

KISHOR GORDHANDAS

Playing-Cards of the Chitrashala Press- Part 1

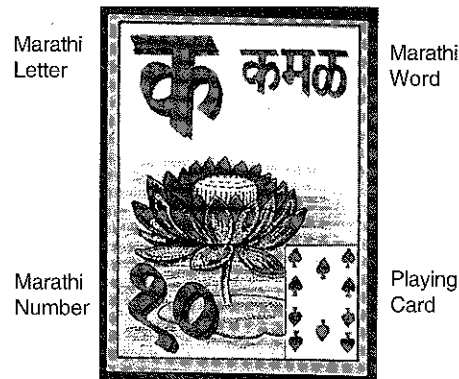
The Chitrashala press was located in Pune (formerly known as Poona) in west central India in today's Maharashtra state where the Marathi language is spoken. Pune is a district administrative and commercial centre with automotive vehicle works and other factories. There are several palaces and temples from the 17th and 18th century dating from when Pune was the capital of the Marathas. Interestingly, Pune is also famed for being the original centre of the transcendental meditation movement. The name of the press is derived from the Marathi words Chitra (art) and Shala (school) and the most recent address of the print works was: 562 Sadashiv Peth, Pune-2, but, alas the press seems to have ceased business in the 1980's. Two important packs were printed by the Chitrashala Press, the first being a children's educational pack and the second a printed ganjifa pack.

THE CHILDRENS ALPHABETICAL PACK

This pack probably dates from 1940 and is cheaply printed with some mistakes such as the inversion of the ♥ on the A♥. The writing on the box is in Marathi and translates as 'Picture Playing Cards' while below it says 'Original (First?) Words'. The two flaps on the box read 'Pictorial' and 'Presented to Children'. Down the sides of the box is written 'Alphabetical Cards' on the left while the right side reads 'Playing cards'. At least three different editions of the pack were printed; two with Marathi text and a third edition in Urdu.

THE MARATHI EDITIONS

The First Marathi Edition: The pack has two objectives namely a game for fun coupled with an educational aspect. As might be expected from an art school pack the intricacy of the overall design couples with the teaching of reading and arithmetic in an overall pleasing fashion so that learning may be enjoyed. The basic pattern of the numeral cards is a central picture illustrating a word that is written in Marathi on the top



Court cards of the first Marathi edition circa 1940

right of the card while the letter with which the word begins is shown on the top left. On the bottom left of the card is a number corresponding to the value of a numeral playing card drawn in the bottom right corner but there are no Arabic number indices on the cards. The Kings and Queens (showing a Maharaja and a Maharani) of the black suits have different designs to those of the red suits but the jacks (princes) are the same for all four. There is no central picture and the appropriate suit sign is shown on the top right. The Marathi letter, or letter combination, is shown at the top left and the letter and the number are printed in the opposing colour to that of the suit sign; a colour scheme, also present on the numeral cards, that considerably adds to the artistic balance of the overall design of the card. In addition the court cards have the appropriate Roman letter i.e. K, Q and J printed above the playing-card possibly for several reasons such as: to make the pack usable by non-Indians, to familiarise the players with European court cards or to

teach some of the English alphabet. While the numeral cards have all different illustrations that correspond with the letter and word on the card, the number written is, of course, the same for each suit. Thus the child could learn to associate visually both the letter and the word and also the number and the playing card and so learn, with the same pack, the arts of reading, writing and arithmetic while at the same time enjoying a game!



Cards from the first Marathi edition including the two Jokers

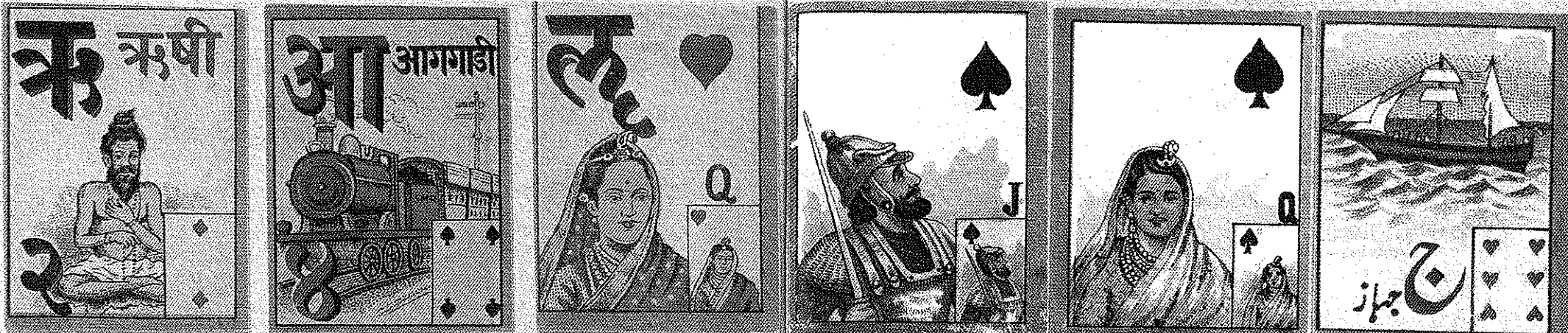
The back design of the earlier of the Marathi editions shows a boy making a card house. The illustrations on the numeral cards show diverse subjects including boats, steam trains, rivers, fruit, animals and tools. It is interesting to note that the 2♦ features a maharishi perhaps reflecting the association of Pune and the origin of transcendental meditation and that the A♠ shows a Zoroastrian fire altar. Zoroastrianism is an ancient religion, originating in Persia in about 500 BC. Zarathustra, or Zoroaster, was the prophet of Zoroastrianism who preached of the battle between good and evil in the

