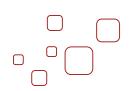# Public Lecture
on

"Indian Boardgames, Colonial Avatars: Transculturation, Colonialism and Boardgames"

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Abstract

How did an Indian game meant to teach the process of rebirth change into the children's race-game, Snakes and Ladders? Why does the Bengali language use Dutch loan-words for the suits of cards? How do the rules of Chess change in India and Europe? The answers to these and other related questions can be obtained after examining in depth the relationship of colonialism to boardgames. Focusing on Indian boardgames and their European versions, this book explores how the Empire's games has had a signal effect on identity and culture in the formerly colonized countries of the Global South.

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More about Boardgames | https://shorturl.at/pyEG6

Broad Abstract

Moving beyond the earlier discussions regarding the origins of certain boardgames, especially in the fields of boardgame studies, anthropology and Indology, the aim here is to address the ways in which these games have seen important cultural shifts under European colonial rule on their journey from the colony to the metropole and back. The cases of Snakes and Ladders and Ludo (incidentally, both are sold together in India) are symptomatic. For example, the adaptation from the Indian game of salvation called Gyan Chaupar to its Western version, Snakes and Ladders and the return of the game to India in its much-altered Western version is a case in point; similarly, the popularity of Ludo across the Indian subcontinent and how this may connect to the Indian origins of Ludo as Chaupar is another intriguing case-study. Ray's film, Shatranj ki Khiladi, points out how the changing rules of Chess, from the Indian to the European version, also reflects the change of the political situation in the Indian state of Oudh, which is about to be taken over by the British East India Company but much more can be gleaned from examining in detail the colonial transactions around other boardgames as well.

For example, Sir William Jones and Captain Hiram Cox, both important functionaries of the East India Company, are major early European commentators on the game of Chess as played in India and of its origins in Chaturanga or 'chaturaji' as are the major early collectors of boardgames such as Richard Johnson, deputy resident of Oudh and even Robert Clive possessed a set of ivory ganjifa cards that can now be viewed in his family home, Powys Castle. Similarly, how the Tigers and Goats game (still popular in the Subcontinent) became the Sepoys and Officers game in the aftermath of 1857 or how missionaries used boardgames to proselytize to their potential Indian converts are other examples where the boardgame features in important and yet hitherto neglected ways in the study of culture(s) and identity-formation under colonial rule. The massive efforts invested by Western and Indian scholars to create inventories of boardgames as an anthropological exercise and to delineate some versions of these games as 'pure' and 'original' and then describe other versions as derivative or 'impure' are also interesting to study and this book will build on related earlier research by exploring new connections between and commentaries on games.

This research analyses the deep orientalist roots of the studies on Indian boardgames by looking at such curricula through a postcolonial lens and will at the same time, study in depth the games that have entered the local play-culture in India from outside the country as colonial imports. As Indian boardgames begin to enter the milieu of serious academic discussion, it is important that the deeply ingrained colonial legacy reflected by boardgames is now taken into account as new research on boardgames shapes up and as a Cultural Studies and Games Studies frameworks are increasingly being considered as imperative to study games in addition to the extant research by anthropologists and historians.

Author Short Biography

Dr. Souvik Mukherjee is a pioneering scholar on videogame research in South Asia focusing on the narrative and the literary through the emerging discourse of videogames as storytelling media, particularly through the lens of Postcolonialism and Subaltern Studies. Related expertise includes topics ranging from identity and temporality in videogames to the videogame industries and cultures in South Asia. More recently, He has been working on a monograph on Indian boardgames and colonialism. Other interests include digital humanities, literary theory and Early Modern Studies. As a digital humanist, I have completed archives of the Scottish and Dutch cemeteries in colonial Bengal. He has helped set up DiGRA's India chapter and also DHARTI, the Indian digital humanities research network. In 2019, He has been nominated a 'Distinguished Scholar' by the Digital Games Research Association (DiGRA) and as a Higher Education Video Game Alliance (HEVGA) fellow in 2022.