

Board games from the city of Vijayanagara (Hampi), 1336-1565: a survey and a study /

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Austere and grandiose Hampi is the site of the last capital of the last great Hindu kingdom of Vijayanagara, whose rich kings built Dravidian temples and palaces, which won the admiration of travelers between the 14th and 16th centuries. Conquered by the Muslims in 1565, the city was pillaged over a period of six months, and then abandoned.

The greater parts of the more interesting buildings are situated in the citadel or innermost line of fortifications and also along the roadside to Hampi. The crowded buildings hint at the centuries-old heritage of the village, for it is some 450 years since Hampi's grandeur came to an end as the center of the Vijayanagara Empire. The present day village preserves the ancient order while its inhabitants reap the benefits of being a living example of old peaceful ways. The Mohammedan invasion and especially the employment of Mohammedan troops by the Vijayanagara kings led to Saracenic features being adopted in some of the buildings in their capital, producing an Indian version of that style known as Indo-Saracenic.

The Vijayanagar capital was probably at first situated at Anegundi on the northern bank of the Tungabhadra river nearly opposite the present hamlet of Hampi. As the empire grew in size and power, the capital was moved to the southern bank of the river and Anegundi was retained as a fortified suburb or outpost.

The cultural remains of the imperial city of Vijayanagara now spread over a vast area of about 25 km covering several modern villages, while the outer lines of its fortifications include still a larger area. There are temples and entrances formed out of the huge rocks everywhere. The monuments which are popularly known as Hampi ruins are mainly situated between the villages of Kamalapuram in the south to Hampi village on the right bank of Tungabhadra river in the north.

The Virupaksha Temple in the middle of Hampi Bazaar commands most respect. It hovers above the hills and trees the boulders and the mirror like rock pools calling you back to the 700-meter long avenue. Along the Tungabhadra river the Vithala Temple, with its stone chariot is the world heritage site. "Hampi" was added to UNESCO's World Heritage List in 1986.

Board Games from Hampi

The City of Vijayanagara offers unique opportunities to investigate Indian board games in the pre-modern era. Archaeological and architectural evidence provides a remarkable record of board games of various types in the place called Hampi, which was probably the most extensive of any Hindu capital in India. The contemporary literary works in Kannada, Sanskrit and Telugu, as well as the graphic description of contemporary foreign visitors help in unearthing the varieties of board games found in the ruined structures, un-cleared rubble piles and numerous overgrown mounds.

The study of board games at Hampi yield rich anthropological, historical and sociological information, but many of these age-old board games are disappearing from regular daily life of the local people. It has now become indispensable to document and preserve as much information as possible.

With this in mind, the present paper has been drafted to highlight the board games played during the pre-modern era by the people of Vijayanagara, and my survey includes and illustrates the details of all available board games, their contents, and rules and how they are played. It also illustrates both living games and games not in practice, wherever possible living games are directly recorded from individuals by personal interview, observation, and over-the-board demonstration.

In this paper I will follow Murray's classification of board games (as in Murray 1952). At Hampi we find:

1. Games of alignment
2. Hunt games
 - On triangular board
 - On square board
 - Solitaire
3. Mancala games
4. Chess
5. Pachisi or Chaupat
6. Single-track games

1. Games of alignment

Local names: *Paggada ata*, *Mooru mane ata* (in Kannada), *Char pur* (in Telugu)

Locations: 1. Hemakuta Jaina temples, 2. under the boulders, 3. underground temple, 4. Hazara Rama temple, 5. Vitthala temple, 6. Pattabhi Rama temple, 7. practically everywhere

Population groups: Still played by masses (also agricultural class) as pastime.

Literary sources: Goparaju 1398; Nanjunda 1500b

Fig. 1

This game is drawn on the floor of the outer mandapa of Hazara Rama temple. This game of alignment is played only by children of 5-7 years of age. It is termed a simpler game and is for beginners.

