



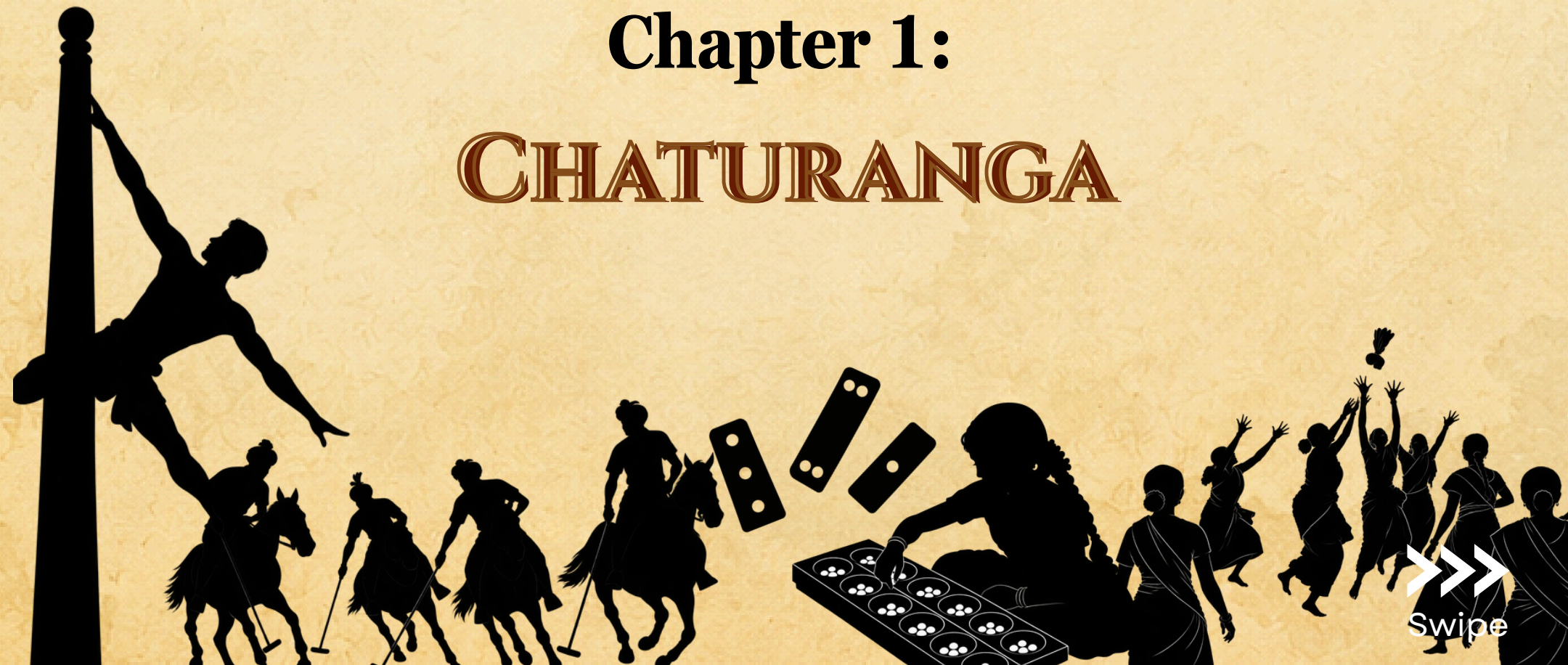
BHARAT AT PLAY

Exploring the History of Indigenous Games and Sports



Chapter 1:

CHATURANGA



Swipe

The Board Before the Game



The **Ashtapada** was a board of sixty-four squares. The term means 'eight steps' or 'eight-footed,' referring to its eight-by-eight arrangement.



People used it to play board games with dice or cowrie shells, where players moved pieces along a route to reach the finish first.



Then, around the **sixth century CE**, in the Gupta period, **an army was brought onto the squares of the Ashtapada**, transforming it into a battlefield.



And this marked the beginning of a new game – **The Chaturanga**.



