

IndicWise: A Children's Book Series

Title: IndicWise: Re-discovering Our Roots

Subtitle: Epic Stories, Timeless Wisdom – A Multi-Format Journey Through Indian Storytelling Heritage

Author: Ankur Gattani (with 11-year-old Anaaya Gattani)

Target Audience: Middle Grade (8-14 years)

Genre: Non-fiction / Mythology / Historical Fiction / Fantasy

Word Count: 40,000-60,000 words per book

1. Why Middle Grade? What Inspired This Series?

My 10-year-old daughter Anaaya—a voracious reader who'd devoured Harry Potter, Percy Jackson, and Keeper of the Lost Cities—abandoned the Amar Chitra Katha comic I handed her after barely a few pages.

"Papa, it's really boring," she said.

That word intrigued me.

Here was a kid who'd happily read 500-page books if they were paced like thrillers, who could discuss moral dilemmas in Percy Jackson for hours. But hand her something about her own heritage, and suddenly... nothing.

The problem isn't Indian stories—they're phenomenal. Full of strategy, betrayal, impossible choices, cosmic stakes. The problem is how we've been telling them. Either oversimplified into comics that lack depth, or presented as dense texts that feel like senior school textbooks.

So I made a bet: What if we told Indian stories with the same thriller-like pacing that hooks kids in international fiction? I started writing the Mahabharata for Anaaya. Not sanitized. Not preachy. Just the strategic brilliance, the impossible choices, the messy emotions.

She finished it. Then asked for more.

That's when I saw the gap more clearly: Indian kids are reading tons of international fiction but growing up disconnected from their own heritage. Not because they don't care, but because no one's offering them stories from their culture that feel as engaging and fast-paced as Percy Jackson.

IndicWise exists to bridge that gap. To give kids stories from Indian heritage that are as unputdownable as their favorite international fiction. To prove that Chanakya, Rana Pratap, and Vikram-Betaal can be just as thrilling and modern as anything from the West.

Anaaya has been reading these books. She's a rather tough critic.

2. Bringing Characters to Life: Historical Narratives That Breathe

Historical figures are already larger than life. Chanakya toppled an empire. Rana Pratap chose death over surrender. Vivekananda changed how the world saw India with a single speech.

The problem? Their stories become eulogies. They seem perfect, distant, impossible to relate to. We celebrate victories but gloss over failures. We present them as born heroes instead of flawed humans who became heroes despite themselves.

Kids need heroes who struggled. Who screwed up. Who had to claw their way to greatness.

So my approach is simple: treat these figures like people, and tell their stories with the thrill and pace that engages the reader.

Chanakya wasn't always a master strategist. He was Vishnugupt—a brilliant, annoying kid who got thrown out of class. He got humiliated at court. He was rejected, mocked, angry. From that anger, he forged an empire.

Rana Pratap wasn't fearless. He watched every kingdom surrender. His own brother betrayed him. He lived in forests while Akbar ruled from palaces. And still, he chose freedom over comfortable survival.

Vivekananda wasn't born enlightened. He was Naren—a wild kid who jumped from terrace to terrace, who questioned everything, who wrestled with doubt even after meeting his guru.

3. Non-Fiction: Heroic Biographies That Read Like Thrillers

IndicWise's non-fiction books are historical biographies of remarkable Indians. Unlike traditional biographies, They're written with the pacing, structure, and intensity of thriller novels.

Each book follows a protagonist through their transformation from ordinary person to historical force. Each focuses on specific turning points, key relationships, and the choices that changed their trajectories.

Here are the planned titles:

1. *The Guru Who Staged a Coup – Story of Chanakya*

Synopsis: When a brilliant boy asks too many questions, he's thrown out of class. When that boy becomes a teacher and gets humiliated at court, he vows revenge. When a rejected student meets a master strategist, an empire is born.

Vishnugupt can't stop asking "why?" At Takshashila, the world's greatest university, he learns that the right questions can topple kingdoms. Mocked by the arrogant Nanda king at court, he becomes Chanakya—forging an emperor from a refused student named Chandragupta.

This is the true story of how an insulted teacher and a determined student united a fractured subcontinent, defeated Alexander's successors, and built the Mauryan Empire through pure strategy and will.

Fast-paced action. Real strategy. A teacher and student who change history. Two outsiders. One impossible mission. Unite a broken land or watch it fall.

2. *The Lion of Mewar – Story of Rana Pratap*

Synopsis: When the mightiest emperor in the world demands your surrender, what do you do? Maharana Pratap said NO.

While every other kingdom bowed to Akbar's unstoppable empire, one young king in the mountains of Mewar refused. Four times the emperor sent diplomats with gold, land, and peace. Four times Pratap chose freedom over survival.

Now war is coming. An army five times his size. Enemies everywhere. Even his own brother has betrayed him. But Pratap has something Akbar's empire can never understand—a horse named Chetak who'll jump impossible ravines, warriors who'll die wearing his crown to save him, and the belief that some things are worth more than life itself.

