

# YUVA EXPLORERS

ISSUE 2 | APRIL 2026



For many years, history of India was written through a western, colonised way of thinking which shaped how events were explained and understood, and also affected how we think about our country today. This also meant many stories felt incomplete. Today, we celebrate the chance to share our history in our own words.

We are the Foundation for Indian Historical and Cultural Research (that's FIHCR for short) team. We help discover and appreciate our country's rich history, fascinating traditions and awesome leaders.

Are you aware of our YUVA program? If you're between 6 and 18 years old, YUVA is designed for you! Our goal is to make history fun for you.

Every two months, with this magazine, we let you peek into history. We will explore exciting, hidden parts of India and learn about lesser-known brave heroes and leaders who helped build our nation.

**Get ready to learn and enjoy yourself!**

## MESSAGE FROM THE FOUNDER



**DR. VIKRAM SAMPATH**

**Founder & Director, FIHCR**

Author, Historian, Fellow of the  
Royal Historical Society, UK

FIHCR was created with a simple purpose: to encourage India to rediscover its own narrative with sincerity and rigour. Our children deserve stories that breathe with life, stories that speak of imagination, courage, scholarship, and heritage. When young minds engage with history through inquiry and wonder, they shape a future rooted in strength and clarity.

YUVA celebrates that spirit. It gives students the chance to explore unfamiliar paths, ask fearless questions, and discover their own relationship with the past. This work carries immense joy because history is never static. There is always something new to discover.

**Thank you for being part of this journey of learning and rediscovery.**



## Greetings, fellow explorers!



I am Kavi, the sharp-eyed crow who has watched India's story unfold from the skies for centuries.

Most people think of history as something trapped inside a heavy, dusty book, but from up here in the skies, I see a different story! The streets you walk on, the water you drink, and even the way you write your name are all influenced by events of the past.

In this edition, we are going on a scavenger hunt through time! We begin at the banks of the Jhelum in 326 BCE for a War Alert, watching King Puru face off against Alexander of Macedonia. Then we will visit the schools which existed around 3000 years ago where you didn't need a bag, a pen or a notebook to learn and yet students used their minds like supercomputers to memorise entire encyclopedias!

You can try your hand at the 'mother script' of India in 'Let's Learn Brahmi', and see if your own memory is as sharp as an ancient scholar in our Whisper Test. We will then meet the 'Super-Scholars' who wrote the world's first books on surgery, grammar, and the stars.

Finally, for the Teacher's Corner, we will fly over Bengaluru to see how a 500-year-old 'water chain' designed by King Kempegowda I, which still exists today.

History isn't something boring that happened long ago. It is happening around you all the time! So sharpen your eyes and let us look closer at history beyond the textbooks!

— Kavi, Chief Explorer



# TIMES OF ANCIENT INDIA

## War Alert: A Foreign King Has Entered India!



**Live**  
from the battlefield (326 BCE)

**This is Kavi reporting from the banks of the Jhelum River and something BIG is happening!**

A powerful king from far away, Alexander of Macedonia, has crossed into the Indian subcontinent with his fierce army. Soldiers, horses, and war equipment stretch as far as I can see!

But wait! He is not the only one prepared! A brave Indian ruler, King Puru of the Paurava Kingdom, is well-prepared to face him near the Jhelum River. And guess what? King Puru has something Alexander has never seen before - war elephants!

For days, both armies have been watching each other from opposite banks. And now, Alexander is making his move at night, when the enemy sleeps. He is secretly crossing the river from another point. Alexander has just launched a pincer attack, striking Puru from two sides at once!

The battle is intense. Horses are charging, soldiers are clashing, and huge war elephants are thundering across the battlefield as the Jhelum River roars!

It is almost dawn now. Alexander has managed to win the battle, and the defeated King Puru is being brought before him. Alexander just asked Puru how he wished to be treated, to which Puru replied boldly, 'Like a king!' Alexander looks very impressed by his courage, even in defeat.

This is amazing, I can't believe what I'm seeing! Alexander just restored Puru as the king even though he lost!

The battle at the Jhelum ended a few days ago. But it has taken a heavy toll. Alexander's soldiers look rebellious and are refusing to march forward. One soldier tells us they are shaken by the fierce resistance posed by the Indians.

The mighty Alexander is forced to accept his army's decision.

And so the march of one of the world's greatest conquerors comes to a halt at the Beas River!