Rules:

Two players, each with three counters – pebbles or marbles – place a counter one at a time onto one of the intersection of two lines (which is one of the nine points), during alternate turns of play. Each player is attempting to make an orthogonal row before the other player does this. When all the counters have been placed, the game continues, and during alternative

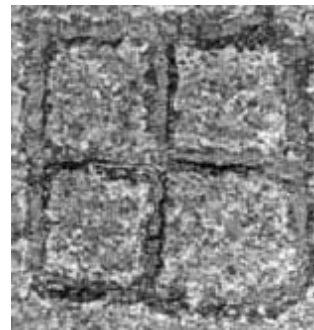


Fig. 1 *Mooru mane ata*

turns, a player can transfer one of his/her counters to any vacant intersection until a row of three is made.

Figs. 2 & 3

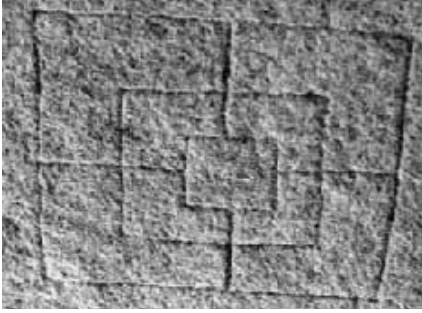


Fig. 2. *Paggada ata*



Fig. 3. *Paggada ata*

Practically both figures are the same; the difference lies only in the central intersection in the second figure. Perhaps this might have been the mistake of the engraver or difficulty in engraving on a granite stone or the skill of the engraver to combine the first and the second game in one figure. The first figure is found almost everywhere at Hampi, but the second figure is found only on the floor of the Vitthala temple.

Rules:

This is for two players, each with nine pieces. Pieces are entered one at a time, in alternate turns, each player attempting to form a row along one of the vertical or horizontal lines of the board, and to confine opponent's pieces so that they cannot move. Each row entitles a player to remove an opponent's piece. When all pieces are entered they can be moved one step at a time along a line to a neighboring empty point. The winner either blocks all the opponent's pieces so that they cannot move, or reduces their number so that they cannot form a row.

Rule variation: Two players, each with nine pieces. Players are not entitled to remove any pawn. The winner is the one who blocks the opponent's moves or form a row first (already in Goparaju 1398; this rule is still in use at Hampi).

2. Hunt Games

- On triangular board

Local names: *Puli-judamu* (in Telugu); *Huli-mane ata*; *Ane-nayi ata*

Locations: 1. underground temple, 2. Vitthala temple, 3. Pattabhi Rama temple

Population groups: Still played by lower classes and agriculture class as strategy game

Literary sources: Goparaju 1398; Nanjunda 1500b

Fig. 4

This hunt game is played only by children with one tiger and five lambs, played on ten points, keeping tiger on the vertex and is termed the simplest game.

Fig. 5

Three tigers and fifteen lambs, played on 19 points. One player has 3 tigers and the other 15 lambs which are commonly called as “dogs”; the tiger is usually placed on the apex of the triangle and the second player enters his lambs. All the pieces move in the same way, one step along a marked line, but the lambs cannot be moved until all are entered. The tiger, which alone can capture, takes lambs by the short leap. The tiger wins if he takes so many lambs that they cannot confine him; the lambs win if they succeed in reducing the tiger to immobility.

General rule: the number of tigers varies from 1 to 4, and the number of goats from 5 to 23. General notion in the region is that the Grand Master is one who plays with more number of tigers and less number of lambs. Locally this game is also termed a gambling game.



Fig. 4. *Huli-mane ata* (simpler game)



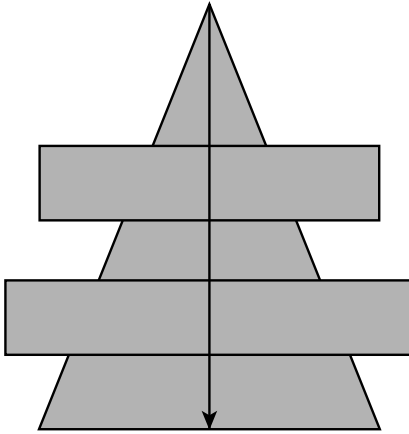
Fig. 5. *Ane-nayi ata* (developed version)

Nanjunda, in his *Ramanatha charite* (1500), has devoted a chapter on games played at Vijayanagara, and narrates how princess Hariyaladevi advised his son Rama not to play the ball game, the hunt game (*pulijudam*) and the game played with cowry shells, which were meant only to ordinary people and not to royalty, and continued that *chaturangam*, the “intelligent game”, was an ideal game for the royalty.

