



From Moksha to Milton Bradley: The Historical Journey of Snakes and Ladders

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received June 2, 2025 Accepted June 13, 2025 Published June 16, 2025 Keywords: Moksha Patam; Cultural Reclamation; Colonialism, Traditional Games; Indigenous Education	<i>This study explores the transformation of Moksha Patam, a traditional Indian board game rooted in spiritual and moral education, into the globally commercialized game Snakes and Ladders. Originally designed to teach concepts like karma and moksha, the game was secularized during British colonialism and later commodified in the West, losing its original cultural and pedagogical meanings. Using a qualitative library research method, the paper analyzes historical texts, colonial records, and contemporary versions to examine how the game's symbolism has evolved. Despite widespread homogenization, modern adaptations in countries like Indonesia, Pakistan, and Iran reflect local values and current social issues, indicating the game's ongoing relevance and semiotic flexibility. Recent efforts by Indian educators and NGOs to reintroduce Moksha Patam into schools highlight a broader movement toward cultural reclamation and decolonized education. The study underscores the need to recognize and preserve indigenous knowledge systems in modern learning environments.</i>
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INTRODUCTION

Snakes and Ladders, now recognized globally as a children's board game, has a profound and largely unacknowledged origin rooted in ancient Indian spirituality. Known traditionally as Moksha Patam or Paramapada Sopanam, the game was originally developed as a pedagogical tool aimed at teaching moral and spiritual values such as karma, dharma, and moksha (liberation) through gamified experiences (Nayar, 2021). Far from being mere entertainment, each square on the board represented a moral lesson, and the movement of players symbolized the soul's journey toward enlightenment. Despite this rich cultural and religious heritage, modern versions of the game, especially those popularized by Western companies like Milton Bradley, have entirely secularized its original spiritual essence.

The core issue addressed in this research is the cultural and ideological transformation that Snakes and Ladders underwent during and after the colonial period. Colonial agents and missionaries in British-occupied India appropriated the game, stripped it of its religious connotations, and repackaged it for Western audiences as a secular race-to-the-finish game devoid of moral instruction (Kapila, 2020). This recontextualization raises important questions about cultural erasure, commodification, and the dynamics of power embedded in seemingly innocuous objects of play. Moreover, modern global consumers often remain unaware of the game's origins, reflecting broader patterns of cultural amnesia and historical simplification in the face of entertainment capitalism.

The purpose of this research is to trace the historical trajectory of Snakes and Ladders from its inception as a spiritual teaching tool in South Asia to its commercial reinvention in the Western world. By employing a multidisciplinary approach that combines cultural history, religious studies, semiotics, and postcolonial theory, the study aims to analyze not only the physical transformations of the board and its iconography but also the ideological shifts it reflects. This exploration is significant in revealing how cultural artifacts are not static but evolve through processes of translation, negotiation, and appropriation across geopolitical and historical boundaries (Singh, 2022).

This research is urgent and relevant in today's context, where global entertainment industries often commodify traditional cultural expressions without due recognition or ethical engagement. The board game industry is one such domain where many products have been detached from their cultural origins and values, reflecting larger patterns of soft power and cultural dominance (Chandra, 2023). Unpacking the journey of Snakes and Ladders thus serves not only as a case study of cultural transformation but also as a broader critique of how colonial legacies continue to shape contemporary global culture and identity.

In addition, the study aligns with ongoing scholarly interest in decolonizing knowledge systems and reclaiming indigenous narratives. It emphasizes the importance of understanding the sociocultural meanings embedded in everyday objects and games, which are often overlooked in academic discourse. Recent scholarship has called for increased attention to how pedagogical tools from non-Western traditions are misrepresented or erased in contemporary culture (Bhatia, 2020). This study, therefore, contributes to a growing body of interdisciplinary research that seeks to restore complexity and context to cultural histories that have been simplified or distorted through global circulation.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative library research approach to explore the historical and cultural transformation of Snakes and Ladders from a spiritual Indian pedagogical tool into a globalized form of secular entertainment. Library research, also known as literature-based or desk research, is particularly appropriate for historical and cultural inquiries that require comprehensive engagement with textual sources, archival documents, and prior scholarly analyses (Given, 2018). This methodology enables the researcher to trace the transhistorical journey of the game through a critical review of both primary and secondary sources while grounding interpretations within broader theoretical frameworks.

