The first serious reference to cards in India is believed to be the one to the Ganjifā cards in the Bāburnāmā, by the emperor himself. The next one is in Humāyun-nāmā by his sister and after that in the Akbarnāmā by Akbar’s friend and philosopher Abul Fazl. But before these emperors of Central Asian descent, there were folk oral traditions of the presence of cards even in ancient India. They were called Krīḍāpatram, meaning playing leaves/rags literally. There is no written evidence or otherwise of the existence of these cards but Abul Fazl does mention in Ain-i-Akbari, before describing Akbar’s changes in the Mughal Ganjifā cards, that the ancient sages had twelve as the basis of the structure of their pack of cards (Blochmann 1873). There were twelve kings, one for every suit, and each suit had twelve cards - a king and eleven followers. Due to the absence of any traces of these it is impossible to say whether Ganjifā had originated from the ancient Krīḍāpatram. However, there are circumstances that may indicate that the sudden growth in the popularity of a foreign element without any antecedent is a bit unnatural.

There are many theories and stories around the origin of this game. Mr. R.V. Leyden believed that chessmen were transferred to paper to make these cards (Leyden 1982). But scholars mostly believe that they came down here from Persia through Bābur. That is most probably because the first clear reference to this game is found in his account and the first sets we find mentioned were based entirely on the Persian court system. However, considering the religious scenario of India (where Hinduism is so deep rooted that many new religions, even after gaining high popularity, could not ever achieve dominance in the country) it is difficult to presume that the game was entirely foreign and that too that it was brought here by some Muslim rulers. One example of such a situation can be observed in the state of Odisha. The cult of Jagannātha started in the 12th century and by the 16th century it had
spread to all the areas of the state and was deep rooted. Moreover, the orthodox Brahmins here were absolutely at loggerheads with any kind of religious interference from outside because of the episode of Kalapahada who was the general of a Mughal governor, Suleiman Karrani of Bengal. Kalapahada was a Brahmin but had married a Muslim woman for which he was banished from his religion. His pleadings at the Puri temple were met with indifference or, rather, loathing. So, he swore vengeance and, while occupying Puri for his master, he destroyed the temple and burnt the image of the great Lord Jagannath (Odisha Review-July 2011). This incident must have created terrible bitterness amongst the Hindus for everything related to the Islamic religion. With this backdrop it is highly unlikely to assume that the game was introduced without any local base exclusively by the Muslims to Odisha. Even if it was such a concept that moved into a highly orthodox, religiously guarded society, it must have undergone a considerable conceptual change to accommodate the gods and goddesses, signs and symbols pertaining to the beliefs of this place. When the concept was changed, the game must have also undergone a lot of changes. This change may have some precedence coming from a similar kind of game practised earlier. In an archaeological context it is always observed that a new concept is never accepted unless it is badly required or a similar kind of concept existed earlier.

This may suggest that the reference by Abul Fazl was not a story but that there did exist such an idea similar to Ganjifā before Ganjifā itself showed up here. To reach a common agreement, it may be concluded that Hinduised Ganjifās like the Daśāvatāra and the Indian versions of Mughal sets were a blend of both the cultures. It might have already percolated to the Indian system much earlier without any religious or ethnic bias. One such example can be sighted in the Surya image which is not necessarily associated with any religion or community.

There can be a few other theories too about the appearance of playing cards in India. The first cards from China travelled through the silk route to
Persia. They, thus, moved through the traders who were most probably the players themselves and carried these cards for their own entertainment. This can also explain the money cards of China getting transformed to the Ganj (treasury) cards which has suits dealing with royal money too. A similar relationship can be established between China and India too. India also had trade relations with China. From some excavated archaeological sites of the eastern coast India like Manikapatana, Khalkapatana in Odisha (Pradhan, et al. 1996, Mohanty and Joglekar 2010), Arikamedu in Tamil Nadu (Wheeler, et al. 1946) and Mantai (Carswell, et al. 2013) on the western coast of Sri Lanka, Chinese ceramics and coins have been found which date back to the 10th - 15th century A.D. Among the traders and travellers many of them might have been Buddhist too as Buddhism was already established in China by that time. This might explain the acceptance of Buddha as one of Lord Viṣṇu’s incarnations in the Jagannātha cult. However, there is no trace of money suits associated with the Hinduised Indian Ganjifā like the Chinese sets used to have.

The start of the Daśāvatāra Ganjifā is again a puzzle. It can be assumed that it started in the seat of Vaiṣṇavism, i.e., Odisha and then spread to all the states and communities that came in contact with the state. When the Marathas attacked Odisha they were influenced by the Vaiṣṇava cult to the extent that, to beautify the great temple of Lord Jagannātha, they pulled off a pillar from in front of the Konark temple and erected it in front of the temple of Puri. Similarly, Daśāvatāra Gaṇjifā is seen in Andhra Pradesh and Bengal which were earlier parts of the Odishan kingdom.