# LEARNING WITHOUT BOOKS!

## Schools in Ancient India

Imagine walking up to school with no heavy bag, or not being asked to complete your notebooks. Sounds like a dream, right? Well, if you ever time-traveled to ancient India, around 3000 years ago, you would be living that reality. In ancient India, students often didn't write things down. They listened, repeated, and memorised. One may call this the great 'oral tradition', where teachers recited or spoke, and students repeated them until they had memorized everything.



You might be wondering, how could anyone memorise and remember all the information? Of course, they did have a few tricks up their sleeve. For instance, they used the technique of **Pradapatha** where they recited the text word by word, or **Kramapatha** which linked words together in a sequence, and the more advanced **Ghanapatha** which is a technique that takes advantage of a complex recitation pattern.

So, what were they learning and memorising? The ancient Indian curriculum made sure that the students who graduated were polymaths (a polymath is someone who knows a lot about a lot of things!). To ensure this, they were taught the Vedas, the oldest sacred texts known to us.

### DID YOU KNOW?

**The Vedas were not written down until a few hundred years later, and the knowledge was preserved only through memorisation techniques.**

There are four Vedas, namely the **Rig Veda**, **Yajur Veda**, **Sama Veda**, and **Atharva Veda**, which are like ancient knowledge encyclopaedias. They contain ideas on subjects such as astronomy, agriculture, philosophy, linguistics, and many more. To master the Vedas, students were taught six supporting subjects called Vedangas. These included *shiksha* (phonetics), *vyakarana* (grammar), *chhandas* (meter), *nirukta* (etymology), *kalpa* (rituals), and *jyotisha* (astronomy/calendars, calculations). Together, these covered many realms. So, a student in ancient India followed a curriculum that was far ahead of its time.



# THE WHISPER TEST

## Can Memory Change a Story?

For many centuries, knowledge in ancient India was passed down mostly through memory and recitation. But have you ever played Chinese Whispers? In this game, one person whispers a sentence to the next person in line. By the time it reaches the last person, the message often becomes completely different!



**Let's try a quick test.**

### Step 1

Read this sentence carefully only once:  
"A wise teacher shares knowledge with every curious student."

### Step 2

Close your eyes and count backwards from 10 to 1. Make sure not to repeat the sentence in your mind. After 10 seconds, write the sentence from memory.

### Step 3

Compare it with the original. Did every word stay the same? Or did something change?

What if a sentence had to be remembered not for 10 seconds, but for 10 years?

**Now Imagine  
This...**

When knowledge is passed down only through memory, small changes can appear over time - just like in Chinese Whispers. That is why ancient scholars developed special recitation techniques to memorise texts like the Vedas with great accuracy.

Why do you think people eventually started writing things down?

- To preserve ideas exactly as they were
- To share knowledge with more people
- To prevent mistakes from creeping in over time

**Or maybe... all three?**

**Think  
About It**



# WHEN KNOWLEDGE FOUND A SCRIPT

To overcome the challenges of the oral tradition, where memories were passed on through recitation and stories, the idea of writing gradually emerged as an important tool for recording information.

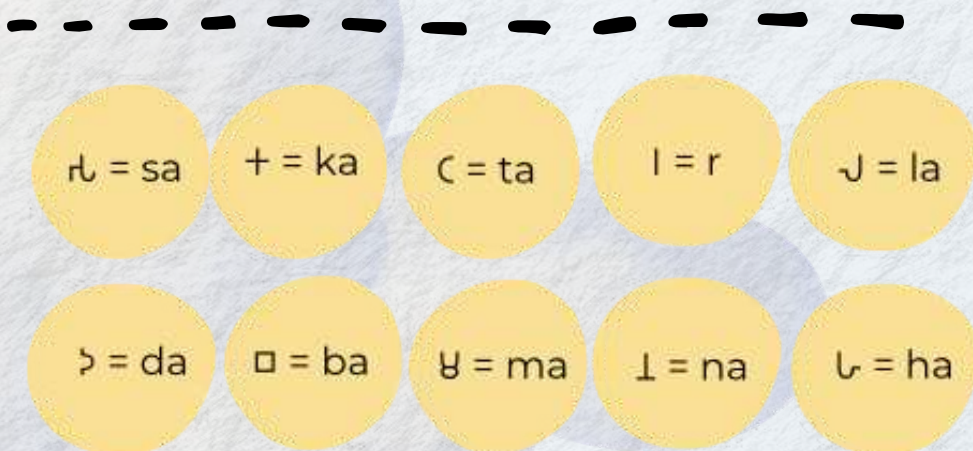
Can you imagine what writing looked like around 2500 years ago? Well, you might picture random symbols that look nothing like the characters that we see today. But that's not entirely true. Most of the modern Indian scripts trace their origin to the ancient script known as Brahmi, which is considered as the mother of all modern Indian scripts.