Follow Pratap from the fall of Chittor fortress to the legendary Battle of Haldighati, through years of eating grass-bread in caves, to finally reclaiming most of his kingdom through sheer determination. This is the true story of India's greatest underdog—the king who chose twenty-five years of hardship over one moment of submission.

No superpowers. No magic. Just one man who refused to submit. History. Honor. Heart-pounding adventure.

3. The Wandering Monk – Story of Swami Vivekananda

Synopsis: He died at 39. But in that time, the wild kid from Calcutta became the monk who electrified Chicago with five words, built a movement that still thunders across continents, and taught a colonized nation to stand tall.

Meet Naren—the 5-year-old who jumped between terraces scaring neighbors, the teenager who questioned everything, the college student who almost became an atheist. Watch him transform into Vivekananda, the monk who walked across India barefoot to understand his country's soul, who faced down skeptics with wit and wisdom, who made America's religious scholars stand and cheer.

"Sisters and brothers of America..." Five words in a speech in Chicago that announced India's spiritual awakening to the world. But before the orange robes and the global fame, there was a quirky genius who meditated with cobras, debated everyone, and refused easy answers.

This is the story of how a restless questioner became a spiritual revolutionary, how he founded the Ramakrishna Mission that runs strong 100+ years later, serves millions, and how he proved that ancient wisdom could light the way forward.

America gave him standing ovations. The world called him a phenomenon. India calls him its awakener.

4. The Thunderbolt – Story of Bhagat Singh

WIP.

Synopsis: He was 23 when they hanged him. But Bhagat Singh chose that ending deliberately—because he believed a martyred cause lives longer than a rescued man.

This isn't the sanitized story you've heard. This is about the college kid who devoured books on revolution, who threw a bomb in the British Assembly not to kill but to make a statement, who laughed and joked while awaiting execution because he'd already won.

When the British offered to commute his death sentence, Bhagat Singh refused. When his mother begged him to apologize and live, he said no. When the entire country pleaded for his life, he chose the gallows—because he understood that ideas need martyrs to become immortal.

Follow Bhagat Singh from bookish teenager to revolutionary mastermind, through daring escapes and impossible plans, to the moment he walked to the gallows singing. This is the story of India's most famous revolutionary—the one who believed dying for your cause beats living without it.

5. *The Unconquered Rebel – Story of Subhas Chandra Bose*

WIP.

Synopsis: Gandhi said win freedom through non-violence. Bose said: "Give me blood, and I will give you freedom."

This is the story of India's most controversial freedom fighter—the man who escaped British prison disguised as a Pathan, traveled through Afghanistan and Soviet Russia in secret, raised an army of 60,000 to fight alongside Japan, and disappeared in a plane crash that nobody can prove.

Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose believed India needed to fight for independence, not beg for it. While Gandhi fasted, Bose built the Indian National Army. While Congress negotiated, Bose attacked. While others talked about one day being free, Bose declared a provisional government and started governing.

Follow Bose from his Cambridge education to multiple imprisonments, from congress president to military commander, through his legendary escape from British surveillance to his alliance with the Axis powers—a choice that made him hero to some, traitor to others.

This is the story of the man who refused Gandhi's path of non-violence and built an army to fight the British Empire head-on. The debate over whether he was right continues to this day. The debate over whether he really died in that plane crash? Also continues.

These books share a common DNA: protagonists who face impossible odds, strategic brilliance over superpowers, real historical stakes, and fast-paced narratives that refuse to let readers get bored. They're non-fiction that reads like fiction because the truth is already thrilling—we just need to tell it that way.

4. Mythology - Mahabharat and Ramayana Retold

Indian mythology isn't just ancient stories. Epic battles. Compelling moral dilemmas. Serious stakes. Flawed heroes making terrible choices. Story-telling brilliance and divine intervention tangled together.

The problem is that most retellings either oversimplify the stories into children's comics or present them as dense religious texts. Neither approach works for modern middle grade readers.

IndicWise retells Mahabharata and Ramayana like the sophisticated narratives they are. These aren't picture books. They're full-length novels with protagonist-driven arcs, pacing, and character growth.

Planned Mythology Titles:

1. *The Ace Archer's Dilemma – Mahabharata Through Arjuna's Eyes*

Status: 85% complete

Follow Arjuna from childhood prodigy to battlefield commander facing the impossible choice at Kurukshetra. This isn't a straightforward "good vs. evil" story. It's about a warrior who spent his life perfecting his skills, only to realize on the battlefield that winning might cost him everything he loves.

The book captures Arjuna's relationships—his brotherhood with Krishna, his rivalry with Karna, his complex bond with Draupadi, his jealousy of his brothers, his pride, his doubts. It's structured like a thriller, with each chapter ending on a choice or revelation that pulls readers forward.

Key moments: The contest for Draupadi's hand. The night at the lac palace. The dice game where everything falls apart. The years in exile. The cattle raid where Arjuna faces Bhishma. And finally, the dawn of war when Krishna must convince him to fight.

This is Mahabharata told with the pacing of a YA thriller and the moral complexity kids can actually wrestle with.