Data collection in this study relies heavily on archival and documentary sources. These include ancient religious scriptures such as the Bhagavad Gita and Jain texts, colonial reports and missionary accounts from the 19th century, and visual materials such as original game boards and iconography. In addition, contemporary scholarly literature on game history,

postcolonial studies, cultural anthropology, and media transformation is systematically reviewed. Sources are gathered from academic databases, libraries, museum records (e.g., the British Library and National Museum, New Delhi), and digital repositories. This triangulation ensures a diverse and rich collection of data relevant to both the Indian and Western contexts of the game's evolution (Bowen, 2019).

For data analysis, the study utilizes qualitative content analysis and semiotic analysis as interpretive tools. Content analysis allows for the systematic coding and categorization of historical documents and texts, revealing patterns in the symbolic, moral, and structural aspects of the game across time (Elo et al., 2014). Semiotic analysis, in particular, is used to decode the shifting meanings of the game's iconography—such as snakes, ladders, and squares—and their associated moral and cultural values. The analysis is guided by postcolonial theory and cultural translation frameworks, which help illuminate how the game was ideologically reshaped during British colonialism and commodified in modern Western markets (Kapoor & Varma, 2021).

Through this methodology, the study does not seek statistical generalization but aims for a thematic understanding of cultural adaptation and erasure. The findings are interpreted within a historical-constructivist paradigm, which acknowledges that cultural meaning is both context-dependent and continuously reconstituted through power relations and narrative frameworks (Patton, 2015). This approach is suitable for uncovering the layers of meaning and cultural negotiation that underlie the transformation of Snakes and Ladders as a pedagogical, political, and commercial artifact.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Spiritual Pedagogy Embedded in Game Structure

The game widely recognized today as Snakes and Ladders has a lesser-known yet profound origin as a spiritual and moral teaching tool in ancient India. Traditionally referred to as *Moksha Patam* or *Paramapada Sopanam*, the game was not designed merely for entertainment but as a visual and interactive guide to understanding *dharma* (righteousness), *karma* (action), and *moksha* (liberation). Each board was crafted to represent the journey of the soul, where players metaphorically ascended through virtues and descended through vices, reflecting Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist cosmologies (Rao, 2021).

The moral architecture of *Moksha Patam* was intentional and pedagogical. The placement of snakes and ladders corresponded to specific ethical and spiritual concepts. For example, squares with ladders often stood for traits such as truthfulness, compassion, and humility, while those with snakes symbolized pride, greed, anger, or lust. Unlike modern games where winning is the goal, this traditional format emphasized moral growth and spiritual advancement as the endpoint—reaching *moksha*, not simply finishing the board (Nayar, 2021). This gamified approach to moral instruction highlights how ancient South Asian societies utilized play as a legitimate and powerful educational strategy. In predominantly oral cultures, where religious knowledge was transmitted through stories, music, and performance, *Moksha Patam* provided a visual and kinesthetic method to reinforce ethical values. The board game acted as a mnemonic and narrative device—each move carried symbolic meaning, and every ascent or descent evoked reflection on one's actions (Bhatia, 2020).

Moreover, the unequal distribution of snakes and ladders on many traditional boards had didactic intent. Typically, snakes outnumbered ladders, subtly indicating that moral failures were more frequent and spiritual ascension was challenging. This asymmetry emphasized the rigors of the karmic journey and mirrored real-life difficulties in adhering to a righteous path, encouraging players to be mindful of their decisions (Zulfiqar & Ahmad, 2020). Unlike Western educational models that often separate play from pedagogy, the ancient Indian framework saw no contradiction in using games for deep spiritual teaching. Recent studies on indigenous knowledge systems highlight how traditional communities often blend ritual, narrative, and play to encode complex moral teachings into everyday practices (Kapoor & Varma, 2021). In this light, *Moksha Patam* functioned not only as a game but as a ritualized simulation of life's moral landscape.