An Army On a Board



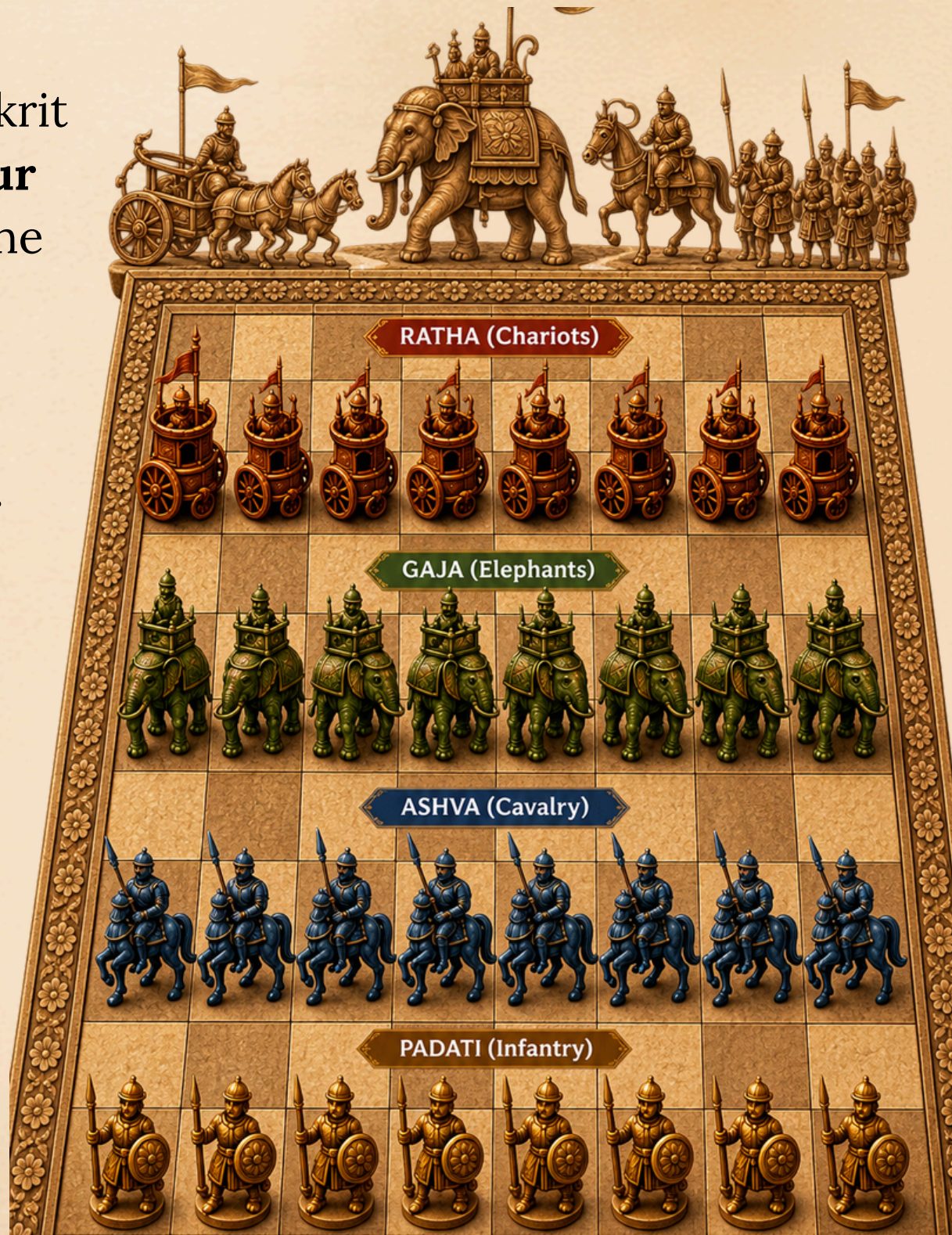
Chaturanga is a Sanskrit word that means “**four limbs**”, referring to the four branches of an Indian king’s army—**chariots, elephants, cavalry** and **infantry**.



Players turned each division into a piece and moved their armies across the board.



It was not a battle of weapons, but a battle of minds, where every move mattered.





Chaturanga Enters Literature



In the 7th century CE, **Banabhatta** mentioned Chaturanga and Ashtapada in his work, **Harshacharita**.



His words describe a **peaceful kingdom** where real battles had disappeared.



Instead of seeing armies march across a battlefield, people could learn about their formations and movements by playing **Chaturanga** on an **Ashtapada** board.



