

Vedank



A

for

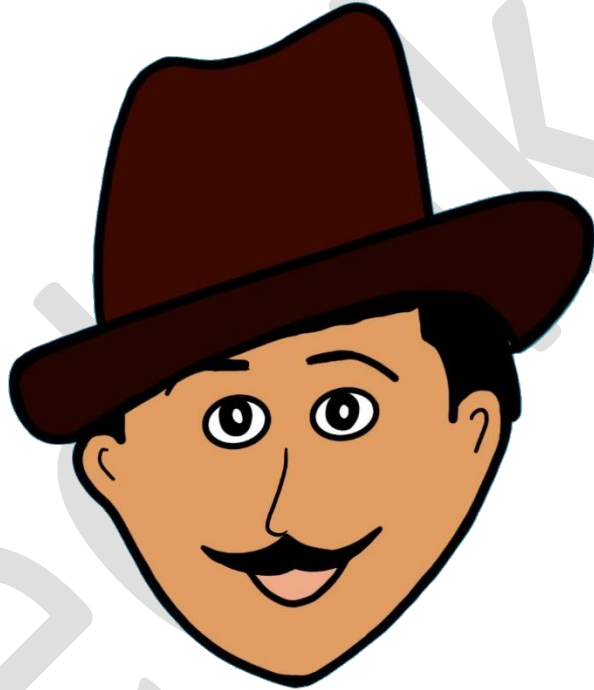
Abhimanyu

...the boy warrior

B

for

Bhagat Singh



...the man who chose Freedom as his bride

*...the boy turned emperor who
united India*



C

for

Chandragupta

Maurya



D

for

Draupadi

*...the original
girl boss*



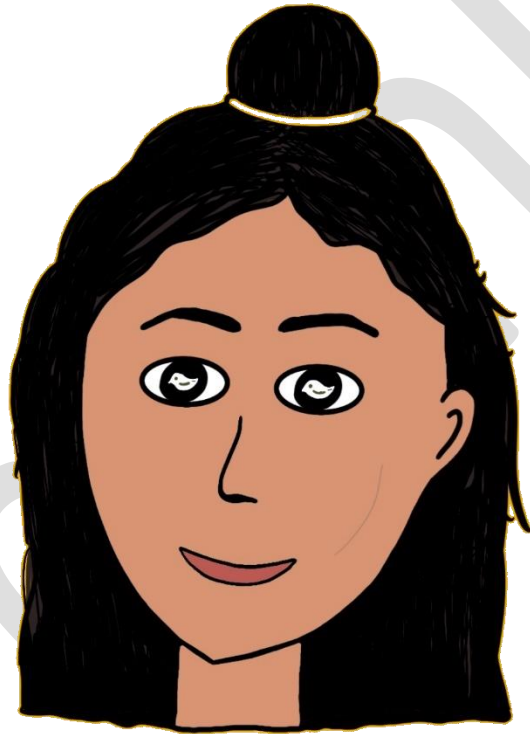
E

for

Eklavya

...the boy who said "thumbs up" when everything was down

...the warrior with the eyes of God

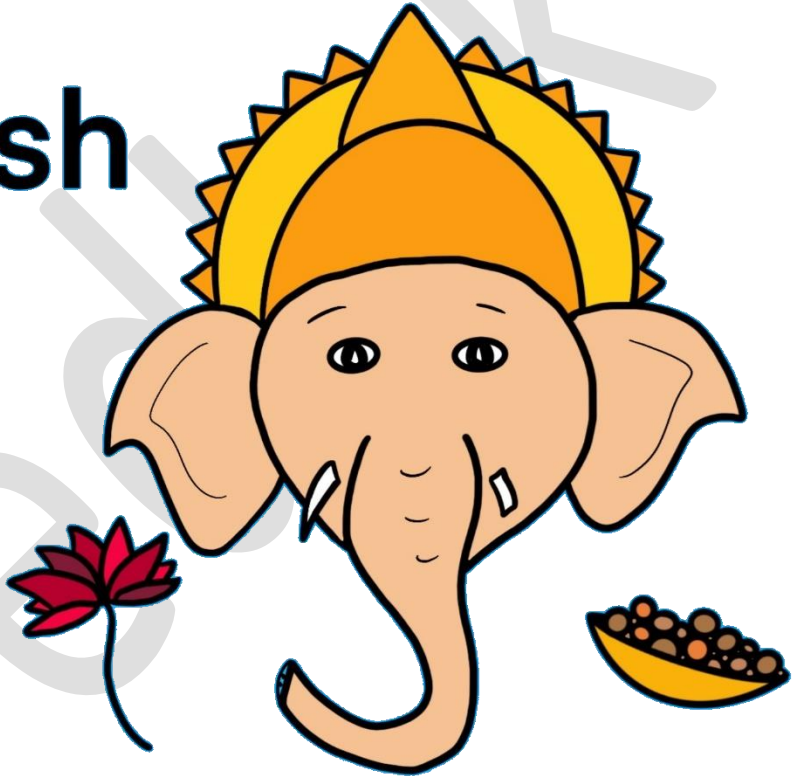


F

for

Falgun

G for Ganesh



...the God whose heart is as big as his belly

...the Queen who spoke for all people



H

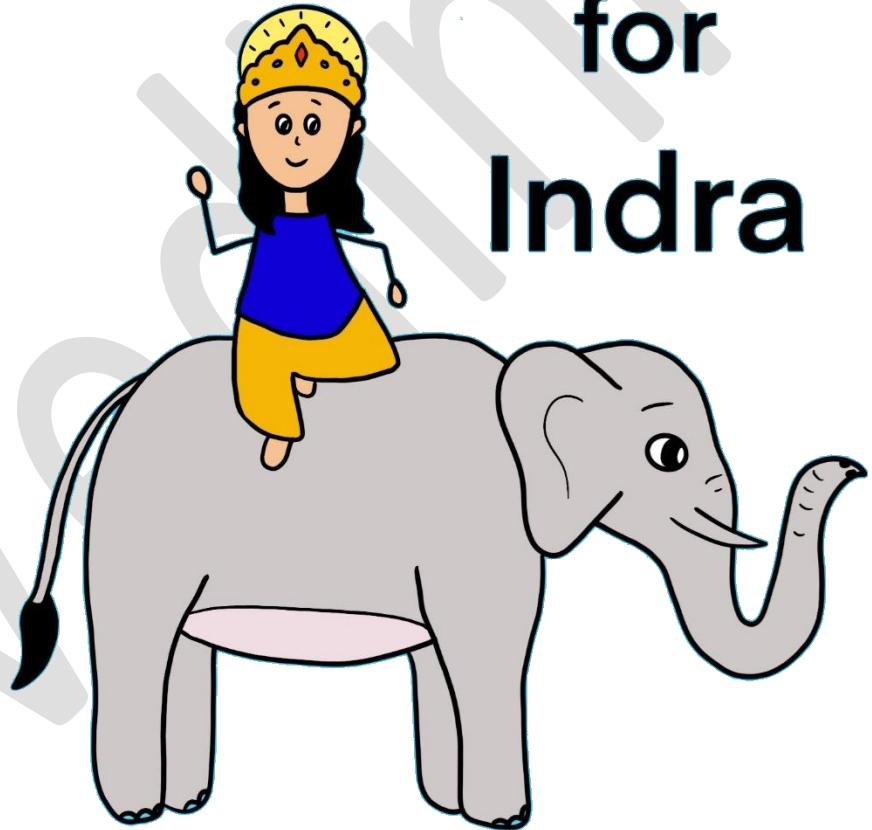
for

Ahilyabai Holkar

*...the King who spent lifetimes
working for others*

I
for

Indra





J
for
Jijabai

*...the mother who molded a boy into a
legend*

K
for
Krishna

*...the thief of butter
(and our hearts)*



*...the Captain
who fought the
British (and
sexism)*



L
for

Lakshmi Sahgal

...the warrior who fought against all odds



Maharana Pratap

N

for

Nachiket



*...the boy
who met
Death and
walked away
full of Life*

O

for



...a reminder of who you are

*...the woman
who put the
Grrrr in girl*



P

for

Savitribai Phule

*...the woman who fought the British with a baby on
her back and fire in her soul*

