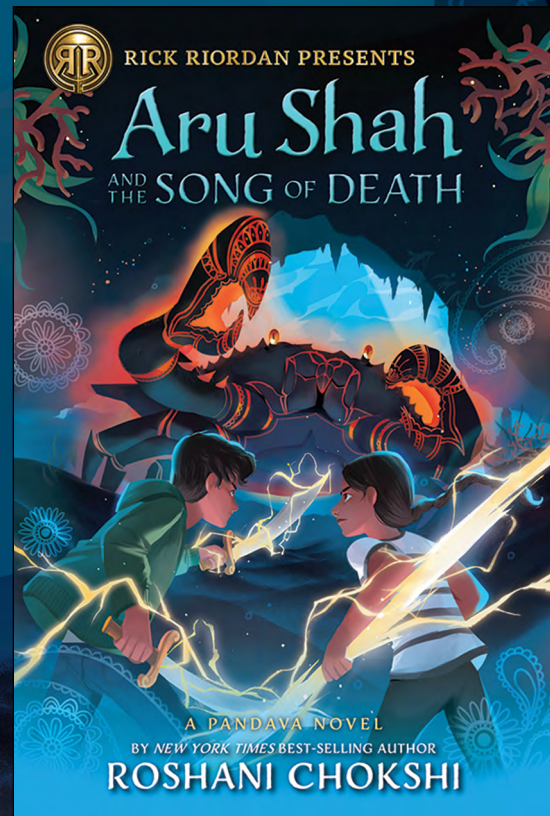
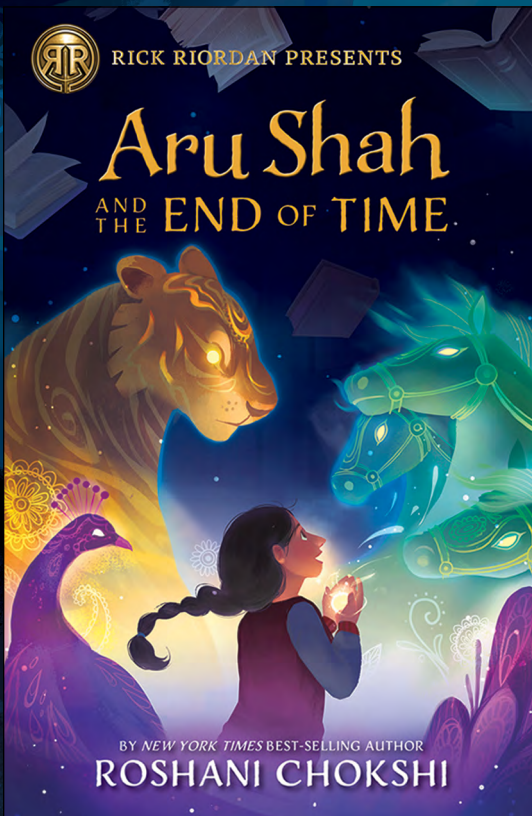




RICK RIORDAN PRESENTS

# The Pandava Series



EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

Disney • HYPERION

## ABOUT THE BOOKS

### ARU SHAH AND THE END OF TIME

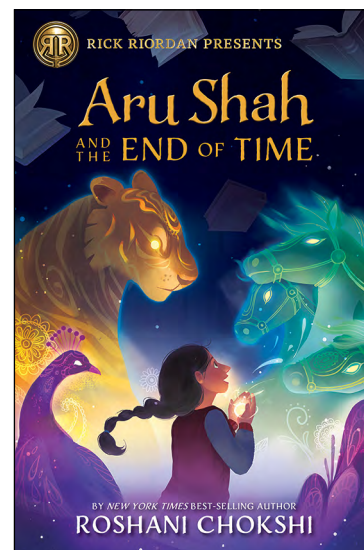
A Pandava Novel, Book One

Best-selling author Rick Riordan introduces this adventure by Roshani Chokshi about twelve-year-old Aru Shah, who has a tendency to stretch the truth in order to fit in at her private middle school. While her classmates are jetting off to exotic vacations, she'll be spending her autumn break in the Museum of Ancient Indian Art and Culture that her mom curates. Is it any wonder Aru makes up stories about being royalty, traveling to Paris, and having a chauffeur?

One day, three schoolmates show up at Aru's doorstep to catch her in a lie. They don't believe her claim that the museum's Lamp of Bharata is cursed, and they dare Aru to prove it. *Just a quick light*, Aru thinks. Then she'll *never ever* fib again.

But lighting the lamp has dire consequences. She unwittingly frees the Sleeper, an ancient demon who is intent on awakening the Lord of Destruction. Her classmates and mother are frozen in time, and it's up to Aru to save them.

The only way to stop the demon is to find the reincarnations of the legendary Pandava brothers and journey through the Kingdom of Death. But how is one girl in Spider-Man pajamas supposed to do all *that*?

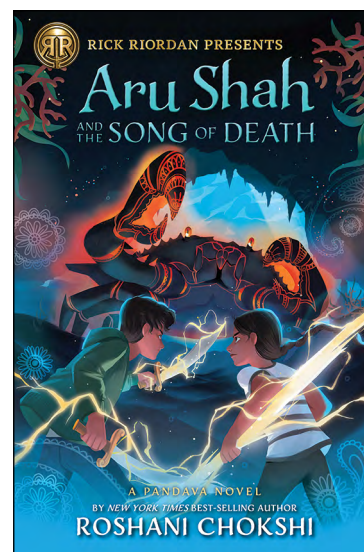


### ARU SHAH AND THE SONG OF DEATH

A Pandava Novel, Book Two

Aru is only just getting the hang of this whole Pandava thing when the Otherworld goes into full panic mode. The god of love's bow and arrow have gone missing, and the thief isn't playing Cupid. Instead, they're turning people into heartless fighting-machine zombies. If that weren't bad enough, somehow Aru gets framed as the thief. If she doesn't find the arrow by the next full moon, she'll be kicked out of the Otherworld. For good.

But, for better or worse, she won't be going it alone. Along with her soul sister, Mini, Aru will team up with Brynne, an ultra-strong girl who knows more than she lets on, and Aiden, the boy who lives across the street and is also hiding plenty of secrets. Together they'll battle demons, travel through a glittering and dangerous serpent realm, and discover that their enemy isn't at all who they expected.





# COMMON CORE ALIGNMENT

This guide is aligned with the College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards (CCR) for Literature, Writing, Language, and Speaking and Listening. The broad CCR standards are the foundation for the grade level–specific Common Core State Standards.

## PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

Before reading the books in the Pandava series, have students complete an anticipation guide structured in the following manner:

BEFORE READING	AFTER READING	STATEMENTS
		It’s acceptable to keep secrets from family members if it protects them.
		There are consequences for every action an individual takes.
		No matter the situation, you should always trust your friends.
		Family is only defined as the people to whom you are related.
		Feeling guilt or remorse for one’s actions can be life-changing.
		To be a true hero, a person must be physically strong; while other strengths are important, physical strength is the most valuable.

Instruct students to complete the guide by placing a “+” sign in the box next to the statements with which they agree, and a “0” next to those with which they disagree. They must commit to agreement or disagreement—there are no conditional responses. Students should be assured that there are no correct or incorrect positions.

Once students have had the opportunity to complete the guide, read each statement aloud and have students who agree show it by standing or raising their hands. Each student should be permitted to provide their rationale for agreeing if they wish.

## BUILDING BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

As the pantheon of Hindu mythology and lore may not be as familiar to students as Greek, Roman, Norse, or Egyptian mythology, consider building background information using the following activity.

**FOR STUDENTS:** To build a foundation for understanding the books in the Pandava series, work independently or with a small group to create a *Who's Who in Hindu Mythology* exhibit. Utilize the “Who's Who” list of Hindu gods and creatures provided and select a research topic. Using the internet and library resources, create a “biography” of the mythological figure that includes the following:

- Physical description
- Relationship to other important Hindu characters
- Explanation of any significant connections to other mythological figures
- Any other important information (such as special abilities or powers)

You or your team should prepare a digital exhibit with a poster or slide show designed to inform others about your Hindu mythological figure as a means of creating background knowledge for reading of the books in the Pandava series.