Language and script are not the same thing. Language is what people speak (English and Hindi). Script is how language is written (Roman script and Devanagari script).

Today, we commonly communicate in Hindi, Tamil, Bengali, Gujarati and so many other languages using the Roman script without even realising it!

## LET'S LEARN BRAHMI

Some Brahmi letters have been listed below.

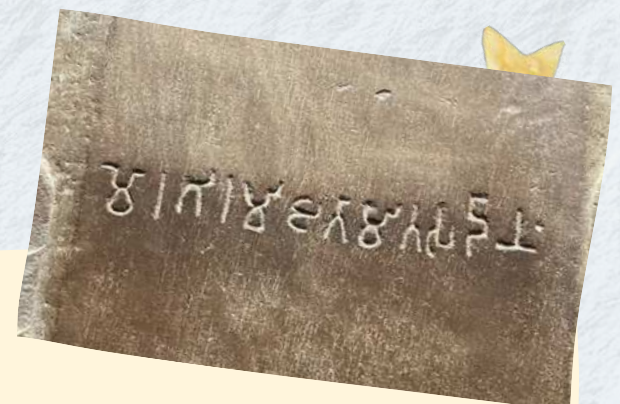


Now identify the English words written in the Brahmi script given below.

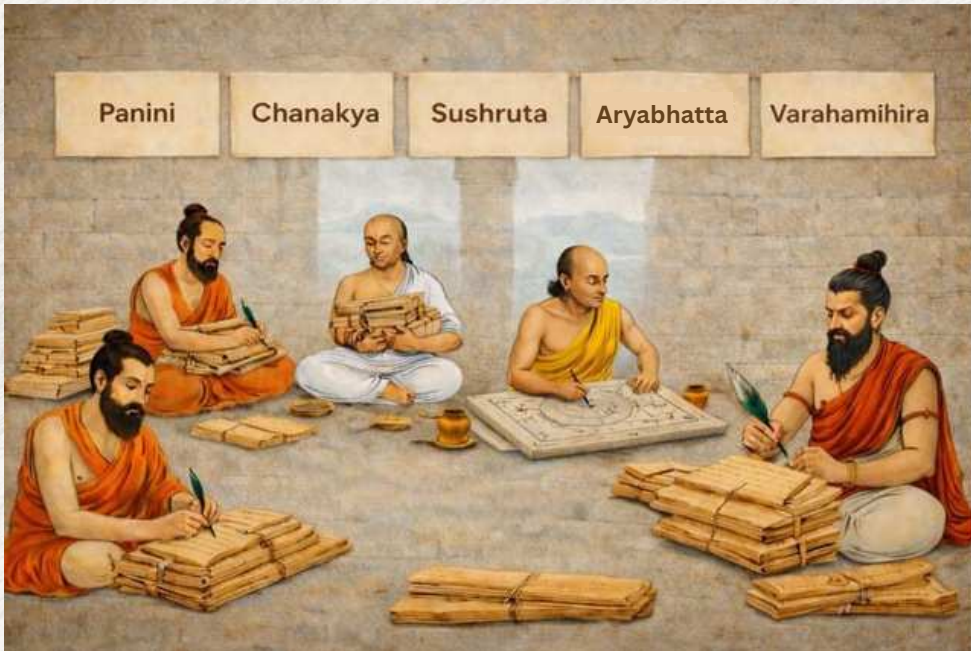
- 𑀫𑀮𑀭
- 𑀰𑀬𑀮
- 𑀲𑀱
- 𑀬𑀮𑀭
- 𑀱𑀮𑀭

### DID YOU KNOW?

In ancient India, the same language could appear in different scripts, and the same script could record different languages. For example, many of the inscriptions of Ashoka were written in different dialects of the Prakrit language using Brahmi and Kharoshti scripts.



This is a message in Brahmi written on a pillar of the Bharhut stupa (currently housed in the National Museum, Delhi). Can you find out what it says?



