels connecting Nagaon river joins it the sea at Colaba which was used a hiding point. Chatrapati Shivaji Maharaj had well secured this territory by building this sea forts.

Geo Location of Khanderi Fort is North latitude - 18° 42' 8" and East longitude - 72° 48' 17". It is a small island two miles and a half from the Colaba mainland, one and a half mile from its adjacent fort called Underi. Underi Fort it is separated by a channel which can be used only by small ships. The island measures one and a half mile in length and half a mile in breadth, being considerably larger and elevated than the island of Underi. (Apte, 1973)

Board Games found at Khanderi Fort: Goats & Tigers (Bagh Chal) and Mancala

Goats & Tigers (Bagh Chal):

It is a type of battle-game which helps to develop strategic war planning. There is a direct conflict between two armies of equal strength upon a field of battle,

circumscribed in extent and offering no advantage of ground to either army (Parker, 1909). Here there is a battle between Goats and Tigers. This is a two-player game. This game is played in different variants, in one of the variants it is played on a square board with five lines passing across from each face including making a grid according to Fig 1. Four 'tigers' are placed at the four corners of the square grid and then one by one the 'goats' are kept on the board. As soon as the first 'goat' is placed on the board, one of the 'tigers' moves to capture it. Tiger can capture a goat when the 'goat' is between the 'tiger' and there is a vacant point in a straight line. The goats are captured as in draughts by jumping over. No 'goat' is to be moved from its place on the board till all the 20 'goats' have been placed on the board one by one. Then the counters can be moved forward and backward on adjacent vacant places. The strategy of the player holding the 'goats' is to block the movements of the 'tigers'. The game finishes when all the 'tigers' are blocked or when all the 'goats' are captured. The persons who perform these two feats is the winner.

In parts of Asia two triangles are added to the above board as an enlarged form of the preceding game, all the lines being extended so as to provide an additional set of positions according to Fig 2 (Murray, 1978)

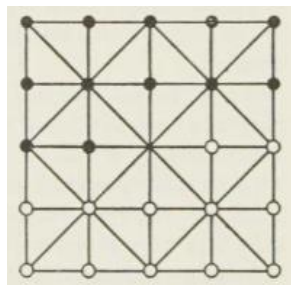


Fig 1

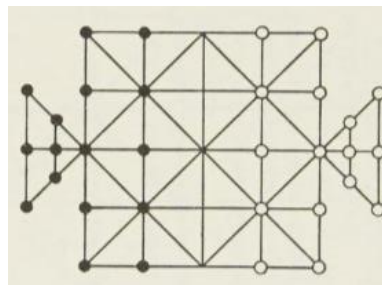


Fig 2

Another variant is further extended with four triangles at four sides of the square according to Fig 3 which is called a The Leopards Game or Diviyani Keliya, Kotiyosha Harak, the Leopards and Cattle. (Parker, 1909) This is played by two persons, one of the player has two Counters called 'Leopards', while the other has twenty-four Counters called 'Cattle'. The Cattle has to block the Leopards, and make them immovable. It is played in the same manner as the last games, the Leopards have to eat the Cattle one at a time, by jumping over them into a vacant place. The stations for the counters are at all meeting places

of lines and the pieces move along the lines, both at right angles and along the diagonals, going one step at a time, except when the Leopard is making a capture. Moving with a strategy and careful play the cattle can block the Leopard from jumping to win the game. Hewakam Keliya or the war game is also a same game played by two players. Each player has sixteen counters called Soldiers and these are said to be chopped when captured. Many Asiatic peoples who play a war game also play a Hunt-game on the same board. (Murray, 1978)

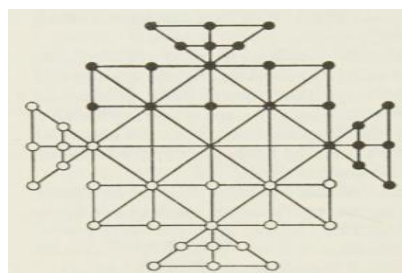


Fig 3

The other names that it is known by are AADU PULI ATTAM in Tamil, PULI-MEKA in Telugu, ADU-HULI in Kannada and BAGH-CHAL in Nepali, is a traditional board game of India and Nepal which is a kind of a disproportionate-strategy game. (Nirbed Ray, 1999) TIGERS AND GOATS and its many variants had existed right from the time of great Empires. History has pointed to several pieces of evidence of this game being played in

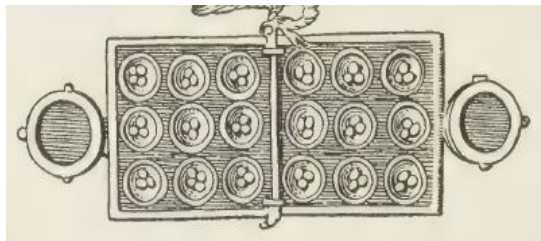


Picture 1

Baghchal games found on the fort are 2. Picture 1 shows game in partly damaged as the lines are not visible. In Picture 2 lines are visible but the stone on which it is carved is dislocated and has fallen from its location. So the game is visible at a tilted position.

