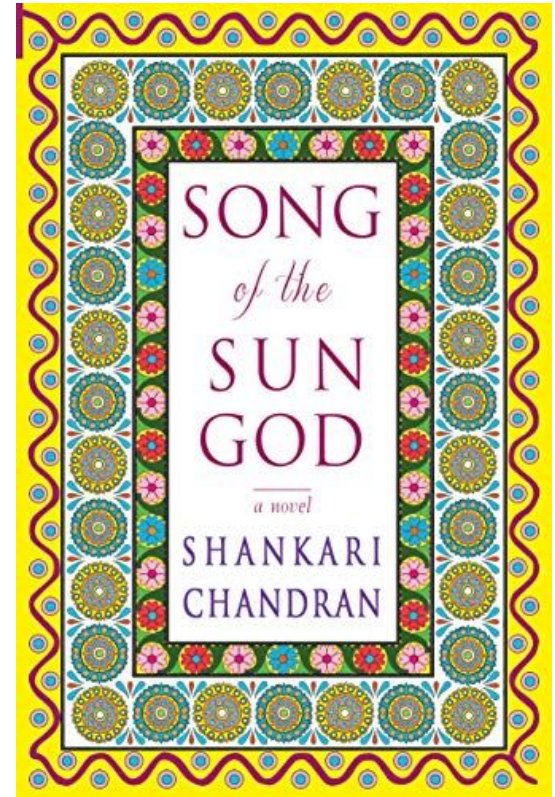


Song of the Sun God

by Shankari Chandran



I) *Song of the Sun God* Summary

Chapters 1 - 12

Chapter 1 - 3

- Follows the childhood and marriage of Nala and Rajan
- Difficulties of childbirth and married life
- Sri Lanka becomes independent

“It’s just history, thambi, it doesn’t matter who arrived first or which kings fought with each other. That is the past and what matters now is the future.”

In Chapter 3, Philomena and Viktoria discuss about the question of independence,

Which person seems to be in the right? What flaws do their arguments have? Is independence a good thing even if it forces unity between the separate?

Chapter 4 - 6

- Sinhala Only Act → riots of Tamils and reaction of Sinhalese
- Priya and Dhara learn Tamil in school, not English
- Death of Mohan → Vani cannot raise her daughter due to trauma
- Priya and Dhara are raised as sisters

“‘Sinhala Only’ the monks said, was not just about language, it was about Buddhism’s return to greatness. Rajan could see it was about racial supremacy, hidden in the rhetoric of religion and the fine detail of domestic policy.”

Rajan wants to leave Sri Lanka, but Nala doesn't and sabotages his chances at British hospitals,

Is Rajan justified in wanting to leave? Is Nala endangering her children by staying in Sri Lanka?
Is safety or national identity more important?

Chapter 7 - 9

- Priya marries Siva and goes to London with a scholarship
- Dhara attends Tamil rallies
- New name Sri Lanka
- Nala and Rajan suffer from racism when visiting Priya
- Dhara is taken by soldiers under the suspicion of her working for the LTTE and gets raped by the soldiers

Chapter 10 - 12

- Dhara gives birth to baby girl Smrithi and stays in Sri Lanka despite the trauma
- Nandan marries a Sinhalese woman Shiranthi and they have a Hindu and Buddhist wedding (“Love Conquers All”)
- Priya raises Smrithi as her own to protect her
- Dhara becomes involved in the conflict by supplying medical care
- Nala and Rajan have to bring Smrithi to the airport to Priya and they get stopped by Sinhalese soldiers → Smrithi exposes them as Tamil by calling Nala “ammamma” → Nala gets burned

Chapter 13 - 14

- Nala is hospitalized and treated for the burns she sustained
- Before leaving for Australia, Nala attempts to convince Dhara to go with them
- Nala and Rajan struggle with their new way of life and community in Sydney, though they begin to adapt
- Nala accompanies Rajan to the hospital he works at, feeling like she can help and fit in with the patients

Chapter 15 - 17

- Conflicts regarding Smrithi's upbringing arise as Priya desperately tries to ensure she internalizes and embodies their families Sri Lankan values and norms
- Dhara uses her medical expertise and resources to support the Tigers; however she soon begins to question their methods
- Priya is devastated upon finding out about Vivek's partner being a Catholic girl of Italian descent, eventually accepting his choice
- During Vivek and Caterina's two wedding ceremonies, Nala notices the similarities between the two communities and cultures

Priya is the one most upset about Vivek not marrying within his own culture and religion,

Why do Vivek's future wife's cultural heritage, ethnicity and religion matter so much to Priya?