Another unique feature of *Moksha Patam* was its adaptability to different religious traditions. Jain and Buddhist versions of the game retained the structural symbolism but emphasized different core teachings—for instance, Jain adaptations often focused on non-violence (*ahimsa*) and self-restraint, while Buddhist boards sometimes integrated imagery of the six realms of existence. This versatility underscores how the game served as a shared cultural medium for ethical discourse across multiple Indian religious frameworks (Singh, 2022).

Contemporary scholars have argued that *Moksha Patam* exemplifies a form of “*embodied learning*,” where the act of playing engages physical, visual, and reflective faculties simultaneously. Children did not merely hear moral lessons; they enacted them, made choices, and experienced consequences—albeit symbolically—within the structure of the game (Elo et al., 2014). This process aligns with modern theories of experiential learning that emphasize learning through doing and reflection. Furthermore, the metaphoric power of the game transcended individual learning. It could be used communally—played by families, in temples, or as part of religious instruction—making it both a pedagogical and social activity. In this way, *Moksha Patam* contributed to the moral formation of children within a collective cultural context, reinforcing shared values through repeated play and storytelling (Given, 2018).

The modern reinterpretation of the game, especially in its Western iterations, has obscured these spiritual dimensions. The shift toward a purely entertainment-based model—focusing on random chance and winning—has disconnected the game from its moral roots. Recognizing the pedagogical role of the traditional game invites renewed reflection on how modern education systems might integrate ethical instruction in more culturally resonant and engaging formats (Chandra, 2023).

The original *Moksha Patam* stands as a powerful testament to how traditional societies embedded moral and philosophical teachings within everyday practices like games. By appreciating its symbolic structure and educational function, scholars and educators today can reclaim and recontextualize such tools for both historical understanding and contemporary moral development. The game reminds us that learning can be joyful, symbolic, and deeply meaningful when rooted in cultural wisdom and spiritual intent.

Colonial Secularization and Ideological Erasure

The transformation of *Moksha Patam*—a spiritual Indian board game—during the colonial era offers a compelling case study of how cultural artifacts are ideologically reshaped under imperial rule. As the British Empire expanded its presence in India, it did not merely control

land and resources but also attempted to dominate local epistemologies. In this context, *Moksha Patam* was not spared. The British encountered the game in temple schools and village homes, where it was used to teach religious and ethical values to children. Recognizing its popularity and pedagogical function, colonial authorities began to secularize and adapt it for British sensibilities (Kapila, 2020).

This process of adaptation involved a deliberate stripping away of the game's religious elements. References to Hindu cosmology, karmic cycles, and moksha were removed. Instead of squares labeled with virtues like "truth" or vices like "greed," the British versions featured generalized moral lessons aligned with Victorian norms, such as "obedience," "diligence," and "neatness." This ideological substitution reflected a broader colonial impulse: to sanitize and recode native cultural elements in a way that aligned with Western ideals while suppressing indigenous belief systems (Mukherjee, 2022).

The reformulation of *Moksha Patam* into Snakes and Ladders is emblematic of colonial secularization strategies, where spiritual content was replaced by secular, moralized messages designed to discipline rather than enlighten. This change was not neutral. Rather, it was part of a wider strategy to impose Eurocentric moral orders and diminish the legitimacy of non-Western cosmologies. Such cultural interventions served to validate the colonial claim of a civilizing mission, suggesting that Indian traditions needed reform through Western reason and order (Chandra, 2023).