Mancala:

Mancala games are played on a board consisting of a grid of holes, usually arranged in two, three or four equal



Mancala games are very ancient and were present in ancient Egypt about 3,500 years ago. Boards have been found at ancient sites, including Kurna, Luxor and Karnak. Though associated with Africa, the games are thought by some to have originated in Arabia. Wherever they originated, mancala games spread around Africa, the Middle East and as far as South-east Asia at some unknown time in the remote past. It is a national game of many African countries (Culin, 1896).

Mancala was described by Thomas Hyde in 1694 and appeared in a number of travel books about Africa and Asia between then and the early twentieth century (Parker, 1909). It was introduced to a wider American public at the Chicago fair in 1894.

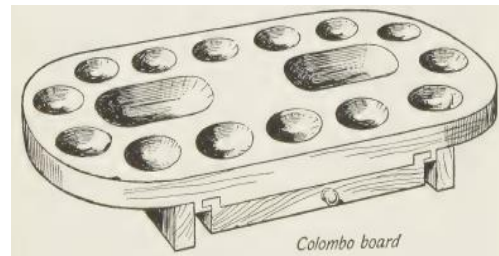
Mancala is a game of pure skill in mathematics which helpful to learn Arithmetics. Even if they teach 'History of Mathematics in Africa' they teach this game. In India it is known as Chenne Mane, Haralu Mane, Pichki Mane, Gotu Guni (Kannada), Pallanguli (Tamil), Saat Gooti

ancient temples across South India, the excavation by Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). (Agarwal, 2018) Dutch people during their Colonial presence in India specifically in south adapted and played this game. The local Tamils taught the Dutch how to play AADU-PULI AATTAM, the grid they used to play the game was comprising of rectangles and triangles. (Balambal V. , 2005)



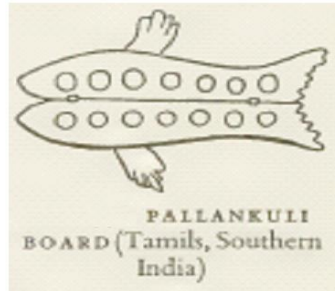
Picture 2

rows. It is called Mancala in Europe, Bao in East Africa, Congkak, Dakon or Sungka in South Asia from Maldives to Philippines, Kalah in North America, Oware in West Africa and West Indies (Kovach, 1995), Toguz korgool or Toguz kumalak in Kyrgyzstan & Kazakhstan. The world Mancala comes from the Arabic word naqala meaning literally "to move". There are more than 800 names for traditional mancala games. (Walker, 2014)



(Hindi), Picchala Peeta (Telugu), Til Gutu (Maithili), Neshkon Kudi (Toda dialect) and Gurpaallayn (Konkani) (R.G.Singh, 2016) In Tamilnadu, India it is known as Pallankuli meaning a game of many pits (pal - many, kuli - pit). (Balambal V. , 2019)

These games may have travelled through sea routes in India as we can see such types of pit holes in many of the caves and Forts. In Maharashtra also we can see such type of pit holes carved in caves and Forts. People in West Africa traditionally played the game by scooping holes into the ground and using as pieces whatever was available: pebbles, nuts, seeds or beans were common. (J. Botermans, 1989) Accordingly, we can see it first on the grounds of many caves' sites. If we look at the evidences much of the Africans have travelled to India for Commercial Purpose. However, commerce alone was not responsible for influencing the society. A history of slavery in Africa states that traders use to send slaves from Africa to India to and from.



The Ports of Konkan Region was an important destination for goods from Africa, including slaves. Many African slaves were made eunuchs in royal families. Malik amber a Habshi from southern Ethiopia was slave and rose to power in the Konkan province who had many African Slaves. Entry of thousands of African people into Deccan Society naturally influenced this region's interstate politics and cultural traditions. As stated earlier Chhatrapati Shivaji

Maharaj and Marathas fought with these African invaders thus, we can realize their presence in Deccan (Apte, 1973). Mancala game which is from foreign origin was brought by the slaves and was soon Indianized and popularized. It was made compact and was played by royal people and the common man in Maharashtra and South India. (Kothare, 2014).