## WHILE READING

### Exploring the Series through Discussion and Writing

The following questions may be utilized throughout the study of the Aru Shah books as targeted questions for class discussion and reflection, or alternatively, they can be used as reflective writing prompts.

#### *Aru Shah and the End of Time*

- 1 As the novel opens, Aru tells readers, “The problem with growing up around highly dangerous things is that after a while you just get used to them.” Do you agree? How does this statement set the stage for the adventures to come?
- 2 In what ways does growing up in the Museum of Ancient Indian Art and Culture make Aru's childhood unique? If you had an opportunity to be raised in a favorite museum or attraction, which one would it be?
- 3 While discussing the *diya* and inquiring with her mother about why it can't be lit, Dr. Shah tells Aru, “Sometimes light illuminates things that are better left in the dark.” In what ways is Aru's mother correct? Can you think of any circumstances that might be an exception?
- 4 While reflecting upon her life lived and spent in the museum, Aru talks about waiting for “magic.” Given what transpires upon her lighting the *diya*, do you believe Aru regrets wishing for something extraordinary?
- 5 What can be gleaned about Aru's need to impress her classmates? Have you ever felt tempted to behave similarly? In your opinion, is telling tales always wrong?
- 6 Aru hears a booming voice ask, “WHO HAS DARED TO WAKE THE SLEEPER FROM HIS SLUMBER?” Upon actually meeting Aru, Boo states, “Only one of the five Pandava brothers could light the lamp.” Why is his reaction to learning that Aru is a twelve-year-old girl so seemingly negative?
- 7 Upon meeting Mini, Aru thinks to herself that meeting her was “better than a middle school dance,” but she still feels cheated. Why is that? In what ways does this change for her as time goes on? Consider Mini's reaction to meeting Aru—is it similar? How do their initial impressions evolve over time?
- 8 Mini tells Aru, “My mother always says that knowledge is power,” to which Aru retorts, “And my mother says that ignorance is bliss.” Consider both of these statements. Which do you agree with more? Can you make a case for the other? Are there any ways in which these statements reflect the how these Pandavas approach their quest?
- 9 In what ways are the physical differences between Aru and Mini reflective of the vastness and diversity of India?
- 10 What was your impression of the Seasons upon Aru and Mini's experience with them at the Court of the Seasons? Had you ever considered seasons in such a way?

- 11 Mini tells Aru, “My mom used to tell me that death is like a parking lot. . . . You stay there for just a bit and then go somewhere else.” How does the idea of being reincarnated help make Aru feel a bit better?
- 12 In what ways does their time at the Palace of Illusions change Aru and Mini? Do you think a place that once was your home holds power? Why or why not?
- 13 Boo often seems frustrated at his role as guardian and teacher of the Pandavas; do you believe he has the right to feel this way? In what ways does he change throughout the course of the book?
- 14 *Aru Shah and the End of Time* features a number of characters that exhibit a variety of strengths. Who most impresses you with their strength? Explain your choice.
- 15 While surrounded by wilderness, having escaped from the Sleeper, Aru hopes that the gods will offer some assistance, until Boo states, “I told you, they will not meddle in human affairs.” Why do you believe the gods generally choose not to help their own children? Do you believe them right not to do so? Explain your position.
- 16 What does Shukra hope to gain by capturing Aru’s and Mini’s memories? Would you be willing to give up yours to save yourself?
- 17 Throughout *Aru Shah and the End of Time*, Aru and Mini consider the role karma plays in their lives. What makes this idea so important?
- 18 Aru’s mother states, “I believe that our destinies aren’t chains around our necks, but wings that give us flight.” Do you agree with her assessment?
- 19 How does learning the identity of the Sleeper impact Aru’s decision making? Do you think you’d have a similar struggle? Why or why not?
- 20 The Sleeper tells Aru, “Mercy makes fools of us.” What does he mean by this statement? Why does he blame Aru and her mother for who he is and the state of his future?

- 21 After learning that her “home” dad hadn’t left them at all—he had just been locked away in a lamp by her mom—Aru thinks, *This is so messed up*. Do you agree with Aru’s reaction? Can you make a case for her mother’s actions?

### *Aru Shah and the Song of Death*

- 1 As *Aru Shah and the Song of Death* begins, readers learn Aru has “a lightning bolt, and she really wanted to use it.” What can be inferred about Aru’s personality and motivations with this knowledge? How does this statement set the stage for the adventures to come?
- 2 Consider the gifts Aru and Mini receive from their soul fathers. What do these celestial gifts (Aru’s Vajra, a lightning bolt, and Mimi’s Dee Dee, an enchanted *danda* stick) suggest about their fathers’ understanding of what’s to come for these two Pandavas?
- 3 Consider the chapter titles; what do you think they add to the story? Which chapter titles did you like best and why?
- 4 Describe the citizens of the Otherworld that Aru and Mini encounter; in what ways are they similar or different from the people Aru and Mini come across in their traditional lives? What is it about the Night Bazaar that holds such allure for these Pandavas?
- 5 Based on what you learn about her in *Aru Shah and the Song of Death*, what are your earliest impressions of Brynne? Do you find her to be a good companion to Aru, Mini, and Aiden on this quest? Using textual examples, support your position. How does learning that Brynne is their Pandava sister impact Aru and Mini?
- 6 What makes being accused of being a thief of the god of love’s bow and arrow so bothersome to the Pandavas? In what ways does this cause additional strife between Aru and Mini and their newly discovered sister?
- 7 Compare the parent-child relationships in *Aru Shah and the Song of Death*. To what extent are the relationships of these characters shaped by the world around them? To what extent do their relationships shape that world?

- 8 In *Aru Shah and the Song of Death*, guilt both motivates and incapacitates Aru. Consider how she deals with her guilt. What is unusual about the manner in which she does so?
- 9 In many ways, the Pandava series is about family. Explain the significance of family to each of the major characters.
- 10 Though he doesn't initially appear to be, in what ways is Takshaka a perfect villain?
- 11 Using the phrase "This is a story about..." supply five words to describe *Aru Shah and the Song of Death*. Explain your choices.
- 12 Consider Lady M's motivations. Given what you learned about her history, are there any ways in which you feel she was right to behave as she does? Explain your answer.
- 13 The Pandavas learn that while their parents are gods, those parents are far from perfect. Consider your favorite character and consider how her knowledge of her godly parent changes throughout the course of the novel. In what ways is this realization similar or different to what kids learn about their own parents?
- 14 How would you characterize the relationship between Aru and Aiden, and how does it change over the course of the novel?
- 15 Aru tells Aiden, "Decisions are hard. . . . But the biggest one is deciding what to do with the time that is given to us." Consider this statement. What do you believe Aru means? Do you agree with her? Why or why not?
- 16 Consider the ending of *Aru Shah and the Song of Death* and predict what's to come in the next Pandava novel.

