

Hinduism Glossary

Preferred Form	Main Variant	Explanation
Ahimsa	Ahimsa	<i>Not killing.</i> Non-violence, respect for life.
Arti	Arti	Welcoming ceremony in which auspicious articles such as incense and lamps are offered to the deity or to saintly people.
Ashram	Asram	A place set up for spiritual development
Atman	Atma	<i>Self.</i> The real self, the soul.
Aum	Om	The sacred symbol and sound representing the ultimate. The most sacred of Hindu words.
Avatar		<i>One who descends.</i> Refers to the descent of a deity, most commonly Vishnu. Sometimes it is translated as incarnation which, although inaccurate, may be the best English word available.
Bhagavad Gita		<i>The Song of the Lord.</i> Spoken by Krishna, this is the most important scripture for most Hindus. Tradition dates it back to 3,000 years BCE, though most scholars attribute it to the first millennium BCE.
Bhajan	Bhajana	Devotional hymn or song.
Bhakti		<i>Devotion or love.</i> Devotional form of Hinduism.
Bhakti-yoga		The path of loving devotion, aimed at developing pure love of God.

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<p>Brahma</p> <p>Brahaman</p> <p>Brahmin</p>		<p>A Hindu deity, considered one of the Trimurti, and in charge of creative power. Not to be confused with Brahman or Brahmin.</p> <p>The ultimate reality, or the all-pervading reality. That from which everything emanates, in which it rests and into which it is ultimately dissolved.</p> <p>The first of the four varnas. The principal social groupings from which priests are drawn. Some writers rather confusingly, use the spelling 'brahman' and the meaning only becomes clear in the context of a few sentences.</p>
<p>Dharma</p> <p>Diwali</p> <p>Durga</p>	<p>Diwali</p> <p>Dipavali</p> <p>Deepavali</p>	<p><i>Religion or religious</i> duty is the usual translation into English, but literally it means the intrinsic quality of the self or that which sustains one's existence.</p> <p>Festival of lights at the end of one year the beginning of the new year, according to one Hindu calendar.</p> <p>Female deity. A form of the goddess Parvati, wife of Shiva.</p>
<p>Ganesha</p> <p>Ganga</p> <p>Guru</p>	<p>Ganesh</p>	<p>A Hindu deity portrayed with an elephant's head – a sign of strength. The deity who removes obstacles.</p> <p><i>The Ganges.</i> Most famous of all sacred rivers of India.</p> <p>Spiritual teacher, preceptor or enlightener.</p>

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Hanuman		The monkey warrior who faithfully served Rama and Sita. Also called Pavansuta (son of the wind).
Havan		The fire ritual which forms the basis of many Hindu rituals used at weddings and other ceremonial occasions. The ceremony or act of worship in which offerings of ghee and grains are made into fire.
Holi		The festival of colours, celebrated in Spring.
Janeu	Jenoi	Sacred thread worn by hindus who study under a guru.
Janmashtami	Janmashtmi	The birthday of Krishna, celebrated on the eighth day of the waning moon in the month of Badra.
Jati		Caste is the usual translation, meaning occupational kinship group.
Jnana-yoga	Gyan-yoga	The path of knowledge, that aims at liberation.
Kali	Kaali	Name given to that power of God which delivers justice – often represented by the Goddess Kali (a form of Durga).
Karma		<i>Action.</i> Refers to the law of cause and effect.
Karma-yoga		The path of self-realisation through dedicating the fruit of one's work to God.
Kirtan		<i>Songs of praise.</i> Corporate devotional singing usually accompanied by musical instruments.

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<p>Krishna</p> <p>Kshatriya</p>		<p>One of the most popular of all Hindu deities in contemporary Britain. Usually considered to be an avatar of Vishnu. His teachings are found in the Bhagavad Gita.</p> <p>Second of the four varnas of traditional Hindu society. The ruling warrior class.</p>
Lakshmi		The goddess of fortune.
<p>Mahabharata</p> <p>Mala</p> <p>Mandir</p> <p>Mantra</p> <p>Maya</p> <p>Moksha</p> <p>Murti</p>	<p>Moksa</p>	<p>The Hindu epic scripture that relates the story of the five Pandava princes. It includes the Bhagavad Gita.</p> <p>Circle of stringed beads of wood or wool used in meditation.</p> <p><i>Temple.</i> The building in which Hindus worship.</p> <p><i>That which delivers the mind.</i> Refers to a short sacred text or prayer, often recited repetitiously.</p> <p><i>Not this.</i> Usually, it refers to illusion, particularly where the permanent soul identifies itself with temporary matter, eg the body, etc. It can also mean power.</p> <p>Ultimate liberation from the process of transmigration, the continuous cycle of birth and death.</p> <p><i>Form.</i> The image of deity used as a focus of worship. 'Idol' should definitely not be used, and 'statue' may also cause offence.</p>