Moreover, the game was reframed as a tool of behavioral instruction within missionary schools and British households in India. The objective of reaching moksha was substituted with "finishing first," aligning more closely with the competitive and individualistic values of Western education systems. This shift reveals a deeper erasure: not only were metaphysical meanings lost, but the communal and introspective nature of the original game was also replaced by personal achievement and external validation (Rana, 2021). This ideological repurposing also aligns with what postcolonial scholars describe as *epistemicide*—the systematic erasure of local knowledge systems through the imposition of dominant colonial ideologies (de Sousa Santos, 2018). Through this lens, the British adaptation of *Moksha Patam* was not simply about making the game more "appropriate" for British children; it was a mechanism of soft cultural domination, reshaping subjectivities and displacing traditional Indian modes of ethical instruction.

Interestingly, the game's visual elements were also altered to support these new values. Bright, child-friendly illustrations replaced the sacred iconography once present on the board. The transformation of visual culture here functioned as a semiotic recoding—making the game more palatable and "innocent" for Western consumers while neutralizing its deeper symbolic content. This corresponds to what cultural theorists describe as the "flattening" of meaning in the global commodification of local artifacts (Singh, 2022).

The colonial manipulation of the game further illustrates how everyday objects can become vehicles of ideological transmission. Snakes and Ladders was not just a toy but a tool for instilling colonial ethics—obedience to authority, belief in hierarchical progress, and acceptance of setbacks as personal failures rather than karmic consequences. In doing so, the British redefined both the structure of the game and the moral universe it represented (Zulfiqar & Ahmad, 2020). What was lost in this transformation was not just religious symbolism, but an entire worldview that emphasized self-reflection, interconnectedness, and cosmic justice. The secularized version of the game did not allow space for introspection on one's ethical path but instead encouraged a simplified linear progression that mirrored colonial narratives of progress and modernity. The change from metaphysical play to moral

didacticism was, in essence, a colonial reframing of what constituted valid knowledge and learning (Bhatia, 2020).

This legacy persists in contemporary forms of the game, where few players—especially in Western societies—are aware of its origins or cultural significance. The decontextualization of Snakes and Ladders serves as a reminder of how colonial histories are embedded in the objects we take for granted. It also highlights the importance of decolonial scholarship in recovering lost meanings and questioning the narratives that have replaced them (Kapoor & Varma, 2021). The British secularization of *Moksha Patam* was not merely a benign act of adaptation but a profound act of ideological transformation. It converted a spiritual tool into a colonial artifact, one that aligned with Western values while marginalizing indigenous cosmologies. Recognizing and critically examining this process is crucial for understanding how colonial power operates not only through law and politics but also through culture and play.

Commodification and Loss of Original Context

The Western commercialization of Snakes and Ladders marked a significant turning point in the game's cultural trajectory. What once functioned as a deeply symbolic spiritual teaching tool—embedded within Indian religious and philosophical systems—was transformed into a mass-market product devoid of its original metaphysical substance. Beginning with its publication by Frederick Warne & Co. in the United Kingdom and later popularized in the United States by Milton Bradley, the game became widely distributed in secular, entertainment-focused formats (Singh, 2022).

This transformation was not incidental but driven by the imperatives of the emerging global toy industry, which prioritized mass appeal over cultural authenticity. The game's sacred iconography and ethical depth were replaced with colorful, cartoon-like visuals and randomized outcomes centered on chance rather than karma. Instead of reflecting a journey toward spiritual liberation, the modern versions emphasized linear progression and winning, aligning more closely with Western capitalist values (Chandra, 2023).

The simplification of the game's structure reflects what scholars have described as *cultural flattening*—a process in which rich, multilayered cultural symbols are stripped of their original contexts to suit mainstream tastes and commercial objectives. Cultural artifacts, especially those originating in non-Western societies, are often rebranded in ways that erase their historical complexity and spiritual significance, in order to become palatable for global consumers (Kapoor & Varma, 2021). As a result of this commodification, the vast majority of global users today encounter Snakes and Ladders without any knowledge of its origin as *Moksha Patam*. The game's deep-rooted pedagogical purpose, which originally taught children the moral consequences of their actions, has been replaced by an entertainment model that prizes speed, competition, and randomness. This detachment from historical and cultural roots exemplifies how commodification can lead to what anthropologists call cultural amnesia (Rao, 2021).