The Hinduised themes then became famous among the Hindu royalty and nobility. The traditional painting industries of different regions started including Gaṇjifā as one of their art items. They prepared and supplied them to the elite players. It became a major attraction for the admirers of these traditional arts. The craft probably prospered both for the game as well as for the collectors as a collectors’ item because of its colourful paintings and religious depictions. The privileged classes, hence, began helping the families
of these artists through their patronage. The Citrakāras flourished under the benevolence of the rich class, especially the royal families, almost everywhere in India. For example, in Sawantwadi Raja Khem Sawant III Bhonsale brought the Citāris into prominence, in Nirmal the Nizam’s and the Mughal’s encouragement to the Naqqāṣ made them prepare the Ganjifā cards and the famous Mysore cards were encouraged by Mummadi Krishnaraja Wodeyar. In Odisha, too, the kings of small kingdoms like Sonepur, Chikitī and Kalahandi, used to play the game themselves. In those times, due to the popularity of the game, the cards were being supplied all over the state from their respective crafting centres. They were prepared at one place but could be found everywhere. The decline of monarchy and the royal houses almost spelt the end for the artists too, except in cases where it could survive only as souvenirs for tourists. The royal patronage and recognition stopped and its status symbol vanished. The cards almost stopped being manufactured and their supply came to an end. The players’ interest too declined as the modern packs were very easily available at much cheaper prices and the new games, with less number of cards and different rules for different types of games, were also easy to play. It probably has the same kind of entertainment as one could obtain from Ganjifā. Everybody, even women and children, could play the game, depending upon its nature. The expanse of the area where this game (Ganjifā) was being played kept shrinking. It was not worthwhile for the players to take the trouble of travelling great distances to procure cards for such a demanding game like Ganjifā by spending much more money on it. As the modern cards slowly stole the market, Ganjifā became more and more confined to a few pockets and eventually survived almost only in the places where it was produced. These are the centres of production of traditional paintings of their respective states and Ganjifā cards, due to their beautiful depictions and artistic treatment, remained more like an art collector’s items, rather than the device of a game.

The new generation lives a highly fast and busy life. There is hardly any time for recreation, whereas their ancestors could spend hours at a stretch for such activities. Whatever time is available is spent in modern luxuries and
games which are mostly virtual and less time-consuming. Also, new games like carrom and ludo entered the recreation world and became popular. The technological advancements have stolen the popularity of the older pastimes. A tough and time-consuming game like Ganjifā is too arduous for them to remember and play unless someone is passionately keen. There is no interest in learning this traditional game which is a part of their culture. Even the children of the veteran players have no idea about it. As a result, the surviving playing centres mostly have only old men in the twilight of their lives. In a few places some youngsters eagerly watch the older men play but they hardly play along with them. The younger players amongst the present players belong to the middle age group. But their number is not enough to keep the game going when the veterans pass away. In Puri, where the players are all elderly, two to three gentlemen have already departed this life in the last four years, leaving their co-players behind. So it is quite apparent what the condition would be in a decade or so or even less. In Sonepur, though there are quite a good number of players and some relatively younger ones, they have decreasingly less time to play the game these days. In Kalahandi the players are too less in number as it is surviving only in a village or two. This alarming condition of such a heritage game calls for some urgent measures. Many of the regions have already lost the game and the cards as well. Whatever is remaining of the game in Odisha as well as the other states needs immediate attention.

The revival of patronage has been noticed in a few places of India to the relief of the people concerned with it. The Citāris had almost forsaken their traditional vocation till recently when, in the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, some of the present members of the royal family, the King, Lt. Col. Rajbahadur Shivaram Sawant Bhonsale and his wife, made efforts for the revival of this art. The Queen has arranged painting workshop for the artists inside the palace itself. In Mysore some devoted artists have tried to keep the card crafting alive. Ganjifā Raghupati Bhatta is one of the main leaders of this movement. In Nirmal, Biṣṇupur and many other centres, Ganjifā cards are no longer prepared. The industry has closed down altogether in Rajasthan, Kashmir and other previously
active areas. In Odisha it is alive to some extent for two reasons - one it is still being played in a few areas and secondly, there is a lot of demand among the tourists and art collectors for the Puri paṭa sets.

