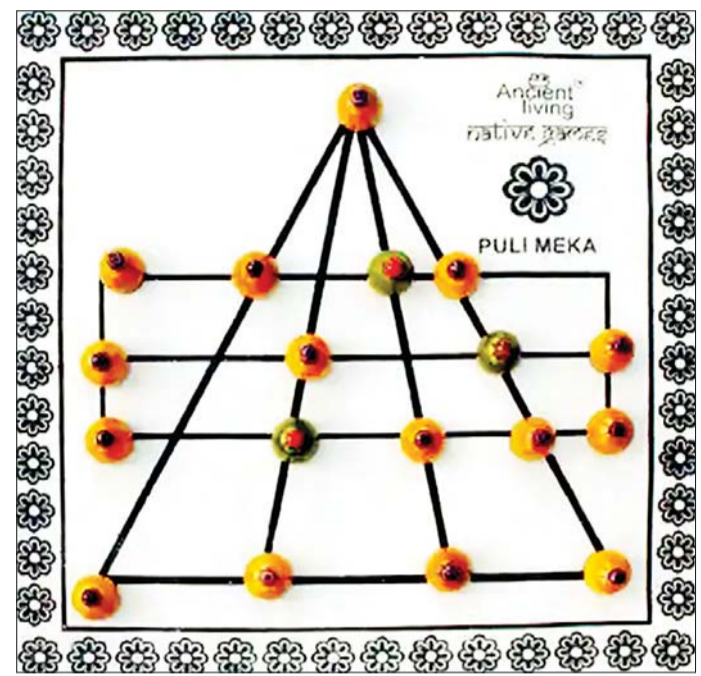


#AADU PULI ATTAM

The Game on the Temple Steps

The tigers are powerful. The goats are weak individually. But have strength in numbers. If they collaborate, surrounding the tigers and blocking, they win



Not too far from Anantya, tucked quietly inside a village temple courtyard, there is a stone step worn smooth by time, bare feet, monsoon rain, and generations of conversation. At first glance, it looks ordinary. But if you look closely, etched into the surface is a game board, simple lines intersecting into triangles and pathways. Villagers know it well. It is the board for Aadu Puli Attam, the ancient game of goats and tigers.

In the afternoons, after work in the fields, farmers and local elders gather around it. No glossy packaging. No digital screen. Just pebbles, seeds, or bottle caps standing in for the pieces: three tigers and twelve goats.

The rules are deceptively simple. The tigers are powerful. They can leap and capture. The goats are weak individually. One goat alone is easy prey. But the goats have strength in numbers. If they collaborate carefully, surrounding the tigers and blocking every move, they win.

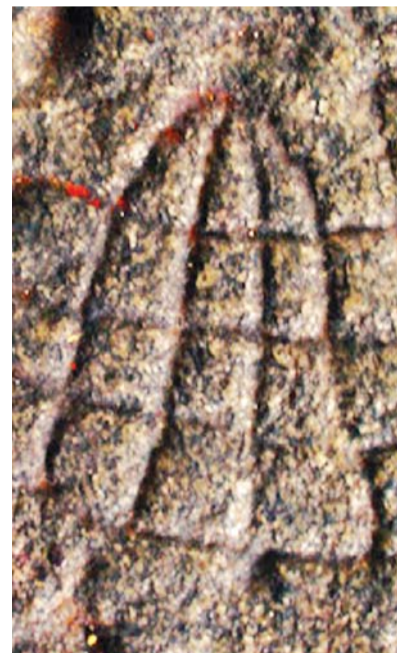
And that is where the game becomes more than a game.

India's most celebrated royal strategy game was chess, the game of kings and queens. In chess, every piece exists to protect the crown. Pawns are sacrificed. Knights fall. Bishops disappear. The logic is hierarchical survival of the ruler matters most. Anyone can be compromised for the glory of the king.

But Aadu Puli Attam carries a very different philosophy.

Here, the weak survive not through dominance, but through cooperation. Every goat matters. Even the smallest move affects the whole community. If one goat breaks formation, the tigers gain power. If the goats remain united, even the strongest predator becomes helpless.

The lesson feels deeply rooted in village life itself. In a village, happiness rarely comes from individual success alone. Crops are harvested together. Wells are shared. Festivals belong to everyone. Even the watchman of the village matters because



safety depends on collective trust. Community survives when people understand that "we" must come before "me."

That wisdom sits quietly on the temple steps.