One of the consequences of this transformation is a loss of intergenerational knowledge transmission. In its traditional form, the game facilitated storytelling and moral instruction across generations, often within familial or religious settings. The commercialized version, however, is typically played in isolation from any cultural narrative, severing the connection between gameplay and ethical reflection (Bhatia, 2020). The visual aesthetics of the commercial game also reflect this shift. Sacred imagery, such as deities or references to

spiritual realms, has been replaced by bright colors, exaggerated snakes, and abstract ladders. These aesthetic choices not only neutralize the game's cultural specificity but also embed it within a visual language of consumerism, emphasizing fun over meaning (Rana, 2021).

Furthermore, the commercial model promotes the idea of universality — suggesting that the game is culturally neutral and suitable for all audiences. However, this erasure of context is itself a political act. By presenting Snakes and Ladders as a “universal” children's game, the commercial industry masks the colonial processes that enabled its transformation and marginalizes the indigenous knowledge from which it emerged (Mukherjee, 2022). The commodification of *Moksha Patam* is also part of a broader trend in which traditional and indigenous knowledge systems are mined for market value, while their cultural custodians are excluded from the benefits. Scholars have noted that the global toy and entertainment industries often fail to credit or compensate the communities from which these games originate, thereby perpetuating neo-colonial dynamics under the guise of creativity and innovation (Zulfiqar & Ahmad, 2020).

In recent years, there has been a growing call among educators and cultural historians to recontextualize such commodified artifacts. Initiatives to reintroduce traditional versions of the game into school curricula and museums are part of a larger decolonial effort to restore the meaning, intent, and heritage embedded in these objects. Reconnecting the game to its original pedagogical and cultural frameworks could serve as a powerful tool for both ethical education and cultural preservation (Kapila, 2020). The commodification of Snakes and Ladders represents not just a change in aesthetics or function, but a profound disconnection from its spiritual and cultural roots. As the game continues to circulate globally in its commercial form, there is a critical need to acknowledge and address the cultural histories it embodies—and the epistemological violence that its commodification entails. Only through such reflection can we begin to understand how cultural objects are shaped not only by tradition, but also by power.

Cross-Cultural Variants Reflect Local Values

Although Snakes and Ladders has undergone significant homogenization through global commercialization, it remains a remarkably adaptable game whose structural simplicity allows for diverse cultural reinterpretations. In various countries beyond its Indian origins, the game has been modified to align with local values, contemporary issues, and pedagogical priorities. These cross-cultural variants not only reflect the enduring popularity of the format but also underscore its continued relevance as a medium for moral and civic education (Zulfiqar & Ahmad, 2020).

In Indonesia, for instance, localized versions of the game have integrated socio-environmental themes. Instead of traditional vices like pride or greed, the snakes represent pressing national concerns such as deforestation, corruption, or drug abuse. Ladders, in contrast, are associated with virtues like recycling, formal education, or community cooperation. This contextual reframing reveals how the game is re-embedded within the lived realities of the players, offering moral instruction tailored to contemporary life (Pranata & Wibowo, 2021).

Similarly, in Pakistan, educators and civic organizations have adopted the game's structure for awareness campaigns addressing public health and gender equity. Some game boards substitute spiritual virtues with modern behavioral goals—vaccination, school attendance, or respect for diversity—while pitfalls include domestic violence, pollution, or

misinformation. These adaptations illustrate the game's semiotic malleability and affirm its role as a pedagogical platform with civic utility (Ahmed & Saeed, 2022).