## WHEN KNOWLEDGE BECAME BOOKS

Once writing became more common, knowledge no longer had to live only in memory. Ideas could now be recorded, copied, and shared across generations. And when scholars began writing things down, they didn't write only about prayers or rituals. They wrote about language, medicine, astronomy, chemistry, mathematics, agriculture, and even architecture.

One of the earliest great scholars was **Panini**, who lived around 2500 years ago. He wrote an important book called the ***Ashtadhyayi***, which explained the rules of the Sanskrit language. Panini described how words are formed and how sentences work. Even today, many linguists and computer scientists study Panini's system because of its incredible logic and precision.

A little later appeared **Kautilya**, another influential scholar. Also known as **Chanakya**, he wrote the ***Arthashastra***, a groundbreaking book on political science and economics. It explained how kingdoms should be administered, how taxes should be collected, and how rulers could maintain a stable and prosperous state.

Hundreds of years later, **Sushruta** wrote the ***Sushruta Samhita***, which is a medical text that describes surgical procedures, medical instruments, and methods of treating injuries and diseases. Because of this work, the scholar Sushruta is often called one of the earliest pioneers of surgery in the world.

In the 5th century CE (which is about 1500 to 1600 years ago), the brilliant mathematician and astronomer **Aryabhata** wrote a text called the ***Aryabhatiya***. In this work, Aryabhata explained ideas about numbers, mathematics, planetary motion, and eclipses. His mathematical theories later influenced scholars not only in India but also in other parts of the world.

By the 6th century CE (more than 1400 years ago), scholars were writing books that covered many different subjects at once. One such work was the ***Brihat Samhita***, written by the scholar **Varahamihira**. This amazing text discussed topics as different as astronomy, weather patterns, agriculture, architecture, water management, and city planning. It was almost like an ancient encyclopedia of science and practical knowledge.

### UNSCRAMBLE THE LETTERS USING THE CLUE PROVIDED

a) A A R V K N A Y A

Clue: The Vedanga that teaches the rules of language and grammar used to understand the Vedas correctly.

b) H M R A B I

Clue: The ancient script used in Ashoka's inscriptions.

c) Y A T R A B A H T A

Clue: The ancient astronomer who wrote about planets and mathematics.

d) N I A P I N

Clue: The great grammarian who systematised Sanskrit.



## KAVI'S TRIVIA



The *Arthashastra* by **Kautilya** recorded quite a lot of information. He wrote about politics, spies, taxes, and traffic rules!

So back when I was in Pataliputra, Kautilya was a stickler for a well-run city. He appointed a powerful official called the **Nagarika**, the ancient version of a City Mayor, to keep everything orderly. Anyone caught dumping trash or muddy water onto the royal highway had to pay a fine! The busy trade routes even had their own traffic rules to prevent chaos. Imagine a traffic jam caused by a herd of elephants! To keep things moving, the **Arthashastra** ruled that everyone had to give the right of way to the elderly, people carrying heavy loads, and, of course, the royal elephants.

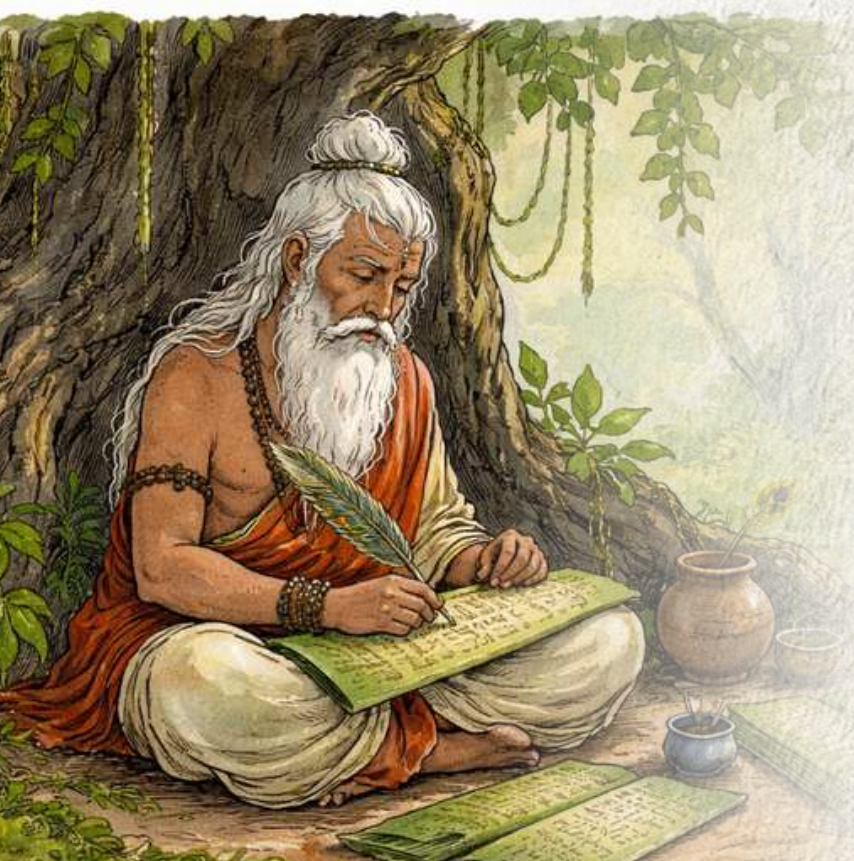
And one time, when I found a gold coin on the street, I couldn't keep it! According to the law, I had to take it to the 'Lost and Found' office at the city gate, which was headed by the *Sulka-adhyaksha* (the Superintendent of Tolls). For all such items, if the real owner could describe the item perfectly, they got it back. But if no one claimed it after a few days, the treasure went straight to the King's treasury!



