

GLOSSÁRIO ♦

Adam masculine proper noun; the first man created by God in the Hebrew Bible. In Islam, Adam is considered the first prophet of God.

Asura name of the group of beings who opposed the Vedic gods (*Devas*), the victory of the later over the former being celebrated as an event that established order and made possible human life; *assura* is often translated as demon. Mahisa Asura, the Buffalo Demon, was battled by Durga.

Balaram(a) the elder brother of Krishna who shared some of his adventures and is regarded as an incarnation of the cosmic snake Shesa or a partial incarnation of Vishnu. In some parts of India he replaces the Buddha in the icons of the ten major incarnations (*avatara*) of Vishnu.

banyan fig tree, considered sacred by Hindus; it represents eternal life because of its seemingly ever-expanding branches.

Barari a snake of Manasa, her vehicle

betel a nut and a leave which when dry is used to make *bidis*, leaf cigarettes; when fresh it is used to make *pan*, a digestive blend of spices.

Bhabani or Bhavani, one of the name's of the wife of Shiva; the name often used for the the *Devi*, the Goddess in *shakta* cults.

Bhagaban, or Bhagavan, the Lord, and the blessed one, a title reserved for Krishna in historical Hinduism and later used for other deities and for the Buddha.

♦ Local terms that don't have a pan-Indian meaning were not included.

Bhagabati devotee to Bhagavan.

Bijoya the immersion festival of the Goddess Durga, the last day of Durgapuja. In some parts of India, *Bijoya Dasami* is the day of burning effigies of Ravana, the ten headed demon king. Signifying the triumph of good over evil, huge effigies of Ravana are built in prominent locations. For Bengalis, it is the Goddess Durga's victory over the Asura, for others it is Lord Rama's victory over Ravana.

Bishahari a name of **Manasha**, a Snake Goddess worshipped in Eastern India.

Brishabhanu father of Radha, Krishna's lover.

Chandi the goddess Durga, especially in the form she assumed for the destruction of the *asura* called Mahisa.

Chandramukhi the moon faced Sita.

crore 100 *laks* or 10 million rupees.

Dakshina Kali, *dakshina*, semicircular altar in which offerings are made to the ancestors, *Kali* the black, name of the goddess of destruction; she is depicted as fierce in appearance, with a girdle of severed human hands, often holding a severed head and weapons in her hands, her long tongue smeared with blood. As such, she represents the destructive aspect of Mother Nature and does not tolerate evil, but also holds the promise of destroying the ignorance and the bonds of *samsara* (the cycle of life).

Dayal the merciful, the compassionate.

dhenki manual husking machine.

didi older sister.

Durga name of a goddess whose appearance is often beautiful but whose nature is nurturing as well as fierce fierce . She was created from the combined *tejas* or fiery energy of the gods, who had been defeated by *Mahisa Asura*, the Buffalo Demon, and rode forth on her lion to battle the enemy. Her function is to restore *Dharma* and the cosmic balance, and to defeat the enemies of the gods. In many regions of India, Durga's festival is celebrated at the end of *Aswin* (*lunar month of September-October*), known to her devotees also as *Navaratri* and *Durga Puja*. This is the case in Bengal.

Fakir from Arab. *faqir*, "pauper", a Muslim ascetic or saint; a wondering wonder-maker or snake-charmer.

Gai , goru, go Bengali for cow

Ganesha the elephant-headed, pot-bellied son of Shiva and Parvati, or of Parvati only. One legend tells that he sprang from the parings of Parvati's body. He is the god of wisdom and remover of obstacles; hence he is often propitiated at the beginning of any important undertaking, and he is invoked at the commencement of books. He is said to have written the *Mahabharata* (the "great epic of the Bharatas" and the longest epic poem of the world, of great importance to the Hindus) from the dictation of Vyasa (the mythic compiler of many works on Hinduism, such as the *Mahabharata*).