world. The rise of Islam drove out Zoroastrianism from Persia in the 8th century A.D. The exiles settled in northern India where they are known today as Parsees. Now localised around Bombay, they do not worship fire, as is commonly thought, but venerate it as a manifestation of good or purity. It is Zoroastrians who give their dead 'air burials' in which bodies are placed in 'Towers of Silence' to be eaten by vultures so that there is no pollution of the pure earth.

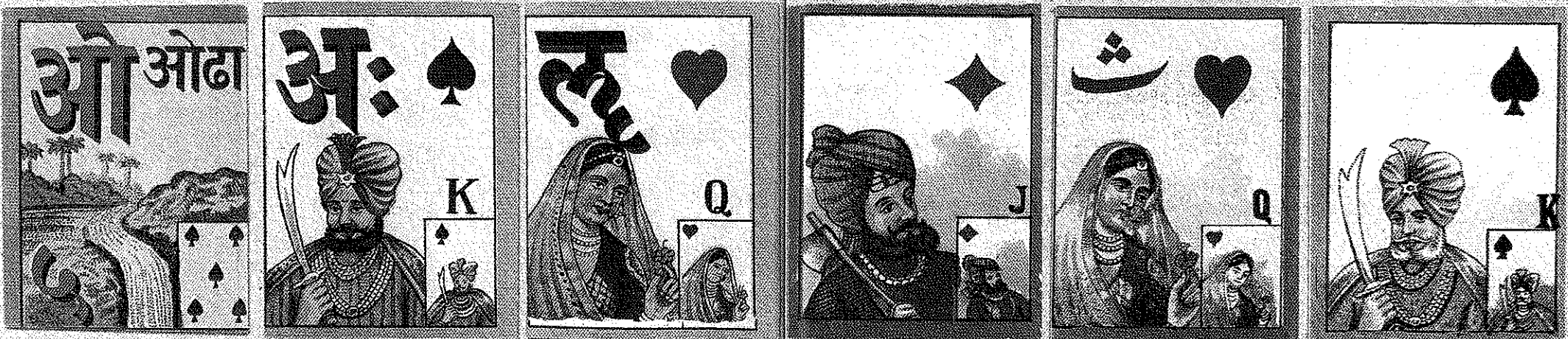
The Second Marathi Edition: A second edition of the Marathi pack was printed with new illustrations for the court cards while following the layout of the earlier pack. The major change was that all of the court cards were different for each suit by contrast to the first edition in which the black suits share the same designs with the red suits. The designs for the K♣, Q♣, K♦ and Q♦ from the first edition were retained for the second edition as was the design for the Jacks which appeared on the J♥. The complete set of illustrations were also used for the Urdu edition albeit with some differences in the colouration. The back design is a floral pattern and this is the rarest of the Marathi packs. The inversion of the ♥ on the A♥ was not corrected.