*Correlates to Common Core Standard Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details R.L.6.2.; Speaking and Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration S.L.6.1., 6.2., 6.3. Key Ideas and Details R.L.7.2.; Speaking and Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration S.L.7.1., 7.2., 7.3.*

## POST-READING ACTIVITIES

### Extension Activities: Writing and Researching

- 1 In *Aru Shah and the End of Time*, the only way to stop the Sleeper is to find the reincarnations of the five legendary Pandava brothers, protagonists of the Hindu epic poem the *Mahabharata*. Using library resources, databases, and the internet, learn more about the epic poem the *Mahabharata* and the role each of the five brothers plays in the story. Use a digital presentation tool of choice to share what is learned.
- 2 The *Ramayana*, written by the sage of learning, Valmiki, is the other celebrated ancient Indian poem well known throughout the world. Using a variety of research tools, dig deeply to discover more about this epic story. Afterward, gather with classmates to critically discuss what you discovered, being sure to focus on what you learned, what you found most interesting, what surprised you, etc.
- 3 In the novel *Aru Shah and the End of Time*, the Museum of Ancient Indian Art and Culture is the setting for the climactic sequence, but currently, no such museum exists in Atlanta; rather, one of the largest collections of ancient Indian and Hindu art is held in the collection at New York City's Metropolitan Museum of Art. Research the collection at the Met to discover the following:
  - When was the Indian and Hindu collection established?
  - What types of pieces are housed there?
  - In your opinion, what did you find most interesting about the collection holdings?
  - What were your particular favorite pieces?Select a favorite piece and become an "expert" on this particular artifact, being able to share specific information about it with others and explain why you personally find it interesting.
- 4 While dealing with Shukra while crossing the Bridge of Forgetting in *Aru Shah and the End of Time*, Aru considers the idea of karma, the idea that "what goes around comes around." Consider this concept—do you agree with it? Why or why not? Research this concept to discover more, and draft a journal entry reflecting on whether your ideas have changed based upon further thought and investigation.

- 5 Many of the fearsome and fascinating mythical creatures that color Hindu mythology appear in the Pandava series. Using library and internet resources, select a specific creature that intrigued you while reading and conduct additional research to share with peers.
- 6 In *Aru Shah and the End of Time* and *Aru Shah and the Song of Death*, readers witness the Pandavas mature and grow throughout the course of the novels, and even Boo changes due to his relationship with the duo. Based on your observations, which character do you believe demonstrates the greatest growth? Compose a short persuasive essay explaining your position. While considering your selected character's experiences, use textual evidence from the novel to provide specific examples to support your case.
- 7 As Aru and Mini return to the palace in *Aru Shah and the End of Time*, they discover that it has been hurt by their absence. Have you ever moved or left a favorite place behind? While that transition might have been difficult for you, have you ever imagined that the place you left might have missed you back? Write a letter to yourself detailing those memories from the point of view of your left-behind place (this could be a previous home or school, or just a location your younger self loved to frequent).
- 8 In *Aru Shah and the Song of Death*, the Ocean of Milk becomes an important setting for the action of the story. Research to learn more about this important setting in Hindu mythology and be sure to discover:
  - Which texts feature references to the Ocean of Milk?
  - Where is it located?
  - Who are the important gods and goddesses associated with it?
  - What does the churning of the Ocean of Milk symbolize?
  - After conducting your investigation, share what you learn with others.
- 9 Though the stories of the major players in the Pandava series have been passed down to us from Hindu mythology, if these characters lived in our time, they would likely use the same social media that is popular in our world today. Working in a small group, select a Hindu god or goddess of your choice and create a faux Instagram account or Facebook page for that character, being sure to complete all the pertinent information, like education, relationships, groups to follow, pages to like, as well as 2–3 status updates with hashtags.
- 10 References to Bollywood dancing and movies are mentioned often throughout the Pandava series. Using the internet and other research resources available through your library, investigate to discover more about Bollywood, being sure to learn the following:
  - What are Bollywood productions?
  - Who are the major stars?
  - What role does dance play in the productions?
  - What makes them so popular?
  - In what ways are there references to these South Asian traditions in American culture?After doing this research, share what you learned with others, and for added fun, watch some of Bollywood's best.
- 11 At the closing of *Aru Shah and the Song of Death*, rather than use the god of love's arrow to bring his parents back together, Aiden decides to use it to help his mother see herself the same way he does. Using Aiden's action as your inspiration, craft a letter to someone you love sharing what you see in them, and all the specific things that make them special to you.
- 12 Throughout the Pandava series, Aru contemplates difficult questions, including what it means to be good or evil, as well as the role of duty to oneself or duty to others. After some careful reflection and discussion, select one of these questions and write a statement sharing your thoughts about your chosen topic.

*Key Ideas and Details R.L.6.2.; Speaking and Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration S.L.6.1., 6.2., 6.3. Key Ideas and Details and Common Core Standard Writing: Research to Build and Present Knowledge W.6.4 and Writing: Research to Build and Present Knowledge W.7.4.*

## MYTHOLOGY FACT OR FICTION?

Test for your knowledge of Hindu mythology by completing this Pandava series inspired trivia.

- 1 The Pandava brothers are demigod warrior princes, and the heroes of the epic *Mahabharata* poem.

FACT or FICTION

- 2 A *makara* is a mythical creature that's usually depicted as half crocodile and half fish.

FACT or FICTION

- 3 Valmiki is the hero of the epic poem the *Ramayana*.

FACT or FICTION

- 4 Samsara is the cycle of death and rebirth.

FACT or FICTION

- 5 *Astras* are supernatural weapons that were usually summoned into battle by a specific chant.

FACT or FICTION

- 6 Shiva is known as the Lord of Cosmic Dance.

FACT or FICTION

- 7 Uchchaihshravas is a seven-headed flying horse created during the churning of the milk ocean.

FACT or FICTION

- 8 Soma is the dessert of the gods.

FACT or FICTION

- 9 Johnny Raja is the Lord of Death and Justice, and the father of the oldest Pandava brother, Yudhistira.

FACT or FICTION

- 10 Gunghroo are anklets made of small bells strung together, worn by Indian dancers.

FACT or FICTION

- 11 Chakora is a mythical bird that is said to live off moonbeams.

FACT or FICTION

- 12 Ghee is a class of clarified chocolate that originated from the Indian subcontinent. It is commonly used in South Asian and Middle Eastern cuisines, traditional medicine, and religious rituals.

FACT or FICTION

- 13 Indra is the son of Vayu, the god of the wind, and Anjana, an aspara.

FACT or FICTION

- 14 Kamadeva is the Hindu god of human love or desire, often portrayed along with his female counterpart, Rati.

FACT or FICTION

- 15 Massis is a popular traditional dahi-based drink that originated in the Indian subcontinent.

FACT or FICTION

- 16 Mayasura is the demon king and architect who built the Pandavas' Palace of Illusions.

FACT or FICTION

- 17 Uloopi is a naga princess who fell in love with Arjuna, married him, and used a magical gem to save his life.

FACT or FICTION

- 18 Parvati is the Hindu goddess of fertility, love, and devotion.

FACT or FICTION

- 19 Rama is the hero of the epic poem the *Ramayana*. He was the first incarnation of the god Vishnu.

FACT or FICTION

- 20 Durvasa is the son of Atri and Anasuya. He is known for his short temper.

FACT or FICTION

1 FACT • 2 FACT • 3 FICTION: Valmiki is the writer of the epic. • 4 FACT • 5 FACT • 6 FACT • 7 FACT • 8 FICTION: Soma is the drink of the gods. • 9 FICTION: Dharmaraja is correct. • 10 FACT • 11 FACT • 12 FICTION: Ghee is a butter. • 13 FICTION: Hanuman is the correct answer. • 14 FACT • 15 FICTION: Lassi is the correct name of the drink. • 16 FACT • 17 FACT • 18 FACT • 19 FICTION: He is the seventh incarnation of the god Vishnu. • 20 FACT



## MYTHICAL TERMS FILL-IN-THE-BLANK

Use what you've learned in your reading of the Pandava series to fill in the blanks.