Q

for the

Queen of

Jansi,

Laxmibai





R

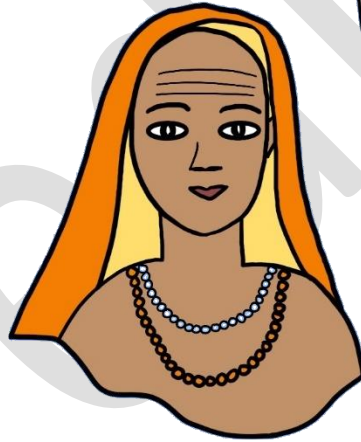
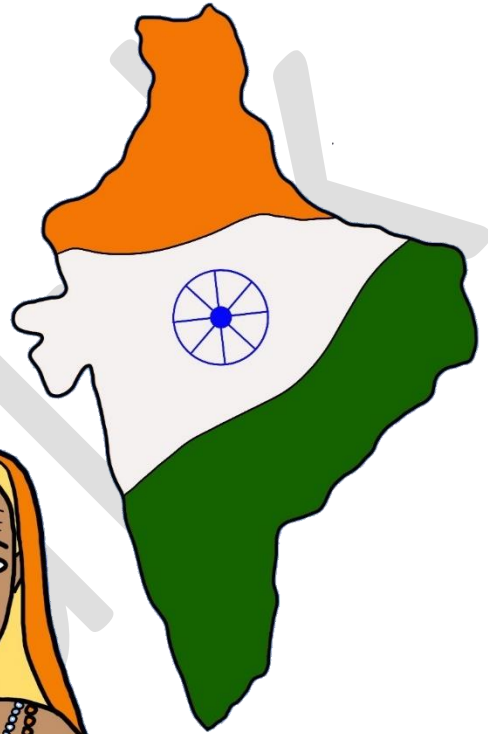
for

Rabindranath

Tagore

*.....the poet who
inspired a nation*

*...the man who
walked across India*



S

for

Sankaracharya

*...the man who lived
and died to make
India free*

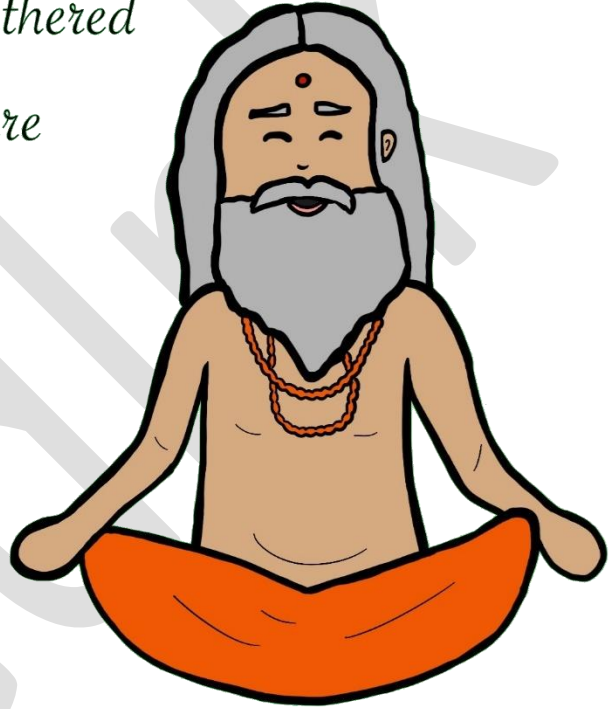


T

for

Tatya Tope

*...the scholar who weathered
a storm for his culture*



U

for

Uddalak

Rushi

V

for

Velu Nachiyar



*...the thorn
in the side of
the British
Empire*

W

What

eXtraordinary

X

things

You

Y

will do and the

Zillions

Z

of changes you

are capable of

for...