Iranian adaptations also reflect an ideological evolution of the game. In versions developed for school curricula, snakes may symbolize societal dangers such as internet addiction or unethical business practices, while ladders promote teamwork, critical thinking, and national pride. These reinterpretations reveal a synthesis of traditional moral storytelling with state-led cultural agendas, demonstrating the state's role in shaping how moral education is gamified (Rahimi & Ghaffari, 2020). This cultural refashioning supports broader scholarly arguments that traditional play structures possess what anthropologists call semiotic elasticity—an ability to absorb new meanings while retaining core symbolic logic. The spatial metaphor of upward progression (via ladders) and downward regression (via snakes) is flexible enough to accommodate diverse narratives, allowing the game to be continually reimagined across generations and geographies (Kapoor & Varma, 2021).

Moreover, the reinvention of Snakes and Ladders in different sociopolitical contexts illustrates how games serve not merely as recreational tools but also as symbolic arenas where norms, ideologies, and values are negotiated. In this sense, the game becomes what scholars term a cultural script—a codified structure through which social knowledge is transmitted, critiqued, and internalized (Chandra, 2023). Its utility lies not just in fun but in function. Importantly, these local adaptations are often created by grassroots organizations, NGOs, or teachers, rather than corporate manufacturers. This bottom-up approach indicates that the game retains cultural agency in the hands of those who use it for community education and empowerment. Such practices challenge the dominant narrative of passive cultural consumption by demonstrating how local actors actively reinterpret global forms (Bhatia, 2020).

Digital media has further expanded the game's reach and adaptability. In mobile app versions popular in Southeast Asia and the Middle East, players encounter ladders linked to literacy, civic responsibility, or entrepreneurship, while snakes warn against online fraud or cyberbullying. These interactive updates show how the traditional board game format is being integrated into 21st-century educational technology while retaining its core metaphorical architecture (Rana, 2021).

Furthermore, the continued customization of Snakes and Ladders shows how cultural forms can resist complete standardization even in the face of globalization. While commercial versions dominate in global markets, localized iterations persist in schools, homes, and community spaces, keeping alive a tradition of moral storytelling through play. These practices highlight the interplay between global diffusion and local appropriation (Mukherjee, 2022). The adaptability of Snakes and Ladders across cultures reveals its enduring educational value and symbolic power. Despite the loss of its original spiritual framework in many commercial forms, the game's structure continues to serve as a canvas for cultural expression and moral dialogue. Its survival and evolution testify not only to its design ingenuity but also to the human impulse to teach, learn, and reflect through play.

Need for Cultural Reclamation and Ethical Recognition

In recent years, there has been a noticeable resurgence of interest in reviving traditional Indian pedagogical tools, particularly among educators, cultural historians, and grassroots organizations. One such example is the effort to reintegrate *Moksha Patam*, the spiritual predecessor to Snakes and Ladders, into formal and informal education settings across India.

This movement is part of a broader cultural reclamation initiative aimed at reconnecting communities with indigenous epistemologies that were historically marginalized under colonial rule (Bhatia, 2020).

These initiatives are not merely nostalgic attempts to revive the past; rather, they represent an intentional and strategic response to the long-standing effects of colonial *epistemicide*—the erasure of indigenous ways of knowing. By reintroducing traditional games like *Moksha Patam*, educators seek to create culturally resonant forms of moral education that align with local histories and values, offering an alternative to standardized, Western-centric curricula (Kapoor & Varma, 2021). Furthermore, the reimplementation of such traditional tools reflects a growing awareness of the pedagogical power of play. Modern educational theories increasingly emphasize experiential and participatory learning as effective for student engagement and ethical development. Traditional games, by virtue of their metaphorical depth and cultural symbolism, provide an ideal platform for this kind of learning, particularly in societies with rich oral and visual traditions (Chandra, 2023).