Chapter 18 - 19

- Smrithi moves to London, finds a partner (Prashant) and begins considering marriage
- Priya visits Smrithi in London in order to support her in her pregnancy and then with her newborn daughter
- Smrithi, Prashant and Ahalya travel to Sri Lanka and visit Dhara
- Dhara now “[works] with all sides of the conflict”, as a Tsunami hits Sri Lanka
- Dhara visits London, though she proclaims to planning on spending the rest of her life in Sri Lanka
- Smrithi and her family move back to Australia

Chapter 20 - 22

- Dhara witnesses as government forces continue to wage war in no-fire-zones
- Leading up to the official end to the armed conflicts, large numbers of tigers and civilians are killed
- Dhara doesn't pick up the phone for weeks, all attempt to locate her fail
- Her family in Australia begins to accept that she must have died
- Nala reveals to Smrithi that Dhara was her mother, leading her to be furious at Priya for deceiving her and sad about not feeling wanted by Dhara

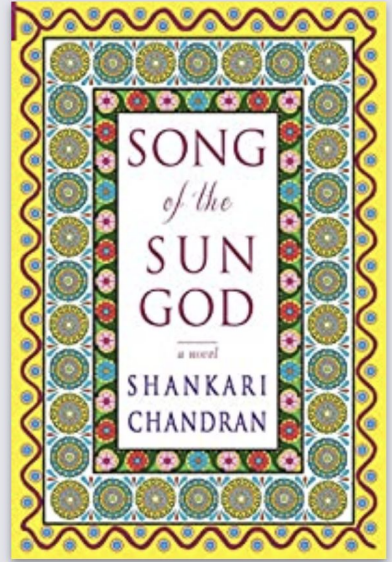
For most of her life, Smrithi's entire family has kept the truth about her mother from her,

Why is Smrithi's anger about being deceived directed at Priya in particular?

Chapter 23 - 24

- Following his general health declining, Rajan passes away
- Smrithi visits her grandparent's house in Colombo, finding the letters Priya sent to Dhara
- Their relationship having been strained for a while, Priya and Smrithi begin to reconnect
- Smrithi and Prashant celebrate their traditional hindu wedding

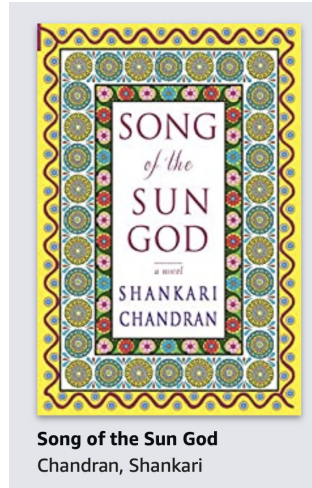
III) Cultural elements in *Song of the Sun God*



Song of the Sun God
Chandran, Shankari

*What cultural elements did you
take out of the novel?*

III) Cultural elements in *Song of the Sun God*



- Language
- Food
- Myths: Mahabharata & Ramayana

Language in *Song of the Sun God*

Although the book is written in English and every character speaks English, the author incorporates **Tamil words** gathered in a glossary of terms.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Acca – elder sister

Amma – mother

Amman – the Mother Goddess

Ammamma – grandmother

Anna – elder brother

Appa – father

Appappa (sometimes shortened to Apps), Parta and Thatha – grandfather

Ayah – nanny or nursemaid

Beedi – native tobacco that is commonly chewed

Bhagavad Gita – the Song of God, or a divine message delivered by Lord Krishna to Arjuna, the Pandava warrior, just before the Mahabharatha war begins. (see Mahabharatha below)

Bhikkus – Buddhist monks

Burgher – an ethnic group in Sri Lanka descended from European colonists (mostly Portuguese, Dutch and British) and local people

Cavanam – be careful

Chappals – slippers or shoes

Chutie – a pet name for little girls, meaning little one

Cousin-brother/sister – in Tamil, cousins are referred to as siblings as there is no word for cousin other than 'machal' which is specifically used for marriageable cousins only

Cunju, cunj, cunji – darling

Language in *Song of the Sun God*

Limits of language

“There were words for most things in Tamil and English and Sinhalese. Widow, widower, orphan- these were words for pain. But he couldn’t find the word for someone who has lost a sibling or a child (...) He must remember to tell Smirithi that language could not describe what Dhara and Priya had each suffered. Language had limits, like the borders of a nation. Pain did not” (145)

Food in *Song of the Sun God*

The reader learns about the Sri Lankan food culture and witnesses a gastronomic clash of culture when a part of the family moves to Australia.

Further areas of clash of culture ?