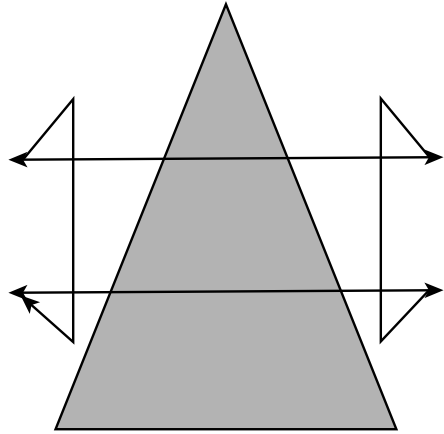
Almost every one from the lower middle class, especially the agricultural class, sheep rearing caste (*kuri kayuvavaru*), children, adults and elders, play this game. This game is drawn, with the help of either chalk piece, white powder, charcoal or green leaves juice on the stone benches, in front of the thatched houses, under the shade of trees, roadside shops, or generally leisurely meeting places

Two variant games are described in Goparaju’s *Simhasana dvatrimisika* (1398) and are still in use in this region.

- 3 tiger and 18-goat play
- 4 tiger and 16-goat play



3 tigers and 18 goats



4 tigers and 16 goats

• On square board



Fig. 6. *Huli-kavilemane ata*
(two-tiger complicated)



Fig. 7. *Huli-kavilemane ata*
(four-tiger complicated)

Local names: *Huli-kavilemane ata*, *Huli-meke ata* (in Kannada)

Locations: 1. Hemakuta, 2. Hazara Rama temple

Population groups: Still played by lower classes and agriculture class as strategy game

Literary sources: Anantha 1456; Ratnakaravarni 1560

Fig. 6

Played with 2 tigers and 24 sheep. The game begins by entering a tiger on any point of the board, usually the central point. Then his opponent enters one of his sheep. Next the second tiger is entered. The tigers are now free to move, but the opponent goes on entering his sheep, one on each move until all are entered, and only then the sheep make a move. If the tiger succeed in taking eight sheep, they are almost certain to win. Jumps may be in any direction including backwards.

Rule variation: 2 tigers with 20 sheep are also played. Here tiger can take one sheep at one leap. Multiple jumps by the same piece during a single turn are not permitted.

Fig. 7

Played with 4 tigers and 20 goats. Four tigers are placed on the four corners of the mountains. The opponent has 20 goats, nine of which are placed on the nine central points of the square. All the pieces move one step along a marked line. The tiger alone has the power to capture, but capture is not compulsory. If along a marked line the tiger has next to it a goat or a succession of an odd number of goats, and the point immediately beyond the goat or row of goats is empty, the tiger leaps over the enemy pieces to the vacant point beyond and takes them. The play ends when goat is reduced to ten or eleven.

Extended triangles are called “mountains”. The best player is considered as one who blocks the tiger at the mountains (triangles).

• Solitaire

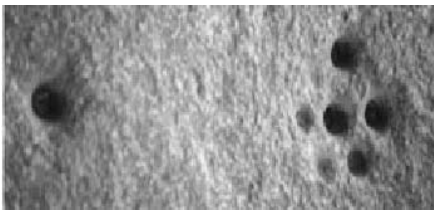


Fig. 8. *Huli-meke ata* (simpler)

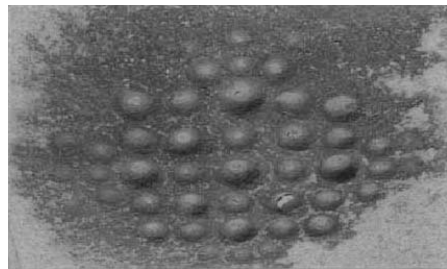


Fig. 9. *Huli-meke ata* (complicated)

Locally this game is called *huli-meke ata*, with a hunting character.

Locations: 1. Pattabhi Rama temple, 2. Hazara Rama temple

Fig. 8

Played with one tiger and three sheep.

