

Glossary

acharya teacher

adhyaksha superintendent/government official of importance

adivasi the indigenous inhabitant – now used sometimes for the Scheduled Tribes (ST) of India

agnikula ruling families claiming ancestry from a hero who sprang out of a sacrificial fire

agrahara donation of land or village to brahmans, usually by royalty

ahimsa non-violence

Ajivika a heterodox sect of the time of the Buddha

Alvar Vaishnava poets and composers of hymns belonging to the Tamil devotional movement

amatya designation of a high official

anuloma literally, in the direction of the body hair, therefore observing the caste hierarchy even in marriages across castes

apsara celestial woman/nymph

aranya forest/wilderness

artha livelihood/economy

aryavarta the land inhabited by *aryas*

ashrama hermitage/refuge; also used with reference to the four stages or *ashramas* of the human life-cycle – *brahmacharin*/studentship, *grihastha*/householdership, *vanaprastha*/initiating renunciation, *samnyasa*/asceticism

ashtakula-adhikarana administrative body

shvamedha sacrifice performed by those desirous of being accorded royal status, and by kings

atman soul

ayukta official designation

banjaras generally cattle pastoralists who were also carriers of goods exchanged in trade

banya member of a trading community

Bhagavata associated with the worship of Vishnu

bhakti devotion, a characteristic feature of what modern historians have called the Bhakti movement, focusing on devotion to a deity

bhogta one who enjoys: used by extension for those who enjoyed revenue rights over certain lands

bhukti administrative unit

bodhisattva one who works for the welfare of the world and voluntarily postpones release from rebirth; also refers sometimes to an incarnation of the Buddha prior to his own birth in the world

brahmacharin celibate studentship, the first of the four stages of the ideal life-cycle
brahmadeya village or land donated to a brahman, who received the revenue that came from it

brahma-kshatra the claim to an ancestry associated with both brahman and *kshatriya*
brahman the first in rank among the four *varnas* of Hindu society, frequently translated as caste, but in some contexts should more correctly be translated as ritual status; the brahman was primarily a ritual specialist and also provided the structures for formal education in Sanskrit

Brahmanas Vedic exegetical texts for rituals

brahmi the earliest deciphered script of India and dating to historical times

chaitya a sacred enclosure – later took the form of a hall and became an essential focus of Buddhist worship together with the *stupa*

chakravartin/chakravartigal/chakkavatti universal monarch

chandala a group from among the outcast section of society, gradually regarded as untouchable

Chandravamsha the lunar lineage, indicative of royal status

chetti/chettiyar merchants

daivaputra literally, the son of a deity; a royal title

dakshina sacrificial fee; the southern direction

dana donation/votive offering

danda force/coercion/punishment

dasa initially ‘the Other’ of the *arya* – later a slave or servant

desha territory or an administrative unit; a region

devadana usually land or revenue donated to a temple

devadasi female slave of the gods, used with reference to women dedicated to the temple

devanagari the later, evolved form of the *brahmi* script, also used for some modern Indian languages

Dhamma/dharma piety, morality, ethics, virtue/the social and religious order

Dharma-shastra texts attempting to codify the social and ritual duties, and obligations of the members of the four *varnas* and the relationship between them

Digambara literally, ‘sky-clad’, one of the two main Jaina schools

digvijayin the conqueror of the four quarters

dinara a coin based on the Roman *denarius*

doab the land between two rivers

dronavapa a measure of grain

dvija literally, the twice-born, refers to either the highest *varna* or the three upper *varnas* of Hindu caste society, where the first birth is the physical birth and the second is the initiation into *varna* status

eripatti land from which the revenue was used to maintain irrigation tanks

gahapati a landowner

gana-rajya oligarchy/chiefdom

garbha-griha literally, the womb-house, the sanctum sanctorum of the Hindu temple

gavunda categories of landowners; could be a member of a local administrative committee

ghatika an educational centre often attached to a temple

ghi clarified butter

grama village

guru teacher or guide

heggade a term used in the peninsula for a landowner

Hinayana The Lesser Vehicle, a major school of Buddhism

itihasa-purana sections of texts claiming to refer to events of the past

jana people, subjects, tribe, clan

janapada literally, where the clan or tribe places its foot; the territory initially occupied by a clan and which could evolve into a state

jati caste; a social segment identified by membership through birth, marriage circles, occupation, custom and location

jyestha elder, as in the guild-like organization of the *shreni*

kahapana/karshapana/pana widely used coin series, often silver

kakini copper coins

Kalamukha a Shaiva sect

kaliyuga the fourth and final age of the great cycle of time, the *mahayuga*

kalpa a frame of time-reckoning

kama desire

Kapalika a Shaiva sect

karma action or deed, and also used in the theory of future births being conditioned by the deeds of the present life

