A Deep Dive into the History of the Snakes and Ladder Board Game



Board games have really taken the virtual world by storm. The impact of online board games has been so significant in the past few years that [major outlets](https://medium.com/@peterattia/the-full-history-of-board-games-5e622811ce89) have called the last decade the “Golden Age for Board Games.”

When talking about impactful board games, it is hard not to bring up the name of the classic snakes and ladders board game. Despite being associated with ludo, the simple and fun board game has managed to carve out its own fan following globally. Thanks to its popularity, tons of [snake and ladder online](https://www.mpl.live/snakes-and-ladders) are available on the Internet for users of all major platforms.

The snakes and ladders game has indeed come a long way. However, to measure the depth of the game’s success, it is essential to know about how it originated and other aspects related to its history. Here is a deep dive into the classic board game’s history and how it has evolved over the years:

## Origins of the Snakes and Ladders Board Game

Snakes and ladders, a board game that is enjoyed by millions of people in both the online and offline format, originated as an integral part of a specific family of Indian dice board game games. The renowned collection of games also included popular names like Gyan Chauper and Pachisi, which later evolved into ludo, the most popular board game of all time.

The game then reached the English subcontinent, where it began to be sold under the label of “Snakes and Ladders.” The popularity of the game did not remain restricted to the U.K. Word about the cult classic game spread, and the board game traveled to the United States. Here, it was sold to the masses under the banner of “Chutes and Ladders.”

## Moksha Patam - The Successor of Snakes and Ladders

Snakes and ladders was not always known by its name, i.e., at the time when it was founded, the game was called “Moksha Patam.” The concept of the game was vastly different from the one which the snakes and ladders game has now.

Moksha Patam was found in ancient India, and back then, the game was synonymous with numerous postulates of the traditional Hindu philosophy. It shed light on the differences between important virtues like karma or kama, or destiny and desire. Moksha Patam focused on destiny, which made it completely different from contemporary board games like Pachisi, which focused on human life as a mixture of skills and luck.

## How Moksha Patam Was Used as a Teaching Tool

Besides being a virtue-centric game, snakes and ladders, or as it was known back then, Moksha Patam, was used as a teaching tool. The game was used to teach individuals the effects of performing good deeds versus bad deeds. Back then, the physical board of the game featured different varieties of symbolic images, including ones of gods, angels, animals, flowers, people, etc.

The ladders present on the game’s board represented different types of virtues, including the likes of generosity, goodness, humility, and numerous similar ones. On the other hand, the snakes present on the game’s board represented vices of humans, such as lust, anger, theft, etc.

The game offered a moral lesson, which made it a highly effective teaching tool. According to the lesson, any individual who wishes to attain moksha or liberation could do it by performing good deeds. On the other hand, if a person performs bad deeds throughout their life, they will be reborn as a lower being.

On the physical game board, the number of ladders present was significantly lesser than the number of snakes, indicating that following a decent life is way more difficult than following a sinful path. Back then, the game excellently served its purpose of imparting much-needed wisdom among the masses.

## Iterations of the Snakes and Ladders Game Over the Years

As mentioned earlier, the snakes and ladders game has gone through numerous stages of evolution to reach where it is at today. For instance, the underlying ideals that Moksha Patam featured inspired numerous iterations.

For starters, one of the most popular ones was introduced in Victorian England in 1892. Individuals belonging to different classes indulged in this unnamed variant.

Another popular variant of the snakes and ladder game became famous in countries with a high Muslim population called Shatranj al- ‘urafa. This iteration of the snakes and ladder game became highly popular in countries like Iran, Turkey, and India.

As opposed to the version which became popular in ancient India, Shatranj al- ‘urafa represents the dervish’s journey or quest to renounce the trappings of the mortal world and achieve union with the almighty God or creator.

Besides the aforementioned variants, the classic game also came to be known by different names in different regions. For example, the game is highly popular in Bengali-speaking states and countries as “Shap Shiri” or “Shapludu.”

## Final Thoughts

As evident in the article, the classic snakes and ludo game has had quite a journey throughout multiple centuries to reach where it stands today. Thanks to its simple and easy-to-understand rules and gameplay, millions of people around the globe play the snakes and ladders game with their friends or anonymous opponents online.

Keeping in mind the current growth in the popularity of online snakes and ladders game, it would be safe to say that it is not going anywhere anytime soon. In fact, its popularity may surpass that of other prominent board games such as ludo and chess.