Nowadays, these cards are more or less just curios. People consider them as coasters to keep cups on. The ignorance is too glaring to keep the tradition in safe hands. The art collectors and researchers are the only ones that show some interest in them. It has thus become an art collector’s object. The cards are only prepared for tourism purposes and on orders from interested people. They also make some very interesting museum antiques and decorative objects. The researcher has come across some interesting uses of the art:

- Some of the Rāmāyaṇa cards have been used in an advertisement of a sweets parlour on a newspaper during the Dushera to celebrate the victory of good over evil.

![Fig. 7.1 The king and ten cards of Rāmāyaṇa set from Paralakhemundi](image)

- The invitation cards for the wedding of actor Vivek Oberoi, the son of actor Suresh Oberoi from the Indian film industry, contained one Gajifā card each. The purpose was to, along with making the wedding cards
unique, create awareness about the dying art and tradition. The Ganjifā cards that were kept in these wedding invitations were from Mysore.

![Image of wedding invitations](http://www.bollywoodshaadis.com/articles/interesting-wedding-invites-of-bollywood-celebs-2164)

**Fig. 7.2 The invitation card box containing a framed card and the couple**

(Source: http://www.bollywoodshaadis.com/articles/interesting-wedding-invites-of-bollywood-celebs-2164)

- In Kaḷinga Aśoka, one of the most popular hotels of Bhubaneśwar, the capital of Odisha (which is known for its banquet hall and wedding party arrangements) one of its long walls is painted with the Puri Ganjapā card designs.
Ganjifā preparation was a profession all by itself once upon a time. But that is no longer possible. The government is as ignorant about it as the common people and there are no efforts on its part to revive it. These displays above may seem reminiscent of whatever is left of the great heritage, but can also be perceived as measures to create awareness.

The playing of the game has also gone into oblivion. There are very few players left in all the places where the game is played. The players are invariably in their ripe old age, i.e., in their 70s or 80s. In Puri, within a span four years, two of the expert players have passed away. The playing population is fast thinning and the new generation is not contributing anything in that field. This study can be used to know the rules of the game and gather and encourage groups of people to play the game on a regular basis. Several facsimiles of earlier Ganjifā sets have been painted in the last few years (Gordhandas 2000). The artists of the younger generation should be given a boost by some monetary help from the government and financially well off patrons. Holding workshops and seminars to propagate this will help to a great extent. It is important to save such a heritage which reflects so many aspects of the players and the society they belong to and is such a rich source of history. As it is, the...
history of cards in India is very unclear and if this tradition vanishes altogether it will be almost impossible to establish the connection between different levels of evolution of the game in future.

Among the handful of scholars who have taken interest in the study of this game and cards, Leyden can be said to be an authority. He has done an almost detailed study of the general characteristics of the Ganjifā cards throughout India. He has also tried to trace the origin of playing cards back to China through Persia to India. He has referred to some of the earlier scholars who have worked on some aspects of these cards or other cards. But his main work has been the cataloguing of the collections of a few European museums. Moreover, there is only one work that is in English, the others are in German and have not been translated. Another such book-cum-catalogue is written by Sarla Chopra from Bharat Kala Bhavan of Benaras Hindu University. She has done a similar study on the cards. There have been some stray studies by collectors like Mr. Kishor Gordhandas, Sanskritists like Dr. S.Y. Wakankar, but there has not been any detailed study on any particular state’s Ganjifā cards. Only the factual aspects of the cards and games like their area, material for production, and the general depictions on them have been dealt with by most of the researchers. But there is no state-specific work done neither is there any work on the cultural and social associations of these cards with the circumstances of the regions they are played and prepared in. They become a part of the lives of the people and the culture of the region. That is why there are so many versions of the game, as the beliefs and life-style change from place to place. None of the earlier works, however, deal with the playing rules and formation of the game with various suits in different places individually. It has been observed that each region, along with their suits, played by different classes of people have developed their regional game rules, that reveal their social, religious and economic background. In Odisha itself there are multiple centres of playing and manufacturing. Every place has its own style and the cards reflect the religious beliefs, the social traits and the cultural elements of different regions.
This work tries to study the versions that are played specifically in the state of Odisha. The variety observed in the depictions, the materials and other beliefs attached to it make the cards of every place different. The most important aspect of this study has been the documentation of the game itself, i.e., how it is played, what are the intricacies of the game and their rules and regulations, especially on a regional basis. The detailed rules of every place where old men are still clinging to the tradition has been documented with card-to-card examples from the game played. This documentation will certainly help in providing an insight to the playing. This may help in the future and if the will to revive the game is needed it can be done from this documentation. However, this work is not complete as it takes into focus only the state of Odisha. The other places may have continuing playing traditions too which the candidate is unaware of. Further studies can be made in those directions and should be encouraged.