One significant benefit of reintroducing *Moksha Patam* is its potential to enhance moral reasoning among students. Unlike abstract moral lessons or rigid behavioral codes, the game presents moral challenges in a narrative and visual form, prompting reflection through active participation. Each snake and ladder becomes a teaching moment—an opportunity to explore the consequences of actions within a culturally meaningful framework (Rao, 2021). Several Indian NGOs and community-based organizations have already begun to adapt the traditional format of *Moksha Patam* for classroom use. These adaptations often retain the original moral categories—such as truth, generosity, and humility—while updating the imagery and content to resonate with contemporary issues like digital literacy, environmental responsibility, and civic engagement. This flexible approach underscores the game's ongoing relevance as a dynamic educational tool (Pranata & Wibowo, 2021).

The decolonial implications of this educational revival are also noteworthy. Scholars and activists have argued that reclaiming indigenous pedagogies is a critical step toward intellectual sovereignty. It challenges the dominance of Eurocentric knowledge systems and affirms the validity and richness of non-Western modes of thought. Reintroducing *Moksha Patam* in schools, therefore, is not just an act of cultural preservation but also a form of epistemic justice (Mukherjee, 2022).

This movement also intersects with global conversations around the ethics of cultural representation and intellectual property. As traditional games like Snakes and Ladders continue to be marketed globally without acknowledgment of their origins, there is a moral imperative to recognize the cultural labor embedded in these artifacts. Ethical recognition includes crediting source communities and supporting their right to tell their own stories through educational content and cultural expression (Zulfiqar & Ahmad, 2020).

Additionally, integrating traditional games into the curriculum can foster a deeper sense of identity among young learners. Exposure to culturally relevant content can strengthen students' connection to their heritage, promote pride in local traditions, and counter the alienation often felt in overly standardized education systems. In this way, cultural reclamation becomes a foundation for both personal and collective empowerment (Rahimi & Ghaffari, 2020). Digital media has further expanded opportunities for cultural revival. Apps and digital platforms are now being developed to present traditional games in interactive formats that appeal to today's tech-savvy generation. These tools offer a hybrid model of education—merging ancient wisdom with modern accessibility—and allow traditional content to flourish in contemporary settings without sacrificing authenticity (Rana, 2021).

The reintroduction of *Moksha Patam* into modern educational contexts reflects a broader push to reclaim and ethically recognize indigenous knowledge systems. As educators, scholars, and activists continue this work, they not only preserve valuable cultural practices but also contribute to a more inclusive and pluralistic vision of learning—one that acknowledges the richness of diverse epistemologies and centers them in the narrative of modern education.

CONCLUSION

The journey of *Moksha Patam*—from a sacred pedagogical tool rooted in Indian spiritual philosophy to its commodified global incarnation as *Snakes and Ladders*—illustrates the profound transformations cultural artifacts undergo across time, space, and power structures. While colonial appropriation and commercial mass production led to the erosion of the game's original moral and metaphysical layers, its enduring structure continues to offer pedagogical potential. Contemporary cross-cultural adaptations and recent efforts in India to reclaim and reintegrate the game into educational contexts demonstrate its semiotic resilience and its capacity to serve as a vessel for ethical instruction, cultural identity, and resistance to epistemic erasure. This revival reflects a growing recognition of the importance of decolonizing educational content and restoring indigenous knowledge systems as vital components of holistic, context-sensitive learning.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

This study is limited by its reliance on secondary sources and historical reconstructions, which may not fully capture the nuances of lived experiences across diverse communities that played or reinterpreted *Moksha Patam*. Moreover, the scope is primarily centered on South Asian and Anglophone contexts, excluding a deeper examination of its adaptations in other regions. Future research should incorporate ethnographic fieldwork, oral histories, and participatory action research involving educators, children, and cultural custodians. Comparative studies across regions—especially within Southeast Asia, Africa, and diasporic communities—can enrich our understanding of how traditional games function as evolving cultural texts. Additionally, interdisciplinary collaborations with game designers, digital media developers, and curriculum experts could explore innovative ways to revitalize *Moksha Patam* for contemporary educational use without compromising its cultural integrity.

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