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Glossary of Terms

Aarti - also spelled *arti*, *arati*, *arathi*, *aarathi* is a Hindu religious ritual of worship, a part of puja, in which light from wicks soaked in ghee (purified butter) or camphor is offered to one or more deities. *Aartis* also refer to the songs sung in praise of the deity, when lamps are being offered.

Akal Takht - is one of five takhts (seats of power) of the Sikh religion. It is located in the Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple) complex in Amritsar, Punjab.

Antargriha – the inner sanctum (inner most) of a series of pilgrimage routes; in case of a temple the inner most part is called as Garbhagriha (innermost sanctum).

Ashram - religious retreat or hermitage/ monastery or seminary, it can also be a place of community living where people learn and practice yoga or classical music or dance.

Bhajan - religious songs and prayers.

Bhakta - a religious devotee, worshipper.

Bhakti - devotional worship.

Bhagvan / Bhagwan - God.

Brahma - the God who created the universe, and is one of the three main Gods in Hindu pantheon, commonly represented with four head, sitting on the lotus plate, and ride on divine swan, and had progeny from the navel of Lord Vishnu.

Brahman – (1) the Supreme spirit, the Absolute reality of the universe; also refers to attached Upa-Vedas and specific segment of Vedic hymns describing rituals and yajnas and associated mythologies. (2) may also refer to the priest, please refer to *Brahmin*.

Brahmin (also termed Brahman) – is the highest ranking of the four social classes in Hindu Varna system in India. The Brahmins are the priests, and are considered to be only class capable of performing certain vital religious tasks. The study and recitation of the sacred scriptures was traditionally reserved for this spiritual elite, and for centuries all Indian scholarship was mostly in their hands.

Brahminical tradition – the religious and ritual traditions as ordained in the *Dharmashastras* (books of Vedic and post-Vedic, viz. *Smritis*, numbering twenty) describing code of behaviour, hierarchy of human beings, details of rituals, life philosophy, etc.

Brahminism – (1) an ideology that believes in maintaining the caste order and the privileged status of the Brahmins. (2) the sectarian philosophy and lifeways, beliefs and practices as described in the Brahminical tradition derived from the Vedic and Post-Vedic tradition.

Chamar - (literally 'leather-worker') is one of the untouchable communities, or Dalits, who are now classified as a Scheduled Caste under modern India's system of positive discrimination. As 'untouchables', they were traditionally considered outside the Hindu ritual ranking system of castes known as varna.

Char Dham - (literally: 'the four abodes/seats') refers to four pilgrimage sites in India that are widely revered by Hindus. It comprises Badrinath, Dwarka, Puri and Rameswaram. It is considered highly sacred by Hindus to visit Char Dham during one's lifetime.

Crore - a unit in the Indian numbering system, equal to ten million (10,000,000).

Dalit - once classified as 'untouchables', *Dalit* were traditionally considered outside the Hindu ritual ranking system of castes known as varna. Untouchability has been abolished according to Art 17 of the Indian Constitution, therefore this group should now be considered as 'ex-untouchable'.

Dargah - a shrine built over the grave of a revered religious figure, often a Sufi saint.

Darshan - an opportunity or occasion of seeing the image or statue of a deity or a holy person or a river like the Ganga or a mountain such Girnar.

Dera - literally meaning camp, Deras have a special place in Sikhism. These are religious retreats headed by a particular preacher.

Dharma - the principle of cosmic order, good karma.

Durga Puja - an annual Hindu festival in South Asia that celebrates worship of the Hindu goddess Durga.

Ghat - embankment, stairway to the water site.

Giriraj/Govardhan - a mount in Braj, seen as a manifestation of Krishna himself and related to episodes in the deities' life; location of Shrinathji's temple in Braj.

Gosain / Goswami - an honorific title given to spiritual leaders in Vaishnava communities. It is also a religious title applied to the dynastic heads of the various *sampradayas* (sects).

Guru - teacher, guide.

Gwalin / gopi - milk maids/cow girls, female members of a cow herding group to which Krishna belonged and who lived around pastoral Vrindavan.

Haj / Hajj - the annual pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia; it is also a religious duty of all devout Muslims. The pilgrimage usually occurs from the 8th to 12th or 13th of Dhu al-Hijjah, the last month of the Islamic calendar. Pilgrims wear two white sheets of seamless cloth.

Haridwar (also spelled Hardwar) - is a holy city to Hindus and one of the four sites of *Kumbh Mela*.

Harijan - Mahatma Gandhi adopted the word Harijan, translated roughly as 'Children of God' to identify 'Untouchables'. However, this term came to be considered derogatory.

Jati - caste.

Karma - action, work or deed.

Kayasth - a caste.

Khatri - a caste.

Kirtan - religious songs and prayers.

Kroscha - a liner measurement of land, roughly 1 kroscha refers to a distance of 2.2 miles or 3.52 km.

