

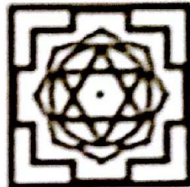
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CATURANGA MOVEMENTS

Described in Rudraṭa's *Kāvyaḷamkāra*

There is a consensus among chess historians that India is the homeland of this 'most intellectual game'. Hence the relative absence of profuse references to it in Sanskrit literature before A.D. 1000 is intriguing. Some scholars feel that India's claim as the birth place of chess is somewhat overstated. In these circumstances, the few available references to Caturaṅga in the literature of the first millennium assume great significance, since their close scrutiny would shed much light on the state of the game as played in earlier times. Rudraṭa's *Kāvyaḷamkāra* is one such source-book which, like Bāṇa's *Harṣacarita*, is an important document to be examined by chess historians. In this paper, an attempt is made to examine allusions to Caturaṅga made in Rudraṭa's work and to have an idea of the game as played in his time.

Rudraṭa's date has been fixed as A.D. 825-50 by P.V. Kane. Rudraṭa is certainly later than Bhāmaha, Daṇḍin and Udbhaṭa, whose poetic schemes of Alamkāra-s are improved upon by him. He is quoted by Utpala, the commentator on *Bṛhajjātaka*, quoted by Abu Masheer, who died in A.D. 886. Hence Rudraṭa belonged to the first half of the ninth century.

It is in the fifth chapter of his *Kāvyaḷamkāra* that Rudraṭa makes allusion to the movement of Caturaṅga pieces, when dealing with poetic figures which can be visually picturized. Here he illustrates several 'bandha-s' or combinations like *khadga* (sword), *musala* (pestle), *dhanus* (bow), *bāna* (arrow), *śūla* (pike), *śakti* (spear), *hala* (plough), *cakra* (wheel) and then proceeds to describe the three *padapāṭha-s* related to the movement of Caturaṅga.

Interestingly, the *Kāvyaḷamkāra* passage in the context contains specific reference to the elevated Caturaṅga board in the expression *caturaṅgapāṭha-viracitaturagagajādipadapāṭhaiḥ*.

The illustration given by Rudraṭa for the movement of a chariot on the chess board is the following verse.

*itīkṣitā suraiścakre yā yamāmamamāyayā
māhiṣam pātu vo gaurī sāyatāsisitāyasā.*

Commenting on the verse, Namisādhu writes :

Here the reading is through progressive and regressive movement of the even feet as in the case of the movement of a chariot.

The following illustration would clarify the idea :

<i>i</i>	<i>tī</i>	<i>kṣi</i>	<i>tā</i>	<i>su</i>	<i>rai</i>	<i>śca</i>	<i>kre</i>
<i>yā</i>	<i>ya</i>	<i>mā</i>	<i>ma</i>	<i>ma</i>	<i>mā</i>	<i>ya</i>	<i>yā</i>
<i>ma</i>	<i>hi</i>	<i>ṣam</i>	<i>pā</i>	<i>tu</i>	<i>vo</i>	<i>gau</i>	<i>rī</i>
<i>sā</i>	<i>ya</i>	<i>tā</i>	<i>si</i>	<i>si</i>	<i>tā</i>	<i>ya</i>	<i>sā</i>

Here the second foot, *yā yamāmamamāyayā* can be got either by progressive movement from left to right or by regressive movement from right to left. In other words, the second and the fourth feet of the verses are identical in converse and reverse directions. This would indicate that in the ninth century A.D., at least in some parts of India, the chariot of traditional Caturaṅga moved horizontally to either side of the board. In modern chess, the rook piece, which seems to be derived from the chariot, makes a similar move, in addition to its vertical movement. However, according to *Mānasollāsa*, the Sanskrit treatise written by Someśvara belonging to the earlier part of 12th century, the chariot is supposed to move aslant to the next but one square. It is possible that the *ratha* movement, as documented by Rudraṭa, may be the source for the modern rook's movement and the *Mānasollāsa* version may be a later local variation of the game. If this is true, it would mean that Rudraṭa has preserved the earliest version of the game, which is the source of Persian and Arabic versions of the game from which modern chess evolved.

The next piece alluded to by Rudraṭa is the horse and the illustrative verse is the following :

senā līlīlīnā nālī

līnānā nānālīlīlī.

nālīnālīle nālīnā

līlīlī nānā nānālī

Here Namisādhu cites the following verse which gives the movement of a horse on a board.

*kaśajhe nāgabhaṭāya
tathakheveñarāghave
śajethādhepacemeṭhe
doṇasachaladeṭhe*

Accordingly, the verse illustrated is to be represented on a board with the letters in the second verse, transcribed on its individual letters, as in the following.