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_ A sometimes good, sometimes bad race of semidivine beings.
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_ A mythical bird that is said to live off moonbeams.
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_ A giant punishing rod that is often considered the symbol of the Dharma Raja, the god of the dead.
- 4 \_\_\_\_\_ The Lord of Death and Justice, and the father of the oldest Pandava brother, Yudhistira.
- 5 \_\_\_\_\_ The powerful queen of Hastinapura.
- 6 \_\_\_\_\_ The elephant-headed god worshipped as the remover of obstacles and the god of luck and new beginnings.
- 7 \_\_\_\_\_ The king of heaven, and the god of thunder and lightning.
- 8 \_\_\_\_\_ A term of endearment that means *life* or *sweetheart*.
- 9 \_\_\_\_\_ A philosophy that your actions affect what happens to you next.
- 10 \_\_\_\_\_ The Hindu goddess of wealth and good fortune, and the consort (wife) of Vishnu, one of the three major Hindu deities.
- 11 \_\_\_\_\_ The demon king and architect who built the Pandavas' Palace of Illusions.
- 12 \_\_\_\_\_ Dancers who entertain in the Court of the Heavens.
- 13 \_\_\_\_\_ A savory snack that originated in India, typically served as an hors d'oeuvre at roadside tracks from stalls or food carts across the Indian subcontinent in India, Pakistan, Nepal, and Bangladesh.
- 14 \_\_\_\_\_ The Sanskrit term for the race of gods.
- 15 \_\_\_\_\_ A character in the Hindu epic *Mahabharata*. The daughter of Kouravya, the king of serpents, she was the second among the four wives of Arjuna.
- 16 \_\_\_\_\_ A nāgarāja, one of the king serpents of Hindu and Buddhist mythology. He played a major role in the churning of the Ocean of Milk when the gods and asuras needed help.
- 17 \_\_\_\_\_ The Hindu goddess of love and desire.
- 18 \_\_\_\_\_ A bow to touch the feet of a respected person, e.g., a teacher, grandparent, or other elder.
- 19 \_\_\_\_\_ A mythical creature that's usually depicted as half crocodile and half fish.
- 20 \_\_\_\_\_ He is the god of compassion, tenderness, and love in Hinduism.

- |            |                |          |              |            |             |             |
|------------|----------------|----------|--------------|------------|-------------|-------------|
| 1. ASURA   | 4. DHARMA RAJA | 7. INDRA | 10. LAKSHMI  | 13. CHAT   | 16. VASUKI  | 19. MAKARA  |
| 2. CHAKORA | 5. GANDHARI    | 8. JANI  | 11. MAYASURA | 14. DEVAS  | 17. RATI    | 20. KRISHNA |
| 3. DANDA   | 6. GANESH      | 9. KARMA | 12. APSARAS  | 15. ULLOPI | 18. PRANAMA |             |

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Roshani Chokshi** ([www.roshanichokshi.com](http://www.roshanichokshi.com)) is the author of the instant *New York Times* best-selling novel *The Star-Touched Queen* and its companion, *A Crown of Wishes*. She studied fairy tales in college, and she has a pet luck dragon that looks suspiciously like a Great Pyrenees dog. *Aru Shah and the End of Time*, her middle grade debut, was inspired by the stories her grandmother told her, as well as Roshani's all-consuming love for *Sailor Moon*. She lives in Georgia and says *y'all*, but she doesn't really have a Southern accent. Her Twitter handle is @roshani\_chokshi.



Photo credit: Aman Sharma

## Q & A WITH ROSHANI CHOKSHI

- Q:** *Aru Shah and the End of Time* is the first installment of Rick Riordan Presents. What has your experience been like getting to work with a mythology expert and reader favorite like Rick Riordan?
- A:** It's been awesome! But also . . . terrifying! When I first got his notes back on *Aru*, I wanted to dieeeeeee. Rick left, I kid you not, like a thousand comments. As it turned out, many of them were "lol," which was great. And the rest of them were exactly the kind of guidance you expect from a teacher, one that lets you find your *own* path through the thicket.
- Q:** You've shared in other interviews that *Aru Shah and the End of Time* is a story of sisterhood; can you explain that vision and why you find that particularly important?
- A:** I'm very close to my siblings, my brother and sister, and I wanted to celebrate sibling relationships as well as female friendships. I've kept my best friends since childhood, and I always used to write stories where we were the protagonists of bizarre adventures to fairyland. With *Aru*, I wanted young girls to see that they are just as deserving of magic.
- Q:** For readers discovering Aru and Mini, can you share a bit about how these characters are similar to you?
- A:** Oh boy. Well, Aru is a lot like me in middle school. I was a notorious liar, with an active imagination and no outlet for that. Mini is every bit of my anxious/neurotic self, ha-ha. But I think the most important trait that both girls have from me is desperately wanting a sense of connection. I was very lucky to find that with my friends and family, and I wanted them to find that, too.
- Q:** What's been the most exciting part of being able to bring *Aru Shah and the End of Time* to young people? Have there been any unique challenges to this endeavor? What are you most looking forward to as you further develop the Pandava world for readers?
- A:** The most exciting part is hearing their reactions! I don't think my inbox has ever been so full of girls (and boys!—I don't believe in girl books vs. boy books) telling me how much they relate to Aru and Mini. For me, the challenge has been balancing how I retell certain myths, which have a lot of nuances and inconsistencies depending on the region of India in which they're told. I'm most looking forward to introducing readers to more of the characters and the larger story underpinning the series.

# WHO'S WHO IN ARU SHAH AND THE END OF TIME

(Shared by Roshani Chokshi)

*Hiyo!* I'd like to preface this glossary by saying that this is by no means exhaustive or attentive to the nuances of mythology. India is GINORMOUS, and these myths and legends vary from state to state.

What you read here is merely a slice of what *I* understand from the stories *I* was told and the research *I* conducted. The wonderful thing about mythology is that its arms are wide enough to embrace many traditions from many regions. My hope is that this glossary gives you context for Aru and Mini's world, and perhaps nudges you to do some research of your own. ☺

**Adrishya** (UH-drish-yah) Hindi for *invisible* or *disappear*.

**Agni** (UHG-nee) The Hindu god of fire. He's also the guardian of the southeast direction. Fire is deeply important to many Hindu rituals, and there are a lot of fun myths about Agni's direction and role. For example, one sage cursed Agni to become the devourer of all things on earth (No one ever told me *why* the sage was mad. . . . Did Agni burn a hole in his favorite sweatshirt? Overcook the popcorn?), but then Brahma, the creator god, fixed it so that Agni became the *purifier* of all he touched. That said, Agni definitely had an appetite. Once, he'd eaten so much clarified butter (often used in religious rituals) from the priests that nothing would fix his terrible stomachache except, well, *an entire forest*. That happened to be the Khandava Forest. Small problem, though. Indra, the god of thunder, protected that forest, because it was where the family of his friend Takshaka lived.

**Amaravati** (uh-MAR-uh-vah-tee) So, I have suffered the great misfortune of never having visited this legendary city, but I hear it's, like, *amazing*. It has to be, considering it's where Lord Indra lives. It's draped in gold palaces and has celestial gardens full of a thousand wonders that even include a wish-granting tree. I wonder what the flowers smell like there. I imagine like birthday cake, because it's basically heaven.

**Ammamma** (UH-muh-mah) *Grandmother* in Telugu, one of the many languages spoken in India, most commonly in the southern area.

**Amrita** (am-REE-tuh) The immortal drink of the gods. According to the legends, Sage Durvasa once cursed the gods to lose their immortality. To get it back, they had

to churn the celestial Ocean of Milk. But in order to accomplish this feat, they had to seek assistance from the asuras, another semi-divine race of beings who were constantly at war with the devas. In return for their help, the asuras demanded that the devas share a taste of the amrita. Which, you know, *fair*. But to gods, *fair* is just another word. So they tricked the asuras. The supreme god Vishnu, also known as the preserver, took the form of Mohini, a beautiful enchantress. The asuras and devas lined up in two rows. While Mohini poured the amrita, the asuras were so mesmerized by her beauty they didn't realize she was giving *all* the immortality nectar to the gods and not them. Rude! By the way, I have no idea what amrita tastes like. Probably birthday cake.

**Apsara** (AHP-sah-rah) Apsaras are beautiful, heavenly dancers who entertain in the Court of the Heavens. They're often the wives of heavenly musicians. In Hindu myths, apsaras are usually sent on errands by Lord Indra to break the meditation of sages who are getting a little too powerful. It's pretty hard to keep meditating when a celestial nymph starts dancing in front of you. And if you scorn her affection (as Arjuna did in the *Mahabharata*), she might just curse you. Just sayin'.

