

## **Ganjifa Art: Aesthetic Representation of Elephant in the Playing Cards of Mysore and Moghul Ganjifa**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Elephants play a large role in other aspects of Indian life beyond religion. Author Heinrich Zimmer says of elephants in India, "In Hindu miniatures and present-day popular drawings [elephants are] a constantly recurring motif".

Each region in the country has its own form of game and Ganjifa is an ancient Indian card game believed to have been brought to India and popularised during Moghul period. The name Ganjifa comes from the Persian word "Ganjifeh" which means playing cards. These playing cards are traditionally hand painted using natural colors and are typically circular. These cards were popular throughout India, each region having its theme and own distinct style.

The Mysore Ganjifa was greatly patronized by the Mysore Royal family during their reign and the Mughals during the 16<sup>th</sup> C made it popular at court.

Meant to amuse, these cards comprised of twelve subjects, including two face cards, a minister and a king along with various other motifs, religious themes based on mythology and Puranas, epics etc. Animals were also represented, of which the elephant was aesthetically represented with much variety. Elephant is considered a symbol of strength, prosperity and auspiciousness and thereby is a recurring motif in Indian art and architecture.

The paper focuses on the symbolism and artistic delineation of elephants on these cards. The fine detailing, the aesthetic elements and the technical skill of the artists to represent the elephants in the Chad (Ganjifa) cards of Mysore and the Moghul Ganjifa will be discussed.

**Key Words:** *Ganjifa, Chad, Ganjifeh, Aesthetics*

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