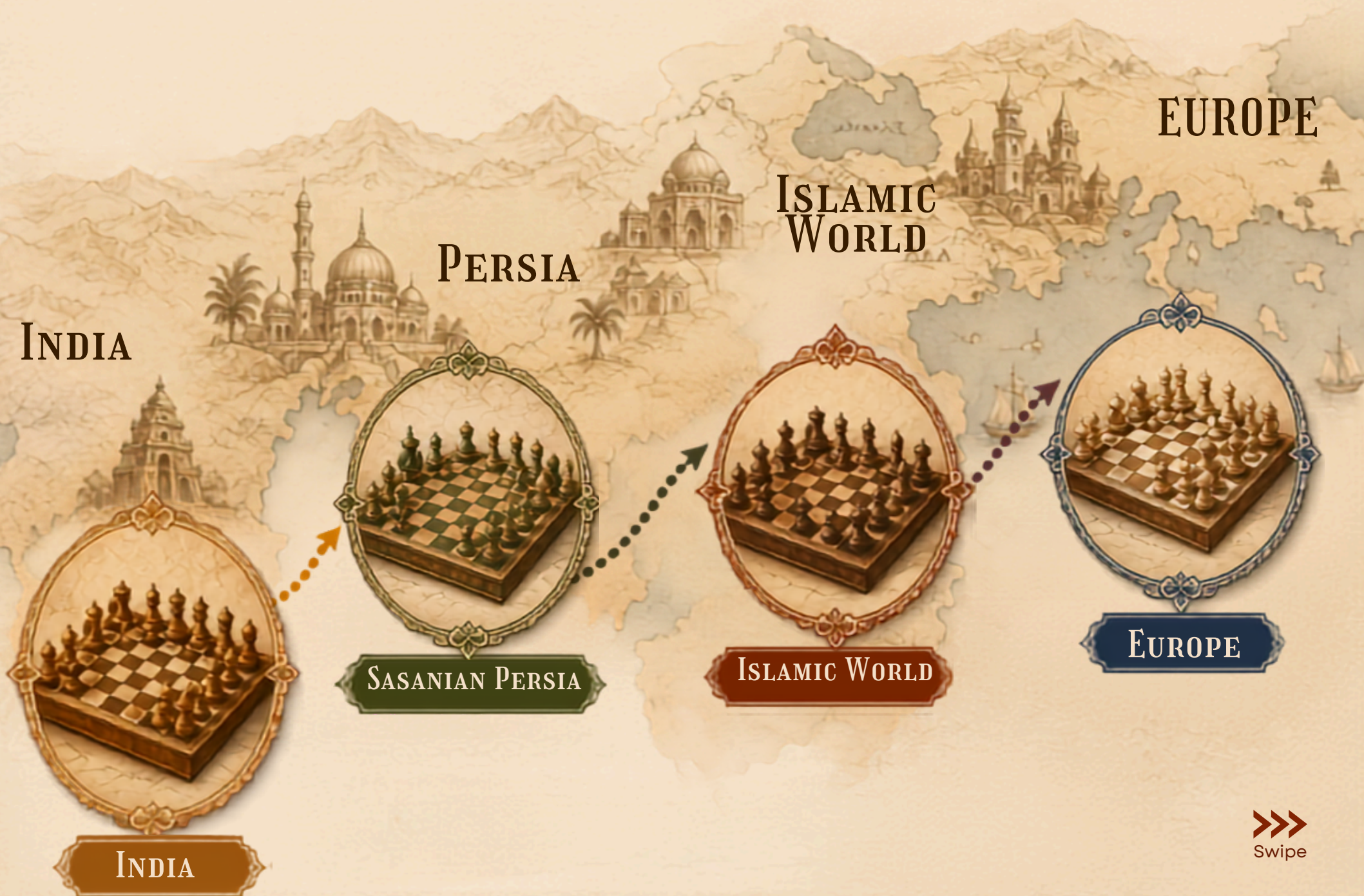


Beyond India

Chaturanga soon travelled beyond India.

It reached Sasanian Persia, where people called it **Chatrang**. From Persia, it entered the Islamic world as **Shatranj** and eventually reached Europe.

As players carried the game across borders, they changed its name, pieces and rules. The game continued to evolve.



Europe Changes **The Game**



Around the **15th century**, European players reshaped the game.



They gave the **queen greater power** and **extended the bishop's range**. These changes made the game more **dynamic, sharper, and unpredictable**.



The ancient Indian battle had travelled across centuries and continents and was now on the path to becoming **modern chess**.





From Chaturanga To Chess

**The
Chariot**



became the

**The
Rook**



**The
Horse**



became the

**The
Knight**



**The
Elephant**



evolved into the

**The
Bishop**



Look closely at a modern chessboard. While you can still find echoes of its early origins, centuries of changes have transformed its pieces and their movements.





The Legacy of Champions



Today, chess continues to hold a special place in **India**. **Viswanathan Anand** became India's first World Chess Champion. Players such as **R. Praggnanandhaa**, **Vaishali Rameshababu**, **Gukesh Dommaraju**, **Divya Deshmukh**, among others, continue India's journey on the global stage.



More than a thousand years later, Chaturanga's legacy lives on in a game played across the world.



The pieces have changed. The rules have evolved.
But the battle of strategy remains.