2. *Collection of Backstories from Mahabharata*

Not every great character in the Mahabharata gets enough screen time in the main epic. This collection focuses on the side characters whose stories are just as fascinating:

- **Barbarika:** The warrior so powerful he could end the war in minutes—if Krishna didn't stop him
- **Shakuni:** The uncle whose dice changed history, and why his hatred ran so deep
- **Parikshit:** Arjuna's grandson, cursed to die by snakebite, and what he did with his final days
- **Vishwamitra:** The king who became a sage through sheer stubbornness
- **Parashurama:** The warrior-sage who trained both Bhishma and Karna, and why he cursed the latter

Each story is designed to be read standalone but connects to the larger Mahabharata universe. Perfect for readers who want bite-sized mythology that doesn't compromise on depth.

3. *Ramayana Retelling – Title TBD*

WIP. An engaging retelling of the Ramayana that focuses on the strategic brilliance of the war in Lanka, the relationship between Rama and Lakshmana, and the impossible choices that define dharma.

These mythology books follow one core principle: trust the source material. The Mahabharata and Ramayana are already filled with drama, strategy, betrayal, and impossible stakes. The job isn't to add to them—it's to tell them in a way that feels immediate, paced, and relevant to kids who grew up on modern fiction.

Mythology made easy doesn't mean mythology made simple. It means mythology made accessible, thrilling, and impossible to put down.

5. Fantasy: Drawing from Vikram and Betaal : Percy Jackson x Black Mirror

The Vikram-Betaal stories are an interesting format for middle grade readers: a wise king repeatedly tricked by a clever ghost, facing moral dilemmas with no clear answers, punished every time he speaks.

But we haven't had a modern retelling that captures the spirit of those stories for today's readers. That's what the *Aanya and B* series does.

Think Percy Jackson meets Black Mirror for middle schoolers. A contemporary fantasy series rooted in Indian folklore where a middle school student engages with a mysterious entity that forces her to confront the messiest parts of being a 12 year old.

That core concept—impossible moral questions, consequences for avoidance, no escape through silence—is the engine of the *Aanya and B* series.

But instead of a king and a ghost in ancient India, we have Aanya, a seventh-grader in Mumbai, and B, a sharp-tongued entity who appears through a cracked phone she finds in her school cupboard.

The Series:

Book 1: *Aanya and B*

When Aanya opens her school cupboard on the first day of Grade 7, she finds a cracked phone inside. Turn it on, and B appears—sharp, sarcastic, impossible to explain.

The deal: Answer ten questions, and B will reveal whose phone it is. But these aren't school questions. They're about the messy, impossible choices you face when no one's watching. About secrets, betrayals, and the gap between who you are and who you pretend to be.

Stay silent or claim you'd never face such dilemmas? The phone reboots. Everything starts over.

Join Aanya as she navigates the eerie world of her own emotions, where every answer reveals something darker—and truer—than she expected.

Each chapter centers on a question from B—usually framed through a story or scenario—and Aanya must answer. The questions aren't abstract philosophical debates. They're grounded in the real social dynamics of middle school: friendship betrayals, academic pressure, family expectations, peer cruelty, the lies we tell ourselves.

What makes this Percy Jackson-esque is the blend of the fantastical (B's superpowers, impossible knowledge, the phone that reboots, the eerie consequences) with the deeply personal (Aanya's real struggles with identity, belonging, morality, and growing up). Like Percy discovering he's a demigod while dealing with ADHD and a difficult stepfather, Aanya is navigating a supernatural mystery while dealing with very real seventh-grade problems.

Book 2: *Aanya Without B*

A term where Aanya tries to apply the lessons she learned with B, and the struggles she faces trying to live up to them. It's not easy. Knowing the right answer and actually doing it in the moment are two different things.

This book explores the gap between moral clarity and moral action—something every middle schooler wrestles with. Aanya doesn't have B's questions to force her to confront her choices anymore. She has to navigate on her own. And sometimes, she fails.

Book 3: *B's Back*

Aanya is 13, almost 14 now. New challenges. New dilemmas. New situations. The questions get harder. The stakes get higher. And B has a few surprises.

Book 4+: Room for Further Development

As Aanya ages, the series can grow with her, following her into high school and beyond, with increasingly complex moral questions that reflect the evolution of her world.

Why This Works:

The *Aanya and B* series captures the spirit of *Vikram-Betaal* but updates it for contemporary readers. It's rooted in Indian storytelling tradition but feels fresh, modern, and relevant to kids navigating middle school today.

Like *Percy Jackson*, it takes mythology seriously while having fun with it. It respects its source material while making it accessible. And it gives young readers a protagonist who's flawed, relatable, and figuring things out as she goes—just like they are.

Fantasy doesn't need to be set in distant kingdoms or ancient times. Sometimes, the most fantastical thing is confronting the truth about yourself. That's what *Aanya and B* does. And that's why it belongs in the same conversation as *Percy Jackson*, *The Kane Chronicles*, and *Magnus Chase*.