Long before management books spoke about teamwork, before corporations invented "collaboration culture," these games were already teaching it to children under banyan trees. A farmer moving goats across a scratched stone board was also passing down an idea about society: that strength without cooperation creates fear, but cooperation among ordinary people creates resilience.

Perhaps, that is why these games endure.

Not because they are ancient curiosities, but because they still speak to modern life. In cities today, many people live surrounded by others yet feel isolated. Competition dominates education, careers, and even relationships. Winning often means someone else must lose.

But the little board carved into the temple stone suggests another possibility.

A good community is not built by powerful individuals standing alone. It is built when ordinary people move together carefully, protect one another, and recognize that every person, however small their role may seem, helps hold the whole structure in place.



Shashank Agarwal Advocate High Court of Rajasthan

My neighbour's son, a bright, cheerful boy who cleared his Class XII boards with distinction, spent six months glued to a phone, playing online card games for money. By the time his family found out, he had quietly emptied a fixed deposit his grandfather had opened in his name. He is not alone. Somewhere in Ajmer, a retired schoolteacher lost most of her pension to an app that promised "double your money in minutes." In Kota, a student preparing for engineering entrance exams found himself borrowing from friends to fund his "next winning streak." These are not imagined situations. They played out in thousands of homes across Rajasthan and the rest of India, quietly before anyone in authority paid serious attention.

Think about the last time you watched an IPL match. Somewhere between the sixes and the wickets, an advertisement popped up, a celebrity grinning at the camera, telling you that depositing a hundred rupees on some gaming app could make you rich by morning. You probably ignored it. But millions of people did not. And that, in a sentence, is how India ended up with one of the most unregulated, most exploitative online gaming markets in the world.

The industry did not grow grad-

ually. It detonated. A leading market player brought data prices crashing down, smartphone prices followed, and suddenly, a farmer in rural Barmer and a college student in Jaipur had equal access to the same betting apps that were plastered across every cricket broadcast, every YouTube video, every billboard outside a coaching institute in Kota. The platforms knew exactly what they were doing. The advertising was designed to make gambling feel like a skill, a sport, an investment. The terms and conditions, buried in small print, told a different story.

Behind this chaos stood a regulatory vacuum that would embarrass a law student. States had their own gambling laws, some ancient, some patchy, almost none written with a smartphone in mind. One State banned fantasy sports; the next State offered quietly allowed it. Companies incorporated themselves in offshore jurisdictions and served Indian users without any Indian authority being able to touch them. When cases came to court, judges in Madras said one thing, judges in Karnataka said another, and nobody quite agreed on what the law and what was not. The platforms watched all this with quiet satisfaction and kept running.

I have been practising law long enough to know that Parliament does not move quickly unless it has to. By 2025, it had to. The Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming Act was passed in August that year, and the Rules that give it opera-

The ban works on three levels. No one can run or host such platforms in India. No one can advertise them, not on television, not on a YouTube pre-roll, not on a cricketer's jersey. And banks, UPI apps, and payment processors cannot handle money going to these platforms. That last point matters enormously. Even if some offshore website keeps running, you cannot legally send money to it from an Indian bank account. The financial pipeline that kept these platforms alive has been cut.



tional life came into force on 1st May 2026. What follows is my attempt to explain, without the jargon that makes lawyers unpopular at dinner tables, what these laws actually say and what they mean for the ordinary Indian family.

Three Boxes, One Big Idea

The Act sorts all online games into three categories, and understanding this division is the key to understanding everything else. The first category is e-sports, proper competitive gaming like organised chess championships, DOTA tournaments, or structured mobile gaming competitions, where outcomes depend entirely on the player's skill, strategy, and mental agility, and which are recognised under the National Sports Governance Act, 2025. The second category is online social games, games played for fun, entertainment, or skill-building, with no money on the line. If you spend Sunday evenings solving word puzzles, playing a casual cricket simulation, or racing cars in a free mobile game, this is where you sit. The government wants both of these categories to grow, and the law actively supports them, including by setting up training academies for e-sports and providing government backing for competitive gaming as a legitimate career.

The third category is online money games. This means any game where you put in real money hoping to get more money back. Notice what the law does not ask, it does not ask whether the game requires skill or whether it is pure luck. That question, which Indian courts debated for decades, has been set aside entirely. If real money goes in with the hope of more money coming out, it is an online money game. And it is now banned.