Ganga Ganges river, flowing out of the Himalaya Mountains and across north India from west to east, emptying in the Bay of Bengal close to Calcutta. It is seen as sacred by many Hindus and as the most sacred river in India. It is regarded as the most auspicious funeral, particularly at Varanasi (Banaras). Many Hindus make pilgrimage to the Ganges and bathe in it for its reputed power to remove one's bad *karma* (action, ritual act).

ghat a bathing-place with steps leading to a river or pond, used for religious purposes; also a place on the bank of a river used for cremation and funeral rites, the relics and ashes being thrown into the river at the end.

Habil and Kabil. sons of Adam, ancestors of Hindus and Muslims according to legend

Hari a name of the Lord Krishna

haria homemade liquor made from fermented rice.

Indra was originally an important Vedic god who acted as the main agent of several creation myths. The most important one among them is the myth of Indo-European origin which describes creation as his combat with the serpent-demon or dragon Vrata which he pierced with his spear, thereby releasing waters, or rescuing captive maidens, symbolising the powers of creation.

Jagannath Lord of the World; name of an image of Krishna in the temple of Puri, Orissa (a state south of Bengal).

Jamuna or Yamuna, a river widely regarded as sacred that emerges from the Himalayas, flows past Delhi and Mathura, in north-western India, and joins the Ganges at Prayaga.

Janaki a patronymic of Sita.

Jaya a salutation to the Goddess, also Jaya and Bijaja, companions of the Goddess Chandi

Kailash a mountain in the Himalayas in Tibet, sacred to Hindus who place there Shiva's paradise and the seat of Kuvera (Kubera), the god of wealth.

Kamala Kamini from *kamala*, "lotus", and *kamini*, "woman", it is a form of the goddess Lakshmi sitting on a lotus throne.

Kanai a name of Krishna

Kanya Kumari "the virgin-damsel", a name of Durga.

Kartik abbrev. for Kartikkeya (or Skanda), god of war, regarded as the son of Shiva, though the connection between them is somewhat indirect. The myths of origin of Kartikkeya

begin with the need of the gods for a general to lead their army in their combats with the demons.

Khoda a Farsi(Persioan) word for God.

Lakshmana name of the brother of Rama in the *Ramayana*, regarded as a partial incarnation of Vishnu or sometimes the cosmic serpent *Shesa* or *Ananta*, associated with Vishnu.

Lakshmi the wife of Vishnu, embodying prosperity and success, who emerged from the froth of the ocean, in full beauty with a lotus in her hand, when it was churned by the gods and the *assuras*. Her name is interchangeable with *Sri*.

Lila play, both in the sense of a game and of a drama, God's play, playful and erotic activities of Krishna. Also referred to Shiva Nataraja, whose dance of cosmic destruction and creation is a performance of unmotivated enjoyment.

Mahamaya a name of the Goddess, especially under her aspect as Durga, called also Mayadevi.

Manasa goddess worshiped especially in Bengal and other parts of north-eastern India. She is a goddess of snakes and their poisons.

Mangala the planet Mars, identified with Kartikeya, the god of war; son of Shiva and the Earth, and as son of the Earth he is also called Mahisuta.

Marang Gurang the name of God among the Shantals.

Marich or Marica, name of the uncle of Ravana, a demon who, according to the *Ramayana* (long poem attributed to the Brahmin sage Valmiki), practised austerities in a forest hermitage. Ravana persuaded his uncle to aid him in his plan to abduct Rama's wife Sita by disguising himself in the form of a deer to lure away Rama and Lakshmana so that Ravana would find Sita alone.

Momin Muslim believer.

muri puffed rice.

palki palanquin, used to transport people (particularly on ritual events) or the *murti* (the image of the deity).

Panchabati or Panchavati, a place in the great southern forest near the sources of the Godavari, where Rama passed a long period of his banishment.