Fig. 9

The game is a contest between one tiger and 13 sheep. Play begins with the tiger being placed at the center. Players may move a piece to any vacant adjacent hole, vertically, horizontally or diagonally. Only the tiger may jump and that piece is removed from the board. The object for the sheep is to block the tiger by surrounding him so he cannot move or jump. The tiger must try to remove all the sheep, or at least enough of them so that there are not enough left for a capture.

3. Mancala games

Local names: *Chenne mane ata* (in Kannada), *Omana guntalu* or *Vamana guntalu* or *Achchana gundlu* (in Telugu)

Locations: 1. Hemakuta Jaina temples, 2. under the boulders, 3. underground temple, 4. Virupaksha temple, 5. Palace area

Population groups: Played only by women and children

Literary sources: Goparaju 1398; Manchena 1400; Anantha 1456

Fig. 10

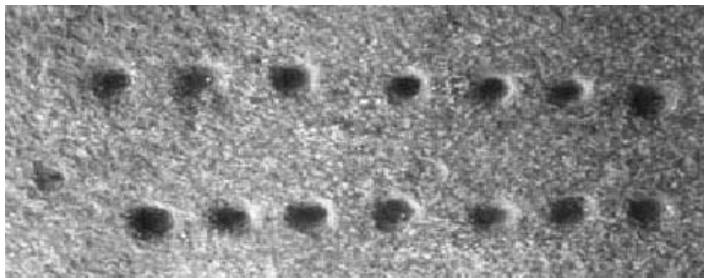


Fig. 10. *Chenne-mane ata* or *Vamana-guntalu*

The game is for two players. They are played on a board with fourteen pits, which are scooped out of the ground. The playing pieces could be stones, seeds, or shells, in rare cases precious stones, gems or pearls.

In Anegondi village, children often play without a board, but instead create their own playing area by scooping out holes in the ground and collecting stones or seeds (whatever is close at hand) each time they want to play. Near the Tungabhadra river, the game is played with smooth pebbles and in agricultural areas, with seeds. Commonly used seeds are tamarind, kemiri, sawo and even corn kernels.

The widespread popularity of this game, *chenne mane ata* around this area, played by women and girls, can undoubtedly be attributed in part to the simplicity of the materials used to play the game. This game, in all its variations, attracted the royal ladies and their assistants. Playing pieces indicated their class or caste they belong.

Based on the version of the game, there is a preliminary distribution of counters (beans, nuts, seeds, stones, etc.) in the board's depressions. Players move alternatively in a series of "laps". A lap involves each player in turn selecting all of the counters in a depression and lifting these and placing counters in each depression in a prescribed direction and manner. What happens then is dependent upon the version of the same being played.

The following five varieties are played at Hampi:

- *Karu baruva ata*, "getting calf" out of the game, played with 4 seeds
- *Katte ata*, also called *Seenya mukya* – also with 4 seeds but little variation in the rules
- *Tara timbata*

- *Hegge timbata*

- *Mule ata*, “constructing houses at the corners”, played with 7 seeds

4. Chess

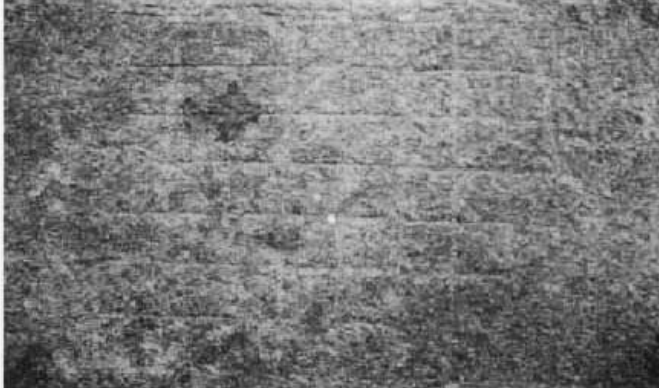


Fig. 11. *Chadurangam*

A 8x8 grid found in the mahamandapa of the Virupaksha temple perhaps used as chessboard. Four sides are carved with beautiful floral design (though not visible) but worn out. According to local say (by elders), only the king or his officials played this chaturangam game. It is also said locally that entry into this temple (meant only for royalty) by lower class was prohibited and hence the chessboard is not seen anywhere, in Hampi.