making

Abhimanyu

16-year-old Abhimanyu stood in front of an unstoppable army. The Kaurava army had formed the chakravyu formation – creating a wheel of soldiers and weapons that was unbreakable. The boy, Abhimanyu, watched as his friends and family fell, one by one, to the force of the chakravyu. It was only a matter of time before the Kaurava army destroyed all of the Pandava army – all of Abhimanyu’s people. Abhimanyu’s uncles and teachers, all great warriors, tried to stop the chakravyu but they failed. Luckily, Abhimanyu had a secret weapon– his uncle. His uncle, Krishna, had taught him years ago how to enter the chakravyu and weaken it from the inside out, but Abhimanyu never learned how to get out once inside. The other soldiers tried to stop Abhimanyu from going– without an exit plan this 16-year-old boy would be alone and surrounded by the Kaurava army, filled with older and more experienced warriors than he. Hearing this, Abhimanyu’s knees shook and his face dripped with sweat, but his heart remained steady. “If I do not try, then we will lose this war and our people will be hurt. I would rather die helping my people, than live knowing I could have done something.” And so, he entered the chakravyu – and alone, in the midst of a storm of enemies, he fought one soldier after another, slowly weakening the Kauravas. And though he died, he lives on in the hearts of the courageous – the heroes who stand up when everything else is falling.

Bhagat Singh

In the year 1919 when the British ruled over India, Indian citizens were treated like strangers in their own homes. They were told their culture, their language, and their lives were not worth as much as the Britishers’ — and so, whispers of revolution flooded the land. A group of Indian men, women and children gathered in a large park called Jallianwala Bagh to protest their unfair treatment, armed with only their voices. They asked for freedom, and the British

responded with violence. The British army shot and killed the thousands of unarmed Indians gathered at the park, drenching the area with blood.

When 11-year-old Bhagat Singh visited this site days later, his eyes filled with red rage. He pocketed some of the red sand as a reminder that his red blood would not rest until his country was free – and for the rest of his (short) life, he was married to only the idea of freedom. When others spoke of fun and banter – he spoke of Revolution. And when nobody listened, he set his words ablaze with fire and guns.

Chandragupta Maurya

Chandragupta Maurya was an Indian emperor who helped to unite almost all of present-day India under one kingdom. He grew up in poverty; one day, as a child, he and his friends were play-acting. Chandragupta played the role of a king and one of his friends played the role of a thief who had stolen some food. The pretend thief was brought in front of “king” Chandragupta for punishment. Chandragupta wisely said, “The punishment for your crime is 10 lashes – 10 lashes to the King. As King, it is my job to make sure my subjects are safe, healthy and happy – if you feel like you need to steal food in order to survive, then my kingdom is at fault and needs to be changed.” It is said that a nearby man, Chanakya, overheard this play-acting. He was so impressed by the young Chandragupta that he took him under his wing and vowed to one day make this pretend king a real King. Whether this story is true or not is unclear, but the character that it depicts is true.

And so, Chandragupta, under the guidance of Chanakya, becomes the first emperor of the Mauryan dynasty, ruling over a vast territory that spans almost all of present-day India. As emperor, Chandragupta was known for his wisdom, fairness and compassion. He implemented many reforms that improved the lives of his people, including the establishment of a centralized government and a system of taxation that was fair and equitable. His reign was marked by peace and prosperity, and his empire became a beacon of culture and learning.

Draupadi

Draupadi was the prettiest woman on Earth, but her physical beauty dimmed in comparison to her character. Draupadi was married to the five Pandavas. One day, Duryodhan, the Pandavas' cousin, decided to exploit the one weakness of the eldest Pandava brother, Yudhishtir. He invited Yudhishtir to play a game of dice, but this game was rigged so that Yudhishtir would lose. And lose he did. Yudhishtir lost his money, his kingdom, his clothes– and when he had nothing else to offer, he gambled things that were not his to gamble– including his brothers and his wife, Draupadi.

When there was nothing left for Yudhishtir to lose, Duryodhan decided to humiliate Yudhishtir and the rest of the Pandavas even more. He told his brother Dushaasan to drag Draupadi into the court and disrobe her in front of everyone. Draupadi pleaded to her husbands and the other men in the court to protect her, but nobody would.

So, she stood surrounded by powerful and armed men. But she, too, was powerful. And she, too, was armed. Armed with character within and God above, she stood steadfast against Dushaasan and Duryodhan.

