

# ganjifa

Traditional Round Indian Playing Cards

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## Understanding the Cards

The ganjifa deck consists of 96 different cards: 8 suits, each of which are indicated by distinct colors and imagery. Each suit consists of twelve cards: ten numbered 1 through 10, as well as two face cards: the vizier (similar to the jack in Western cards) and the raja (similar to the king). The values of the numbered cards are indicated by the number of symbols on each card. The raja is the most valuable card in each suit, followed by the vizier, and then the number cards 10 to 1. The raja usually sits on a throne while the vizier rides a horse, camel, or ox. The symbols consist of strongly-stylized items, which give the suit its name, as follows:

Suit	Color	Symbol	Suit	Color	Symbol
Surya	Green	Gold Coin	Chandra	Black	Silver Coin
Barat	Blue	Bill of Exchange	Phul	Brown	Crown
Kumancha	Yellow	Merchandise	Ghulam	Purple	Slave
Cheng	Orange	Harp	Shamsher	Red	Sword

*Variation:* In the original Mughal ganjifa the value of the number cards depends on the suit. For some suits 10 is considered high and 1 is low, while in other suits the 1 is considered high and the 10 is considered low. In all cases the face cards—the vizier and the raja—are higher than the numbered cards. For simplicity's sake, we recommend that new players just stick with 10 always being high and 1 being low. However, those wanting the historical experience may refer to this chart.

Suit	High	Low	Suit	High	Low
Barat	10	1	Phul	1	10
Surya	10	1	Ghulam	1	10
Kumancha	10	1	Shamsher	1	10
Cheng	10	1	Chandra	1	10

## nakaṣṭh

(2 – 6 Players)

First the stake of the game is determined and placed in the middle of the table. This is the same for all players, and is typically some amount of money, chips or other tokens. Then all the cards are shuffled and two cards are dealt to each player, face-down.

The value of each card corresponds to the number of symbols on it. The raja counts for 12 and the vizier for 11 points.

Each player turns over their cards. Whoever has a sum of 18, 19, 21, or 23 has a losing hand. She receives 0 points.

All remaining players then check to see if they have achieved one of the following victory conditions. The order the conditions are listed in indicates their values: a pair of 1s trumps a pair of rajas, etc.

1. A pair of 1s
2. A pair of rajas
3. A pair of viziers
4. A pair of 10s
5. A total of 17 points
6. A total of 16, and so on

Losers pay their stake to the winner, and a new round begins. Whoever has won the most after an agreed-upon number of rounds wins the game.

## ekrang

(2 – 4 Players)

Shuffle the cards, then deal an equal number to each player, starting to the right of the dealer and going counter-clockwise. (With three players, everyone receives 32 cards; with four players, everyone receives 24 cards). The players then take all their cards into their hand.

Should the game be played during the daytime, the player who possesses the raja of the surya (green) suit begins play. Should the game be played during the evening or night, the player who has the raja of the chandra (black) suit begins. The player who begins play in this way is considered “active player.” Which player is “active” will change between rounds.

Before the first round of play, the starting active player lays the surya raja (or chandra raja), together with one of her highest number cards, face-up in the middle of the table. All other players must then play a card of lower value (of any suit) on top of each of the two face-up cards. The active player takes these cards as a trick and then the first round of the game begins. Every round consists of two successive phases:

### Phase 1

The active player picks a suit and must play her highest card of that suit. She places this card face-up in the middle of the table. All other players must then play a card of the same suit on top of that card. Should a player be unable to play a card of that suit, she may substitute a card of any other suit. These cards will be taken as the trick by the active player when the phase ends. Such cards are placed in front of her face-down.

However, if any other player has a card of the same suit as the card played by the active player, but with a higher value she must play it now. She immediately wins the current trick, taking all the cards on the table. Play then skips Phase 2 and a new round begins with her as the active player.

Note that any cards taken as a trick are placed face-down in front of the player who took them. At no point may any player again look at the values of these face-down cards.

### Phase 2

The active player must now play her card with the lowest value of the same suit as the card she played before. All other players then, in turn, play a card on top of it.

The player who played the highest-valued card of the same suit wins this trick and becomes the new active player. Note that the cards played here may be of any suit, but only those of a matching suit may win the trick. Then a new round begins, starting with Phase 1.

### Winning the Game

When all of the cards have been played, the player who took the most tricks wins the game.