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A New Watchdog and What It Will Do

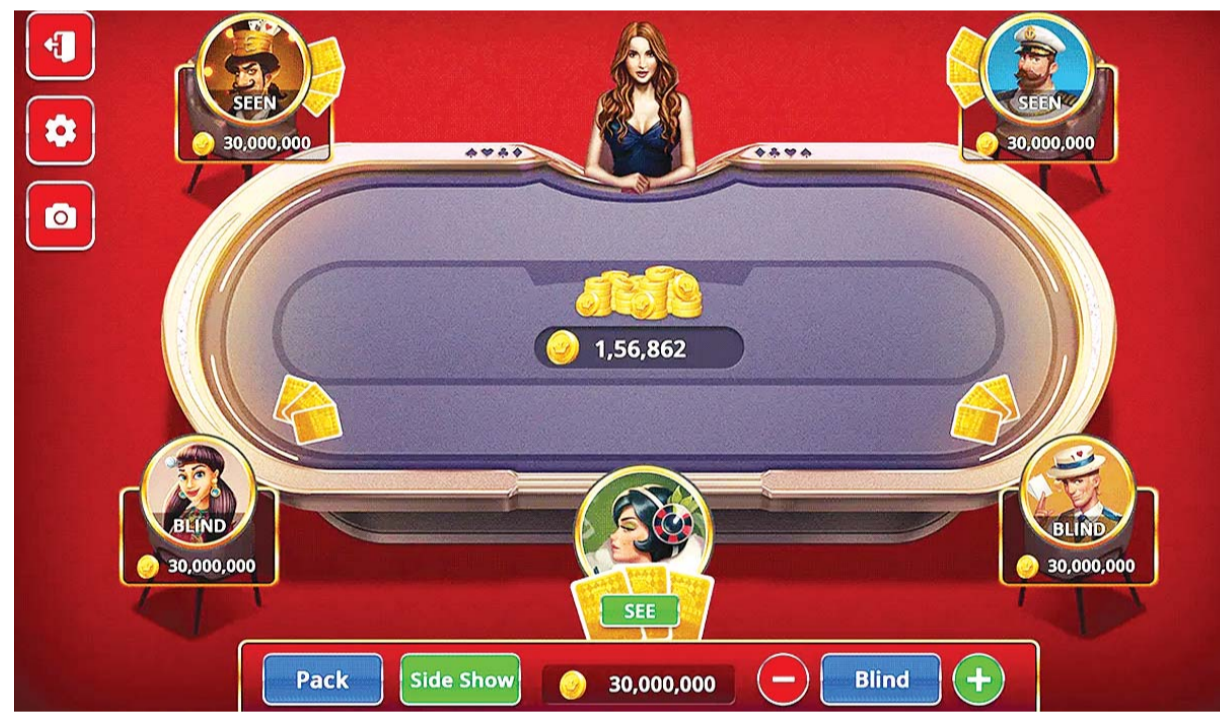
For a law to mean anything, someone has to be responsible for enforcing it. That someone, under the 2026 Rules, is the Online Gaming Authority of India, a new regulatory body sitting under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology in Delhi.

Think of it as a referee that the game has been missing for years. The Authority will decide which games fall into the prohibited category of online money games, maintain a publicly accessible list so that users, banks, and advertisers all know exactly which platforms are off-limits, and this is the part that actually matters to most people, hear complaints from users who have been wronged by a gaming company and get nowhere with it. If you raise a grievance with a platform and they brush you off or simply do not respond, you now have

Don't Stake Money And You Win!



#GAMBLING IN YOUR POCKET



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somewhere to go. The Authority can step in, direct the company to act, and if needed, coordinate with banks to choke off the illegal payment flows that keep these platforms running. It can also work directly with law enforcement when criminal prosecution is warranted.

That last point is worth sitting with for a moment. Before this law, a user cheated by an online gaming platform had almost no practical recourse. Filing a police complaint about an offshore app felt pointless. Consumer forums moved slowly. The platform simply did not care. The Authority changes that equation, not perfectly, and not overnight, but it changes it. There is now a named, empowered institution whose specific job is to hold these companies accountable.

What I find genuinely worth noting is the user protection rules that every registered gaming platform must now follow. Age verification is mandatory, no minor can create an account. Parents can set time limits and spending controls. Platforms must provide coun-

selling resources and self-exclusion tools for users who recognise they have a problem. These are not suggestions tucked away in a government circular. They are legal requirements backed by real penalties: civil fines up to Rs. 10 lakh, and criminal prosecution leading to three years in prison for first offence and five years for repeat violators. The days of a platform quietly harvesting teenagers' pocket money with no consequences are over, at least on paper.