### WHAT DOES THIS TELL US?

Education in ancient India was not only about memorising texts or chanting prayers. Students and scholars were also asking questions about language, nature, medicine, materials, and the universe. Their curiosity helped create a tradition of knowledge that continues to inspire scientists and scholars even today.

### MATCH THE SCHOLAR TO THE SUBJECT



| Column A   | Column B          |
|------------|-------------------|
| Panini     | Astronomy         |
| Sushruta   | Grammar           |
| Aryabhatta | Political science |
| Chanakya   | Medicine          |

# TEACHING ITIHAS

## History Beyond Textbooks

TEACHER'S  
Corner

History often feels like a series of distant events, especially the long lists of dates and rulers.

However, it becomes truly engaging when we show students that the past is actually the foundation of the world they walk through every day. Instead of focusing solely on dates and dynasties, we can spark interest by exploring how historical figures solved the same problems we face today, like urban planning and water scarcity. By connecting the curriculum to the physical landscape of our cities, we transform students from passive listeners into historical detectives.

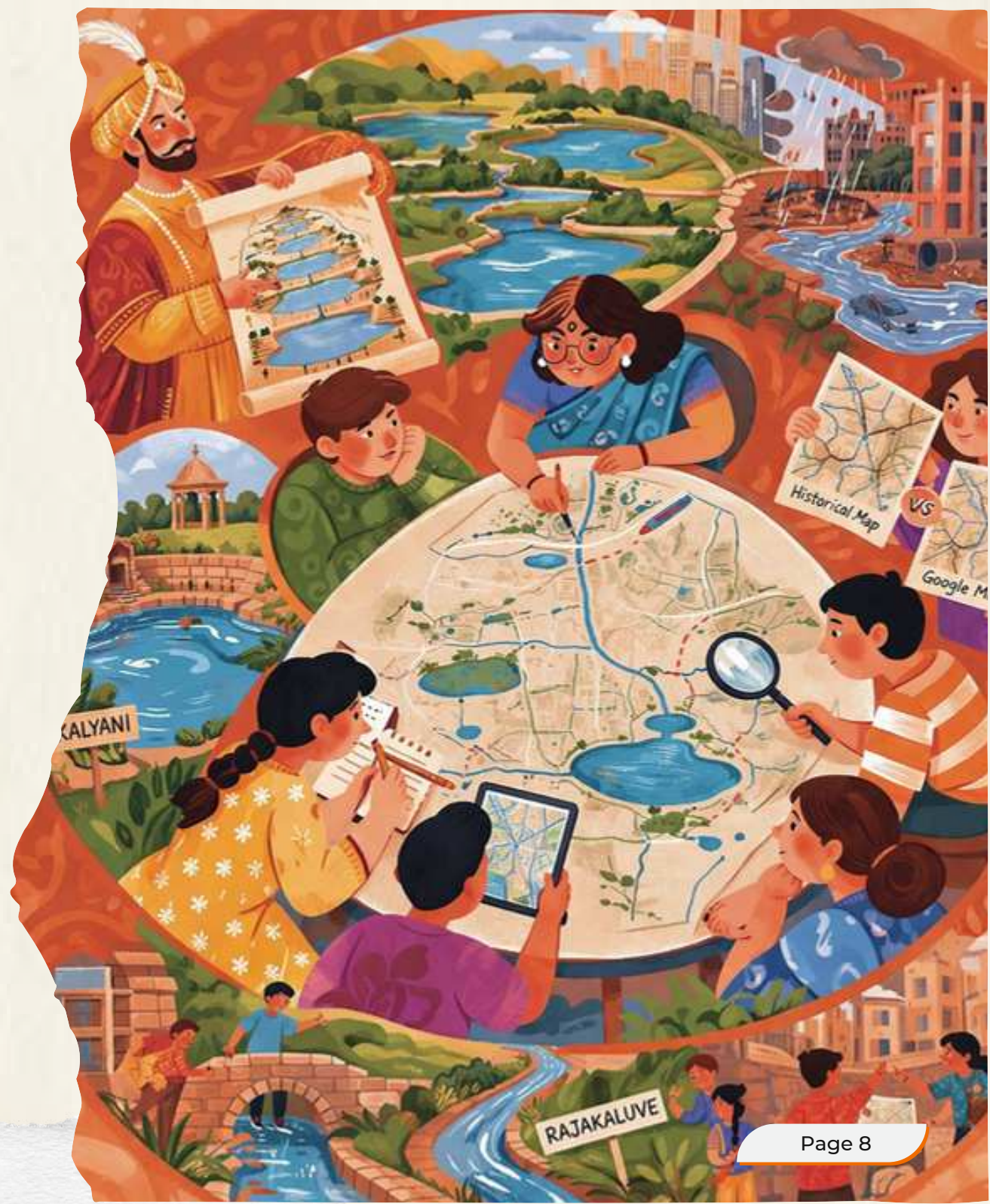
A perfect example is the 16th-century expansion of Bengaluru under **Kempegowda I**. Since the city sits on a hill with no major rivers, **Kempegowda** designed an innovative 'cascading' system of lakes (**kere**) and tanks (**kalyani**).

These were linked by 'Royal Canals' called **rajakaluve**. Together, this network of water bodies ensured that when it rained, the overflow from the tank or lake filled the next, and this way, rainwater was not wasted. More than just a collection of ponds, it was a strategic network that recharged groundwater and supported agriculture. Bringing this to the classroom allows students to see history as a broader subject rather than just a story about a bygone era from a textbook.