*Variation:* For a fast introduction to the game, sort the cards by suits and play with only a number of suits equal to the number of players. A 4-person game can be played with 4 suits; a 3-person game uses 3 suits, etc. Under no circumstances may the surya or chandra suits be left out.

*Variation:* For an interesting two-player game, take out four card suits and remove them from the game. The surya and chandra suits may never be removed. The remaining four suits are shuffled. From these 48 cards, 14 random cards are placed back in the box without either player looking at them. The player with the highest card of the surya (or chandra) suit begins.

*Variation:* For a cooperative experience, play the game with teams of two players each. Team members should sit opposite across the table and help each other take tricks. At the end of the game the team that collectively took the most tricks wins.

## क०मी

(2 – 6 Players)

First determine which player will be the dealer this round. The role of the dealer will rotate counterclockwise among the players each round.

The dealer then shuffles the cards and each other player determines her stake. This is typically some amount of money, chips or other tokens.

The dealer deals each player, including herself, three cards, starting with the player on her left and going counterclockwise around the table.

All players flip over their cards simultaneously. Each player then scores their hand by adding together the values of all three of their cards. Numbered cards are worth their indicated value and face cards are each worth zero. Suits do not matter for this game. If the hand's value is in the double digits, the first digit is ignored; the score of the player's hand is only equivalent to the last digit.

*Example:* A player is dealt a 5, a 7 and a vizier.  $5 + 7 + 0 = 12$ , but only the last digit is used for the value, so this player would have a final score of 2.

There is one exception to this scoring system. If a player receives a hand consisting entirely of face cards, this hand is called “Komi.” A Komi beats all other hands except for other Komis, which it ties.

All players who have a lower score than the dealer pay her their stake. All players who have a higher score than the dealer have the dealer pay them their stake. Finally, all players that scored the same as the dealer keep their stake, but neither are they paid anything.

Whoever has pocketed the most winnings after an agreed-upon number of rounds wins the game. Typically the number of rounds is a multiple of the number of players in the game, in order that every player may be the dealer an equal number of times.

*Variation:* This variation makes Komi into more of a betting game. In it each player may look at her hand after it is dealt, but before it is revealed. She may then opt to keep her stake as it is, double her stake or fold. Should she fold, she leaves the game and half her stake is paid to the dealer, rounding up. The dealer, who has no stake, does not have this option.

## ह०र०र०ग

(4 Players)

Shuffle the cards. Starting with the player who shuffled and going counter-clockwise, each player picks a card from the top of the deck. The player with the highest valued card goes first. Then reshuffle the cards.

The starting player then deals the cards four at a time till all players have 24 cards each. Dealing is done counter-clockwise.

If the game is played during the daytime, the player with the raja of the surya (green) suit starts the game. She should play the surya raja along with her lowest valued card from the surya suit. If she has no other surya cards, the lowest valued card from any other suit may be substituted. The other three players—in counter-clockwise order—then must play both their highest and lowest cards of the surya suit, substituting the highest card or the lowest card of any other suit if they do not have any surya cards. When the game is played during nighttime, the same procedure is followed with the chandra (black) suit instead of the surya suit. So the player with the chandra raja leads.

From the second round on, the lead player must pick a suit in which she has a face card and play her highest and lowest card of that suit.

Every round, the player who played the highest valued card of that suit takes the trick. Once a different player takes the trick, she then becomes the lead player. Note that this means the player with the surya raja (or chandra raja) always wins the first round.

If a player has no face cards left she is out of the game. She places her cards face-down in front of her and stops playing until the game is over.

The game continues until all players have played all of their face cards. At the end, the player who took the most tricks wins the game.

*Variation:* In this variation, the player who takes the trick is not the player with the highest card of the appropriate suit, but the one with the highest *sum* of two cards of the appropriate suit. The vizier counts for 11 and the raja for 12. So, for example, playing a vizier and a 5 gives a sum of 16. Ties go to the player with the highest card of the suit.

*Variation:* For a more strategic game, when a player plays her two cards, she may play her highest card of the suit in question and any other card of that suit—regardless of whether it is her lowest or not. Combined with the “sum” variation above, this allows her to deliberately save certain cards for later or take a trick with a particularly high card.

*Variation:* In this variation, players do not leave the game when they have no face cards remaining. Instead, players continue to play their highest and lowest cards of the relevant suit until all cards have been played and the game ends.