Kumbh Mela - an ancient tradition of mass Hindu pilgrimage in which Hindus gather to bathe in a sacred river. Traditionally, four fairs are widely recognized as the Kumbh Melas: the Haridwar Kumbh Mela, the Allahabad Kumbh Mela, the Nashik-Trimbakeshwar Simhastha and the Ujjain Simhastha.

Kurukshetra - this town (about 170 km from New Delhi) in the northern state of Haryana is the site of the mythical epic battle of the Mahabharata and the place where Lord Krishna is believed to have given his message of Gita, a holy text of the Hindus.

Lakh - a unit in the Indian numbering system equal to one hundred thousand (100,000).

Lakshmi - Hindu goddess of wealth, fortune, and prosperity (both material and spiritual). She is the wife of Lord Vishnu, one of the three main deities of Hinduism.

Lingam - the cylindrical phallic symbol of Lord Shiva. The god is mostly worshipped in this form. The lingam is a symbol of generative power that is without a beginning and with no end. The lingam rests on a disc-shaped yoni that represents Shakti or creative power.

Makar Sankranti - Hindu festival celebrated in almost all parts of India, mostly falls on the 14th January, but exceptionally on 15th January like the one in 2050. The festival is based on astronomical events marking the beginning of the *Makara rashi* (Capricorn) period under the sidereal zodiac.

Malamas/ Madhumas/ Purushottam Mas - an intercalary month of lunar calendar, when every third year 28/or 29 days added (an extra month) to make it corresponds with Solar calendar. In this month the Panchakroschi Yatra at Varanasi and Rajgir are performed. This is considered an inauspicious month for other festivals and rituals.

Maulana - Muslim religious scholar.

Nag - snake.

Nirvana - liberation from the cycle of birth and rebirth as conceived in Buddhist thought.

Paap / Pap - sin.

Padyatra - a journey by foot in its literal translation, but meaning a journey undertaken by a politician and/or prominent citizen to interact more closely with different parts of society, educate about issues concerning them, and galvanize his or her supporters. *Pada Yatras* or 'Foot pilgrimages' are also Hindu religious pilgrimages undertaken towards sacred shrines or pilgrimage sites.

Pilgrimage mandala – a series of pilgrimages routes moving systematically clock-wise and meet at the same point from where starts, and links shrines and sacred sites described in the mythologies consisting of the rules of rituals and the ways of worshiping the deities there. This system together with spatial manifestation forms pilgrimage mandala.

Prasada / Prasada - food that is a religious offering to God in both Hinduism and Sikhism. It is normally consumed by worshippers after worship.

Puja - the act of worship.

Puja Pandal - a temporary structure set up to venerate the god Ganesha during Ganesh Chaturthi or the goddess Durga during Durga Puja, known as puja pandal.

Punda / Panda (Pundah / Pandas) - temple priest / priest at a sacred site.

Punya - saintly, virtue, holy, sacred, pure, good, meritorious, virtuous, righteous, just.

Purana - a class of texts narrating the ancient histories of the sectarian Hindu traditions, the source of much of the mythology of Hindu deities.

Rathayatra - literally, the journey (yatra) of a chariot (rath), this is the biggest annual festival of the Jagannath Temple at Puri in India. In this festival (taking place every year around July-August), the temple's deities - Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra - are taken out in a procession on three chariots. The festival attracts lakhs of pilgrims from across India.

Sampradaya - an established sect in the Indian bhakti tradition.

Samsara - theory of rebirth and the cyclicity of all life, matter, existence, a fundamental assumption of all Indian religions.

Sevak - servant with respect to a temple functionary and devotee/followers.

Shiva - one of the three major deities of the Hindu pantheon also called the Supreme Lord, Maheshvara.

Spatial manifestation – re-establishing the original sacred site at different place, but through glorification giving an upward position equally to the original one; most of the ancient sacred Hindu places have several such examples.

Suba - term for State or Province as referred to in Mughal and British India.

Tirth - pilgrimage place.

Tirth Yatra - pilgrimage.

Tula Dan - a weighing ceremony against precious items for the purpose of charity.

Varna - ancient Hindu literature classified all humankind in four strata of society: 1) the *Brahmins*: priests, scholars and teachers 2) the *Kshatriyas*: rulers, warriors and administrators 3) the *Vaishyas*: cattle herders, agriculturists, artisans and merchants 4) the *Shudras*: laborers and service providers.

Veda - the *Vedas* are amongst the oldest sacred texts in Hinduism.

Vishnu - one of the three major deities of the Hindu pantheon.

VS - Vikram Samvat is a luni-solar calendar based on ancient Hindu tradition, it is 57 years ahead of the solar Gregorian calendar. Every third year a leap month is added to keep symmetry with the solar calendar; therefore it completely differs from the Islamic Hijri calendar.

Yatra - journey, a procession or pilgrimage, especially one with a religious purpose.

Yoga - is a physical, mental, and spiritual practice or discipline which originated in ancient India.