**Ashvins (Nasatya and Dasra)** (OSH-vin, NUSS-uht-yuh, DUS-ruh) Twin horsemen gods who symbolize sunrise and sunset, and are considered the gods of medicine and healing. They're often depicted with the heads of horses. Thanks to the boon of Kunti (the mother of Arjuna, Yudhistira, Bhima, and Karna, who was blessed with the ability to call on any god to give her a son), the Ashvins became the fathers of Nakula and Sahadeva, the twin Pandavas, by King Pandu's second wife, Madri.

**Astras** (AHS-trahz) Supernatural weapons that are usually summoned into battle by a specific chant. There are all kinds of astras, like *Gada*, the mace of Lord Hanuman, which is like a giant hammer; or *Indraastra*, invoked by the god Indra, which brings a shower of arrows, much like Indra, the god of the weather, can summon “showers.” Get it? Ha! Gods like irony. And violence.

**Asura** (AH-soo-rah) A sometimes good, sometimes bad race of semidivine beings. They’re most popularly known from the story about the churning of the ocean. You see, once upon a time the gods were not immortal. In order to attain the drink of immortality (*amrita*), they had to churn the Ocean of Milk. But . . . it’s an ocean. So the gods needed help. And who did they call? You guessed it, the asuras. The asuras were promised a cut of the immortality. But the gods, obviously, did not want to share. Lord Vishnu, the supreme god, transformed into Mohini, an enchantress. Once the asuras and devas (divine ones) had churned the ocean, Mohini sneakily gave *all* the amrita to the devas. As one can imagine, the asuras were *not* happy.

**Bhai** (BHAI) *Brother* in Hindi.

**Bhangra** (BAHN-grah) One of several popular Punjabi-style dances. The technique is quite simple: “pat the dog” and “screw in a lightbulb” AT. THE. SAME. TIME. This is critical. And then you must hop back and forth. Many Indian men think they’re very good at this. They are usually not. Like my father.

**Bharata** (BAH-rah-tah) The Sanskrit name for the Indian subcontinent, named after the legendary emperor Bharata, who was an ancestor of the Pandavas.

**Bharatnatyam** (BAH-raht-naht-yum) An ancient, classical dance form that originated in South India. Yours truly studied Bharatnatyam for ten years. (You can ask my kneecaps about it. . . . They’re still angry with me.) Bharatnatyam is its own kind of storytelling. Oftentimes the choreography of the dance draws on episodes from Hindu mythology. Bharatnatyam is frequently connected to Lord Shiva. One of Shiva’s other names is Nataraja, which means “the Lord of Dance” and symbolizes dance as both a creative and destructive force.

**Bhasmasura** (BAHS-mah-soo-rah) Once upon a time there was an asura who prayed long and hard to the god Shiva (Lord of Destruction, as you might recall). Shiva, pleased with the asura’s austerities, granted him a boon, and this dude, real casually, BTW, asked for this: “ANYONE WHOSE HEAD I TOUCH WITH MY HAND GETS BURNED TO ASHES.” I imagine their convo went like this:

*Shiva*: Why, though?

*Bhasmasura*: ☺

*Shiva*: No, seriously, why? That’s a horrible wish.

*Bhasmasura*: ☺

*Shiva*: I . . . ugh. Okay. Fine. You will regret this!

*\*shakes fist\**

*Bhasmasura*: ☺

Okay, so fast forward, and everyone hates Bhasmasura and is scared of him, so Lord Vishnu has a solution. He changes form to Mohini, the beautiful enchantress. Bhasmasura is like “OMG I love you,” and Mohini’s like “LOL, okay, let’s dance first, and see if you can match me move for move,” and Bhasmasura is super excited and does the thing. Well, joke’s on him, because when Mohini/Lord Vishnu puts her hand on her own head, Bhasmasura imitates her. BAM. Turned into ashes. Let it be known to all ye mortals: don’t underestimate what you might consider froufrou things, like dancing, because you might just end up a pile of ashes.

**Bollywood** India’s version of Hollywood. They produce tons of movies a year. You can always recognize a Bollywood movie, because somebody gets fake-slapped at least once, and every time a musical number starts, the setting changes *drastically*. (How did they start off dancing in the streets of India and end up in Switzerland by the end of the song?) One of Bollywood’s most enduring celebrities is Shah Rukh Khan. (Yours truly did *not* have the most giant crush on him and keep his picture in her locker. . . . You have *no* proof, go away.)

**Chaat** (CHAHT) Not to be mistaken for a quick phone call, chaat is a yummy savory snack found all over India. My grandmother makes it with fried pieces of gram flour smothered in spiced potatoes, chopped onions, pomegranate seeds, yogurt sauce, and OH MY GOD I’M HUNGRY!



**Chakora** (CHUH-kor-uh) A mythical bird that is said to live off moonbeams. Imagine a really pretty chicken that shuns corn kernels in favor of moondust, which, to be honest, sounds way yummier anyway.

**Chitrigupta** (CHIT-rih-GOOP-tuh) The god tasked with keeping records of each human's life. He's known for being very meticulous and is often credited with being the first person to start using letters. Before Chitrigupta arrived in the Underworld, the Dharma Raja (the god of the dead) kept getting overwhelmed with the number of people in his kingdom. Sometimes he'd get so confused, he'd send a good guy to hell and a bad dude to heaven. Whoops. That must've been awkward to explain. I wonder if they got freebies in the next life: *So sorry about that mix-up! Here! Enjoy a lifelong ten percent discount at any Pizza Hut of your choice.*

**Dada-ji** (DAH-dah-jee) *Grandfather* in Hindi.

**Danda** (DAH-nduh) A giant punishing rod that is often considered the symbol of the Dharma Raja, the god of the dead.

**Devas** (DEH-vahz) The Sanskrit term for the race of gods.

**Dharma** (DAR-mah) Oof. This one is a doozy. The simplest way to explain *dharma* is that it means *duty*. (Sorry, I keep imagining the dog, Do, interjecting here with a barking laugh and shouting, *Doo-tee, doo-tee!*) But it's not duty as in *this is your job*, but as in *this is the cosmically right way to live*.

**Dharma Raja** (DAR-mah RAH-jah) The Lord of Death and Justice, and the father of the oldest Pandava brother, Yudhistira. His mount is a water buffalo.

**Diya** (DEE-yuh) An oil lamp used in parts of South Asia, usually made of brass and placed in temples. Clay diyas are colorfully painted and used during Diwali, the Hindu Festival of Lights.

**Dosa** (DOE-sah) A savory crepe-like dish that is a large part of South Indian cuisine. My best friend's mom used to make them for us every day after school with fish tikka masala. They're delicious.

**Draupadi** (DROH-puh-dee) Princess Draupadi was the wife of the five Pandava brothers. Yup, you read that right—all five. See, once upon a time, her hand was offered in marriage to whoever could do this great archery feat, etc. . . . and Arjuna won because Arjuna. When he came home, he jokingly told his mom (who had her back to him and was praying), "I won something!" To which his mother said, "Share equally with your brothers." The rest must've been an awkward convo. Anyway, Draupadi was famously outspoken and independent, and she condemned those who wronged her family. In some places she is revered as a goddess in her own right. When the Pandavas eventually made their journey to heaven, Draupadi was the first to fall down and die in response (PS: She loved Arjuna more than her other husbands). Mythology is harsh.

**Drona** (DRONE-ah) The famous warrior teacher of the Pandavas. He promised to make Arjuna the best archer in the world and therefore shunned Ekalavya, the son of a tribal chieftain, who had the same ambition.