To make this practical, try a 'neighbourhood search' activity. Many of these ancient lakes have disappeared due to urbanisation, but traces of the original **rajakaluve** or old **kalyanis** often remain.

Ask your students to look for these features in their own localities or compare historical maps with Google Maps. When they realise that their neighbourhood's geography was dictated by a 500-year-old water system, and unplanned development has disrupted the system, causing floods during heavy rains, the subject finally 'clicks' as interesting, relevant and with practical applications!

For more such activities, check out **The Missing Rocks of Hampi** by Mala Kumar on water management systems in Vijayanagara.

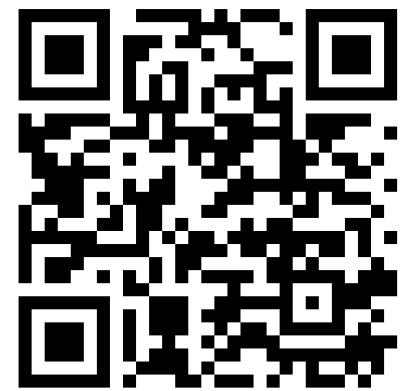




**Instagram handle:**

@mangala.krishnamurthy.581

**Scan Here to Buy**



While on our travel to Chennai, we were very keen to go to the old and evergreen Higgins Bothams book store on Mount Road! I have had a wonderful experience visiting the store, and I always make it a point to buy books there whenever I am in Chennai.

As usual, I bought five books, but one book that caught my eye was this one titled 'The Merchant of Nagapattinam, The Origin Story' written by Harini Srinivasan. Since I possess a liking for historical fiction books, I was more than happy to buy this book.

Well, I had huge expectations before reading the book. And boy, the book exceeded my expectations! It had the perfect blend of drama and mystery.

The Chozha Nadu (the land ruled by the Cholas) is clearly depicted. The biggest advantage that worked in favour of the book was the character's exploration. Every character had a role to play. And every character showed different emotions at different times in the story. For instance, the protagonist Pamban shows anger, sadness, misery, happiness, confusion, etc.