Very interestingly there is another Virupaksha temple, approximately 100m away, meant for visit by lower caste people. Surprisingly, in this temple, we find different games such as hunt games on triangular and square boards, row games and mancala games, engraved on the floor

5. Pachisi or Chaupat

Local names: *Pagadekayi ata* (in Kannada), *Pachikala ata* (in Telugu)

Locations: 1. Hemakuta-Jaina temples, 2. Palace area (lines are not clear), 3. Found in almost every Brahmin house

Population groups: Played by higher class-Brahmins and royals. Living game.

Literary source: Somana 1450

Rules:

The present practice of playing this game at Hampi and surrounding areas is:

- This is played either by two, four or even groups.
- Now only Brahmin women play this game; a few rich people possess boards made of wood, ivory carved, embroidered cloth. The other caste groups are only witness, in case, if they are allowed inside the Brahmin house.
- Often this game is played in Brahmin families as pastime, sometime as gambling



Fig. 12. *Pagade kayi ata* or *Pachikala ata*

too. Also played on special occasions. The ladies of the younger generation are neither aware of the game nor know to draw the board. Slowly it is getting extinct.

- This is played on the wooden board, cloth board or drawing on the floor.
- Presenting this game-board set to the daughter as a marriage gift by the mother still exists in this region (North Karnataka).
- Playing pieces are made of shells, cowries, and specified pawns indicative of four colours or sizes or shapes.
- Played with either dice or cowries.
- To highlight more details a separate paper and session is necessary.

6. Single-track games

Figs. 13, 14, 15.

No local names

Locally no one is aware of this game and it is not played any longer.

Locations: 1. Hemakuta-Jaina temples, 2. under the big boulders, 3. underground temple, 4. Hazara Rama temple, 5. Vitthala temple, 6. Pattabhi Rama temple, 7. Practically everywhere

The track is set out as a series of cells with right angle turns; a square or a series of dotted holes of 5x5 cells forms a looped circuit; cross-cut cells (representing safe squares) occur at the corners and at the junction of the right angle turns.

The lines are formed by a series of lightly pecked dots, and sometimes the surface is worn. It is possible, however, to infer how the game might have been played because of its similarities to other recorded Asian games.

The idea of the game was probably for two equal teams (two, four, six persons, etc.) to race along the track starting from the opposing crosscut squares, the first player to



Fig. 13

Fig. 14

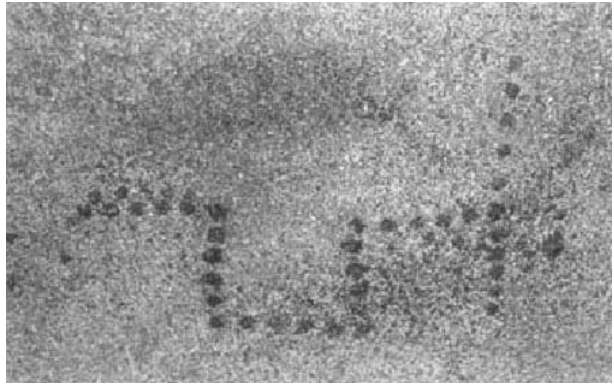


Fig. 15

Figs. 13-15. Single-track games incised into pavements at Hampi

complete the looped course and return home wins. Players might have three or four pieces each. The action is controlled by throwing dice, requiring a certain throw to enter the game (for example 1, 5, or 6) and the same number to continue the turn. Hence throwing 2, 3 or 4 would end the turn. Landing on an opposing player's piece captures the piece, unless the piece is on a cross-cut safe square. Usually, in this type of game, an exact throw is required to "get out" and thereby win the game.

Enhanced rules such as blocking tactics and playing in patterned teams such as in Pachisi may also have been used.

To conclude, according to the existing oral and play tradition, to contemporary (1300-1600) regional literature and to foreign traveler's accounts, the board games from the city of Vijayanagara and surroundings may be classified into five categories, such as:

1. games played by the royalty,
2. games played for the royalty,
3. games played by masses ("folk games"),
4. games played by ladies,
5. games played by children,

contrary to the classification made by H.J.R. Murray (Murray) between war games, hunt games, race games, games of alignment, etc.

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