**Durvasa** (dur-VAH-suh) An ancient and powerful sage so infamous for his short temper that his name literally translates to *one who is difficult to live with*. Legend has it that the reason he is commanding and grumpy is because he was born out of Shiva's anger. Go figure. It was Durvasa who ended up cursing the gods to lose their immortality, all because of a flower wreath. Yup. Once, Durvasa was wandering the world in a (shocker) *ridiculously good mood*. He came across a beautiful nymph, saw her flower garland, and was like, "OMG that's adorable. Gimme." The nymph, probably aware of what happened when Durvasa *didn't* get his way, respectfully gave him her crown. While wearing the flower garland, Durvasa ran into Indra. He tossed the garland to the god, who caught it and placed it on the head of his cloud-spinning elephant. The elephant was like, "Ugh! My allergies!" and threw the wreath on the ground. Durvasa was like, "How *dare* you!" and placed a curse on Indra that, just like the flower garland, he and the rest of the devas would be cast down from their positions. And that, children, is why you should always ask an elephant permission before you put any flowers on its head.

**Ekalavya** (eh-KUH-lav-yah) A skilled warrior who trained himself in the art of archery after he was rejected by the leg-endar-y teacher Drona on account of his lower status. Drona's favorite student just so happened to be Arjuna. One day, Arjuna saw Ekalavya perform an incredible feat of archery and got distressed that someone was actually better than him (cue hair flip). This made Drona nervous, because he had prom-ised Arjuna that he would be the best archer who ever lived. Drona demanded to know who Ekalavya's teacher (guru) was. Ekalavya said, "You." As it turned out, the archer had made a symbolic statue of Drona and meditated on it to guide him in his self-teaching. When Ekalavya offered Drona *guru daksina*, an act of respect to teachers, Drona responded with "Give me your right thumb." At this point of the story, I just get angry. Why should Ekalavya be punished for achieving something on his own merits? GRUMP. But respect, especially to one's elders, is critical in many Hindu legends. And so Ekalavya cut off his thumb and was no longer better than Arjuna.

**Gali** (GAH-lee) *Air or wind* in Telugu.

**Gandhari** (GUN-dar-ree) The powerful queen of Hastinapura. When she married the sightless king, Dhritrashtra, she chose to wear a blindfold in order to share his blindness. Only *once* did she let her blindfold drop: to see Duryodhana, her eldest son (and an enemy of the Pandava brothers). Had he been naked at the time, her gaze would've made him invincible. But the dude was modest and left his underwear on, thereby remaining vulnerable. (Sounds a bit like the story of Achilles, doesn't it?)

**Gandharva** (gun-DAR-ruh-vuh) A semidivine race of heavenly beings known for their cosmic musical skills.

**Ganesh** (guh-NESH) The elephant-headed god worshipped as the remover of obstacles and the god of luck and new beginnings. His *vahana* (divine vehicle) is a mouse. There are lots of explanations given for why Ganesh has the head of an elephant. The story my grandmother told me is that his mother, Parvati, made him out of clay while her husband, Shiva (Lord of Destruction), was away. As Parvati is getting their home ready for Shiva's return, she tells Ganesh not to let anyone through the door. (Guests can be a nuisance.) So Ganesh, being a good kid, says "Okay!" When Shiva strides up to the door, shouting,

"Honeyyyy, I'm hooooome!" Ganesh and Shiva look at each other, frown, and at the same time say, "And just who do you think *you* are?" Keep in mind, this is the first time father and son are meeting. Angry that he's not being let into his own house, Shiva lops off Ganesh's head. Which I can only imagine was supremely awkward for the family. To avoid a big fight with Parvati, Shiva goes out and grabs an elephant's head, sticks it on his son's body, and *bam*, now it's fine.

**Ghee** (GHEE) Clarified butter, often used in Hindu rituals.

**Gulab jamun** (GOO-lab jah-MOON) A delicious dessert made with milk, dripping in warm syrup. Most commonly found in my belly.

**Gunghroo** (GOON-groo) Anklets made of small bells strung together, worn by Indian dancers.

**Guru daksina** (GOO-roo DUCK-shee-nah) An offering to one's spiritual guide or teacher.

**Halahala** (HAL-lah-HAL-lah) When the gods and the demons churned the Ocean of Milk to get the nectar of immortality, *lots* of other stuff came out of the ocean. Some things were really good! Like the seven-headed horse that Indra claimed as his vahana. One of the not so great things was halahala, the most vicious poison in the world. Shiva saved the lives of the gods and demons by drinking the poison when it spewed out of the ocean, which is why his throat is blue and why one of his names is Nilakantha, meaning *the one with the blue throat*.

**Halwa** (HUHL-wah) A catchall term for desserts. It literally means *sweet*.

**Hanuman** (HUH-noo-mahn) One of the main figures in the Indian epic the *Ramayana*, who was known for his devotion to the god-king Rama and Rama's wife, Sita. Hanuman is the son of Vayu, the god of the wind, and Anjana, an apsara. He had lots of mischievous exploits as a kid, including mistaking the sun for a mango and trying to eat it. There are still temples and shrines dedicated to Hanuman, and he's often worshipped by wrestlers because of his incredible strength. He's the half brother of Bhima, the second-oldest Pandava brother.

**Idli** (IHD-lee) A type of savory rice cake popular in South India.

**Indra** (IN-druh) The king of heaven, and the god of thunder and lightning. He is the father of Arjuna, the third-oldest Pandava brother. His main weapon is Vajra, a lightning bolt. He has two vahanas: Airavata, the white elephant who spins clouds, and Uchchaisravas, the seven-headed white horse. I've got a pretty good guess what his favorite color is. . . .

**Jaani** (JAH-nee) A term of endearment that means *life* or *sweetheart*.

**Jaya and Vijaya** (JAY-uh and vee-JAY-uh) The two gatekeepers of the abode of Vishnu. Think divine club bouncers. One time, they refused to let a group of powerful sages in to see Vishnu because they thought the sages looked like kids. Who knows what they said? Probably “Ha! Imma need to see some ID, infants.” And then they laughed. I bet they stopped laughing pretty quick when the sages cursed them to lose their divinity and be born as mortals on earth. (Sometimes I'm offended that this is the worst curse possible. “OH GOD, NOT A MERE MORTAL, A SLAVE TO INTERNET SUBSCRIPTION SERVICES AND SUBJECT TO TAXES! ALAS!”) The god Vishnu gave them a choice. Jaya and Vijaya could either take seven births on Earth as pious devotees of Vishnu, or they could take three births as his sworn enemies. They chose the shorter option. One of their reincarnations turned out to be as the most popular villain of them all: Ravana—the ten-headed demon king who kidnapped Vishnu's wife—and his brother. Makes you wonder about the real nature of villains, huh?

**Kalpavriksha** (kuhl-PUHV-rik-shaw) A divine wish-fulfilling tree. It is said to have roots of gold and silver, with boughs encased in costly jewels, and to reside in the paradise gardens of the god Indra. Sounds like a pretty useful thing to steal. Or protect. Just saying.

**Kamadeva** (KAH-mah-deh-vuh) Hindu god of human love or desire, often portrayed along with his wife, Rati. One time, the gods needed Kamadeva's help to get Shiva and Parvati back together after Parvati had been reborn on earth. The problem was that Shiva, devastated over her

loss, had been in deep meditation and pretty much refused to open his eyes to anything. Enter Kamadeva, armed to the teeth with the stuff of crushes: funny memes, spaghetti noodles for that iconic *Lady and the Tramp* moment, same Hogwarts houses, etc., etc. But Shiva was having *none* of it. Furious at being manipulated, he opened his third eye on poor Kamadeva, incinerating him on the spot. But don't worry, Shiva and Parvati got back together! And Kamadeva was eventually fine, but perhaps a little less eager to jump into the games of celestial match-making after that.

**Karma** (KAR-mah) A philosophy that your actions affect what happens to you next. Imagine there's one last piece of chocolate cake at a bakery. You've just bought it for your mom, but some dude steals it while you're putting your change into your pocket. As he runs out the door cackling “*Mwahaha, the chocolate is mine,*” he slips on a banana peel and the cake box soars out of his hand. It lands, *unharm*ed, on the floor by your feet. You would shake your head, say, “That's *karma!*” and take the cake. For a musical rendition of karma, listen to Justin Timberlake's “What Goes Around . . . Comes Around.”