kassaka a cultivator, not as well-off as the *gahapati*

kayastha a caste, chiefly of scribes

kharoshthi a script used in north-west India and derived from the Aramaic script

kshatrapa associated with the administrative title of satrap, and used specifically for some rulers of western India

kshatriya the second in rank among the four *varnas*; included a warrior aristocracy, landowners and royalty

kshetra field

kula family

kuladevi clan goddess

kulyavapa a winnowing basket

kumaramatya a title of honour, often used for a prince

kutumbi householder

lingam the phallic symbol, associated with the worship of Shiva

mahadanas great gifts/donations

maharajadhiraja great king of kings

mahasamanta ruler or governor but subordinate to an overlord

mahasammata ‘the great elect’, the person elected to rule and signifying the origin of government in Buddhist theory

mahasenapati commander-in-chief of the army

mahattara head of the village

Mahayana the Great Vehicle, a major school of Buddhism

mana a large unit of weight

mandala a cosmogram, projecting the universe in a geometric pattern, often concentric with indications of cardinal points and sometimes square; also refers to a theory of interstate relations where the king desirous of victory is at the centre and the pattern lays out potential allies and enemies.

mandalam an administrative unit

manigramam a formal association or guild of merchants

mantra sounds, words, verses associated with magical and religious connotations

marga the path/mainstream

matha a hospice or a monastery attached to a temple and often a centre of education

matsyanyaya a political theory where a parallel is drawn between a condition of drought when tanks dry up with the big fish eating the small fish, and a condition of political anarchy when the strong devour the weak

maya illusion

mlechchha outside the pale of caste society/impure

moksha liberation from rebirth

nadu a territorial unit in south India

nagarashresthin the chief merchant of the city

nataka dance, mime, drama

Nayanars Shaiva poets of Tamil devotionalism

nigama a market or a ward of a city

nirvana release from the cycle of rebirth

nishka a unit of value, later used for a coin

paan betel-leaf

Pali an Indo-Aryan language in which the Buddhist Canon of the Theravada sect was recorded

palli a hamlet, sometimes also a small market centre

panchakula administrative body

panchayat an administrative body, said to be a council of five

Pashupata a Shaiva sect

pipal *figus religiosa* tree

pradesha an administrative unit

pratiloma literally, against the direction of the body hair, therefore against the hierarchy of castes in relation to marriage

purohita priest and mentor, especially in families of status

rajadhiraja royal title

rajasuya sacrifice performed to enhance royal or chiefly status

rajuka official designation

ranaka rank or status given to a landed intermediary

rasa a mood or an emotion evoked in creative literature, music and dance

rashtra country/administrative unit

sabha an assembly, usually small and of special persons

samanta initially a term used for a neighbour; later it referred to a landed intermediary subordinate to the king

samiti an assembly

samnyasi ascetic

samsara used most commonly to refer to the cycle of transmigration

sangha frequently used to indicate the organizational Order in the Shramanic religions and more commonly in Buddhism

sankirna jati mixed caste

sarthavaha caravaneer

sati a virtuous woman; one who has immolated herself on the funeral pyre of her husband

setthi merchant

shakti power

Shangam assembly; more specifically the earliest literary corpus of Tamil poems

shastra texts on various subjects viewed as authoritative

shatamana coin

shikhara tower surmounting the sanctum of the temple

shraddha worship of the ancestors at a particular time of the year

shreni formal association of members of a profession; a guild

shudra the fourth and lowest *varna*

shunya the zero

Shvetambara literally, clad in white, one of the major Jaina schools

soma the plant from which the juice was prepared and drunk in a ritual context during some Vedic sacrifices, and thought to be a hallucinogen

stri-dhana the wealth of a woman given specifically to her for her own use

stupa tumulus-like structure containing relics of the Buddha or others and worshipped by Buddhists

Suryavamsha solar lineage

suvarna literally, of good colour and another name for gold

svyamavara the ceremony at which a princess chose her husband from among an assembly of suitors

thakkura the rank or status of a landed intermediary

Theravada an early Buddhist sect

tirtha literally a ford, more frequently a place of pilgrimage

tirthankara literally, a ford-maker; the teachers of Jainism

ur village assembly in south India

vaishya the third status in the *varna* hierarchy concerned theoretically with raising livestock, cultivation and trade

valanadu administrative unit in south India

vana forest

varna literally, colour; used for the four castes often as ritual statuses; the reference was not to skin pigmentation since in one text the four colours listed are white, yellow, red and black

varna-ashrama-dharma upholding a society organized on the basis of *varna* and the social and sacred duties that this entailed

velala peasants or landowners of various categories

vihara Buddhist monastery

vina lyre

vishaya an administrative unit

vishti forced labour or labour in lieu of a tax, often compared to the corvée

vratya initially referring to those who were thought not to conform to orthodoxy, it came to mean degenerate forms in various categories

yaksha a demi-god

yoni female organs of generation

yuga a period of time

ziarat a place of pilgrimage