The most impressive factor in the story was that, despite the author viewing the events from different characters' perspectives, she kept the plot intact. The author leaves a few plot holes as an assumption to the reader. Reading the story for the first time, one may find a few plot holes/inconsistencies in the later part of the story. But once you read it again slowly for the second time, you will understand that everything makes sense and is connected.

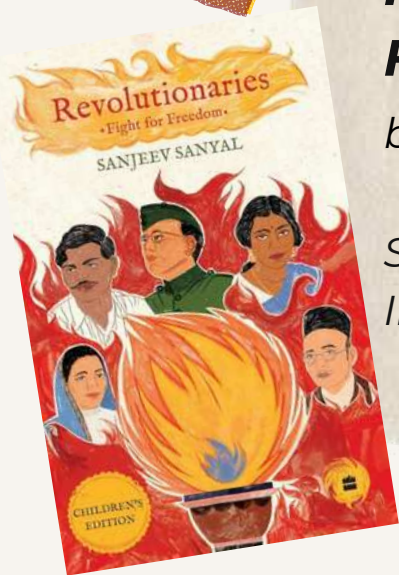
It is such an amazing story that it can be read by people of all ages and still be relatable. That's how deep and complex every character is portrayed. Overall, a mind-boggling book! Just read the first chapter, and I bet none of you fellow readers will stop reading the book even for a second.

## YUVA RECOMMENDS

Summer is here again, and that usually means the familiar challenge of keeping kids engaged and curious through the long break.

If you are looking for a way to turn the holidays into an adventure, why not explore the stories that shaped India?

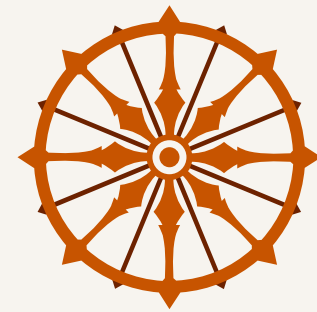
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### **Revolutionaries: Fight For Freedom**

by Sanjeev Sanyal

Stories of lesser-known Indian freedom fighters.



2



### **Travelling Treasures**

by Mala Kumar

Uncovers stories behind Indian museum artefacts and their historical significance.

3



### **Rani Durgawati**

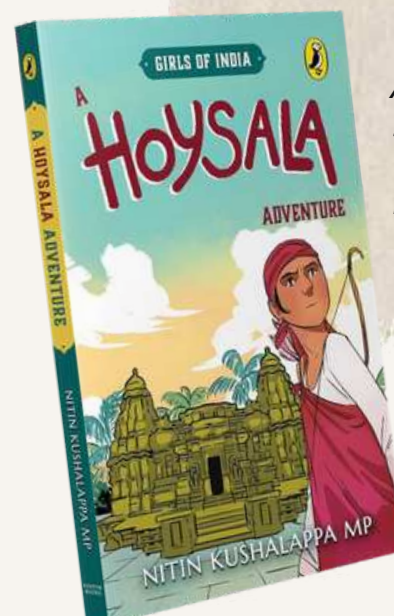
by Nandini Sen Gupta

The brave story of Rani Durgawati, a warrior queen who stood up to the Mughals.

### **A Hoysala Adventure**

by Nitin Kushalappa

A historical fiction set in the twelfth-century Hoysala Kingdom.



4

## ANSWERS

### Match the Scholar to the Subject

1. Panini- Grammar
2. Sushruta- Medicine
3. Aryabhatta- Astronomy
4. Chanakya- Political Science

### Let's Learn **Brahmi**

1. Colour
2. Button
3. Summer
4. Tunnel
5. Mother

### Unscramble the letters using the clue provided

1. Vyakarana
2. Brahmi
3. Aryabhatta
4. Panini

## WITH GRATITUDE



Bhavish Aggarwal  
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Rajalakshmi Aggarwal  
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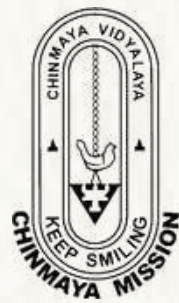


Devesh Varma  
Head, OLA Foundation

We are grateful to **Bhavish Aggarwal, Rajalakshmi Aggarwal, Devesh Varma and the Ola Foundation**, whose generous support allows us to shape several key initiatives.



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