



BHARAT AT PLAY

Exploring the History of Indigenous Games and Sports



Chapter 5: PACHISI

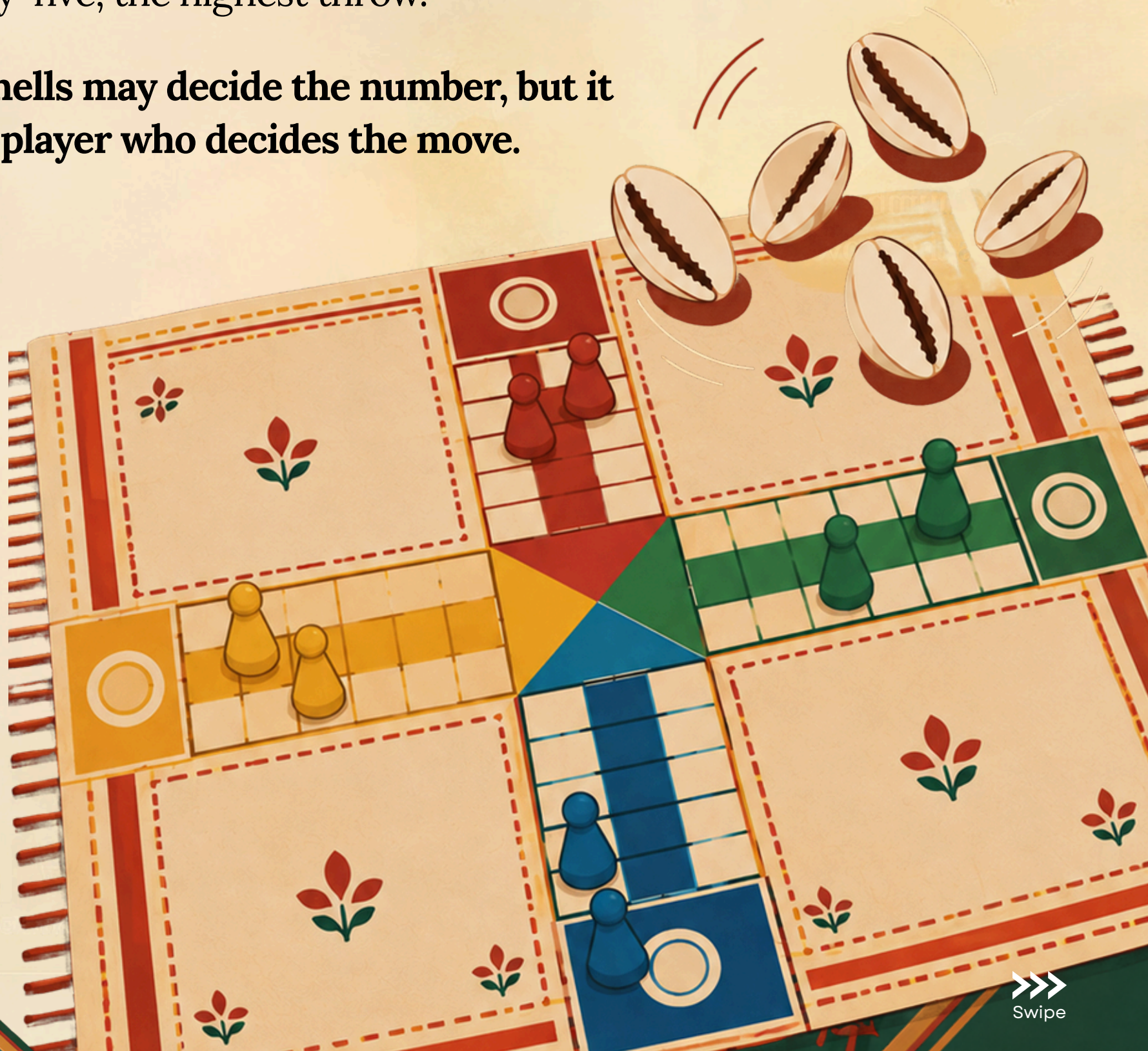




A Game of Chance and Choice

Played with four pieces, a cloth board and five cowrie shells, **Pachisi** gets its name from the word **pachis**, which means twenty-five, the highest throw.

The shells may decide the number, but it is the player who decides the move.





How the Game Works

The cross-shaped board of Pachisi has four paths meeting at the centre, called **Charkoni**. Four players form two teams, each guiding four pieces around the board.

Capture your opponents. Race your pieces home.
Outsmart the other team.





A Game with an Epic Connection

The *Mahabharata* mentions a dice game called *pasha* or *dyutakrida*, the fateful game of gambling between the Kauravas and Pandavas.

However, the epic does not describe the cross-shaped Pachisi board or its rules. Therefore, the connection is to the tradition of dice-playing, and not to Pachisi as we know it today.





Pachisi in Akbar's Court

While Pachisi's exact origins remain uncertain, surviving evidence places it firmly in **16th century**, when it flourished under **Emperor Akbar**. At **Agra and Fatehpur Sikri**, the game grew larger than life. Giant **Pachisi courts** were built that turned the palace grounds into game boards, with **courtiers serving as the pieces themselves!**



From Court to Canvas

Pachisi appears frequently in **Mughal and Rajput paintings**, offering colourful glimpses of people gathered around the game. Surviving boards and playing pieces also provide clues about its design, rules and how the game was enjoyed.





From India to the World

Pachisi didn't stay on Indian game boards. It travelled across oceans, inspiring games in different parts of the world, from **Ludo** in Britain and **Mensch ärgere Dich nicht** in Germany to **Sorry!** in the United States.





Bharat At Play

From quiet courtyards to dusty wrestling pits, these ancestral games carried our knowledge and traditions across centuries.

The games may adapt and evolve, yet the core remains the same - a shared joy of celebrating strength, skill, strategy and cultural unity that connects us all.