<i>ka</i> <i>se</i>	<i>śa</i> <i>nā</i>	<i>jhe</i> <i>lī</i>	<i>nā</i> <i>lī</i>	<i>ga</i> <i>lī</i>	<i>bha</i> <i>nā</i>	<i>ṭā</i> <i>nā</i>	<i>ya</i> <i>lī</i>
<i>ta</i> <i>lī</i>	<i>tha</i> <i>nā</i>	<i>khe</i> <i>nā</i>	<i>ve</i> <i>nā</i>	<i>ñā</i> <i>nā</i>	<i>rā</i> <i>lī</i>	<i>gha</i> <i>lī</i>	<i>ve</i> <i>lī</i>
<i>śa</i> <i>nā</i>	<i>je</i> <i>lī</i>	<i>thā</i> <i>nā</i>	<i>dhe</i> <i>lī</i>	<i>pa</i> <i>lī</i>	<i>ce</i> <i>nā</i>	<i>me</i> <i>lī</i>	<i>the</i> <i>nā</i>
<i>do</i> <i>lī</i>	<i>na</i> <i>lī</i>	<i>sa</i> <i>lī</i>	<i>cha</i> <i>nā</i>	<i>la</i> <i>nā</i>	<i>ḍe</i> <i>nā</i>	<i>pa</i> <i>nā</i>	<i>ḍe</i> <i>lī</i>

The movement of the horse can be represented like this.

1	30	9	20	3	24	11	26
16	19	2	29	10	27	4	23
31	8	17	14	21	6	25	12
18	15	32	7	28	13	22	5

But the present author finds that the formula given by Namisādhu as printed in the edition of Pt. Ramadeva Sukla (Chowkhamba Vidyabhavan, 1966) needs to be modified as follows to get the correct

movement of the horse in a Caturanga game.

ka sa jhe nā ga bha ṭā ya
 ta tha khe veṇa rā ghabe
 ṣaje thā dhe pa ce me the
 doṇa sacha lade pa de

If we follow the sequence of the consonants mentioned in this verse, the squares of the following board can be numbered in this order, suggesting the movement of the horse :

1	30	9	20	3	24	11	26
16	19	2	29	10	27	4	23
31	8	17	14	21	6	25	12
18	15	32	7	28	13	22	5

This movement exactly corresponds to the movement of the horse, mentioned in Someśvara's *Mānasollāsa*, as well as the movement of the modern knight, as illustrated below.

		←	↑	→			
	↑		↑		↑		
	←	←	H	→	→		
	↓		↓		↓		
		←	↓	→			

The only point of difference is that Rudrata's verse can be represented only in a board of 32 squares (8x4)

whereas in classical Caturaṅga and modern chess, the squares number 64 (8x8). In other words, it takes 63 moves for a horse to traverse all the squares of a board.

Rudraṭa gives the following illustration for the movement of the elephant.

*ye nānādhīnāvā dhīrā
nādhīvā rādhīrā rājan
kiṃ nānāśaṃ nākaṃ śaṃ te
nāśaṅkante śaṃ te tejaḥ*

In his commentary on this verse Namisādhu describes the movement of an elephant on the Caturaṅga board, suggested in this verse.

Here this verse comes into being on the basis of the movement of an elephant. This has to be gathered on the basis of the sequence of the letters contained in the verse in the following manner : 1, 9, 2, 10, 3, 11, 4, 12 etc.

The verse, accordingly, can be represented in a board of 32 squares as in the following :

1 <i>ye</i>	2 <i>nā</i>	3 <i>nā</i>	4 <i>dhī</i>	5 <i>nā</i>	6 <i>vā</i>	7 <i>dhī</i>	8 <i>rā</i>
9 <i>nā</i>	10 <i>dhī</i>	11 <i>vā</i>	12 <i>rā</i>	13 <i>dhī</i>	14 <i>rā</i>	15 <i>rā</i>	16 <i>jan</i>
17 <i>kiṃ</i>	18 <i>nā</i>	19 <i>nā</i>	20 <i>saṃ</i>	21 <i>nā</i>	22 <i>kaṃ</i>	23 <i>śaṃ</i>	24 <i>te</i>
25 <i>nā</i>	26 <i>śaṅ</i>	27 <i>kan</i>	28 <i>te</i>	29 <i>śaṃ</i>	30 <i>te</i>	31 <i>te</i>	32 <i>jaḥ</i>

The verse can be exactly reproduced if we read it following the sequence of the squares numbering 1, 9, 2, 10, 3, 11, 4, 12 etc.