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Navaratri	Navaratra	The Nine Nights Festival preceding Dassehra and held in honour of the goddess Durga.
Parvati		The consort of Shiva, also known by other names such as Durga, Devi, etc
Prahlada	Prahalada	A great devotee of Vishnu, connected with the festival of Holi.
Pravachan	Pravacham	A lecture of talk, usually based on the scriptures.
Prashad		Sacred or sanctified food.
Puja	Pooja	<i>Worship.</i> General term referring to a variety of practices in the home or mandir.
Purana		<i>Ancient.</i> Part of the Smriti scripture. Contains many of the well-known stories of Hinduism.
Raja Yoga	Raj Yoga	Path of self-control and meditation to realise God.
Rakhi	Raakhi	A bracelet, usually made out of silk or cotton, tied to give protection and to strengthen the bond of mutual love.
Raksha Bandhan		The festival when women tie a decorative bracelet on their brothers' wrists.
Rama		The incarnation of the Lord, and hero of the Ramayana (avoid using the variant 'Ram').
Ramayana	Ramayan	The Hindu epic scripture that relates the story of Rama and Sita, composed by the sage Valmiki thousands of years ago.

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Ravana		The ten-headed demon king featured in the Ramayana epic, defeated by Rama.
Rig Veda		The first scripture of Hinduism, containing spiritual and scientific knowledge.
Sadhu	Saddhu	Holy man, ascetic.
Samsara	Sansara	The world – the place where transmigration, the soul's passage through a series of lives in different species occurs.
Sannyasa		The state of renunciation, the fourth stage of life.
Sarvodaya		Community based projects.
Sannyasin	Samyasin	One who has given up worldly affairs and attachments and has entered the fourth stage of life, often as a mendicant.
Sanskrit		Sacred language of the Hindu scriptures.
Seva	Sewa	Service, either to the divine or to humanity.
Shakti	Sakti	Energy or power, especially of a Hindu feminine deity.
Shiva	Siva	<i>Kindly or auspicious.</i> A Hindu god.
Shivaratri	Sivaratri	The annual festival celebrated in February or March in honour of Shiva. Also called Mahashivaratri.
Shruti	Srti	<i>That which is remembered.</i> Applicable to Hindu scriptures other than the Vedas.

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Sita Smriti Swami	Seeta Svami	<p>The divine consort of Rama.</p> <p><i>That which is heard.</i> A term specifically applied to the four Vedas, including the Upanishads. Some Hindus believe that Smriti is subservient to Shruti, but others Hindus consider them to have equal importance.</p> <p><i>Controller.</i> Sometimes more specifically, Goswami, one who can control their senses. An honorific title applied to a religious teacher or holy person, particularly the sannyasi.</p>
Trimurti		<p><i>The three deities.</i> Refers to Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, who personify and control all matter. They represent and control the three functions of creation, preservation and destruction. 'Trinity' should be avoided.</p>
Upanayana		<p>Ceremony when the sacred thread is tied to mark the start of learning with a guru.</p>
Vaishya Varanasi	Vaisya Benares Banares Kashi	<p>The third of the four varnas of Hindu society composed of merchants and farmers.</p> <p>City on the river Ganges, sacred to Shiva. It is one of the holiest pilgrimage sites and also an ancient centre of learning.</p>

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Varna		<i>Colour.</i> The four principal divisions of Hindu society. The word caste refers to sub-divisions within each varna and not to varnas themselves.
Veda		<i>Knowledge.</i> Specifically refers to the four Vedas, through any teaching which is consistent with the conclusions of these scriptures is also accepted as Vedic.
Vishnu	Visnu	A Hindu god. With Brahma and Shiva forms the Trimurti.
Vrindavan	Brindavan	The sacred village connected with Krishna's pastimes as a youth.
Yamuna	Jamuna	Tributary of the river Ganges, considered by many Hindus to be the most sacred of all holy rivers.
Yatra	Jatra	<i>Pilgrimage.</i> Usually to important sacred places in India.
Yoga		Communion, union of the soul with the Supreme, or a process which promotes that relationship. The English word 'yoke' is derived from yoga.