As they try to disrobe her, she prays to Krishna to protect her and Krishna responds by giving her a sari as long as her faith. No matter how hard they pulled at her sari, it would not come off.

To this day, Draupadi's courage and faith serve as a reminder of the importance of standing up against injustice.

Eklavya

Eklavya was a hunter. He hunted deer, rabbits and all sorts of animals. But, most of all, he hunted for an education, because archery wasn't just his livelihood, it was his passion. He wanted to become the world's greatest archer, and so he went in search of Drona, the greatest teacher of his time. But, just as we do, he lived in a world where education wasn't truly free, because Drona only taught those of royal blood. And while Eklavya's blood was thick, strong and fiery, it was not royal. So Drona refused to teach Eklavya, but Eklavya refused to accept no for an answer.

He had set out to learn from Drona, and from Drona he would learn. He built a statue of Drona and day after day, Eklavya would practice archery in front of the statue's stony gaze. In time, he amassed such skill that it was as if the real Drona had actually taught him. So it was no wonder that Drona, and his star pupil, Arjun, heard of Eklavya's skills and set out to learn more about this extraordinary archer with an ordinary background.

When they meet, Drona asks Eklavya, "From whom did you learn archery? Your skill is undeniable." Eklavya humbly responds, "From you, Drona. After you turned me down, I made a statue of you. Every day I worshipped and practiced before your image. You refused to teach me, but your statue did not. Thanks to it (and you) I have almost become the world's greatest archer."

Hearing this, Drona and Arjun get worried. Arjun had always assumed that he would eventually assume the title of the world's greatest archer and Drona was weary that a mere commoner

may one day be a match for Arjun's royal blood. And so Drona tells Eklavya, "If you have truly learned from me, then I am your guru. As such, I request a guru dakshina." Now in the old days, teachers were not paid, but once a disciple graduated, he could offer a gift to the teacher. This was referred to as guru dakshina and could be anything from a promise to use the knowledge and skills learned for good to money for supplies for future students.

Eklavya asks Drona what would like for guru dakshina. Unfortunately, what Drona wants is Eklavya's thumb, which would cripple Eklavya as an archer. Eklavya had learned archery under Drona's stony eyes, but now his gift was being taken from him because of Drona's stony heart. If he agreed, Eklavya would forgo his dream of becoming the world's greatest archer. But Eklavya didn't care. He had accepted Drona as his teacher and was willing to sacrifice anything to cement that relationship.

So head down, thumbs up and spirits high, Eklavya cuts his thumb off. Seeing Eklavya's selfless sacrifice, Drona is humbled. He blesses Eklavya, saying that Eklavya would still go on to be a skilled archer and would always be remembered as a loyal pupil.

And he did, and he is. So what if he was never the world's greatest archer – he was something so much more. He was loyal and brave and strong. He reminds us that our achievements are not our own – they are the cumulative result of hundreds of real (and statue) hands that have guided us from our birth.

Falgun (Arjun)

"What do you see?" Asked Drona as he looked back at the eager faces of his students. Today Drona, the mighty Indian warrior, was teaching his young students how to fight. He had placed a wooden bird in one of the nearby trees and today's goal was simple — the student to hit the eye of the bird with an arrow would win.

Each student lined up, with steady hands and ready bows, eager to be the first to shoot. But before they could release their arrows, they had to answer one question: “What do you see?”

One by one, the students answered:

“I see my teacher and all of my friends.”

“I see my mighty bow and sharp arrows, ready to pierce that bird’s eye.”

“I see a wooden bird surrounded by green leaves on a sunny day.”

And, one by one, Drona responded, “Then you are not yet ready to shoot.”

Finally, it was Arjun’s turn. Arjun stepped up and said, “I see only the eye of the bird.”

Surrounded by the singing of the birds, the chattering of his friends and the rustling of the leaves – surrounded by all of the distractions that summer day had to offer – Arjun saw only his goal. “You alone are ready,” said Drona, and he told Arjun to shoot. And Arjun’s shot, just like his eyes, was centered and true.

So, the next time your goal seems hard – don’t change your goal, change your eyes.