The movement of the elephant envisaged in the above verse will, accordingly, be like this :

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32

But this movement of the elephant is not seen in any of the later works. The elephant, according to *Mānasollāsa*, moves vertically and horizontally in a straight way. In some other works, the elephant moves in a diagonal direction. This would suggest that Rudraṭa was familiar with a form of Caturaṅga wherein movements of some individual pieces were slightly different from those attested in later works.

It is interesting to note that Rudraṭa also refers to the technical term, *sarvatobhadra* in the same context. As pointed out by A.K. Warder, *sarvatobhadra*, 'good from every side', being an auspicious form, suggests a mystical significance, resembling Brahmā who faces in all directions or the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra whose benevolence radiates all round.¹ The term has also a military significance, as it denotes an array of an ancient Indian army. According to the *Mahābhārata*, the array of the Kaurava-s on the ninth day of the

battle was *sarvatobhadra*. In the context of Caturāṅga, the term refers to a version of the game wherein the King, having the power of all the other pieces, faces all of them on his own. The movement of the game is determined by the dice. This verse can be read in the square vertically as well as horizontally, both from left to right and right to left. Bhāravi also, in his *Kirātārjunīya* (xv.25) gives an example for *sarvatobhadra* which runs as follows :

*devā kā ni ni kā vā de
vā hi kā sva sava kā hī vā
kā kā re bha bha re kā kā
ni sva bha vya vya bha svani*

The *Sarvatobhadra* variety of chess is described in *Mānasollāsa* as follows :

*sarvatobhadranāmānyaḥ kathyate khelanakramah
ekatra balavinyāso rājñā cānyatra kevalah
sa rājā gajavad yāti rathavad dvijavattadā
mantrivad bhaṭavaccāpi svapadair api sarvataḥ
evam padeṣu sarveṣu khelakena niyojitaḥ
yāti hanti ca badhnāti parakīyabale nṛpaḥ
tasya mārge nirodhāya racaneyam manīṣiṇā*
(605-8)

According to Andreas Bockroming, in this variety, the king, who is endowed with the powers of all the other pieces, plays alone against his adversaries.² Another feature is that the movement of the pieces is determined by dice. However, it is not clear if the *sarvatobhadra* described by Rudrāta resembles this game. The examples cited by Rudrāta to illustrate

sarvatobhadra is the following :

rasā sārarasā sāra

sāyatākṣa kṣatāyasā

sātāvāta tavātāsā

rakṣatastvastvataksara

This verse can be represented in the *sarvatobhadra* visual form as follows :

1 <i>ra</i>	2 <i>sā</i>	3 <i>sā</i>	4 <i>ra</i>	5 <i>ra</i>	6 <i>sā</i>	7 <i>sā</i>	8 <i>ra</i>
9 <i>sā</i>	10 <i>ya</i>	11 <i>tā</i>	12 <i>ksa</i>	13 <i>ksa</i>	14 <i>tā</i>	15 <i>ya</i>	16 <i>sā</i>
17 <i>sā</i>	18 <i>tā</i>	19 <i>vā</i>	20 <i>ta</i>	21 <i>ta</i>	22 <i>vā</i>	23 <i>tā</i>	24 <i>sā</i>
25 <i>ra</i>	26 <i>ksa</i>	27 <i>ta</i>	28 <i>stva</i>	29 <i>stva</i>	30 <i>ta</i>	31 <i>ksa</i>	32 <i>ra</i>
33 <i>ra</i>	34 <i>ksa</i>	35 <i>ta</i>	36 <i>stva</i>	37 <i>stva</i>	38 <i>ta</i>	39 <i>ksa</i>	40 <i>ra</i>
41 <i>sā</i>	42 <i>tā</i>	43 <i>vā</i>	44 <i>ta</i>	45 <i>ta</i>	46 <i>tā</i>	47 <i>yā</i>	48 <i>sā</i>
49 <i>sā</i>	50 <i>ya</i>	51 <i>tā</i>	52 <i>ksa</i>	53 <i>ksa</i>	54 <i>tā</i>	55 <i>ya</i>	56 <i>sā</i>
57 <i>ra</i>	58 <i>sā</i>	59 <i>sā</i>	60 <i>ra</i>	61 <i>ra</i>	62 <i>sā</i>	63 <i>sā</i>	64 <i>ra</i>

Notes

1. *Indian Kavya Literature*, Vol.I, p. 226.
2. 'The varieties of Indian Chess through ages' *Asiatische Studien Études Asiatiques* KLIX-2-1995, p. 314