Panta Bhat, rice cooked the day before and eaten cold the day of particular Hindu festivals when fire cannot be lit

Pir Muslim ascetic, Muslim saint.

puja honour, worship and respect; the term is used to refer to the act of venerating highly respected persons or for the act of worshipping God or gods.

Radha prosperity; the name of a Gopi (cowherdess; milkmaid) who was Krishna favourite lover. As a goddess, Radha does not receive reverence as a divine Mother or in a fierce form, but only in association with her divine lover.

Radhika a diminutive and endearing form of the name Radha.

Ram(a) prince of Ayodhya and hero of the *Ramayana*, he is depicted as a human hero and as an *avatara* or incarnation of Vishnu, usually counted as the seventh incarnation in a list of ten. He married Sita and was to assume the throne but, due to palace intrigue, was exiled to the forest, where he was accompanied by his wife and younger brother Lakshmana. There they experienced many adventures, namely the abduction of Sita by Ravana.

Ravana demon king of Lanka and the villain of the *Ramayana*, he is depicted as having ten heads. He abducts Sita while she is in exile with her husband Rama in the forest, and carries her off to his homeland. Rama arrives with army of allies and Ravana fights until he dies at Rama's hands.

sadhu a word meaning successful, excellent, or having reached a goal; the word is used particularly to refer to a holy man, renouncer or saint.

sakhi woman friend.

sankha a conch shell, bracelet, or necklace.

Saraswati in the Vedas just a river goddess, gradually came to represent waters in general with their cosmic symbolism, eventually becoming the goddess of wisdom and the wife of Brahma (the chief god during the period of Brahmanism). Now worshiped as the Goddess of Learning, especially students and teachers

sari woman's garment, made from a long strip of unstitched cloth, ranging from four to nine metres in length, which can be draped in various styles.

shakti power, divine power, divine creative force; usually regarded as female in character, it often epitomises the Goddess or in personalised form the consort of a god, mainly Shiva.

Shankar, "auspicious", a name of Shiva in his creative character or as chief of the Rudras (deities of storm associated with rain and Indra).

Shantals a tribe of eastern India.

shehnai north Indian oboe, with eight holes that has a wooden body with a brass bell; its sound is considered particularly auspicious, and therefore it is found in temples and it is a central component of any North Indian wedding.

shinni offering, worship.

Shurpanakha sister of the demon king Ravana. Infatuated with Rama who is in love with his wife Sita, she appeals to her older brother Ravana to avenge her humiliation, while enchanting him with descriptions of Sita's beauty. Her uncle, Maricha, takes the form of a golden deer, captivating Sita who sends Lakshmana, her protector, to go to Rama's aid.

sindur red vermillion powder worn on the forehead and the *sinthee*, the parting of the hair, by married women as an auspicious item.

Sita the heroine of the *Ramayana*, and wife of Rama; as an incarnation of Lakshmi she represents prosperity, the earth and the Goddess. After being abducted by the demon Ravana and held captive, he hopes to convince her to marry him. Sita is finally rescued and brought back to Rama, but he suspects of her fidelity and she has to assert her purity by the ordeal of fire. On their return to his throne at Ayodhya he distrusts her again and banishes her, who, deeply wounded, calls her mother earth; the ground opened, and she was taken back into the source from which she had sprung. Rama was now extremely unhappy and decided to quit his mortal life.

sitar a plucked stringed instrument that uses strings along with a gourd resonating chamber; it is used in classical music all over India.

Subhadra daughter of Vasudeva, sister of Krishna and wife of Arjuna, who appears especially as sister of Krishna in his form of Jagannath, and according to tradition there was an incestuous intimacy between them.

Sumitra one of the four wives of Dasaratha, a prince of the Solar lineage and king of Ayodhya, and mother of Lakshmana and Satrugna

Tara a goddess that was temporarily abducted by Soma, the Moon god, and as a result gave birth to Buddha.

tulsi basil, a plant sacred to Vishnu, that Hindus worship in the morning and evening.

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