Ganesh

Once Ganesh and his brother Kartikeya both wanted a piece of fruit. There was only one left so they decided to race for the fruit. Whoever could run around the entire world 3 times first would be the winner and would receive the fruit. Now Ganesh had a lot of good qualities – but speed was not one of them. Fortunately, his intellect made up for his lack of speed.

On the count of three, Kartikeya sped off in a cloud of dust. He ran around the world three times in record speed. Yet, when he came back home, he found Ganesh smiling and eating the fruit. Kartikeya was surprised. He asked Ganesh, “How did you run around the world faster than me?” Ganesh said, “I had our parents, Shiva and Parvati, sit on two chairs, and I ran around

those chairs 3 times because our parents are not just my world, they are my entire universe.” Kartikeya was so impressed by his brother’s foresight and realized that sometimes mental strength is as important as physical strength.

Ahilyabai Holkar

Ahilya was born in 1725 in the kingdom of Maratha. According to legend, when she was 8 years old, the King of Maratha saw her at a temple, feeding and caring for the poor. He was so impressed by her kindness and piety that he decided to marry her to his son Khande Rao. In 1766, after both her husband and father-in-law passed away, Ahilya ascended the throne. In a time when women were rarely taught to read or write and were thought of as second citizens to men, Ahilya broke all of the rules and became the ruling Queen of Maratha.

For over 30 years she ruled justly and fairly. With her strong arms, she led her army against invaders. With her kind heart, she helped elevate the status of women – allowing widows legal protection to keep their land after their husbands passed. With her smart mind, she built wells to physically nourish her subjects, and temples to mentally nourish them. Under her guidance, her kingdom and its people both flourished.

Indra

Once there was a mighty demon named Vritra who was causing chaos in the world. He had taken control of all the water in the world, causing drought and famine. Indra, being king of the

gods, took it upon himself to attack Vritra and protect the world. Armed with his divine weapon, the Vajra, Indra attacked Vritra again and again; yet, Vritra could not be defeated.

Realizing that he could not fight Vritra alone, Indra sought the help of Vishnu who told him that Vritra had a weak spot—a blade of glass that was protecting his heart. Indra struck at this area and was able to defeat Vritra. The rivers and streams were freed from Vritra's grasp and the world was saved, all because Indra was able to ask for help when he needed it.

Jijabai

Jijabai was born in Maharashtra in 1598. At that time, much of India, including Maharashtra, was controlled by Mughals. Though Jijabai lived a fairly comfortable life on the outside, inside she felt a sense of unease that her people were not free. She craved to see an independent India. At the age of 14, she married Shahaji Bosale, but her husband was soon captured by the Mughals, leaving her to raise her son, Shivaji alone. She rose to the occasion.

She instilled in Shivaji a deep love for his country. She taught him about his culture and shared stories about brave heroes like Ram and Bheem. Most importantly, she taught him to be courageous, honest and kind.

As Shivaji grew older, Jijabai was one of his key political advisors and was instrumental in forming alliances with other Maratha leaders. And when Shivaji finally created an independent Maratha kingdom in 1674, Jijabai was right by his side.

Her legacy lives on as a symbol of the power of a mother's love and the importance of standing up for what is right, even in the face of danger.

Krishna

Krishna lived in Mathura. While he lived comfortably, others around him didn't. Krishna watched, day after day, as villagers would sell milk across the town while their next-door neighbors slept hungry. So, Krishna decided to act. He formed a band of thieves who took a little bit of milk and butter from each house and distributed them to the hungry and the poor. He and his band of thieves stole inequality, greed and hunger. And, over time, they were able to convince the villagers to feed their hungry first before selling food to make a profit. Today we call him "makhand chor" because of this, but the only thing he really stole was our hearts.

Lakshmi Sahgal

Captain Lakshmi Sahgal was a commander in the Indian National Army. She was in charge of a group of women soldiers, who were known as the Rani of Jhansi regiment. Just like the namesake, she was brave and bold. Once, while fighting against the British, Captain Lakshmi was hit by shrapnel and injured. Though she was bruised and bleeding, she refused to leave her soldiers and continued fighting and leading her regiment. After the battle, she was captured by the British, but despite facing hardships in prison, she refused to back down and continued speaking out against the British government.