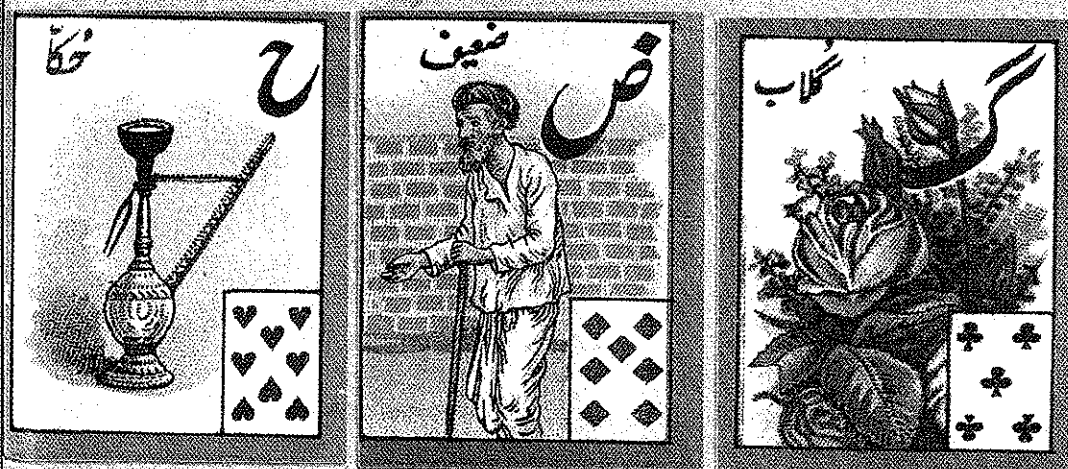
2nd Marathi edition: Note inverted ♥ on the A♥ (Bottom right)



Four cards from the first Marathi edition by Chitrashala Press, Poona (darker border).



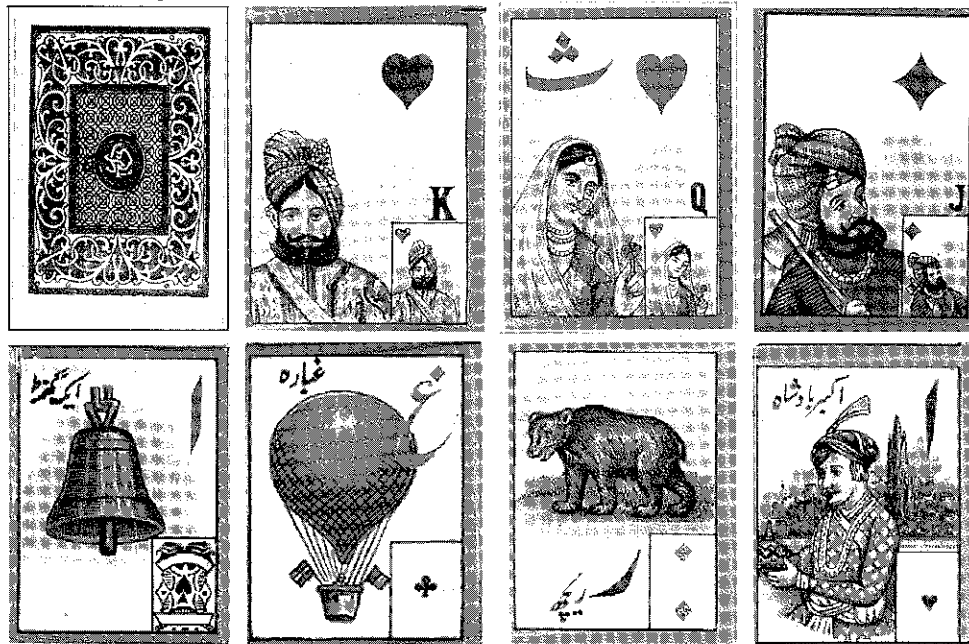
Five cards from the second Marathi edition (lighter border).



Nine cards from the Urdu edition.

THE URDU EDITION

The Urdu edition shares the same dual objectives of the Marathi packs. This pack might have been intended to be sold to a local Urdu-speaking population at the time of the printing in Maharashtra or beyond that region. One major difference between the Urdu and Marathi packs is that in the Urdu edition the letter and the name of the subject/object is written where space permits and not as in the format of the Marathi cards. The cards printed with Urdu text show characteristic features of the Muslim culture such as a mosque on the 7♣ and a bear on the 2♦ whereas in the Marathi version this is a maharishi or yogi. The court cards have the same images as the second Marathi edition but have different colouration and sky backdrop that is not present on the Marathi cards. The A♠ features a bell and the playing-card lacks mention of the Chirasala Press. The letter present on the Marathi court cards is also sometimes occasionally missing. There are differences on other cards, for instance a ship is shown on the 8♣ of the Marathi pack whereas in the Urdu edition it is shown on the 6♥. Similarly a duck is shown on the Marathi 6♣ and on the 2♥ of the Urdu edition. The Urdu A♥ shows a King, probably shows King Akbar who was the Moghul Emperor between 1556-1605, whereas the Marathi A♥ shows a kite and the Figure 1. In the Urdu edition the A♥ has been redrawn with the correct orientation of the ♥. There are other differences of this nature reflecting cultural differences. The other difference is that the back has a blue and white back design within its centre the monogram C. S. P. – standing for Chitrashala Press. ♣



Cards of the Urdu edition: Note the anonymous A♠ and the corrected A♥