**Kauravas** (KORE-aw-vuhz) The famous cousins of the Pandava brothers and, later, their sworn enemies.

**Khandava Forest** (KUHN-duh-vuh) An ancient forest, once home to many creatures (both good and bad), including Takshaka, a naga king. On the advice of Lord Krishna, the Pandavas burned the entire forest for Agni, the god of fire, to consume. One of the inhabitants they spared was Mayasura, the great demon king architect, who built them the beautiful Palace of Illusions on top of the ashes.

**Krishna** (KRISH-nah) A major Hindu deity. He is worshipped as the eighth reincarnation of the god Vishnu and also as a supreme ruler in his own right. He is the god of compassion, tenderness, and love, and is popular for his charmingly mischievous personality.

**Kurekshetra** (KOO-rook-SHET-rah) Kurekshetra is now known as a city in the state of Haryana, India. In the Hindu epic poem the *Mahabharata*, Kurekshetra is a region where the Mahabharata War was fought. It gets its name from King Kuru, the ancestor of both the Pandavas and their mortal enemies/cousins, the Kauravas.

**Lakshmi** (LUCK-shmee) The Hindu goddess of wealth and good fortune, and the consort (wife) of Vishnu, one of the three major Hindu deities. Her vahanas are an owl and an elephant, and she's often depicted in art as seated in an open lotus blossom.

**Lassi** (LUH-see) Lassi is a blend of yogurt, water, spices, and sometimes fruit. In my opinion, nothing beats a tall glass of mango lassi on the hottest day of summer.

**Laxmana** (LUCK-shman-ah) The younger brother of Rama and his aide in the Hindu epic the *Ramayana*. Sometimes he's considered a quarter of Lord Vishnu. Other times, he's considered the reincarnation of Shesha, the thousand-headed serpent and king of all nagas, devotee of Vishnu.

**Mahabharata** (MAH-hah-BAR-ah-tah) One of two Sanskrit epic poems of ancient India (the other being the *Ramayana*). It is an important source of information about the development of Hinduism between 400 BCE and 200 CE and tells the story of the struggle between two groups of cousins, the Kauravas and the Pandavas.

**Mahabharata War** The war fought between the Pandavas and the Kauravas over the throne of Hastinapura. Lots of ancient kingdoms were torn apart as they picked which side to support.

**Makara** (MA-kar-ah) A mythical creature that's usually depicted as half crocodile and half fish. Makara statues are often seen at temple entrances, because makaras are the guardians of thresholds. Ganga, the river goddess, uses a makara as her vahana.

**Masi** (MAH-see) *Aunt* in Gujarati, specifically a way of addressing one's maternal relation.

**Mayasura** (MAI-ah-SOO-rah) The demon king and architect who built the Pandavas' Palace of Illusions.

**Meenakshi** (mee-NAHk-shee) Another name for the goddess Parvati, but it also means *the one with fish-shaped eyes*. I assume it must be a very attractive fish, because imagine if they were talking about one of those deep-sea anglers with the light attached to its forehead. Nope.

**Mehndi** (MEN-dee) A form of temporary body art made from the powdered dry leaves of the henna plant. The designs are intricate and usually worn on the hands and feet during special occasions like Hindu weddings and festivals. It has a distinct smell when it dries, like licorice and chocolate. (I *love* the smell!)

**Naan** (NAHN) A leavened oven-baked flatbread. Sometimes people say *naan bread*, which is as redundant as saying "ATM machine."

**Naga (nagas, pl.)** (NAG-uh) A naga (male) or nagini (female) is one of a group of serpentine beings who are magical, and, depending on the region in India, considered divine. Among the most famous nagas is Vasuki, one of the king serpents who was used as a rope when the gods and asuras churned the Ocean of Milk to get the elixir of life. Another is Uloopi, a nagini princess who fell in love with Arjuna, married him, and used a magical gem to save his life.

**Pachadi** (puh-CHAH-dee) A traditional South Indian *raita*, or condiment, served as a side dish. Broadly translated, it refers to food that has been pounded.

**Pandava brothers (Arjuna, Yudhistira, Bhima, Nakula, and Sahadeva)** (PAN-dah-vah, ar-JOO-nah, yoo-diss-TEE-ruh, BEE-muh, nuh-KOO-luh, saw-hah-DAY-vuh) Demigod warrior princes, and the heroes of the epic *Mahabharata* poem. Arjuna, Yudhistira, and Bhima were born to Queen Kunti, the first wife of King Pandu. Nakula and Sahadeva were born to Queen Madri, the second wife of King Pandu.

**Parvati** (par-VAH-tee) The Hindu goddess of fertility, love, and devotion, as well as divine strength and power. Known by many other names, she is the gentle and nurturing aspect of the Hindu goddess Shakti and one of the central deities of the goddess-oriented Shakta sect. Her consort is Shiva, the god of cosmic destruction.

**Pranama** (PRAH-nuh-mah) A bow to touch the feet of a respected person, e.g., a teacher, grandparent, or other elder. It makes family reunions particularly treacherous, because your back ends up hurting from having to bend down so often.



**Rakshasa** (RUCK-shaw-sah) A rakshasa (male) or rakshasi (female) is a mythological being, like a demigods. Sometimes good and sometimes bad, they are powerful sorcerers, and can change shape to take on any form.

**Rama** (RAH-mah) The hero of the epic poem the *Ramayana*. He was the seventh incarnation of the god Vishnu.

**Ramayana** (RAH-mah-YAWN-uh) One of two great Sanskrit epic poems (the other being the *Mahabharata*), it describes how the god-king Rama, aided by his brother and the monkeyfaced demigod Hanuman, rescue Rama's wife, Sita, from the ten-headed demon king, Ravana.

**Rambha** (RAHM-bah) One of the most beautiful apsaras, often sent on assignment by Lord Indra to break the meditation of various sages and also test them against temptation. This is all well and good, except for that *one* time when Rambha (doing her job, mind you) disturbed a sage who then cursed her to become a rock for ten thousand years. TEN. THOUSAND. YEARS.

**Rati** (RAH-tee) The Hindu goddess of love and carnal desire and other stuff that Aru is too young to know about, so move along.

**Ratri** (RAH-tree) The goddess of the night. Her sister, Ushas, is the goddess of the dawn.

**Ravana** (RAH-vah-nah) A character in the Hindu epic the *Ramayana*, where he is depicted as the ten-headed demon king who stole Rama's wife, Sita. Ravana is described as having once been a follower of Shiva. He was also a great scholar, a capable ruler, a master of the *veena* (a musical instrument), and someone who wished to overpower the gods. He's one of my favorite antagonists, to be honest, because it just goes to show that the line between heroism and villainy can be a bit murky.

**Rishi** (REE-shee) A great sage, usually someone who has meditated intensely and attained supreme truth and knowledge.

**Ritus** (RIH-too-z) Seasons. There are typically six seasons in the Indian calendar: Spring (Vasanta), Summer (Grishma), Monsoon (Varsha), Autumn (Sharada), Pre-winter (Hemanta), and Winter (Shishira).

**Salwar kameez** (SAL-vahr kah-MEEZ) A traditional Indian outfit, basically translating to *pants and shirt*. (A little disappointing, I know.) A salwar kameez can be fancy or basic, depending on the occasion. Usually, the fancier the garment, the itchier it is to wear.

**Samosa** (SAM-oh-sah) A fried or baked pastry with a savory filling, such as spiced potatoes, onions, peas, or lentils. It's like a Hot Pocket, but 1000x better.

**Samsara** (SAHM-sahr-uh) The cycle of death and rebirth.

**Sanskrit** (SAHN-skrit) An ancient language of India. Many Hindu scriptures and epic poems are written in Sanskrit.

**Sari** (SAH-ree) A garment worn by women in South Asia that is created by a length of silk intricately draped and tied around the body. Attempting to put one on unassisted usually results in tears. And they are very difficult to dance in.

