



HOW TO PLAY *PALLANKUZHI*?

Note: Non-English terms used below are from Palakkad Tamil.

Material needed for the game:

- The actual *pallankuzhi*, which is a rectangular wooden board with fourteen holes (*kuzhi*) on top of it (seven on each side, equidistant from each other); the best *pallankuzhi* have deep holes!
- Small sized conches (called *chinni*) and if desired, two larger ones (*chogi*) to use to mark the *kashi* [more on this later].

Rules of the game:

This is basically a two-person game. The *pallankuzhi* is placed between the two players, such that each player has seven holes in front of them. The game starts with the players filling in six holes on each side with a fixed even number of *chinni* (usually twelve). The middle hole on each side is not

filled at this stage and is marked with a single *chogi*. The two middle holes represent the *kaashi* (or treasure); these cannot be used to play the game but the *chinni* in these can be won by the players.

The game starts with one person (Player A) playing with the *chinni* from any of their six holes. The *chinni* are distributed one by one in all holes in a clockwise direction (including the *kaashi* and the opponent's holes). That is, the first of the twelve *chinni* is put in the hole to the left of the one you have chosen to play from, then the one left of it and so on. When Player A runs out of *chinni*, they continue with the *chinni* from the hole immediately next to the one where they ended (that is, where the twelfth *chinni* was put) unless they have ended in the hole to the right of the *kaashi* (on either side of the board). This continues until

- either the player ends up in a hole to the right of any one of the two *kaashis*.
- Or the player ends up before an empty hole, in which case the player is entitled to all the *chinni* in the hole immediately after the empty one as well as the hole opposite this one. In case the player ends up before an empty hole just before the *kaashi*, the player can take all the *chinni* from the *kaashi* except one (the *chogi* if that is being used or else, any one *chinni*). Whoever wins the *kaashi* in a game will continue to take any *chinnis* that are put in it until the end of that game.

Player B then plays in the same fashion as above. The two alternate until one or both players run out of *chinni* to play with. Technically, the game could stop at this point in which case, the player with the most *chinni* wins. However, the usual practice is to continue until one player does not have enough *chinni* to fill all their six holes (allowing for the option of starting a new round with a reduced number of *chinni* if required, although it necessarily has to be an even number). If any one or both of the *kaashis* have not been won by the player, they are carried forward to the next round (*kaashi vaayum* or the treasure lives on). In case Player A has won a *kaashi* and Player B does not have sufficient *chinni* to play the next round, the two players may mutually decide to share the unwon *kaashi* (*pangu kaashi*). In that case, Player A – who has won a *kaashi* – gets one *chinni* less than half the total and Player B gets one *chinni* more [basically, a symbolic acknowledgement of unequal riches!]. A single *chinni* or *chogi* is always left in the *kaashi* even in this case.

Points to keep in mind while playing:

- As play progresses and holes kept emptied and filled, the number of *chinni* in a hole will often reach half the total number with which play was started (six, if the game was started with twelve). This is called a *muthu* (pearl) and can be collected by the player on whose side it appears. This is a defensive strategy, basically to avoid the possibility of the *chinni* falling into the hands of the other player at a later time. However, this possibility is lost once the pearl ripens (*muthu pazhuthachu*), that is the number increases to more than half.
- In case two holes are consecutively empty after the hole where one ends playing, one does not get anything.
- Finally, there is actually a fair bit of strategizing involved in the game, all of which is basically aimed at maximizing your own share of *chinni* or in a defensive mode, preventing your opponent from getting more *chinni*. Remember that you can get more *chinni* if you end up before an empty hole that is followed by the *kaashi* or an empty hole after which there are holes (the next one, and the one opposite it) which are full. Hence you should plan your next and subsequent moves keeping these options in mind!