Once India finally gained independence, Captain Lakshmi did not stop fighting. Instead, she started to use her strong voice and heart to speak for justice and equality for all and promoted women's rights.

Her courage, dedication and unwavering commitment to justice inspire all of us who strive for a more just and equal world.

Maharana Pratap

Maharana Pratap was the king of the Mewar kingdom in India. At that time, the Mughal Emperor Akbar had set his sights on Mewar and launched attack after attack. Despite being vastly outnumbered and outgunned, Maharana Pratap refused to back down and fought for independence for his people.

Yet, though Maharana's will and passion were strong, he was ultimately defeated in battle and Mewar was occupied by Mughal forces. Still, Maharana refused to surrender. He and his remaining army retreated to the hills and continued to fight a guerrilla war against the Mughals. Their small acts of resistance kept hope alive in the hearts of Hindus and eventually helped pave the path towards independence.

Through it all, Maharana never compromised his principles or his people's freedom, even in the face of overwhelming odds. His legacy inspires us to stand up for our beliefs and fight for justice.

Nachiket

Nachiket is the boy who met Death and walked away full of Life. His story starts when his father decides to give away some of his possessions in order to please God. While the intent was good, the execution was poor. So, Nachiket watched as his father gave with an open hand but a closed heart— giving away his oldest and dustiest possessions while keeping the best things for himself.

Nachiket tried to subtly nudge his father towards the right path. He reminded his father that they had greater possessions that they should be offering to the world (and God). When that did not work, he told his father, “I, also, am yours. To which God will you give me?”

In a moment, his father realized his hypocrisy and in a blinding flash of guilt (and rage) his father replied, “I will give you to Yama, the God of Death.” As water evaporates quickly under heat, so too did his father’s rage dissipate. But the damage was already done.

Nachiket, as obedient as he was brave, had already set off on a journey to meet Death. When he finally reaches Yama’s house, he finds that Yama is not there. And so, he waits at Death’s doorstep for 3 days until finally Yama comes home to see a young boy with an empty stomach but a full heart at his doorstep.

Now Yama may be the God of Death, but he still had the manners of the living, so he was distraught by how long Nachiket had to wait. He gives Nachiket 3 wishes – 1 for each day he had waited. While most people would wish to eat, drink and be (transiently) merry, Nachiket chose to think, know and be (eternally) merry.

He spent his first wish on the person who sent him to Death – wishing for peace of mind for his father, who was so full of anger and greed. He spent his second wish on humanity – wishing to understand the art of sacrifice. And for his third wish he asked to learn what comes after Death. Hearing this Yama trembled because this knowledge would give Nachiket the power to escape Death.

And so, Yama tried to entice Nachiket with fame, beauty, money and things – urging him to choose anything else for his third wish. But Nachiket had waited long enough and he would wait no longer. With a firm mind and knowing eyes, he politely stood his ground until Yama acquiesced. And that is how Nachiket approached Death with open arms and left with an open mind. How he faced Death and left with immortality.

Nachiket's life proves that knowing beats having, that giving beats taking, and that a selfless life beats mighty Death.

Savitribai Phule

Savitribai Phule was a social reformer and pioneer of women's education. She grew up in the 1800s when education for girls was rare, but Savitribai and her husband sought to change this. They started the first school for girls in Pune in 1848 and were faced with a lot of resistance from the community. One day, when Savitribai was on her way to the school, she was attacked by a group of men who threw mud and stones at her. Despite this, she did not lose courage. She continued educating girls and the first batch of eight girls graduated from her school in 1854. She and her husband went on to establish several more schools and worked to promote equality for all people.

Queen Laxmibai

In the 1850s, the British had already taken control of many areas in India, but they wanted more. After the death of the King of Jhansi in 1853, they set their sights on the Kingdom of Jhansi and attacked the Jhansi fort. Queen Laxmibai refused and rallied her people to join the fight for independence. Under her command, Jhansi became a center of resistance against the British. On June 7, 1857, when the British attacked Jhansi, Laxmibai and her troops fought valiantly, holding their ground against the bigger and better-equipped army for 2 weeks. However, eventually, the city fell and Laxmibai and her troops retreated. Determined not to surrender, she escaped with her son and some supporters and continued to fight alongside

other leaders like Tatya Tope. She fought until the end and eventually died on the battlefield in 1858. But her bravery and sacrifice live on as a reminder of the strength that we carry.