**Shakhuni** (SHAW-koo-nee) One of the antagonists of the *Mahabharata*. Shakhuni was the king of Subala, and the brother of the blind queen, Gandhari. He is best known for orchestrating the infamous game of dice between the Pandavas and the Kauravas that led to the Pandavas' twelve-year exile and, ultimately, the epic war.



**Shakuntula** (shah-KOON-tuh-luh) A famously beautiful woman and one of the many victims of Sage Durvasa's infamous curses. Once, Shakuntula fell in love with, and secretly married, a neighboring king. He went back home to tell his parents the good news, and promised to come back for her. Shakuntula, pining and lovesick, spent a lot of that time sighing and listening to Ed Sheeran, etc., etc., which means that she was too distracted to notice Sage Durvasa when he visited the ashram where she lived. Angry about going unnoticed, Sage Durvasa placed her under a curse that the person she was thinking of would immediately forget her. Yikes. Shakuntula was heartbroken, but Sage Durvasa softened the curse a bit, saying that if she showed her king the ring he'd given her, he would remember her. So Shakuntula set out to do that, but as she crossed a river, her ring fell in the water and was swallowed by a fish. Lo and behold, the king was all "new number who dis" when Shakuntula showed up. . . . It could've been downright tragic, but then a fisherman caught the fish, sliced it open, found the ring, and showed it to the king. Maybe the fisherman guy was expecting a great reward, but the king just jumped up and yelled, "OH CRAP! I TOTALLY FORGOT I HAD A WIFE!" and ran off to go apologize to Shakuntula and ride off into the sunset with her, etc., etc. I wonder if the fisherman ever got a thank-you gift. I doubt it.

**Sherwani** (share-VAH-nee) A knee-length coat worn by men in South Asia.

**Shiva** (SHEE-vuh) One of the three main gods in the Hindu pantheon, often associated with destruction. He is also known as the Lord of Cosmic Dance. His consort is Parvati.

**Sita** (SEE-tuh) The consort of the god Rama, and a reincarnation of the goddess of wealth and fortune, Lakshmi. Her abduction by the demon king Ravana and subsequent rescue are the central incidents in the *Ramayana*.

**Soma** (SO-muh) The drink of the gods.

**Surpanakha** (SOOR-pah-nah-kuh) The sister of Ravana, the demon king in the *Ramayana*. Surpanakha was once taken with the beauty of the god king Rama and

his younger brother, Laxmana. Rama explained that he had a wife already and wasn't interested in another, so Surpanakha asked Laxmana, who also rejected her, but not nearly as kindly. Things went downhill from there, with Surpanakha not only getting humiliated, but also getting her nose cut off after trying to attack Sita, the god king's wife. Not a great day, all in all. After that happened, she ran to her brother and sought vengeance, but once Ravana heard how beautiful Sita was, he had other plans.

**Takshaka** (TAHk-shah-kah) A naga king and former friend of Indra who once lived in the Khandava Forest before Arjuna helped burn it down, killing most of Takshaka's family. He has sworn vengeance on all the Pandavas ever since. Wonder why. . .

**Uchchaisravas** (OOCH-chai-SHRAH-vahs) A sevenheaded flying horse created during the churning of the milk ocean, the king of horses, a vahana of Indra. Forget dragons, I want one of these.

**Uloopi** (OOH-loo-pee) A nagini princess who was the second of Arjuna's four wives. A practitioner of magic, Uloopi was responsible for saving Arjuna's life on the battlefield after he was killed by his own son (though he didn't know it at the time).

**Urvashi** (OOR-vah-shee) A famous apsara, considered the most beautiful of all the apsaras. Her name literally means *she who can control the hearts of others*. Girl also had a *temper*. In the *Mahabharata*, when Arjuna was chilling in heaven with his dad, Indra, Urvashi made it known that she thought he was pretty cute. But Arjuna wasn't having it. Instead, he respectfully called her *Mother*, because Urvashi had once been the wife of King Pururavas, an ancestor of the Pandavas. Scorned, Urvashi cursed him to lose his manhood for a year. (Rude!) In that year, Arjuna posed as a eunuch, took the name Brihannala, and taught song and dance to the princess of the kingdom of Virata.

**Ushas** (OOH-shahs) A Vedic (ancient Hindu) goddess of the dawn, who pulled the sun into the sky with the help of her bright red cows. They must have been very strong cows. Her sister is Ratri, goddess of the night.

**Valmiki** (VAHL-mee-kee) The sage revered as the writer of the *Ramayana*. He earned the name Valmiki (“born of an anthill”) after performing severe religious penances for several years. During that time, large anthills formed near him. Not sure why. Building a nest around a human dude does not seem like a sound housing decision. Maybe they thought he was a boulder. Must’ve been quite a shock when Valmiki finally opened his eyes and stood up. (“Boulder, how could you? Betrayal!”)

**Varuna** (VAH-roo-nuh) The god of the ocean and seas.

**Varuni** (VAH-roo-nee) The goddess of transcendent wisdom and wine. She is the consort of Lord Varuna.

**Vasuki** (VAH-soo-key) A naga king who played a major role in the churning of the Ocean of Milk when the gods and asuras needed help. He basically got wrapped around a mountain and was used as a churning rope. It’s a good thing he wasn’t ticklish. After the Ocean was churned, Lord Shiva blessed him and he is often depicted coiled around the god’s neck.

**Vayu** (VAH-yoo) The god of the wind and the father of Bhima, the second-oldest Pandava brother. Vayu is also the father of Hanuman, the monkey-faced demigod. His mount is a gazelle.

**Vishnu** (VISH-noo) The second god in the Hindu triumvirate (also known as the Trimurti). These three gods are responsible for the creation, upkeep, and destruction of the world. The other two gods are Brahma and Shiva. Brahma is the creator of the universe and Shiva is the destroyer. Vishnu is worshipped as the preserver. He has taken many forms on earth in various avatars, most notably as Krishna, Mohini, and Rama.

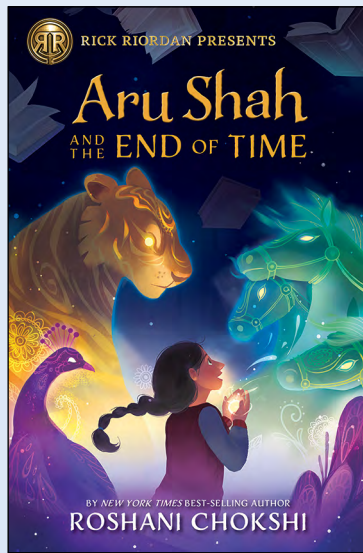
**Yaksha** (YAK-sha) A yaksha (male) or yakshini (female) is a supernatural being from Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain mythology. Yakshas are attendees of Kubera, the Hindu god of wealth, who rules in the mythical Himalayan kingdom of Alaka.

If you made it to the end of this glossary, you deserve a high five. Sadly, I’m a little wary of those. (As Mini would say, “Germs! PLAGUE!”) How about an elbow-bump instead? Ready? Three . . . two . . . one . . .



This guide was created by Dr. Rose Brock, an assistant professor at Sam Houston State University.  
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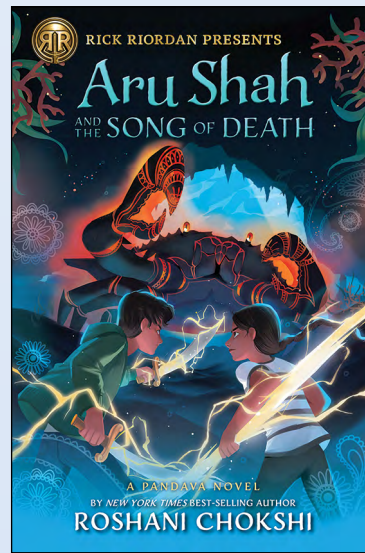
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