

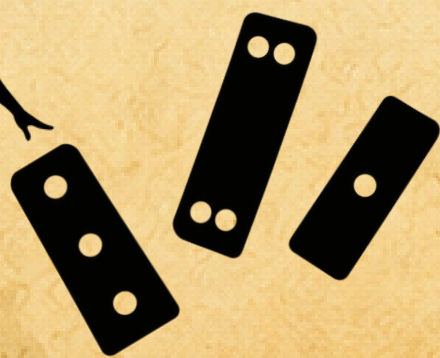


BHARAT AT PLAY

Exploring the History of Indigenous Games and Sports



Chapter 3: PALLANGUZHI



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Fourteen Pits, One Game



Fourteen little pits. A handful of shells.

Two players. And a battle of clever moves.

This is **Pallanguzhi**, a traditional South Indian game played for generations, especially in **Tamil Nadu and Kerala**.

It looks simple, but every move demands careful counting, quick thinking, and a clever plan.



The Mancala Tradition



Pallanguzhi was part of a much larger family of games called **mancala** games. The word ‘mancala’ comes from the Arabic word ‘naqala’, meaning “to move”, just like the counters moving from pit to pit. In South India, one of these became Pallanguzhi.



PALA - MANY

KUZHI - PIT



Why “Pallanguzhi”?



The name itself tells us about the game.

In Tamil, “*pala*” means **many** and “*kuzhi*” means **pit**.
The traditional board has fourteen pits, seven for each player.

Add a few shells or seeds, and the game is ready to begin.





Seeds Become Strategy

Two players sit opposite each other with their pits filled with shells or seeds.

A player picks up the counters from one pit and drops them, one by one, into the following pits.

Where the last counter lands could decide the next move. Another turn, a capture or an advantage.





Origin & Stories



No one knows exactly when the game began.

A popular **regional folklore** speaks of Sita playing Pallanguzhi while she was in Ashoka Vana. The story says that she played it to pass the long, difficult days of her captivity, turning a simple game of pits and counters into a small source of comfort, focus and quiet resilience.

So powerful is this legend that Pallanguzhi also has a single-player version called **Seethai Pindi** in Tamil Nadu.





One Game, Many Names

As similar games spread across South India, they developed different names and rules.

KARNATAKA
Ali Guli Mane

TELANGANA
Vamana Guntalu

ANDHRA PRADESH
Vamana Guntalu

TAMIL NADU
Pallanguzhi





Learning through Play

Pallanguzhi is an exercise in **mental arithmetic**, **memory**, and **strategic planning**. Players constantly count seeds, remember previous moves, anticipate outcomes, and make decisions based on changing patterns.

Through repeated play, the **game strengthens numeracy, concentration, recall, and logical thinking**, showing how traditional games made learning an engaging part of everyday life.