Mancala Board Carvings

- **Total Number of Mancala Games found on the fort are 9.**
- **All these are found above the Boundary walls and are in good condition.**
- **Stones on which Mancala game is carved are intact.**



Picture -3



Picture -4



Picture -5



Picture -6



Picture -7



Picture -8



Picture -9



Picture -10



Picture -11

Observation of Mancala Boards

Picture - 3	There are total 17 cup holes in this game out of them a set of 7 holes are placed in parallel. In between this there are two cup holes facing each other which are for storage. One hole is outside them.
Picture - 4	There are total 18 cup holes in this game out of them a set of 8 holes are placed in parallel. In between this there are two cup holes are nearby each other which are for storage.
Picture - 5	There are total 12 cup holes in this game out of them a set of 6 holes are placed in parallel. There is no storage cup hole.
Picture - 6	There are total 16 cup holes in this game out of them a set of 7 holes are placed in parallel. 2 Storage holes are placed outside the parallel cup holes.
Picture - 7	There are total 27 cup holes in this game. out of them a set of 7 holes are placed in parallel also there is another set with 7 and 6 cup holes in parallel. It looks like an African game which is called BAO
Picture - 8	This is different game as it has total 7 cup holes in which 6 holes are in circular and one cup hole at the centre. It is like an alignment game which is called a Shisima or Tic, Tac Toe game.
Picture - 9	There are total 17 cup holes in this game out of them a set of 8 holes are placed in parallel. 1 Storage hole are placed in between the parallel holes.
Picture - 10	There are total 23 cup holes in this game out of them a set of 3 rows of cup holes in parallel. 1 st row is having 7, 2 nd row is having 8 and 3 rd row is having again 7 number of cup holes.
Picture - 11	There are total 27 cup holes in this game out of them a set of 4 rows of cup holes in parallel. 1 st row is having 6, 2 nd row is having 7, 3 rd row is having again 7 and 4 th row is having again 7 number of cup holes.

Survey and observations:

A proper mapping and details are maintained wherever we noticed any of such carved board games. Other than documentation of these games, the Airoli based Team Aapla katta Santha in association with Art of Playing have been promoting these board games for the last 12 years through workshops and exhibitions. Team also participated in India International Science Festival-2024 in Science through Games for promoting Ancient Board Games which should be a part of our academic curriculum.

The subject like Indian Knowledge System from National Education policy 2020 will definitely help us to be leader in knowledge and to solve current and future challenges. IKS helps students to connect with the heritage and value the contribution of ancient Bharat. Since these ancient games of Bharat focus on mental, physical or overall growth of students thus needs to be practiced in day today life to face real-time challenges.



Conclusion:

Games which were played in and around the Khanderi fort tell us their existence from (Culin, 1896) the year this fort was built. These games were popularized in and around Konkan Region as we can find these game boards for sale in Sawantwadi Region. Due to Trade the popularity of these games may have spread among local inhabitants. Although we can see many graffiti of Mancala board at the Konkan coast but Wagh Bakri is the game which is newly found on a Sea fort. That means this type of War game were also popular at that time. Art of Playing is documenting the archaeological evidences of these games and promoting it to the future generations. These games inculcate many skills such as thinking out of the box, team building, communication skills, attention, concentration, strategic planning, execution skills, fine motor development and logical thinking. Most importantly, these games can be played by things available in nature.

Thanks to Special Educator Mrs. Mamta Bhosale, Photographer Mr. Siddhesh Gurao who are the helping

Financial support and sponsorship

Nil.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

References

1. Agarwal, S. (2018). Analyzing Thosand years old game Tigers and Goats is still alive. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Information Technology & Multimedia*, 7(2), 1-11.
2. Apte, D. B. (1973). *A History of The Maratha Navy and Merchant Ships*. Mumbai: Government Central Press, Bombay.
3. Balambal, V. (2005). *Folk Games of Tamilnadu*.
4. Balambal, V. (2019, june 2). Playing with the Past. *Traditional Board Games, Women and Society*.
5. Bell, R. (1969). *Board and table games*. london: Oxford University Press.
6. Culin, S. (1896). *Mancala - The National Game of Africa*. Washington: Government Printing Office.
7. *English Factory Records*. (n.d.).
8. Gaikwad, D. H. (2024). *Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Father of the Indian Navy*. New Delhi: Prabhat prakashan.
9. J. Botermans, T. B. (1989). *The World of Games*. New York: Facts on File.
10. Kothare, D. A. (2014). Gayachole an Ancient Board Game in Deccan and African Traditions. *RCA Chaturanga*, 16.
11. Murray, H. (1978). *History of Board Games other than Chess*. New York : Hacker Art Books .
12. Nirbed Ray, A. G. (1999). *Sedentary Games of India*. Kolkata: Arunima Printing Works.
13. Parker, H. (1909). *Ancient Ceylon*. London: Luzac & Co.
14. R.G.Singh, H. C. (2016). *Indian Traditional Board Games*. Germany: Ramsons Kala Pratishtana.
15. Walker, D. (2014). *A Book of Historic Board Games*.

hands and working for promoting this game to Children with Special needs.

Team Art of playing conducting workshops in schools and colleges since more than 10 years so that our future generations are aware of our ancient treasure.

Acknowledgment

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to Aapla Katta Sanstha for providing the necessary facilities and support to carry out this research. We also thank Special Educator Mrs. Mamta Bhosale, Photographer Mr. Siddhesh Gurao for their valuable guidance and insightful suggestions during the course of this study.

We are grateful to Aapla Katta Sanstha for supporting us under the project "Art of Playing". Special thanks are extended to members of Aapla Katta sanstha for their assistance with data collection, analysis, and administrative support.