Seventy-Five Years of Legal History, Overturned

Here is where things get interesting for those of us who spend our days reading old statutes. In December 1949, the Rajpramukh of Rajasthan promulgated the Rajasthan Public Gambling Ordinance, Ordinance No. 48 of 1949, to punish public gambling and the keeping of common gaming houses. It was a straightforward law for a different era, designed to deal with physical gam-

bling dens in towns and cities. But Section 12 of that Ordinance contained a line that would shape gaming law across India for the next seventy-five years. It said, simply, that the Ordinance would not apply to any game of mere skill, as distinguished from a game of chance, unless it were being run in a common gaming house.

That one exemption became the legal scaffolding on which India's entire real-money gaming industry was built. The Supreme Court, in the 1957 case of State of Bombay vs. R.M.D. Chamarbaugwala, held that games where skill dominates over chance are not gambling. Rajasthan courts applied this faithfully. When Dream11 was challenged before the Rajasthan High Court, the judges pointed to Section 12 of the 1949 Ordinance and held that fantasy cricket, requiring statistical knowledge, player analysis, and strategic judgment, qualified as a game of "mere skill" and was therefore outside the reach of gambling law.

Fantasy sports companies, rummy platforms, and poker apps all built their legal defence on this doctrine, and for years, it held up. The PROG Act does not engage with this argument at all. It sidesteps it. The new law does not ask whether your game is skill or chance. It asks whether real money is being staked for a monetary return. If yes, it is out.

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The PROG Act does not engage with this argument at all. It sidesteps it. The new law does not ask whether your game is skill or chance. It asks whether real money is being staked for a monetary return. If yes, it is out. Seventy-five years of carefully developed case law, built on the foundation of a 1949 Ordinance from an undivided Rajasthan, has been legislatively overridden in the online space. Whether that override survives constitutional scrutiny is a separate question, but as the law stands today, the skill exemption no longer protects online money gaming.

What Happens to Poker?

Let me tell you about a client I met last year, a software engineer from Pune who played online poker seriously, the way some people play chess or follow the stock market. He tracked every hand he played in a spreadsheet. He studied probability tables. He read books on game theory. He was, by an honest measure, genuinely good at the game and made a modest but consistent income from it. When I explained to him what the PROG Act meant for his hobby, he looked at me the way people look at a doctor delivering bad news. "But it's not gambling," he said. "I win because I'm better than the other players." He was not wrong. He was just on the losing side of a legislative decision.

Poker's legal story in India has been a long and genuinely complicated one. The Madras High Court, in 2023, ruled that online poker is a game of skill, deserving the same constitutional protection as any legitimate trade or business. The Karnataka High Court agreed. When a Bengaluru poker club was raided and an FIR filed, the Karnataka High Court quashed it, holding that what the police had witnessed was not gambling but a skill-based game. The Karnataka government appealed all the way to the Supreme Court in 2025. The Supreme Court looked at the matter and refused to interfere with the High Court's order, but in a move that left the entire legal community waiting, it deliberately declined to decide whether poker is skill or chance, leaving the question formally unanswered.



That unresolved question, which courts had been circling for years, became irrelevant almost overnight when the PROG Act came into force. The law does not get into philosophical debates about the nature of poker. It does not care that my client kept spreadsheets or that serious players consistently outperform beginners over thousands of hands. The moment real money is wagered online in expectation of a return, it is an online money game, and it is banned.

Adda2, once one of the country's most prominent poker platforms, has shut its real-money operations. The skill argument, valid as it may be intellectually, has no legal home anymore, at least not in the online money gaming space.

What remains legal is worth being clear about. Sitting around a table with friends on a Saturday night and playing poker without money changing hands is perfectly fine. A friendly game of cards will not get anyone arrested. The law is not making a moral judgment about poker as a game. It is making a financial one, wherever real money meets online gaming, the door is now closed.

Several gaming companies, including Head Digital Works, the parent company of the A23 platform, have challenged the Act before the Supreme Court. Their argument is that Parliament has trespassed into state territory, betting and gambling fall under Entry 34 of the State List in the Constitution, and that the blanket ban violates fundamental rights

under Articles 14, 19, and 21. All High Court challenges have been consolidated before the Supreme Court and hearings are proceeding. That verdict, whenever it comes, will be among the most significant decisions for India's digital economy.

Does This Law Actually Help Ordinary People?