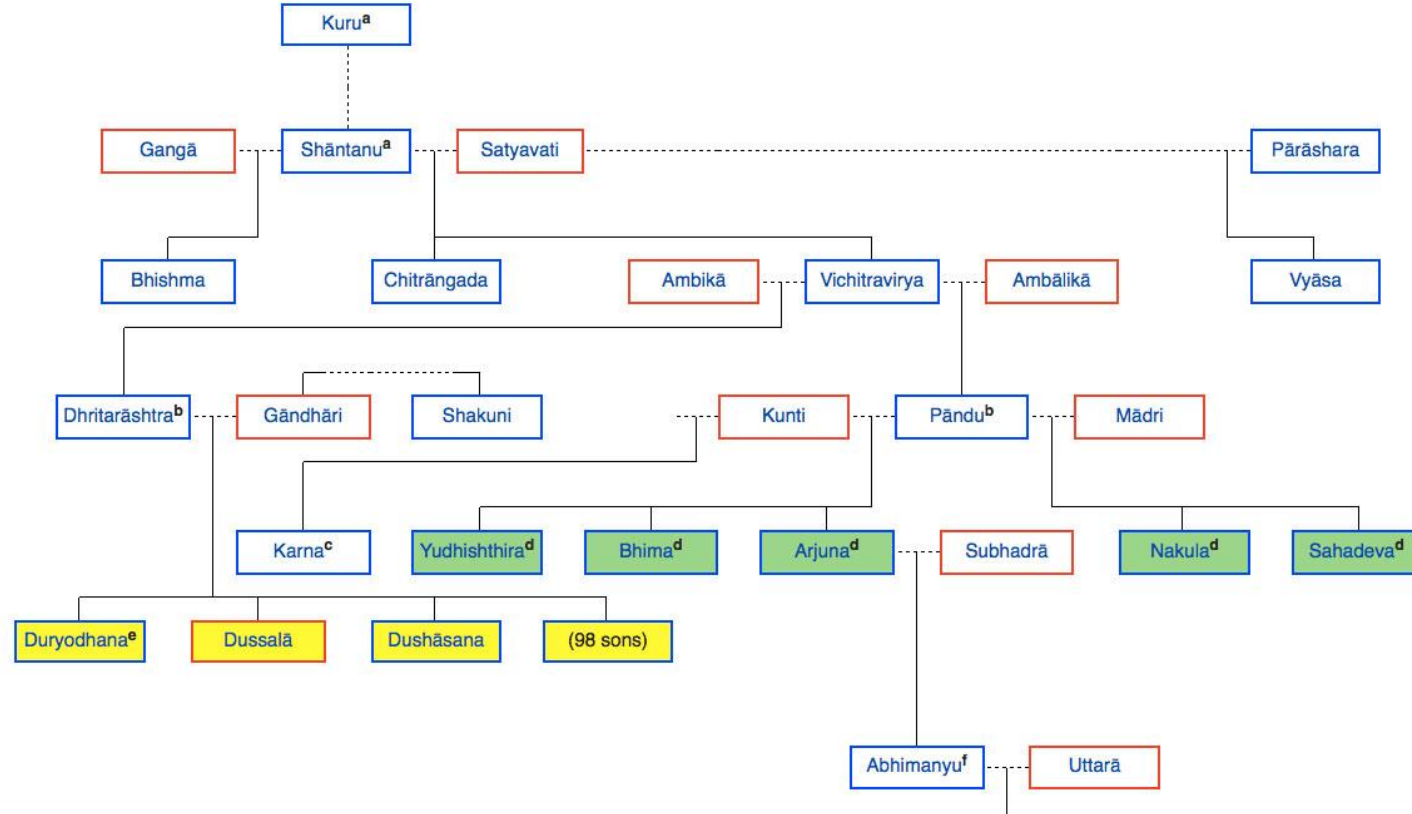


Myths in *Song of the Sun God*

Called after a famous mythical figure, the novel often refers to the **Mahabharata** and the **Ramayana**, two major Sanskrit epics of ancient India.



Myths in *Song of the Sun God*



Myths in *Song of the Sun God*

The figure of *Sun God* in the Mahabharata and the Ramayana

What role do myths play
in the novel *Song of the
Sun God* ?



References to other events

“Nala had asked Rayan why they targeted the Tamil businesses. He mumbled something about common criminals and petty jealousy. ‘It was like this for the Jews in the beginning’, he said. She didn’t know what their riots had to do with the terrible things that had happened in Germany, but she didn’t want to probe him.” (63)

Other references in mind? What effect do those references have on the reader’s understanding of the Sri-Lankan political and societal context?