Rabindranath Tagore

In 1913, Rabindranath Tagore became the first Indian writer to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature for his collection of poems, "Gitanjali." Yet, Tagore had never intended to submit his work for the prize, and it was only through a chance encounter with a Swedish scholar named Dr. Axel Karlfeldt that he even became aware of the prize.

In 1912, Karlfeldt had visited India to study Indian literature and culture. He was deeply impressed by Tagore's work and felt that Tagore deserved recognition on the international stage. Karlfeldt urged Tagore to submit his work for the Nobel Prize, but Tagore was hesitant. He had never been particularly interested in awards and was content to let his work speak for itself. However, Karlfeldt was persistent and eventually Tagore submitted his work for consideration. The next year, he won the prize—the first non-European to do so.

He used the prize money to establish a school in rural Bengal, which became a model for education reform in India.

Shankaracharya

Shankaracharya was an Indian philosopher who lived during the 8th century. He lived for only 32 years, but during that short time he walked throughout India twice, establishing schools in each of the four corners of India and spreading Vedic philosophy throughout the land. He teaches us that it is not how many years we have, but how we spend those years that matters.

Tatya Tope

After the Indian Rebellion of 1857, Tatya Tope was captured by the British and sentenced to death for his role in the rebellion. While he was in prison, he came up with a daring plan to escape. He befriended a guard named Sher Khan, who was sympathetic to the Indian cause and convinced him to help him escape from prison.

On the night of April 7, 1859, Tatya Tope disguised himself as a Muslim holy man, and Sher Khan helped him escape from the prison by hiding him in a basket of food. Once outside the prison walls, Tatya Tope fled into the nearby jungle. He managed to evade the British for several months; all the while, he continued to fight for the Indian cause, organizing guerrilla attacks against the British and rallying support from the local people.

He was eventually betrayed by a fellow rebel, captured by the British and subsequently executed. Yet, his legacy lives on as a hero of the Indian independence movement.

Uddalaka Rushi

Uddalaka Rushi was an Indian philosopher who lived during the 7th century BC. Yet, before he became a renowned Vedic scholar, he was a simple student whose teacher was named Ayodha Dhaumya. In those days, students used to live with their teachers in an ashram. One night, there was a storm in Ayodha's ashram, so Ayodha sent Uddalak to check on the fields and make sure the water did not overflow them. They had built small trenches or holes for extra water to gather, but because the storm was so bad, the water had overflowed and was seeping into the fields.

The fields provided food for all of the students who studied at the ashram, so Uddalaka quickly attempted to stop the flood. He tried to use rocks and nearby sticks to build a barrier between

the water and the fields but to no avail. Finally, he laid down on the field himself to prevent the water flow using his own body. He stayed on the field all night – though he was cold and tired, he was able to protect the field and all the crops from being washed away. When Dhaumya realizes what Uddalaka had done, he is blown away by Uddalaka's dedication and sincerity.

Velu Nachiyar

Velu Nachiyar lived in Southern India in the 1700s when India was ruled by the British. When she was just a teenager, her father was killed by the British. This inspired her to fight against the British, not just for her father, but for all the Indians who were made to feel like imposters in their own homes.

From a young age she was trained in martial arts and warfare, both skills which came in handy when she became queen of the Sivaganga estate. She used these skills to become a thorn in the side of the British empire, organizing rebellion after rebellion against the British, trying to halt their hostile takeover of India. Though the British army was stronger and larger than Velu Nachiyar's army, Velu Nachiyar had 2 secret weapons—her passion and creativity. With these, she trained an elephant named Kuyili to carry an explosive device and charge into the British camp, causing chaos and destruction.

In the end, Velu Nachiyar was able to establish an independent kingdom in the region, free from British rule. She was a true hero and is remembered as a symbol of resistance and independence.