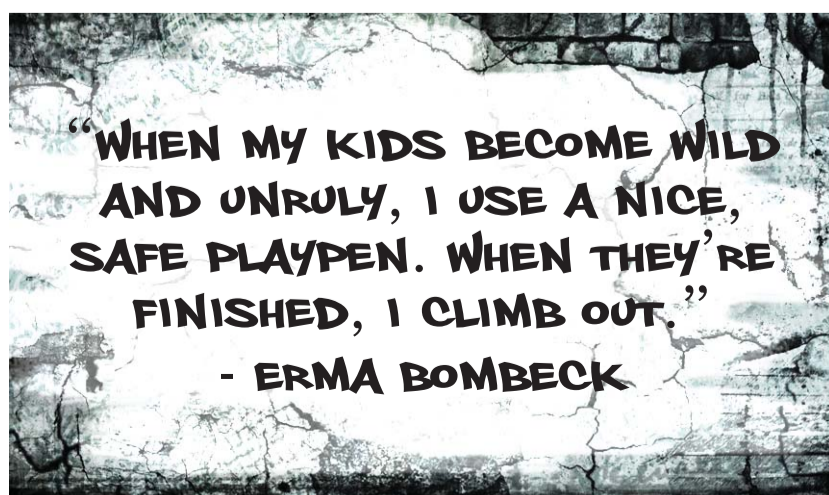
My honest answer is: more than the previous situation did. The neighbour's son I mentioned at the start, under this law, the platform he used would have been prohibited. The bank transfer that funded his spiral would have been blocked at the source. His parents could have set spending and time controls on any registered gaming app he accessed. None of that fixes back his grandfather's big deposit, but it makes it meaningfully harder for the next teenager to walk the same road.

The law has real shortcomings. Treating a thoughtfully played skill game the same as a manipulative slot machine is a blunt approach. It has put thousands of people in the gaming industry out of work overnight. And there is a legitimate concern that addicted players will not simply stop, they will move to illegal, unregulated platforms that are now harder to monitor than the licensed ones that just got shut down. These are not small objections.

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THE WALL

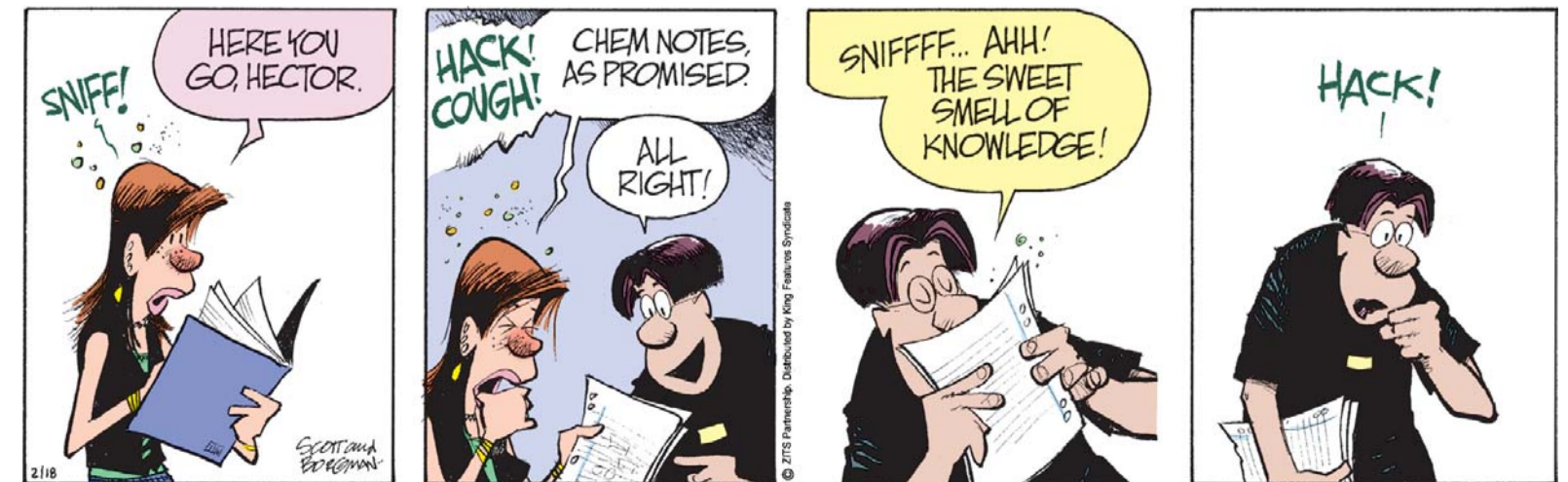


BABY BLUES



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

ZITS



By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman

