# The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Hinduism

James G. Lochtefeld, Ph.D.

# The Illustrated Encyclopedia
## of
## Hinduism

# India

Afghanistan

Feyzabad

*Note: Kashmir borders are in dispute, claimed by India, Pakistan and China

Kabul

Peshawar

Srinagar

Leh

Islamabad

Jammu and Kashmir

Jammu

Gar

Chaman

Fort Sandemann

Himachal Pradesh

Quetta

Pakistan

Lahore

Amritsar

Chandigarh

Simla

Dehra Dun

China

Lhasa

Punjab

Haryana

Uttaranchal

New Delhi

Delhi

Nepal

Sikkim

Thimphu

Arunachal Pradesh

Sukkur

Uttar Pradesh

Kathmandu

Gangtok

Siliguri

Bhutan

Itanagar

Ledo

Agra

Jaipur

Lucknow

Assam

Nagaland

Rajasthan

Kanpur

Bihar

Shillong

Kohima

Allahabad

Varanasi

Patna

Meghalaya

Bangladesh

Imphal

Kandla

Gandhinagar

Madhya Pradesh

Jharkhand

West Bengal

Dhaka

Agartala

Manipur

Ahmedabad

Bhopal

Jabalpur

Ranchi

Kolkata

Tripura

Aizawl

Gujarat

Chattisgarh

Jamshedpur

Jessore

Mizoram

Mandalay

Veraval

Narmada

Raipur

Mouths of the Ganges

Myanmar (Burma)

Nagpur

Diu

Daman

Silvassa

Maharashtra

Cuttack

Bhubaneshwar

Dadra and Nagar Haveli

Godavari

Orissa

Puri

Mumbai

Pune

Arabian Sea

Krishna

Hyderabad

Vishakhapatnam

Bay of Bengal

Yangon (Rangoon)

Karnataka

Andhra Pradesh

Pondicherry

Margao

Panaji

Guntakal

Andaman Islands (India)

Goa

Port Blair

Andaman Sea

Mangalore

Bangalore

Chennai

Pondicherry

Cuddalore

Pondicherry

Calicut (Khozikode)

Tamil Nadu

Pondicherry

Kavaratti

Kerala

Madurai

Jaffna

Lakshadweep

Thiruvananthapuram

Gulf of Mannar

Sri Lanka

Trincomalee

Nicobar Islands (India)

Laccadive Sea

*Note: The city of Chandigarh is encompassed by the Province of Chandigarh.

National Capital

State or Union Territory Capital

City

Disputed Territory

Disputed Border

State or Union Territory Border

Primary Road

Secondary Road

Railroad

International Border

0  100  200  300  400 km

0  100  200  300 mi

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*To teachers whose gift of learning I can never fully repay.*
*To students whose learning has taught me, and whose friendship has enriched me.*
*To Fiona, Vera, and Gavin, who put life back into perspective every day,*
*although they have yet to know this.*
*To Rachel, who has made all of this possible.*

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# Introduction

As you drive through the cornfields of northern Illinois, just north of the town of Aurora, you may see a massive brick building that seems out of place. It stands three or four stories high with an elaborate facade depicting pillars and cornices. Topped by towering spires with flapping banners, it looks as if it belongs to another world. In a sense it does—the architectural style comes from southern India, and the building itself is a Hindu temple.

I was there late on a Sunday morning, and the parking lot was about half full. There were cars from as far away as Michigan. The building's main entrance was a little below ground level, and as is common with Hindu temples outside of India, the lowest level had a lobby, a kitchen, and a large meeting room that was comparable to the "church basements" of its Christian counterparts. The lobby was furnished austerely, with folding tables and chairs. There were a few people sitting near the kitchen, drinking tea and chatting informally.

By the staircases leading upstairs to the temple room were rows of simple shelves, fronted by low benches. I removed my shoes, as is customary before entering a temple, both to preserve the temple and to signify that one is walking on holy ground. The staircase marked the threshold between two regions, the outer and the inner world. Upstairs, the temple was richly decorated. The presiding deity was Venkateshvara, a form of the god Vishnu, whose image was placed in the center of the temple, the most important space. Yet, as in most Hindu temples, there were images of deities from throughout the pantheon: Ganesh, Shiva, Subrahmanya, other forms of Vishnu, different forms of the Goddess, and various subsidiary deities. Most of the images were carved from black South Indian granite and polished to a mirrorlike finish. Many were housed in small shrines built out of white marble. The primary function of a Hindu temple is to serve as the home for the deities it contains, and it was clear that the people who had commissioned the temple had spared no efforts. The temple had been lovingly built and has been carefully maintained.

The worshipers in the temple took little notice of me, and I was allowed to roam as I wished. Even though Venkateshvara was the temple's presiding deity, the primary activity while I was there took place in front of one of the subsidiary shrines, an image of the Goddess in the form of Kumari ("virgin"). Seated around the image were about twenty members of an extended family. The young girls, who were clearly the focus of the rite, sat directly in front of the shrine. Brahmin priests took various offerings from the older women: plastic gallon jugs of milk, Ziploc bags of sugar, and Tupperware containers of yogurt and honey. Each offering was poured over the image in turn. A pitcher of water was poured over the image between each offering to wash it clean. The temple priests performing the rite were dressed traditionally, with white dhotis (garments worn around the waist, extending below the knees), bare chests, and the sacred thread over their left shoulders. They bore crisp red tilaks (sectarian identifying marks) on their foreheads, and intoned the rite in rapid-fire Sanskrit.

Although a Christian visitor might find the languages, deities, and rites completely alien, many of the other elements of the day would be soothingly familiar: a group of families coming for worship on a Sunday morning, dressed in their "Sunday best," with others chatting over coffee and sweets in the "church basement." Except for a few sari-clad older women, the people there were dressed no differently than anyone one might encounter on the street—the men in suits and jackets, the girls and women in long, flowing dresses.

Just as the Hindu temple in rural Illinois had introduced Indian customs to the local community, it was clear that the influence of American culture had set this temple apart from its traditional counterparts in India. Unlike in India, where temples serve mainly as places of worship, Hindu temples in America often serve as cultural centers for the Hindu community, sponsoring events such as dance, music, and drama performances, along with language study programs and festival celebrations.

In many cases, the membership of Hindu temples in America cuts across the traditional barriers that divide Indian society—social status, regional background, sectarian loyalty—giving these Hindu temples far more inclusive constituencies.

The cultural landscape of the United States has changed dramatically in recent years. Today it possesses a plurality of cultures that my grandparents and their generation probably would have found inconceivable. The Hindu temple outside of Aurora, Illinois, is but one small sign of the increasing visibility of Asian cultures in American society. Another sign of this pluralism is the growing number of ways that Americans are coming into contact with traditional Hindu culture—whether through practicing yoga, through alternative medical systems such as ayurvedic medicine, or through the piquant delights of Indian cuisine.

Despite the growing interchange between Indian and American cultures, Hinduism is still often stereotyped and misunderstood. On one hand are the remnants of an antiquated point of view that refuses to see the United States as anything but a Christian nation. Those holding this view either dismiss Hinduism as an alien or exotic set of rituals and beliefs or actively condemn it as idolatrous. On the other hand are people searching for an alternative spirituality who idealize Asian cultures as founts of ancient wisdom. At the very least, such an uncritical embrace ignores these cultures' genuine tensions, problems, and inequities; at the extreme it can result in a "designer religion," in which beliefs and practices from various religious traditions are selectively adopted, wrenching each of these elements from its roots in a living culture.

Outright condemnation and idealized acceptance overlook the richness and complexity of India's religious and cultural traditions. To gain a genuine understanding, it is important that we discern the cultural context behind Hindu beliefs, practices, and history. In learning about this context, one quickly encounters familiar ideas: hard work, thrift, education, and the importance of the family. Along with these general similarities to American cultural values, one finds equally profound differences. To examine the nuances of Hindu culture is to enter into a rich and complex world with its own inner logic and consistency. Encountering and understanding a different world view can throw one's own into sharper perspective, enriching it with new depth and understanding.

## What Is Hinduism?

The very word *Hinduism* is misleading. The word was coined by the British as an umbrella term, referring to any and all forms of religion in India, many of which share few if any common features. It was used to describe all sorts of beliefs and practices, from simple nature worship to the most highly sophisticated ritual and philosophical systems.

Hinduism is a vast religious tradition, encompassing various and contradictory strands and ideas. It has usually defied all the usual strategies for categorization and classification. There is no founder, no definitive scripture, no centralized authority, no single supreme god, no creed of essential beliefs, and no heresy. Thus, it would be more accurate to think of the religion as *Hinduisms* rather than *Hinduism*, since this would reflect the rich diversity one encounters.

India is a land of contrasts and cultural variety. The subcontinent contains almost every type of environmental ecosystem, the inhabitants of each possessing their own local and regional culture. There are over a dozen distinct languages, each of which establishes and nourishes a regional identity that many Indians maintain with great care wherever they live. The combinations of language, regional identity, sectarian affiliation, and social status have given rise to overwhelming variation. For Hindus, diversity is a basic trait of Hindu life, and thus one person's practice may be very different from another's. This has given Hinduism little in the way of centralized doctrine or dogma, but its grounding in everyday life has made it extraordinarily resilient and adaptable.

## Basic Beliefs

Hinduism is first and foremost a way of life. This means that Hinduism has tended to be orthoprax (stressing correct behavior) rather than orthodox (stressing correct belief). It tends to be woven through the differing elements of everyday life, rather than only performed as practices or rituals for certain days and times. Hindu religious expression is conveyed through every facet of society: music, dance, art and architecture, philosophy, politics, literature, and social life.

Some of the most important aspects of everyday life in the Hindu tradition are a person's family and social affiliations. Despite the incredible variety of Hindu belief and practice, each family and local community is tightly and carefully organized. Every individual, as a member of a particular family, has a well-defined role and an obligation to fulfill specific duties. As in any culture, one's individual identity is strongly shaped by the linguistic, regional, or sectarian characteristics of his or her family. This familial influence persists whether the family lives in its ancestral home or moves to a different region of India or a foreign country.

Families, of course, are members of a larger community. These communities share certain beliefs about a person's proper role in society based on status, age, and gender. Traditional Indian society was sharply hierarchical. According to the traditional social groupings, there should be four status groups: the brahmins, who are scholars and religious technicians; the kshatriyas, who are warriors and rulers; the vaishyas, who are artisans and farmers; and the shudras, who serve the others. Each person is born as a permanent member of a particular group. Society is seen as an organic whole, in which some parts have higher status than others, but every part is necessary for the whole to function smoothly. A common metaphor for social organization is the human body, which has many different parts performing many different functions, all of which are necessary for the body's maintenance and well-being. In actual practice, the picture was far more complex. Each of these four groups was split into hundreds of subgroups known as jatis. Jatis were most often identified with a certain hereditary occupation, and a jati's status in a particular place was subject to all kinds of local variables. These variables could include whether or not members of a jati owned land or the degree to which a jati's occupation was economically vital to its community.

These beliefs about social status are becoming less important in modern India, and have even less importance for Hindus who live abroad. In modern India, society is still functionally divided into four groups: brahmins; "forward castes," which tend to control land, money, or power; "backward castes," which have historically had very little influence, although the situation is changing rapidly; and Dalits ("oppressed"). Once called "untouchables," many Dalits live in poverty and oppressive social conditions. Except for the brahmins, these social divisions bear little relationship to the four groups in the earlier model.

Reincarnation is still a pervasive belief within Hinduism, as it is in other Indian religions such as Jainism, Buddhism, and Sikhism. Almost all Hindus have generally accepted that although our bodies are transient, our souls are immortal. After the death of a particular body, the soul will inhabit a different body. The nature of one's incarnation in a future life is determined by the quantity and quality of one's karma. Karma literally means "action," but it also can be generated by words or even thoughts. It is not produced only by the things one does or says, but also by one's underlying motives. An individual's good karma will bring a favorable rebirth in heaven as a god or on earth as a wealthy or high-caste human being. Bad karma will bring an unfavorable rebirth. A person's current social status reveals how properly he or she lived in the previous life. The notion of karmic rewards and punishments is a central justification for the traditional social hierarchy in India.

Karma is thought of as a purely physical process, like gravity, operating without any need for a divine overseer. An action one performs, for good or for ill, is seen as

the cause, with the future reward or punishment as the effect. Some of these consequences occur in this life, while others occur in future lives. Since karma reflects the overall tone of one's life, it is comparable to the notion of a person's "character": Both are formed over a long period of time, both are measures of the whole person, and both reflect how our habitual ways of feeling, thinking, and acting tend to shape who we are.

It is tempting to envision reincarnation as an opportunity to rectify past mistakes or to learn lessons still unlearned. For Hindus, as for Buddhists, Sikhs, and Jains, nothing could be further from the truth; reincarnation is never seen as an opportunity, but invariably as a burden. This is because all states of being, both good and bad, are ultimately impermanent and thus provide no sure refuge. Even the gods, who are enjoying the rewards of their past actions, will be born elsewhere when their stored merit is exhausted. Others are enduring punishment for their sins, but when this is done they will be reborn elsewhere.

Although most Hindus would grant that liberation from reincarnation (moksha) is the ultimate goal, traditional Hindu culture has sanctioned three other goals, all of which are more compatible with a normal life in society: the search for pleasure (kama); the quest for wealth, fame, and power (artha); and, above all, the search for a righteous, balanced life (dharma). This stress on multiple goals reflects the flexibility of Hindu religious life. Each person can pursue different goals according to his or her inclinations, although certain goals are considered to be more appropriate for particular stages of life. In this way a person is free to express his or her individual religious identity, although that identity is inevitably shaped by forces arising from a larger familial, social, and cultural context.

## The Roots of Hinduism

The influences and developments of Hinduism are as expansive as the roots and branches of a banyan tree. A banyan tree is unusual in that in addition to the tree's upward spreading branches, it also has branches that grow down, take root, and become trunks in their own right. An old banyan tree can be hundreds of feet in diameter, and it is often difficult to discern which is the original trunk. In the same way, the religion that we call Hinduism is constantly evolving. New religious forms arise from the older ones, while many of the older ones continue to exist. Despite Hinduism's complex origins, its religious history can be roughly divided into six periods, corresponding to the development of varying religious tendencies and ideas.

The earliest and most mysterious of these is the period of the Indus Valley Civilization, named for the large ruined cities found throughout the Indus Valley and beyond. The ruins of prominently placed storage granaries indicate that the civilization's economic base was agricultural, and the striking uniformity of the ruins of these cities leads one to believe that the people were bound by some strong central authority. Archaeologists have recovered a wealth of physical artifacts, revealing a great deal about the layout of the cities, what the inhabitants ate and wore, and the animals they domesticated. At the same time, nothing is certain about the religious life of these people, although certain artifacts have raised intriguing speculations. It is not even known whether the religion and culture of the Indus Valley Civilization have continued to affect Indian culture, although some scholars have been more inclined to infer this than others.

This culture seemed to lose its vitality sometime around 2000 B.C.E. Within a few centuries it had largely disappeared from the Indus Valley, although it remained vital for much longer in outlying regions, particularly Gujarat. According to some theories, its decline was the result of a prolonged drought. The latter part of its decline was marked by the arrival of the Aryans. This brought Hinduism into its second period of religious history. The Aryans were a nomadic cattle-herding people whose earliest religious text, the Rg Veda, is believed to have been preserved unchanged for almost four

thousand years. The later strata of the Vedas were composed as the Aryans moved through the Punjab into the Ganges basin. These later parts of the Vedas included the Brahmana literature, which stressed the importance of sacrifice, and the later Aranyakas and Upanishads, which tended to focus on more speculative and philosophical questions. During the period in which the Aranyakas and Upanishads were composed, asceticism became an increasingly important element of Hinduism. Asceticism denotes the use of physical discipline and deprivation as a way to attain religious insight and liberate the soul from the cycle of reincarnation. Part of the reason for asceticism's prominence was the growth of competing groups, such as the Jains and the Buddhists, whose monks lived an ascetic life. Asceticism has had an important place in Indian religious life since that time.

The period after the composition of the Vedic literature is sometimes called the Epic period. Between roughly 300 B.C.E. and 500 C.E., many of the ideas most important to classical Hinduism were developed and codified. This time was marked by the initial composition of the two great Hindu epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, although their final revisions came centuries later. The early part of this period also saw the composition of the religious literature known as the Kalpa Sutras. In theory, each Kalpa Sutra had three parts: a shrauta sutra, a grhya sutra, and a dharma sutra, but this neat ordering is belied by the scarcity of complete three-part collections, and the abundance of one or another of these sections without its corresponding parts. Shrauta sutras are manuals for Vedic sacrifice, which had become so complex that additional reference material was needed. The shrauta sutra is the only element of the three that has not retained great importance in modern Hindu life. The grhya sutras are manuals for domestic sacrifices, which include the life-cycle rites known as samskaras. Some elements of the grhya sutras still remain vital and vibrant parts of modern Hindu religious life, probably because of their connection with the central transitions in human life: birth, marriage, and death. The dharma sutras provide prescriptions for an organized and stable society by means of a rigid social hierarchy. The prescriptions in the dharma sutras were later expanded in the dharma shastras, which are the theoretical basis of the Hindu social structure.

Aside from the epics and the Kalpa Sutras, this period was also notable for the development of the six classical philosophical schools: the Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Samkhya, Yoga, Mimamsa, and Vedanta (although the defining figure in the Vedanta school, Shankaracharya, is generally dated in the early ninth century). The philosophical system developed by each of these six schools had a common goal: liberating the soul from the bondage of reincarnation. Each of the schools believed that the soul could be liberated by avoiding conceptual errors and apprehending universal truths, although there was considerable disagreement about the nature of these universal truths. The foundational texts for each of these schools laid out their basic philosophical position; in some cases, these texts buttressed their position by appealing to authoritative religious texts such as the Vedas. Over the following centuries these foundational texts received further elaboration through multiple layers of commentaries, which in some cases have continued to be written almost up until contemporary times.

This period is also marked by the rise in importance of the deities Shiva, Vishnu, and the Goddess, who are still the primary deities worshiped in modern Hinduism. These deities had a central place in the sectarian literature known as the puranas, another of the important types of text composed in this period. The puranas' most notable feature is their sectarian character, as they often exalt one particular deity over the others. They also include information on many other aspects of religious life, including sacred places, sacred times, instructions for various religious rites, and even descriptions of the heavens and hells. The final type of religious text first composed in this period were the tantras, which laid out esoteric and often hidden ritual traditions.

In later times, both the puranas and the tantras have been the subject of extensive commentaries. In addition, this period saw the development of new artistic and architectural styles. Many of the forces manifested or formed in this period remain integral parts of contemporary Hindu life.

The period following this was marked by the growth and flowering of the devotional (bhakti) tradition, which for more than a millennium has been one of the most powerful religious forces in Hindu culture. Bhakti stresses the necessity of a direct and personal relationship with God, in whatever form that deity is conceived. Its proponents tended to be contemptuous of the neatly constructed social order detailed in the dharma shastras, which stressed birth rather than devotional capacity as the most important criterion. Much of medieval Hindu thought was formed out of the tension between these two competing ideals, dharma and bhakti, and there was often no easy resolution of the conflict between their differing perspectives.

The growing presence of Europeans in India marked the next period in Hinduism's history. Although there had been a European presence in India since the mid-1500s, when the Portuguese colonized Goa, the introduction of British colonists presented the greatest challenge to Indian society. In the early 1600s, the British East India Company gained its first foothold with a trading station at Surat in modern Gujarat and gradually put down additional roots in Bombay, Madras, and the Bengal region. With the effective collapse of the Moghul empire in the mid-1700s, the nobility that ruled peripheral regions such as Bengal began to function independently. This allowed the British to displace the indigenous rulers as the political authorities and the recipients of land revenue. The East India Company was a commercial venture, and its primary goal was to make money for its shareholders. Yet the Indian body politic was so fragmented that the company encountered little effective resistance and aggressively expanded its sphere of influence from Bengal up the Ganges River valley and into central India. In some cases the company would simply absorb small kingdoms under the pretense of protecting law and order, especially when the leadership had no clear line of succession. In other cases it would make agreements with local nobility to create small princely states, some of which survived until Indian independence in 1947. General discontent with the company's aggressive expansion finally exploded in the rebellion of 1857–58, after which India was governed as part of the British Empire.

The company was primarily driven by economic motives, but it justified its paternal presence by portraying the Indians as unable to govern themselves effectively. Although the company's policy was not to interfere with its subjects' religious lives, since any such tensions would be bad for business, the company's board of directors in England was under strong domestic pressure to open up their dominions to Christian missionary activity. Contemporary missionary polemics against Hinduism usually stressed repugnant practices such as sati (the burning of a widow on her husband's funeral pyre), child marriage, the pitiable plight of many widows, or Hindu "idolatry." Such political and religious critiques assumed the implicit superiority of European Christian culture and provided the moral sanction for colonialism that Rudyard Kipling described as the "white man's burden."

Hindus responded to these critiques in several ways. The most violent response came in the rebellion of 1857–58, in which popular discontent led various groups to try to drive the British out of India. Although there was widespread opposition to British rule, it was never unified, allowing the British to defeat their adversaries one by one. A far more effective response came in religious terms, as progressive Hindus attempted to respond to the missionary critiques. One result of this was the formation of various societies, such as the Brahmo Samaj, Prarthana Samaj, and Arya Samaj. The first two of these attempted to reform Hindu religious life by removing certain offensive practices in response to criticism from outsiders. These practices included the

caste system, child marriage, and the ban on widow remarriage. The Arya Samaj was formed to regenerate and revitalize Hinduism, with the explicit position that Hinduism was far superior to Christianity and Islam.

The end of the nineteenth century was also marked by the gradual establishment of Hinduism as a viable religious tradition in the West, as Hindu teachers arrived in Europe and America. Some of the early figures were Swami Vivekananda and Paramahamsa Yogananda, and the more recent ones are Prabhupada, Muktananda, Yogi Bhajan, Guru Maharaj Ji, Krishnamurti, and Shri Chinmoy. This recent group of teachers had an explicit missionary goal, aiming to gain followers among native-born Europeans and Americans.

The most recent period in the development of Hindu religious traditions is marked by the emigration of Indians to America. Many Indians have settled abroad seeking education or to pursue specialized careers. They have established centers of Hindu worship, like the temple Aurora, to serve the needs of the Indian community, including the need to pass on a sense of Hindu identity to their children. Yet despite their efforts to preserve their traditions and culture, their very presence in a different society is causing changes in their religious lives. American society has made certain traditions more difficult to preserve. For example, the community often celebrates religious festivals on the weekend following the traditional festival day, since this is when people have more spare time. Life in American society and the influence of American values have also made it difficult to conform to certain traditional patterns. The traditional requirement that Hindus marry within their jati has been assailed both by the American emphasis on the importance of a "love marriage" and by the potential shortage of suitable partners. In the same way, certain dietary restrictions become harder to maintain but have greater complexity. A Hindu in America must decide not only if he or she should simply avoid eating beef but also whether to avoid any place where beef is served.

In India, the twentieth century has been marked by the development of an assertive and militant Hindu nationalism. Hindu nationalism's "founding father" was V. D. Savarkar, but the most important body promoting this idea in the recent past has been the Rashtriya Svayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The RSS is the mother organization for many different affiliates, ranging from labor unions to student organizations to social relief bodies. Its two most important affiliates for promoting Hindu nationalism are the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), a religious organization, and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a mass-based political party. In the early 1990s, both organizations were instrumental in radical Hindu politics, particularly in the destruction of a mosque alleged to have been built on the site of the god Rama's birthplace in the North Indian city of Ayodhya. Since that time, the VHP has retained its radical edge, but the BJP has not. The BJP has put greater distance between itself and the VHP, seeking to move toward the political center and thus expand its reach in electoral politics. It has begun stressing issues that are vital to a broader spectrum of Hindu voters, such as corruption and the rising cost of living.

This encyclopedia offers the student of religion a place to begin exploring the key elements of Hindu religious culture and practice. I hope that the entries will be a springboard for further study of this great, living religious tradition.

# How to Use This Book

This encyclopedia includes the following features:

- The Contents by Subject lists related entries in the following categories: Art, Architecture, and Iconography; Astrology and Cosmology; Biographical Entries; Calendar and Time; Ceremonies, Practices, and Rituals; Communities, Groups, and Organizations; Dance; Dynasties; Geography; Literature, Language, and Drama; Medicine, Physiology, and Alchemy; Music, Hymns, and Prayers; Mythology and Beliefs; Philosophy and Logic; and Yoga and Tantra.

- Cross-referenced terms within entries are indicated in boldface type.

- Parenthetical citations are used to refer to selections from primary Hindu texts. For sources from the Vedas, the first number refers to the book and the second to the hymn. For later sources, including the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, and all of the dharma literature, the first number refers to the chapter and the second to the verse.

- Lineage charts for characters in the Hindu epics the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* appear on pages 401 and 556, respectively.

- Words with distinctive pronunciations are listed in the back of the book with diacritical marks—symbols above or below the letters to indicate their proper pronunciation.

- Abbreviated bibliographic citations appear at the end of some entries. The full citations are grouped together in the bibliography.

# Note on Dates

In many cases, determining dates for the lives of Indian figures is problematic because there are not good records for many figures, even in comparatively modern times. The most definite dates tend to be from inscriptions, and thus this evidence is best for kings and others who were able to commission inscriptions. Philosophers, devotional poets, and writers often could not. In this book, a question mark follows dates that scholars have determined by inference (for example, based on internal evidence in texts, such as references to historical events) but are not backed up by documentary evidence.

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## Music, Hymns, and Prayers

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# A

## Abhang

("unbroken") Poetic form characteristically used by the saint-poets of the **Varkari Panth**, a religious community centered around the **worship** of the Hindu god **Vithoba**. Each abhang is usually made up of four lines, with an *abbc* rhyme scheme. Although each abhang is a complete poem in its own right, they are often strung together in groups, to create either a longer narrative poem (in which each abhang stands as one segment) or a group of poems devoted to a common theme. Such versatility made it one of the dominant poetic forms in the Marathi language, just as the **doha** form is ubiquitous to medieval and modern **Hindi**.

## Abhava

("[knowledge from] absence") Abhava is one of the two means of valid knowledge (**pramana**) unique to the **Purva Mimamsa** school of **philosophy**, the other being presumption (**arthapatti**). All Indian philosophical schools concern themselves with codifying pramanas, that is, the means by which human beings can gain true and accurate knowledge. Behind this concern lies the basic Hindu religious goal of learning to live, act, and think in a way that leads to the final liberation of the soul from the cycle of reincarnation (**samsara**). Almost all schools accept perception (**pratyaksha**), inference (**anumana**), and authoritative testimony (**shabda**) as pramanas. The Purva Mimamsa school claims that abhava, or perception of the absence of something ("there is no jug in this room"), is a means of knowledge that cannot be accounted for by the other pramanas.

## Abhaya Hasta

In Indian **dance**, **sculpture**, and ritual, a particular hand **gesture** (**hasta**) in which the hand is held with the palm facing out, with the fingers together and pointing upward. The word *abhaya* means "without fear," and the gesture is meant to reassure the viewer that all will be well. This hand gesture can be found in most depictions of the Hindu gods and goddesses, particularly when the **deity** in question has multiple hands.

## Abhijnanashakuntala

("Recognition of **Shakuntala**") Drama written by **Kalidasa** (5th c. C.E.), who is widely considered the greatest classical **Sanskrit** poet. The *Abhijnanashakuntala* describes the trials and troubles of the mythical heroine Shakuntala and is considered Kalidasa's greatest drama. In the story, Shakuntala, the **daughter** of the sage **Vishvamitra** and the celestial nymph **Menaka**, attracts the eye of King **Dushyanta** while he is away from his kingdom on a hunting trip. Shakuntala and Dushyanta marry by mutual consent, in what is known as a **gandharva marriage**. After their marriage, Dushyanta returns to his kingdom. Shakuntala remains at her home and has the misfortune to irritate the sage **Durvasas**, who **curses** her to be forgotten by her beloved. Shakuntala pleads with Durvasas, who is moved to mitigate the curse such that Dushyanta will remember everything if Shakuntala can show Dushyanta a sign of their union. Dushyanta had given Shakuntala his signet ring, but she loses it before she can see him. Denied by Dushyanta, Shakuntala endures numerous trials until she finds the ring in the belly of a fish. When Dushyanta sees the ring, he immediately recognizes Shakuntala (hence the play's name), and they live happily ever after.

The *Abhijnanashakuntala* has two features that characterize most classical Sanskrit plays. One is the preference for a happy ending, although this resolution

Dancers performing in the Kathak style. Most Kathak performances include dances in the abhinaya genre, in which performers use dance to act out a story from religious literature.

is usually preceded by trial and tribulation. The other is that the drama's dialogue is in two different languages. Characters from the higher classes speak Sanskrit, the language of high, learned culture. Characters from the lower classes (including many of the **women**) speak in **Prakrit**, an umbrella term for the grammatically simpler vernacular languages that developed from Sanskrit through natural linguistic change. This difference in dialogue doubtless reflected the social realities of the time in which the play was written, when Sanskrit would have been the elite language but was always learned as a second language after learning one's

"natural" language. The play has been translated into English by Michael Coulson and published in an anthology titled *Three Sanskrit Plays*, 1981.

## Abhimanyu

In the ***Mahabharata***, the later of the two great Hindu epics, Abhimanyu is one of **Arjuna's sons** by his wife, **Subhadra**. Abhimanyu is known as a great warrior who fights with valor in the Mahabharata war. As he fights in battle, he enters the enemy's **chakravyuha** formation, a battle array that is widely believed to be virtually impenetrable. According to tradition, Arjuna is one of the few people who knows how to

counter the chakravyuha. While Abhimanyu was in his mother's womb, he heard his father describe how to penetrate it. Once Abhimanyu is in, however, he realizes that he does not know how to get out, and although he kills a great number of the enemy, he is eventually slain.

## Abhinavagupta

(10th c. C.E.) Kashmiri writer famous for his works on poetics and aesthetics. Abhinavagupta was a pivotal figure in the development of **Trika Shaivism**, a particular religious community devoted to the god **Shiva**. The writer's most famous religious work is the *Tantraloka*, a twelve-volume work elucidating the metaphysics and ritual of Trika Shaivism. His *Dhvanyaloka* gives similar attention to aesthetics and poetics. See also **Kashmir** and **Shaiva**.

## Abhinaya

("bringing near") In Indian drama, the general name given to acting. Its ultimate purpose is to convey an emotion through a look or **gesture** and thus "bring" it to the audience. In Indian **dance**, this term refers to a piece in which the dancer acts out a story, with the aim to convey to the viewers the emotions of her character. Particularly with Indian dance, this sort of acting is not mere artistry, however refined, but carries explicit religious meaning. Not only is the story's content often drawn from religious literature, but most Indian dance forms were first performed in temples as entertainment for the resident **deity**.

## Abhira

Sanskrit term for **Ahir**. See **Ahir**.

## Abhisheka

("anointing") Ritual bathing (**snana**) or anointing with **water**, particularly of the image of a **deity** during **worship**. In earlier times this term referred to the ritual anointing of a king at his coronation (**rajabhiseka**). In modern times the term can also apply to anointing or sprinkling individuals with water during religious or life cycle rituals, particularly rites of **initiation** (**diksha**) involving a change of status for the initiate—such as the shift from householder to initiated **ascetic** or in the ritual tradition known as **tantra**, an initiation bestowing certain ritual and religious qualifications (**adhikara**). In both cases the anointing is intended to honor the initiate, to evoke images of royal coronation, and to suggest the importance of the occasion.

## Abortion

Hindu views toward abortion have varied widely over the course of time. It is unequivocally condemned in the **dharma literature**, which prescribes loss of **caste** for a person procuring an abortion or for a **woman** having one. This prescription may have been based on the use of abortion to conceal illegitimate **births**, but it may well have been condemned because it entailed the loss of a potential son. In modern times attitudes have changed somewhat, in part because of family planning initiatives and in more recent times because of the technology available for sex determination. Abortion facilities are now more widely available in India due to the government's emphasis on family planning and population control, and there is less social stigma associated with the procedure. However, traditional proscriptions remain. With the advent of methods for prenatal sex determination, couples began selectively aborting female fetuses because **sons** are more highly valued in Hindu society. This practice was widespread and generated such concern that it was outlawed in 1995, although the law has reportedly only succeeded in driving this practice underground.

## Achala Ekadashi

Festival falling on the eleventh **day** (**ekadashi**) of the dark (waning) half of the **lunar month** of **Jyeshth** (May–June). As are all of the eleventh-day observances, this is dedicated to the **worship** of the god **Vishnu**. The name Achala means "immovable"; another name for this ekadashi is *apara*, meaning "matchless." The name refers to the religious merit generated by observing this festival, which, according to tradition, cannot be nullified or overturned. Most Hindu festivals have certain prescribed rites, usually involving fasting (**upavasa**) and worship, and often promise specific benefits for faithful performance. Individual observance varies depending on a person's piety and inclinations. Fasting, for instance, can vary from abstaining only from certain foods to refraining from all foods during the day. Individuals may go to temples for worship, or they may worship in their homes. Faithfully observing this festival is believed to absolve one of the evil effects of one's past deeds, particularly deeds that would result in **birth** as a **pret**, or unquiet spirit, and also to increase one's fame, wealth, and religious merit.

## Achamana

("sipping") The act of sipping **water** that has been poured or scooped into one's right hand. This is performed as a rite of purification. Achamana is a symbolic action that has been incorporated into many religious rituals. It is also part of the required early morning ablutions, the purpose of which is to remove any impurity (**ashaucha**) encountered while sleeping. In the Hindu tradition, human beings are considered impure upon waking for a number of reasons. Since sleep entails loss of consciousness, one may not know whether one has come into contact with impurity. Further, bodily functions that may occur while sleeping cause impurity. In addition, it is popularly believed that one's soul (**atman**) leaves the body during sleep and then reenters it before the body awakens. While the soul is gone, the body is believed to be a **corpse**, which is an impurity that must be cleansed.

## Achamaniya

("to be sipped") The fifth of the sixteen traditional **upacharas** ("**offerings**") given to a **deity** as part of **worship**, on the model of treating the god as an honored guest. In this upachara, the deity is offered **water** for rinsing and cleaning the mouth. The actual act of offering can be done in various ways and often depends on the worshiper's inclinations. In some cases the water vessel will simply be presented before the deity's image, with the understanding that the water has been taken, whereas in other cases the devotee (**bhakta**) will actually rinse the image's mouth. In either case the underlying motive is to show love for the deity and to minister to its needs.

## Achara

("conduct") Appropriate or approved behavior according to customary law, which is established in the **dharma literature**. The **dharma** assumes that society is made up of different social subgroups known as **jatis**, which are usually defined (and hierarchically arranged) by the group's hereditary occupation. Each jati had its own customary code of appropriate behavior, and there were often sharp differences between them. For example, it was often acceptable for members of lower-status jatis to eat meat and drink **liquor**, whereas these practices were forbidden to higher-status groups. Aside from the customary rules of one's social group or subgroup, notions of appropriate behavior for a particular person would also be shaped by age and gender considerations: A young and sexually fertile **woman** would be subject to far greater restrictions than a postmenopausal woman, since any sexual scandal (or even the hint of it) could ruin a young

woman's opportunities for a good marriage or produce an illegitimate child.

## Acharya

Traditional term of respect for a religious leader or a spiritual teacher; the word connotes great learning as well as a religious life. The term literally means someone who knows or teaches about **achara**, the traditionally accepted way of life prescribed in the **dharma literature**. As a title in modern Hindu life, it indicates the respect and social standing conveyed by the English word *doctor*.

## Achintyabhedabheda

("inconceivable identity and difference") Key philosophical concept of the **Gaudiya Vaishnava** school, which was founded by the Bengali saint **Chaitanya** (d. 1533) and is devoted to the **worship** of **Krishna** as the Supreme Being. The concept was first enunciated by Chaitanya's disciple **Jiva Goswami** (late 16th c.) and explains the relationship between God (Krishna) and the human soul, and between God and his **divine powers**. In both cases these relationships are described as simultaneously involving sameness and difference. On one hand, human souls are clearly different from God, as shown by their imperfections and their susceptibility to the action of **karma**, both of which contrast with God's utter transcendence and perfection. Yet since it is possible for human souls to gain ultimate liberation (**moksha**) from the action of karma, they must also share some part of God's nature, since liberation would be impossible if human souls were completely different. Even though human souls partake in the divine nature, their distinctness is upheld even after liberation, when the human soul does not merge with Krishna but remains separate.

This same concept is used to describe the second relationship, between God and his divine powers.

The divine powers are often conceived not just as attributes (e.g., the ability to create, preserve, and destroy the universe) but as actual embodied **deities**, particularly in the form of goddesses. These powers are both the same as God, since they come from Him, but also different since each of the embodied powers does not contain the glory of the whole. In both cases the precise nature of this simultaneous identity and difference is "inconceivable," which here carries a mystical sense. For further information see Sushil Kumar De, *Early History of the Vaishnava Faith and Movement in Bengal, from Sanskrit and Bengali Sources*, 1961.

## Achyuta

("imperishable") Epithet of **Vishnu**, referring to the devotees' (**bhakta**) beliefs that nothing can stand against Vishnu and that his power will never wane. Hindu **deities** often have many names that sometimes denote unique form of the deity and at other times denote a special quality of the deity. No two deities will ever share the same epithet. The proliferation of names for deities may be related in part to the characteristics of the **Sanskrit** language, which is rich with synonyms. This allows words to fit into various poetic **meters**. See **Vishnu**.

## Act of Truth

In Hindu mythology, a ritual action that is described as being able to neutralize poison, bring rain, make a river flow backward, or even compel the gods to grant one's wishes. The act of truth draws its effectiveness from the **power of truth** and is usually performed as a last resort when all other avenues have been blocked. The act of truth is a conditional statement: the first part is a true statement about one's past behavior, the second part a request for some specific result ("If I have always given to those who begged from me, may this **fire** not

burn me"). The rite's success stems from the truthfulness of the first condition—that the power of truth in the condition actually causes the second part to come true. One example of the act of truth being used to compel the gods to grant a wish occurs in the story of the lovers **Nala** and **Damayanti**. Damayanti intends to choose Nala as her husband but finds that four of the gods have taken Nala's form, in an effort to foil her. Damayanti's act of truth affirms that she had chosen Nala as her husband and has never wavered in this choice, and it then directs the gods to take their true forms again. The gods take their true forms, and Nala and Damayanti are married.

As Sanskritist and Indologist W. Norman Brown observes, in cases where the act of truth is successful, the people making the act of truth have perfectly fulfilled their social roles, and this perfection allows them to make the conditional affirmation so central to the act of truth. Successful men have been either great kings, **ascetics**, or householders; successful **women** have usually been absolutely faithful to their husbands (fulfilling one idealized women's role). One story tells of a prostitute who affirmed that she had serviced all of her clients without partiality, thus perfectly fulfilling her particular social role. In any of these cases, perfection of one's role is believed to bring spiritual merit as well as the ability to unleash it by performing the act of truth. For further information see W. Norman Brown, "The Metaphysics of the Truth Act," in *Mélanges D'Indianisme à la Mémoire de Louis Renou*, 1968.

## Adharma

In the **dharma literature**, this term designates the absolute opposite of **dharma**, the fundamental values that serve to uphold society. Although adharma can denote a particular unrighteous action, it more widely implies a state of affairs in which society has been completely corrupted; the values that uphold society have been subverted, overturned, or ignored and hence such particular unrighteous actions become possible, even likely.

## Adhikamasa

See **Intercalary Month**.

## Adhikara

("qualification") In any sort of Hindu **worship**, but particularly in **tantra**, adhikara indicates that one has the religious qualifications to perform certain ritual actions. This refers partly to knowing how to perform the ritual, and thus being "qualified" in that sense of the word. More importantly, it refers to having gained the ritual status that entitles one to perform the ritual. This status is usually conferred by some sort of formal **initiation** or initiations given by one's teacher, who decides what type of and how much adhikara to transmit based on an assessment of the student's abilities, temperament, and desire to learn.

## Adhiratha

The foster father of **Karna** in the great Hindu epic, the *Mahabharata*. Karna is born when his mother, **Kunti**, uses a special **mantra** given to her by the sage **Durvasas**, which gives a **woman** the power to conceive and bear children by the gods. Kunti impulsively uses the mantra to invoke the **Sun**, by whom she conceives and bears Karna. In her panic at unexpectedly becoming a mother—she is still unmarried, and concerned about what people might think—she puts the child in a box and abandons him in the **Ganges**. When Adhiratha goes to the Ganges to bathe (**snana**), he finds the child, and since he and his wife are childless, they raise the boy as their own.

There are a number of interesting aspects to the story of Adhiratha. Although he is not of high status, he becomes the king of the country. He comes from a social group whose traditional occupation is driving chariots.

The Shri Channakeshara temple in Somnathpur, India. A traditional feature of Hindu temple architecture is the adhishthana, a raised base upon which the temple is built.

One can read this dissonance in the epic's recognition that the hierarchical, occupationally based social model is an idealized projection and not always the reality. It can also be argued that since Adhiratha is not fulfilling his particular religious duty (**dharma**) but has usurped that of the ruling class, both he and the country are destined for ruin. The reality of his family's lowly status and the uncertainty about his **birth** trouble Karna for most of his life.

## Adhishthana

("foundation") In Hindu temple **architecture**, the raised base on which a temple was built. These are particularly high in the temples at **Khajuraho**, and their height accentuates the upward thrust of these temples. Whether high or low, the adhishthana is important as the temple's foundation, the stable base on which all else rests.

## Adhvaryum

A type of sacrificial priest described in the **Brahmana** literature, one of the later strands of the sacred literature known as the **Vedas**. The Brahmanas largely functioned as manuals describing how to perform sacrificial rites—which primarily involved burning **offerings** in a sacred **fire**—and the care and attention devoted to detailing these **sacrifices**, which leads to the inference that these were the primary religious acts. These rites were so complex that they required specialized ritual technicians: the adhvaryum, the **hotr**, the **udgatr**, and the **brahman**. The adhvaryum was the sacrificial priest who chanted the hymns from the **Yajur Veda** that were used in the **sacrifice**. He was also responsible for preparing the sacred altar, assembling the sacrificial materials, kindling and feeding the sacred fire, and actually offering the sacrificial **animals**.

## Adhyasa

("superimposition") In **Advaita Vedanta**, one of the **six schools** of classical Indian **philosophy**, this is a key concept used to explain the ultimate unreality of the world around us, despite its apparent

reality. For the Advaita Vedanta school, there is ultimately only one real idea in the universe, namely **Brahman**. All things are in fact that one thing, and this never changes. Since Brahman is the all in all, it can never actually be an object of perception (**pratyaksha**). What the Advaitins then have to explain is how things in the world apparently change, or seem diverse and different. This is explained as stemming from our mistaken perception and understanding. They call this notion adhyasa, which is rooted in the human tendency to "construct" a picture of world. According to this explanation, human beings superimpose a false understanding (that reality is diverse and differentiated) on top of the correct understanding (that all reality is nothing but undifferentiated Brahman). According to the Advaitins, the world is real because Brahman is real. What is not real is the world as most unenlightened people perceive it.

Advaitins illustrate this concept by two well-known errors in judgment: the case of a rope that one briefly mistakes for a snake, or a post that one imagines is a man. Although these judgments are erroneous—as one quickly discovers—they are not made up out of nothing. In each case, one is perceiving something real—the rope and post both actually exist—but "superimposing" a different and mistaken identity on these things, and thus "transforming" them into something they are not. In the same way, it is argued, human consciousness begins with the Supreme Reality (Brahman), which is actually there, but superimposes onto it something which is not (the judgment of a diverse world).

According to the Advaitins, the real problem is epistemological, that is, how human beings come to know things, rather than in the nature of the things themselves. One comes to a true understanding not when the things themselves change—to refer back to the example, the rope always was and always will be a rope—but with the destruction of the mistaken notions that

led to the initial error, and their replacement by true understanding. For the Advaitins, adhyasa is a manifestation of **avidya** (lack of true knowledge); this avidya is reinforced and upheld by the **karmic** power of one's mistaken thoughts and actions. Adhyasa immediately disappears at the moment true understanding is gained, when one comprehends that the world (and oneself) are both nothing but Brahman. This moment of realization brings ultimate wisdom that can never be lost, just as that once one has recognized the piece of rope, it can never again become a snake. For further information see Karl H. Potter (ed.), *Advaita Vedanta up to Samkara and His Pupils*, 1981; and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore (eds.), *A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy*, 1957.

## Adi

Fourth month in the Tamil solar **year**, corresponding to the northern Indian solar month of Karkata (the zodiacal sign of Cancer), which usually falls within July and August. The existence of several different **calendars** is one clear sign of the continuing importance of regional cultural patterns. One way that the Tamils retain their culture is by preserving their traditional calendar. Tamil is one of the few regional languages in India with an ancient, well-established literary tradition. See also **Tamil months**, **Tamil Nadu**, and **Tamil language**.

## Adigranth

("Primal Book") One of the names for the Sikh scripture, most often used by people outside the tradition. Sikhs themselves are more likely to use the honorific title *Shri Guru Granth Sahib*, which reflects the scripture's status as the spiritual leader (**guru**) of the Sikh community. This status was conferred by the tenth Sikh guru, Gobind Singh (d. 1708), who proclaimed that after his

death the community would have no more human leaders, but only their scripture to guide them. The book's religious authority can be seen in the way that the Sikhs treat it. They accord the Adigranth the status of a living person. In Sikh temples the Adigranth is ceremonially put to bed at night and woken up in the morning. It is enshrined under a canopy (a sign of royalty) for **worship**, is fanned during hot weather and warmed during cold, and if it has to be taken anywhere, is carried on the bearer's head, considered the purest part of the body. In according this respectful treatment to a physical book, the Sikhs were probably influenced by Muslim practice with regard to the Qur'an, since in general Hindus pay little heed to a book itself, however important the text may be.

The Adigranth plays a central role in Sikh life: Children are named by opening the book at random and taking the first consonant on the upper-left-hand page as the first letter of the child's name; Sikh couples are married by circling the book, as Hindu couples circle the sacred **fire** (**agnipradakshinam**), and a commonly performed death rite is an unbroken reading (**akhand path**) of the entire text.

The text itself was compiled in 1603–1604 by Guru Arjan, the fifth Sikh guru. According to tradition he compiled the book in response to certain rivals contesting his authority, some of whom had compiled and were circulating books purporting to be the teachings of Guru Nanak, the Sikhs' founder and first guru. There may be some truth in this tradition, but it is now well established that Arjan himself was working from a compilation made a generation before. The text's opening verses are known as the mul **mantra**, which gives a collection of attributes and qualities ascribed to the Supreme Being. After this opening, the Adigranth has three main parts. The first is the Japji, a sequence of thirty-eight poems written by Guru Nanak that is considered the essence of the Sikh faith,

and which is recited by the faithful as the morning prayer.

The second section contains the hymns of the Sikh gurus, arranged by **raga**, or melodic mode. Within each raga the hymns are arranged according to poetic **meter**, and within each meter the hymns are arranged sequentially according to which of the gurus composed them. Since the Sikh tradition holds that all ten gurus contained the same divine spirit, they all identified themselves as "Nanak." But introductions to the songs differentiate between them by calling them *Mahala* (literally "house," but figuratively "body") followed by a number—from Mahala 1 for Guru Nanak to Mahala 5 for Guru Arjan.

The final section of the Adigranth contains hymns by various other devotees (**bhakta**), both Hindu and Muslim, whom the Sikh gurus believed to be propounding the essential Sikh message of monotheism and the need to serve God. Among the Hindu devotional (**bhakti**) poets whose works can be found in this section are **Trilochan**, **Jayadeva**, **Pipa**, **Ramananda**, **Sen**, **Namdev**, **Kabir**, and **Ravidas**, with significant collections for the last three. Even for those not interested in the Sikhs, this last section makes the Adigranth an extremely important document. Not only does this section provide manuscript tradition that can be precisely and accurately dated, but the sacred status of the text has ensured that it has remained unchanged since the beginning of the seventeenth century. Many other manuscript sources for these poets are far more recent and are made problematic by textual corruption and pseudonymous additions.

## Adishesha

("Primal **Shesha**") Epithet of Shesha. See **Shesha**.

## Aditi

In Hindu mythology, one of the wives of the sage **Kashyapa**, who also married

Adivasi man going to the market. The Adivasis consist of different tribal groups that are settled throughout the forest and hill regions of India.

Aditi's twelve sisters and through them begat all living creatures. Aditi is first mentioned in the **Rg Veda**, where she is one of the few female figures, although a minor one. The epic *Mahabharata* describes her as giving **birth** to twelve divine **sons**, the **Adityas**: Dhata, Aryama, Mitra, Shakra (**Indra**), **Varuna**, Amsha, Bhaga, Vivasvan (**Surya**), **Pushan**, Savitr (**Surya**), **Tvashtr**, and **Vishnu**. Both Hindu epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, also describe how Aditi gave birth to the **Vamana avatar**, that is, the "divine descent" of the god Vishnu, in his form as a dwarf.

## Aditya

In the Hindu epic the *Mahabharata*, a group of twelve divine **sons** born to the sage **Kashyapa** and his wife **Aditi**, from whom these sons get their collective name. The twelve are named Dhata, Aryama, Mitra, Shakra (**Indra**), **Varuna**, Amsha, Bhaga, Vivasvan (**Surya**), **Pushan**, Savitr, **Tvashtr**, and **Vishnu**. Several of these **deities** are important figures in the religious scriptures known

as the **Vedas**, and Vishnu later gained prominence as one of the primary Hindu gods. On one hand, the Adityas illustrate the Hindu concept that the divine beings (**devas**) have many similarities to humans, although they are more powerful and live in a different world, the **heavens**. On the other hand, they also demonstrate how the Hindu tradition changes over time. Among the Adityas, Vishnu is one of a number of divine beings who are all subject to **birth**, death, and the operation of **karma**, whereas in his later aspect as the Supreme Being, he is considered not only to be beyond all these forces, but to wield control over them.

The twelve Adityas are the sun in the twelve months of the year. In at least one of the Puranas these twelve Adityas are each connected with a particular sign of the **zodiac**.

## Adivasi

("first inhabitant") General term for different groups of tribal peoples. They are usually associated with forests and other less developed

areas, often making their living by hunting, woodcutting, gathering honey and medicinal plants, and through subsistence agriculture. The largest concentrations are in **Orissa**, **Madhya Pradesh**, and **Bihar**, on both sides of the **Vindhya Mountains** separating northern and southern India, but they are also found in regions such as the **Nilgiri Hills** in southern India. Adivasis are still largely unassimilated into **caste** Hinduism. Many are illiterate and desperately poor, despite programs giving them **reservations** for higher education and government employment. In recent years they have been the focus of intense missionary activity by both Christians and Hindu missionaries sponsored by the **Vishva Hindu Parishad**.

## Adoption

One of the most important requirements for every Hindu male is to have at least one son, so that the funeral rites for himself and for his ancestors will be correctly performed and maintained. These rites are considered central for the well-being of the dead, particularly the recently departed. Even in modern times, only men are allowed to perform funeral rites. Given the importance of these ceremonies, men with no biological **sons** adopt a son to guarantee the performance of the ceremony. The ideal candidate is a blood relative, such as a brother's son, who is of equal social status with the adoptive father. Through adoption the boy becomes a member of another family, but the legal texts disagree on his continuing relationship with his natal family. Many sources claim that an adopted son has no right to the **inheritance** of his natal family and no entitlement to offer funeral rites for those ancestors, since by adoption he has become part of another family. Other texts speak of special arrangements by which an adopted son is considered to have two fathers, one biological, one adopted. He inherits from, and performs ancestral rites for both fathers.

## Adultery

Given the traditional Hindu belief that **women** are the vessels and guardians of family status, rules about adultery outlined in the **dharma literature** are mostly concerned with the conduct of women, although these texts do prescribe a penance (**prayashchitta**) for a man who commits adultery with another man's wife. As outlined in the dharma literature, adultery is much more serious for women. It is notable that in most cases the dharma does not recommend the woman be driven from her home. An adulterous woman is to perform a rigorous penance until her next menstrual period—sleeping on the ground, wearing dirty clothes, and getting very little food; during this time she also loses her status as a lady of the house and whatever domestic authority she may have wielded. According to the dharma literature, all of this is to end with a bath at the end of her menstrual period, after which she is accepted back at her former status. Women who conceive as a result of adulterous liaisons are to be abandoned. In practice this often means being secluded and cut off from the family, although she still receives food. Abandonment is also recommended in certain other cases: in adulterous liaisons with a man's student or his **guru**, if a woman attempts to kill her husband, or if she kills her fetus. The reluctance to completely cast a woman away, and the willingness to bring her back to her former status after doing penance, both reflect the importance of marriage and family life in Hindu culture, as well as women's importance in the family.

Although these prescriptions in the dharma literature seem relatively humane, often there has been a considerable difference between these prescriptions and a particular group's actual practice. In general, the higher the group's social status (or the more a group is trying to improve its social status), the more harshly it treats such infractions, since these infractions

injure its social standing. At present this disjunction is also affected by the differing attitudes toward sexuality between rural and urban contexts, with the latter tending to be more permissive and the former far more restrictive. These differences are illustrated by occasional reports of adulterous women being killed to restore the family's honor; this far exceeds even the harshest penalty prescribed in the dharma literature.

## Advaita Vedanta

One of the branches of **Vedanta**, the philosophical school claiming to reveal the ultimate (anta) teaching of the ancient sacred texts known as the **Vedas**. The Advaita school upholds a philosophical position known as monism, which is the belief that a single Ultimate Reality lies behind all things. Advaita proponents believe that reality is nondual (advaita)—that is, that everything in the world is actually the formless, unqualified **Brahman**, despite the appearance of difference and diversity. To support this claim, the Advaitins provide a convincing explanation for the world one perceives to have many separate and diverse things.

Advaitans account for this apparent diversity by using the concept of **adhyasa** (superimposition), in which a false, mistaken understanding is projected upon a real object—in the classical Advaita example, seeing a rope in the twilight and mistaking it for a snake. For the Advaitins, the "snake" is not completely unreal, since it depends on the rope for its existence—one cannot see the snake unless the rope is there. At the same time, the "snake" is clearly not real since one does not persist in this error, and once the illusion of the snake has been dispelled, one can no longer see it.

In the same way, the Advaitins believe that our idea of the phenomenal everyday world is projected upon the one thing in the universe that is truly real—Brahman. Like the snake, the world is unreal as it is perceived but real insofar as it depends on Brahman. For

the Advaitins, the roots of adhyasa are epistemological, that is, related to how human beings come to know things, but the results of adhyasa are both epistemological and ontological (related to how things actually are). On one hand, adhyasa obscures the Ultimate Reality and prevents one from accurately perceiving it, and on the other, its projective character creates our notions of the world. For the Advaitins, the source of all this confusion is ultimately rooted in **avidya**, or primal ignorance, under the influence of which one forms mistaken ideas about the world. The operation of this ignorance is said to have no beginning, but one of the things that keeps it going is one's **karma**, based on the continuing actions caused by this mistaken understanding. Another source of this ignorance is the power of illusion (**maya**) wielded by God (**Ishvara**), which bewilders human beings. For the Advaita Vedantin, God is identified as a qualified (**saguna**) form of Brahman—thus below the highest unqualified (**nirguna**) Brahman, and himself a product of superimposition.

Since the Advaita school believes that the source of bondage to karma results from mistaken understanding, the only way to destroy bondage is to gain the correct understanding. Although the Advaitans say that people must perform obligatory religious actions (**nitya karma**) as a matter of duty, actions can never bring about the understanding that is necessary for salvation, although they may aid the process by removing some of the karmic obstacles. To support this understanding, the Advaitins begin their analysis with an appeal to the knowing subject as the one thing that can never be doubted, and claim that this self-consciousness is evidence for the existence of the inner Self, or **atman**. Aside from this appeal to experience, they depend heavily on the authority of the sacred texts, particularly the **Upanishads**, to uphold their key doctrines: that Brahman is the source of all things; that the human soul is ultimately identical to Brahman, although hampered by obstructions

based on past karma; and that gaining true knowledge is the basis of liberation.

The first and greatest Advaita thinker was the philosopher **Shankaracharya**; other significant figures were his two disciples, **Sureshvara** and **Padmapada**, as well as **Mandana Mishra** and **Vachaspati Mishra**. For further information see Karl H. Potter (ed.), *Advaita Vedanta up to Samkara and His Pupils*, 1981; and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore (eds.), *A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy*, 1957.

## Advani, Lal Krishna

(b. 1927) Modern Indian politician as well as past president and leader of the **Bharatiya Janata Party** (BJP), a party often considered the political wing of the **Rashtriya Svayamsevak Sangh** (RSS). Advani joined the RSS as a young man and was encouraged by the RSS to become active in politics, first in the **Jana Sangh** and later in the BJP. In the fall of 1990, Advani embarked on a tour of northern India to raise public support for building a **Rama** temple in **Ayodhya**, on a site which at the time was occupied by a Muslim mosque. The public response to this **rath yatra** ("chariot journey") was positive and brought great political benefits to the BJP; the BJP has since run the state governments in some of India's most important states and has become the largest opposition party in Parliament. During the 1990s the BJP's influence waxed and waned, but for much of this time, Advani has been one of the leading figures in the party. In the spring of 1996, however, he was one of many Indian political figures whose name was connected with a major bribery scandal. He immediately resigned his seat in Parliament and promised that he would not seek office until his name had been cleared. The allegation was found to be completely baseless, and Advani was reelected to Parliament in March, 1998. During the thirteen months of BJP government rule in 1998–99, Advani served as Home Minister (the Cabinet officer responsible for all domestic affairs) and has continued in this position during the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance.

## Aerial Cars

One of the standard images in Hindu mythology. The most famous of the cars is the **Pushpak Viman**, which is originally owned by **Kubera**, a minor **deity** associated with mountains and their mineral wealth. The Pushpak Viman is commandeered and stolen by **Ravana**, the **demon**-king of **Lanka**. In modern times, mythological references to such aerial cars are often cited as evidence that ancient Indians possessed the technology for flying machines, an assertion for which there is no historical evidence.

## Aesthetics
See **Rasa**.

## Agama

In its most general meaning, this refers to any authoritative text. In a philosophical context, this word designates one of the **pramanas**, the means by which human beings can gain true and accurate knowledge. As a pramana, the agama denotes testimony from a reliable source, particularly from scriptures such as the **Veda**. Within specific sectarian communities, such as the devotees (**bhakta**) of the gods **Shiva** (**Shaivas**) and **Vishnu** (**Vaishnavas**), the word also commonly designates the particular texts deemed most authoritative by that community.

## Agastya

In Hindu mythology, Agastya is one of the **rishis** (sages) of ancient India and is attributed with various supernormal powers. As with many of the rishis, Agastya is marked as different even by his **birth**, which is far outside the normal manner. According to the story, Agastya is conceived when the **semen** of the **deities** Mitra and **Varuna** is placed in a pot and develops there into

a baby boy. Agastya is described as preferring a detached, **ascetic** lifestyle, but he compromises in deference to his ancestors. The ancestors appear to Agastya in a vision, imploring him to marry and have children, so that his **sons** can continue performing the ancestral **offerings**; this is one of the **three debts** that every Hindu man must pay. Agastya consents and marries **Lopamudra**.

Agastya's ascetic lifestyle is said to have generated immense powers, which he demonstrates by performing many marvelous deeds. According to some accounts, he curses king **Nahusha** to become a giant serpent, in retribution for the insults Nahusha has heaped upon him. Agastya also curses King **Indradyumna** to become an **elephant**, and the **gandharva** named **Huhu** to become a crocodile; the two are released many years later through the god **Vishnu's** divine **grace**.

Not all of his exploits stem from his readiness to **curse**—a trait found in many of the sages—and some are performed for the benefit of human beings. He is reported to have humbled the **Vindhya Mountains** (here personified), which through envy of Mount **Meru** have grown so tall that the **sun** and **moon** are unable to get around them. Agastya does this by asking Vindhya to bow down to let him get through on his journey to southern India. Agastya promises that Vindhya can stand up again when he returns, which has yet to happen. In other cases Agastya is reported to have used his powers to help get rid of **demons**. On one occasion, when a group of demons is hiding in the sea by day and coming out to pillage at night, Agastya exposes them by drinking up the ocean and thus taking away their place of refuge. On another occasion he foils a demon who has been taking the form of a goat to be cooked and eaten by unsuspecting diners. The demon has been killing the diners by exploding out of their stomachs. Agastya eats the demon as usual, but it is then completely destroyed by Agastya's

prodigious digestive powers. See also **Gajendramoksha**.

## Aghori

In one context this term refers to one of the two loosely organized groups of the **Jogi ascetics**, the other being the **Nathpanthis**. There are three major groups of ascetics devoted to the god **Shiva**; they are the Aghoris, Nathpanthis, and **Dashanami Sanyasis**. The difference between these is that the Dashanamis are said to have been founded by the philosopher **Shankaracharya**, while the Aghoris and Nathpanthis are believed to be descended from earlier **Shaiva** ascetic orders, particularly the **Kapalikas**, **Kalamukhas**, and **Pashupatas**. The term *aghori* also refers to ascetics whose reputed practices make them both respected and feared by the general population. The Aghoris draw their name from one of the names of the god Shiva, Aghora, which despite its literal meaning ("not terrifying"), designates one of the most frightful and powerful forms of Shiva. As devotees (**bhakta**) of this form of Shiva, the Aghoris are famous for their disregard of all social conventions and boundaries. They often eat from a vessel made of a human skull and are popularly reputed to eat anything, including dung and human flesh. Such behavior generates fascination and sometimes respect among the larger Hindu populace, but also considerable fear; Aghoris are so far outside the normal social boundaries that most people would rather avoid interaction with them.

## Agni

("**fire**," cognate with Latin *ignis*) Hindu **deity** present in every fire. Agni is also one of the eight dikpalas, or **Guardians of the Directions**, with responsibility for the southeast quarter. As fire, Agni is also one of the five **elements** in classical Hindu **cosmology**.

Agni is important in the **samhitas** (hymns) of the **Rg Veda** and in the **Brahmanas**, a later strand of Vedic liter-

Depiction of the god Agni. Agni is identified with fire and is believed to be present in all fires, along with lightning and the sun.

ature emphasizing sacrificial rites. The Rg Veda opens with a hymn to Agni and describes him as "the household priest, the god and officiant of the **sacrifice**, [and]. . .the giver of blessings." Agni remained important in the Brahmanas since, as the sacrificial fire, he was essential to all ritual. Agni's importance in these texts stems from his presence in all three levels of the Vedic universe—on the **earth** as fire, in the middle atmospheric realm (**antariksha**) as lightning, and in the sky as the **sun**. This ability to move between these levels made Agni the intermediary between the gods and human beings. From above, Agni served as the messenger of the gods, while as the sacrificial fire on earth, Agni not only consumed the **offerings** but conveyed them in the smoke to the gods above. Because of his role in bringing about the sacrifice, another epithet for Agni is the "mouth of the gods."

Unlike many of the other Vedic deities, Agni has retained a certain prominence even in the present day. Although Vedic sacrifices are uncommon, sacrificial motifs have been incorporated into many contemporary rites.

Ceremonies often have a part in which offerings (often of clarified butter) are ladled into a sacrificial fire. Fire plays an important role in many rituals, particularly that of **arati**, in which lamps are waved before the image of a divinity as an offering of light. Agni also serves as the divine witness to the single action widely believed to seal a marriage. This is **agnipradakshinam**, in which the bride and groom make seven revolutions around a lamp or fire. Even on the most prosaic level, fire is still essential to daily life since most Indians continue to cook over an open flame—whether coal, wood, dung, or bottled gas. This everyday utility, combined with his abiding ritual presence, have assured Agni a continuing presence in Hindu life.

## Agni Akhara

The name of a particular subgroup of the **Naga** class of the **Dashanami Sanyasis**, a particular type of renunciant **ascetic**. The Dashanami Nagas are devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva**, organized into different **akharas** or regiments on the model of an army. Until the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Nagas' primary occupation was as mercenary soldiers, although they also had substantial trading interests; both of these occupations have largely disappeared in contemporary times. The Agni akhara is a subunit of the **Juna akhara**, one of the largest and oldest of the Naga akharas.

The Agni akhara's membership is very different from that of the other established akharas. Whereas the other Naga Sanyasi akharas will accept men from all levels of society—in some cases even the lowest status group, the **shudras**—the Agni akhara admits only unmarried **brahmins** who have been lifelong celibates. Perhaps as a consequence of their more exclusive membership criteria, the Agni akhara is the only Dashanami Naga akhara that has no naked (naga) ascetics. All of its members remain fully clothed during the procession for their bath at the **Kumbha Mela**.

The Agni akhara was first established in **Benares**, and this remains their most important site. All of the akharas have particular features that define their organizational identity, including specific patron **deities**; the Agni akhara's patron deity is the **goddess** Gayatri, considered the embodiment of the **Gayatri Mantra**.

## Agnihotra

("**fire sacrifice**") Religious rite in which **offerings** are made to the sacred fire, considered to be the god **Agni** in material form. The term can also refer to the maintenance and care of the sacred fire itself. The roots of **worship** based on a sacrificial fire go back to the **Vedas**, the oldest and most authoritative Hindu sacred texts. This type of worship is still present in modern times, although much diminished in emphasis.

## Agnikula

("fire lineage") A collective name for the four main clans of **Rajputs** (warrior princes): the Pariharas, Chauhans, Solankis, and Pawars. According to tradition, this collective name refers to the Rajputs' descent from a single mythical king who had arisen from a sacrificial fire pit at Mount Abu in the state of **Rajasthan**. Although their historical origin is unclear, these four clans ruled over much of northwestern India, either as independent kings or feudal vassals, after their appearance at the end of the first millennium. The Pariharas ruled southern Rajasthan. The Chauhans ruled the region around Delhi. The Solankis ruled in **Gujarat**. The Pawars ruled in western **Madhya Pradesh**. Although their days as warrior princes have passed, they remain influential in politics, both as politicians and as constituent communities.

## Agnipradakshinam

("circling the **fire**") A common rite in many modern Hindu **marriage ceremonies**, usually performed as part of the **saptapadi**, in which the bride and groom take seven steps to definitively seal their marriage. The saptapadi and the agnipradakshinam are combined so that the bride and groom make seven revolutions around a small fire. As the god **Agni**, the fire is the divine witness to the marriage bond between bride and groom, a bond often symbolized by tying the end of the groom's turban to the fringe of the bride's sari. The fire is also a sign that the celebration of marriage is a **yajna**, or sacrificial rite.

## Agnipravesha

("entering **fire**") Death by fire, which could occur in several different contexts. This was often used to refer to the practice of **sati**, in which a **widow** would be burned on her husband's funeral pyre. Death by fire was also one of the mandated forms of religious **suicide**; this could be done either as a means of relief for someone afflicted by an incurable disease, or as part of certain rites of **sacrifice** such as the **sarvasvara**, which was performed to send the sacrificer to **heaven**. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, religious suicide had been condemned and had fallen into disuse. In the nineteenth century, British horror at the practice of sati led them to ban it wherever they were able to do so.

## Agnishtoma

Particular rite of **sacrifice** prescribed in the later strands of the **Vedas**, the earliest Hindu sacred texts. The agnishtoma was most often performed in the early spring and was dedicated to the Vedic god **Agni** (**fire**). The rite's two central elements were the pressing and consumption of the mysterious sacrificial drink called **soma** (seen as a material form of the Vedic god Soma), and the slaughter of sacrificial **animals**, which were burned on the

sacrificial fire (the god Agni in material form). A final chant during the sacrifice was addressed to Agni. During the Vedic period, this rite became largely the province of kings since they were the only people who could command the necessary resources for it. With the later reaction against **animal sacrifice**, the rite fell out of favor, although it is still performed occasionally in a modified fashion without sacrifice.

## Agrahara

A **brahmin** residential enclave, usually established by a land grant from a wealthy land owner or royalty to a particular brahmin. Brahmins had the highest status in traditional Hindu society, based on the belief that they had higher ritual **purity**. The purpose of the agrahara was to protect this ritual purity since it could be compromised fairly easily. Agraharas were most common in southern India, where brahmins formed an extremely small percentage of the general population—on average, about four percent. As a small **minority**, southern Indian brahmins could maintain a more controlled environment, thereby reducing the possibility of having their purity tainted. In northern India, brahmins formed a significant part of the population and tended to live within the towns and cities, although they often inhabited particular sections of these places.

## Ahalya

In Hindu mythology, Ahalya is the wife of the sage **Gautama**. She is turned into stone by Gautama's curse and later restored to life by being touched by the foot of the god **Rama**. Gautama's curse is brought on by the actions of the god **Indra**, who lusts for Ahalya. One day, when Gautama has gone to the river to bathe (**snana**), Indra takes Gautama's form and goes to Ahalya in a bid to make love to her. Accounts differ on whether Ahalya is aware of her lover's identity—in

some she is flattered by Indra's attention, in others she is genuinely deceived. When Gautama discovers what has happened, he curses Ahalya to become a stone and Indra to have a thousand vaginas on his body, as a punishment for his lust. Gautama is later mollified into modifying the **curses**, so that Ahalya will remain a stone until she is touched by Rama's foot, and Indra will be covered instead with a thousand eyes. This story primarily illustrates the power of the sages to curse even the gods, but the different versions also reveal varying assumptions about the nature of **women**.

## Aham Brahmasmi

("I am **Brahman**.") In the Hindu philosophical tradition, this is one of the four "great utterances" (**mahavakyas**) expressing an ultimate truth. The truth expressed in this utterance is the idea that **atman** (the individual Self) and Brahman (Ultimate Reality) are one and the same—identical; this truth is at the heart of the speculative texts called the **Upanishads**. The four mahavakyas, aside from their philosophical importance as capsulizing fundamental truths, were also appropriated by the four divisions of the **Dashanami Sanyasi ascetics** as identifying symbols. Each division had a different mahavakya, just as each had a different **Veda**, a different primary sacred center, and a different paradigmatic ascetic quality. Aham Brahmasmi is the mahavakya associated with the **Bhuriwara** division of the Dashanami Sanyasis.

## Ahamkar

("I-making") In the **Samkhya** school of Hindu **philosophy**, ahamkar is one of the stages in the **evolution** of **prakrti** (primal matter) away from its initial undifferentiated unity toward differentiation of the Self and other things. The final result of this degradation is the world that we see around us, in which human souls are subject to

Temple to the goddess Durga in the city of Aihole.

reincarnation (**samsara**). Prakrti evolves first into **mahat** ("the great one") and then into ahamkar, which is the first stage in which there is a sense of self and subjectivity. This sense of subjectivity colors the entire devolution after that. Ahamkar then evolves further, forming the basis for both the subjective and objectice world: on one hand, the individual's organs of sense (**jnanendriya**) and organs of action (**karmendriya**) develop, and on the other hand, the five subtle **elements** (**tanmatras**), which are the basis of the gross material elements, evolve. In colloquial speech, *ahamkar* is used to mean "self-pride," invariably in a pejorative sense.

## Ahimsa

("refraining from harm") Ahimsa refers to the conscious commitment to refrain from harming other living beings, either directly or indirectly. The emphasis on ahimsa originated with the Jains, for whom all actions carry karmic consequences, but who also believe that the karmic consequences

generated by intentional evil acts are far more severe than those from unintentional ones. Jain and Buddhist commitment to ahimsa brought it further into Indian society, and it has been an important feature of Hindu practice for well over two thousand years. In the **Yoga Sutras**, **Patanjali** mentions ahimsa as one of the restraints (**yama**) and thus recommends it as one of the basic foundations for religious life. This commitment to ahimsa is believed to be one of the major forces responsible for the decline of **animal sacrifice**, which was one of the most important types of religious practice as described in the **Vedas**, the oldest Hindu scriptures. Far more recently, in the twentieth century, ahimsa was one of the guiding principles of **Mohandas Gandhi** during the struggle for Indian independence. Although Gandhi did not rule out the use of violence in principle, his commitment to ahimsa reflected his judgment that means and ends are karmically linked, and that the means one employs will determine both the nature and tone of one's ends. See also **karma**.

## Ahir

The model for traditional Indian society was as a collection of **endogamous** subgroups known as **jatis** (**birth**). These jatis were organized (and their social status largely determined) by the group's hereditary occupation, over which each group had a monopoly. In traditional northern Indian society, the Ahiras were a jati whose hereditary occupation was herding and selling milk.

## Aihole

Historical site in the state of **Karnataka**, just south of the modern city of Bijapur. Aihole was an important city during the **Chalukya dynasty** (4th–8th c. C.E.), and its surviving buildings are some of the oldest standing Hindu temples. These temples represent an early stage in the **evolution** of Hindu **architecture** from earlier architectural forms, such as the rock-cut cave temple (**chaitya**) or enclosed courtyard (**vihara**). One of the earliest temples (ca. 450 C.E.) is a simple square pavilion (**mandapa**) with a tower (**shikhara**) over the main image of the **deity**, one of the hallmarks of later Hindu temples. A temple to **Durga** built about a century later has the general plan of a chaitya, but a shikhara was also added. Although the temples at Aihole are related to the earlier forms, they also prefigure the mature development of medieval Hindu architecture.

## Aims of Life

(purushartha) Four general goals that Hindu society has accepted as legitimate ends for all human beings: **artha** (wealth and power), **kama** (desire, especially sexual desire), **dharma** (righteousness or religious duty), and **moksha** (final liberation of the soul from the cycle of reincarnation). Hindus have affirmed that all of these are worthy ends, but have generally accepted that the last goal is qualitatively different from the other three, which are more strongly interrelated. There is nothing wrong with seeking money or pleasure, and Hindu culture affirms both of these aims with the understanding that their pursuit and enjoyment should ultimately be regulated by a commitment to dharma. Although there are paths to moksha that allow one to remain in the world, it is generally accepted that a person pursuing moksha will be less attentive to worldly desires because they are incompatible with this ultimate goal.

## Aippasi

Seventh month in the Tamil solar **year**, corresponding to the northern Indian solar month of Tula (the zodiacal sign of Libra), which according to the Indian **calendar** usually falls within October and November. The existence of several different calendars is one clear sign of the continuing importance of regional cultural patterns. One way that the Tamils retain their culture is by preserving their traditional calendar. Tamil is one of the few regional languages in India with an ancient, well-established literary tradition. See also **Tamil months**, **Tamil Nadu**, and **Tamil language**.

## Airavata

In Hindu mythology, the divine **elephant** who is the vehicle of **Indra**, king of the gods. The only significant role Airavata plays in any myth is as the ultimate cause for why the gods have to churn the Ocean of Milk. One day the powerful and irascible sage **Durvasas** gives a garland to Indra. Indra places the garland on Airavata, who throws it on the ground. The reasons for this differ— in one account Airavata is plagued by the bees gathering on it, and in another he is intoxicated by the scent of the flowers. Durvasas understands this as an insult and, in his anger, **curses** the gods to be subject to old age and death. The only way the gods can escape the effects of the curse is to obtain the nectar of immortality, which is done by churning the Ocean of Milk. See also **Tortoise avatar**.

## Aiteraya Brahmana

Along with the **Shatapatha Brahmana**, the two most important texts in the

A shrine to Aiyanar, a regional deity in southern India who is the protector of villages.

**Brahmana** stratum of Vedic literature. The Brahmanas are primarily manuals describing the correct performance of Vedic ritual **sacrifices**. Because they were composed later than the actual **Vedas**, each Brahmana is connected in theory with one of the Vedas, to give it authority as a sacred Vedic text. According to tradition, the Aiteraya Brahmana is associated with the earliest of the Vedas, the **Rg Veda**.

## Aiyanar

Southern Indian regional **deity**. In the state of **Tamil Nadu** Aiyanar is an important **village deity**, generally considered to be the guardian of the village tank, bringer of rain, and protector of the village. It is likely that he is an indigenous deity who has been assimilated into the Hindu pantheon. Aiyanar is sometimes identified with **Aiyappa**, although there are some discrepancies between the two—Aiyanar is a deity associated with the protection of villages, whereas Aiyappa is associated with the hills, the jungle, and the hunt. For further information see Louis Dumont, "A Folk Deity of Tamil Nad: Aiyanar, the Lord," in T. N. Madan (ed.), *Religion in India*, 1991.

## Aiyappa

Hilltop **deity** of the southern Indian state of **Kerala**, who at the local level is often identified with **Aiyanar**, the Tamil **village deity**. The most important of Aiyappa's shrines is at **Shabari Malai** in the hills of central Kerala, to which there is an important pilgrimage each winter in December and January. Aiyappa's strong associations with the hills and the hunt make it likely that he was originally a local deity of the hills of Kerala, but in more recent times he has been assimilated into the larger Hindu pantheon as the **son** of **Shiva** and **Vishnu**. Although both of these gods are male, Aiyappa's conception is said to happen when Vishnu takes the form of the female enchantress **Mohini**, to beguile the **demons** into parting with the nectar of immortality. Because of his parentage, Aiyappa is also called Hariharaputra, "the son (putra) of Hari (Vishnu) and Hara (Shiva)."

Due to his unusual conception, Aiyappa is fated to kill a particularly troubling buffalo demoness, **Mahishi**, who has been given the boon that she cannot be killed by anyone born from the union of male and female. After his **birth** the infant Aiyappa is abandoned by a riverbank, and adopted by King **Rajashekhara**, who names him Manikanta. Manikanta's stepmother is very jealous of her stepson and wishes to clear the path to the throne for her own child. When Manikanta is twelve his stepmother feigns an illness that she says only **tiger's** milk can cure. Everyone is understandably reluctant to try to get the tiger's milk, but Manikanta finally agrees to do so.

On his way to get the tiger's milk, Manikanta is met by messengers of Shiva, who remind him that his life's ultimate purpose is to kill Mahishi. After a long struggle, Manikanta dispatches the demon, but while he is dancing on the she-buffalo's body, another female figure rises out of it. She identifies herself as **Lila**, and wants to marry Manikanta, but as a celibate student he does not desire this. He appeases Lila

with the conditional vow that he will marry her the year that a celibate pilgrim does not come to visit him on Shabari Malai—a vow that will never come true since **celibacy** is the single most important requirement for the Shabari Malai pilgrimage. Manikanta then placates Lila by establishing a temple for her on a neighboring hilltop.

Returning to his original task of retrieving the tiger's milk, Aiyappa then bids Shiva to take the form of a tiger, upon which he rides back to his stepparents, inviting them to milk the tiger to their heart's content. This image of the young boy returning astride the tiger is one of the most common Aiyappa images. For further information see E. Valentine Daniel, *Fluid Signs*, 1984; Kunissery Ramakrishnaier Vaidyanathan, *Pilgrimage to Sabari*, 1978; and Lars Kjaerholm, "Myth and Fascination in the Aiyappu Cult: A View from Fieldwork in Tamil Nadu," in Asko Parpola and Bent Smidt Hansen (eds.), *South Asian Religion and Society*, 1986. See also **Tortoise avatar**.

## Aja Ekadashi

Festival falling on the eleventh **day** (**ekadashi**) of the dark (waning) half of the **lunar month** of **Bhadrapada** (August–September). As are all of the eleventh-day observances, this is dedicated to the **worship** of **Vishnu**. Most Hindu festivals have certain prescribed rites, usually involving fasting (**upavasa**) and worship, and often promise specific benefits for faithful performance. The most important requirement for this festival is to pass the night in worship; taking part is believed to free one from all evil. The name Aja means "unborn" and is one of the epithets of Vishnu.

## Ajamila

In Hindu mythology Ajamila is an example of a completely corrupted sinner, who is saved from Death by the boundless power of God's **grace**. Ajamila is a fallen **brahmin** who does all the things forbidden to brahmins—he eats meat, drinks **liquor**, takes a low **caste** woman as his mistress, and ignores all the **purity** laws which brahmins are supposed to keep. His only redeeming feature is his love for his **son Narayana**, which is also one of the names of **Vishnu**. As he lies dying, Ajamila sees the minions of Death coming for him, whose terrible forms portend a dire fate. In his terror at this vision and his longing for his son, Ajamila calls out "Narayana" with his dying breath, and because of this Vishnu sends his minions to rescue Ajamila. Ajamila is brought to **Vaikuntha**, Vishnu's dwelling place, where he lives happily.

## Ajatashatru

("[he whose] enemy is unborn," 5th c. B.C.E.) King in the Magadha region in the modern state of **Bihar**. Ajatashatru deposed and murdered his father, **Bimbisara**, around 494 B.C.E., then expanded his father's territorial gains. Ajatashatru first annexed the area around the city of **Benares** and then conquered the city of **Vaishali**, capital of the kingdom of the Vrjjis. Ajatashatru and his father both aimed at building an empire in the **Ganges** River basin, and they were among the first Indian kings to conceive of a far-flung empire.

## Ajatashatru

(2) In the **Brhadaranyaka Upanishad**, a great sage who was also the king of **Benares**. Ajatashatru is notable for instructing Gargya, a **brahmin** priest, on the nature of **Brahman**, even though this was inappropriate by contemporary standards since Ajatashatru was a **kshatriya** warrior king and thus should have been receiving instruction from Gargya. The **Upanishads** have several episodes in which, contrary to the norm, kshatriyas instruct brahmins. Such episodes reveal the nature of wisdom as conceived in the Upanishads—it is achieved by individual striving and realization and not conferred by **birth** or social position.

## Ajita Keshakambalin

In classical Indian **philosophy**, the reputed founder of a **materialist** philosophical school and whose name reflects his usual garb—a hair blanket (kesha-kambal). Ajita was a contemporary of the Buddha, and information about him comes from the Buddhist scriptures. Ajita's materialist philosophy was that human beings are composed of four elements, that these elements disperse after death, and that the individual then ceases to exist. Given this philosophy, Ajita believed that one should enjoy life while one could, taking pleasure in the good and accepting the bad, and that all religious observances were a waste of time and a futile hope. Ajita was the first in a long tradition of materialists, and one finds evidence of this materialist perspective as late as the eighth century of the common era.

## Ajivika

Ancient philosophical school traditionally believed to have been founded by **Gosala Maskariputra**, a contemporary of the Buddha. The Ajivikas were fatalists who believed that all things are inexorably predetermined by destiny (**niyati**). Since, according to this **philosophy**, all things are preordained, religious practice has no effect on one's future lives, and in doing such things people are only doing what they are already predetermined to do. The Ajivikas compared the process of reincarnation (**samsara**) to a ball of string, which would unroll until it was done and then go no further. The Ajivikas shunned clothing and lived a strict **ascetic** lifestyle, believing that this was the lifestyle preordained for them. The school had a significant presence in southern India well into the common era but finally disappeared around the fourteenth century. For further information see Arthur Llewellyn Basham, *History and Doctrines of the Ajivikas, a Vanished Indian Religion*, 1981.
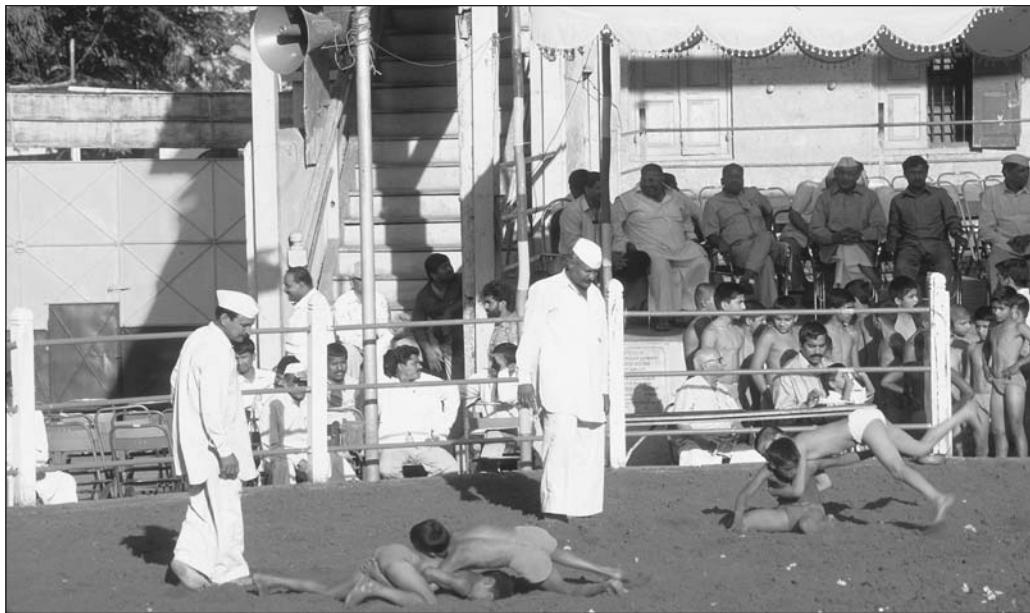
## Ajna Chakra

In many schools of **yoga** and in the esoteric ritual tradition known as **tantra**, the ajna chakra is one of the six psychic centers (**chakras**) thought to be in the **subtle body**. The subtle body is an alternate physiological system, believed to exist on a different plane of existence than gross matter but with certain correspondences to the material body. The subtle body is comprised of a set of six chakras, which are visualized as multipetaled lotus flowers running roughly along the course of the spine, connected by three vertical channels. Each chakra has important symbolic associations—with differing human capacities, different subtle elements (**tanmatras**), and different seed syllables (**bijaksharas**) formed from the letters of the **Sanskrit** alphabet, thus encompassing all sacred sound. Above and below the chakras are the bodily abodes of **Shiva** (awareness) and **Shakti** (power), the two divine principles through which the entire universe has come into being. The underlying assumption behind this concept of the subtle body is thus the homology of macrocosm and microcosm, an essential Hindu idea since the time of the mystical texts known as the **Upanishads**.

The six chakras are traditionally enumerated from the bottom up, and the ajna chakra is the sixth and highest of these. It is visualized as a two-petaled lotus located in the forehead just above the top of the nose. Its petals contain the bijaksharas Ham and Ksam, formed from the last two letters of the Sanskrit alphabet. The ajna chakra is associated with the capacity for thought, considered a distinctively human capacity and thus the most important human faculty. For further information see Arthur Avalon (Sir John Woodroffe), *Shakti and Shakta*, 1978; and Philip S. Rawson, *The Art of Tantra*, 1973.

## Akasha

("**space**") One of the five **elements** in traditional Indian **cosmology**, the others being **earth**, **fire**, **water**, and **wind**. In some philosophical schools, each of the

Boys in Shri Shaku Khashbaug competing in the village akhara, or wrestling ground.
Training in wrestling and participating in competitions are considered religious disciplines.

elements is paired with one of the five senses; akasha is associated with hearing since it is believed to convey sound from place to place.

## Akbar

(r. 1555–1605) Third and greatest ruler in the **Moghul dynasty**, a Muslim dynasty that controlled large parts of India between 1525 and 1707, existing in reduced form until 1857. Akbar's long reign was marked by generally good relations with his Hindu subjects, many of whom were put into positions of authority and for whom he seems to have had genuine sympathy and understanding. One of his most important gestures was to repeal a poll tax on non-Muslims, which had been customary but was highly unpopular among Hindus. Although more orthodox Muslims insinuated that Akbar was a closet Hindu, the goodwill and cooperation that he fostered helped keep things peaceful throughout his reign.

## Akhand Path

("unbroken recitation") The unbroken recitation of an entire religious text, which is believed to bring religious benefits; individuals may perform such recitations for their own benefit, or they may hire another person to perform the recitation for them. The benefits of this action are believed to come from the perceived power of the sacred text itself. The recitation may be done as a pious act, simply for the merit in sponsoring it, or as part of a festival observance; it may also be a last resort in times of dire emergencies or a religious act performed after a death in the family. One of the texts often recited without a break is the **_Ramcharitmanas_**, a retelling of the **_Ramayana_** by the sixteenth-century poet-saint **Tulsidas**; in the Sikh community, the **Adigranth** is recited.

## Akhara

In its most basic meaning, an akhara is a "wrestling ground," a place in the village or city where young men come to train, tone, and compete. Such practices at an akhara are not merely physical exercise but also a form of religious practice, since wrestlers often begin by worshiping **Hanuman**, a **deity** associated with strength and power. Among the **Naga** class of the

**Dashanami Sanyasis**, the word *akhara* means something closer to "regiment." The Dashanami Nagas were **ascetics** devoted to the god **Shiva** and who formerly made their living as traders and mercenary soldiers. These Nagas were organized into different akharas based on the model of an army, and here the word primarily marks group affiliation, although it can also refer to the buildings in which the group lives. The Nagas are divided into seven main akharas—the **Juna** or Bhairava, **Agni**, **Avahana**, **Niranjani**, **Ananda**, **Mahanirvani**, and **Atala**. Among the **Bairagi Naga** ascetics—militant ascetics who are devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Vishnu**—the largest division of forces is into **anis** ("armies"), which are then subdivided into akharas.

## Akhyati

("nondiscrimination") **Theory of error** propounded by **Prabhakara**, a member of the **Purva Mimamsa** philosophical school, who lived in the seventh or eighth century C.E. All the theories of error aim to explain why people make errors in judgment, such as the stock example of mistaking the silvery flash of a seashell for a piece of silver. Prabhakara explains this error as rooted in the inability to make sharp distinctions. The person uncritically connects two simple judgments, "that object is silvery" and "silver is silvery." By themselves, both of these statements are true; what is false is their combination into the complex judgment, "that object is silver." According to Prabhakara, the problem lies not with the simple impressions given by perception (**pratyaksha**) or memory—both of which are true—but with their uncritical connection, in which the mind fails to recognize that other judgments are possible. For further information see Bijayananda Kar, *The Theories of Error in Indian Philosophy*, 1978; and Karl H. Potter (ed.), *Presuppositions of India's Philosophies*, 1972.

## Akkadevi

Sister of King Jayasimha II (1015–1042 C.E.), a monarch in the **Chalukya dynasty** that ruled large parts of the **Deccan** peninsula. Akkadevi was important not only through her family connections but also because she served as a provincial governor in her brother's kingdom. Her example shows that **women** in powerful families have often been able to overcome the seeming social disadvantages imposed by their gender, a maxim proven most recently by Sonia Gandhi.

## Akrura

In Hindu mythology Akrura is most famous as the envoy from the royal court at **Mathura**, who takes the god **Krishna** away from Krishna's childhood home in **Braj**, never to return. Krishna's wicked uncle, King **Kamsa**, instructs Akrura to lure Krishna and his brother **Balarama** to a festival, where they will be killed in a "friendly" bout with some wrestlers. Akrura sees through the plot and warns Krishna about it, but he remains indelibly associated with Krishna's departure from Braj, which for his devotees (**bhakta**) is the bitterest moment in all of Krishna's mythology. For a moving, dramatic account of this incident, see John Stratton Hawley, *At Play with Krishna*, 1981.

## Akshakumara

In the Hindu epic the ***Ramayana***, this is one of the **sons** of **Ravana** by his wife **Mandodari**. Akshakumara fights bravely and valiantly in the war against **Rama's** army but is eventually killed by Rama's servant, the monkey-**deity**, **Hanuman**.

## Akshamala

A string of beads used to keep count when reciting prayers or **mantras**, sometimes translated by the accessible but misleading term "rosary." An akshamala is one of the most common religious articles, and the materials

from which it is made can often reveal sectarian affiliations. **Shiva** is often depicted wearing beads made of the seeds of the *Elaeocarpus ganitrus* tree, which are known as **rudraksha** ("eye of **Rudra**"). Devotees (**bhakta**) of Shiva emulate this practice. Devotees of the god **Vishnu** often carry beads made of wood from the **tulsi** plant, which is considered a form of Vishnu's wife **Lakshmi**. Other commonly used materials are sandalwood and crystal, but akshamalas can also be made from expensive materials such as coral and amber. In Hindu iconography the akshamala is one of the items commonly held by the **goddess Saraswati**, in keeping with her identity as the patron **deity** of learning and, by implication, sacred sound. The akshamala is also one of the items commonly held by the god **Brahma**, but in his case it has less specific significance.

## Akshar Purushottam Samstha

One of the prominent branches of the **Swaminarayan sect**, which split off from its parent body in 1906. The Swaminarayan movement is based on the teachings of Sahajananda Swami (1781–1830), an **ascetic** who was a devotee (**bhakta**) of the god **Vishnu**. Sahajananda's followers eventually revered him as a manifestation of **Krishna** (an incarnation of Vishnu), based on the idea that **avatars** of Vishnu appear on **earth** in times of extreme trouble. This same reverence is given to Sahajananda Swami's ascetic successors, who are known by the title **Pramukh Swami** ("President Swami"). At present the Akshar Purushottam Samstha has several million lay devotees (**bhakta**) who are mainly **Gujarati** merchants; their affluence has helped make the movement financially strong. The most important figures in the movement are the small number of ascetics who serve as teachers and spiritual advisers, headed by the Pramukh Swami. For further information see Raymond Brady Williams, *A New Face of Hinduism*, 1984.

## Akshaya Trtiya

(also called Akha Teej) Festival celebrated on the third **day** of the bright (waxing) half of the **lunar month** of **Baisakh** (April–May). The festival's name reflects the belief that the religious merit from rites performed on this day is indestructible (akshaya). This is thought to be the day on which the **Treta Yuga** (a previous cosmic age) began, and as a transitional day is believed to be highly auspicious. This day is marked by **worship** of **Vishnu** and his consort **Lakshmi**; it is also believed to be the birthday of Vishnu's sixth incarnation, **Parashuram avatar**. Consistent both with the worship of Vishnu and the belief that this is a transitional day, on Akshaya Trtiya the temple doors are opened at the Four Himalayan Dhams (the holy towns of **Yamunotri**, **Gangotri**, **Kedarnath**, and **Badrinath**) after having been closed all winter, and worship in those places is resumed until after the festival of **Diwali** in the fall. See also **Four Dhams**.

## Akshaya Vata

("indestructible banyan tree") In Hindu mythology, a particular banyan tree that existed before the creation of the universe and will be the only thing to survive the cosmic dissolution (**pralaya**) at the end of the cosmic cycle. According to one mythic account, the sage **Markandeya** saw a vision of pralaya in which the only thing remaining was this single tree, under which lay the god **Krishna** in infant form, sucking on his toes. The akshaya **vata** is identified with a particular banyan tree in **Allahabad** at the junction of the **Ganges** and **Yamuna** rivers, where it is now enclosed within the fort built by the Moghul emperor **Akbar**. Earlier writers report an enormous tree on the site, but in modern times the tree is quite small. In some stories it was cut down by one of Akbar's successors. According to the seventh-century Chinese pilgrim **Hsuan Tsang**,

The Alakananda River near Badrinath Garhwal.
As a tributary of the Ganges, its waters are considered sacred.

one of the preferred methods for committing religious **suicide** was to jump from the branches of the vata tree; this practice is also mentioned four centuries later by the Islamic scholar **Alberuni**.

## Alakananda River

The longest and largest Himalayan tributary of the **Ganges** River; the Ganges forms at **Devaprayag**, where the Alakananda unites with a second major tributary, the **Bhagirathi** River. As with all the Himalayan tributaries of the Ganges, the Alakananda River is considered sacred. Important pilgrimage places (**tirtha**) along the river include the temple town of **Badrinath** near its headwaters, its junction with the **Pindara River** at **Karnaprayag**, its junction with the **Mandakini** River at **Rudraprayag**, and Devaprayag.

## Alakhiya Akhara

The name of one subgroup of **ascetics** within the **Naga** class of the **Dashanami** order of **Sanyasis**. The Dashanami Nagas are devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva**, organized into different **akharas** or regiments that follow the model of an army. Until the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Nagas' primary occupation was as mercenary soldiers, although they also had substantial trading interests; both of these occupations have largely disappeared in contemporary times. The Alakhiya akhara is a subunit of the **Juna akhara**, one of the largest and oldest of the Naga akharas. The name *Alakhiya* comes from the word *alakh* ("without characteristics," a name for the Supreme Being), which many **Shaiva ascetics** utter when **begging** for alms.

Until the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Nagas were fighting ascetics, drawn largely from the ranks of the **shudras**, the lowest Hindu **varna**. According to tradition, these fighting ascetics were recruited to protect the learned ascetics who, because they were saintly and scholarly men, could not protect themselves. The Nagas also had substantial trading interests. Two and three hundred years ago, these akharas were very powerful, especially in parts of the country where the centralized government had broken down. The Naga akharas sold their services as mercenaries, lent money at interest, engaged in trade, and often owned large amounts of property. The one place where the divisions and subdivisions of the akharas are still quite important is at the celebration of the **Kumbha Mela**, a bathing (**snana**) festival. There is a strict order for bathing, and individuals get a place in line based on their affiliation. Two hundred years ago, being first in line signified political, economic, and/or military dominance. The present bathing order reflects each group's relative importance from that time.

## Alambhusha

In Hindu mythology, a celestial **woman** who was the **daughter** of the sage **Kashyapa**. As with many of the celestial women, she was often sent by **Indra**, the king of the gods, to seduce sages whose spiritual merit was great enough to pose a threat to Indra's lordship. The assumption behind this is that **celibacy** builds spiritual power, through which one can become a rival to the gods themselves. Sexual activity quickly drains this accumulated power, although the release of such power usually has positive consequences. Alambhusha is best known for her dalliance with the sage **Dadhichi**, by whom she had a **son** named **Saraswat**.

## Alamkara

("ornamentation") A term for figures of speech in **Sanskrit** poetry, of which there are more than one hundred types. Many of these are the same as those used in English poetics, such as metaphor, simile, contrast, hyperbole, alliteration, and puns. The Sanskrit literati distinguished these figures of speech even further into more specific types, such as a simile expressing wonder, a simile expressed by doubt, and poetic error, which is the inverse of a metaphor ("that's not the **moon**, but her face . . ."). Other forms are unique to Indian poetry, such as respective enumeration, an extended comparison in which one line mentions several referents and the following lines describe their attributes, always in the same order as the first line. Another form unique to Indian poetry is denial in which the speaker's real intent is expressed by denial, but is accompanied by enough suggestion to indicate the true meaning. The use of alamkara marked all kinds of Sanskrit poetry, both religious and nonreligious, and many of these forms were brought into the later devotional poetry in the vernacular Indian languages. For further information on Sanskrit poetics, see Daniel H. H. Ingalls, *Sanskrit Poetry*, 1968.

## Alandi

**Maharashtra** village famous as the home of the poet-saint **Jnaneshvar** and the site of his **samadhi** (**burial**) **shrine**. Jnaneshvar was the first great figure in the **Varkari Panth**, a religious community centered around the **worship** of the Hindu god **Vithoba**. Varkari religious practice centers primarily around two annual pilgrimages, in which all the participants arrive in **Pandharpur** in the modern state of Maharashtra on the same day. Despite having been dead for over 700 years, Jnaneshvar still symbolically travels from Alandi to Pandharpur twice each year; a **palanquin** (palkhi) carrying his sandals is at the head of the procession bearing his name.

## Alberuni

(973–ca.1050 C.E.) Anglicized version of the name of Abu Rayhan Biruni, a central Asian scholar-scientist who was one of the greatest intellectual figures of his time. Alberuni was a member of the court of King **Mahmud of Ghazni**—by most accounts, quite reluctantly—and was forced to accompany Mahmud on some of his pillaging raids in India. Alberuni used this involuntary "fieldwork" as an opportunity to study Hindu life, culture, and sciences, and his work shows him to be a perceptive, careful, and dispassionate observer. In 1030 C.E. he published his findings in his *Tahqiq ma li'l-Hind*, which was translated in 1888 by Edward Sachau as *Alberuni's India*. An abridged edition edited by Ainslee Embree was published in 1971.

## Alchemy

Esoteric tradition that seeks to transform, transmute, and perfect the body through the use of various chemicals, with the ultimate goal of rendering the body immortal. Both Hindus and Buddhists have alchemical schools. The reported difference between the Buddhist **rasayana** school and the Hindu **dhatuvada** school is that the latter is solely materially based, whereas the former stresses meditation to gain final enlightenment. These two schools agree on many basic points of alchemy.

Hindu alchemists view the world as a series of bipolar opposites in tension with one another, and they are convinced that unifying these opposing forces brings spiritual progress and the end of reincarnation (**samsara**). Hindu alchemy shares this model of uniting or transcending opposing forces with Hindu **tantra**, an esoteric, ritually based system of religious practice, and with **hatha yoga**, which is based on a series of physical exercises that are also believed to affect the **subtle body**. Although all three traditions share a common assumption, they prescribe different forms of practice to effect the final goal: in tantra, ritual; in hatha yoga, physical exercises; and in alchemy, physical consumption of various substances.

In the alchemical tradition, the governing metaphor for this combination of opposites is the union of **sun** and **moon**. In Hindu tradition the sun and moon are connected to other opposing principles through an elaborate series of associations. The sun is identified with heat, drying power, **fire**, **Shakti**, and menstrual **blood**; the moon with coolness, healing power, **water**, **Shiva**, and **semen**. In alchemical practice the two essential chemical elements are **mercury** and **sulfur**—the former identified with Shiva's semen and the latter with Shakti's uterine blood. By properly mixing and consuming these elements, the aspirant's body is purified and refined, eventually rendering it immortal. Modern descriptions of this practice invariably warn that it should only be carried out under the direction of one's **guru** (spiritual teacher), since otherwise these combinations will be harmful. This warning is not surprising since mercury is a deadly poison. For further information see Shashibhushan B. Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cults*, 1962; and David Gordon White, *The Alchemical Body*, 1996.

## Alidhasana

("shooting posture") Bodily posture (**asana**) characteristic of certain images in Hindu iconography. This position is like that of an archer drawing a bow, in which one knee is thrown forward, the other leg pushed back, and the trunk twisted in the direction of the front leg. The god **Shiva** in his manifestation as **Tripurari**, "the destroyer of the Triple City," is often shown in this posture. The god **Rama** is also portrayed in his warrior pose.

## Allahabad

("City of Allah") City at the junction of the **Ganges** and **Yamuna** rivers. The city was named Allahabad by the Moghul emperor **Akbar**, who built a fort there in 1583 to signify Moghul control of the region. Traditionally, the place where the rivers meet is considered a sacred bathing (**snana**) place, and the city was called Prayaga ("place of **sacrifice**") by the Hindus. This name is still used to distinguish the sacred site (**tirtha**) from the city surrounding it. Another name for the junction is **Triveni** ("triple stream"), reflecting the traditional belief that the two visible rivers are joined at the confluence by a third underground river, the **Saraswati**. Near the bathing place is a banyan tree believed to be the **akshaya vata** ("indestructible banyan tree"), which despite its powerful name is at present very small.

As with all places where the Ganges makes some natural transition—here its confluence with another sacred river—Prayaga is considered especially holy, and bathing there is believed to confer even greater religious merit than a normal Ganges bath. This sanctity can be further amplified by bathing during particularly auspicious times in the **calendar**. For example, the annual **Magh Mela** is a bathing festival held during the **lunar month** of **Magh** (January–February). The holiest time for bathing is during a festival called **Kumbha Mela**, which is held approximately every twelve years when **Jupiter** is in Taurus. The Kumbha Mela is followed six years later by the **Ardha** ("half") **Kumbha Mela**, which carries less sanctity than the "full" Kumbha Mela but is still considered a highly propitious event. Allahabad's Kumbha Mela in 1989 was the largest religious festival on earth, attended by an estimated fifteen million people on a single day.

## Allama Prabhu

(12th c. C.E.) Poet-saint and religious leader in the **Lingayat** community, a **bhakti** (devotional) community that **worships Shiva** as the single supreme god and rejects all **caste** regulations. The Lingayats formed in the southern Indian state of **Karnataka**, where they still have a considerable presence, and the collections of poetry that form their most important religious texts are composed in the **Kannada** language. According to legend, Allama was Shiva himself on **earth**, and the honorific title "Master" (Prabhu) indicates the respect that his Lingayat contemporaries granted him. In his poetry, Allama spoke from the perspective of one who had gained final liberation and had completely transcended all ritual and worldly ties. For further information see A. K. Ramanujan (trans.), *Speaking of Siva*, 1973.

## Alvar

Collective name for twelve poet-saints devoted to the god **Vishnu** who lived in southern India between the seventh and tenth centuries. In conjunction with the **Nayanars**, who were devoted to the god **Shiva**, the Alvars spearheaded the revitalization of Hindu religion vis-à-vis the Buddhists and the Jains. Both the Alvars and the Nayanars stressed passionate devotion (**bhakti**) to a personal god and conveyed this devotion through hymns sung in the **Tamil language**. The earliest Alvars were a group of three seventh-century contemporaries: **Poygai**, **Pey**, and **Bhutam**, whose propitious meeting on a rainy night is described as sparking the devotional flame. The next group: **Tiruppan**, **Tirumalisai**, **Tondaradippodi**, **Kulashekhara**, **Periyalvar**, **Andal**, and **Tirumangai**, are believed to have lived in the ninth century. They were followed by **Nammalvar** and his disciple **Mathurakavi**, who can be reasonably placed in the beginning of the tenth century, as can **Nathamuni**, who collected all of the Alvars' hymns in the *Nalayira Prabandham*. Although the

Alvars described themselves only as human devotees (**bhakta**), by the tenth century they were revered by the **Shrivaishnava** religious community as **anshavatars**, or incarnations of Vishnu's attributes or companions. Their collected hymns were (and are) popularly known as the Tamil **Veda** and became a vital part of later **Vaishnava** piety in southern India. This is particularly true for the Shrivaishnava tradition, in which one of the major figures was Nathamuni himself.

## Amalaka

In the **Nagara** style of Hindu temple **architecture**, the amalaka is a stone disk, usually with ridges on the rim, that sits on top of the temple's main tower. According to one interpretation, the amalaka represents a lotus and is thus the symbolic seat for the **deity** worshiped below. Another interpretation is that it symbolizes the **sun** and is thus the gateway to the heavenly world. The amalaka itself is crowned with a **kalasha** (finial), from which a temple banner is often hung. See also **heavens**.

## Amalaki Ekadashi

Festival falling on the eleventh **day** (**ekadashi**) of the bright (waxing) half of the **lunar month** of **Phalgun** (February–March). As are all of the eleventh-day observances, this is dedicated to the **worship** of **Vishnu**. Most Hindu festivals have certain prescribed rites, usually involving fasting (**upavasa**) and worship, and often promise specific benefits for faithful performance. On this day, one should worship the amvala tree since this is one of the places in which Vishnu is believed to reside.

## Amarkantak

Sacred site (**tirtha**) at the headwaters of the **Narmada River**, in the **Vindhya mountains** in the state of **Madhya Pradesh**. As with all the junctions of India's sacred rivers, Amarkantak is held to be an especially holy place for religious actions. Most pilgrims go there to perform common pilgrimage rites such as **snana** (bathing) and **shraddha** (memorial rites), but Amarkantak is also one of the places mentioned in **Sanskrit** texts as a site for religious **suicide**.

## Amarnath

("The Undying Lord") Sacred site (**tirtha**) and pilgrimage place located high in the mountains of **Kashmir**, dedicated to the god **Shiva** in the form of Amarnath (The Undying Lord). The focus of the site is a limestone cave, where each year melting snow trickling through the limestone fissures naturally forms a pillar of ice. At its largest, this pillar can be more than seven feet tall, but this can vary significantly from year to year depending on the weather. The most common **aniconic image** of Shiva is the **linga**, a cylindrical form imperfectly described as a "phallic symbol." Hindus believe that the ice pillar in the Amarnath cave is a svayambhu, or "self-manifested," linga of Shiva. Such lingas are not made by human beings but are places where Shiva decides to reveal himself, out of love for his devotees (**bhakta**). Any **svayambhu image** is believed to be particularly holy because Shiva is thought to be uniquely present. These sites are often seen as places where prayers and **worship** are particularly efficacious.

The Amarnath cave is in a remote spot that is inaccessible for most of the year due to snow. The pilgrimage takes place during the month of **Shravan** (July–August), with travelers timing their trip to arrive on the day of the **full moon**. The pilgrimage officially begins at the **Dashanami Sanyasi akhara** in Shrinagar and is led by the akhara's leader (**mahant**), who carries a silver mace as an emblem of his authority. This preeminence is given to **ascetics** because they are living symbols of Shiva himself, who is the perfect ascetic. Most pilgrims start their journey at the town of Pahalgam. From there they walk almost thirty miles to

The outside entrance of the limestone caves at Amarnath.
This is a sacred site in which the god Shiva is believed to reside.

Amarnath, crossing two mountain ranges on the way. Although the region is thinly settled for most of the year, during the pilgrimage season, camps and businesses spring up along the route; many are run by local Kashmiri Muslims, for whom this is a major source of livelihood. The **offerings** at the shrine are evenly split between the mahant, the local **pandas** (Hindu pilgrimage priests), and a group of Muslims from a village near Pahalgam who traditionally maintained the road, although the state has done this since India has gained independence. During the early 1990s, parts of Kashmir were a war zone between Indian government forces and a variety of Kashmiri Muslim groups, some of which pressed for greater self-determination and others for unification with Pakistan. These problems have affected the pilgrimage, which passes through some of the most contested areas. In 1994 there were several attacks on travelers, reportedly prompted by pilgrims chanting anti-Muslim slogans, and in 1995 the pil-grimage took place under heavy security provided by the Indian army. The 1996 pilgrimage had no political turmoil, but several hundred people died of hypothermia caused by a sudden unseasonable snowstorm.

## Amaru

(7th c.?) **Sanskrit** poet traditionally thought to be the author of the *Amarushatakam* ("Amaru's Hundred"), a collection of poems on the theme of **erotic** love. The text's name is doubly misleading since present editions contain almost 200 poems, and there is strong evidence that it was compiled from several earlier collections, making its authorship uncertain. Although Amaru's poetry explores the joys of carnal love and is thus not explicitly religious, the themes of lover/beloved and union/separation treated in this poetry later became standard themes in **bhakti** (devotional) poetry. In the *Shankaradigvijaya*, a legendary biography of the philosopher

**Shankaracharya**, Amaru is described as a king who becomes mythically connected with the great sage. In response to the challenge that he knows nothing about sexuality, Shankaracharya uses his yogic powers to animate Amaru's body immediately after the latter's death. In this form Shankaracharya experiences this facet of human life, although reportedly without desire on his part. Shankaracharya has sexual relations with Amaru's wives, enjoys the fruits of passion, and pens the *Amarushatakam* to record his deeds. Although this claim is highly doubtful, it helps to illustrate some important thematic connections between religious and erotic poetry. For further information see Lee Siegel, *Fires of Love—Waters of Peace*, 1983.

## Amaruka

Another name for the legendary poet **Amaru**. See **Amaru**.

## Amarushatakam

("**Amaru's** Hundred") Collection of poems on the theme of **erotic** love, traditionally ascribed to the seventh-century poet Amaru. The text's name is doubly misleading since present editions contain almost 200 poems, and there is strong evidence that it was compiled from several earlier collections, making its authorship uncertain. Although the poetry explores the joys of carnal love and is thus not explicitly religious, the themes of lover/beloved and union/separation treated in this poetry later became standard genres of **bhakti** (devotional) poetry.

## Amba

In the Hindu epic the *Mahabharata*, Amba is the elder sister of **Ambika** and **Ambalika**. In the story she is abducted with her sisters by **Bhishma**, to be married to his stepbrother **Vichitravirya**. Ambika and Ambalika happily marry Vichitravirya, but when Amba confides

that she has already given her heart to King Salva, Bhishma releases her to go to him. When Amba returns to Salva, he rejects her on the grounds that her virginity is suspect because she has been abducted by another man. Amba returns to Bhishma and demands that he marry her, since he is responsible for her plight. Bhishma refuses to do so because he has promised his father, King **Shantanu**, that he will never marry, to ensure that his stepbrothers will have no rivals for the throne. His refusal leaves Amba with no source of support, and she vows to get revenge. She is later reborn as the man-woman **Shikhandi**, behind whom **Arjuna** hides to shoot the arrows that eventually kill Bhishma.

## Ambakeshvar

Another name for **Tryambakeshvar**, the presiding **deity** of a sacred site (**tirtha**) at **Trimbak**, in the **Nasik** district of the state of **Maharashtra**. Tryambakeshvar is one of the twelve **jyotirlingas**, the "**lingas** of light" that are considered especially sacred to **Shiva**. See **Tryambakeshvar**.

## Ambalika

In the Hindu epic the *Mahabharata*, Ambalika is the **daughter** of the king of **Kashi** and one of the wives of King **Vichitravirya**. When Vichitravirya dies childless, his mother, **Satyavati**, calls upon her eldest **son**, **Vyasa**, to sleep with Ambalika and her sister **Ambika** in the hope that the **women** will conceive and continue the family line. According to tradition, Vyasa is very ugly, and each woman involuntarily reacts when Vyasa appears in her bed. Ambalika turns pale, causing her son **Pandu** to be born with an unnaturally pale complexion, and Ambika covers her eyes, causing her son **Dhrtarashtra** to be born blind.

## Ambarisha

In Hindu mythology, a king of the **Ikshvaku** dynasty about whom various sources paint very differing pictures. In the *Ramayana*, the earlier of the two

great Hindu epics, he is portrayed as a man who is willing to **sacrifice** a boy, Sunassepha, in place of a sacrificial **cow** that **Indra** has stolen. At the moment of the sacrifice, Sunassepha prays to the gods, and Indra appears to bless both Ambarisha and Sunassepha. In another story, from the ***Bhagavata Purana***, Ambarisha is portrayed as a fervent devotee (**bhakta**) of **Vishnu**. When the sage **Durvasas** tries to disrupt Ambarisha's **ekadashi** ("eleventh **day**") observances, Ambarisha calls for help from Vishnu's discus weapon, **Sudarshana**. At Ambarisha's prayer, the discus pursues Durvasas throughout the universe and gives him no place of refuge. In the end, a humbled Durvasas is forced to beg Ambarisha's forgiveness, and the latter informs Durvasas of the powers of ekadashi observance.

## Ambedkar, Dr. Bhim Rao

(1891–1956) Thinker, writer, and social activist whose worldview always reflected his birth as a **Mahar**, a **caste** of **untouchables** in the state of **Maharashtra**. Ambedkar's father had joined the British army, which brought the family enough social mobility for Bhim Rao to get an education: a B.A. in Bombay, an M.A. and Ph.D. from Columbia University in New York City, and a D.Sc. from London University. He also passed the British bar exam. Ambedkar spent his life fighting for the rights of the untouchable classes, through both political lobbying and social action. In 1932, through his efforts, untouchables were given a separate electorate as a **minority** group. **Mohandas Gandhi** was bitterly opposed to removing untouchables from the larger Hindu body politic and began a fast unto death. In the end Ambedkar relented, but for the rest of his life he maintained that Gandhi had used the untouchables as pawns in India's political struggles with Britain. Ambedkar claimed that for untouchables there was no material difference between Gandhi's practices and traditional caste

Hinduism, because rather than having any real political power, the untouchables had to continue relying on the "goodwill" of Hindus to look after their needs. Ambedkar played an important role in the formation of the Republic of India, including being called upon to author its constitution, but social inequality continued to rankle him. In 1956 he and many of his followers formally converted to Buddhism as a way to leave the caste system behind. These "neo-Buddhists" still exist, and despite their relatively small numbers, their militancy makes them an important group.

## Ambika

("mother") Epithet of the **Goddess**. In many cases it refers specifically to **Shiva's** wife **Parvati**, but it is also used as the name of a powerful female **deity** in the ***Devimahatmya***, the earliest text in which a female divinity is presented as the Ultimate Reality in the universe.

## Ambika

(2) In one of the great Hindu epics, the ***Mahabharata***, Ambika is the **daughter** of the king of **Kashi** and the wife of King **Vichitravirya**. When Vichitravirya dies childless, his mother, **Satyavati**, calls upon her oldest **son**, **Vyasa**, to have sex with Ambika and her sister **Ambalika** in the hope that the **women** will conceive and continue the family line. According to tradition, Vyasa is very ugly, and each woman involuntarily reacts when Vyasa appears in her bed. Ambika covers her eyes, causing her son **Dhrtarashtra** to be born blind, and Ambalika turns pale, causing her son **Pandu** to have an unnaturally pale complexion.

## Ammonite

Spiral-shaped fossil shell of a prehistoric sea creature. The black stones in which these fossil shells are embedded are known as **shalagrams** and are found in great numbers in the **Kali Gandaki** River in **Nepal**. The name *ammonite* comes from the Latin

expression meaning "horn of Ammon," which refers to a form of the god **Jupiter** that bears rams' horns. In India the ammonite's circular form is understood as a symbol of **Vishnu's** discus (**chakra**), and thus the shalagram is considered a **svayambhu** "self-manifested" image of Vishnu himself. As with all svayambhu forms of a **deity**, the shalagram is considered to be extraordinarily holy and is usually kept as an object of **worship**.

## Amritanandamayi

(b. 1953, as Sudhamani) Modern Hindu teacher and religious leader, whose devotees (**bhakta**) **worship** her as an incarnation of the **Goddess**. She was born the **daughter** of a poor fisherman, and from her earliest childhood she focused on religious life. Her teachings stress the importance of devotion (**bhakti**), particularly to one's spiritual teacher (**guru**), and her devotees credit her with healing and spiritual awakening. The Mata Amritanandamayi **Math**, located in the city of Quilon in the state of **Kerala**, was formed to spread her teachings in India and abroad.

## Amrta

("imperishable") In Hindu mythology this is the nectar of immortality, which is churned from the Ocean of Milk through the combined efforts of the gods and the **demons**. The word is also used metaphorically to describe anything believed to be especially purifying and powerful, such as **charanamrta** ("foot nectar"). Charanamrta are the liquids (milk, **water**, etc.) given to devotees (**bhakta**) to drink, which are often the fluids in which their **guru's** feet or the image of a **deity** have been bathed. See also **Tortoise avatar**.

## Anahata Chakra

In many schools of **yoga** and in the esoteric ritual tradition known as **tantra**, the anahata chakra is one of the six psychic centers (**chakras**) believed to exist in the **subtle body**.

The subtle body is an alternate physiological system, thought to be on a different plane of existence than gross matter but with certain correspondences to the material body. It is comprised of a set of six psychic centers, which are envisioned as multi-petaled lotus flowers running roughly along the course of the spine, connected by three vertical channels. Each of these chakras has important symbolic associations—with differing human capacities, different subtle elements (**tanmatras**), and different seed syllables (**bijaksharas**) formed from the letters of the **Sanskrit** alphabet, thus encompassing all sacred sound. Above and below these centers are, respectively, **Shiva** (embodying awareness) and **Shakti** (embodying power), the two divine principles through which the entire universe has come into being. The underlying assumption behind this concept of the subtle body is thus the harmony of macrocosm and microcosm, an essential Hindu idea since the time of the mystical texts known as the **Upanishads**.

The six chakras are traditionally listed from the bottom up, and the anahata chakra is the fourth. It is visualized as a twelve-petaled lotus located in the region of the heart. These petals each contain a seed syllable formed from a letter of the Sanskrit alphabet, in this case the first twelve consonants. On a symbolic level, the anahata chakra is associated with the circulation of **blood** throughout the body. It is also identified as the bodily seat for the subtle element of **wind**, the action of which (through the operation of the five **vital winds** known as **pranas**) is believed to be responsible for circulating things through the body. For further information see Arthur Avalon (Sir John Woodroffe), *Shakti and Shakta*, 1978; and Philip S. Rawson, *The Art of Tantra*, 1973.

## Analogy

In certain schools of Indian **philosophy**, analogy is considered to be one of the **pramanas**, the means by which human beings can gain true and accurate knowledge. See **upamana**.

## Ananda

("bliss") One of the three traditional attributes of the Supreme Reality (**Brahman**), usually described as being-consciousness-bliss (**sacchidananda**). Ananda, or bliss, is heavily stressed in certain forms of **tantra**, an esoteric ritual tradition. In tantra, ananda is both an aspect of mundane physical enjoyment and a way of describing the ultimate realization. In this understanding, even ordinary pleasures are reflections of ultimate bliss. Ultimate bliss differs from ordinary pleasure both because it is permanent, and because you lose your sense of self and are aware only of bliss.

## Ananda Akhara

The name of a specific group of the **Naga** class of the **Dashanami Sanyasis**, a particular type of renunciant **ascetic**. The Dashanami Nagas are devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva**, organized into six different **akharas** or regiments on the model of an army. Until the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Nagas' primary occupation was as mercenary soldiers, although they also had substantial trading interests; both of these occupations have largely disappeared in contemporary times.

For organizational purposes, the Ananda akhara is considered a subsidiary of the powerful **Niranjani akhara**, one of the other seven akharas. All of the groups have particular features that define their organizational identity, especially specific tutelary **deities**; the tutelary deity of the Ananda akhara is **fire**.

## Ananda Marga Yoga Society

Modern Hindu organization founded by Shri Anandamurti. The Society emphasizes **yoga** and meditation, which are intended to set its practitioners on the path (marga) to bliss (**ananda**). The movement is the strongest in the state of **West Bengal**, and has been dogged by controversy in India, particularly after Anandamurti was indicted for the murder of two of his disciples. In the end he was acquitted of all charges, but the organization's legal troubles made its members withdraw from society. Many Indians view them with suspicion, if not outright hostility, and the movement is associated with ritual murder and black **magic**. In recent times, it has even been suspected of terrorism, after a large shipment of black-market arms was mysteriously parachuted into a nearby region in early 1995. Although it has never been proved that the arms were for the Society, this incident is one more element in the surrounding cloud of secrecy and suspicion.

## Anandamath

Novel by the Bengali nationalist author **Bankim Chandra Chatterjee** (1838–1894). It is set in eighteenth-century Bengal during the so-called **Sanyasi Rebellion**, which invloved bands of Hindu and Muslim militant **ascetics**. Both groups fought with the British East India Company for control over the region.

Historical inquiry suggests that the roots of this conflict lay in the extreme social tensions in Bengali society, particularly changes in land ownership patterns and the havoc wreaked by the great famine of 1770–1771. Chatterjee was an ardent Indian nationalist and portrayed the Sanyasi Rebellion as a struggle by Mother India's loyal children to expel the parasitic British invaders from her shores.

Although the novel was set in an earlier era to avoid problems with the British authorities, *Anandamath* is clearly allegorical and nationalistic, and it is viewed by contemporary critics as Chatterjee's way to symbolize the need for continuing the struggle against British imperialism in the mid-nineteenth century.

## Anandamayi Ma

(1896–1982) Hindu mystic and saint, who during her lifetime gained a wide following in all parts of Hindu society as a manifestation of the Mother **Goddess**. She was born in Dhaka in modern Bangladesh and from a very young age showed strong spiritual tendencies. These intensified after her marriage, when she would slip into blissful meditation, oblivious to her surroundings and the passage of time. The marriage was never consummated and her husband became one of her primary disciples. For some time she lived in an **ashram** in the city of **Benares**, which is famous as a sacred site (**tirtha**). Later she built an ashram just outside the city of **Haridwar**, where her **samadhi** ("**burial**") **shrine** can be found.

## Anandapala

The last great king in the Pratihara dynasty, which ruled large sections of the northwestern part of the Indian subcontinent between the eighth and eleventh centuries. In 1001 C.E., Anandapala assembled a coalition of Hindu princes to do battle with **Mahmud of Ghazni** in a desperate attempt to halt the latter's expansion. Anandapala and his allies were annihilated in a battle near Peshawar in modern Pakistan, and the Pratihara dynasty's power was completely destroyed. With this powerful dynasty out of the way, there was no political force in northern India strong enough to stop Mahmud. He began making annual raids into India.

## Anandawara

One of the four major groups of the **Dashanami Sanyasis**, renunciant **ascetics** who are devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva**; the other three divisions are **Kitawara**, **Bhuriwara**, and **Bhogawara**. Each of these groups has its headquarters in one of the four monastic centers (**maths**) supposedly established by the philosopher **Shankaracharya**. Each group also has particular religious associations: with one of the four **Vedas**, with a particular quarter of the Indian subcontinent, with one of the "great utterances" (**mahavakyas**) expressing ultimate truth, with a specific **ascetic** quality, and with several of the ten Dashanami divisions.

The Anandawara group is affiliated with the **Jyotir Math** in the Himalayan town of **Joshimath** and is thus connected with the northern quarter of India. Their **Veda** is the **Atharva Veda**, their mahavakya is **Ayamatma Brahman** ("This Self is **Brahman**"), and their ascetic quality is to be satisfied with whatever food they get without **begging**, since they are not attached to worldly pleasures. The particular Dashanami divisions associated with this group are **Giri**, **Parvata**, and **Sagara**.

## Ananga

("bodyless") Epithet of **Kama**, a **deity** who is the personification of desire. Kama was given the name Ananga because his body was destroyed by the **fire** from **Shiva's** third eye. See **Kama**.

## Ananta

("endless") Epithet of **Shesha**, the god **Vishnu's** serpent couch. See **Shesha**.

## Anantadas

(late 16th c.) Poet and hagiographer who wrote "introductions" (parchais) for some of the best-known northern Indian devotional (**bhakti**) poet-saints, among them **Ravidas**, **Kabir**, **Namdev**, **Trilochan**, **Angada**, and **Pipa**. His era can be fixed with reasonable assurance since Anantadas himself gives 1588 C.E. as the date of composition for his *Namdev Parchai*. Anantadas was contemporary with another famous hagiographer, **Nabhadas**, whom Anantadas names as a "**guru** brother" to his own guru, making Nabhadas a "spiritual uncle" of Anantadas. Although both hagiographers provide valuable information, the descriptions

by Nabhadas are quite brief, whereas Anantadas gives extended information about his subjects. Anantadas's works are by far the earliest detailed accounts of these literary figures, although the marvelous events included in the introductions render them suspect as historical sources. Because his collected works have never been published, he remains virtually unknown. For further information see David Lorenzen, *Kabir Legends and Ananta-Das's Kabir Parachai*, 1991; and Winand Callewaert and Peter G. Friedlander (trans.), *The Life and Works of Raidas*, 1992.

## Anant Chaturdashi

Festival falling on the fourteenth **day** (chaturdashi) of the bright (waxing) half of the **lunar month** of **Bhadrapada** (August–September). This festival falls during the four-month period when the **deity Vishnu** is believed to be sleeping on **Shesha**, his serpent couch, while his wife **Lakshmi** massages his feet. The festival itself is named after Shesha, one of whose epithets is Anant ("endless"). On this day, devotees (**bhakta**) of Vishnu should **worship** and meditate on this particular image of Vishnu, with Shesha and Lakshmi.

Before beginning worship, devotees tie onto their forearm a string dipped in turmeric, an eastern Indian spice, in which fourteen knots have been made. Each of these elements is symbolic: The string is a symbol of Shesha, the color yellow is associated with Vishnu, and the fourteen knots signify the fourteenth day.

Aside from worshiping Vishnu, devotees should also fast (**upavasa**) on this day. Carefully observing the requirements for this festival is believed to ensure prosperity and freedom from exile. According to mythic tradition, keeping this vow enables the five **Pandava** brothers, the heroes of the epic *Mahabharata*, to escape from exile and regain their kingdom.

## Anasuya

In Hindu mythology Anasuya is the wife of the sage **Atri**. On one occasion Anasuya is begged by the gods **Brahma**, **Vishnu**, and **Shiva** to help them. A woman named Silavati has cursed the **sun** not to rise, and the creatures on **earth** are very distressed. Anasuya succeeds in persuading Silavati to recall her **curse**, and in their gratitude the three gods tell her she can ask for whatever she wants. Anasuya requests that each be born as one of her **sons**, and this is granted: Vishnu is born as **Dattatreya**, Shiva as **Durvasas**, and Brahma as Chandra.

## Ancestral Spirit

(pitr) This term is a translation of the word that literally means "fathers"; these ancestral spirits are seen as a collective group to whom every man has duties. One of these duties is to perform certain memorial rites for them, such as the rite of **sapindikarana**. Like most funerary rites (**antyeshthi samskara**), the major objective is to transform the recently deceased and potentially malevolent spirit into a benign and helpful ancestor. Another duty is to procreate **sons**, so that the rites may be performed without interruption. Both of these are weighty responsibilities, and Hindu mythology is replete with tales of lifelong **ascetics**, such as **Jaratkaru**, who are rebuked by their ancestral spirits for shirking their duty to procreate. By virtue of their stable ancestral status, these spirits are also well-defined and generally benevolent.

## Andal

(9th c.) The only woman among the **Alvars**, a group of twelve poet-saints who lived in southern India between the seventh and tenth centuries. All the Alvars were devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Vishnu**, and their stress on passionate devotion (**bhakti**) to a personal god, conveyed through hymns sung in the **Tamil language**, transformed and revitalized Hindu religious life.

Temple of Venkateshvara in the town of Tirupati in Andhra Pradesh.

As with many female bhakti figures, Andal had a particularly passionate relationship with her chosen **deity**, whom she considered her betrothed husband. This deity was **Ranganatha**, a particular form of Vishnu resident at the temple of **Shrirangam** in the state of **Tamil Nadu**. According to legend, Andal was an earthly manifestation of **Vishnu's** wife Bhudevi ("**Earth Goddess**") and appeared as an abandoned baby to her foster father, **Periyalvar**, another of the Alvars. When she came of age, she was adamant that she would have no human husband and merged into the image of Ranganatha at Shrirangam.

Although many of the details about her life are uncertain, Andal did compose two collections of poetry, the ***Tirruppavai*** and the ***Nacciyar Tirumoli***, both of which are dedicated to Vishnu in his form as **Krishna**. For further information see Vidya Dehejia (trans.), *Antal and Her Path of Love*, 1990.

## Andhaka

("blind") In Hindu mythology, a **demon** born from the darkness that arises when the **goddess Parvati** play-fully covers her husband **Shiva's** eyes with her hands. Shiva names him Andhaka because he arises from darkness. Andhaka lusts after Parvati and continues to pursue her, despite repeated remonstrances that approaching another man's wife is improper. Eventually he goes all the way to Shiva's home on Mount **Kailas**, where the god kills him.

## Andhra

**Brahmin** subcommunity that is one of the five southern brahmin communities (**Pancha Dravida**). As their name would indicate, the core region for the Andhra brahmins is located in the modern state of **Andhra Pradesh**.

## Andhra Pradesh

Modern southern Indian state. Andhra Pradesh is one of the so-called linguistic states formed after independence to unite people with a common language and culture (in this case, Telegu) under one state government.

In the case of Andhra Pradesh, this was done by combining the princely

state of Hyderabad with the Telegu-speaking provinces of the former state of Madras. This merger did not happen without some drama; when independence arrived, the Nizam of Hyderabad, a Muslim ruler whose subjects were mainly Hindus, was initially reluctant to join the Indian union, although he acceded after troops were deployed by the Indian government. The state capital has remained at Hyderabad, which is the largest and most important city.

Andhra Pradesh is overwhelmingly agricultural, with fertile land in the **Krishna** and **Godavari** river deltas, but it is relatively undeveloped, and there is still a great disparity between the rich and the poor. In recent years it has become the home of an important regional political party, the Telegu Desam, as well as a base for the Marxist revolutionary group known as Naxalites, who are carrying on an armed struggle against the landlords.

Andhra is also home to India's richest temple, the temple of **Venkateshvara** at **Tirupati**, and to **Mallikarjuna**, one of the twelve **jyotir-lingas**, a group of sites especially sacred to **Shiva**. For general information about Andhra Pradesh and all the regions of India, an accessible reference is Christine Nivin et al., *India*. 8th ed., Lonely Planet, 1998.

## Anekantavada

One of the three **causal models** in Indian **philosophy**, along with **asatkaryavada** and **satkaryavada**. All three models seek to explain the workings of causality in the everyday world, particularly the relationship between causes and their effects, which has profound implications for religious life. Philosophical theory assumes that if one understands the causal process correctly and can manipulate it through one's conscious actions, it is possible to gain final liberation of the soul (**moksha**). Disagreements over differing causal models are grounded in varying assumptions about the nature of things.

The asatkaryavada model assumes that effects do not preexist in their causes; the satkaryavada model assumes that they do. The third model, Anekantavada ("the view that things are not single"), seeks to occupy the middle ground between these two.

Anekantavada stresses how one looks at things and the way that this can color a judgment. In viewing the transformation of milk to curds, butter, and clarified butter, an anekantavada proponent would claim that the substances in question were contained in the causes (supporting the satkaryavada notion), but that the qualities each of these substances possessed were newly created each time (supporting the asatkaryavada notion).

Thus, causes and effects are simultaneously both the same and different, depending on the lens through which one looks at them. This theory is an attempt to find a middle ground between the other two causal models by showing that each is possible, but it runs the risk of being seen as not taking any position at all. The major proponents of this position are the Jains, who are outside the scope of the present work. For further information see Karl H. Potter (ed.), *Presuppositions of India's Philosophies*, 1972.

## Anga

The traditional name for the region and people of the border area in eastern India shared by the modern states of **West Bengal** and **Bihar**.

## Angada

In the **Ramayana**, the earlier of the two great Hindu epics, Angada is the **son** of the monkey-king **Bali** and his wife Tara. Even though **Rama**, the seventh incarnation of **Vishnu**, has killed his father under questionable circumstances, Angada is one of Rama's loyal allies. Angada takes part in the search for **Sita**, and then in the battle in **Lanka** to free

her, in which his major contribution is combat with **Ravana's** son Meghanada (an epithet of **Indrajit**).

After the conquest of Lanka, Rama appoints Angada as the crown prince of **Kishkindha**, a forest in southern India. Many of the characters in the *Ramayana* are paradigms for Indian cultural values. Angada exhibits bravery, loyalty, and sincere devotion to Rama, all of which bring their eventual rewards.

## Angiras

In Hindu mythology, one of the six **sons** of **Brahma**, all of whom become great sages. All are "mind-born," meaning that Brahma's thoughts are enough to bring them into being. The others are **Marichi**, **Atri**, **Pulastya**, **Pulaha**, and **Kratu**.

## Angkor

Temple complex built in northwestern Cambodia by the Khmer ruler **Suryavarman II** (1112–1153 C.E.). The Khmer people were indigenous to Kampuchea, but the temples at Angkor were dedicated to Hindu gods. This reflects the prodigious influence of Hindu culture, which by the end of the first millennium C.E. had been spread throughout Southeast Asia by Indian (primarily southern Indian) merchants and traders.

## Ani

(according to tradition, a shortened form of the **Sanskrit** word *anika*, meaning "army") A major organizational division of the **Bairagi Nagas**, **ascetic** traders and mercenary soldiers who were devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Vishnu**. At present there are three Bairagi anis: the **Digambara**, **Nirmohi**, and **Nirvani**. In earlier times these anis were actual fighting units, but in modern times these distinctions are mainly important to determine bathing (**snana**) order in the bathing processions at the **Kumbha Mela**. Of the three anis, the Digambaras are by far the most

important and at the time of the Kumbha Mela take precedence over the others.

## Ani

(2) In the region of Tamil, which lies at the southern tip of the subcontinent on the Bay of Bengal, the month of Ani is the third month of the solar **year**. It corresponds to the northern Indian solar month of **Mithuna** (the zodiacal sign of Gemini), which usually falls within June and July. The existence of several different calendars is one clear sign of the continuing importance of regional cultural patterns. One way that the Tamils retain their culture is by preserving their traditional **calendar**. Tamil is one of the few regional languages in India with an ancient, well-established literary tradition. See also **Tamil months**, **Tamil Nadu**, and **Tamil language**.

## Aniconic Image

A symbol that is meant to represent a **deity**. Although it is more common for human or **animal** likenesses to stand for deities, some deities are represented by symbols or non-pictorial images. Examples of this would be the **linga** or the **shalagram**, both of which are well-known symbolic forms of particular deities—**Shiva** and **Vishnu**, respectively.

## Anima

("minuteness") One of the eight superhuman powers (**siddhi**) traditionally believed to be conferred as a result of high spiritual attainment. This particular power gives one the ability to become as small as an atom.

## Animals

In the Hindu religion, it is believed that some human beings can be reincarnated as animals. According to generally held notions about **karma**, being born as an animal is an unfavorable rebirth in punishment for a previous grave sin. One is born as an animal to expiate, or atone for, one's evil

deeds through suffering, in many cases by being born as a particular type of animal thousands of consecutive times.

Unlike the Jains, who see all matter (even stones) as possessing souls, most Hindus would consider this possible only for sentient, or fully aware, beings, including animal life. The conviction that animals have souls is one of the reasons why many Hindus are vegetarian, since this diet does the least harm to other living things.

For Hindus, the animal realm is considered a place of punishment. From a karmic perspective, being born as an animal is an unenviable state, since animal behavior is run entirely by instinct, and thus as animals they can make no conscious effort to better themselves. From a more concrete perspective, animals in India often lead very difficult lives—including, in many cases, the "sacred" **cow**.

As with all other unfavorable karmic states, one's animal life will eventually end, but only after one's sins have been fully expiated. This suffering and lack of control over one's destiny makes birth as an animal a state to be avoided.

## Animal Sacrifice

The practice of animal sacrifice can be found in two different strands of the Hindu tradition. The first, and by far the earliest, is in the cult of sacrifice described in the later strata of the **Vedas**, particularly in the **Brahmana** literature. The cost of these rites virtually ensured that they could only be performed by royalty and nobility, since some entailed the slaughter of hundreds of **animals**.

Perhaps the most famous of these rites was the horse sacrifice (**ashvamedha**), which served to prove a king's great power. In the early centuries before the common era, these sacrifices grew less frequent—a trend often connected to the stress on **ahimsa** by the Buddhists and Jains, two groups that opposed the slaughter of any life—and by the early centuries of the common era, even Hindu commentators denounced the Vedic sacrifices because

they entailed animal slaughter. In modern times, these rites have largely fallen into disuse, and even when they have been revived and re-created, they usually do not involve animal slaughter but substitutions of some sort, such as vegetables or fruits.

The other context in which animal sacrifice can be found, and is still performed quite regularly, is in the **worship** of **village deities**, or certain powerful and terrifying forms of the **Goddess**. In this worship the animals (usually goats) are decapitated, and the **blood** is offered to the **deity**, often by smearing some of it on a post outside of the temple.

In Hindu culture, blood is considered a "hot" substance—highly impure, extremely powerful, and readily contaminating other things. Any deity that requires sacrifice is also "hot"—powerful enough to grant favors to their devotees (**bhakta**), but also marginal, potentially dangerous, and requiring frequent animal sacrifice to maintain their power.

The most extreme example is at the temple of the goddess **Kamakhya** in modern **Assam**, a region located in northeastern India. This is one of the few reported instances of **human sacrifice**, although the custom was halted by the British in 1832. When Kamakhya's present temple was consecrated in 1565, she was supposedly offered the heads of 140 men, all of whom had volunteered themselves as **offerings**.

Although such blood-drinking deities are often very powerful, many Hindus do not approve of the impurity (**ashaucha**) and slaughter connected with animal sacrifice. For this reason, one of the first ways to make a particular deity acceptable to a more cultured public is often to make the sacrifices vegetarian, by substituting a gourd or cucumber in place of the sacrificial animal.

## Aniruddha

("unobstructed") In Hindu mythology, the **son** of **Pradyumna** and the grandson of **Krishna**.

## Anirvachaniyakhyati

("indescribable discrimination") This is a particular **theory of error** that aims to explain why people make errors in judgment, such as the stock example of mistaking the silvery flash of a seashell for a piece of silver. This theory was advanced by the philosophical school of **Advaita Vedanta**, a group that would consider this judgment to be a false one; they would also believe, however, that until one realizes that the object is just a shell, one actually sees the silver there.

The Advaita theory of error is based on the fundamental concept of superimposition (**adhyasa**), in which one perceives something that is actually there (in this case, the shell). This real object is the basis for the illusory perception (the silver), which is a mistaken projection. The Advaitins claim that the "silver" is real insofar as it is based on the shell, and false insofar as one believes it to be precious metal.

Of course, according to the Advaitins, the shell and all the other "real" things of the world are themselves ultimately illusory since they are superimposed on **Brahman**, the only thing in the universe that is truly real. For further information see Bijayananda Kar, *The Theories of Error in Indian Philosophy*, 1990; and Karl H. Potter (ed.), *Presuppositions of India's Philosophies*, 1972.

## Anjali Hasta

In Indian **dance**, **sculpture**, and ritual, the anjali hasta is a particular hand **gesture** (**hasta**) in which the palms of the two hands are joined together with the fingers pointing upward, often with the base of the thumbs resting against the chest. This gesture conveys respect and prayerful devotion.

In modern India this is also the most common gesture of greeting and salutation. Since traditional Indian society was (and to some extent, remains) so intensely conscious of **purity**, it is not surprising that this greeting can convey respect without requiring one to touch another person, which could transmit impurity (**ashaucha**) from one person to another.

## Anjana

In the ***Ramayana***, the earlier of the two great Hindu epics, Anjana is the mother of the monkey-**deity Hanuman**. In her previous birth, Anjana was a **goddess**, but as the result of a **curse**, she is born as a monkey. With the birth of Hanuman (fathered by **Vayu**, the god of **wind**), the curse was lifted and she returned to **heaven**.

## Ankusha

("**elephant** goad") This is a weapon with a wooden or metal handle, with a point and a sharp hook that real elephant handlers use to coax and goad elephants—sometimes by poking them with the hook, sometimes by hitting them with the butt of the handle.

The ankusha is an important symbol in Hindu iconography and is primarily associated with the god **Ganesh**—perhaps partly because of his elephant head. This weapon also corresponds with Ganesh's stature as the Lord of Obstacles, since he can use the ankusha to poke and prod them out of the way.

Aside from Ganesh, the ankusha is also a symbol associated with certain powerful forms of the **Goddess**. This may originate with the myth that describes her as being formed from the collected radiance of all the gods, and receiving duplicates of their weapons from them.

## Annakut

("Mountain of food") Northern Indian festival celebrated on the day after the festival of **Diwali** (October–November). This festival is more popularly known as **Govardhan Puja**.

A woman displays the anjali hasta hand gesture.
This gesture conveys respect and is a common greeting and salutation.

## Annaprashana ("food-eating") Samskara

Traditionally, this is the seventh of the life-cycle ceremonies (**samskaras**) in which the young child is first given solid food. In many of the traditional texts on **dharma**, the **Dharma Shastras**, parents are directed to feed the child **animal** flesh. In modern times children are more commonly fed rice; as the most popular grain in much of India, rice can be considered a symbol for food in general.

As in any society, the introduction of solid food marks a major transition in the infant's young life, even though the infant may not wean for some time after that. Unlike many of the traditional samskaras, this is still an important **childhood rite** in modern India.

## Anrta

In the **Vedas**, the earliest Hindu scriptures that are still the most authoritative religious texts, anrta is characterized as the opposite of **rta**, the cosmic order. Anrta is particularly associated with falsehood and untruth, and it involves acts of deliberate perversions of speech. Hindus believe that these mistruths undermine the established order of the cosmos.

## Anshavatar

A "partial" (amsha) incarnation of a divinity, which is believed to have only part of the **divine power**. See also **avatar**.

## Anshuman

In Hindu mythology, the grandson of King **Sagar**. After the death of his sixty thousand uncles, who because of their disrespect were killed by the sage **Kapila**, Anshuman was the sole surviving member of the royal line. Anshuman and **Dilip**, his **son**, labored mightily to bring the **Ganges** (the earthly embodiment of the **goddess Ganga**) from **heaven** down to **earth**, so that by her touch the souls of their relatives might find peace. Their efforts were unsuccessful, but Dilip's son **Bhagirath** was finally able to bring the Ganges to earth.

## Antahpura

("inner city") In classical times, the name for the **women's** quarters of the palace, so designated because they were the most stringently protected. Although most Hindus had only one wife, in earlier times it was not uncommon for kings to have a number of wives and concubines, who would be housed in the antahpura. In such cases the king's first wife would generally have higher status, since this marriage would often be used to cement a political alliance.

## Antarala

("intermediate space") The antarala was a transitional space between a temple's main hall and the inner sanctum (**garbhagrha**), where the image of the temple's primary **deity** would be housed. The antarala is characteristic of **Nagara architecture**, which is one of three primary styles of Hindu temples. This space was found only in the largest temples and in many smaller ones was omitted entirely.

## Antariksha

In the **cosmology** found in the **Vedas**, the earliest Hindu scripture, the antariksha is the middle region of the sky between the **earth** and fixed stars; it corresponds to what might now be called the atmosphere. This region is considered the theater of activity for **Indra**, god of the storm and the most important Vedic **deity**; it is also home to one manifestation of the Vedic god **Agni** (**fire**), in his form as lightning.

## Antaryaga

("internal **sacrifice**") In Hindu **worship**, but especially in the secret ritual tradition known as **tantra**, antaryaga refers to the internalization of worship. In this process, worship involving external actions is replaced by worship based on mental acts.

This is a later phase of the initiate's spiritual path, and is attempted only after the initiate has mastered the external forms of worship. The process of internalization becomes progressively more subtle and sophisticated. This step also demonstrates that the initiate has achieved more highly developed religious capacities, in which external objects are no longer needed.

A woman prepares a deceased man for cremation.
This ritual is one stage of the antyeshthi samskara, the traditional Hindu funerary rites.

## Antinomianism

This word has its origins in the convictions of an early Christian sect, whose members believed that the only thing needed for salvation was faith, and not obedience to moral rules. In an extended sense, this term describes an attitude in which people ignore accepted social rules.

In Indian society (as in all societies) most people uphold the accepted behavioral norms, but certain groups—particularly renunciant **ascetics** and practitioners of **tantra**, a secret ritual tradition—emphasize the breaking of society's normally held rules. For the ascetics, such intentional disregard was (and is) a symbol of their separateness from conventional society; they believe that such rules no longer apply to them. As a class, ascetics are well-known for their unpredictable and sometimes uncontrolled behavior.

The process is more controlled for practitioners of tantra and most often takes place in a formal ritual setting. The stereotypical pattern is to partake of the "five forbidden things" (**panchamakara**), thus consciously breaking societal norms by consuming **intoxicants** and nonvegetarian foods, as well as practicing illicit sexuality. Although tantric antinomianism deliberately breaks social taboos, in theory it is an attempt to make sacred what is normally forbidden. By doing this, tantric practitioners destroy embedded dualistic ideas that are exemplified by notions such as pure and impure.

From a tantric perspective, the entire universe is one principle—often the activity of a particular **deity**—which means that one must reject all concepts based on dualistic thinking. Such practices are also seen as proof that tantra is superior to other sorts of religious activities, since it uses things that are normally forbidden. For further information see Arthur Avalon (Sir John Woodroffe), *Shakti and Shakta*, 1978; Swami Agehananda Bharati, *The Tantric Tradition*, 1977; and Douglas Renfrew Brooks, *The Secret of the Three Cities*, 1990.

## Antyeshthi ("last rites") Samskara

The sixteenth and last of the traditional life-cycle ceremonies (**samskaras**), comprising what can be described as

funerary rites. These rites are not a single action, but a series: **deathbed rites** for the dying person, **cremation** for the **corpse**, **asthi-sanchayana** (gathering the ashes), **sapindikarana** (assimilation to the ancestors), various memorial rites known as **shraddhas**, and **asthi-visarjana** (immersing the ashes in a sacred river).

These rites have a twofold purpose. The first is to get rid of the corpse, which is a source of contagion and impurity (**ashaucha**), and thus to protect the living from the dead. The second is to ease the passage of the dead person's spirit into the next world. Aside from these functions, performing familiar and ceremonial rites for the dead undoubtedly gives psychological relief to the living and aids in the process of grieving. What follows is merely an overview of these rites; for more detailed information see the individual entries.

Ritual activities are the most concentrated during the first ten days after death, which is believed to be the period of greatest impurity. Cremation usually takes place on the day of death, not only to prevent decay and disease in a hot climate but also to destroy the body so it will not be reanimated by a wandering spirit. Gathering the ashes (asthi-sanchayana) is done on the second or third day. In earlier times they would have been kept in a safe place, sometimes for years, until a relative visiting a sacred river could perform asthi-visarjana (immersing the ashes); with the advent of modern transportation, this is generally performed a few days after death.

During this ten-day period, the spirit is given symbolic nourishment to help build a "new" body. On the eleventh day, the family performs the first of the memorial ceremonies known as shraddhas; in this case an **ekoddishta** shraddha is performed in which **brahmin** guests, considered surrogates for the ancestors, are fed. On the twelfth day after death, the family performs the rite of sapindikarana, through which the deceased is incorporated into the ranks of the **ancestral spirits** (pitr) and is thus no longer considered a restless spirit. This is followed by anniversary shraddhas at regular intervals during the first year; after this period there is an annual shraddha once a year during the **Pitrpaksha** ("fortnight of the ancestors"), the waning **moon** period in the **lunar month** of **Bhadrapada** (August–September), which is solely devoted to such memorials. For further information see Pandurang Varnan Kane (trans.), *A History of Dharmasastra*, 1968; and Raj Bali Pandey, *Hindu Samskaras*, 1969. For accounts of modern practice, see David M. Knipe, "Sapindikarana: The Hindu Rite of Entry into Heaven," in Frank E. Reynolds and Earle H. Waugh (eds.), *Religious Encounters with Death*, 1977; Lawrence Babb, *The Divine Hierarchy*, 1975; and Anne Grodzins Gold, *Fruitful Journeys*, 1988.

## Anulepana

("smearing") The ninth of the sixteen traditional **upacharas** offered to a **deity** as part of **worship**, which are meant to treat the deity as an honored guest. In this **offering**, the deity is presented scented unguents, or ointments, such as sandalwood paste. These ointments are not only used for their fragrance but are also believed to be good for the skin.

## Anuloma

("with the **hair**") See **hypergamous marriage**.

## Anumana

("measuring after") In Indian **philosophy** this is the term for an inference, which is generally accepted as one of the **pramanas**, the means by which human beings can gain true and accurate knowledge. The word's literal meaning reflects the Indian conviction that any inference

must be grounded in perception (**pratyaksha**), the most direct means of knowledge, and must ultimately appeal to perception for evidence.

A classic inference includes three terms: a hypothesis (**pratijna**), a reason (**hetu**), and examples (**drshtanta**), each of which is made up of parts. One part of the hypothesis is the idea to be proved (**sadhya**), which is predicated on a certain class of objects, called the **paksha**. In the statement "there is fire on this mountain," the sadhya is the assertion that there is fire, and the paksha is the particular mountain. The object mentioned in the paksha must also appear in the second term, the hetu, along with the stated reason. In the example cited above, the hetu could be "because there is smoke on this mountain."

As proof, it was necessary to cite positive and negative examples, known as the **sapaksha** and **vipaksha**, respectively. An appropriate sapaksha could be "like kitchen," since ancient kitchens had both fire and smoke; a vipaksha could be "unlike lake," since lakes contain neither of these.

This general form of an inference is subject to numerous tests for validity; one of the most important of these is **vyapti**, the requirement that the reason given must account for all cases of the idea to be proved. For further information see Karl H. Potter (ed.), *Presuppositions of India's Philosophies*, 1972.

## Anushtubh

By far the most widely used **meter** in **Sanskrit** poetry, composed of two lines of sixteen syllables each with eight syllables per half line. The metric pattern for each half line is based on the distinction between "heavy" and "light" syllables. A heavy syllable is any syllable with a long vowel or consonant cluster; all other syllables are light. According to the prescribed pattern, the fifth syllable of each half line

should be light, the sixth heavy, and the seventh alternately heavy and light. The anushtubh's simplicity makes it the meter of choice for many religious texts, including much of the **Bhagavad Gita**.

## Anyathakhyati

("discrimination of something else") A **theory of error** that aims to explain why people make errors in judgment, such as the stock example of mistaking the flash of a seashell for a piece of silver. This particular theory of error originated with the **Naiyayika** philosophical school. Like the **Purva Mimamsa** philosopher **Prabhakara**, the Naiyayikas believe that the simple judgments "that object is silvery" and "silver is silvery" are both true and indisputable. Whereas Prabhakara explains the error as an error of omission, in which one fails to notice the non-relationship between these judgments, the Naiyayikas explain this as an error of commission, by projecting something that actually is not there.

In Naiyayikan metaphysics all objects and their attributes are connected by a dependent relationship known as **inherence** (**samavaya**), which in this case connects a silvery color with two different objects: elemental silver, and a shell. They believe that the perceiver is projecting a wrong inherence relationship (silver) onto the perceived object (shell).

The Naiyayikas can claim this projection is real because they accept the reality of nonexistent things (e.g., the nonexistence of a crocodile in my bathtub). For the Naiyayikas all such projections are rooted in karmic dispositions stemming from **avidya**, or primal ignorance, specifically the greed for silver that prompts people to look for such items of value. For further information see Bijayananda Kar, *The Theories of Error in Indian Philosophy*; 1978 and Karl H. Potter

(ed.), *Presuppositions of India's Philosophies*, 1972.

## Apabhramsha

("fallen away") An important northern Indian **Prakrit**, one of the vernacular languages that developed naturally from **Sanskrit**. Apabhramsha was the latest addition to the Middle Indo-**Aryan** languages and is considered a direct precursor of early modern **Hindi**, which was becoming established as early as the twelfth century. Although Apabhramsha has lesser status than **Sanskrit**, it was nevertheless an important regional literary language.

## Apaddharma

Religious protocol that comes into effect in times of distress, disturbance, natural disaster, or social deterioration. The practical effect of apaddharma is to suspend most of the normal social rules, particularly those governing interaction and **commensality** between different social subgroups (**jatis**). In ordinary circumstances these rules are affected by concepts of **purity**, impurity (**ashaucha**), and relative social status.

The underlying message here is that the preservation of life is more important than such rules, and that they can be broken to save a life—as in the case of escaping a **fire** or flood, in which the usual concerns about physical contact with lower-status people are suspended.

## Apana

One of the five bodily "winds" considered to be responsible for basic bodily functions, the others being **prana**, **vyana**, **udana**, and **samana**. The apana wind is believed to exist in the region of the anus and is associated with discharging material out of the body: urine, feces, gas, **semen**, menstrual discharges, and the **birth** of children.

## Apastamba

(4th c. B.C.E.?) Sage, writer, and commentator. Apastamba is known for his influential work with the **Kalpa Sutra** form, a type of text that consists of three essential elements: instructions for **Vedic** rituals (**Shrauta Sutras**), for domestic rites (**Grhya Sutras**), and for suitable human behavior (**Dharma Sutras**).

He is one of three authors, along with **Baudhayana** and **Hiranyakeshin**, who wrote complete Kalpa Sutras with all three parts. All three of these men belonged to the same school, the Taittiriya school of the **Black Yajur Veda**.

Apastamba's Dharma Sutra is extremely significant, for it is considered one of the major sources for the law code attributed to **Manu**. This code was an important legal document even in the early twentieth century, since India's British rulers considered it a source of "traditional" Hindu law.

## Appar

(7th c. C.E.) One of the earliest of the **Nayanars**, a group of southern Indian poet-saints who were devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva**. The Nayanars helped to revitalize the Hindu religion through their passionate devotion (**bhakti**) to a personal god, conveyed through hymns sung in the **Tamil language**.

Historians believe that Appar was born into a Shaivite family but became a Jain **ascetic** in his youth. The turning point came when he suffered a serious illness. Discouraged when Jain medicines were unable to cure his illness, he prayed to Shiva for help and was cured.

Along with his younger contemporary **Sambandar**, Appar actively confronted and opposed the heterodox sects of the times, particularly the Jains, with open defiance, debates, and miracles. His greatest achievement is reported to have been the conversion of King **Mahendravarman** (r. 600–630 C.E.), one of the greatest kings

in the **Pallava dynasty**, from Jainism to Shaivism.

The collected hymns of the three most important Nayanars—Appar, Sambandar, and **Sundaramurtti**—comprise the **Devaram**, the most sacred of the Tamil Shaivite texts.

## Appaya Dikshita

Sixteenth-century writer and commentator in the **Bhamati** branch of the **Advaita Vedanta** philosophical school.

## Aprashasta ("reprehensible") Marriages

According to the texts on religious duty (**dharma**) known as the **Dharma Shastras**, these are the four forms of marriage subject to disapproval: the **asura marriage**, **gandharva marriage**, **rakshasa marriage**, and **paishacha marriage**. Although all of these are considered reprehensible, this disapproval comes in differing measures: the asura (paying money for a bride) and gandharva (betrothal by mutual consent) marriages are tolerated, while the rakshasa (forcible abduction) and paishacha (taking advantage of an insentient woman) forms are forbidden.

Despite such harsh condemnation, all of these marriages are held to be legally valid. It is generally agreed that this position was intended not to legitimatize unconscionable actions but to give the woman the legal rights of a wife, whatever the circumstances of her marriage. The asura marriage is the only one of these forms still practiced in modern times, although it is done only by people who are either very poor or of very low social status.

## Apsara

In Hindu mythology, a class of celestial nymphs renowned for their beauty, **grace**, and irresistible attractiveness. One of their main mythic functions is to seduce **ascetics** and sages when they become too powerful. Because ascetics practice **celibacy**, and it is assumed that celibacy builds spiritual power, successful ascetics can become rivals to the gods themselves. Sexual activity will quickly exhaust the ascetic's power, although it can often bring other benefits to the world, including the **birth** of children, which always results from such intimate encounters.

The apsaras are sent on their missions by **Indra**, the king of **heaven**, since any ascetic who gains too much power will be able to claim Indra's divine throne. One famous apsara is **Menaka**, whose seduction of the sage **Vishvamitra** results in the birth of **Shakuntala**. Another is **Urvashi**, who is renowned for her dalliance with King **Pururavas**.

## Apurva

According to the **Purva Mimamsa** philosophical school, apurva is an unseen force created by action—particularly ritual action. This unseen force exists from the beginning of the action to the result of that action, and it invariably brings the intended result into being. This doctrine was developed to connect actions with their results, particularly when the result came some time after the initial action, and is especially relevant to **karma**.

The Mimamsas developed the concept of the apurva because they wanted to support information found in the **Vedas**, which in many cases specifies that certain actions will eventually produce specific results. For further information see Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore (eds.), *A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy*, 1957.

## Aranya Dashanami

One of the ten divisions of the **Dashanami Sanyasis**, **ascetics** who are devotees (**bhakta**) of **Shiva**. The Dashanamis were supposedly established by the ninth-century philosopher **Shankaracharya** in an effort to

An arati lamp is waved before an image of the god Ganesh before the statue is immersed in water.
The light from the flame is considered a religious offering.

create a corps of learned men who could help to revitalize Hindu life. Each of the divisions is designated by a different name—in this case, aranya ("forest"). Upon **initiation**, new members are given this name as a surname to their new ascetic names, thus allowing for immediate group identification.

Aside from their individual identity, these ten "named" divisions are divided into four larger organizational groups. Each group has its headquarters in one of the four monastic centers (**maths**) also established by Shankaracharya. The Aranya Dashanamis belong to the **Bhogawara** group, which is affiliated with the **Govardhan Math** in the city of **Puri**, on the Bay of Bengal.

## Aranyaka

("Forest books") General designation for a type of literature contained in the sacred texts known as the **Vedas**. The Aranyakas are transitional in nature; in their content they move away from the focus on ritual and **sacrifice** found in the **Brahmana** literature and foreshadow the later, more speculative texts known as the **Upanishads**.

Because of their name, the Aranyakas are widely believed to have been composed in the forests, perhaps by **ascetics** who had left formal society. The tone in these texts is questioning and speculative, and in stylistic terms there is no clear break between the Aranyakas and the Upanishads: one of the earliest upanishads is named **Brhadaranyaka** ("Great Forest-Book") **Upanishad**, which reinforces the connection.

## Arati

The act of waving a lighted lamp before a **deity**. The deity may be present in many forms, such as a picture, statue, symbol (**svayambhu image**) such as the **shalagram**, or even a natural phenomenon such as a river, as in the case of the **Ganges**.

The arati lamp usually is a shallow vessel holding a cotton wick soaked in oil or clarified butter, with a ring-shaped handle to protect one's hands. This is one of the sixteen traditional **offerings** (**upacharas**) presented to a deity as part of **worship**. This particular act is the offering of light.

Arati is arguably the single most common act of Hindu worship, performed daily in Hindu homes and temples throughout the world. Because of this fact, the word *arati* is sometimes used to refer to any act of worship, even singing panegyric hymns during worship. Before electric lights were invented, when the temples were much darker, arati also served to give the devotees (**bhakta**) in the temples a better view of the deity, which was very important.

## Aravalli Hills

A range of hills running diagonally from the southwestern to the northeastern corner of **Rajasthan**. They are important for their physical characteristics, which have a profound effect on the environment. On the northern side of the hills, the land slopes gently into the Thar desert and is arid and thinly settled. On the southern side, the hills provide more protection. As a result the land is greener and comparatively richer than on the northern side.

Sacred sites (**tirthas**) in the Aravallis include the town of **Pushkar**, with its holy lake, as well as the temple devoted to **Balaji**, which is located in the village of **Mehndipur**.

## Archana

("salutation") Rites of welcome and reverence, usually performed during formal **worship** of a **deity** in a temple. In a larger sense, this word can also refer to those rites of reverence and salutation performed for one's elders, superiors, or any honored guest.

## Architecture
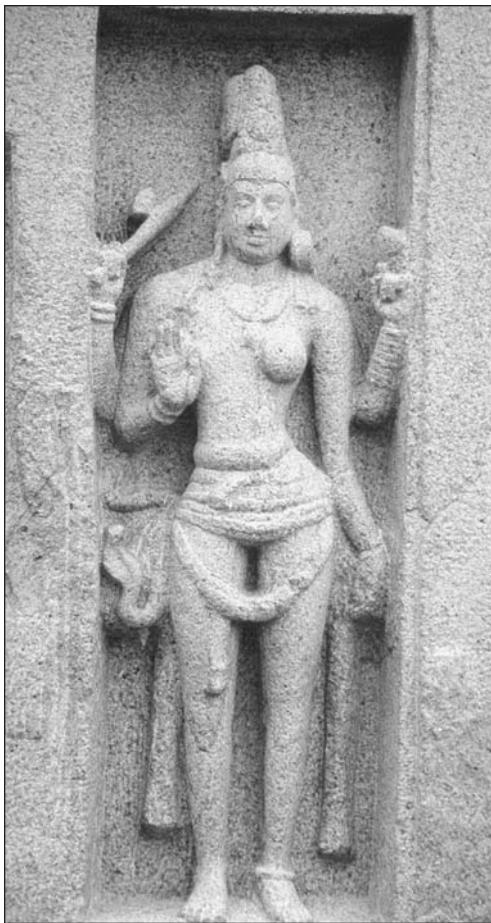
Hindu temple architecture in India has developed over time into several distinct, mature styles. The earliest phases are based on early Buddhist architectural forms, such as the rock-cut cave temple (**chaitya**) or enclosed courtyard (**vihara**). Some of these early Hindu rock-cut temples include those at **Ellora** and **Elephanta**; others are free-standing but based on this form, as at **Aihole**.

Later Hindu architecture has three basic styles: **Nagara**, **Dravida**, and **Veshara**, of which the first two are the most important. Each of these styles is found in a certain area of India: the Nagara in the north and east, the Dravida in the south, and the Veshara in the west and in **Deccan**. The basic differences between them can be simplified to the different styles of the temple towers.

The Nagara style emphasizes verticality, with the whole temple building culminating in a single highest point. Different emphases in the ways of treating the tower led to different substyles: In the temples at **Khajuraho**, the entire structure gradually leads up to the central tower, whereas the **Orissa** style stresses a single enormous tower surrounded by much smaller subsidiary parts.

In the Dravida style, the towers tend to be composed of horizontal tiers, with the visual emphasis on horizontal rather than vertical. In the later Dravida temples, the tallest structures are the **gopurams**, the central gateways in the walls enclosing the temples. A Dravida-style temple may have a fairly modest tower over the central shrine, but the area covered by the temple is often enormous, and many of them are cities in their own right.

The Veshara style has a barrel roof over the sanctuary, an architectural

An image of the deity Ardhanarishvara in Mahabalipuram. A form of the god Shiva, Ardhanarishvara is half male and half female.

feature with roots in the Buddhist chaityas (rock-cut cave temples). This architectural style is midway between the Nagara towers and the Dravida tiers.

## Ardha ("Half") Kumbha Mela

A religious celebration secondary to the **Kumbha Mela**. The Kumbha Mela is a gigantic religious festival that entails bathing (**snana**) in sacred rivers. It is celebrated at four sacred sites (**tirthas**): **Haridwar**, **Allahabad**, **Ujjain**, and **Nasik**. It occurs approximately every twelve years, based on the position of the planet **Jupiter** in the **zodiac**.

The Ardha Kumbha Mela is celebrated six years after the full (purna) Kumbha Mela, when Jupiter has advanced halfway through the zodiac toward the next full Kumbha Mela. It is generally celebrated only at Allahabad and Haridwar, marking the greater importance of these two sites. Although the full Kumbha Mela is deemed more auspicious and gets much larger attendance, the Ardha Kumbha Mela is still attended by millions of pilgrims.

## Ardhamandapa

("half pavilion") In the later **Nagara** style of temple **architecture**, the ardhamandapa was the entrance porch of the temple, which formed a transitional area between the outside world and the **mandapa**, or hall.

## Ardhanarishvara

("the **deity** who is half woman") Particular form of the god **Shiva**, in which the left side of the image has female form, dress, and ornamentation, and the right side has male characteristics and dress.

The image has several possible interpretations. As a divinity one of Shiva's attributes is his ability to transcend all duality, and this half-woman, half-man image symbolizes that power over even the most basic human difference, sexual identity. In the context of the esoteric ritual tradition known as **tantra**, which describes the universe as the product of the interaction between the divine principles of awareness (Shiva) and power (**Shakti**), this image symbolizes not only the radically different natures of these two principles, but also their inseparability in action.

The Ardhanarishvara is sometimes referred to as the androgyne; this term seems inappropriate, however, since the image does not show the loss of sexual characteristics associated with androgyny but rather the full development of each on their respective sides.

## Arghya

The fourth of the sixteen traditional **upacharas** ("**offerings**") given to a **deity** as a part of **worship**. The upacharas are based on the model of treating the deity as an honored guest. The word *arghya* literally means "to be respected"; in this offering the image is given a drink of **water** or some other beverage as a sign of respect.

The actual act of offering can be done in various ways and often depends on the worshiper's preferences. In some cases the water vessel will simply be presented before the deity's image, with the understanding that the deity has taken it, whereas in other cases the devotee (**bhakta**) will actually give some water to the image. In either case the underlying motive is to show love for the deity and to minister to its needs.

## Arjuna

The third of the five **Pandava** brothers in the *Mahabharata*, the later of the two great Hindu epics. Arjuna is born when his mother, **Kunti**, uses a powerful **mantra** to have a **son** by **Indra**, the king of the gods.

Arjuna is the prototypical **kshatriya** warrior-king. He is described as peerless in battle, a hero ever ready to defend the truth, and a person always faithful to his word—but at times arrogant, egocentric, quick to anger, and inclined to use force to settle disputes.

Arjuna is most famous as an archer, as which he has no equal. When he and his brothers are studying archery with their teacher **Drona**, Arjuna outshines them all with his dedication and ability, but his spiteful side can be seen in the story of **Ekalavya**. Ekalavya is a tribal boy who wants to learn archery from Drona, the royal archery teacher, but is refused because of his low **birth**. Undaunted, Ekalavya makes a clay image of Drona, treats it as his teacher (**guru**), and through his assiduous practice and his devotion to his guru becomes the most skilled archer on

**earth**. When Arjuna discovers this, he becomes jealous and complains to Drona, since the teacher has promised Arjuna that no one will surpass him as an archer. Drona asks Ekalavya how he has become so skillful, and when he learns that Ekalavya has worshiped Drona's image as his guru, Drona notes that he is entitled to a preceptor's fee (**dakshina**). As his fee he requests Ekalavya's right thumb, a gift that will considerably diminish Ekalavya's shooting abilities since its loss will impair his ability to draw a bow. Ekalavya fulfills Drona's wish without hesitation but from that day on he is no longer better than Arjuna.

Another instance of Arjuna's narrow-mindedness comes in his claim that another great rival, **Karna**, cannot compete in a royal shooting competition because Karna is a foundling, and his lineage is thus unknown. Karna is a close companion of Arjuna's cousin **Duryodhana**, and because of this insult the relations begin to deteriorate between the Pandavas and the **Kauravas**, the two branches of this extended family. The final result is the fratricidal civil war that is the climax of the epic.

Throughout the *Mahabharata*, Arjuna is associated with numerous heroic exploits. To fulfill a promise given to his teacher Drona, Arjuna defeats King **Drupada**, who has earlier insulted Drona. Through a feat of archery, he wins the hand of **Draupadi** by drawing a bow that others cannot even lift and then hits a target suspended in the air. He aids the **fire** god, **Agni**, in the burning of the **Khandava forest**. He shields Agni from the rain by creating a tent of arrows that keeps the forest covered. During the year that the Pandavas spend incognito, after twelve years of exile in the forest, Arjuna takes the guise of the eunuch **Brhannala** and in this guise wins a great battle against the Kauravas.

His greatest exploits occur during the epic's climactic eighteen-day war, in which he defeats the Kaurava armies, fights all their major figures, and finally

kills his long-standing adversary Karna, who is actually his own half brother. After destroying the Kauravas in the Mahabharata war, Arjuna serves his elder brother, **Yudhishthira**, who becomes king; after the conflict, however, the need for such a warrior has passed.

Arjuna is also known as a listener. At the moment when the great war is about to begin, Arjuna has sudden doubts about the propriety of killing his friends and relatives, even during a just war. To allay his doubts and to help him regain his resolve, his charioteer **Krishna** recites the **Bhagavad Gita**, one of the single most influential Hindu religious texts. The Gita's advice on the nature of Self, struggle, and the search for God has served to counsel those fighting literal and metaphorical battles, most notably **Mohandas K. Gandhi** during the struggle for Indian independence.

## Arranged Marriage

A marriage that is arranged by the parents of the bride and groom, although it has become fairly common for the prospective couple to meet beforehand to assess whether or not they are compatible.

Although this practice seems strange by mainstream American standards, proponents of arranged marriages see them as better and longer lasting than **love marriages**. It is assumed that with arranged marriages parents will be able to take a more detached and rational perspective. They will usually choose spouses who come from similar social and economic backgrounds, in many cases from the same **jati**, or social subgroup. Parents may compare their children's horoscopes for clues, and they may also try to match people with compatible personalities. Ideally, all of this is done with great care and with the understanding that their highest priority will be their children's long-term welfare. Marriage is widely seen as the most important event in a person's life since it is the basis of family life, and the family

is the foundation of society. Part of the marriage negotiations between the two sides includes whether or not the bride will have a **dowry**, and if she will, what this will be.

One of the assumptions with arranged marriages is that men and **women** will play fairly traditional roles. This gives the couple some idea of what to expect and what is expected of them, but it can also be confining for people who do not wish to fulfill such roles. At least in northern India, the adjustments often fall much more heavily on the new bride, since she will become part of her husband's family.

Arranged marriages are still extremely popular among modern Hindu families, and many young people would not dream of fixing their own marriages. A practical consideration supporting the popularity of arranged marriages is that it is often difficult for young people to meet and develop the friendships that could lead to love marriages. Indian society is still very sex segregated. Social interaction between unrelated single men and women is still uncommon in villages and smaller towns, although this pattern is breaking down in larger cities since more women are working outside the home.

In both contexts the biggest mixing place tends to be the college or university, but even there women and men tend to associate in groups rather than as individuals. In a society in which contact is limited, and formal dating even more unusual, an arranged marriage is often the best way to find a compatible spouse.

## Arsha Marriage

One of the eight ways to perform a marriage recognized in the **Dharma Shastras**, the treatises on religious duty (**dharma**). In an arsha marriage, the bride's father receives a pair of cattle from the bridegroom with the understanding that the cattle are to be used for sacrifice.

This was regarded as one of the four approved forms of marriage (**prashasta marriages**) but fell out of favor because of the stigma of accepting any sort of gift for the bride, even one explicitly designated for sacrifice. The form was named after the **rishis** (sages) because of the implicit sacrificial rites. See also **marriage, eight classical forms**.

## Artha

In Indian **philosophy** this is one of the four purusharthas, or **aims of life**, with the others being **kama** (desire), **dharma** (religious duty), and **moksha** (final liberation of the soul). The word *artha* has different shades of meaning in various contexts, but all of these meanings center on the definitions "aim," "goal," or "end." The word can thus refer to any goal of human life, but as one of these purusharthas, artha refers to riches, power, and worldly prosperity. These are the material things that allow one to fulfill one's temporal goals, and unless one gains them in some measure, any sort of worldly happiness becomes problematic.

Hindu culture has traditionally sanctioned wealth and power as a legitimate human goal, although this endeavor must be governed by a commitment to dharma. When controlled by an overall orientation to righteous action, the quest for wealth is part of an integrated life. Without this commitment the drive for wealth becomes an all-consuming desire that ultimately destroys a person.

## Arthapatti

("presumption") All Indian philosophical schools concern themselves with codifying the **pramanas**, that is, the means by which human beings can gain true and accurate knowledge. Almost all schools consider perception (**pratyaksha**), inference (**anumana**), and authoritative testimony (**shabda**) as pramanas; the **Purva Mimamsa** school, one of the **six schools** of traditional Hindu **philosophy**, posited two others: **abhava** ("knowledge from absence") and arthapatti.

Arthapatti is an inference from circumstance in which a judgment is made about one case based solely on similarities to related cases. An example would be when a traveler is presumed to have reached her destination, since the train's arrival time has passed. According to Indian philosophy, this is not a true inference since the judgment must always be confirmed by direct perception, in this case that the train had actually reached its destination. The Purva Mimamsas justified this new pramana by arguing that this knowledge could not be accounted for by any of the existing pramanas and thus required this new one to explain it. The other schools were not inclined to accept it, since its presumptive nature could often lead to error.

## Arthashastra

("Treatise on Power") Text on power and politics attributed to **Kautilya**, the Machiavellian prime minister said to have orchestrated the rise to power of **Chandragupta Maurya** (r. 321–297 B.C.E.), the founder of the **Maurya dynasty**. The *Arthashastra* was intended as a guidebook for the king, to help him control both the people in his kingdom and the surrounding states.

The *Arthashastra*'s fundamental assumption was that the king wanted to remain in power and should do whatever it took to retain it.

Within the kingdom, Kautilya advocated a strict and authoritarian government aided by an extensive network of spies to gather intelligence and assess the popular mood. These spies included men posing as wandering **ascetics**, who could move about without suspicion. The book also advised the king to assign special spies to his closest advisers to monitor their ambition, and to have these spies report only to the king himself.

In regard to neighboring countries, the *Arthashastra* assumed that each king wanted to increase his kingdom at

the expense of his neighbors. Weaker neighbors were to be conquered and assimilated, whereas stronger ones were to be pacified or stalled with the eventual hope that these stronger states could be countered by making other alliances.

Although the *Arthashastra* was never the "Bible" of any ruling Indian dynasty, it detailed political **philosophy** and practices that existed in ancient and medieval India and can even be discerned in contemporary parliamentary politics.

## Arundhati

The wife of the sage **Vasishtha**. In Hindu mythology Arundhati is a model of devotion to her husband, and during contemporary **marriage ceremonies**, she is invoked by the groom as a model of wifely fidelity. Arundhati is also personified as the minor star Alcor in the constellation known as the Big Dipper (known in India as the Seven Sages because of its seven main stars); here she accompanies the star personifying her husband.

## Aryabhatta

Ancient astronomer and mathematician, whose major work was composed in 499 C.E. Among Aryabhatta's accomplishments were his theories that the **earth** was a sphere that rotated on its axis, and that **eclipses** were caused by the shadow of the **moon**. He also calculated the value of *pi* to four decimal places and the length of the **year** to seven decimal places. Both these feats show not only great facility with mathematics but also the use of the zero.

Although Aryabhatta is celebrated as a scientist, in the ancient world there was no differentiation between astronomer and astrologer. Given the assumption that the heavenly bodies influenced human affairs, his astronomical conclusions would have also been used in the field of astrology.

## Aryan

This word is derived from the **Sanskrit** word *arya* ("noble"), which is used in the earliest Hindu sacred literature, the **Vedas**, to describe a certain group of people that believed the Vedas were sacred. In the beginning this word simply designated "our group" from "other people," whom the Veda names **Dasyus** ("slaves"). These provide a description of the slaves as having flat noses and curly **hair**. Throughout history Hindu writers have often described themselves as "Arya," although it is important to note that this need not be understood as a racial designation, since it could merely be intended to mean "noble."

Who were these Aryans? Nineteenth-century European philological research discovered structural relationships between Sanskrit and classical European languages and speculated that all these languages came from a common parent. Based on further analysis, these researchers hypothesized that people speaking this parent language originated in Central Asia, somewhere near the Caspian Sea. From there, some went west to Europe, some went southwest to Turkey, and some went south toward Iran and later to India. The conclusion that these Indian pilgrims came from Iran is based on comparisons between the Avesta and the Veda, the Iranian and Indian religious texts. These texts show broad linguistic similarities and indicate that the people speaking the languages were closely related. This entire theory is thus based solely on the observed similarities between languages and on how they changed.

For the nineteenth-century philologists, "Aryan" was a linguistic category used to designate people speaking certain languages and involved no assumptions about the speakers' racial identity. Despite this fact, the word quickly assumed a racial connotation in European discourse, with terrible consequences.

The Aryan movement was once described as an "invasion," but in recent years it has become more common to describe it as a "migration." According to the accounts in the Vedas, the Aryans were a pastoral people, and although some Vedic passages mention war chariots, the majority describe herds of cattle. Given this picture of nomads following their cattle to pasture, the image of an invading army seems improbable.

The Aryan migration theory accounts for the dissemination of various languages but is not universally accepted. Many modern Indians subscribe to the **Indigenous Aryan** (IA) **theory**, which maintains that the Aryans are the original inhabitants of India and as proof points to the artifacts found in the **Indus Valley civilization**. Some of the people that believe the IA theory may be reacting against the Aryan migration theory's perceived colonialist bias, since the theory was developed by Europeans and assumes that the dominant groups in modern India must have come from outside. Other supporters are the proponents of **Hindutva**, who claim that all Indians are "really" Hindus and thus one social group, whatever their particular religious beliefs.

This assertion has profound political implications in modern India, where Christians and Muslims are not only religious communities but social and political ones as well. By connecting Hindu identity with good Indian citizenship, Hindutva proponents are marginalizing Christians and Muslims as outsiders.

## Arya Samaj

Reformist Hindu organization formed in 1875 by **Swami Dayanand Saraswati**. The Arya Samaj was formed in an era of sweeping social, economic, and religious change—the last particularly caused by Christian missionary evangelism—and represented an authentic Hindu response to these changes.

For some time, more traditional Hindus perceived this organization as a genuine religious threat. Swami Dayanand's fundamental assumption was that ultimate religious authority lay only in the ancient scriptures called the **Vedas**. This stance allowed him to attack many of the "social evils" plaguing nineteenth-century Hinduism, such as child marriages, **sati**, image **worship**, the **caste** system, and a ban on **widow** remarriage. He contended that these practices were corrupt and illegitimate since they could not be found in the Veda, and the Arya Samaj worked ceaselessly to get rid of such practices.

Unlike the **Brahmo Samaj**, an earlier reformist organization, the ideas of the Arya Samaj showed no Christian influence. It certainly addressed many concerns raised by Christian reformers, but the Arya Samaj was militantly anti-Christian. It was equally opposed to the "corruption" of contemporary Hinduism.

Although the Aryas claimed that they were simply getting back to the Veda, the ultimate aim was not to reclaim that long-gone era but to develop a form of Hindu religious life more compatible with "modern" times. The Aryas replaced image worship with a **fire sacrifice** based on the rituals in the Veda. The Arya Samaj was also notable for promoting the ceremony of "purification" (**shuddhi**), through which Hindus who had become members of other religious communities were received back into the Hindu community.

Dayanand and his followers were quite militant in espousing such reforms and saw themselves as developing the leadership for the future of Hinduism. To accomplish this the Arya Samaj strongly emphasized education, and one of its most lasting achievements has been establishing schools and colleges to educate its **women** and men.

Although the Arya Samaj was highly controversial for its first sixty years, by the late 1930s its revolutionary spirit had somewhat cooled; at present the Aryas have become a sectarian group more or less assimilated into larger Hindu

A man practices the fetus position.
This asana, or bodily posture,
is one of many that are used in yoga.

society. For further information see Ganga Prasad Upadhyaya (trans.), *Light of Truth*, 1960; Kenneth W. Jones, *Arya Dharm*, 1976; Daniel Gold, "Organized Hinduisms: From Vedic Truth to Hindu Nation," in Martin Marty and R. Scott Appleby (eds.), *Fundamentalisms Observed*, 1991; and Kenneth W. Jones, "The Arya Samaj in British India, 1875–1947," in Robert D. Baird (ed.), *Religion in Modern India*, 1998.

## Asamanjasa

In Hindu mythology, the son of the celebrated King **Sagar** and his wife **Keshini**. Keshini has received a boon that she will bear a single son through whom the royal lineage will continue, whereas her co-wife **Sumati** will bear sixty thousand **sons** who will all die before they are married. Asamanjasa is that single son, but his character is so bad that his lineage, the **Solar Line**, seems to be in grave danger.

In the ***Ramayana***, the earlier of the two great Hindu epics, the only mention of Asamanjasa describes how he throws children into the Sarayu River and then laughs as they drown. Fortunately for the Solar Line, which is one of the two great lineages, Asamanjasa's son **Anshuman** is very virtuous, and the line continues both unbroken and uncorrupted.

## Asana

("bodily posture") In the **ashtanga** ("eight-part") **yoga** first codified by **Patanjali** (1st c. C.E.?), asana is the third of the eight elements of yoga practice and involves different body postures. In his text, Patanjali asserts that one's physical position should be stable and comfortable, since the ultimate end of these postures is to enable one to concentrate without physical distractions. A series of positions for developing and training the body evolved from this text. The most familiar of these is the lotus posture (**padmasana**).

These physical exercises are the best-known feature of yoga and are often confused with the larger practice of yoga itself. Although these postures have definite physical benefits, such as increased bodily flexibility, their ultimate purpose is to enable one to sit for long periods in meditation without physical distractions. As such, they are a necessary element for progress on the spiritual path but should not be confused with the end goal.

In a more general context, the word *asana* can refer to various ways of sitting, and by extension to the thing upon which one sits. In general the object upon which one sits—particularly for meditation or any sort of religious practice—is believed to be charged with power because of its association with spirituality. Many of these objects, especially **animal** skins, are believed to confer certain powers and thus have symbolic meaning as well.

In the context of **worship**, asana is the second of the sixteen **upacharas** ("**offerings**") given to a **deity** as a way of treating the god as an honored guest. In this case asana refers to offering the deity a place to sit, one of the most basic acts of human hospitality.

## Asat

This word denotes a general category in Indian speculative thought and is often translated as "nonbeing." It is the absolute opposite of **sat** and is formed by the addition of the negative prefix. If sat is "that which (really and truly) exists," then its opposite is "that which does not exist." Since the word *sat* also carries connotations of Truth—that things that exist are both "real" and "true"—*asat* carries connotations of falseness.

## Asatkaryavada

One of the three basic **causal models** in classical Indian **philosophy**, along with **satkaryavada** and **anekantavada**. All three models seek to explain the workings of causality in the everyday world, particularly the relationship between causes and their effects, which has profound implications for religious life. All of the philosophical schools assume that if one understands the causal process correctly and can manipulate it through one's conscious actions, it is possible to gain final liberation of the soul (**moksha**). Thus disagreements over differing causal models are not merely academic disputes but are grounded in varying assumptions about the nature of things.

The asatkaryavada model assumes that effects do not preexist in their causes; that is, they are completely and utterly distinct from them. In the classic examples for this model, one can create a clay pot by putting together the two halves of the pot, or one can weave a cloth from many strands of thread. Each of these acts creates a new object that did not previously exist, which came into being through certain material and instrumental causes.

Since each act of creation brings a new thing into being, this causal model tends to multiply the number of objects in the universe. It also admits that human efforts and actions are part of the causes influencing these effects, making it theoretically possible to act in a way that brings final liberation to the soul.

The disadvantage of this model is that it can lead to philosophical skepticism. As the world gets fragmented into more and more causes—most of which one cannot control—one can easily believe that one's actions will have no discernible effect, even over time. To counter this danger of skepticism, asatkaryavada proponents stress the conditions that govern the causal process and gear people's efforts accordingly.

This model is espoused by the **Nyaya Vaisheshikas** and the **Prabhakara** school of **Purva Mimamsa**, as well as by the Buddhists. For further information see Karl H. Potter (ed.), *Presuppositions of India's Philosophies*, 1972.

## Ascetic

In the most general sense, this word denotes a person who has renounced regular society and conventional social life in a quest to seek religious insight and to gain final liberation of the soul (**moksha**). Such spiritual seekers sometimes emphasize **asceticism** or physical discipline, but this is not a necessary element.

Ascetics can be organized into different subgroups based upon organizational affiliation or the particular Hindu **deity** that they **worship**. The **Bairagis**, **Dashanami Sanyasis**, and **Nathpanthis** are all well-defined ascetic organizations into which one must undertake formal **initiation**; the Bairagis are devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Vishnu**, and the other two are devotees of **Shiva**.

The **sadhu** ("straight") is the other major type of ascetic and the most difficult to define. Most sadhus are unaffiliated with any religious organization, have undertaken no formal ascetic initiation, and fall outside the other groups' sectarian boundaries. A sadhu is a solitary religious seeker, driven to attain religious goals by doing whatever seems best to him (or more rarely, to her).

## Asceticism

In the most general sense, this word denotes physical discipline, most often the renunciation of regular society and conventional social life in a quest to seek religious insight and to gain final liberation of the soul (**moksha**).

Historically, **ascetic** practice has stressed several constant themes. One of the most common has been **celibacy**, for a variety of reasons. Not only does sexual enjoyment use the senses to trap a person, but the attachments caused by home and family are seen as a distraction to serious spiritual life. Yet the emphasis on celibacy is also motivated by the belief that **semen** is a man's concentrated essence, and thus it is something to be carefully hoarded. Although semen must be expended for procreation, it should not be spilled casually since this drains away a man's vitality. It is believed that energy gained from celibacy leads to greater spiritual accomplishment.

Another hallmark has been the practice of **tapas**, or physical asceticism, under the assumption that enduring physical hardship not only builds character but also generates spiritual power. At times tapas can assume grotesque forms of self-mutilation and mortification. At other times it may be a milder physical discipline, such as a form of **hatha yoga**, to train the body and mind for extended practice.

In general, ascetic spiritual development can proceed along a variety of different paths, which often reflect the abilities and inclinations of the ascetics following them. Some paths have stressed the importance of traditional learning, some have stressed **worship** and devotion, some have stressed physical asceticism, and some have stressed meditation and individual realization. In almost all cases, this spiritual training takes place under the direction of a religious preceptor (**guru**), who takes responsibility for the spiritual development of his disciples.

Asceticism in India has a long and venerable history, although there is considerable disagreement regarding how long and how venerable. The most ambitious claim is that the Indian ascetic tradition comes from the religion of the **Indus Valley civilization**. This claim is based on one of the **Indus Valley seals**, an ancient artifact that shows a figure sitting cross-legged as if in meditation.

Whether or not one accepts this claim, there is ample evidence of asceticism in the **Vedas**, the earliest Hindu scriptures. The Vedas mention renunciant figures, such as the **vratya**, **yati**, and **muni**, and also refer to ascetics living in the forest. Indeed, the very name of one stratum of the Veda, the **Aranyakas** or "Forest Books," suggests that it was composed by such ascetics. Buddhist and Jain literature clearly shows that ascetic life was well established by the fifth century B.C.E., as do some of the later upanishads. All of these ascetics, whether Hindu, Buddhist, or Jain, were designated under the umbrella term **shramana**, a word whose basic meaning is "to strive." It is generally accepted that there was religious tension between the two dominant religious paradigms, the **Brahmana** ideal connected with Vedic religion and the shramana ideal associated with asceticism. The Brahmana ideal was based on **sacrifice**, mastery of complex sacred texts, and hereditary priesthood; furthermore, it was so expensive that it virtually required royal patrons—all of these factors rendering it the "establishment religion." These concepts clashed with the shramana ideal,

which was renunciant, individualist, and stressed inner experience.

By the time of the **Dharma Shastras** (treatises on religious duty), this tension had been somewhat resolved; asceticism had been relegated to the last of the four ashramas (**stages of life**), that of the **Sanyasi**. Yet even here the tension remains, since according to these texts, a **twice-born** man cannot become a Sanyasi until he has seen his children's children, which would make him well advanced in years. These texts restrict asceticism to twice-born men who have fulfilled their obligations as householders, but they deny it to **women** and low-**caste** men. Needless to say, the actual picture has never been quite as neat as the idealized society found in the Dharma Shastras.

Organizationally, initiated Hindu ascetics can be divided into several major groups. One division is based on the ascetics' patron deity; the **Shaiva** are devotees (**bhakta**) of **Shiva**, and the **Vaishnava** worship **Vishnu**.

The **Kapalikas**, **Kalamukhas**, and **Pashupatas** are Shaiva ascetic groups that have disappeared; the two Shaiva groups that still survive are the **Dashanamis** and the **Nathpanthis**. The Dashanamis are the most prestigious of all ascetics. They were supposedly organized by the great philosopher **Shankaracharya** and have traditionally emphasized learning. The Nathpanthis trace their origin to **Gorakhnath**, a miracle-working **yogi** about whom little is definitely known. The Nathpanthis are known for their stress on the transformation of the physical body through **yoga**.

Vaishnava ascetics are more recently organized, and in northern India they are broken into four groups (**chatuh-sampradayi Nagas**), named after each group's reported founder: **Ramananda** for the **Ramanandis**, **Nimbarka** for the **Nimbarkis**, **Chaitanya** for the Madhva Gaudiyas (**Brahma Sampraday**), and **Vishnuswami** for the Vishnuswamis.

From at least the sixteenth century, and perhaps much earlier, both the Dashanamis and the Vaishnava ascetics organized bands of fighters known as **Nagas** ("naked"). These soldier-ascetics were commissioned to protect the other ascetics, but they also served as long-distance traders and mercenary soldiers. These Naga orders still exist today, although they are no longer prepared for battle. Another important sect is the **Udasis**, who worship the panchayatana ("five-fold"), a collection of five Hindu **deities**: Shiva, Vishnu, **Durga**, **Ganesh**, and **Surya**. Religiously speaking, the Udasis thus fall between the Shaivas and Vaishnavas.

In the past few centuries, reform-minded ascetics have organized their own ascetic bands, a process that still continues today. For further information see G. S. Ghurye, *Indian Sadhus*, 1964; Jadunath Sarkar, *A History of the Dasanami Naga Sanyasis,* 1958; Padmanabh S. Jaini, "Sramanas: Their Conflict with Brahmanical Society," in Joseph Elder (ed.), *Chapters in Indian Civilization*, 1970; Robert Lewis Gross, *The Sadhus of India*, 1992; and Peter van der Veer, *Gods on Earth*, 1988. See also **panchayatana puja**.

## Ashadh

According to the lunar **calendar**, by which most Hindu religious festivals are celebrated, Ashadh is the fourth month in the lunar **year**, usually falling within June and July. In northern India, this is usually the hottest month of the year.

The major holidays celebrated in Ashadh are **Yogini Ekadashi**, the **Rath Yatra**, **Devshayani Ekadashi**, and **Guru Purnima**. Devshayani Ekadashi also marks the beginning of the **Chaturmas Vrat**.

This is a four-month (lunar) period generally coinciding with the rainy **season**. During this time the god **Vishnu** is believed to be "sleeping," and because of this the period is considered inauspicious.

Men wash the body of a deceased man to prepare it for cremation.
A dead body is considered to be a potent source of ashaucha, or impurity.

## Ashaucha

("impurity") Name for the ritual impurity caused by contact with any source of pollution; these sources come in many different guises, both physical and social.

**Purity** and impurity are religious categories and thus fundamentally different from cleanliness and dirtiness, which are hygienic categories. For example, **cow dung** is considered a pure substance in traditional Hindu society and is smeared on patches of ground to purify it. It is also important to realize that impurity is a natural part of life—as just one example, everyone goes to the bathroom every day—and that becoming impure carries no sense of moral imperfection or lapse.

Most bodily fluids are considered polluting; one becomes impure through any activity involving them, such as urination, defecation, sexual activity, giving **birth**, or being born. One can become polluted through contact with people or things deemed impure, such as people of lower social status, **animals**, any sort of ordinary filth, or even the dust from the road.

Impurity can also be caused by social connections. The impurity from childbirth (**sutakashaucha**) obviously affects the mother and child because of the bodily fluids involved, but it also affects all other members of the immediate family.

If a person has come into contact with something polluting, the solution is to remove the source of impurity. The most common means of purification is to bathe in running **water**, which removes less virulent impurities by carrying them away with the water's flow. The purifying power of bathing (**snana**) makes it a prelude to many religious rituals, in which one of the general preconditions is scrupulous purity, both for the person performing the ritual and the place where it is performed.

The most polluting substance of all is a **corpse**, which is one reason why bodies are destroyed by **cremation** on the day of death. The impurity from death (**maranashaucha**) is the most violent impurity of all, and contact with a corpse affects the entire family for ten days after the death.

For further information see Pauline Kolenda, "Purity and Pollution," in T. N. Madan (ed.), *Religion in India*, 1991.

## Ashirvad

("benedictory formula") General term used to denote words of blessing, whether formal or informal. One of the basic assumptions of Hindu religious life is that certain spiritually powerful people—in particular, **ascetics** and learned **brahmins**—can confer blessings and **curses** at will. Both the blessings and curses are believed to take effect immediately and without fail, which is why a prudent person will always treat ascetics and learned brahmins with the respect that they deserve.

## Ashoka

(r. 269–232 B.C.E.) The greatest ruler in the **Maurya dynasty**, who reigned over a kingdom stretching from Afghanistan to southern India from his capital at **Pataliputra**. Ashoka's father, **Bindusara**, and his grandfather, **Chandragupta Maurya**, had created a centralized empire. Aside from the far south, the only area outside its influence was the region known as Kalinga (modern state of **Orissa**).

Early in his reign, Ashoka's armies conquered Kalinga in a bloody campaign, killing hundreds of thousands of people; the carnage had a profound effect on the young Ashoka. Several years later Ashoka formally adopted Buddhism and embraced the principle of nonviolence (**ahimsa**). As a result he formally renounced war as a means of conquest.

Early historians believed that Ashoka used his royal power to make Buddhism the state religion, but this position appears to misread the evidence. Ashoka did seem to be attracted to Buddhism, but his public pronouncements on "Dhamma," earlier identified with Buddhist teaching, seem to have been aimed at creating a climate of social responsibility, tolerance, nonviolence, and harmony. These were qualities that most reasonable people would endorse, and some historians have suggested that such vague guidelines indicate an attempt to unify a religiously diverse empire.

Ashoka is by far the best-known figure of his era, largely because he set up public **inscriptions** all over his kingdom. **Rock edicts** tended to be carved on rock faces close to the empire's borders, while **pillar edicts** were inscribed on pillars erected on the main roads.

The writing used for these inscriptions varied in different regions of the empire, although the language for all was a **Prakrit**, one of the grammatically simple vernacular languages that developed from **Sanskrit**. These inscriptions are the earliest written Indian documents of any historical significance; they reveal a great deal about Ashoka's public persona, his exhortations to his subjects, and even something about the man himself.

In modern India, Ashoka is the model for the enlightened ruler, and the Ashokan pillar capped with four **lions** has been adopted as the emblem of the modern republic of India.

## Ashoka Tree

(*Jonesia ashoka*) Flowering tree traditionally associated with love and fertility. When in bloom, the Ashoka tree is covered with red flowers—a color typically associated with passion—that contrast with its green foliage. According to tradition, the ashoka tree will not bloom until it has been kicked by a young woman's foot, implying the transfer of her fertile energy to the tree.

The Ashoka tree is also famous in the ***Ramayana***, the earlier of the two great Hindu epics. When **Sita** is kidnapped by **Ravana**, the **demon**-king of **Lanka**, she is imprisoned in a grove of Ashoka trees, where she pines away waiting to be rescued by her husband **Rama**.

Religious leader at an ashram in Puri.

## Ashram

The abode of an **ascetic** or religious renunciant. The word is derived from a form of the verb "to strive" and has several different meanings: On one hand, an ashram is also a place where one gives up one's conventional worldly striving; on the other hand, it is a place at which one can seriously strive for spiritual goals that are often less emphasized in the material world.

In modern Hinduism (both in India and abroad) the word can refer to a full spectrum of living arrangements, from a simple hut or cave inhabited by one person to magnificent building compounds that can house thousands of people at a time.

## Ashrama

("stages, abodes") See **stages of life**.

## Ashrama Dashanami

One of the ten divisions of the **Dashanami Sanyasis**, renunciant ascetics who are devotees (**bhakta**) of **Shiva**. The Dashanamis were supposedly established by the ninth-century philosopher **Shankaracharya** in an effort to create a corps of learned men who could help to revitalize Hindu life. Each of the divisions is designated by a different name—in this case, *ashrama* ("hermitage"). Upon **initiation**, new members are given this name as a surname to their new ascetic names, thus allowing for immediate group identification.

Aside from their individual identity, these ten "named" divisions are divided into four larger organizational groups. Each group has its headquarters in one of the four monastic centers (**maths**) supposedly established by Shankaracharya, as well as other particular religious associations. The Ashrama Dashanamis belong to the **Kitawara** group, which is affiliated with the **Sharada Math** in the city of **Dwaraka**, located near the Arabian Sea.

The Ashrama division is considered an elite group because it is one of the few that will initiate only **brahmins** (the other such divisions are the **Saraswati Dashanamis**, **Tirtha Dashanamis**, and part of the **Bharati Dashanamis**.)

## Ashtachap

("eight seals") A group of eight northern Indian **bhakti** (devotional) poets: **Surdas**, **Krishnadas**, **Parmananddas**, **Kumbhadas**, **Nanddas**, **Chaturbhujdas**, **Chitswami**, and **Govindswami**.

In the sectarian literature of the **Pushti Marg**, a **Vaishnava** community whose members are devotees (**bhakta**) of **Krishna**, all eight of these poets are named as members of the sect and associates of the Pushti Marg's early leaders. Surdas, Krishnadas, Parmananddas, and Kumbhadas are connected with the Pushti Marg's founder, **Vallabhacharya** (1479–1531); Nanddas, Chaturbhujdas, Chitswami, and Govindswami are associated with Vallabha's **son** and successor, **Vitthalnath** (r. 1566–1585). Evidence of their membership can be found in their poetry, which confirms this claim for many of the poets; for Surdas, however, this claim seems highly unlikely.

## Ashtadhyayi

("Eight Sections") Text composed by the **Sanskrit grammarian Panini** (ca. 4th c. B.C.E.); the text's name stems from the

eight sections it contains. Panini wrote the *Ashtadhyayi* as a descriptive account of contemporary Sanskrit, but in later generations the text was transformed into the prescriptive norm for the language. Each of the *Ashtadhyayi*'s eight sections is composed of a series of brief aphorisms (**sutras**), which are usually only a few words long, and refers to a specific facet of Sanskrit grammar. Each sutra in a given section builds upon all the preceding sutras, and in turn provides the foundation and background for understanding those coming after it. This sequential description means that Panini began with Sanskrit's most general linguistic features and moved from there to more specific ones. This method allowed Panini to provide a complete account of the Sanskrit language as briefly as possible, and the text's condensed form facilitated memorization. As with most sutra texts, the *Ashtadhyayi's* terseness of expression presupposes a commentary, since the sutras themselves are so short and pithy that they are simply cryptic to the uninitiated. The *Ashtadhyayi*'s most famous commentary is the *Mahabhashya*, written by the grammarian **Patanjali** in the second century B.C.E.

## Ashtalakshmi

Eight different forms of the **goddess** named **Lakshmi**, representing her different aspects as the source of wealth and prosperity. The eight are often portrayed as a set, although one may also encounter them separately: **Vijaya** ("victory") Lakshmi, **Jaya** ("conquest") Lakshmi, Dhana ("wealth") Lakshmi, Dhanya ("grain") Lakshmi, Gaja ("**elephant**") Lakshmi, Aishvarya ("**divine power**") Lakshmi, **Vina** (a musical instrument) Lakshmi, and Raja ("royal") Lakshmi.

## Ashtanga ("eight-limbed") Yoga

System of **yoga** (religious discipline) traditionally ascribed to **Patanjali** (1st c. C.E.?). This author is believed to be different than the **grammarian** Patanjali, who wrote the *Mahabhashya* commentary on **Panini's Sanskrit** grammar.

Patanjali's **Yoga Sutras** are the basis for the Yoga school of Indian **philosophy**, one of the **six schools**. By the early centuries of the common era (approximately 100–300 C.E.), the Yoga school had become paired with the **Samkhya** school. In this pairing, Samkhya provided the theoretical and metaphysical explanations for the bondage and liberation of the soul, while Yoga laid out the concrete path for ending bondage and gaining liberation.

Ashtanga yoga is made up of eight parts, known as "limbs" (**anga**): restraints (**yama**), observances (**niyama**), bodily postures (**asana**), restraint of breath (**pranayama**), withdrawal of the senses (**pratyahara**), concentration (**dharana**), meditation (**dhyana**), and trance (**samadhi**).

Patanjali's system is an eight-step program for self-transformation, which begins by cultivating certain wholesome behavioral patterns (yama and niyama). From there one progresses to development and control of the mind, which is considered a more subtle and internalized practice. It culminates in a mystic insight that brings liberation, which in its original articulation is described as yogic aloneness (**kaivalya**) because Samkhya is atheistic.

Patanjali's path shows general similarities to another well-known program for self-transformation, the Buddha's eightfold path. Although both Patanjali and the Buddha are credited with originating their particular paths, it is likely that they both drew from an existing yogic tradition and shaped it to fit their own assumptions.

Although Samkhya metaphysics have long been discredited, the techniques of the Yoga school are still vitally important in modern Hindu religious life. Many modern Hindu movements stress yoga practice as a means of spiritual discipline, purification, and self-awareness. For further information see Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles

A. Moore (eds.), *A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy*, 1957.

## Ashtavakra

("eight bends") In the ***Mahabharata***, the later of the two great Hindu epics, Ashtavakra is a sage who is the **son** of Khagodara. According to tradition, Ashtavakra is an exceptionally precocious child, and this gets him into serious trouble. While he is still in his mother's womb, Ashtavakra corrects his father's pronunciation of a certain **mantra**. In response his father curses him to be bent, and when the child is born he has eight bends in his body.

Despite his unusual appearance, Ashtavakra becomes a learned sage and is widely believed to be the author of the *Ashtavakragita* ("Song of Ashtavakra"). This text describes the philosophical concept of monism, which is the belief that a single Supreme Reality (named **Brahman**) lies behind the entire universe, and that all things are merely differing manifestations of this reality.

## Ashutosh

("quickly satisfied") Epithet of the god **Shiva**. This name reflects Shiva's relationship with his devotees (**bhakta**), as well as his ultimate nature. When his devotees approach him with sincerity, he demands neither expensive **offerings** nor prolonged **worship**, and he extends his favor immediately. See **Shiva**.

## Ashvalayana

Sage and author of one of the **Grhya Sutras**, the manuals of domestic rites. Ashvalayana's work is one of the earliest to mention the various life-cycle ceremonies (**samskaras**) and is thus an important source on these rites.

## Ashvamedha

("horse **sacrifice**") Vedic sacrifice performed to display and prove royal power. In this sacrifice a specially consecrated horse was released to roam as it wished, followed by an armed band of the king's servants. When the horse wandered into a neighboring ruler's territory, that king had two choices: He could either acknowledge subordinate status to the king who had released it, or he could attempt to steal the horse, and do battle with the king's servants.

After one year of wandering, the horse was brought back to the royal capital and killed by suffocation or strangulation, so that its **blood** would not be shed. After the horse had been killed, the chief queen would lie down next to it and simulate sexual intercourse. When the instructions for this ritual were first translated in the nineteenth century, this simulated intercourse generated considerable horrified interest among European scholars, even though it was clearly a subsidiary part of the ritual.

The rite's major emphasis was a celebration of royal power, since the king performing it was able to control the territory covered in a year by a free-roaming horse. The queen's role, in contrast, seems aimed at symbolically assuring the fertility of the land. Historical records indicate that the ashvamedha was performed until the tenth century C.E. As with all other cases of **animal sacrifice**, concerns about the karmic consequences of slaughtering a living being has been an important factor in its discontinuation. See also **karma**.

## Ashvattha

The sacred fig tree, *Ficus religiosa*, which in modern times is more commonly known as the pipal. The ashvattha is especially noted for its aerial roots, which extend downward from some of the limbs until they touch the ground, at which point they take root themselves. Because their roots can become subsidiary trunks, ashvattha trees can grow to be enormous. They have traditionally been favored as places for **ascetics** to dwell, in part because of their sacred associations and in part because their dense foliage provides shelter from the elements.

Their unusual structure is noted in chapter fifteen of the **Bhagavad Gita**, in which the ashvattha is described as the tree of life. The ashvattha is also believed to be the type of tree under which the Buddha attained enlightenment.

## Ashvatthama

In the *Mahabharata*, the later of the two great Hindu epics, Ashvatthama is the **son** of **Drona**. When Drona becomes the archery teacher to the **Pandavas** and the **Kauravas**, the epic's two central royal families, Ashvatthama also receives instruction along with the young princes. He absorbs his father's teaching well and masters the use of terrifying magical weapons. During the *Mahabharata's* climactic civil war, he fights on the side of the Kauravas and kills many of the Pandava allies; this includes **Dhrshtadyumna**, who has earlier killed his father, Drona. After the war is over, Ashvatthama retires to the forest with the sage **Vyasa**.

## Ashvin

According to the lunar **calendar**, by which most Hindu religious festivals are determined, Ashvin is the seventh month in the lunar **year**, usually falling within September and October. In Ashvin the monsoon rains usually taper off, and the weather becomes a bit cooler.

The dark (waning) half of this month is the **Pitrpaksha**, one of the most inauspicious times of the year. The bright (waxing) half contains one of the most important festivals of the year, the fall **Navaratri**, culminating in **Dussehra** or Vijaya Dashami. Other festivals during this month are **Indira Ekadashi**, **Papankusha Ekadashi**, and **Valmiki Jayanti**.

## Ashvins

Twin **deities** named Satya and Dasya, who are **sons** of the god **Surya** (the **Sun**)

and the physicians to the gods. In the *Mahabharata*, the later of the two great Hindu epics, the Ashvins are the divine fathers of the **Pandava** twins, **Nakula** and **Sahadeva**. Nakula and Sahadeva are born when their mother, **Madri**, uses a powerful **mantra** enabling a woman to have a child by any one of the gods; as the sons of the divine physicians, the epic portrays these twins as having their fathers' ability to heal. In the Hindu lunar **calendar**, the month of **Ashvin** (October–November) is devoted to them.

## Assam

Before Indian independence in 1947, this name designated the entire territory east of Bengal province in northeastern India; in the time since independence, it was divided into seven different administrative regions, one of which is the contemporary state of Assam.

Like all other states in the northeastern corner, much of modern Assam is culturally distinct from the rest of India. One marker of this cultural divide is language: whereas most Indians speak languages from the Indo-Aryan or **Dravidian** language families, many tribal people in Assam speak Tibeto-Burman languages. The bulk of modern Assam is in the Brahmaputra River valley, which is where most of the Hindus in the northeast reside.

Despite its remoteness from the rest of India, Assam does have one very important sacred place, the temple of the **goddess Kamakhya** just outside the capital of Gauhati. This is one of the **Shakti Pithas**, a network of sites connected with the **worship** of the Mother **Goddess** that were established at places where it is believed that body parts of the dismembered goddess **Sati** fell to **earth**. Kamakhya is considered the most powerful of all the Shakti Pithas since it is believed to be where Sati's vulva (a highly charged female body part) fell to earth.

In the asthi-visarjana funeral ceremony, after cremation
the remains of a body are gathered and immersed in sacred water.

## Asthi-Sanchayana

("gathering the bones") Name for a particular ceremony performed as one of the last rites (**antyeshthi samskara**) connected with death. Asthi-sanchayana is usually performed on the second or third **day** after **cremation**. In this rite, some of the remains of the deceased—bits of bone and ash—are gathered from the site of the cremation pyre. These remains are collected and kept in a safe place until their final dispersal in the last of the death rites, **asthi-visarjana**.

## Asthi-Visarjana

("scattering the bones") Name for a particular ceremony performed as one of the last rites (**antyeshthi samskara**) connected with death. In this ritual, bits of bone and ash collected from the **cremation** site in the rite of **asthi-sanchayana** are immersed in the **waters** of the **Ganges** or some other sacred river. This is the final ceremony for the dead, since in earlier times the collected remains might be kept for years before a family member was able to bring them to a pilgrimage place (**tirtha**) to perform this rite. Modern transportation has changed this pattern somewhat, making it more common for asthi-visarjana to be carried out immediately after death but before the **sapindikarana** ceremony on the twelfth day.

This rite is still widely performed in modern India and remains important for at least two reasons: On one hand, there is the symbolism of redemption for the dead through consigning their ashes to the sacred waters, and on the other, providing definitive ritual closure for the living.

## Astrology

See **jyotisha**.

## Asura

See **demons**.

## Asura Marriage

One of the eight ways to perform a marriage recognized in the **Dharma Shastras**, the treatises on religious duty (**dharma**). It is named after the asuras, a class of powerful divine beings whose interests are often at odds with those of the gods (**deva**); thus, the name carries an unfavorable connotation.

An asura marriage takes place when a man gives money to the bride's family and the bride herself. This is one of the four

reprehensible (**aprashasta**) forms of marriage because of the connotation that the bride is being sold, yet like all the other reprehensible forms, it is deemed to create a valid marriage.

Despite this general disapproval, it is one of the two classical forms that is still practiced (the other being the **Brahma marriage**), although because of the stigma attached to the implication of selling one's child, it is only done by people who are either very poor or of very low social status. See also **marriage, eight classical forms**.

## Atala Akhara

The name of a subgroup of the **Naga** class of the **Dashanami Sanyasis**, a particular type of renunciant **ascetic**. The Dashanami Nagas are devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva**, organized into different **akharas**, or regiments, based on the model of an army. Until the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Nagas were known as mercenary soldiers, although they also had substantial trading interests; both of these occupations have largely disappeared in contemporary times. The Atala Akhara has traditionally been considered a subsidiary of the **Mahanirvani akhara**, at least for their marching order in the bathing (**snana**) processions for the **Kumbha Mela**. During the 1998 **Haridwar** Kumbha Mela, the Atala akhara demanded to be separated from the Mahanirvanis and to be allowed to march in their own procession; when this request was turned down, the Atala akhara boycotted the bathing processions in protest. The Atala akhara is one of the seven main Dashanami Naga akharas, although it is now the smallest and least important. All of the akharas have particular features that define their organizational identity, especially specific guardian **deities**; the guardian deity of the Atala akara is the god **Ganesh**.

## Atharva Veda

The Atharva Veda is the last of the four **Vedas**, which are the oldest and most authoritative Hindu religious texts. In many ways the Atharva Veda is the most unusual. Whereas the other three—**Rg Veda**, **Sama Veda**, and **Yajur Veda**—focus mainly on sacrificial rituals, the Atharva Veda is largely a collection of spells and incantations that can be used to counter or correct misfortune, and also to bring about one's desired result. Its unusual contents make it very different from the other three, and since some early sources mention only the first three Vedas, it apparently gained authority as a Veda sometime later.

## Atikaya

In the *Ramayana*, the earlier of the two great Hindu epics, Atikaya is one the **sons** of the great **demon Ravana** by his wife **Mandodari**. Like his father, Atikaya is described as a great devotee (**bhakta**) of **Shiva** and, because of his constant devotion, he gains many wondrous weapons and powers. Atikaya fights bravely and valiantly in the war with **Rama's** army but is eventually killed by Rama's brother **Lakshmana**.

## Atita

("gone beyond") In its most general usage, this term denotes an **ascetic** who has completely renounced all things and thus "gone beyond" all the social boundaries that enmesh normal people. It is also the name of a particular low-**caste** community, some of whom are ascetics and some of whom are householders.

## Atman

Reflexive pronoun in **Sanskrit** grammar, that can be used for all three persons in the singular and that carries the sense of "self" or "oneself." From the time of the mystical texts known as the **Upanishads**, the word *atman* has also been used to designate each human being's inner essence—which is eternal, unchanging, gives one

continuing identity in one's different incarnations, and is ultimately identical to **Brahman**, the single source of all things in the universe.

## Atranji Khera

Architectural site near the city of Aligarh that is located in the modern state of **Uttar Pradesh**. Excavations at Atranji Khera have revealed an ancient urban center dating back to the second millennium B.C.E. The settlements here were not as developed as those in the **Indus Valley civilization**, although they are believed to be distinct from it and thus another potential source for ancient Indian culture.

## Atri

In Hindu mythology, Atri is one of the six **sons** of **Brahma**, all of whom become great sages. All are "mind-born," meaning that Brahma's thoughts are enough to bring them into being. The others are **Marichi**, **Angiras**, **Pulastya**, **Pulaha**, and **Kratu**.

Atri is also cited as one of the seven sages; the others are **Kashyapa**, **Bhrgu**, **Vasishtha**, **Gautama**, **Bharadvaja**, and **Vishvamitra**. All **brahmins** are believed to be descended from these seven sages, with each family taking the name of its progenitor as its **gotra** name.

In modern times, these gotra divisions are still important, since marriage within the gotra is forbidden. After her marriage the new bride adopts her husband's gotra as part of her new identity. See also **marriage prohibitions**.

## Aughar

Name given to a novice in the **ascetic** community known as the **Naths**, who are devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva**. An aughar has been initiated as a member of the Naths and has taken up their ascetic way of life, but he has not yet received his final **initiation**. In this final ritual, the cartilage in the novice's ears is pierced in order to insert the large earrings that are one of the **Nath** community's defining characteristics.

## Aurangzeb

(r. 1658–1707) The last of the great emperors in the **Moghul dynasty**, after whose reign the empire, which at its zenith stretched over most of the Indian subcontinent, was fragmented into smaller kingdoms. Aurangzeb was a very strict and pious Muslim who is generally painted as an enemy of Hinduism. He is the "bad" Moghul emperor, as opposed to his great-grandfather **Akbar**, the "good" Moghul emperor. Aurangzeb unquestionably ordered several notable acts of iconoclasm, the most renowned being the destruction of the **Vishvanath** temple in the city of **Benares**; however, the records from his reign also include orders that the Hindus of that city should not be hindered from practicing their religion.

One possible theory that reconciles these contradictions is that the destruction of the Vishvanath temple and other acts of iconoclasm were done for political rather than religious reasons, to punish local populations for rebellion and noncooperation. One piece of evidence for this theory is that the year before the destruction of the Vishvanath temple, the **Mahanirvani akhara** in Benares took part in a battle with Aurangzeb's soldiers.

## Aurobindo Ghose

(1872–1950) Freedom fighter, philosopher, and **ascetic yogi**. He is perceived as a modern example of the concern for ultimate truth that always runs beneath the surface of Hindu life.

Until he was twenty, Aurobindo lived much of his life in England, to fulfill his father's desire to see his **son** get a "proper" English education. Upon his return to India, Aurobindo was more interested in politics than in working, and after a few years quit his job to take part in the political struggle

against the British government. His political career lasted only four years, but his intellect and energy soon made him a leader in the Bengali language and national politics.

His life was transformed again by a stay in prison, during which he remembered the advice of an ascetic who had told him to focus on his inner self. Aurobindo later had a vision of **Swami Vivekananda**, who guided his **yoga** practice, and after he was released from prison, Aurobindo withdrew from political life. In 1910 he moved to the French enclave of Pondicherry in southern India, where he lived until his death in 1950. Aurobindo spent these years developing his spiritual life, and in his later years he was known as Shri Aurobindo.

His teachings focus on the insights found in the **Upanishads**, and stress the development of true knowledge, which leads to self-realization.

## Auspiciousness

This is the general term for events or conditions that cause or promote life, prosperity, and overall well-being. Along with **purity** and impurity (**ashaucha**), auspiciousness and **inauspiciousness** are fundamental concepts in Hindu life.

The life-giving qualities connected with auspiciousness make it a state that Hindus pursue—whether through performing rituals, scheduling important events such as **marriage ceremonies** for astrologically favorable times, or avoiding people and things deemed to be inauspicious. For extensive information of auspiciousness and its importance in Hindu life, see Frederique Apffel Marglin, *Wives of the God-King*, 1985.

## Avadhi

Avadhi is a language known in two different contexts. In a literary context, Avadhi is a dialect of medieval **Hindi** (and a sister language of **Braj Bhasha**)

found in the eastern part of the state of **Uttar Pradesh**, in the region surrounding **Ayodhya** (Avadh). It is recognized as the language in which the poet-saint **Tulsidas** (1532–1623?) wrote his vernacular retelling of the *Ramayana*, the *Ramcharitmanas*.

In a linguistic context, Avadhi is one of the dialects of modern standard Hindi spoken throughout the same region. Although it shows similarities to the language of Tulsidas, it has evolved from that version.

## Avadhuta

("one who has cast away [all attachments]") In its most general sense, an avadhuta is an **ascetic** who does not adhere to any social or religious rules but his (or far more rarely, her) own. Needless to say, their behavior is often unpredictable, seemingly capricious, and sometimes intentionally shocking.

As a more technical title, avadhuta is a term of respect for the senior members of the **Naga** class of the **Dashanami Sanyasis**, renunciant ascetics who are devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva** and who formerly made their living as traders and mercenary soldiers.

## Avahana

("summoning") The first of the sixteen **upacharas** ("**offerings**") given to a **deity** as part of **worship**, which is done to treat the deity as an honored guest. Although the literal translation of this word ("summoning") seems inappropriate for interacting with a god, the true sense of the word is inviting the deity to become present for worship, just as one would invite a guest into one's house for hospitality.

## Avahana Akhara

The name of a particular group of the **Naga** class of the **Dashanami Sanyasis**, which is comprised of renunciant

The ten avatars of the god Vishnu. In Hindu mythology, Vishnu has appeared on earth in different forms: Fish, Tortoise, Boar, Man-lion, Vamana (dwarf), Parashuram, Rama, Krishna, Buddha, and Kalki.

**ascetics**. The Dashanami Nagas are devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva**, organized into **akharas**, or regiments, on the model of an army. Until the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Nagas' primary occupation was as mercenary soldiers, although they also had substantial trading interests; both of these occupations have largely disappeared in contemporary times.

The Avahana akhara is one of the seven main Dashanami Naga akharas, but for organizational purposes it is considered a subsidiary of the **Juna akhara**. Its name, which means "summons," supposedly comes from its status as the first organized **ascetic** group, formed in response to the call from the philosopher **Shankaracharya** to revitalize Hindu society.

## Avalon, Arthur
Pen name of **Sir John Woodroffe**.

## Avani
Fifth month of the Tamil solar **year**, which usually falls within August and September. This month corresponds to the northern Indian solar month of Simha (the zodiacal sign of Leo). The existence of several different **calendars** is one clear sign of the continuing importance of regional cultural patterns. One way that the Tamils retain their culture is by preserving their traditional calendar. Tamil is one of the few regional languages in India with an ancient, well-established literary tradition. See also **Tamil months**, **Tamil Nadu**, and **Tamil language**.

## Avatar
("descent") In Hindu mythology, the descent (of a **deity**), but more colloquially the incarnation, of a deity on **earth**. The concept of avatars has been best developed by the devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Vishnu**, who perceive him as taking a specific form to help the world. Examples of avatars can be found for other divinities as well.

Hindus draw a distinction between full avatars, which have the complete power of the deity, and partial incarnations, or **anshavatars**. Vishnu has ten full avatars, each of whom has appeared to restore the cosmic balance when the

world has fallen out of equilibrium. The root cause of such disequilibrium is usually a **demon** (asura) who has grown too strong and uses that power to oppress others. This imbalance prompts Vishnu to take form as an avatar, destroy the evildoers, and definitively restore the cosmic balance.

Although there is some variation in the list of Vishnu's avatars, the generally accepted list is as follows: **Fish**, **Tortoise**, **Boar**, **Man-Lion**, **Vamana** (dwarf), **Parashuram**, **Rama**, **Krishna**, **Buddha**, and **Kalki**. This list of avatars follows an "evolutionary" sequence—the first three are **animals**, the fourth a hybrid man-animal, and the ones after that mythic heroes and sages; the exception is the Buddha, a real person who has been incorporated into the Hindu pantheon. The tenth form, Kalki avatar, is yet to come, and his coming will herald the end of the age. Vishnu's partial avatars—as sages, saints, and gods—are countless and potentially limitless, providing a ready-made way for new Hindu movements to ascribe divine authority to their founders.

Although the avatar concept is most commonly associated with Vishnu, it has been applied to other Hindu gods as well. One example of partial avatars can be seen in the *Mahabharata*, the later of the two great Hindu epics, in which all five of the **Pandava** brothers are partial incarnations of various gods. In addition, devotees of the god **Shiva** have developed a list of his twenty-one avatars, who are saints, sages, and minor deities. This list was probably developed in response to the **Vaishnava** doctrine of avatars, but Shiva's forms are far less important than Vishnu's; Vishnu's avatars include Rama and Krishna, who are major objects of **worship** in their own right.

For the Vaishnavas, the avatar doctrine is generally seen as a way to assimilate existing cults into the pantheon by claiming that various deities are merely different manifestations of Vishnu. The **Shaiva** avatars were developed much later,

essentially so that Shiva would also have these forms. See also **Jagannath** and **Balarama**.

## Avidya

("lack of [true] knowledge") Avidya is the absence of true understanding and is the fundamental problem in almost all Hindu philosophical and religious thought. The presence of avidya leads people to misperceive the true nature of reality and to act based on these misperceptions.

The most fundamental of these false perceptions is to identify the eternal Self (**atman**) with the body. As a result of this misidentification, egoism leads one to try to protect and advance the Self (in its particular embodied state) and incites feelings and actions of greed, lust, and hatred. These feelings create bondage for the soul and entrap it in **samsara**, the cycle of rebirth.

In most Hindu philosophical schools, the avidya tends to be conceived in epistemological rather than metaphysical terms—that is, it is not an actual thing in its own right but exists as a function of how one comes to know things, insofar as that knowledge is inaccurate or incomplete. Once one's deficient awareness has been corrected, the cause of bondage is removed, resulting in the final liberation of the soul (**moksha**).

## Avimukta

("unforsaken") The word *Avimukta* carries two shades of meaning: in a more general sense, it is a name for the city of **Benares**; in a more specific sense, it refers to the part of Benares considered to be the sacred heart of the city, in the region centered around the **Vishvanath** Temple.

Avimukta gets its name from the belief that **Shiva** never leaves this place, and because of this its proponents claim that it is the holiest spot on **earth**. See **Benares**.

## Avvaiyar

Poet whose compositions appear in the **Sangam literature**, which are collections of Tamil poems written and compiled in the early centuries of the common era (approximately 100–300 C.E.). Avvaiyar is notable as a female poet, indicating that certain **women** at that time took an equal part in cultured and intellectual society. See also **Tamil language**.

## Ayamatma Brahman

("This Self is **Brahman**") In the Hindu philosophical tradition, one of the "great utterances" (**mahavakyas**) expressing ultimate truth. The truth here is the identity of **atman** (the individual Self) and Brahman (Ultimate Reality); this identity is the heart of the mystical texts called the **Upanishads**.

Aside from their importance in a philosophical context as fundamental truths, four mahavakyas were also appropriated as symbols by the four divisions of the **Dashanami Sanyasi** ascetics. Each division had its own mahavakya, just as each had a different **Veda**, a different primary sacred center, and a different ascetic quality. Ayamatma Brahman is the mahavakya associated with the **Anandawara** division of the Dashanami Sanyasis.

## Ayana

("going") In the estimation of the Hindu **calendar**, the word *ayana* refers to the movement of the **sun** during its yearly course, which is divided according to the direction of the sun's movement. The six months that the sun moves in a northerly direction is called the **uttarayana**, and its southward movement in the following six months is the **dakshinayana**. The transition points at which the sun changes direction do not fall on the solstices, as figured in the Gregorian calendar, but about three **weeks** later on **Makara Sankranti** (around January 14) and **Karka Sankranti** (around July 14).

The sun's northward journey is considered a more **auspicious** time than the southward journey, although many other factors can influence the judgment of a particular **day**.

## Ayodhya

("unassailable") Sacred city (**tirtha**) on the Sarayu River, in the Faizabad district of the state of **Uttar Pradesh**, and one of India's **seven sacred cities**. Ayodhya is famous as the setting for much of the *Ramayana*, the later of the two great Hindu epics, whose principal character is the god **Rama**. In the *Ramayana*, Ayodhya is the capital city of Rama's father, King **Dasharatha**, the birthplace and childhood home of Rama and his brothers, and the city to which Rama returns in triumph after his exile is over.

Although historians have raised doubts about the *Ramayana*'s historical veracity and the reality of the events described there, Rama's devotees (**bhakta**) entertain no such doubts. For them the cult of Rama is deeply entrenched in Ayodhya, and various places in the city are associated with events in the epic that are believed to have actually occurred.

In most cases this has had no ill effects, with the exception of the **Ram Janam Bhumi**, the site identified as Rama's birthplace. Until 1992, this site was occupied by the **Babri Masjid**, a Muslim mosque supposedly built after the existing temple was demolished. On December 6 of that year, the mosque was destroyed by teams of activists from the **Vishva Hindu Parishad**, who tore it down in just over six hours. The destruction sparked Hindu-Muslim riots all over India, in which thousands of people were killed. For further information on Ayodhya, see Hans Bakker, *Ayodhya*, 1986; Peter van der Veer, *Gods on Earth*, 1988; Sarvepalli Gopal, *Anatomy of a Confrontation*, 1991; and Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*, 1996.

## Ayudhapurusha

An ayudhapurusha is the personified form of a divine weapon or emblem, which is conceived as either masculine, feminine, or neuter according to the gender of the **Sanskrit** word. For example, the words **shakti** ("spear") and **gada** ("club") are portrayed as feminine, **chakra** ("discus") as neuter, and **khadga** ("sword") and **trishul** ("trident") as male.

## Ayurveda

("knowledge of life") Ayurveda is the best known of the indigenous Indian medical systems and is primarily based on the two **Sanskrit** medical texts: the *Charaka Samhita* (1st c. C.E.) and the *Sushruta Samhita* (4th c. C.E.).

The underlying assumption in both of these texts and in ayurveda is the theory of the three bodily humors—**vata** (**wind**), **pitta** (bile), and **kapha** (phlegm). Each of these is composed of different elements, and although everyone has all three humors, their relative proportions are used to explain varying body types, metabolic dispositions, and personalities.

People in whom vata predominates are said to have quick minds, slender bodies, and to be full of energy, but they are also said to get run down more easily than others. Pitta-dominant people are said to be strong-willed and good leaders but also hot-tempered and bothered by heat. Kapha-dominant people are strong, healthy, and stable but also have tendencies toward lassitude and inertia.

Each of these humors can thus have both wholesome and unwholesome manifestations, but when the humors are in relative balance, the five bodily winds (**prana**) that are considered responsible for basic bodily functions will work effectively, and the person will be healthy.

According to ayurveda, disease is caused by an imbalance of these humors that usually has perceivable environmental roots. One possible cause is environmental circumstances, such as the stresses that the differing **seasons** (hot, cold, damp, etc.) put on varying constitutions. The other possible cause for an imbalance is the person's own behavior—improper diet, poor sleep habits, deficient or inappropriate bodily exertion, and other habitual stresses on the body.

In ayurveda, people are conceived as beings in interaction with their environment, and ayurveda's proponents recognize that many ailments may have multiple causes. The ultimate aim of any treatment, whether diet, exercise, or medicine, is to restore this lost equilibrium. The equilibrium being sought will be different for everyone, since it will necessarily reflect each person's individual make-up. For further information see Gopi Warrier, *The Complete Illustrated Guide to Ayurveda*, 1997; and Judith Morrison, *The Book of Ayurveda*, 1995.

# B

## Baba

In its literal meaning, an affectionate term of address meaning "father." Although this can be used to address any older man, it is most commonly applied to **ascetics**, either in speaking of them as a class or as a respectful way to address a particular one.

## Babar's Mosque

See **Babri Masjid**.

## Babri Masjid

("Babar's Mosque") Mosque built in 1528 on the outskirts of the city of **Ayodhya**, which was constructed at the order of Mir Baqi, a general of the Moghul emperor Babar (1483–1530). The site has long been a source of controversy between the Hindu and Muslim communities, and British sources recorded conflicts there in 1855 and 1934. Local tradition holds that the mosque was built on the birthplace of the Hindu **deity Rama**, and that it was constructed only after demolishing the Hindu temple there, although there is little hard evidence for the latter claim. A few months after India gained independence in 1947, several local Hindus surreptitiously installed images of the child Rama, his wife **Sita**, and his brother **Lakshmana**; they spread the tale that the images had miraculously appeared in a ball of light. The government had only recently quieted the Hindu-Muslim massacres that accompanied the division of British India into India and Pakistan, and it was reluctant to reinflame religious passions. Its solution was to padlock the compound's gates and

send the case to the courts for resolution, where it languished for almost forty years.

The early 1980s saw renewed controversy over the site, when the Hindu religious organization **Vishva Hindu Parishad** (VHP) first began calling for its "liberation" and proclaiming that the existing structure was an insult to all Hindus. This campaign portrayed the mosque as a symbol of Muslim iconoclasm. Moreover, it depicted government efforts to protect the mosque as an attempt to appease the Muslim community and retain their votes. In 1986 the VHP's drive to liberate the site was aided by the national government headed by Rajiv Gandhi, which in a patent attempt to claim Hindu support, unlocked the compound's gates so that Hindus could **worship** on the site.

The pressure intensified as the decade progressed, culminating in a series of campaigns to begin constructing a Hindu temple on the site. Many of these campaigns coincided with national elections, and the emotion they generated helped benefit the electoral fortunes of the **Bharatiya Janata Party**, a political party with close ties to the VHP. Eventually, on December 6, 1992, the mosque was demolished. The whole operation was carefully planned; the demolition teams were highly trained, and the first thing they did was to destroy all the television cameras there to prevent any media coverage by outsiders. It was carried out with the blessing of the state government, which made no attempt to protect the building. The demolition was followed by riots, particularly in the state of **Maharashtra**, in which over three thousand people were killed, most of them Muslims.

Even after the destruction of the Babri Masjid, the site remained a bone of contention. Immediately following the demolition, Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao promised to rebuild the mosque on the same spot, but he did nothing to accomplish this during his time in office. Various Hindu groups,

Temple to the god Vishnu in the Himalayan town of Badrinath.
Parts of the temple's architecture suggest that it may have originally been a Buddhist temple.

including traditional religious leaders such as the **Shankaracharyas**, have been calling for the construction of the **Ram Janam Bhumi** temple at the site. Anticipating nothing but trouble ahead, the government again has sent the matter to the courts for resolution, where it remains to this day and may remain for four more decades. For further information see Sarvepalli Gopal, *Anatomy of a Confrontation*, 1991; and Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*, 1996.

## Badarayana
(ca. 400–200 B.C.E.) Philosopher traditionally cited as the author of the **Vedanta Sutras**. This collection of 555 brief **sutras**, or aphorisms, is the basis of the philosophical school known as **Vedanta**, so named because it claims to reveal the ultimate meaning of the religious scriptures known as the **Vedas**. The sutras attempt to summarize and systematize the philosophic and religious ideas in the **Upanishads**, the speculative texts that form the latest stratum in the Veda. Because the Vedanta Sutras are particularly concerned with the ideas about the Supreme Reality known as **Brahman**, they are also called the **Brahma Sutras**. The brevity of the individual sutras—many are only a few words—presupposes commentary, which was later provided by various writers. Badarayana himself considered the Upanishads the ultimate source for his teachings, although his text was judged equally authoritative by later Vedanta writers.

## Badrinath
("Lord of Badri") Sacred site (**tirtha**) in the Himalayan area of Chamoli district in the state of **Uttar Pradesh**, near the headwaters of the **Alakananda River**, the largest tributary of the **Ganges**. Badrinath is high in the mountains at an altitude of over 10,000 feet. It is connected to Tibet by the Mana Pass, one of the traditional land routes by which Chinese goods have come into India. Badrinath's high altitude also means that it is only accessible between late April and

October, after which it is closed for the winter months; this pattern is echoed at **Yamunotri**, **Gangotri**, and **Kedarnath**, the three major Himalayan pilgrimage sites. The town's name comes from its presiding **deity**, **Vishnu**, whose temple is the reason for the site's existence. The main image in the temple is claimed to have miraculously emerged full-formed from a **shalagram**, a particular type of black stone containing fossilized **ammonite**, which is itself considered a "self-manifested" form of Vishnu.

Badrinath has a long history as a venerable sacred site. Scholars believe that it was occupied by a Buddhist temple until several centuries into the present millennium, based on the **architecture** of some of the temple's older parts. Local tradition reports that until the middle of the twentieth century when the Chinese sealed the Tibetan border, Buddhists came from Tibet for the temple's closing rites in the fall, bringing a hand-woven blanket to drape around the image. In Hinduism, Badrinath is one of the **four dhams** ("divine abodes") connected with the philosopher **Shankaracharya**. Shankaracharya reportedly chose one Hindu sacred center in each corner of the subcontinent to combat the spread of Buddhism and revitalize Hindu religion. At each center he established a **Dashanami Sanyasi** monastic center (**math**) to train learned monks. Badrinath is associated with the sacred center **Jyotir Math** in the Himalayan town of **Joshimath**, forty miles south. Each winter, the image at Badrinath is symbolically transported to the Narasimha temple in Joshimath.

According to Badrinath temple records, for several hundred years temple **worship** was performed by the **Dandi Sanyasis**; they were a group of **ascetics** devoted to the god **Shiva** who were also **Nambudiri brahmins**, the same **caste** into which Shankaracharya is supposed to have been born. When the last of these ascetics died without a successor in 1776, the local king who served as the protector of the shrine invited a non-ascetic Nambudiri brahmin

to serve as the temple's priest. In deference to his ascetic predecessors, this priest was given the title **rawal** ("deputy"), and his extended family has run the shrine since then. The rawal is the only person allowed to touch the image, and as a consequence he is required to remain a bachelor, lest the ritual impurity (**ashaucha**) arising from the **birth** of a child (**sutakashaucha**) render him unable to attend to his duties. For a long time, the rawals had sole rights to the **offerings** given at the shrine, but since 1939 the temple has been managed by a committee, and the rawal has been restricted to ritual duties.

## Bahi

("account book") Name for the pilgrim registers maintained by hereditary pilgrimage priests (**pandas**). Each panda family in any sacred site (**tirtha**) has the right to serve pilgrims whose ancestral homes are in a particular place, whether or not the pilgrims still reside there. For example, a family from the Marwar region of the state of **Rajasthan** will always be served by the **Marwari** panda, even if the family has not lived in Marwar for generations. Pilgrims make an entry in their panda's pilgrim register during each visit, in which they write down the date, the names of those who visited, and the reason or reasons for which they have come. These details are noted on a thick sheet of paper about ten inches wide and three feet long, and there may be multiple entries on a page. One of the page's narrow sides has holes punched in it, and a string can be threaded through these holes to tie a number of such sheets together. This allows the panda to compile registers for a particular village or specific family, and when not in use these bahis are rolled into a circle and tied.

These registers provide not only a record of pilgrim visits, but are also the unassailable evidence of the hereditary connection between a panda and a pilgrim family. Most pilgrims will demand to see the entries for their ancestors as

proof that a particular priest is their hereditary panda. This usually happens when many years have elapsed between visits, and the pilgrims may never have met their panda in person. A panda's bahis are thus the sole proof of his rights to a particular pilgrim group, which makes these registers extremely valuable documents. Most pandas zealously safeguard their bahis, since anyone with a copy can claim the pilgrims therein. The bahis' importance also gives them a high market value. They may be used as collateral to gain a loan and can even be sold outright. This latter course is extremely unusual, since for working pandas their bahis are not only the source of their livelihood, but also their family **inheritance**.

## Bahina Bai

(1628–1700) Poet and saint in the **Varkari Panth**, a religious community centered around the **worship** of the Hindu god **Vithoba** at his temple at **Pandharpur** in the modern state of **Maharashtra**. Bahina Bai ran counter to contemporary assumptions not only because she was a female religious figure, but also because she was a **brahmin** disciple of the **shudra** poet-saint **Tukaram**, an association that inverted the usual patterns of social status. This is because a brahmin is someone of high social standing while a shudra is of the lowest and least influential class in Hindu society. According to tradition, Tukaram initiated Bahina as his disciple in a **dream** because Bahina's husband—a learned brahmin who was highly conscious of brahmin status—had forbidden her to meet with him. Aside from her devotional poetry, Bahina also wrote an autobiography, whose content was heavily influenced by her religious beliefs. Bahina is notable as one of the only **women bhakti** (devotional) figures who was able to reconcile the demands of her marriage with her commitment to God, although these issues were not resolved without considerable trouble and heartache. For further information

see Justin E. Abbott (trans.), *Bahina Bai*, 1985; and Anne Feldhaus, "Bahina Bai: Wife and Saint," in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 50, 1982.

## Bahiryaga

("external **sacrifice**") In Hindu **worship**, especially in esoteric ritual tradition known as **tantra**, bahiryaga refers to any type of religious practice involving actions, words, or the manipulation of concrete objects. This is the only kind of worship that most people perform. The ultimate goal in tantra, however, is to internalize these acts through repeated practice and to transform them into **antaryaga** ("internal sacrifice"), in which all external actions have been replaced by mental acts.

## Bahudaka

("having much **water**") The name for one of four particular types of Hindu **ascetics**. Each of these four types reflects the ascetic's supposed means of livelihood, which in practice has been much less important for ascetic identity than organizational affiliation. The Bahudaka is an ascetic who begs for his food at sacred bathing places. The other three types are the **Kutichaka**, which has lower status than the Bahudaka, and the **Hamsa** and **Paramahamsa**, which have higher status.

## Bahula Chauth

Religious festival celebrated on the fourth **day** (chauth) of the dark, or waning, half of the **lunar month** of **Bhadrapada**, the sixth month of the lunar **year**, which usually falls within August and September. On this day mothers perform duties for the welfare of their **sons**. They should refrain from all activity and from eating wheat or rice (the staple food grains). As a symbolic indication of allowing mothers to care for their children, on this day **cows** are not milked, and their calves are allowed to suckle as much as they want.

A baiga, or healer, uses spiritual techniques to remedy a person's physical or emotional troubles.

Such motherly concern for their sons reflects not only normal maternal instincts but the importance of male children in traditional Hindu life. According to the customary pattern, at least in northern India, **daughters** leave their natal homes to live with their husbands' families, whereas sons bring their brides into the family home. One's sons thus ensure the continuity of the family, in addition to taking care of the parents in their old age. Sons are also important because only they can perform the annual **shraddhas**, or memorial rites to the ancestors, although couples without any natural sons can satisfy this requirement through **adoption**.

## Baiga

(probably a corruption of the word *vaidaga*, or "healer") A sorcerer, healer, and ritual technician connected with spirits at the lower levels of the pantheon; a baiga sometimes acts as a medium for **village deities** and at other times as an exorcist for witches, **bhuts**,

and **prets**. A baiga's power is based on his command of **mantras**, sacred sounds either acquired from a relative as his hereditary birthright or bought from a knowledgeable person. Baigas minister to people's immediate troubles, whether caused by illness, misfortune, accident, or alleged **possession**. This pervasive connection with people's everyday concerns makes them important figures in urban as well as rural India. The most successful baigas are those who radiate the greatest air of authority, and thus instill in their patients the confidence that the baiga can and will alleviate their distress. For a short account of the baiga's work, see Lawrence Babb, *The Divine Hierarchy*, 1975; for a more developed perspective on Indian healers and healing, see Sudhir Kakar, *Shamans*, *Mystics*, *and Doctors*, 1991.

## Baijnath

Sacred site (**tirtha**) and archeological area in the Himalayan foothills of the state of **Uttar Pradesh**, about forty-

five miles north and west of the town of Almora. Baijnath contains a temple complex believed to date from the thirteenth century C.E. Many of the temples are quite well-preserved, although only one is still used as a place of **worship**. Although the name of the site is a vernacular form of **Vaidyanath**, a form of the god **Shiva**, the presiding **deity** in the temple is Shiva's wife **Parvati**. Her main image is over four feet tall and is a magnificent work of art, carved from a piece of rose-colored granite. Smaller figures carved into the image itself illustrate the mythic story of Shiva's wife **Sati**, her rebirth as Parvati, and Parvati's remarriage to Shiva. The statue is clearly the work of a master sculptor, and it far exceeds the quality of the artwork one normally finds in such isolated places. Another temple in a nearby village has a statue of **Vishnu** made from a similar type of stone and carved in a similar style. The simplest explanation for this correspondence is that a single sculptor was commissioned to create both images.

## Bairagi

("dispassionate") This is the general name for any **ascetic** whose patron **deity** is **Vishnu**, but it is particularly applied to the fighting ascetics known as **Nagas**. See also **Chatuh-Sampradayi Nagas**.

## Baisakh

According to the lunar **calendar** by which most Hindu religious festivals are determined, Baisakh is the second month of the lunar **year**, usually falling within April and May. This is established as one of the months of spring, but in northern India the weather is beginning to get quite warm at this time, especially in the middle of the day. The major holidays in Baisakh are **Shitalashtami**, **Baruthani Ekadashi**, **Parashuram Jayanti**, **Narasimha Jayanti**, **Baisakhi**, **Mohini Ekadashi**, and **Buddha Purnima**.

## Baisakhi

Annual festival taking place in the **lunar month** of **Baisakh** (April–May), for which it is named. Baisakhi marks the **sun's** transition into Aries, which according to the Indian estimation occurs around April 14. This festival marks the beginning of the solar **year** on the traditional **calendar**. Baisakhi is celebrated mainly in the north, particularly in the state of **Punjab** and its surrounding regions. In the days when pilgrims still traveled through the **Himalayas** on foot, this festival marked the beginning of the Himalayan pilgrimage season; during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Baisakhi was the occasion for a great trading festival in the town of **Haridwar**, the gateway to the Himalayan shrines. Although this fair has long been eclipsed, Baisakhi is still the climactic bathing (**snana**) day for the Haridwar **Kumbha Mela** and **Ardha Kumbha Mela**, each of which is a bathing festival that occurs about every twelve years when **Jupiter** is in the sign of Aquarius (for the Kumbha Mela) or Leo (for the Ardha Kumbha Mela).

## Baithak

("seat") In the **Vaishnava** sect known as the **Pushti Marg**, a religious community whose members are devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Krishna**, the baithaks are a group of 108 sacred sites (**tirthas**). Each site is somehow associated with the life and activities of the philosopher **Vallabhacharya**, the Pushti Marg's founder. Most of these baithaks are in well-established sacred areas that were considered holy long before Vallabhacharya's time, but the charter story for each baithak records some activity of the philosopher in that particular place, to further sanctify it for his followers. These baithaks create a sectarian network within the existing pilgrimage

places and imbue each one with additional significance for the Pushti Marg.

## Bajrang Dal

("**Hanuman's** Host") The Bajrang Dal is a modern Hindu organization that has strong connections with the Hindu nationalist **Vishva Hindu Parishad** (VHP), although both are nominally independent. The Bajrang Dal is sometimes characterized as the VHP's "youth wing," and its primary function is to aid the VHP in carrying out its religious, political, and social campaigns, particularly by supplying members to build a crowd. The god Hanuman is best noted for his prodigious strength, and it is this quality that the Bajrang Dal seems to have emphasized in choosing him as their symbol. Membership is open to young men from all social strata, but the organization reportedly draws much of its followers from lower-**caste** groups. Although local chapters of the Bajrang Dal often perform social services and philanthropic activities (as one might find with any organized group), as a whole the organization is widely seen as an instrument of the VHP, to be used when the situation calls for producing a crowd, intimidation, or violence.

## Baka

In Hindu mythology, a **demon** killed by the god **Krishna** during Krishna's childhood in **Braj**. Baka is one of the demon assassins sent by Krishna's wicked uncle, **Kamsa**, to try to get rid of the god. He comes to Braj in the form of a giant crane (baka) and swallows Krishna and his companions, but he is killed when Krishna expands to such a giant size in Baka's stomach that the demon explodes.

## Bakasur

In the *Mahabharata*, the later of the two great Hindu epics, Bakasur is a fero-cious man-eating **demon**. To preserve their lives, the local villagers send Bakasur a daily sacrificial victim who is chosen by lot, along with a wag-onload of food that the demon also eats. One day the lot falls to the **brahmin** who is hosting the **Pandavas**, the five heroic brothers who are the epic's protagonists. When the brothers' common wife, **Draupadi**, discovers what has happened, she asks one of the brothers, **Bhima**, to deliver the food in the brahmin's place. Bhima drives the wagon to the cave, goads the demon into battle by eating the food in front of him, and then slays Bakasur with one mighty blow.

## Baksheesh

(from the Persian word *bakhshidan*, meaning "to give") A gift, usually of money, given to facilitate service. This is usually paid in advance but can also be given after the fact. In some cases this is unabashed bribery, but most often it is simply a way to ensure continuing service and attention, or a gratuity for services already rendered.

## Balabhadra

Epithet of the mythic hero **Balarama**, the god **Krishna's** older brother. Although he is a fairly minor mythic figure, he is important for his connection with the temple of **Jagannath** in the city of **Puri**. The temple's presiding **deity** is Jagannath ("Lord of the World"), a tribal god who has been assimilated into the Hindu pantheon as a form of Krishna. The image of Jagannath appears together with two other images, Balabhadra and their sister **Subhadra**, and the three deities invariably appear as a group.

The poet **Jayadeva**, in his list of the ten **avatars** ("divine incarnations") typically associated with the god **Vishnu**, named Balabhadra as the eighth avatar, the place normally occupied by Krishna. According to Jayadeva, Jagannath/Krishna is not a

form of Vishnu but the Ultimate Reality from whom all the avatars spring.

## Balaji

Popular epithet of the god **Venkateshvara**, the presiding **deity** of the temple of the same name at **Tirupati** in the state of **Andhra Pradesh**. See **Venkateshvara**.

## Balaji

(2) Presiding **deity** of the Balaji temple in **Mehndipur** village, **Rajasthan**, who is considered a form of the monkey-god, **Hanuman**. As an infant, Hanuman is continually hungry, and one day he attempts to eat the **sun**. **Indra**, the king of the gods and ruler of **heaven**, is incensed at Hanuman's action and strikes him with a thunderbolt, breaking his jaw (hanu). The **wind**-god, who is **Vayu**, Hanuman's father, goes on strike to protest this punishment. Since in traditional Indian physiology, winds are considered responsible for all internal functions, including digestion, respiration, and elimination, Vayu's strike means that no one can live a normal life. After a short time, the gods realize their predicament and beg Vayu for forgiveness; the deity is placated when each of the gods promises to give Hanuman a divine gift. By virtue of these gifts, Hanuman gains great power; not only is he immensely strong, but he is an expert healer, through both his skill in using herbs and natural medicines and his magical abilities to protect people from malevolent supernatural beings.

These powers and healing qualities make Hanuman a strong protective deity, and he is often worshiped on days and at times deemed inauspicious or unfavorable. These protective attributes have made him enormously important in contemporary Hindu life despite his theoretically intermediate place in the divine pantheon, and these qualities are especially evident in his form as Balaji. His temple has gained regional prominence as a healing center for people possessed by malevolent spirits known as **bhuts** and **prets**. The exorcisms proceed in a quasi-judicial fashion, with the spirits being hauled into the divine court, tried, and banished from the sufferer with the underlying assumption that these rites succeed through Balaji's irresistible healing powers. As Sudhir Kakar has masterfully shown, the language associated with **possession** and exorcism, when understood in the context of traditional Hindu culture, can be seen as a way of describing what modern psychiatrists might call the diagnosis and treatment of mental illness. See Sudhir Kakar, *Shamans*, *Mystics*, *and Doctors*, 1991.

## Balakrishna

Figure of **Krishna** in the form of a child (bala). Devotees (**bhakta**) who **worship** this form of Krishna are partaking in the devotional relationship known as **vatsalya bhava**, which parallels the connection between parent and child. The unusual twist is that the devotee takes the role of the parent, lavishing love and care on the **deity** in its child form in a warm, protective, and intimate relationship.

## Balarama

**Krishna's** older brother. According to most estimations, Balarama is a partial **avatar**, or incarnation, of **Shesha**, a serpent upon whom the god **Vishnu** reclines as on a couch. Shesha takes human form as Balarama, and Vishnu takes human form as Krishna, to destroy the evil king **Kamsa**. Kamsa has imprisoned their parents, **Vasudeva** and **Devaki**, because on their wedding day a disembodied voice has foretold that Devaki's eighth child will kill Kamsa. Kamsa kills Devaki's first six children at **birth** by flinging them onto stones, but Balarama is saved when the embryo in Devaki's womb is magically transplanted into the womb of Vasudeva's second wife, **Rohini**. Because of the unusual

Hindu temple in Bali, Indonesia. In the early centuries of the common era,
Hinduism was introduced to Bali by merchants and traders,
where it was transformed by the influence of both Buddhist and indigenous religious beliefs.

circumstances surrounding his development *in utero*, Balarama is also known as **Sankarshana** ("dragging away"). Balarama is raised with Krishna in **Nanda** and **Yashoda's** household and takes part in many of Krishna's adventures, including the slaying of Kamsa.

Balarama is usually portrayed as having a fair complexion, whereas Krishna is dark. According to one story, when the gods approach Vishnu to take form on **earth**, he plucks both a white **hair** and a black hair from his head. The former is born to Rohini as Balarama, the latter to Devaki as Krishna.

**Jayadeva's** *Gitagovinda* presents a different picture of Balarama. Jayadeva is closely linked to the **Jagannath** temple in **Puri**, whose presiding **deity** (Jagannath) has been assimilated into the pantheon as Krishna. For Jayadeva, Jagannath/Krishna is not a form of Vishnu but the Ultimate Reality from whom all the avatars spring. Jayadeva incorporates Balarama into the pantheon as the eighth avatar, to fill the

place left by Krishna's promotion to supreme god.

## Bali

In Hindu mythology Bali is a **demon** who is tricked by **Vishnu** into granting the god three paces of land of his own. Bali does this with little thought because Vishnu has come in the form of a dwarf (vamana), but when the gift has been given, Vishnu grows immensely large and claims the whole universe, relegating Bali to the **Patala** underworld. See also **Vamana avatar**.

## Bali

(2) In Hindu mythology, a monkey-king in the *Ramayana*, the earlier of the two great Hindu epics. Bali and **Sugriva** are brothers who together rule the kingdom of **Kishkindha**, but enmity develops between them, and Bali drives away his brother and takes Sugriva's wife. After the abduction of the god **Rama's** wife **Sita**, Sugriva meets with Rama and the

god's brother **Lakshmana**, and they agree that Rama will help Sugriva regain his wife and kingdom if Sugriva and his monkey-subjects will help to search for Sita. Sugriva challenges Bali to battle but cannot compete with his superior strength. Although Rama has agreed to shoot Bali with an arrow, he is unable to tell which of the monkeys he is. In a second battle, when Sugriva is marked by a garland, Rama shoots Bali with an arrow from behind and kills him.

## Bali

(3) Island in Indonesia that has the last surviving remnant of the Hindu-Buddhist culture that pervaded the region after the early centuries of the common era. Indian beliefs were first brought by traders and merchants, and **inscriptions** reveal that the Balinese kings patronized a variety of sects, both Hindu and Buddhist. In time, Indian sacred geography was transferred and transposed to Bali, native **deities** were gradually assimilated into the pantheon, and all the competing sects finally were fused into the new entity known as Balinese religion.

## Bana

("arrow") One of the characteristic objects in Hindu iconography, which is associated with various **deities**—the **Goddess**, **Shiva**, and **Vishnu**—and is thus emblematic of no particular one. It is often found in images in which the figure carries a bow (**dhanus**).

## Bana

(2) (7th c. C.E.) Poet and author who was a contemporary of the northern Indian emperor **Harsha** (r. 606–647), and one of the leading members of Harsha's court. Bana is widely acclaimed as one of the great **Sanskrit** writers, based on his two best works: the *Harshacharita*, a panegyric narrative of Harsha's deeds, and *Kadambari*, a romance left unfinished at his death. He is also famous for his *Chandishataka*, a collection of one



The bana linga, an egg-shaped stone, is believed to be a manifestation of the god Shiva.

hundred poems dedicated to the differing forms of the **Goddess**.

## Bana Linga

An egg-shaped stone considered a svayambhu ("self-manifested") form of the god **Shiva**. As with all **svayambhu images**, the bana linga is considered to be extraordinary, since in it the god has spontaneously revealed himself. Bana lingas are only found in certain places, particularly on the banks of the Chambal River in the state of **Madhya Pradesh**, where they can be found in large numbers. They come in a wide spectrum of colors and can be several feet in width, although most are smaller. The smaller ones are movable and may even be carried by wandering **ascetics** as portable objects of **worship**. The larger ones are usually found only in temples, not only because of the limits on motion imposed by their greater size, but also because they are believed to be so powerful that they should be kept in a carefully maintained place.

## Bania

(variant of Baniya) In traditional northern Indian society, a merchant or shopkeeper often but not exclusively belonging to the **vaishya varna**, which is the third of four social classes in Hindu culture. Aside from their merchant activities, the more prosperous ones often engaged in **moneylending**, sometimes at prodigious rates of interest, as a way to further increase their capital. In

traditional lore, banias are invariably painted as greedy and avaricious people who care about nothing but money. Although they were often stereotyped as parasites, banias were a necessary part of the traditional agricultural economy, because they gave farmers goods on credit to be repaid after the harvest. They also lent farmers money to get started again after a bad harvest. Both groups thus depended on one another—the farmers for capital, the banias for continuing consumption and patronage. For a masterful reconstruction of the ethos in the northern Indian merchant family, in which Hindu piety was an important element, see C. A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars*, 1983.

## Banjara

The model for traditional Indian society was a collection of **endogamous** subgroups known as **jatis** ("birth"). These jatis were organized (and their social status determined) by the group's hereditary occupation. In traditional northern Indian society, the Banjaras were a jati whose hereditary occupation was driving pack **animals**, either as peddlers selling retail goods to people in more remote places or as transporters conveying commodities from one seller to another. They appear in poems by some of the **bhakti** (devotional) poets, particularly by **Ravidas**, as a symbol of human heedlessness or as a person who never stops moving to reflect on where he has been.

## Banking

In traditional Hindu culture, banking was often an extension of a merchant family's economic life, particularly in times and places in which centralized banking did not exist. In most cases these families transacted their business using letters of credit known as **hundis**, which enabled them to conduct business over large distances without the risk of transporting gold and silver bullion. By the early 1800s, these hundis functioned as virtual currency in much of India, since in some cases they were used in twenty or thirty transactions before eventually being returned to the issuing family for cashing. This system made a merchant family's creditworthiness its most valuable asset. Once this was lost, the family's hundis were no longer honored, and they were unable to conduct business. Since the evaluation of a family's credit was often tied to judgments about its character, merchant families strove to cultivate the image of seriousness, dependability, and thrift. In this ethos the only acceptable forum for lavish expenditures was for religious endowments, since these reinforced the family's pious image and thus enhanced their creditworthiness. With part of their surplus capital, these families would usually engage in **moneylending** as one way to increase their wealth; the largest families routinely lent money to royalty, which provided them with even greater status. For a masterful picture of the merchant family ethos in northern India, see C. A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen, and Bazaars*, 1983.

## Barahmasa

("twelve months") Poetic genre in which each of the poem's verses, or stanzas, is devoted to one month of the **year**, with the months treated in chronological order. This is a purely vernacular genre for which there are no known instances in **Sanskrit**. Barahmasa poems often reveal a great deal about everyday life and can be subdivided into several basic categories: an enumerative type, which describes appropriate activities for each month such as farming or religious practice; a narrative form, which recounts a woman's longing (**viraha**) for her absent lover; and a type describing a young wife's trial of chastity as she withstands various temptations during an extended separation from her husband. For further information see Charlotte Vaudeville, *Barahmasa in Indian Literature*, 1986.

## Barat

One of the common elements in a modern northern Indian **marriage ceremony**, in which the groom is brought in a procession to the wedding site, escorted by his (mostly male) relatives and friends. The barat evokes the symbolism of a royal procession in which the groom is the king, at least for the day. The groom most commonly rides a gaily decorated white mare, although any means of transportation representing his importance is acceptable—from an **elephant** to a horse-drawn carriage to an automobile strung with garlands. In keeping with the royal imagery, the groom often wears a crown or ornaments made of tinsel. The entire procession is usually accompanied by a marching band, in the role of the heralds who march before the royal presence; the band will often stop along the way to play, at which time the participants will **dance** around them. Although the groom usually remains reserved throughout the barat—in keeping with the gravity of the occasion—for the rest of his companions, it is a time for joking, laughing, dancing, and celebration immediately before the wedding. The barat may also involve the consumption of **liquor**, although many more conservative Hindus frown upon this element.

## Barsana

A village in the **Braj** region of the state of **Uttar Pradesh**, which is most famous as the birthplace of the god **Krishna's** loving companion, **Radha**.

## Baruthani Ekadashi

Festival falling on the eleventh **day** (**ekadashi**) of the dark, or waning, half of the **lunar month** of **Baisakh**, which takes place within April and May. The festival is dedicated to the **worship** of **Vishnu**, especially in his **Vamana avatar**, which is his fifth incarnation. Most Hindu festivals have certain prescribed rites, usually involving fasting (**upavasa**) and worship, and often promise specific benefits for faithful performance. Those observing this ritual should abstain from anger and backbiting and eat food that is prepared without salt or oil. The name *Baruthani* means "armored" or "protected," and faithfully observing this festival is believed to protect one from all evil and grant enormous good fortune. In the charter myth, an **ascetic** whose foot has been chewed off by a wild beast regains the limb by performing this ritual.

## Basavanna

(1106–67/68) Poet-saint and religious leader in the **Lingayat** community, a **bhakti** (devotional) group that worships **Shiva** as the single supreme God and rejects all **caste** regulations. The Lingayats were formed in the southern Indian state of **Karnataka** where they still have a considerable presence, and the collections of poetry that form their most important religious texts are composed in the **Kannada** language. According to tradition, from his youth Basavanna was a great devotee (**bhakta**) of **Shiva**, whose piety was so intense that he rejected all notions of ritual and caste. After spending much of his youth as a religious seeker, Basavanna became minister to a king named Bijjala. Basavanna used his position's wealth and influence to care for Shiva's wandering devotees (**jangama**), and Bijjala's court became a magnet for many important figures, including the poet and religious leader **Allama Prabhu**. Basavanna's patronage was vital in forming the Lingayat community, and as a token of his importance, the suffix *anna* ("elder brother") was attached to his name, Basava. As the Lingayat community grew stronger, their public opposition to ritual **worship** and caste distinctions generated intense hostility from more traditional groups. This conflict finally came to

a violent head when the fledgling Lingayat community apparently arranged a marriage between an **untouchable** boy and a **brahmin** girl. Traditionalists became so enraged that they executed the bride and groom's fathers. The Lingayat community was dispersed, and Basavanna died soon afterward. For further information see A. K. Ramanujan (trans.), *Speaking of Siva*, 1973.

## Basohli

A town west of **Jammu** in the state of Jammu and **Kashmir**, close to the border of **Himachal Pradesh**. Although it is an insignificant place in modern times, in the seventeenth century, Basohli was the capital of a small kingdom in the **Shiwalik Hills**. It was in Basohli that the **Pahari** style of **miniature painting** first appeared. The Basohli version of that style is characterized by highly defined profiles, sharply flattened perspective, and broad bands of a single intense color for backgrounds. It serves as a transitional style between the so-called **Rajasthani** and the more developed techniques of the Pahari schools.

## Bath, Mohenjo-Daro

One of the most striking structures excavated at **Mohenjo-Daro**, the first city of the **Indus Valley civilization** to be discovered. This bath is an oblong pool, thirty-nine by twenty-three feet in area and eight feet deep. It is built of brick and sealed with pitch. The tank could be drained through an opening in one corner, and it was surrounded on all four sides by small rooms reminiscent of changing rooms. The Indus Valley cities gave great attention to plumbing, sanitation, and sewers, suggesting that bathing (**snana**) may have been connected with ritual **purity** as in modern Hindu life. With this in mind, the bath was probably not a swimming pool but rather had some deeper connection with religious life. For further information see Walter Ashlin Fairservis, *The Roots of Ancient India*, 1975.

## Bathing

See **snana**.

## Baudhayana

(6th–3rd c. B.C.E.) Sage, writer, and commentator. Baudhayana is the author of one of the three surviving religious texts known as the **Kalpa Sutras**. **Apastamba** and **Hiranyakeshin** wrote the other two Kalpa Sutras. Each of the surviving works contains the three elements dictated for a Kalpa Sutra: prescriptions for Vedic rituals (**Shrauta Sutras**), prescriptions for domestic rites (**Grhya Sutras**), and prescriptions for appropriate human behavior (**Dharma Sutras**). All three of the authors belonged to the same school, the Taittiriya school of the **Black Yajur Veda**. According to tradition, Baudhayana was the oldest, Apastamba was his disciple, and Hiranyakeshin was Apastamba's disciple. This relative chronology is supported by the texts themselves, since Baudhayana's work is much less organized than the others, his language is more archaic, and he is often less strict in his opinions. His texts gain their primary importance as a source for his successors.

## Begampura

Fictional city named in one of the poems written by the poet-saint **Ravidas** (ca. 1500). The word *begam* can mean either "queen" or "without pain." The poem clearly shows the city as an idealized place far from the tribulations of ordinary human life, such as pain, sorrow, taxes, wrongdoing, and to a lesser extent, class distinctions. Although Ravidas was born a tanner (**chamar**), an occupation that was looked down upon, this is one of his only poems that speaks about social issues, however indirectly.

## Begging

One of the recognized means of livelihood in traditional Hindu society that is a sign of either very low or very high

Beggars sitting outside of a religious fair in Allahabad.
When beggars receive alms, they are also believed to receive the giver's bad luck.

status, depending on the circumstances. Some beggars are simply people who are desperately poor, disabled, or unable to provide for themselves and their families and who must depend upon gifts (**dana**) to survive. Such beggars have extremely low social status, although they may make a fairly decent living, particularly if they live in a favorable environment such as a pilgrimage place (**tirtha**), where giving gifts is a common religious act. Aside from all of the obvious disadvantages—low social status, an uncertain income, and having to endure scorn and verbal abuse—these beggars also suffer the stigma of living on charity, rather than earning an income. This is karmically undesirable since giving gifts is one of the methods by which people get rid of **inauspiciousness**, which is transferred to the receiver along with the gift. In many cases such a beggar is considered nothing more than an instrument to be used, and the most common word for such a person is *patra* ("vessel").

Some **ascetics** also make their living by begging but fall into a completely different category. In the ideal case, these are people who have given up all visible means of support as part of an effort to renounce the world; this differentiates them from the poor, who are part of ordinary society, albeit at the lowest level. There is general social approval for supporting ascetics, at least the ones who are considered genuine spiritual seekers, and doing so is widely seen as a source of religious merit. Although it is sometimes difficult to distinguish poorer ascetics from ordinary beggars, in the case of the most respected ascetics the distinction is very clear. Such respected ascetics confer status on people by accepting their gifts, and consequently they tend to screen the donors and their motives very carefully to protect their reputations. See also **karma**.

## Begram

Architectural site west of the city of Kabul in modern Afghanistan. Excavations there have revealed artifacts from Kushana culture, primarily relief carvings on ivory plaques.

## Bel

Another name for the **bilva** tree. See **bilva**.

## Belagave

Village in the Shimoga district of the state of **Karnataka**. Belagave was the most important center for the **Kalamukhas**, which was an **ascetic** sect of devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva**. The Kalamukhas had an important historical role in southern India between the tenth and thirteenth centuries, but they disappeared some time after that. Their ritual center in Belagave was the temple of Kedareshvara, which was Shiva in his form as the lord of Kedara. Although the Kalamukhas have disappeared, their presence and prominence in the region are confirmed by the **inscriptions** at this and numerous other temples.

## Belur

Town in the state of **Karnataka**, about sixty miles northwest of the modern city of Mysore. As at its sister site, **Halebid**, Belur is known for a magnificent collection of temples built by the **Hoysala dynasty**, which ruled western Karnataka from the eleventh to thirteenth centuries C.E. At both sites the temples were built from a particular type of stone—variously described as chlorite schist, steatite, or soapstone—that was quite soft when newly quarried but gradually hardened with exposure to the air. This initial malleability made the stone easy to carve and facilitated the lush detail characteristic of Hoysala temples. Architecturally speaking, these temples have certain unique features: a central hall connecting three star-shaped sanctuaries, and temple towers (**shikharas**) composed of well-defined horizontal tiers rather than the continuous upward sweep characteristic of the northern Indian **Nagara** architectural style.

## Belur Math

World headquarters of the **Ramakrishna Mission**, a modern religious organization. The Ramakrishna Mission was founded in 1897 by **Swami Vivekananda**, the most famous disciple of the nineteenth-century Bengali mystic **Ramakrishna**. The Mission is equally dedicated to both social service and spiritual uplift, based on Vivekananda's realization that India needed concrete development as much as religious teaching. Belur Math was constructed in 1899, two years after the Ramakrishna Mission was founded. It is located just north of Calcutta on the west side of the Hugli River, quite close to the **Dakshineshwar** temple where Ramakrishna lived for most of his adult life.

## Benares

City and sacred center (**tirtha**) on the banks of the **Ganges** in the state of **Uttar Pradesh**. Benares is an anglicized form of **Varanasi**, one of the traditional Hindu names for the city, as well as **Kashi** and **Avimukta**. All three of these names are used to designate the entire city, but in a more specific context, they denote concentric sacred zones surrounding the **Vishvanath** temple; Avimukta is the smallest, then Varanasi, and finally Kashi. As with all other pilgrimage places on the Ganges, Benares is considered sacred because of its proximity to the river, particularly because at Benares the Ganges flows in a northerly direction, which is considered auspicious. The Ganges is an integral part of the identity of Benares, and much of the city's religious life centers around it.

The most important sacred presence in the city, however, is the god **Shiva**. Benares is the city of Shiva, his dwelling place on **earth**, and the site he never leaves, hence the name Avimukta ("never forsaken"). Temples to Shiva are scattered throughout the city—some old, some new, some nearly forgotten—but the most important is the Vishvanath ("Lord of the Universe")

temple. Vishvanath is one of the twelve **jyotirlingas**, a group of sites deemed particularly sacred to Shiva. The original Vishvanath temple was destroyed by the Moghul emperor **Aurangzeb**, who built a mosque on the site; the present Vishvanath temple was rebuilt next to the original location. Shiva's eternal presence makes Benares one of the **seven sacred cities**, in which death brings liberation of the soul (**moksha**). At the moment of death, Shiva is believed to come to the dying person and impart his salvific wisdom. Shiva's presence is also evident at the **cremation ground** at the sacred site **Manikarnika Ghat**, which is in the very heart of the city rather than at the margin as in most other places. Here too Shiva teaches human beings a lesson; specifically, Shiva reminds them of their imminent death. This is not to distress or depress them, but to spur them on to serious religious life.

The presence of the Ganges and Shiva make Benares an ideal place to die, or to immerse oneself in spiritual life; what is often overlooked is that Benares is also an unusually vibrant place to live. It has a long history as a trading center and market town, and it remains so today even though the creaking wooden boats traversing the Ganges have been supplemented by other means of transport. Benares is famous for its artisans, particularly weavers and metalworkers, many of whom are Muslim. It has also been renowned as a cultural center for at least a thousand years. Benares is still one of the most important centers in India for all branches of traditional Sanskritic learning, from grammar to astrology to medicine. It is likewise a center for music, **dance**, and all of the arts and has been home to a galaxy of Indian religious figures, including the poet-saints **Tulsidas**, **Ravidas**, and **Kabir**. For a detailed exposition of the city and its life, see Diana Eck, *Banaras,* 1999.

## Benares Hindu University

Indian educational institution founded in 1916 by the nationalist figure **Madan Mohan Malviya** (1861–1946). The World War I era marked a more activist orientation to the Indian independence movement. One of the ways this activism manifested itself was in founding educational institutions, which gave Indians greater control over the universities' mission, tone, and curriculum. Benares Hindu University was founded to uphold Hindu cultural and philosophical traditions, but also to educate its students in the sciences and thus prepare them for the modern world. This mission reflected the modernist thinking of its founders as well as their passionate commitment to traditional Hindu culture. It is still one of the finest universities in India, particularly for the study of classical Indian culture.

## Bengali

Modern Indian language in the Indo-European language family, spoken in the region of modern Bengal, for which it is named. Like many of India's regional tongues, Bengali has a long history as a literary language in its own right. In the nineteenth century, Calcutta was the most important cultural center in India as well as a hotbed of resistance to British rule. As the vernacular tongue, Bengali was used in that era's revolutionary politics, particularly by **Bankim Chandra Chatterjee** and **Aurobindo Ghose**; it was also the language used by religious figures such as **Ramprasad** and **Ramakrishna**.

## Betel

Common name for the small, hard nut from the areca palm tree, which is consumed by mixing slices of the nut with lime, tobacco, and spices and wrapping the whole thing up in a betel leaf. This is not eaten but lodged against the cheek and slowly chewed, to let the juices flow. This method of gradually absorbing the juice may be the reason for its most

Betel nuts wrapped in a leaf. These nuts are taken from acacia palm trees, dried, wrapped in betel leaves, and chewed to aid digestion.

common name, *pan* ("drinking"). The nut turns the saliva a bright red color, which is the reason for the distinctive crimson smears adorning many Indian buildings. Chewing betel is widely believed to be good for the digestive tract, a genuine concern in a country where intestinal upsets are still quite common. Chewing betel is such a deeply embedded part of sophisticated Indian cultural life that it even has its own aesthetic, and folding betel is one of the sixty-four arts mentioned in the *Kama Sutra*.

## Bhadrakali

(from *bhadra*, meaning "blessed" in **Sanskrit**) In Hindu mythology, the epithet of a powerful and terrifying form of the **Goddess**. According to one version of the story, Bhadrakali's **birth** is associated with the death of **Shiva's** first wife, **Sati**. Sati goes to a great **sacrifice** sponsored by her father, **Daksha**. When Daksha intentionally and publicly insults her husband Shiva, in her anger and shame, Sati immolates herself in the sacrificial **fire**. When Shiva learns of Sati's death, he is so enraged that he plucks two matted locks (**jata**) from his head and

dashes them to the ground. The first takes form as **Virabhadra**, a wrathful and terrifying form of Shiva, and the second takes form as Bhadrakali. Just as Virabhadra represents Shiva's destructive aspect, Bhadrakali symbolizes the ferocious and dangerous side of the Goddess, in contrast with the gentle and loyal Sati. Shiva orders the two to destroy Daksha's sacrifice, which they do with great abandon.

Bhadrakali also appears in the stories connected with the birth of the god **Krishna**. While Krishna is developing in his mother, **Devaki's**, womb, Bhadrakali enters the womb of Krishna's foster mother, **Yashoda**. The two children are born on the same night, and under cover of darkness they are switched with one another. The next morning the baby girl is snatched from Devaki by her stepbrother, **Kamsa**, the wicked king of **Mathura**, who dashes out the child's brains on a rock; this is just as he has done with Devaki's six other children because it has been foretold that one of them will kill him. From the infant's **corpse** arises an eight-armed figure of the Goddess, who taunts Kamsa that his destroyer has already escaped and then disappears.

## Bhadrapada

According to the lunar **calendar**, by which most Hindu religious festivals are determined, Bhadrapada is the sixth month of the lunar **year**, usually falling within August and September. This is one of the months associated with the **monsoon** rains. The major festivals in Bhadrapada are Kajari Teej (**Teej**), **Bahula Chauth**, **Janmashtami**, **Radhashtami**, **Aja Ekadashi**, Hartalika Teej (Teej), **Ganesh Chaturthi**, **Rishi Panchami**, **Parivartini Ekadashi**, **Anant Chaturdashi**, and in southern India, **Onam**.

## Bhadrasana

("decent posture") In **yoga** practice this is one of the sitting postures (**asana**) described in commentaries to the **Yoga Sutras**. In this position the legs are crossed with the feet tucked under the thighs so that the crossed heels form a cavity around the scrotum. This is called the "decent posture" because the cupped hands are placed over the cavity made by the heels, covering the private parts. In Hindu iconography this is one of the common postures in which images of the **deities** are portrayed.

## Bhagabhadra

Monarch in the Sunga dynasty, which was centered in the **Malwa** region in the western part of the state of **Madhya Pradesh**, in the centuries following the decline of the **Maurya dynasty** just before the turn of the common era. Despite the fragmentation of the Maurya state, rulers seem to have maintained contact with the Greek-speaking kingdoms to the west, since a pillar **inscription** records that Bhagabhadra received an ambassador named Heliodorus from the king of Takshasila, in modern Pakistan.

## Bhagavad Gita

One of the best-known Hindu scriptures, which is itself a section in the *Mahabharata,* the later of the two great Hindu epics. The parts of the epic before the Bhagavad Gita chronicle the growing strife between the **Pandavas** and the **Kauravas,** the two branches of a royal family who are the epic's main characters. The parts following the Bhagavad Gita detail the battle that ultimately destroys the entire family. The Bhagavad Gita itself is set in that moment of calm just before the battle begins, and it is written as a dialogue between the **Pandava** prince **Arjuna** and the supreme divinity **Krishna**, here disguised as Arjuna's charioteer. Arjuna is the world's greatest archer and can decimate his enemies with ease. But as he looks at the faces of the enemy, he realizes that the people he is about to fight and kill are his relatives, teachers, and friends. Not surprisingly, the prospect leaves him cold, and it is up to Krishna to give him divine guidance.

The Gita's second chapter opens with Krishna trying to shame Arjuna into fighting (in essence, saying "everyone will think you were afraid and make fun of you"), but when this tactic fails, Krishna has to give more substantive advice, which makes up the rest of the text. Different parts of the Bhagavad Gita invoke all three of the generally accepted paths to liberation of the soul (**moksha**): the path of wisdom (**jnanamarga**), the path of action (**karmamarga**), and the path of devotion (**bhaktimarga**).

The path of wisdom is rooted in the teachings of the speculative texts known as the **Upanishads**. This path stresses the realization of one's essential nature as the eternal Self (**atman**). The atman is identical with the universal reality known as **Brahman**; once one has accepted this, all dualistic ideas and false knowledge disappear. The path of action stresses acting without selfish desire—performing one's duty as duty, but without attachment to the ultimate outcome. This path thus upholds and reinforces the rigid social structure propounded in the **dharma literature**. As a warrior in that social system, Arjuna's

job is to kill people. At the same time, the path of action provides a way to transform socially sanctioned duty into religious practice. The path of devotion entails surrendering all one's actions to God and performing one's role as an instrument of divine will.

The Bhagavad Gita shows no clear preference for any of these paths, which implies that different writers reworked the text over time. Professor Arthur Llewellyn Basham has speculated that the "original" Bhagavad Gita ended with verse 2.38, after a section establishing the morality of fighting in a just war, thus giving Arjuna his rationale to fight. It is believed that this "original" text was then reworked by a philosopher of the upanishadic type, who conceived of the Ultimate Reality as the impersonal Brahman and of liberation in terms of mystical realization. The final sections were most likely added by a passionate devotee (**bhakta**) of **Vishnu**, particularly in his form as Krishna. According to Basham, this last author not only inserted verses in some of the earlier books but also added some completely new ones. One of these, Arjuna's vision of Krishna's cosmic form in the Gita's eleventh chapter, is considered among the most brilliant religious texts ever written. Although some scholars might take issue with specific points, Professor Basham's theory seems the most convincing explanation for a highly varied text.

In the roughly two thousand years since the Bhagavad Gita was compiled, different commentators have interpreted its message according to their own proclivities. The ninth-century philosopher **Shankaracharya** saw it as sanctioning the path of wisdom, while the eleventh-century philosopher **Ramanuja** was convinced that it stressed devotion. The most recent pivotal interpreter, **Mohandas Gandhi**, understood the text as commanding action. He saw in Arjuna's struggle a blueprint for his own time and work, urging him to labor for Indian independence but to do so without attachment or hope for personal gain. The text has become even more important as a "scripture" during the past two centuries, largely because of pressure from Christian missionaries. One sign of this is that in modern Indian courtrooms, the Gita is the text upon which Hindus take the oath of truthfulness when being called to take the stand. For an accessible translation of the text itself, see Barbara Stoller Miller (trans.), *The Bhagavad-Gita*, 1991; for Dr. Basham's analysis of the text, see Arthur Llewellyn Basham, *The Origins and Development of Classical Hinduism*, 1991.

## Bhagavan

("Blessed One") Name denoting both respect and reverence. In different contexts this name can be used as an epithet of either the god **Krishna** (as in the **Bhagavad Gita**) or the god **Shiva**. In modern usage, at least in northern India, it is also the word that comes closest to expressing the notion of abstract divinity, much like the word "God" in English. It is often used to denote God by Hindus who are religious but who do not **worship** particular **deities**.

## Bhagavata

("devotees of the Blessed One") General name for the earliest devotees (**bhakta**) of **Vishnu**, particularly the devotees of **Krishna**-Gopala, a deified cowherd hero who later became identified with Vishnu. Until the development of sectarian Vaishnavism in around the eleventh century C.E., the word *bhagavata* was a blanket term for all **Vaishnavas** except the Pancharatrikas, who were followers of the secret ritual tradition known as **Pancharatra**.
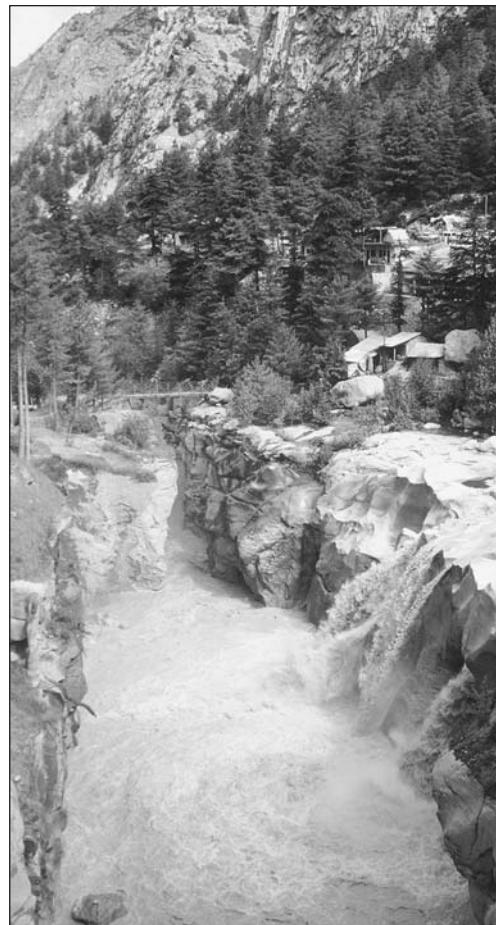
## Bhagavata Purana

Sectarian religious text that is by far the most important text for the **worship** of

the god **Krishna** as the single Supreme Being. Internal evidence hints that it was written in southern India in the ninth or tenth century, making it much later than many of the other **puranas**. The bulk of the text focuses on Krishna's early life in the village of **Brindavan**—infancy, childhood, and adolescence—but gives little attention to his later exploits as a king and hero. This purana's best-known section is the tenth book, which describes Krishna's amorous exploits with the local herd girls (**gopis**) as they pass the nights in a circle **dance** (**ras lila**) on the shores of the **Yamuna River**. The image of Krishna throughout the text is that of a god in constant play with the world. For Krishna's devotees (**bhakta**), the supreme felicity comes with the opportunity to take part in that divine play (**lila**).

## Bhagirath

In Hindu mythology, the single person most responsible for bringing the celestial **Ganges** down to **earth**. The river Ganges and the **goddess** Ganges are the same, hence the river is considered holy. Bhagirath is the great-great-grandson of King **Sagar**, whose 60,000 **sons** have been burned to ash by the sage **Kapila's magic** power when they erroneously accuse Kapila of being a thief. The sage later tells **Anshuman**, King Sagar's grandson and sole surviving descendant, that the only way to bring peace to their souls is to bring the Ganges from **heaven** down to earth. Anshuman strives to do this for the rest of his life, as does his son **Dilip** after him, but both are unsuccessful. Dilip's son Bhagirath takes their efforts to heart and retires to the **Himalayas**, where he performs **asceticism** until the gods finally agree to send the Ganges down to earth. Yet Bhagirath's efforts are not over. He next has to appease the god **Shiva** so that the deity will agree to take the shock of the falling river on his head, since its force will otherwise destroy the earth. When all is finally in place, the Ganges falls to earth onto the head of Shiva. From there Bhagirath leads the river out of the



As a tributary of the Ganges, the waters of the Bhagirathi River are considered sacred and its banks contain several pilgrimage sites.

mountains to the sea, where she touches his ancestors' ashes, after which they find peace at last.

## Bhagirathi

Epithet for the **Ganges** as both river and **goddess**. The word *Bhagirathi* is derived from the name **Bhagirath**, the single person most responsible for bringing the Ganges to **earth**. Bhagirathi is also the name for a Himalayan tributary of the river; the Ganges itself is formed when the Bhagirathi unites with the **Alakananda River** at **Devaprayag**. Although the Alakananda is longer and wider, the Bhagirathi flows through **Gangotri**, the sacred site (**tirtha**) celebrated as the source of the Ganges. As with all the Himalayan tributaries of the Ganges, the Bhagirathi is considered

sacred. Important pilgrimage places along this tributary include Gangotri near its headwaters, **Uttarkashi**, and Devaprayag.

## Bhairava

("terrible") A wrathful and powerful divine attendant of the god **Shiva** who is often identified as a form of Shiva himself. According to the *Shiva Purana*, a sectarian scripture, Bhairava is produced when the god **Brahma** insults Shiva, and Shiva's rage takes concrete form as Bhairava. After his **birth**, Bhairava's first act is to cut off one of Brahma's heads—the one whose mouth has uttered the insult—thus leaving the god with four remaining heads. Since Brahma is considered a **brahmin** priest, this act makes Bhairava guilty of brahmin murder, the most serious of the **four great crimes** (**mahapataka**). As a sign of the enormity of his act, Brahma's severed head sticks to Bhairava's hand; as penance (**prayashchitta**) Bhairava has to wander the countryside as a beggar, displaying Brahma's severed head as a continual advertisement of his crime. In his travels Bhairava visits many pilgrimage places (**tirtha**), but none of them have the power to cleanse him from the sin of brahmin murder. He finally obtains a pardon in the city of **Benares**, at a site named **Kapalamochana** ("releasing the skull"). As soon as Bhairava bathes there, Brahma's head falls from his hand into the **Ganges**—a sign that his crime had been expiated.

Although often seen as Shiva's attendant, Bhairava is important in several different contexts. He is often portrayed as the consort of powerful, independent **goddesses** such as **Durga** and **Kali**, although he is subordinate to them, befitting their status as supreme **deities**. Bhairava's associations with wrath and power have made him popular with practitioners of the secret ritual tradition known as **tantra**, who may invoke him for **magic** powers or other favors. Bhairava is also popular with the **Naga** class of the **Dashanami Sanyasis**, ascetic devotees (**bhakta**) of Shiva who formerly made their living as traders and mercenary soldiers; this group sees him as a divine image of themselves. Some of the ambivalence associated with Bhairava is symbolized by his **animal** vehicle, the **dog**, which in Hindu culture is almost invariably a scavenger and considered highly impure.

## Bhairava Akhara

Another name for the **Juna akhara**, a particular subgroup of the **Naga** class of the **Dashanami Sanyasis**, who are devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva**. See **Juna akhara**.

## Bhairava Jayanti

Annual festival on the eighth **day** of the dark, or waning, half of the **lunar month** of **Margashirsha** (November–December), which is celebrated as the birthday of **Bhairava**. Bhairava is a wrathful and powerful form of the god **Shiva** and is actually the god's anger personified. He emerges from Shiva's forehead after Shiva has been insulted by the god **Brahma**, and Bhairava's first act is to cut off the head of Brahma that has uttered the insult, leaving the god with four heads. Bhairava's wrath gives him an aura of danger but also the power to help his devotees (**bhakta**), who **worship** him to attain success, remove obstacles, and recover from disease. On this festival people worship Bhairava, Shiva, and Shiva's wife, **Parvati**, as well as Bhairava's **animal** vehicle, the **dog**. People are encouraged to worship through the night and to pass this time by telling mythic stories of Bhairava, Shiva, and Parvati.

## Bhairavaprakasha

("brilliance of **Bhairava**") Name given to the spear that is the symbolic weapon of the **Mahanirvani akhara**, a particular group of the **Naga** class of the **Dashanami Sanyasis**. The Dashanami Nagas are devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva** and are organized into different

**akharas**, or regiments, much like an army. Until the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Nagas' primary occupation was as mercenary soldiers, although they also had substantial trading interests; both of these have occupations largely disappeared in contemporary times. All of the akharas have particular features, including this spear, which signify their organizational identity.

## Bhairavi

Feminine form of **Bhairava** and an epithet of the **Goddess**. Bhairavi is one of the ten **Mahavidyas**, a group of goddesses who are both extremely powerful and potentially dangerous.

## Bhaiya Duj

Annual festival falling on the second **day** (duj) of the bright, or waxing, half of the **lunar month** of **Kartik** (October–November). This festival is celebrated to emphasize the bond between a brother (bhaiya) and sister. During Bhaiya Duj, married **women** invite their brothers into their homes, apply **tika** marks on their brothers' foreheads as a sign of respect, and feed them sweets and a hearty meal. Sisters also tie a string around their brothers' right wrists to symbolize the emotional bond between them and the brother's obligation to protect his sister throughout her lifetime. Unmarried women host their brothers in the same way in their natal homes. In either case, on this day women should pray that their brothers have long lives and that they themselves be happily married. The brothers, in turn, give presents to their sisters.

Aside from reaffirming the normal family love between brother and sister, this festival also emphasizes the protective role that brothers play in their sisters' lives, particularly after women are married. The traditional pattern in northern India is for married women to live with their husbands' families. Since women generally outlive their fathers,

for most of her life a woman's primary protectors will be her brothers. A woman without brothers is in a position of relative weakness. If nothing else, these yearly visits give brothers the chance to assess their sister's happiness and the state of affairs in her married home. Such visits also notify the husband's family that they are still concerned with her welfare.

## Bhajan

("sharing") General name for a religious or devotional hymn, which is almost always sung in a vernacular language. As an expression of personal devotion, bhajans have no prescribed forms and in contemporary times are often set to the melodies of film songs. As a genre, bhajans can have any or all of the following themes: detailing the deeds of a particular **deity**, praising the deity, addressing the god in a tone of complaint or humble supplication (vinaya), reminding the deity of the speaker's difficulties from internal or external sources, or warning the listeners to examine and reform their lives. Singing and listening to such hymns was, and remains, a major form of religious activity in the **bhakti** (devotional) movement. During these sessions, devotees (**bhakta**) "share" their songs and experiences with one another. Although one can find bhajans dedicated to all the gods in the pantheon, from a historical perspective this singing tradition has been strongest among the devotees of **Vishnu**. **Vaishnava** devotional literature is full of tales of Vishnu coming in disguise to take part in bhajan sessions, since the company of his devotees is said to be **heaven** on **earth**.

## Bhakta

("sharer") In Hinduism, this word denotes a devotee of any particular **deity**. The word's literal meaning, "sharer," has a twofold sense. On one hand, the devotee shares in the deity's **grace** by virtue of his or her piety. On the

A family makes an offering in a burning tray.
Offerings are a sign of religious
devotion (bhakti) to a deity.

other hand, since most Hindu devotionalism involves a community of worshipers, the devotee also gets to share in the company and community of like-minded people.

## Bhaktamal

("Garland of Devotees") Text written by **Nabhadas** (ca. 1600) in which he gives short (six-line) biographical accounts of over two hundred **bhakti** (devotional) figures. Although Nabhadas himself was a **Ramanandi**, and thus a devotee (**bhakta**) of the god **Rama**, his work not only includes devotees of all sectarian persuasions but is generally considered unbiased. The text is notably free of astonishing and miraculous events. Instead, the main emphasis is on the devotee's personal qualities, which serve as a model for others. In many cases the *Bhaktamal* gives the earliest reliable account of these figures, which makes it an extremely important source for northern Indian literary and religious history. It is all the more interesting that the text cannot be definitively dated,

although internal evidence suggests that it was completed early in the seventeenth century.

## Bhaktavijaya

("Triumph of [God's] Devotees") Text written by **Mahipati**, an eighteenth-century writer and hagiographer of the devotional (**bhakti**) poet-saints. The stories in the *Bhaktavijaya* focus mainly on the saints connected with the **Varkari Panth**, a religious group centered around the **worship** of the god **Vithoba** at his temple at **Pandharpur**. This focus is understandable since Mahipati himself was a Varkari. In keeping with the trend toward unification often promoted by the devotional movement, he also included tales of other great devotees (**bhakta**), most notably **Kabir**, **Namdev**, **Jnaneshvar**, and **Narsi Mehta**. The stories in the *Bhaktavijaya* present each of these saints as a paradigm of devotion and stress the power of piety to overcome all obstacles. This theme also marks Mahipati's other major work, the ***Bhaktililamrta***. The *Bhaktavijaya* has been translated by Justin E. Abbott and Narhar R. Godbole as *Stories of Indian Saints*, 1988.

## Bhakti

("sharing") The most common word denoting devotion to God. This is one of the three traditional paths to gain final liberation of the soul (**moksha**), and it has been the most widespread type of religious practice for well over a thousand years. The word's literal meaning conveys the sense of relationship. On one hand, it refers to an intense and passionate love between devotee (**bhakta**) and **deity**, and on the other, it refers to separate communities of people bound together by their common love of God. Although references to bhakti can be found in such early texts as the **Shvetashvatara Upanishad** and the **Bhagavad Gita**, the bhakti propounded here is radically different from later

usages. In both these texts, bhakti is presented as a form of **yoga** in which one contemplates God as part of a controlled and disciplined practice. This is a far cry from the abandonment and passionate involvement in later times.

The beginnings of this latter sort of bhakti arose in the Tamil country of deep southern India between the sixth and ninth centuries B.C.E. It had an intensity that was radically different from earlier notions, a devotional "heat" as opposed to the "coolness" of yoga. Tamil bhakti expressed, and continues to express, its devotion through songs sung in vernacular languages, conveying an intimate relationship with a personal god.

These characteristics basically held throughout history. The use of vernacular speech was especially significant, for this was the language of ordinary life and marked the egalitarianism that was one of the hallmarks of bhakti devotion. Bhakti devotees were men and **women** from all strata of society, from the highest to the lowest; here was an opportunity for religious life based solely on the depth and sincerity of one's devotion rather than on one's **birth**. Despite this religious egalitarianism, devotees rarely tried to restructure their hierarchical societies. The idea was that religious equality was supposed to transcend rather than reform human society.

Aside from egalitarianism and personal experience, bhakti worship also stressed community, based on the interconnections between devotees. Though each devotee was an individual (and indeed, bhakti poets had real personalities, as the many hagiographies bear witness), they also fell into "families," all of which were connected with each other. Many of the bhakti saints fell into recognizable groups: Some were centered around a particular sacred place, such as the temple at **Pandharpur** in the state of **Maharashtra**; some were connected as teachers and students, such as **Nammalvar** and his disciple **Nathamuni**; and some had long-term

associations, as with the **Lingayat** community. In all cases these devotees were keenly aware of those who had preceded them and their connections with one another. Such communities were both formed and reinforced through **satsang**, the "company of good people" whose influence over time was believed to have the power to transform. This was a type of "sharing" that bound devotees to each other and to their teacher, and through these two vehicles carried them to God.

These are general characteristics, and bhakti's regional manifestations often take on a distinct flavor marked by, if nothing else, the differing languages. The *Padma Purana* speaks of bhakti (a feminine noun) as a maiden who was born in southern India, attained maturity in the state of Maharashtra, and was rejuvenated in northern India. Although this is a metaphor, it accurately charts the historical diffusion of bhakti devotion, as well as its changes as it moved north. All forms of bhakti are shaped by specific times, places, and circumstances.

## Bhaktililamrta

("Nectar of the Play of Devotion") Text written by **Mahipati**, an eighteenth-century writer and hagiographer of the devotional (**bhakti**) poet-saints. Mahipati belonged to the **Varkari Panth**, a religious group centered around the **worship** of the god **Vithoba** at his temple at **Pandharpur**. The *Bhaktililamrta* gives extended accounts of Varkari saints, such as **Eknath**, **Tukaram**, Ramdas, and Bhanudas. The text presents each of these saints as a paradigm of devotion and stresses the power of worship to overcome all obstacles. This theme also marks his other major work, the ***Bhaktavijaya***. Parts of the *Bhaktililamrta* have been translated by Justin E. Abbott as *The Life of Eknath*, 1981; and *The Life of Tukaram*, 1980.

## Bhaktimarga

("path of devotion") Along with the path of action (**karmamarga**) and the path of wisdom (**jnanamarga**), this is one of Hinduism's three generally accepted ways to gain final liberation of the soul (**moksha**). The bhaktimarga seeks release of the soul through **bhakti**, or passionate devotion to God.

## Bhaktirasabodhini

("Awakening the Delight in Devotion") Name of a commentary on the *Bhaktamal* of **Nabhadas**; this commentary was written by **Priyadas** in 1712. In the *Bhaktamal*, Nabhadas had given brief six-line biographies of over two hundred contemporary **bhakti** (devotional) figures. These biographies are notably free of astonishing and miraculous events and usually stress the devotee's personal qualities, to serve as a model for others. In the *Bhaktirasabodhini*, Priyadas gave greatly expanded accounts for each devotee mentioned by Nabhadas, often narrating amazing stories to which Nabhadas made no reference. In his biography of the poet-saint **Ravidas**, Nabhadas drew from the texts written by the biographer **Anantadas**, but in other cases his sources are not clear. The accounts in the *Bhaktirasabodhini* are suspect as genuine biographies of these saints, given Priyadas's penchant for miraculous events and his chronological distance from his subjects. Still, the text is extremely valuable as a mirror of his time, and careful analysis can reveal much about contemporary religious tensions and issues.

## Bhamati Advaita

A later branch of the **Advaita Vedanta** philosophical school. The Advaita school upholds a position known as monism, which is the belief that a single Ultimate Reality lies behind all things and that everything is merely a differing form of that reality. Advaita proponents believe that reality is nondual (advaita), that is, that all things are nothing but the formless, unqualified **Brahman** despite the appearance of diversity. For the Advaitins, this assumption of diversity is a fundamental misunderstanding of the ultimate nature of things, or **avidya**. Although often translated as "ignorance," *avidya* is better understood as a lack of genuine understanding, which ultimately causes human beings to be trapped in karmic bondage, reincarnation (**samsara**), and suffering.

Bhamati Advaita is based on the ideas of **Mandana Mishra**, although the school takes its name from a commentary written by Mandana's disciple **Vachaspati Mishra**. Mandana was a contemporary of the philosopher **Shankaracharya**, Advaita Vedanta's greatest exponent, and took definitive stands on several philosophical points on which Shankaracharya had remained silent. One such point was the location of avidya, which Mandana claimed must be each individual Self because it was absurd to conceive of Brahman as subject to ignorance. For Mandana there were clearly multiple, separate selves, since one person's liberation did not bring liberation for all.

Mandana's comments presupposed the existence of a common, if illusory, world, which his followers explained as the activity of one primal ignorance; however, they also had to explain how a single primal ignorance could simultaneously affect multiple souls. This was done using philosophical models known as **limitationism** and **reflectionism**, although it is the former that has been more commonly associated with the Bhamati school. Limitationism assumes that there are some things (i.e., the color red) that we do not conceive of as divided, even when different red colors appear in different places. In the same way, the Bhamati school argued, avidya can be found in multiple souls at the same time but is complete and undivided in each of them. Reflectionism is based on the idea of a mirror's image, which is different from the original but made from it. Therefore

the avidya found in any particular soul is a "reflection" of the original avidya. For further information see Karl H. Potter (ed.), *Presuppositions of India's Philosophies*, 1972.

## Bhandara

("storehouse") A banquet given for large numbers of people—either by special invitation, restricted to certain classes of people (such as **ascetics**), or open to the general public. Sponsoring such a banquet is believed to generate considerable religious merit, but this is also a conspicuous opportunity for both the donor and attendees to enhance their status. Issues of status are also marked among the attendees. The most honored guests confer status on the donor simply by deigning to come, and accordingly such guests will be treated differently from the common lot. The rest of the guests generally get no such special treatment. They give status to the host by **eating** the food he (or she) has had prepared, but they get little in return other than the meal itself, which is usually of poor quality since the food is prepared in large quantities.

Based on these considerations, ascetics with sufficient resources of their own will usually avoid such banquets because of both the quality of the food and the concerns over status. To eat at a bhandara is not only to confer prestige on the donor, but to lower one's own status by appearing as though one needs to do this to survive. The main exception is when one has been invited as an honored guest, but even in these cases it is not unusual for such guests to eat little or nothing, thereby giving status by their presence but losing none through consumption.

## Bhandarkar, R. G.

(1837–1925) **Sanskrit** scholar and intellectual who was the first Indian to serve as professor of Sanskrit at **Deccan** College, in Poona. Bhandarkar was one of the first Indian academics to combine the traditional mastery of Sanskrit texts with critical and objective research, a project that until then had been confined to European scholars. Bhandarkar is emblematic of Indian intellectuals in the late nineteenth century, who began by learning from the Europeans but were then able to work with the best of them. Bhandarkar authored two Sanskrit workbooks and numerous scholarly texts, but his most significant legacy is the **Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute**; it was founded in 1917 by his students, friends, and admirers and is still a highly respected research institution.

## Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute

(BORI) Research institute founded in 1917 and named after the great scholar **R. G. Bhandarkar** (1837–1925). The Institute is devoted to the study and preservation of traditional Indian culture, and it is respected in scholarly circles throughout the world. Its two most important publications have been P. V. Kane's *History of Dharmasastra* and a multivolume critical edition of the ***Mahabharata***, the later of the two great Hindu epics. Aside from its publications, the Institute is also noted for its vast collection of **Sanskrit** manuscripts, which makes it one of the finest research establishments in all of India.

## Bhang

Paste or dough made from crushed marijuana (*Cannabis sativa*), which is often mixed with spices or other flavorings before being formed into a ball. It is taken as an **intoxicant**, either eaten, or mixed into a "cooling" milk-based drink called **thandai**. In general, **eating** bhang is disapproved of by respectable people, although it is fairly common in certain circles, particularly among ascetics. Despite this basic disapproval, bhang is widely consumed as part of the festival celebrations for **Shivaratri** and **Holi**, even by people who avoid it the rest of

the year. The former festival is dedicated to **Shiva**, who is famous for his love of the **drug**, whereas Holi is associated with overturning social boundaries, giving greater license to do things normally proscribed. Aside from being consumed during certain celebrations, it can also be taken in special places, particularly when on a pilgrimage. Several of the most famous Hindu sacred sites (**tirthas**)—among them **Benares**, **Puri**, and **Haridwar**—have government-run bhang stands where pilgrims can fulfill their needs.

## Bhanita

In poetry, particularly the vernacular form of the **bhakti** poets, a signature line in which the author is identified by name. This line has two major functions: to identify the poet and to provide a summation of the poem's message. The word *bhanita* comes from a verb meaning "to speak," and by adding a signature line the poet is stamping his or her authorship on the poem. Of course, there is nothing to prevent others from doing this as well. In a performance context, the poet's name comes at the beginning of the final line and alerts the audience to pay special attention to that line, which often sums up the entire poem's message.

## Bharadvaja

In the *Ramayana*, the earlier of the two great Hindu epics, Bharadvaja is an important **ascetic** and sage. His **ashram**, or abode, is at **Chitrakut**; this is now a town in the southeastern area of the state of **Uttar Pradesh**, but the epic describes the place as a forest hermitage. When **Rama**, his wife **Sita**, and his brother **Lakshmana** are beginning their fourteen years of exile, they come to Bharadvaja to seek his blessings (**ashirvad**). In a broader mythological context, Bharadvaja is one of the seven sages whose names mark exogamous **gotra** ("lineages"); the others are **Kashyapa**, **Bhrgu**, **Vasishtha**, **Gautama**,

**Atri**, and **Vishvamitra**. All **brahmins** are believed to be descended from these seven sages, with each family taking the name of its progenitor as its gotra name. In modern times, these gotra divisions are still important, since marriage within the lineage is forbidden. After her marriage the bride adopts her husband's gotra as part of her new identity. See also **marriage prohibitions**.

## Bharadvaja

(2) (5th c. B.C.E.?) Religious scholar named as the author of a **Shrauta Sutra** (manual on prescriptions for **Vedic** rituals) and a **Grhya Sutra** (manual on domestic rites). The period during which he flourished is uncertain but must precede **Panini**, since this grammarian mentions Bharadvaja in the *Ashtadhyayi*. Given their interest in strengthening the authority of their sacred texts, many Hindus identify this author with the legendary sage Bharadvaja, although there is no hard evidence for this claim.

## Bharata

In Hindu mythology, the **son** of King **Dushyanta** and the maiden **Shakuntala**; Bharata is considered a partial incarnation of the god **Vishnu**. Dushyanta and Shakuntala are married in secret in a **gandharva marriage** executed by their mutual consent. Dushyanta must return to his capital and leaves Shakuntala at her home. While he is gone, she is cursed by the sage **Durvasas** that her lover will forget her. In time, Bharata is born and Shakuntala goes off to search for her beloved. She has to endure many trials before the **curse** is broken. Since Shakuntala and Dushyanta have been married in secret, it takes some time before Bharata is accepted as Dushyanta's legitimate son, and thus heir to the throne. When Bharata finally ascends the throne, he reigns for a long time. After his reign the land of India becomes traditionally known as Bharata.

## Bharata

(2) In the **_Ramayana_**, the earlier of the two great Hindu epics, Bharata is the **son** of King **Dasharatha** by his wife **Kaikeyi** and the righteous younger brother of the god **Rama**, the epic's protagonist. Bharata's loyalty to his family has to endure several tests. The strictest one comes early in the epic when, through Kaikeyi's treachery, Rama is sent into exile in the forest for fourteen years, and Bharata is named king in his place. Despite the obvious temptations of wealth and power, Bharata refuses to assume the throne in place of his brother, **curses** his mother for her deceit, and sets off to live in exile with Rama. Rama commands Bharata to return to **Ayodhya** and rule during his exile, on the premise that the people will suffer without a king. Bharata reluctantly agrees to act as a temporary king, but with two symbolic adjustments: He moves the court from the capital city of Ayodhya to the village of **Nandigrama** as a symbol of **Rama's** exile, and throughout his rule sits at the foot of the royal throne; a pair of Rama's sandals are placed upon the throne as a symbol of the rightful king.

Many characters in the _Ramayana_ are paradigms for Indian cultural values, and Bharata stands for the ideal younger brother. In the traditional joint household the brothers are the heart of the family, since it is they who remain at home their entire lives, whereas their sisters live with their husbands' families after they are married. The eldest brother in every generation eventually becomes the head of the joint family after the older members have passed away. He carries primary authority and responsibility for the family as a whole but cannot succeed without the cooperation of his younger brothers, who must acknowledge and support his authority. By refusing to usurp his elder brother's rightful leadership, Bharata is a paradigm for the ideal younger brother, who puts aside his own desires and opportunities to uphold and promote the welfare of the family as a whole.



A dancer performs in the classical Bharatanatyam form. She assumes the pose of Nataraja, the "Lord of the Dance."

## Bharatanatyam

One of the classical **dance** forms of India; some of the others are **Kathak**, **Orissi**, **Kuchipudi**, **Kathakali**, **Chau**, and **Manipuri**. Bharatanatyam has its home in the temple towns of the state of **Tamil Nadu**, particularly **Tanjore** city's **Brhadeshvar** temple. This temple is dedicated to the god **Shiva**, whose most famous form is **Nataraja**, the "Lord of the Dance." According to tradition the name **_bharata_** comes not from the sage Bharata, the reputed author of the text on dance called the **_Natyashastra_**, but from an acronym of the dance's three most important elements: "bha" from _bhava_ ("feeling"), "ra" from **_raga_** ("melodic mood"), and "ta" from **_tala_** ("rhythm"). The second word in the name, _natyam_, simply means "dance."

Bharatanatyam's historical roots are uncertain. The existence of dance can be dated to the early centuries C.E. since

it is mentioned in the two **Tamil epic** poems, *Shilappadigaram* and *Manimegalai*. Carvings at the Shiva temple in **Kanchipuram** suggest that this dance was well developed in the **Pallava dynasty** (6th–9th c. C.E.), but hard evidence for structured temple dance, including the hereditary dancers known as **devadasis**, did not appear until the **Chola dynasty** (9th–14th c. C.E.). Although royal patronage was an important factor in its survival, Bharatanatyam was performed primarily in the temples until the twentieth century, when the dance began to be performed on stage.

As an artistic form, the dance's present technique was codified in the early nineteenth century by four brothers in the service of Raja Serfoji II of Tanjore. Stylistically, Bharatanatyam presents a sharply geometric line. The most characteristic posture has a stiff upper torso, with the knees flexed outward in line with the rest of the body, and the feet spread gently outward. This posture is a recurring motif in any performance. As in all the Indian dances, Bharatanatyam has a well-developed vocabulary of **gesture** and expression, which makes it possible for the dancer to tell complex stories. Like most other Indian dance forms, Bharatanatyam has been influenced by the shift from temple to stage as its primary theater. Although its roots lie in **worship** and devotion, the move to the stage has inevitably disrupted some of these religious connections. For further information see Mohan Khokar, *Traditions of Indian Classical Dance*, 1984.

## Bharati Dashanami

One of the ten divisions of the **Dashanami Sanyasis**, renunciant **ascetics** who are devotees (**bhakta**) of **Shiva**. The Dashanamis were supposedly established by the ninth-century philosopher **Shankaracharya** in an effort to create a corps of learned men who could help to revitalize Hindu life. Each of the divisions is designated by a different name—in this case, *bharati* ("Indian"). Upon **initiation**, new members are given this name as a surname to their new ascetic names, thus allowing for immediate group identification.

Aside from their individual identity, these ten divisions are divided into four larger organizational groups. Each group has its headquarters in one of the four monastic centers (**maths**) supposedly established by Shankaracharya, as well as other particular religious associations. The Bharati Dashanamis belong to the **Bhuriwara** group, which is affiliated with the **Shringeri Math** in the southern Indian town of **Shringeri**. The Bharati division is elite because it is one of the few that will initiate only **brahmins**. Other such divisions are the **Saraswati Dashanamis**, **Tirtha Dashanamis**, and **Ashrama Dashanamis**. The Bharatis are unusual, however, since only part of the division is restricted to brahmins.

## Bharatiya Janata Party

(BJP) Modern Indian political party with a strong Hindu nationalist (**Hindutva**) orientation. The party was formed as the political wing of the Hindu nationalist organization known as **Rashtriya Svayamsevak Sangh** (RSS), and many of the BJP's leaders have been RSS members for decades. The BJP was formed in 1980 after the dissolution of its predecessor organization, the **Jana Sangh**. The latter was an RSS affiliate as well, several of the whose leaders, notably **Lal Krishna Advani** and Atal Behari Vajpayee, have also led the BJP. At first the BJP took a moderate political stance and fared quite poorly, winning only two seats in the 1984 elections. In the later 1980s it took a far more militant tone, stressing as its focal issue the campaign to build the **Ram Janam Bhumi** temple in **Ayodhya**. As the Indian electorate grew more religiously polarized, the BJP climbed to eighty-six seats in 1989 and 120 seats in 1991. In the 1996 elections it won 160 seats, becoming the largest single party in India's 535-seat Parliament.

The president of India invited the BJP to form a government, but this failed when it was unable to gain enough support from other parties to muster a majority of votes in Parliament.

The BJP's traditional constituency has been **brahmins** and members of the trading communities, both of whom tend to be religiously conservative and supportive of the Hindutva message. In the mid-1990s the BJP muted its Hindu nationalist rhetoric in an attempt to reach beyond these traditional constituencies and to gain more widespread support by moving closer to the political center. Despite these changes, many of the established secular parties still view the BJP with suspicion and have refused to ally themselves with the organization. The BJP's inability to mobilize such support among the larger body politic was a major factor behind the collapse of its short-lived government in 1996. The country was then run by a coalition of thirteen secular political parties, whose single binding commitment is their opposition to the BJP. However, since 1998 the BJP has succeeded in building coalitions to form a government. For further information see Walter K. Andersen and Shridhar D. Damle, *The Brotherhood in Saffron*, 1987; and Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*, 1996.

## Bharat Mata

("Mother India") Modern Hindu "**deity**" whose primary image is a map of the subcontinent, often prominently marked with the network of India's sacred sites (**tirthas**). The presupposition behind most of these particular sacred sites is that the land itself is holy, but the idea of Bharat Mata takes this idea to a more abstract level, sanctifying the whole subcontinent. Although this map and its image of Mother India are usually not actual objects of **worship**, they carry important symbolic messages. In an abstract way, the holiness of Mother India unites all Hindus regardless of their sectarian affiliation.

Moreover, it suggests that India is one unified culture despite its striking regional diversity. These ideas can be found in specific areas, particularly in the networks of tirthas knitting the country together, yet in contemporary times this image's underlying purpose is often political rather than religious. At times it simply represents national pride, but at other times it has a more sinister hidden agenda. This identification of Indian culture with the motherland can be used as a way to marginalize religious **minorities**—primarily Muslims and Christians, whose holy places lie in other countries—as "foreigners," and people whose patriotism and connection to the Indian nation are potentially suspect.

## Bharatmilap

("Meeting **Bharata**") A particular scene in the dramas known as the **Ram Lila**, which are reenactments of the *Ramayana*, the earlier of the two great Hindu epics. This scene records the meeting between the god **Rama** and his brother Bharata, which takes place after Rama has been in exile for fourteen years, during which Bharata has faithfully served as ruler in his brother's place. According to connoisseurs of the Ram Lila, this brief scene is filled with some of the most rapturous emotion in the play. Certainly there is the exaltation that the time of separation has ended, but the scene's popularity also comes from the way it reflects certain basic cultural values. The brothers are considered the heart of the traditional Indian joint family since they remain at home their entire lives, whereas their sisters become part of their marital families. The eldest brother in every generation eventually becomes the head of the joint household, but he cannot succeed without the support and cooperation of his younger brothers. Rama and Bharata are thus models for the brothers in a traditional joint family: Rama for treating his younger brother with love and care, and Bharata for obediently carrying out his

An image of the god Vithoba. Bharud poetry was composed by poet-saints in the Varkari Panth, a religious community devoted to Vithoba.

older brother's wishes for the good of the family as a whole.

## Bharavi

(6th c. C.E.) **Sanskrit** dramatist who is best known as the author of the drama *Kiratarjuniya*. This play describes the meeting between the god **Shiva**, disguised as the tribal hunter Kirata, and the warrior-hero **Arjuna**. Arjuna is one of the five **Pandava** brothers, who are the heroes of the epic *Mahabharata*. In Hindu mythology, Arjuna is the world's greatest warrior, but he is also afflicted with pride. The play describes how the arrogant Arjuna becomes humbled at the hands of this tribal hunter, who in contemporary terms would be of very low social status. In the end, however, Shiva reveals his true form to Arjuna and blesses him for his valor.

## Bhartrhari

(5th c. C.E.) **Sanskrit** poet-philosopher who authored the *Shatakatrayam* ("Three Hundred"), a three-part collection of poems on political life, love, and renunciation. According to legend, Bhartrhari was born the **son** of the **brahmin** Vidyasagara and his **shudra** wife, **Mandakini**. Vidyasagara was the adviser to the king of Kalinga and was given the kingdom upon the ruler's death; after Vidyasagara's death Bhartrhari's brothers designated him as king. Bhartrhari was very happy until he realized that his wife was being unfaithful to him. When her secret was discovered she tried to poison him. Completely disillusioned, Bhartrhari renounced the world to live as an **ascetic**, during which time he reputedly composed his poetry.

Although this is a good story, since many of these poems stress the degradation inherent in courtly life, Bhartrhari was most likely a courtier. His poetry treats all of the conventional purposes of life. The first two sections are about power (**artha**), sensual desire (**kama**), and righteous action (**dharma**), whereas the final section is concerned with the ultimate end, or liberation of the soul (**moksha**). For further information see Barbara Stoller Miller (trans.), *The Hermit and the Love-Thief*, 1978.

## Bhartrprapancha

(7th c. C.E.) In Indian **philosophy**, the first exponent of the **Bhedabhada** ("identity-in-difference") philosophical school. The period during which Bhartrprapancha flourished is uncertain, but he precedes the eighth-century Bhedabhada commentator **Bhaskara**. The Bhedabhada position identified three levels of being: the Ultimate Reality known as **Brahman**, the "witness" consciousness (**sakshin**) in the human being, and the world. This school paradoxically asserted that these three levels were identical, yet different. Thus the world is identical to Brahman but subject to change and decay, unlike Brahman. In the same way, while each human soul is identical to Brahman, it is also subject to bondage and reincarnation (**samsara**), unlike Brahman. The

bondage of the soul was caused by the primal ignorance known as **avidya**, but it could be erased by a combination of action and awareness (**jnanakar-masamucchaya**). The basic philosophical problem for Bhartrprapancha and his followers came from their belief that Brahman was actually transformed into both the world and the Self, a philosophical outlook known as **parina-mavada**. Since they believed that Brahman underwent real changes, it was subject to bondage and ignorance. This position was untenable and unacceptable from a religious perspective because Brahman was deemed to be perfect and unchanging. This difficulty may account for the school's relatively short life.

## Bharud

The name for a specific genre of **bhakti** (devotional) poetry, found particularly among the **Varkari Panth**, a religious community centered around the **worship** of the Hindu god **Vithoba** at his temple at **Pandharpur**, in the modern state of **Maharashtra**. The bharud is essentially a dramatic poem in which the speaker takes on one or more roles to convey the message of devotion to God. It was especially favored by the poet-saint **Eknath**, who used the genre to adopt the personae of **women**, **untouchables**, Muslims, and other marginal people. In modern times these bharuds have become the basis for popular dramas, usually performed during the biannual Varkari pilgrimage to Pandharpur. While singing the songs of the earlier saints during a pilgrimage is an important religious act, these modern renditions are mainly for entertainment. The actors playing the roles in these bharuds frequently add in their own words and actions, which are often quite bawdy.

## Bhashya

("commentary") Any commentary, whether on a text or an oral teaching.

The need for commentary was presupposed in most texts on Hindu **philosophy** as well as in the secret ritual tradition known as **tantra**. Philosophical works were often nothing more than collections of brief aphorisms, which were intentionally kept short to facilitate memorization but which clearly needed further explanation. In the case of tantra, commentary was essential because the texts were written using coded language to conceal their contents from the uninitiated. This may have been in the form known as **sandhabhasha**, which often uses **erotic** language to indicate religious practice, or it may simply have been a technical language in which everyday words had contextual meanings.

## Bhaskara

In Indian **philosophy**, an eighth-century proponent of the **Bhedabhada** ("identity-in-difference") school. The Bhedabhada position identified three levels of being: the Ultimate Reality known as **Brahman**, the "witness" consciousness (**sakshin**) in the human being, and the world. They paradoxically asserted that these three levels were identical, yet different. Thus the world is identical to Brahman but subject to change and decay, unlike Brahman. In the same way, while each human soul is identical to Brahman, it is also subject to bondage and reincarnation (**samsara**), unlike Brahman. The bondage of the soul was caused by the primal ignorance known as **avidya**, but it could be erased by a combination of action and awareness (**jnanakar-masamucchaya**). The basic philosophical problem for the Bhedabhada school was that because they believed that Brahman was actually transformed into the world and the Self (**parinamavada**), it followed that Brahman was subject to bondage and ignorance. This idea was difficult to defend, since the transcendence of Brahman was well established by

sacred texts such as the **Upanishads**, and this problem may account for the school's relatively short life.

## Bhasmasur

In Hindu mythology, a **demon** with great power but limited intelligence. According to tradition, the god **Shiva** has given Bhasmasur the power to change anyone to ash (bhasma) simply by placing his hand on that person's head. Bhasmasur falls in love with Shiva's wife **Parvati** and attempts to place his hand on Shiva's head, and the god has to flee. Bhasmasur is destroyed when the god **Vishnu** tricks him into putting his hand on top of his own head, which instantly transforms him into ash. In metaphorical usage, the term *Bhasmasur* denotes any problem that has grown out of hand through lack of foresight.

## Bhava

("being") Epithet of the god **Shiva**. See **Shiva**.

## Bhavabhuti

(early 8th c. C.E.) **Sanskrit** dramatist and playwright noted for his ability to express and transmit emotions through language. His best-known play, the romance *Malatimadhava*, is famous not only in its own right, but because the primary villain is an evil **ascetic** believed to be a member of the defunct ascetic group known as **Kapalikas**. The Kapalikas were devotees (**bhakta**) of **Shiva**, and their reputed practices emulated Shiva in his wrathful form as **Bhairava**. They wore their hair long and matted, smeared their bodies with ash (preferably from the **cremation ground**), and carried a club and a skull bowl (**kapala**). According to some sources, they also indulged in forbidden behavior—drinking wine, **eating** meat, using cannabis and other **drugs**, performing **human sacrifice**, and orgiastic sexuality—which caused them to be avoided and feared. Bhavabhuti's description of this evil ascetic and his disciples is one of the earliest datable references to the **Shaiva** form of **asceticism**, and therefore important from a historical perspective.

## Bhavani

(feminine form of **Bhava**) Epithet of the god **Shiva's** wife, **Parvati**. See **Parvati**.

## Bhavas

("states") In Indian aesthetics the bhavas are a set of nine states considered the most basic unadulterated emotions: sexual excitement, laughter, grief, anger, energy, fear, loathing, wonder, and peace. To these nine bhavas correspond the nine **rasas** ("tastes"), or moods transmitted by various types of artistic expression: the **erotic**, comic, compassionate, cruel, heroic, terrifying, loathsome, marvelous, and peaceful. Although these bhavas and rasas clearly correspond to one another, there is an important difference between them. A person's emotive states come and go in response to circumstances that are often beyond one's control. Because such naturally occurring emotions usually cannot be sustained, they are generally not objects of aesthetic satisfaction. This is not true in the case of rasa, since mood can be artificially generated by an artistic endeavor. Any particular rasa can thus be sustained and satisfying. The single most dominant aim in all the Indian arts, therefore, is to create such a mood or moods for the audience.

## Bhave, Vinobha

(1895–1982) Social and religious reformer whose basic principles reflected his long association with **Mohandas K. Gandhi**, to whom Bhave came as a disciple in 1916. Bhave was one of Gandhi's close associates in the struggle for independence and was particularly absorbed with Gandhi's idea of village self-sufficiency. In the years after independence, he traveled around India on foot to meet the people. It was on one

such tour that he started the Bhoodan ("land gift") movement, the purpose of which was to obtain donations of land for the poor. Much of Bhave's life after independence was devoted to village development, in particular through a movement called Sarvodaya ("welfare of all"), which sought to solve problems through collective involvement and service to one another.

## Bhedabhada

("identity-in-difference") Philosophical school whose best-known figures were **Bhartrprapancha** and **Bhaskara**. The Bhedabhada position identified three levels of being: the Ultimate Reality known as **Brahman**, the "witness" consciousness (**sakshin**) in the human being, and the world. The school paradoxically asserted that these three levels are identical, yet different. Thus the world is identical to Brahman but is subject to change and decay, unlike Brahman. In the same way, while each human soul is identical to Brahman, it is also subject to bondage and reincarnation (**samsara**), unlike Brahman. The bondage of the soul was caused by the primal ignorance known as **avidya**, but it could be erased by a combination of action and awareness (**jnanakarmasamucchaya**). The basic philosophical problem for Bhartrprapancha and his followers was that because they believed that Brahman was actually transformed into the world and the Self (**parinamavada**), it followed that Brahman was subject to bondage and ignorance. Thus, if one must destroy avidya to gain liberation, one must also destroy part of Brahman. These were difficult ideas to defend since the transcendence of Brahman was well established by sacred texts such as the **Upanishads**, and this problem may account for the school's relatively short life.

## Bhil

The name of a tribal (**adivasi**) group found in greatest numbers in the **Vindhya Mountains**, in the eastern part of the state of **Madhya Pradesh**. They are historically associated with the forest, particularly with hunting and gathering honey. As with many tribal groups, their homeland is often in marginal lands, and most of them are quite poor.

## Bhima

The third of the five **Pandava** brothers who are the heroes in the *Mahabharata*, the later of the two great Hindu epics. Bhima is born when his mother, **Kunti**, uses a powerful **mantra** (sacred sound) to have a **son** by the **wind**-god, **Vayu**. Of all the Pandavas, Bhima is the largest and strongest, and his favorite weapon is the club, which requires great physical strength. This strength is one of the sources of enmity between the Pandavas and the **Kauravas** (cousins of the Pandavas), since during their adolescent training, Bhima can always draw on his superior power to outdo his cousins. His earthy and untamed nature is evident through his consumption of strange foods as well as from his liaison with the **rakshasi** (female **demon**) Hidambi, by whom he has a son, **Ghatotkacha**. Bhima's notable deeds tend to be feats of strength. In many cases this involves killing demons, such as **Bakasur** or Hidamba in hand-to-hand combat; but Bhima is also a major figure in the Mahabharata war, in which he uses his club to kill great masses of the Kaurava army.

Besides his strength and unusual appetites, which make him a figure subject to caricature, Bhima is also absolutely devoted to his brothers and to their common wife, **Draupadi**. Whenever her honor is at stake, Bhima is the person to whom she turns. When Draupadi is molested by **Kichaka** during the year that the Pandavas spend incognito at the court of King **Virata**, Bhima disguises himself as Draupadi, goes to meet Kichaka, and kills him. It is also Bhima who vows to kill the two Kaurava brothers, **Duhshasana** and **Duryodhana**, because of their behavior toward Draupadi after Bhima's brother

Bhima River at Pandharpur,
in the state of Maharashtra.

**Yudhishthira** loses an important game of dice. Duhshasana drags Draupadi into the hall by her **hair**, her garments stained with menstrual **blood**, and Duryodhana bares his thigh (a euphemism for the genitals) toward Draupadi and directs her to sit on his lap. Bhima vows that to avenge these insults he will rip open Duhshasana's chest so that Draupadi can wash her hair in his blood, and smash Duryodhana's thigh with his club. Although it takes thirteen years before he carries out these promises, in the end he avenges Draupadi's honor. After the Mahabharata war, Bhima aids his brother Yudhishthira in reigning as king. After Yudhishthira abdicates the throne, Bhima travels with him and their other brothers on a great journey to the **Himalayas**, where Bhima eventually dies of exposure.

## Bhima River

A central Indian tributary of the **Krishna River**, rising in the state of **Maharashtra**, on the inland side of the western **ghats** and meeting with the Krishna in the state of **Karnataka**. At the Bhima's headwaters can be found **Bhimashankar**, which is one of the twelve **jyotirlingas**, a group of sacred sites (**tirthas**) deemed especially holy to the god **Shiva**. Aside from Bhimashankar, another important religious site on the Bhima is the temple of **Vithoba** at **Pandharpur**.

## Bhimashankar

("**Bhima's Shiva**") One of the twelve **jyotirlingas**, a group of sacred sites (**tirthas**) deemed especially holy to the god **Shiva**. Bhimashankar is the name of both the place and the presiding **deity**. It is located in **Maharashtra's** Pune district at the source of the **Bhima River**, hence its name. Unlike many of the other jyotirlingas, Bhimashankar is visited little during the year since it is far from urban centers and relatively inaccessible. The major pilgrim traffic comes on the festival of **Shivaratri**, which usually falls within February and March.

## Bhishma

In the *Mahabharata*, the later of the two great Hindu epics, Bhishma is the **son** of King **Shantanu** and an uncle and counselor to both warring factions, the **Pandavas** and the **Kauravas**. His name as a child is Devavrata; he receives the name Bhishma ("terrible") as an acknowledgment of his extremely difficult vow. King Shantanu has fallen in love with the maiden **Satyavati**, who agrees to marry him on the condition that her sons will rule instead of Devavrata, who has already been anointed the heir apparent. Bhishma not only agrees to give up the throne but takes the solemn vow that he will never marry, so that there will be no claimants from his lineage to compete for the throne. When Bhishma takes his dreadful vow, he is also given the option of choosing the time of his death.

Bhishma faithfully keeps this vow, and his adherence to it eventually costs

him his life. It is Bhishma who abducts **Amba**, **Ambika**, and **Ambalika**, the **daughters** of the king of **Kashi**, to be married to his stepbrother **Vichitravirya**. Ambika and Ambalika happily marry Vichitravirya, but when Amba confides that she has already given her heart to King Salva, Bhishma releases her to go to him. Salva rejects Amba on the grounds that her virginity is suspect, since she has been abducted by another man. Amba returns to Bhishma and demands that he marry her since he is responsible for her plight, and when Bhishma refuses to break his vow, Amba is determined to get revenge. She is reborn as the man-woman **Shikhandi**, behind whom the **Pandava** prince **Arjuna** hides to shoot the arrows that eventually kill Bhishma.

Bhishma is a great man who is respected by all. His skill with arms makes him one of the finest warriors of his time, but he is most famous as a wise and generous counselor to both the Pandavas and the Kauravas. Although he ultimately sides with the Kaurava prince **Duryodhana** in the war between the two groups, before its outbreak Bhishma repeatedly advises Duryodhana to make peace with the Pandavas and share the kingdom with them. He fights valiantly in the Mahabharata war and destroys a large part of the Pandava armies, but finally he is hit by so many of Arjuna's arrows that he lays upon them like a bed. Although Bhishma is mortally wounded by Arjuna, he delays his death (through the boon given by his vow) until the **sun** resumes its more **auspicious** northern path (**uttarayana**). During this time he gives the victorious Pandavas copious instruction on state affairs and related topics. Bhishma's unswerving commitment to a vow that deprives him of the joys of family life, and his inability to avert the fratricidal conflict between his nephews, through which the family is ultimately destroyed, make him a lonely, somewhat tragic figure.

## Bhishma Ashtami

Festival celebrated on the eighth **day** (ashtami) of the light, or waxing, half of the **lunar month** called **Magh** (January–February), marking the death of **Bhishma**. Bhishma is an uncle to both the **Kauravas** and the **Pandavas**, warring factions in the Hindu epic *Mahabharata*. He is well known for his bravery, continence, and truthfulness. He also has the power to choose the time of his death. Although he is mortally wounded in the great Mahabharata war, he remains alive until **weeks** later (delivering discourses and advice to the victorious Pandavas the entire time), delaying his death until the **sun** has resumed its northward course (**uttarayana**). On this day parents give **offerings** of food and **water** in Bhishma's name in the hope that their **sons** may have his good qualities.

## Bhogamandapa

("food pavilion") The outermost entrance hall in the style of **architecture** found in the largest temples in **Orissa**. At the temple of **Jagannath** in **Puri**, the term *bhogamandapa* specifically refers to the area where the food offered to Jagannath as **prasad** ("favor") is cooked. Jagannath's temple is unusual in that the normal restrictions regarding **commensality** are suspended. Everyone eats together rather than being segregated by **caste**, signifying Jagannath's ultimate lordship over all beings. The prominence of this particular rite makes the bhogamandapa all the more important.

## Bhogawara

One of the four major organizational groups of the **Dashanami Sanyasis**, renunciant **ascetics** who are devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva**; the other three groups are **Kitawara**, **Bhuriwara**, and **Anandawara**. Each of these divisions has its headquarters in one of the four monastic centers (**maths**) supposedly established by the philosopher **Shankaracharya**. Each group also has

certain religious associations: with one of the four **Vedas**, with a particular quarter of the Indian subcontinent, with one of the "great utterances" (**mahavakyas**) expressing ultimate truth, with a specific ascetic quality, and with several of the ten Dashanami divisions. The Bhogawara group is affiliated with the **Govardhan Math** in the city of **Puri** on the Bay of Bengal, and it is therefore connected with the eastern quarter of India. Their Veda is the **Rg Veda**, their mahavakya is Prajnanam **Brahman** ("Knowledge is Brahman"), and their ascetic quality is to remain indifferent to worldly pleasures. The particular divisions associated with this group are the **Aranya Dashanamis** and **Vana Dashanamis**.

## Bhoja

(r. 918–955 C.E.) Medieval Hindu king in the **Malwa** region of the modern state of **Uttar Pradesh**. Bhoja was famous both as a scholar and as a dam builder who created lakes for irrigation.

## Bholanath

("simple lord") Common epithet of the god **Shiva**. In ordinary usage the word *bhola* carries a negative connotation: "simple," "guileless," and even "foolish." Yet in using this word to designate Shiva, his devotees (**bhakta**) are not intentionally insulting him but celebrating his boundless generosity to those with whom he is pleased. Shiva's devotees can give the simplest **offerings** (such as leaves, fruit, and **water**) and in turn ask for wealth, success, and power. Shiva's nature is considered "simple" because he willingly participates in such unequal exchanges, providing sharp contrast to the world economy, which demands equal value.

## Bhramargit

("songs to the bee") Poetic genre in the devotional poetry of the god **Krishna**, which is set in the time after Krishna has gone to claim his kingdom in **Mathura**, never to return. The story tells how Krishna sends his companion **Uddhava** back to **Braj** with a message for the **gopis**, the cowherd **women** who are Krishna's dear companions, and who are virtually insane with longing because of his absence. Uddhava tries to reassure the gopis by telling them not to dwell on Krishna's physical absence. Uddhava further reminds them that since Krishna is the all-pervading divinity, he will always be with them even though he might not be visible. In the bhramargit poems, the gopis scornfully reject Uddhava's notions, asserting that this view of Krishna is abstract, lifeless, and suitable only for those who have never known Krishna in his embodied form. The genre's name comes from this story's earliest appearance, in the *Bhagavata Purana*. Here the gopis address their complaints about Krishna's absence to a large black bee, which in their passion and loneliness they mistake for Krishna.

## Bhramari

("circling") Powerful form of the **Goddess**. Bhramari takes form to oppose the **demon** Aruna, who in his hubris is trying to compromise the chastity of the gods' wives. They implore the Goddess to help them, and in her form as Bhramari, she kills the demon and removes the threat. Bhramari is worshiped on the eighth night of **Navaratri**, a nine-**day** festival in which one goddess is appeased every night.

## Bhrgu

In Hindu mythology, one of the **sons** of **Brahma** and one of the seven sages whose names mark exogamous clan "lineages" (**gotra**); the others are **Kashyapa**, **Bharadvaja**, **Vasishtha**, **Gautama**, **Atri**, and **Vishvamitra**. All **brahmins** are believed to be descended from these seven sages, with each family taking the name of its progenitor as its gotra name. In modern times these divisions are still important since

marriage within the gotra is forbidden. After her marriage the bride adopts her husband's gotra as part of her new identity.

Bhrgu is most famous for testing the three major Hindu gods, which results in **Vishnu** being declared the greatest of the three. Bhrgu first goes to Brahma's house where the god does not pay Bhrgu appropriate respect, and in revenge Bhrgu **curses** Brahma to receive no **worship**. Next he goes to see **Shiva**, who refuses to meet with him because he is making love to his wife **Parvati** at the time. In turn, Bhrgu curses Shiva to be worshiped as the **linga**, the pillar-shaped symbol that has undeniable phallic associations. Lastly he visits Vishnu and, finding him asleep, gives him a sound kick in the chest. Vishnu wakes up, but shows no anger at this disrespect. Instead he massages Bhrgu's foot, gently inquires whether it has been hurt, and promises to retain its mark on his chest forever, where it appears as the **shrivatsa**. Vishnu's magnanimous behavior leads Bhrgu to proclaim him the best of all the gods. Not surprisingly, this version of the tale appears only in **Vaishnava** sectarian literature. See also **marriage prohibitions**.

## Bhubaneshvar

Capital city of the modern Indian state of **Orissa**. Bhubaneshvar reportedly has over 500 temples, of which the most prominent is the **Lingaraja Temple**. It is dedicated to **Shiva** in his form as Tribhuvaneshvar ("Lord of the Triple World"), from which the city also gets its name.

## Bhudevi

See **earth**.

## Bhujangavalaya

("snake bracelet") In Hindu iconography, the name of a particular ornament worn by the god **Shiva**. The bhujangavalaya is a bracelet shaped in the form of a snake. In Hindu mythology Shiva is famous for wearing serpents, especially cobras, as ornaments around his arms and torso. This is just one of the attributes that marks him as different, powerful, and potentially dangerous. The prescriptive canons for the creation of Hindu images have followed up on this tradition, and Shiva is invariably shown wearing these bracelets.

## Bhuriwara

One of the four major organizational groups of the **Dashanami Sanyasis**, renunciant ascetics who are devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva**; the other three groups are **Kitawara**, **Bhogawara**, and **Anandawara**. Each of these groups has its headquarters in one of the four monastic centers (**maths**) supposedly established by the philosopher **Shankaracharya**. Each division also has certain religious associations: with one of the four **Vedas**, with a particular quarter of the Indian subcontinent, with one of the "great utterances" (**mahavakyas**) expressing ultimate truth, with a particular ascetic quality, and with several of the ten Dashanami divisions. The Bhuriwara group is affiliated with the **Shringeri Math** in the southern Indian town of **Shringeri** and is thus connected with the southern quarter of India. Their **Veda** is the **Yajur Veda**, their mahavakya is **Aham Brahmasmi** ("I am **Brahman**"), and their ascetic quality is to renounce all wealth and to live on food growing wild in the jungles. The specific divisions associated with this group are **Saraswati Dashanami**, **Bharati Dashanami**, and **Puri Dashanami**.

## Bhushundi

A character in the ***Ramcharitmanas***, the version of the ***Ramayana*** written by the poet-saint **Tulsidas** (1532–1623?). Bhushundi is a crow who symbolizes the power of devotion to God to redeem even the lowest of creatures. One of the most pronounced differences between the original **Valmiki** *Ramayana* and the Tulsidas *Ramayana* is that Tulsidas puts

Women praying at a shrine in Bihar. This northern Indian state is home to many sacred sites.

far greater stress on devotion to **Rama**, of which Bhushundi is a perfect example. In Indian culture, crows are considered unclean birds since they are scavengers who will eat anything. Yet in one of the narrative levels of the *Ramcharitmanas*, it is the "unclean" crow Bhushundi who narrates the story to the "sacred" eagle **Garuda**—the vehicle of the god **Vishnu**. As part of his account in the *Ramayana*, Bhushundi relates the terrifying experience of being given an unmediated vision of Rama in all his majesty, and how he (as did the sage **Markandeya**) went into Rama's mouth and perceived the entire universe inside.

## Bhut

("[someone who] was") The spirit of a person who has recently died, which is still inappropriately connected to the world of the living. This is often a troubling or malevolent presence, either to the departed's family or the general population. Bhuts and other malignant spirits, such as **prets** or **churails**, have generally either suffered an untimely or violent death or died with certain unfulfilled desires, particularly relating to marriage and family life. In cases where both these factors are present, the likelihood of the departed becoming a bhut is deemed much greater. Bhuts make themselves known to the living through either **dreams** or **possession**. In some cases they have specific requests and can be placated by **worship** and **offerings**. In such cases the dreams and possession are methods of communicating with the living, who can perform the necessary actions. Some bhuts resort to possession as an attempt to realize their unfulfilled desires by directly using a living person's body. These spirits are far more malevolent, and the only way to remove them is through exorcism. For further information on the care of restless family spirits, see Ann Grodzins Gold, *Fruitful Journeys*, 1988; for a masterful psychological interpretation of spirits, possession, and healing, see Sudhir Kakar, *Shamans, Mystics, and Doctors*, 1991.

## Bhuta

Epithet of the god **Shiva**. See **Shiva**.

## Bhutalingas

("elemental **lingas**") A network of five southern Indian sacred sites (**tirthas**), four in the state of **Tamil Nadu** and one in **Andhra Pradesh**, all dedicated to the god **Shiva**. In each of these centers, the most sacred object is the linga, a pillar-shaped form representing Shiva. What makes these sites unique is that the linga is supposedly composed of one of the five primordial **elements**. Thus the linga in **Tiruvannamalai** is formed from **fire**; the linga in **Jambukeshvar** is formed from **water**; the one in **Kanchipuram** is made from **earth**; that in **Kalahasti**, the sacred site in Andhra Pradesh, is formed from air; and the linga in **Chidambaram** is made from **space**. Between them, these five sites comprise a symbolic **cosmology** that encompasses all created things.

## Bhutam

(7th c. C.E.) With **Pey** and **Poygai**, one of the first three **Alvars**, a group of twelve poet-saints who lived in southern India between the seventh and tenth centuries. All of the Alvars were devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Vishnu**. Their stress on passionate devotion (**bhakti**) to a personal god, conveyed through hymns sung in the **Tamil language**, transformed and revitalized Hindu religious life. According to tradition, the three men were caught in a torrential storm, and one by one they took shelter in a small dry spot, with each making room for the next. As they stood together they felt a fourth presence, which was Vishnu. The Alvars were such great devotees that their combined energy was sufficient to provoke Vishnu's manifestation. Overwhelmed with ecstasy, the three burst into song, which formed the first of their compositions. For further information see Kamil Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature*, 1975.

## Bhutayajna

("**sacrifice** to creatures") One of the five great sacrifices (**panchamahayajna**) that is prescribed in the texts on religious duty (**Dharma Shastras**). These five great sacrifices are daily religious observances for a "**twice-born**" householder, that is, a householder born into one of the three "twice-born" groups in Indian society—**brahmin**, **kshatriya**, and **vaishya**—who is eligible to receive the adolescent religious **initiation** known as the "second birth." Each sacrifice (**yajna**) is directed toward a different class of beings, from the Ultimate Reality down to **animals**, and is satisfied by specific actions. The bhutayajna is directed toward animals and outcasts (and in some understandings, **ghosts**), and it is satisfied by putting out food for them to eat. In the time since the Dharma Shastras were composed, Hindu life has undergone significant changes, and this particular sacrifice is rarely performed today.

## Bidhai Samaroh

("farewell celebration") In northern India, the formal departure of a new bride for her marital home. This is a momentous event for several different reasons. A marriage is the start of a family, and through her marriage a young woman gets the opportunity to become a wife and mother; these roles are still seen as a woman's highest fulfillment and happiness. Yet according to the traditional model of the Indian joint family, after marriage a woman goes to live with and becomes part of her husband's family. Thus the act of seeing off a new bride carries bittersweet feelings—happiness for her marriage and hopes for her good fortune, but also the sense that things have irreversibly changed.

## Bihar

One of the states in modern northern India, sandwiched between **Uttar Pradesh** and **West Bengal**, with **Nepal** on its northern border. Bihar has an

incredibly rich history; it was the ancestral homeland of the **Maurya dynasty**, which ruled over much of the Indian subcontinent between the fourth and third centuries before the common era. The capital city was at **Pataliputra**, identified with modern Patna. Bihar also contains the town of Bodh Gaya, where the Buddha attained enlightenment, in addition to many other places associated with events in his life.

Despite this lush past, modern Bihar is an extremely difficult place to live; illiteracy and infant mortality rates are very high, life expectancy is fairly low, and social conditions can best be described as feudal. Most of its citizens can barely make a living and do so through agriculture, while a small percentage are fabulously wealthy. Bihar is also a textbook example of what modern Indians call the "criminalization of politics," in which known criminals are either agents for politicians or are themselves holding political office. Although Bihar has abundant mineral resources, its pervasive corruption virtually ensures that their benefits will reach only a few. Despite all of these disadvantages, Bihar does have well-known sacred sites (**tirthas**). One of these is the town of **Gaya**, famous as a place to perform funerary rites (**antyeshthi samskara**). Another sacred place is the temple at **Vaidyanath**, which is one of the twelve **jyotirlingas**, a group of sites especially sacred to the god **Shiva**. For general information about Bihar and all the regions of India, an accessible reference is Christine Nivin et al., *India*. 8th ed., Lonely Planet, 1998.

## Bijak

("inventory") One of the three main collections of verse ascribed to the poet-saint **Kabir** (mid-15th c.?); the other two are found in the **Adigranth** and the manuscripts of the religious organization **Dadupanth**. Kabir is the best known of the **sants**, an umbrella term for a group of central and northern Indian poet-saints who share several concepts: stress on individualized, interior religion leading to a personal experience of the divine; disdain for external ritual, particularly image **worship**; faith in the power of the divine Name; and a tendency to ignore conventional **caste** distinctions. Of all the sants, Kabir is the most iconoclastic with regard to established religious practices and authorities. He invariably emphasizes the need for individual searching and realization.

Given the content of Kabir's message, it is notable that the *Bijak* is the scripture of the **Kabirpanth**, a religious community claiming to be his followers. Certainly Kabir himself would have condemned the notion of making him the founder of anything, or of his verses gaining the authority of a scripture. In content, the *Bijak* contains verses of varying types: short epigrams that have become proverbial wisdom, longer stanzas in the **chaupai** form, and shorter two-line verse (**doha**). Linguistic features identify the *Bijak* as belonging to the eastern part of the **Hindi** language region, hence its common name as the "eastern" recension. For translations of the text itself, see Linda Hess and Shukdev Singh (trans.), *The Bijak of Kabir*, 1983.

## Bijakshara

("seed syllable") In the esoteric ritual tradition known as **tantra**, a bijakshara is a particular set of syllabic utterances that is believed to have an intimate connection with a **deity**—either as a way of gaining access to the god's power or as the subtlest form of the deity itself. These syllables are usually meaningless sounds (for example, *aum*, *hrim*, *klim*), although at times they may contain actual words. Bijaksharas are important not for their meaning but for the power inherent in the sounds themselves. The transmission of such seed syllables and the entitlement (**adhikara**) to use them is an important feature of tantric **initiation** (**diksha**). For further information see Swami Agehananda Bharati, *The Tantric Tradition*, 1977; and Douglas

Renfrew Brooks, *The Secret of the Three Cities*, 1990.

## Bilva

The wood-apple tree (*Aegle marmelos*). Although this tree is known for its delicious fruit, its primary religious importance is its leaves. These are used in the **worship** of **Shiva** and are usually placed as an **offering** on the god's image or **linga** (pillar-shaped symbol). These leaves are believed to be dearer to him than any other offering. In everyday language this tree is also commonly known as the bel.

## Bimbisara

(d. 494 B.C.E.) King of Magadha, the region corresponding to modern **Bihar**, whose reign ended shortly before the traditionally accepted date for the death of the Buddha. Bimbisara was an energetic administrator who had designs on ruling a much larger empire. To this end, he tried to conquer and control large parts of the **Ganges** basin. Bimbisara is believed to have been the first king to conceive of ruling a large empire, although he was deposed and murdered by his **son Ajatashatru** before he saw it become a reality.

## Bindu

("drop") In the **Shrividya** school, a particular branch of the esoteric ritual tradition known as **tantra**, the bindu is the name for the dot in the very center of the **shrichakra**, which is a Shrividya symbolic diagram (**yantra**) used in **worship**. The shrichakra is composed of nine interlocking triangles—four pointing up and five pointing down—surrounded by a double series of lotus petals and exterior circular and angular walls. The bindu symbolizes the ultimate unity of the divine principles, **Shiva** and **Shakti**, and by extension the unity of all reality. For further information see Douglas Renfrew Brooks, *The Secret of the Three Cities*, 1990.

## Bindusara

(3rd c. B.C.E.) **Son** of **Chandragupta Maurya**, the founder of the Mauryan empire, and father of **Ashoka**, the empire's greatest figure. At Bindusara's accession the Mauryans controlled the **Indus** and **Ganges** river basins. Bindusara not only consolidated his father's gains, but also expanded Mauryan control into the **Deccan** region as far south as Mysore. He was reportedly a man of universal tastes, since tradition holds that he asked Antiochus I, the Seleucid ruler of Syria, for sweet wine, dried figs, and a sophist. Antiochus apparently sent the first two items but declared that Greek philosophers were not for export. See also **Maurya dynasty**.

## Birla, Ghanshyamdas

(1894–1983) Patriarch of the Birla industrial family. The Birlas made a fortune in opium in the early decades of the twentieth century and then diversified into a variety of other industrial ventures. Ghanshyamdas was a close friend of **Mohandas K. Gandhi** and the major financial supporter for Gandhi's political organization, the Indian National Congress, to which Birla had given an estimated 100 million rupees by the time of independence. In his later years, he devoted considerable money and attention to building temples, sponsoring religious and charitable trusts, and performing other honorable deeds.

## Birth

At its most basic level, birth is a biological event, but it becomes a cultural event by virtue of the rites performed for and significance given to it. Different Hindu communities show considerable regional and sectarian variation in the ways that they mark a birth, but several themes remain fairly constant. Although the birth of a child is a highly **auspicious** occasion, it is also considered impure because of the various bodily tissues and fluids coming with it (**blood**,

Depiction of the god Vishnu's Boar avatar.
Vishnu appears on earth in the shape
of a boar to combat a demon.

membranes, amniotic fluid, placenta, etc.). Thus, birth rituals usually include rites of purification for both mother and child, to remove this birth impurity (**sutakashaucha**). For the mother this is fairly simple: a bath after the birth followed by baths during a period of seclusion (7–10 days). The final rite for the child, the head **shaving** known as the **chudakarana samskara**, may not come for years after the birth.

Aside from impurity (**ashaucha**), another constant theme is the threat of potential danger. Immediately after birth, both mother and child are seen as highly vulnerable, not only from environmental stresses such as cold, fatigue, or infection, but from ills brought on by **witchcraft** or the evil eye (**nazar**). Given this concern, it is not surprising that the placenta and all other childbirth byproducts are carefully collected and disposed of, lest they be used for spells. The period of seclusion after the birth is intended both to prevent contact with such malevolent forces and to ward them off through **rites of protection**. The mother is usually given massages and fed strengthening foods to bolster her resistance. The use of charms, or

amulets, is also quite common. For further information see Lawrence Babb, *The Divine Hierarchy*, 1975; and Doranne Jacobsen, "Golden Handprints and Redpainted Feet: Hindu Childbirth Rituals in Central India," in Nancy Falk and Rita M. Gross (eds.), *Unspoken Worlds: Women's Religious Lives in Non-Western Cultures*, 2000.

## Black Yajur Veda

Along with the **White Yajur Veda**, one of the two major forms of the **Yajur Veda**, one of the oldest Hindu religious texts. The major difference between these two forms is in the placement of explanatory notes on the Vedic **mantras** (sacred sounds) and their significance. The four recensions of the Black Yajur Veda include these notes in the text itself. In contrast, the one recension of the White Yajur Veda gathers these notes into an appendix known as a **Brahmana**, which gives its name to the second major stratum of Vedic texts.

## Blessing

See **ashirvad**.

## Blood

As with all bodily fluids, blood is considered ritually impure and a source of pollution upon contact. Blood is also deemed a "hot" and powerful substance, not only by virtue of its impurity (**ashaucha**), but also because of its connection with life. Witches are popularly seen as deriving their nourishment from human blood. This highlights both their malevolent character, since they can only live by destroying others, and also their marginal, antisocial quality, since they feed on a substance considered violently impure. In another context, blood from **animal sacrifice** is often offered to **village deities** or to certain powerful and terrifying forms of the **Goddess**. Any **deities** taking blood sacrifice are considered "hot," meaning that they are powerful enough to grant favors to devotees but also marginal, potentially dangerous,

and requiring continual infusions of life-sustaining blood to maintain their powers. See also **witchcraft**.

## Boar Avatar

The third **avatar**, or "incarnation," of the god **Vishnu**. Vishnu takes this form at the beginning of one of the cosmic ages, when the process of creation has been interrupted by the disappearance of the **Earth**. The source of this problem is the demon-king **Hiranyaksha**, who has kidnapped the Earth and hidden her in the depths of the cosmic ocean. Taking the form of a giant boar, Vishnu dives to the bottom of the ocean, where he slays Hiranyaksha, places the Earth on the tip of his tusk, and lifts her from the waters. With the reappearance of the Earth, the process of creation resumes.

It is generally accepted that the avatar doctrine provided a way to assimilate smaller regional **deities** into the larger pantheon by designating them as forms of Vishnu. This inference is supported by the Boar avatar, which seems to have absorbed an ancient cult in central India by making the boar an incarnation of Vishnu. In modern times the Boar avatar is worshiped little, although it had a significant following in the past, particularly in central India. This is partly supported by the sculptural record; the caves at **Ellora** and **Udayagiri** have particularly fine sculptural renditions of this avatar. For further information see Arthur Llewellyn Basham, *The Wonder That Was India*, 1968.

## Bose, Subhash Chandra

(1896–1945) Bengali politician and freedom fighter. Before World War II, Bose had unsuccessfully contested with **Mohandas K. Gandhi** for the leadership of the Congress Party. Bose was more impatient than Gandhi for the British to leave, and he was more willing to expel them by force. During World War II, Bose used Japanese patronage to form the Indian National Army (INA), whose objective was to expel the British from India by armed force. Starting in Singapore the INA marched 5,000 miles through Southeast Asia, but they were ultimately defeated by the British army at the city of Kohima in eastern India. Although there is eyewitness testimony that Bose died from burns stemming from a plane crash in the final days of the Pacific war, even today many Bengalis believe that he is still alive and living incognito.

## Brahma

Brahma is the first member of the **Trimurti**, the "three forms" of divinity made up of the dominant male **deities** in the Hindu pantheon: Brahma as the creator of the universe, **Vishnu** as the preserver or sustainer, and **Shiva** as the destroyer. Brahma is usually portrayed with four heads (the fifth having been cut off by **Bhairava**, a wrathful form of Shiva), and his **animal** vehicle is the **hamsa**, or Indian goose.

According to one widely held myth, during the time of cosmic dissolution between world cycles, Vishnu floats in the middle of the cosmic ocean, lying on the giant serpent **Shesha**. When the time for creation comes, a lotus sprouts from Vishnu's navel and opens to reveal Brahma inside. Brahma takes up the work of creation, and at the end of the world cycle, Brahma returns to the lotus, which is reabsorbed into Vishnu. Because of his spontaneous appearance at the beginning of every cosmic age, one of the names for Brahma is **Svayambhu** ("self-born"). Unlike the Judeo-Christian belief, the world is not created from nothing. Brahma merely arranges the existing elements of the universe into a coherent and ordered cosmos.

Brahma is a major figure in the pantheon and is prominent in many episodes in Hindu mythology. His mythic presence often obscures the fact that he is never worshiped as a primary **deity**. In fact, he has only one temple devoted to him in all of India, in

**Pushkar**. Some Hindus have attributed this lack of **worship** to his status as the creator. After all, since creation has been completed, why should one bother with Brahma, whose work is done? In the **puranas**, texts on Hindu mythology, this lack of worship is usually ascribed to a **curse**—sometimes by the god Shiva but in other stories by the sage **Bhrgu**.

## Brahmacharin

("seeker of **Brahman**") A term with several possible meanings depending on the context. In the **dharma literature**, which gives instruction on religious duties, a brahmacharin is a person in a period of religious study. This period is the first of the four ashramas ("**stages of life**") of a **twice-born** man, that is, a man born into one of three groups in Indian society: **brahmin**, **kshatriya**, or **vaishya**. Such men are eligible to receive the adolescent religious **initiation** known as the "second birth." According to the ideal, after his initiation and adornment with the **sacred thread**—the most visible sign of a twice-born man—the brahmacharin shall live in his **guru's** household and study the **Veda**, the oldest Hindu religious text, in addition to performing other religious acts. Since brahmacharins are focused on gaining religious knowledge, this is supposed to be a very austere time of life marked by strict **celibacy**, hard work, service to the teacher, meticulous observance of all religious rites, and avoidance of luxuries such as beds, cosmetics, and bodily ornaments. Once this period of study is over, the student will marry and enter the second ashrama, that of the householder. The system described in the dharma literature is an idealized model, and one cannot be sure that it was ever strictly followed. Although many contemporary brahmin boys still undergo the "second birth," other elements—such as the **ascetic** lifestyle and emphasis on the study of the Veda—are largely ignored in contemporary times.

Some of the term's original meaning remains in an ascetic context.

*Brahmacharin* can also be defined as a novice or junior monk, whose duty is to serve and learn from the senior monks, or as the name of two particular ascetic groups. One of these groups is the prestigious **Swaminarayan sect**, whose members are recruited solely from the **caste** of brahmins. The other is an organization called the Brahmachari **Sanyasis**, devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva** who are distinct from the **Dashanami** Sanyasis. The Brahmachari Sanyasis have an **ashram** on Mount **Girnar** and in the bathing (**snana**) festival known as the **Kumbha Mela**, the Brahmachari **Naga** (fighting) Sanyasis have a recognized place among the other Naga groups. For further information see G. S. Ghurye, *Indian Sadhus*, 1964.

## Brahmacharya

("going after **Brahman**") In its most traditional sense, this word refers to the lifestyle of a young man belonging to a particular class during his life as a student (**brahmacharin**). This period is the first of the four ashramas ("**stages of life**") of a **twice-born** man, that is, a man born into one of three groups in Indian society: **brahmin**, **kshatriya**, or **vaishya**. Such men are eligible to receive the adolescent religious **initiation** known as the "second birth." His life as a student will then commence, and he will move into his **guru's** household and study the sacred texts, the **Vedas**. This is conceived as a period of intense study, religious practice, and an austere lifestyle marked by the restraint of desires, for which the hallmark is **celibacy**. Although the model of the four ashramas is largely archaic in modern times, the word *brahmacharya* still connotes this sort of austere religious lifestyle, and it is often used as a synonym for celibacy.

## Brahmahatya

("**brahmin** murder") In the **dharma literature**, which gives instruction on religious duties, brahmahatya is one of the

**four great crimes** that makes one an outcast from society. This crime's seriousness stems from notions of brahmin sanctity and status; with the exception of self-defense, the deliberate murder of a brahmin holds serious repercussions. Even the gods are subject to this act's negative karmic consequences. Hindu mythology records that the god **Bhairava** wanders the **earth** for years after cutting off one of the heads of the god **Brahma**. The skull sticks to his hand as a visible sign of his crime until it finally falls off at **Kapalamochana**. In the more lenient prescriptions in the dharma literature, the punishment for a brahmin murderer is parallel to that of Bhairava. The murderer has to carry the skull of the dead man for twelve years, wearing only a rough garment to cover his loins, and during that period he has to live on alms, **begging** at no more than seven houses per **day**. After twelve years he is deemed pure, unless the murder was intentional, in which case the term of punishment is doubled. According to several commentators, however, when a brahmin is intentionally murdered by a **kshatriya**, **vaishya**, or **shudra**, the only possible expiation (**prayashchitta**) is death.

## Brahma Kumaris

Modern Hindu religious organization founded in the 1930s by a Sindhi jeweler named Dada Lekhraj. In 1947, after the partition of British India into India and Pakistan, the organization relocated its headquarters from Sindh (in modern Pakistan) to Mount Abu in the Indian state of **Rajasthan**. Although the sect has only about 100,000 members—minuscule by Hindu standards—it is noteworthy for several reasons. Unlike most Hindus, the Brahma Kumaris aggressively seeks out and converts new members, and thus it has a much higher profile than other religious sects. The organization preaches a doctrine foretelling the imminent end of the world, which must be prepared for by radical **asceticism**. It is also noteworthy that
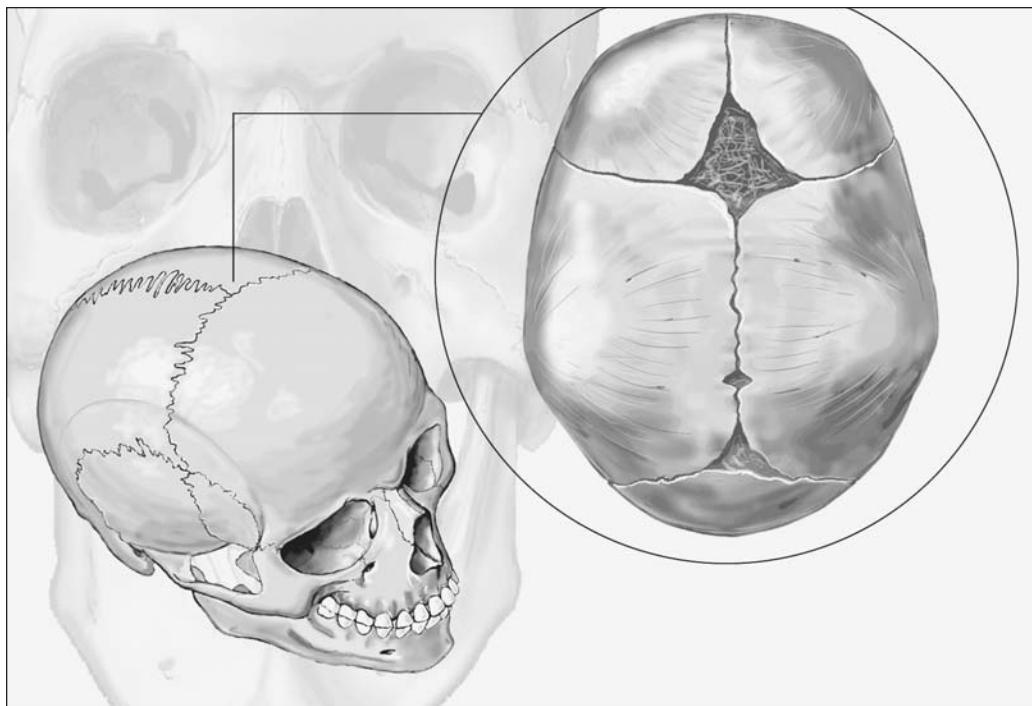
since its beginning, the majority of its adherents have been **women**.

The movement began following a series of apocalyptic visions by Dada Lekhraj. These visions not only convinced him of the coming tribulation but also reinforced his conviction that a human being's real identity lay not in the body but in the soul. This latter realization resulted in the organization's adoption of complete **celibacy**. When this ideal was adopted by some of his young women followers, it initially led to a tremendous uproar, because they renounced their primary traditional roles as wives and mothers. The movement persisted despite these troubles, which bound the followers together even more tightly. By the time Dada Lekhraj died in 1969, the movement had developed a strong missionary bent. All of these factors make it unusual and, in the eyes of many ordinary Hindus, marginal and suspicious. For further information see Lawrence Babb, *Redemptive Encounters*, 1987.

## Brahma Marriage

One of the eight ways to perform a marriage according to the **Dharma Shastras**, the treatises on religious duty (**dharma**). In a **Brahma** marriage the bride's father gives away his **daughter**, along with any ornaments he can afford, to a learned man of good character. This man is respectfully invited to accept her with absolutely no conditions or fees. This form is considered the most suitable for **Brahmans** because it is free from lust or any sort of financial inducements, hence the name *Brahma marriage*. For these reasons it is also deemed the best of the four approved (prashasta) forms of marriage.

The Brahma marriage is one of the two forms practiced in modern India. It is by far the more socially respectable, since the **asura marriage**—in which the groom gives money to the bride and her family—carries the connotation of selling the bride. Yet even with the Brahma

After death, a liberated person's soul is believed to escape through an opening in the skull
called the brahmarandhra. This is thought to correspond to the fontanel,
an opening in an infant's skull (right) that closes in adulthood (left).

marriage, there has been significant divergence from the classically mandated form. In many modern Indian weddings, it has become common for the bride's family to give the groom's family a **dowry** as a condition for the marriage, which can easily be interpreted as selling the groom. See also **marriage, eight classical forms**, and **prashasta marriages**.

## Brahma Muhurta

("time of **Brahma**") The forty-eight-minute period (**muhurta**) immediately before sunrise, which is thought to be the most auspicious time of the **day**. This **auspiciousness** makes it the best time for **worship**, meditation, or any type of religious practice; serious spiritual aspirants rise before it begins so that they may take full advantage of the time.

## Brahman

In its first appearances in the **Rg Veda**, the earliest text in the sacred literature known as the **Vedas**, the term *Brahman* both denotes the power inherent in, and gives potency to, the sacred word. In the **Brahmana** literature, one of the later strands in the Vedas, *brahman* was the name for one of the four types of priests who officiated at a **sacrifice** (the others being **hotr**, **udgatr**, and **adhvaryum**). In the **Upanishads** and afterward, *Brahman* is the generally accepted term for the highest reality in the universe, which is both the material cause and the final cause of all that exists. In the worldview of the Upanishads, the speculative and most recent texts in the Vedas, Brahman is the single binding unity behind the world's apparent diversity. These texts also affirm Brahman's identity with **atman**, the individual soul, and thus the identity of the essence of macrocosm and microcosm. As described in many of the Upanishads and later systematized by the philosopher **Shankaracharya** (9th c.), the ultimate form of Brahman is without qualities (**nirguna**), formless, nameless, indefinable, and grammatically a neuter

noun. In contrast, particular **deities** are seen as lower, provisional, qualified (**saguna**) forms of Brahman. This understanding was modified by the influence of later devotional trends, in which ideas of the highest Brahman became identified with a particular deity, who was seen as the ultimate source of all things.

## Brahmana

General name for the second literary stratum in the **Vedas**, the earliest and most authoritative Hindu religious texts. Although the composition of these differing parts of the Veda is not completely linear, the Brahmanas generally come after the hymns of praise to the gods known as **samhitas** and precede the speculative texts known as the **Aranyakas** and the **Upanishads**. In theory, each Veda has a Brahmana as an appendix, which is intended to give further explanation of the Vedic rituals. Although the **Yajur Veda** is the only one for which this is actually true, this understanding gives the Brahmanas the authority of revealed scripture (**shruti**) and thus makes them unquestionable. There are several different Brahmanas, of which the most important are the **Aiteraya Brahmana** and the **Shatapatha Brahmana**; the latter's tone and contents (including the **Isha Upanishad**) clearly mark it as the most recent of the Brahmanas.

The Brahmanas are primarily ritual manuals, and they give exacting, painstaking instructions for performing these Vedic rituals. These texts indicate a fundamental shift in religious practice, from the earlier emphasis on **sacrifice** as a means of invoking and pleasing the Vedic gods to an importance on the power of ritual itself. This new emphasis makes the sacrificial priests the most powerful people of all, since even the gods themselves are subject to the rituals. The power of correctly performed ritual paves the way for the Aranyakas and the Upanishads, which asks more speculative questions about the rituals themselves. At times these differing

religious genres are juxtaposed—as in the Shatapatha Brahmana, in which the Isha Upanishad is embedded. Such juxtapositions indicate that although the stress varied in differing types of texts, there was some overlap during the time they were composed.

## Brahmanda
See **cosmic egg**.

## Brahmarandhra

("aperture of **Brahman**") In traditional mystical physiology, an opening in the crown of the head—perhaps corresponding to the fontanel in young children. Although this hole usually closes up, it is widely believed that if at the time of death the departing soul can be channeled through this aperture, it will bring final liberation of the soul (**moksha**). The earliest mention of this idea can be found in **Katha Upanishad** 6.16, and exercises to facilitate this practice are stressed in certain varieties of **yoga**. The desire to open this aperture is the reason behind one of the actions sometimes performed during **cremation**. In many cases the pyre's heat will itself split the skull, but when it does not, a long pole is used to break it open in an effort to release the soul.

## Brahma Sampraday

One of the four branches of the **Bairagi Naga** class of **ascetics**. The Bairagi Nagas are devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Vishnu**, organized in military fashion into different **anis**, or "armies." Until the beginning of the nineteenth century, their primary occupation was as mercenary soldiers, although they also had substantial trading interests; both of these occupations have largely disappeared in contemporary times. The Brahma Sampraday traces its immediate spiritual lineage through the **Gaudiya Vaishnava** sect, founded by the Bengali devotee **Chaitanya**, but claims ultimate descent from the southern Indian philosopher **Madhva**. This latter

claim seems highly suspect, in part because the guardian **deities** of the two sects are different; Chaitanya and his followers **worship** the gods **Krishna** and **Radha**, whereas Madhva and his followers worship **Lakshmi**-Narayan. There are also differences in their observances. Although the Madhva ascetics have a long history in southern India, they have virtually no presence in the north, where the Chaitanyite ascetics are well represented. Ghurye speculates that this claim is based on the desire of the Gaudiya Vaishnavas to establish ties to an ancient lineage; this would give them an unassailable identity and thus a place in the bathing (**snana**) procession at religious festival **Kumbha Mela**. See G. S. Ghurye, *Indian Sadhus*, 1964.

## Brahmasutra Bhashya

A commentary (**bhashya**) written by the philosopher **Shankaracharya** on **Badarayana's Brahma Sutras**, a collection of 555 brief aphorisms (**sutras**) that form the basis for the philosophical school known as **Vedanta**. This commentary is the defining text for the **Advaita Vedanta** school of Indian **philosophy**. Shankaracharya begins his investigation by establishing the Self as the basis of all knowledge, since the one thing that can never be doubted is the reality of the one who knows. He identifies this knowing consciousness as the eternal Self, or **atman**, which never changes over time despite the vicissitudes of the physical bodies it inhabits. According to Shankaracharya, the perceivable world is clearly subject to change and thus is not the Absolute Reality, which the philosopher identifies as the unqualified, unchanging **Brahman**. Following the **Upanishads**, Shankaracharya identifies atman as identical to Brahman. He states that for human beings the reason for both unhappiness and the bondage of the soul is the ignorance of this relationship, which causes one to mistake this perceivable reality for the Ultimate Reality. With the destruction of this mistaken understanding, all bonds are broken, and the person attains final liberation.

## Brahma Sutras

Variant name for **Badarayana's Vedanta Sutras**, which date from the third to the fifth century B.C.E. This collection of 555 brief aphorisms (**sutras**) is the basis for the philosophical school known as **Vedanta**, so named because it claims to reveal the ultimate meaning of the religious scriptures known as the **Vedas**. They are given the name Brahma Sutras because they attempt to summarize and systematize the philosophic and religious ideas in the speculative texts known as the **Upanishads**, particularly the ideas about the Ultimate Reality known as **Brahman**. The sutras are so brief that they presuppose commentary, of which the most famous is the *Brahmasutra Bhashya*, written by the philosopher **Shankaracharya**.

## Brahmayajna

("**sacrifice** to **Brahman**") One of the five great sacrifices (**panchamahayajna**) prescribed in the texts on religious duty (**Dharma Shastras**). These five great sacrifices are prescribed daily religious observances for a "**twice-born**" householder, that is, a householder who has been born into one of three groups in Indian society—**brahmin**, **kshatriya**, or **vaishya**. Such men are eligible for the adolescent religious **initiation** known as the "second birth." Each of the five sacrifices (**yajna**) is directed toward a different class of beings, from the Ultimate Reality down to **animals**, and is satisfied by different actions. The brahmayajna is directed toward the Ultimate Reality (Brahman) and is satisfied by teaching and studying the **Vedas**, the oldest Hindu religious texts. In the time since the Dharma Shastras were composed, Hindu life has undergone significant change, but many brahmins still study the Veda—if not daily, at some point in their youth.

## Brahmi

The most commonly used script in the **inscriptions** of the emperor **Ashoka** (r. 269–232 B.C.E.), the greatest figure in the **Maurya dynasty**. Ashoka's empire encompassed all of the subcontinent except the deepest parts of southern India and went west into modern Afghanistan. Brahmi script was used in all regions of the Mauryan empire except in the northwest, where the **Kharoshthi** script was used. Ashoka's **rock edicts** and **pillar edicts** are the earliest significant Indian written documents and give invaluable information about contemporary social, political, and religious life. Brahmi is the ancestor of the modern Indian scripts, including **Devanagari**. It is also the ultimate source for all indigenous southeast Asian alphabets, which developed from trade with southern India in the early medieval period. Over the course of time, Brahmi was replaced by later scripts, was forgotten, and became unreadable. Although Ashoka's inscriptions ensured that Europeans were aware of Brahmi, their content was a mystery until 1837, when **James Prinsep** deciphered the Brahmi alphabet by working backward from later, known scripts.

## Brahmin

In the traditional Hindu theory of the four major social groups (**varnas**), the brahmins are the group with the highest status, based on the belief that they are purer than all others. This belief is based on the creation story known as the **Purusha Sukta**, in which the brahmins are created from the Primeval Man's mouth. The mouth is part of the head and thus the highest part of the body, and it is also associated with speech, one of the definitively human faculties. From the earliest Hindu recorded history, brahmins have been associated with speech and the sacred word; they were the scholars, priests, ritual technicians, and protectors of sacred learning. This is still true in modern times, although there are also many brahmins who have other occupations, such as trade, business, and government service.

Aside from their traditional association with sacred learning, their other source of social status is their ritual **purity**, which is believed to be greater than that of all other human beings. This ritual purity is inherent, conferred by **birth**. According to tradition, even an uneducated brahmin should be considered a "god on **earth**," whereas a learned brahmin is more sacred still. This ritual purity makes brahmins preferable for service to many of the gods of the Hindu pantheon, since they are considered the best intermediaries to "insulate" the **deities** from ordinary people. Although brahmins as a whole have the highest status, within the brahmin community there are highly defined subgroups (**jatis**), which are often defined by region of origin.

## Brahmo Samaj

The earliest of the Hindu reform groups, founded in Calcutta in the early nineteenth century by **Ram Mohan Roy** (1774–1833). His purpose was to purge contemporary Hinduism of its "corrupt" practices, such as **sati** (**widow** burning), the ban on widow remarriage, image **worship**, and **caste**. In his effort to find a traditional authority for such reforms, he chose the **Upanishads** as his key religious texts. After his death the movement was eventually headed by Debendranath Tagore (father of the Nobel laureate **Rabindranath Tagore**) and later by **Keshub Chander Sen**; disagreements over ritual matters split the movement under both leaders. By the late 1800s the Samaj's influence had largely passed, although in an interesting twist, it became the vehicle through which the mystic **Ramakrishna** met many of his disciples.

The Brahmo Samaj's social program reflected and responded to contemporary European critiques of popular Hinduism, some levied by Christian

missionaries and others based on the rationalist emphasis of the Enlightenment. The Brahmo Samaj's openness put it at the forefront of legal reform—in particular, influencing the 1829 law banning sati. But at the same time, its members were mostly Westernized urban intellectuals, far removed from the life and religious concerns of Hindus. For further information see Spencer Lavan, "The Brahmo Samaj: India's First Movement for Religious Reform," in Robert D. Baird (ed.), *Religion in Modern India*, 1998.

## Braj

Northern Indian region on the **Yamuna River**, south of the modern city of Delhi. According to Hindu tradition, Braj is the land where the god **Krishna** lived during his time on **earth**. The Braj region does not have clearly defined boundaries, and the name has never referred to an official administrative area. Instead it has been defined by popular piety. Krishna's devotees (**bhakta**) place great emphasis on visualizing his exploits as a way to attain communion with him, and thus places throughout the Braj region are associated with very specific incidents in Krishna's life. As it now stands, the southern and eastern borders of the region are just over five miles southeast of the city of **Mathura**, and its northern and western boundaries are nearly five times that distance. For extensive information on Braj and its culture, see A. W. Entwistle, *Braj*, 1987.

## Braj Bhasha

The "language of **Braj**"; a dialect of medieval **Hindi** primarily spoken in the Braj region, south of the modern city of Delhi. Braj is the land associated with the god **Krishna**, and the devotion that flourished there between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries made Braj Bhasha a major literary language. Aside from being the language of Krishna worshipers, it also functioned as a lingua franca—a common language used by diverse peoples—for religious devotees (**bhakta**) in a much larger area of northern India, although it varied at the borders.

## Brhadaranyaka ("Great Forest Book") Upanishad

By general consensus, the oldest of the **Upanishads**, the speculative religious texts that form the most recent stratum of the **Vedas**. The Brhadaranyaka Upanishad's chronological priority is supported by at least four pieces of evidence: its length, its lack of organization, its archaic language, and its relationship to earlier Vedic texts. The opening passage gives an extended comparison between the world and the sacrificial horse, showing clear parallels with the earlier **Brahmana** literature. Moreover, by its very name ("great forest book"), the Brhadaranyaka Upanishad clearly points to a transition from the **Aranyaka** ("forest books") literature, which followed Brahmana literature. This upanishad first addresses many of the questions raised in later texts and is therefore an important source for the development of the tradition. Unlike most of the later Upanishads, it is written in prose rather than poetry, with the instruction often in the form of dialogue between various speakers.

## Brhadeshvar

Temple built in the southern Indian city of **Tanjore** around the year 1000 B.C.E. by the Chola king **Raja Raja** (r. 985–1014). The temple is dedicated to the god **Shiva** in his form as Brhadeshvar (the "great lord"). It was built in the **Dravida** style characteristic of southern Indian temples, in which the buildings are of modest height but cover an immense area and are surrounded by a boundary wall with massive towers (**gopurams**) over each wall's central gateway. The Brhadeshvar temple is famous as a center for traditional arts and culture, particularly as a home for the **dance** style known as **Bharatanatyam**. It also contains some exceptional **murals**, an

extremely unusual feature in Indian temples. See also **Chola dynasty**.

## Brhannala

This was the identity assumed by **Arjuna**, one of the five **Pandava** princes, during the year they lived incognito after twelve years of forest exile. The Pandavas are the heroes of the *Mahabharata*, the later of the two great Hindu epics, which details the struggle for power between the Pandavas and their cousins the **Kauravas**. At one point in their struggle, Arjuna's older brother, **Yudhishthira**, has lost all the brothers' freedom and **possessions** to the Kauravas in a game of dice. As a penalty for this loss, the Pandavas have to go into exile for twelve years and spend the thirteenth year back in society, unrecognized. It is understood that if the brothers are discovered during that year, they will be banished again. Arjuna, the epic's most heroic warrior, disguises himself as a eunuch named Brhannala, knowing that no one will suspect him in such guise. He spends the year living in the women's quarters of the palace, singing and dancing as a eunuch. At the end of the year, still in his eunuch's garb, Arjuna takes part in a great battle in which he defeats the troops of the Kauravas.

## Brhaspati

In Hindu mythology, Brhaspati is a sage chosen by the **deities** (**devas**) as their **guru**, or spiritual teacher. Brhaspati is also one of the names used to designate the planet **Jupiter**, since in Hindu astrology this planet is the most significant, and thus the symbolic "guru" among the **planets**.

## Brideprice

The money the groom's family gives to the bride's family as a condition for marriage. This exchange of money for the bride is the defining feature of the **asura marriage**, one of eight recognized forms of marriage in the **Dharma Shastras**, the treatises on religious duty (**dharma**).

This form of marriage is considered **aprashasta** ("reprehensible") because of the implication of selling one's children. Even though it does take place in modern India, communities practicing this form have very low social status. In modern times, giving brideprice is an admission that the bride's family deserves compensation for the loss of a wage earner, implying that her labor is necessary for the family. In contrast, the higher-status type of marriage, the **Brahma marriage**, transfers both the bride and wealth (in the form of a **dowry**) to the groom's family with the understanding that both families have enough money that her paid labor is unnecessary.

## Brindavan

("**tulsi** forest") Small town in the **Mathura** district of the state of **Uttar Pradesh**, which is the town in which the god **Krishna** is supposed to have lived during his childhood. Although every place in Brindavan is associated with the life of Krishna and is full of temples dedicated to him, one particularly important place is the **Chir Ghat**, at which Krishna stole the **gopis**' clothes as they were bathing (**snana**) in the **Yamuna River**. (The gopis were female cowherds who were companions to Krishna during his youth.) An interesting architectural site is the **Gobind Deo Mandir**, built in 1590, which has a vaulted ceiling. This latter temple is also notable for its lack of exterior ornamentation, perhaps to avoid antagonizing the nearby Moghuls. For a description of the sacred life in Brindavan, see John Stratton Hawley, *At Play with Krishna*, 1981. See also **Moghul dynasty**.

## Bronzes

For most of Indian history, stone has been the preferred medium for creating images of the Hindu **deities** for **worship**. One of the significant exceptions to this trend can be found in southern India, primarily under the **Chola dynasty**

Depiction of the god Vishnu's Buddha avatar. Some Hindus claim that the Buddha was actually an incarnation of Vishnu.

(9th–14th c.), in which another important medium was bronze. The images were made using **lost wax casting**, which allows for great detail. They were cast in bronze with a high copper content, which tended to give them a greenish tinge as the metal oxidized. Some of the images are only a few inches high, albeit with exquisite detail, whereas the largest are over four feet tall and even today are the primary images worshiped in temples. These images were subject to the same established rules of construction (**shilpa shastra**) as stone **sculptures**. Despite this strict form, many of the bronzes are masterful works of art with a presence rarely found in the stone sculptures. Although images were made of all of the deities in the pantheon, among the best known bronzes are figures of the god **Shiva** as **Nataraja**, "the Lord of the **Dance**."

## Buddha Avatar

The ninth **avatar**, or "incarnation," of the god **Vishnu**. As the only attested historical figure (and one who clearly differed with the Hindu orthodoxy of his time), the Buddha avatar shows how the avatar doctrine was used to envelop and assimilate existing religious figures. Although this designation as an avatar was an attempt to appropriate a significant religious figure by projecting him as an incarnation of Vishnu, this attempt's

transparency can be seen in the differing opinions over this avatar. In the opening chapter of his **Gitagovinda**, the poet **Jayadeva** claims that Vishnu incarnated as the Buddha to condemn the **animal sacrifices** prevalent in Vedic times. Other accounts portray him as misleading the wicked by instructing them to deny the authority of the **Vedas** (which the historical Buddha explicitly denied) and drive themselves into **hell**. Despite being named as one of the avatars, the Buddha was never worshiped by **Vaishnavas**, and Buddhists themselves have certainly never accepted this assertion.

## Buddha Purnima

The **full moon** in the **lunar month** of **Baisakh** (April–May). Buddhists throughout the world celebrate this full moon as the anniversary of the Buddha's **birth**, enlightenment, and death. Although many Hindus respect the Buddha as a sage and religious teacher, he is not central to Hindu religion. Therefore, this is not a major festival, although this particular full moon is still named for him. More recently, the **day** of this full moon has been described as the best day of the **year** for bathing (**snana**) in sacred rivers, a practice that the Buddha would certainly have denounced. Given the **auspiciousness** connected with every full moon, this may be an effort to "take back" the day as a Hindu holiday by emphasizing a distinctively Hindu practice.

## Buddhi

This word refers to the mental faculty often translated as "intellect," but it carries connotations beyond mere knowledge. The buddhi is the intellectual capability for awareness, mental perception, and decision-making, and as such it is the basis for all cognitive thought. In the account of **evolution** found in the **Samkhya** philosophical school, buddhi is one stage in the evolution of the human personality and the external world. In the Samkhya account,

buddhi is the first faculty to emerge from **prakrti**, or "primal matter," and is also known by the name *mahat* (the "great one"). The mental processes facilitated by buddhi spur the development of the next stage of evolution, **ahamkar**, or "subjective consciousness." In more colloquial language, buddhi describes the overall quality of a person's mind, whether it is wholesome or unwholesome, sound or unsound.

## Bull

Although the **cow** is the Hindu symbol for motherhood, with all of the emotional baggage that accompanies it, the associations connected with bulls are not nearly so important. In a religious context, the bull is associated with the god **Shiva** because his animal vehicle is the bull **Nandi**, who can invariably be found guarding the door at Shiva's temples. In pre-modern times, of course, adult bulls were a relatively small percentage of the total cattle population, since most young bulls were routinely castrated to become the oxen that were essential agricultural work **animals**.

## Bundi

City and district in the southeastern part of the state **Rajasthan**, about 100 miles south of the state capital, Jaipur. Before 1947, when India gained independence, Bundi was a small kingdom. In the late seventeenth century, Bundi became a center for the **Rajasthani** style of **miniature painting**, perhaps by attracting artists from the Moghul court who were seeking outside patronage. Aside from the portraits and court groups characterizing this genre under the Moghuls, Rajasthani miniature painters portrayed Hindu religious themes, particularly incidents in the life of the god **Krishna**. Whereas some styles have flat, monochromatic backgrounds, the Bundi style shows an intense focus on nature, such as detailed depiction of the trees (usually banana trees) surrounding the subjects, in addition to flowers, birds, and lotus-filled ponds. For further information see

W. G. Archer, *Indian Painting*, 1957; or his *Indian Painting in Bundi and Kotah*, 1959. See also **Moghul dynasty**.

## Burial

Although **cremation** is the most common means by which Hindus dispose of **corpses**, occasionally bodies are buried. One such case is with the bodies of very young children, as if it is recognized that they never developed into real individuals. The only other people usually buried are **ascetics**, for which there are varying interpretations. One idea is that they are not actually dead but in a state of deep meditation (**samadhi**). In such cases the ascetic is often buried in a sitting posture because he is considered still present. Another reason for burying ascetics may reflect the general assumption that renouncing the world had made them "dead" to it, making further ceremonies unnecessary. Indeed, one part of some ascetic **initiations** is to perform one's own funeral rites. Burial is often reserved for ascetics with disciples who will keep their graves as shrines. Those who are not buried are usually weighted down with rocks and thrown into bodies of water.

## Busti

("settlement") In its literal meaning, anywhere people live—a settlement, village, or community. In modern usage it has come to denote an illegal settlement, such as one built by squatters who have put up dwellings on vacant land using whatever materials are available, from brick to cardboard to plastic. At first, such settlements have no civic amenities such as **water**, power, roads, or sewers, and in most cases the living conditions are abysmal. In many cases such "slums" become people's hereditary homes, particularly in Bombay, where real estate is exorbitantly expensive. These residents have usually gained access to electricity and water, typically via illegal hookups. In rarer cases squatters have gained title to the land through exerting political pressure, after which conditions have generally improved.

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## Calendar

One of the most fundamental Hindu religious beliefs is that different times carry different qualities. Whereas some times are considered more auspicious and propitious, others are more inauspicious and dangerous. These judgments may either describe the general qualities of specific times or determine the proper time for carrying out particular activities. Thus Hindus have given considerable attention to organizing time and predicting auspicious moments. Many modern Hindus simultaneously use several different calendars, although they may use them for different purposes. To begin with, everyday timekeeping is done with the Gregorian calendar of the common era, which may reflect the influence of the British empire or, more simply, the influence of modern commerce and communications. It is notable that the only holidays celebrated according to this calendar are national holidays such as **Independence Day**, **Gandhi Jayanti**, and **Republic Day**—all of which are fixed on particular **days**. Beyond this there are many other methods of measuring time, some of which overlap with each other and some of which are found only in certain regions of the country.

Several of these systems are based on the movement of the **sun**. The most basic unit, of course, is the solar day, which traditionally begins and ends not by the clock but by the rising of the sun. The **week** contains seven solar days. The movement of the sun divides the **year** into halves, with the **uttarayana** period occurring when the sun is moving northward and the **dakshinayana** period taking place when the sun is moving

southward. There are also two separate versions of the solar year, each of which has twelve solar months. In northern India these months correspond to the twelve signs of the **zodiac** and mark the sun's passage through them. In southern India one finds an identical calendar, the Tamil solar year, in which the names of the months are drawn from the names of certain **nakshatras**, or signs of the lunar zodiac.

Whereas the solar calendar is usually used for astrological purposes, the lunar calendar is important for religious life. The lunar calendar is used to measure the two eras still used for dating history: the **Vikram era** (fifty-six or fifty-seven years later than the common era) and the **Shaka era** (seventy-eight years earlier than the common era). The lunar year is made up of twelve **lunar months**, each of which has thirty lunar days. Since the cycle of the **moon** is only about twenty-eight solar days, a lunar day is slightly shorter than a solar day. The lunar month is divided into two halves of fifteen days each: the "dark" (**krishna paksha**) half, when the moon is waning and that ends with the **new moon**; and the "light" (**shukla paksha**) half when the moon is waxing and that culminates in the **full moon**. In northern India the lunar month begins with the moon's dark half, and ends on the full moon, whereas in the south the reverse is often true. Since the solar year has about 365 days and the lunar year about 354, if left uncorrected each lunar year would begin eleven solar days earlier than the previous one. To correct this discrepancy, an **intercalary month** is added about every two and a half years. This helps to keep the lunar months falling at around the same time every year, although the celebration of a particular festival can vary by several weeks from one year to the next.

Almost all Hindu festivals are celebrated according to the lunar calendar. Some festivals' celebrations are associated with certain lunar days and thus occur twenty-four times in a twelve-month lunar year: The eleventh

day (**ekadashi**) of each half of the lunar month is sacred to the god **Vishnu**; the eighth day (ashtami) is devoted to the **Goddess**, particularly in her form as **Durga**; the evening of the thirteenth day (trayodashi) and the fourteenth day (chaturdashi) are sacred to the god **Shiva**; and the fourth day (chaturthi) is dedicated to the god **Ganesh**. The time for celebrating annual religious festivals is set according to the lunar month, the half of the moon, and the particular lunar day. For example, the god **Krishna's** birthday is celebrated on **Bhadrapada** Krishna eight, the eighth day of the dark (waning) half of the lunar month of Bhadrapada. The birthdays of many important historical religious figures such as Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh community; the Buddha, and the devotional poet-saints are also celebrated according to the lunar calendar.

These overlapping calendars mean that any particular day can be designated by several different markers: the day of the week and the day in the common era (as in many societies), the day according to the traditional solar calendar, and the day according to the lunar calendar. Depending on the context—business, astrological, or festival—any one of these may be given preference. See also **auspiciousness**, **inauspiciousness**, and **Tamil months**.

## Campantar

Tamil form of the name for the poet-saint **Sambandar**. See **Sambandar**.

## Caste

The best-known term to denote the traditional Hindu social structure in which groups are arranged in a hierarchy of status, usually based on the perceived **purity** of each group's traditional occupation. The word "caste" is actually derived from the Portuguese word for "chaste." The Portuguese observed that different groups in Indian society kept themselves separate from each other, particularly when **eating** and in marriage.

They used the term "caste" to describe this social phenomenon.

Among Hindus themselves the most important concept for social ordering is known as the **jati** ("birth"). One becomes a member of a jati by being born into it. The jatis were usually divided according to traditional occupation, which (in theory) would be performed by that jati alone. A jati's social status generally stemmed from the status of its occupation, and jatis such as latrine cleaners and tanners were thought to be defiled by their trade. Society as a whole was conceived on the model of the body, with the different jatis comparable to different body parts. While each part had a differing status and role, every one was necessary for the whole to function smoothly. These differences in status were marked and reinforced by strict rules to keep each group distinct from the others. The strictest regulations were in regard to marriage, and in earlier times members of a jati would marry only within that group. It was almost as if the jatis were seen as separate "species" of human beings that had to be kept apart. Marrying within one's jati is still the ideal, although there is now considerably more intermarriage than in the past.

The best-known model for ordering Indian society is that of the four major social groups (**varna**) described in the **dharma literature**: **brahmin** (priest), **kshatriya** (warrior-king), **vaishya** (merchant), and **shudra** (servant). However, the number of different jati groups makes the social hierarchy far more complex. A small village might have dozens of jatis, all performing certain tasks, whereas a city might have hundreds of jatis, some highly specialized. Even within the brahmin varna, there are different brahmin jatis (for example, **Saraswat**, **Chitpavan**, **Kanyakubja**, and **Kanaujia**). For other varnas the picture is even more complex. For instance, some jati groups fall between the vaishya and shudra varnas, and jati groups of humble status who have achieved political success may claim

kshatriya lineage. The same jati's social position can vary from region to region, depending on if they comprise a majority or a minority of the population or have status as a land-holding community. As in most of Hindu life, a group's status is usually influenced by local factors; in the past fifty years, such status determinations have also been affected by changes in Indian society, which have tended to relax social distinctions. For further information see McKim Marriot, "Hindu Transactions: Diversity Without Dualism," in Bruce Kapferer (ed.), *Transaction and Meaning*, 1976.

## Castration

Castration of human beings has been almost completely absent in Indian history, with the notable exception of the **hijras**. Hijras are male cross-dressers who dress and behave as **women** and have usually undergone self-castration as a ritual renunciation of their sexuality. Hijras are often homosexual prostitutes, and they are an established part of the decadent underside of most Indian cities. Their most important ritual function is to sing and **dance** at the houses in which a male child has been born, but they may also be called to perform on other auspicious occasions. Despite the hijras' associations with certain auspicious occasions, they are marginal to society and have very low social status. For a reliable study of the hijras, see Serena Nanda, *Neither Man Nor Woman*, 1999. See also **auspiciousness**.

## Causal Chains

The underlying ultimate concern in all Indian philosophical schools is to uncover and understand the causal forces that keep human beings enmeshed in **samsara**, the continual cycle of reincarnation. One of the ways that Indian philosophers attempted to do this was to formulate various chains of cause and effect detailing the process through which human beings become subject to the bondage of **karma**. By

understanding this process, they hope to be able to manipulate it, ultimately leading to the final liberation of the soul (**moksha**). The oldest causal chains were formulated by the Buddha and the Jains. In each of these theories, **avidya**, or lack of genuine understanding, starts the causal chain. In the Buddhist and Jain traditions, these causal chains can be broken by a religious discipline that begins with moral action and at more advanced levels involves meditation and wisdom.

Causal chains in Hindu **philosophy** have much in common with these beliefs, particularly the notion that avidya is the basic problem. In the **Nyaya Sutras**, the **Nyaya** philosopher **Gautama** propounded a five-fold causal chain: pain, **birth**, activity, defect, and wrong notion. Each of these elements is caused by the one succeeding it and is eliminated with the destruction of its cause. The **Vaisheshika** school, which was traditionally paired with the Nyayas, also used this model. The causal chain in the **Samkhya** philosophical school, as described by its founder, **Ishvarakrishna**, ascribes bondage to the process of **evolution**, stemming from the confusion between **purusha** (conscious spirit) and **prakrti** (primal matter). According to Samkhya, these two first principles are always separate from one another, but humans can confuse them. The **Yoga** school, traditionally paired with the Samkhya, used this model as well. The philosopher **Ramanuja**, founder of the **Vishishthadvaita Vedanta** school, proposes an evolutionary scheme similar to the Samkhya model, although instead of Samkhya's dualism, all things evolve from a single source, **Brahman**.

The only major Hindu philosophical school without a causal chain is **Advaita Vedanta**. All of the other schools explain the relationship between the Ultimate Reality (in most cases, Brahman) and the perceivable world with the doctrine of **parinamavada**. This philosophical perspective accepts the reality of the world as it is perceived and also assumes

that the changes in the material world involve the genuine transformation (parinama) of one thing into another, which can be explained by cause and effect. The Advaita school upholds a philosophical position known as monism, which is the belief that a single Ultimate Reality lies behind all things, which are merely differing forms of that reality. For the Advaitins, this single reality is the formless, unqualified Brahman. Advaitins explain the appearance of difference and diversity in the everyday world as an illusory rather than a genuine transformation of Brahman, a philosophical outlook known as **vivartavada**. This illusory transformation is caused by a quality of the human mind, which leads to the mental superimposition (**adhyasa**) of a mistaken understanding in place of the real one. For the Advaitins, as for all of the other schools, the ultimate problem is still avidya, or mistaken understanding, which must be replaced by correct understanding. Whereas all of the other schools give some importance to actions, the Advaitins believe that avidya is the sole cause and its removal the sole solution. For further information see Karl H. Potter (ed.), *Presuppositions of India's Philosophies*, 1972.

## Causal Models

In Indian **philosophy**, there are three different models describing the relationships between cause and effect: **satkaryavada**, **asatkaryavada**, and **anekantavada**. The first model, satkaryavada, assumes that effects preexist in their causes. Effects are thus transformations (real or apparent) of these causes. The classic example is the transformation of milk to curds, butter, and clarified butter. According to satkaryavada's proponents, each of these effects was already present in the cause and emerges from it through a natural transformation of that cause.

The second model, asatkaryavada, assumes that effects do not preexist in their causes—they are completely distinct. In the classic examples for this model, one creates a clay pot by putting together the two halves of the pot, or one weaves a cloth from strands of thread. According to asatkaryavada's proponents, with each of these acts, certain material and instrumental causes create an entirely new object.
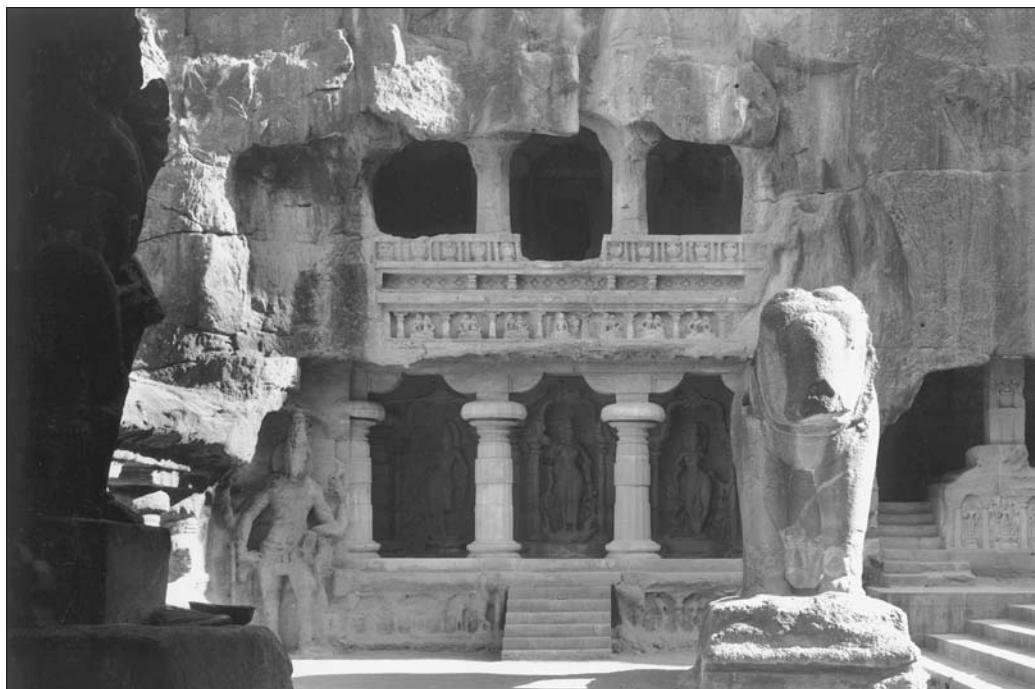
The third model, anekantavada ("the view that things are not single"), seeks to occupy the middle ground between the other two models. Anekantavada stresses the importance of one's perspective and the way it can color a judgment. In viewing the transformation of milk to curds, butter, and clarified butter, an anekantavada proponent would claim that these substances were contained in the causes (supporting the satkaryavada notion) but that the qualities of these substances were newly created each time (supporting the asatkaryavada notion). Thus causes and effects are simultaneously both the same and different, depending on the way one looks at them.

All of these philosophical schools believe that if one understands the causal process correctly and can manipulate it through one's conscious actions, it is possible to gain final liberation of the soul (**moksha**). Each of these causal models thus has profound implications on religious life. Satkaryavada believes that causal relations are strong, but they may be so strong that humans cannot affect the **causal chain**; the asatkaryavada believes that causal relations are weak, with the danger that human action is too unreliable to bring about a desired effect; anekantavada purports to find a middle ground but can be construed as inconsistent or self-contradictory. For further information see Karl H. Potter (ed.), *Presuppositions of India's Philosophies*, 1972.

## Cauvery

Southern Indian river rising at the base of the western **ghats** in the state of **Karnataka**, then flowing east through the state of **Tamil Nadu** before entering

The Kailasanatha Temple in the state of Maharashtra is surrounded by artificial caves sculpted into solid rock.

the Bay of Bengal. It is traditionally considered one of India's seven sacred rivers along with the **Ganges**, **Godavari**, **Indus, Narmada**, **Saraswati**, and **Yamuna**. Important sacred sites (**tirthas**) on the Cauvery include **Shrirangapatnam** and **Tiruchirappalli** as well as the Cauvery Delta in Tamil Nadu's **Tanjore** district, which is filled with temple towns. Since 1947, when India gained independence, the rights to the Cauvery's water have become a major dispute between Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. Farmers in Tamil Nadu have been demanding a more significant share of the waters impounded in reservoirs in Karnataka.

## Caves, Artificial

This was a common architectural form in the western part of the state of **Maharashtra**, particularly in the early centuries of the common era. The earliest form was the **chaitya** or rock-cut cave temple, which is specifically associated with Buddhist architectural sites. A chaitya typically had a large chamber sculpted into the side of a hill, usually with a Buddha image at the far end and a window above the entrance to admit more light. These caves were excavated and sculpted from the top down so that no scaffolding was necessary. The sides and central pillars were carved to mimic wooden construction. Early Hindu **architecture** adapted the chaitya form but eventually moved beyond it to construct free-standing temples. The most impressive Hindu rock-cut temples are the caves at **Ellora**, particularly the **Kailasanatha** temple (late 8th c.), dedicated to the god **Shiva** in his form as the Lord of Mount **Kailas**. The Kailasanatha temple was sculpted out of solid rock but carved to look as if it were built of masonry. This temple marked the height of the artificial cave as an architectural type, although the temples at **Elephanta** were done later. After this period, the emphasis tended to be on free-standing temples.

## Cekkilar

(12th c. C.E.) Author of the ***Periya Puranam***, a hagiographical account of the sixty-three **Nayanars**. The Nayanars

were a group of sixty-three **Shaiva** poet-saints who lived in southern India between the seventh and ninth centuries. Along with their **Vaishnava** counterparts, the **Alvars**, the Nayanars spearheaded the revitalization of Hindu religion in opposition to the Buddhists and the Jains. Both the Nayanars and the Alvars stressed passionate devotion (**bhakti**) to a personal god—**Shiva** for the Nayanars, **Vishnu** for the Alvars—and conveyed this devotion through hymns sung in the **Tamil language**. According to tradition, Cekkilar was a minister at the court of the **Chola dynasty**'s king Kullottunga II (r. 1130–1150 C.E.). Cekkilar was distressed by the king's admiration for a Jain epic poem and composed his own text to distract the king. His text portrays the Nayanars as models of devotion to Shiva, although they are sometimes extreme in their actions. Yet in every case, the love between devotee (**bhakta**) and **deity** manifests itself in the circumstances of everyday life, leading the saints to final liberation.

## Celibacy

In traditional Indian culture, celibacy was widely seen not only as a sign of sanctity but also as a source of power. On one hand, since sexual desire is often the symbol for all types of desire, renunciation of sexual activity is thus a sign for the renunciation of the world in general. On a more literal level, retention of **semen** through celibacy is believed to prevent the loss of a man's vital energy. In traditional Indian physiology, semen is believed to be distilled from **blood** and is therefore the concentrated essence of a man's vitality. Although semen can and must be expended for procreation, all other losses should be carefully weighed. Thus there are strong taboos on masturbation. This vital energy, stored and conserved through celibacy, can then be used for spiritual advancement. The paradigm for the celibate **ascetic** is the god **Shiva**, one of whose symbols is the **linga**, a pillar-shaped

image with clear phallic associations. Shiva is the model husband and the consummate ascetic. The linga represents his stored celibate energy, as the product of his **tapas** (ascetic practices). In the same way, celibacy is a way for human men to conserve their vital energies, whether one is a lifetime celibate (**naisthika**), a student (**brahmacharin**), or—as in many cases—a married man who has already had children.

## Chaitanya

(1486–1533 C.E.) Bengali saint, devotee (**bhakta**) of the god **Krishna**, and the founder of the **Gaudiya Vaishnava** religious community. Chaitanya was such a pivotal figure that there are many traditional sources for his life, although their hagiographic character makes them historically unreliable. According to one of these traditions, Chaitanya embodied Krishna himself. Krishna became Chaitanya to experience the longing of **Radha**, his beloved consort whom Chaitanya imagined himself to be. Thus, for his followers Chaitanya was conceived as Krishna and Radha in the same body.

Chaitanya was born in the town of **Navadvip** in the state of **West Bengal** and given the name Vishvambar. Traditional sources portray the young man as a gifted teacher but with no inclination toward Krishna. In 1508 he went to **Gaya**, a sacred site (**tirtha**) associated with rites for the dead, to perform rites for his dead father. In Gaya, Vishvambar met his teacher, **Ishvara Puri**, and something profound happened there, for he returned to Navadvip a passionate devotee of Krishna. On his return, Vishvambar began to hold the public **kirtan** (devotional chanting) that has become the hallmark of the Gaudiya Vaishnava school. Devotees sang and danced in the streets and wept uncontrollably. Through this ecstatic emotional **worship**, they sought to regain the devotional atmosphere associated with the **gopis**, Krishna's cowherd **women**, and thus

share in the gopis' intimate relationship with Krishna.

In 1510 Vishvambar formally became an **ascetic**, taking the name Krishna Chaitanya, and for the rest of his life propagated the worship of Krishna. For much of that time, he resided in the sacred city of **Puri**. This was reportedly in deference to his mother, since she felt that Krishna's childhood home, **Brindavan**, was too far away. Despite his mother's wishes, Chaitanya did take several lengthy trips: a two-year tour of the holy places in southern India between 1510 and 1512, and in 1514, a trip to Brindavan, in which Chaitanya had frequent mystical experiences. After his return to Puri, he met the brothers **Rupa** and **Sanatana Goswami**. Chaitanya directed them to settle in Brindavan and re-establish the holy sites associated with Krishna's life. Driven by Chaitanya's charisma and ecstatic devotion, Rupa, Sanatana, and their nephew **Jiva Goswami** became pivotal figures in the development of the Gaudiya Vaishnava school. While Chaitanya was absorbed in his devotion to Krishna until his death, Rupa, Santana, and Jiva Goswami gave this devotion a systematic organization. For further information see Sushil Kumar De, *Early History of the Vaishnava Faith and Movement in Bengal*, 1961; and Janardana Chakravarti, *Bengal Vaishnavism and Sri Chaitanya*, 1975.

## Chaitanya-Charitramrta

("nectar of **Chaitanya's** deeds") A name shared by at least three separate texts, all devoted to recounting the life of the Bengali saint Chaitanya (1486–1533). The earliest was written by **Murari Gupta**, an associate of Chaitanya. Most of this text focuses on Chaitanya's early life up to his southern Indian pilgrimage ending in 1513, but it also briefly mentions his pilgrimage to the town of **Brindavan** in 1514 and his final return to the sacred city of **Puri**, in which he lived until his death. The second account was written nine years after

Chaitanya's death by **Kavikarnapura**, who freely acknowledged his debt to Murari Gupta. The final account was written by **Krishnadas Kaviraj** about ninety years after Chaitanya's death. Kaviraj's account focuses mainly on Chaitanya's later life, particularly his time in Brindavan. This last version is marked by the philosophical influence of Chaitanya's most important disciples, the Goswamis (**Rupa Goswami**, **Sanatana Goswami**, and **Jiva Goswami**), whose ideas were a major influence in shaping the **Gaudiya Vaishnava** religious community. None of these texts gives an "objective" biography; the works are hagiographies written by passionate devotees (**bhakta**). See also **philosophy**.

## Chaitra

According to the lunar **calendar**, by which most Hindu religious festivals are determined, Chaitra is the month in which the lunar **year** both begins (during the two weeks of the bright or waxing, half of the **moon**) and ends (during the two weeks of the dark, or waning, half of the moon, which precedes the bright half). Thus, the waning half of Chaitra ends one lunar year, while the waxing half that follows it begins the next lunar year. This month usually falls within March and April. This is one of the months of spring, and in northern India the weather is warm and pleasant at this time. The major festivals in Chaitra are **Papamochani Ekadashi**, the spring **Navaratri**, **Ram Navami**, **Kamada Ekadashi**, **Hanuman Jayanti**, and in **Tamil Nadu**, the **Chittirai** festival.

## Chaitya

("place of **worship**") A rock-cut cave temple. This architectural form is closely associated with Indian Buddhism but was also used in early Hindu temple **architecture**. The earliest chaityas were simple caves, but these grew more elaborate as the form developed. In its later stages, the builders would not only cut

out the side of the hill to make a cave; they would also sculpt pillars and other architectural details that mimicked free-standing construction. Another characteristic architectural feature was a ceiling carved into the shape of an arch. The true arch, built from the bottom up and used in Roman architecture, was not used in ancient India. A third common feature was a large window opening over the doorway to let in additional light. During the construction, the builders began removing stone at the top of the structure and worked their way down; this eliminated the need for any scaffolding during the building process, but it also meant that the builders had to work carefully to avoid mistakes. This construction method creates structures considered gigantic sculptures rather than buildings. The earliest examples are Buddhist caves carved into the side of the western **ghats** in **Maharashtra**. The form was later used to create Hindu temples, specifically at **Ellora** (in which the oldest caves are Buddhist) and on the island of **Elephanta**.

## Chakora

The red partridge (*Perdrix rufa*). According to popular belief, the chakora bird eats nothing but moonbeams. It is thus happy and content during the night but tormented by hunger during the day. In court poetry the chakora bird often symbolized a cultured and discriminating person who appreciates the finer things in life. In **bhakti** (devotional) poetry the chakora is often a symbol for a devotee (**bhakta**), since the chakora bird is said to be in love with the **moon**. Thus it is joyful when the moon is out but pines for it during the day, just as a devotee is blissful in the **deity's** presence and in its absence is consumed with longing.

## Chakra

("wheel") In Hindu iconography the chakra is the discus-weapon carried by several of the Hindu **deities**. It is often associated with the god **Vishnu** and is one of the four objects he invariably carries, along with the club (**gada**), lotus (**padma**), and conch shell (**shankha**). The discus was an actual weapon in the Indian military arsenal, and its sharp edges made it fearsome in close combat. Vishnu's discus (named **Sudarshana**) is even more fearsome in its power. According to tradition it was fashioned by the divine craftsman, **Vishvakarma**, from pieces trimmed off of the **sun**; thus it carries the power of the sun's blazing energy. The discus is also carried by certain powerful forms of the **Goddess**. In her charter myth, she was formed from the collected radiance of all the gods and received duplicates of all their weapons.

In the esoteric ritual tradition known as tantra, a chakra is a psychic center in the **subtle body**. The subtle body is an alternate physiological system that corresponds to the material body but is believed to reside on a different plane of existence. The subtle body is visualized as a set of chakras, or psychic centers, that are arranged in a column from the base of the spine to the top of the head and connected by three vertical channels. Each chakra is pictured as a multipetaled lotus flower. All tantric traditions speak of six chakras: **muladhara**, **svadhishthana**, **manipura**, **anahata**, **vishuddha**, and **ajna**; some traditions name additional ones. Each of these chakras has important symbolic associations—with a different human physiological capacity, subtle element (**tanmatra**), and with differing seed syllables (**bijakshara**) formed from the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet, together encompassing all sacred sounds. For further information see Philip S. Rawson, *The Art of Tantra*, 1973.

A shoemaker in Agra. Shoemaking and leather tanning are traditional occupations of the Chamar social group.

## Chakravyuha

("circular phalanx") A circular military formation described in the *Mahabharata*, one of the two great Hindu epics (along with the *Ramayana)*. The Chakravyuha was widely believed to be unconquerable because each person in the formation was protected by those behind him. During a battle in the Mahabharata war, **Abhimanyu** becomes trapped in the chakravyuha by his enemy. Because his father, **Arjuna**, is the only person who knows how to get out, Abhimanyu is killed.

## Chalukya Dynasty

(7th–8th c. C.E.) Central Indian dynasty whose capital was at Badami, in the **Deccan** plateau in modern **Karnataka**. The greatest Chalukya ruler was **Pulakeshin II**, who defeated the northern Indian emperor **Harsha**, stopping his southern advance. He also killed the **Pallava dynasty** ruler **Mahendravarman**, setting off a series of wars between the Chalukyas and the Pallavas in which each dynasty was able to defeat the other in battle, but neither was strong enough to retain control of the other's empire. Aside from the Chalukya dynasty based at Badami, there were two other smaller dynasties by the same name, both of which flourished between the tenth and thirteenth centuries. One of these later dynasties was in the **Gujarat** region, and the other was in the Karnataka region.

## Chamar

In traditional northern Indian society, the chamars were a **jati** ("birth") whose hereditary occupation was tanning **leather** and making shoes. The jatis were subgroups of traditional Indian society whose social status was determined by their hereditary occupation. The chamars were traditionally considered among the lowest of the untouchables since their work brought them in continual contact with dead **animals** and their skins, which are considered extremely impure. The most famous chamar is the poet-saint **Ravidas**, whose poetry focuses on the difference between worldly status and devotion.

## Champaran

Region in the northern part of the state of **Bihar**, between the **Gandaki** River

and the border of **Nepal**. Now it is composed of two provinces, eastern Champaran and western Champaran. The Champaran region is famous as the place where **Mohandas K. Gandhi** engineered the first successful **satyagraha** (nonviolent resistance campaign) against British rule. At the time, the province was largely agricultural, as it remains today, and most of the inhabitants were very poor. The farmers had traditionally designated a portion of their land for growing indigo to give to the landlords as rent. This arrangement was disrupted by the invention of a much cheaper synthetic indigo. The landlords responded by ordering the tenants to stop growing indigo but proceeded to raise the rent on their land, based on the traditional agreement that allowed them to do so if a tenant grew no indigo. The trouble began in 1912, but Gandhi did not arrive until 1917. After a campaign lasting nearly a year, the tenants won concessions from the landlords guaranteeing no further rent increases and a 25 percent rebate on the previous increases. For further information see Mohandas K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography*, 1993; a more readable, though highly partial, account can be found in Louis Fischer, *Gandhi*, 1954.

## Chamunda

Presiding **deity** of the Chamunda Devi shrine on the banks of the Bana Ganga in the state of **Himachal Pradesh**, and one of the nine goddesses whose shrines are scattered through the **Shiwalik Hills**. Although each of these goddesses has a separate identity, they are all ultimately seen as differing manifestations of a single **Goddess**. Chamunda's charter myth is drawn from events in the *Devimahatmya*, a **Sanskrit** text that describes the Goddess's several different forms and is the earliest and most important mythic source for the cult of the Goddess. The *Devimahatmya*'s seventh book tells how the goddess **Ambika's** anger takes material form as the terrifying goddess **Kali**, who

advances into battle against the **demon** generals **Chanda** and **Munda**, whom she eventually beheads. Since the shrine on the Bana Ganga marks the place where both Chanda and Munda were destroyed, the goddess is worshiped here as Chamunda.

The name Chamunda designates a fierce and dangerous goddess who has often been identified with the goddess Kali. In the poet **Bhavabhuti's** eighth-century drama *Malatimadhava*, the heroine, Malati, is kidnapped by devotees (**bhakta**) of the goddess Chamunda to be offered as a **human sacrifice** to her. The events in the drama reflect the ambivalence with which such powerful goddesses—and their devotees—have been seen. For further information see David R. Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, 1986; and Kathleen Erndl, *Victory to the Mother*, 1993.

## Chanakya

According to tradition, the chief minister of the founder of the **Maurya dynasty**, **Chandragupta Maurya** (r. 321–297 B.C.E.). As the king's counsel, Chanakya became famous for his skill in statecraft, and is believed to have been instrumental in establishing the dynasty. Under the name **Kautilya**, Chanakya is also celebrated as the author of the *Arthashastra*, the classic Indian treatise on the strategies and mechanics of ruthlessly efficient central government.

## Chanda

A **demon** general killed by the **Goddess** in the *Devimahatmya*, the **Sanskrit** text that is the earliest and most important mythic source for the cult of the Goddess. This text describes the Goddess in several different manifestations. The seventh book tells how the goddess **Ambika's** anger takes form as the terrifying goddess **Kali**. Kali attacks the demon armies commanded by Chanda and his companion **Munda**, and after destroying the armies she

beheads the two generals. As a memorial of this mythic deed, one of the names under which the Goddess is worshiped is **Chamunda**, as the slayer of Chanda and Munda.

## Chandas
One of the six **Vedangas**. These were the auxiliary branches of knowledge intended to facilitate the use of the **Vedas**, the oldest Hindu religious texts. Chandas was concerned with the study of metrical forms and verse, which were central to the composition of the Vedas. One indication of the importance of **meter** is that in many sources (such as in **Panini's** grammar, the *Ashtadhyayi*) the word *chandas* is used to designate the Vedas themselves. Aside from chandas, the other Vedangas are **shiksha** (correct pronunciation), **vyakarana** (**Sanskrit** grammar), **kalpa** (ritual instructions), **nirukta** (etymology), and **jyotisha** (auspicious times for sacrifices).

## Chandella Dynasty
(10th–14th c. C.E.) Northern Indian dynasty that in its heyday controlled much of the **Ganges** River valley and northern **Madhya Pradesh**. The Chandellas are famous for the magnificent temples that they built in the village of **Khajuraho**, largely between the eleventh and twelfth centuries. These temples have survived to the present, perhaps due to their remote and inaccessible location. They are excellent examples of the developed form of the **Nagara** architectural style and are world-famous for their astounding display of **erotic** sculptures.

## Chandi
("fierce") Epithet used for the fierce and powerful goddesses **Durga** and **Kali**. A variant form of the name Chandi is **Chandika**, and under this name Chandi is identified as one of the **Navadurgas**, the "nine [forms of the **goddess**] **Durga**" worshiped during the nine nights of the **Navaratri** festival. Chandika is the goddess

worshiped on the festival's ninth and final night and is thus the most powerful of these divine forms.

## Chandidas
(15th c. C.E.) Bengali poet and devotee (**bhakta**) of the god **Krishna**. In his poems Chandidas uses the conventions of **Sanskrit** love poetry to express devotion to Krishna, most often through the figure of **Radha** as Krishna's favored devotee and lover. His poems are still recited in Bengal and according to tradition were admired by **Chaitanya**, the Bengali devotee who was the founder of the **Gaudiya Vaishnava** religious community. Despite his poetry's continuing acclaim, little is known about the life of Chandidas himself. This same name was used by a Bengali poet of the **Sahajiya** sect, who wrote several centuries later than the original Chandidas and whose poetry is clearly distinguished by doctrinal differences. For selections from the poetry of Chandidas, see Edward C. Dimock Jr. and Denise Levertov (trans.), *In Praise of Krishna*, 1981.

## Chandika
A variant of the name **Chandi**, which designates a powerful and terrifying form of the **Goddess**. Chandika is one of the **Navadurgas**, the "nine [forms of the goddess] **Durga**" worshiped during the nine nights of the **Navaratri** festival. Chandika is the goddess worshiped on the festival's ninth and final night and is thus the most powerful of these divine forms.

## Chandiprakasha
("effulgence of **Chandi**") Name given to the spear that is the symbolic weapon of the **Atala akhara**, a particular group within the **Naga** class of **Dashanami Sanyasis**. The Dashanami Nagas are devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva**, organized into different **akharas**, or regiments, on the model of an army. Until the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Nagas' primary occupation was as

mercenary soldiers, although they also had substantial trading interests. These functions have largely disappeared in contemporary times. All of the akharas have certain symbols that signify their organizational identity, and the Atala akhara is represented by this particular spear.

## Chandogya Upanishad

Along with the **Brhadaranyaka Upanishad**, one of the two earliest upanishads, the religious texts that form the most recent stratum of the **Vedas**. Internal textual factors indicate that the Brhadaranyaka Upanishad is the older of the two, and since large sections of both texts are the same, the Chandogya Upanishad is thought to be dependent on the Brhadaranyaka. Both texts are also much larger than the other upanishads and much less organized, rambling from topic to topic without an apparent focus. Both are written in prose rather than poetry, with the text itself often presented as a dialogue between various speakers. Their profoundly speculative discussions about the nature of the universe became important sources for the later upanishads.

## Chandra Gupta I

(r. 320–35 C.E.) Founder of the **Gupta dynasty**, which like the **Maurya dynasty** had its capital in **Pataliputra**, identified with the modern city of Patna in the state of **Bihar**. The Gupta capital was later moved to **Allahabad**. At the height of the dynasty, under **Chandra Gupta II** (r. 376–415), the Guptas controlled all of northern India and modern Pakistan, as well as the **Coromandel** Coast all the way to modern Madras. The Gupta dynasty flourished between about 350 and 550 C.E., and its reign is associated with the development of Indian culture and a revival of Hinduism in northern India. Both were accomplished through the patronage of the Gupta kings, who are remembered both as patrons of high



Coins from the Gupta dynasty.

culture and ardent devotees (**bhakta**) of **Shiva**.

## Chandra Gupta II

(r. 376–415 C.E.) Third in the line of great monarchs in the **Gupta dynasty**, after his father, **Samudra Gupta**, and his grandfather, **Chandra Gupta I**. The Gupta dynasty reached its territorial peak under Chandra Gupta II. During his reign the Shaka kingdom of the **Malwa** region was finally conquered, after which the Guptas controlled by conquest or tribute all of northern India and modern Pakistan, as well as the **Coromandel** Coast all the way to modern Madras. The Gupta dynasty flourished between about 350 and 550 C.E., and its reign is associated with the development of Indian culture and a revival of Hinduism in northern India. Both were accomplished through the patronage of the Gupta kings, who are remembered both as patrons of high culture and ardent devotees (**bhakta**) of **Shiva**. This is especially true of Chandra Gupta II, since one of the major figures associated with his court is **Kalidasa**, considered the greatest of the **Sanskrit** poets. See also **Shaka era**.

## Chandragupta Maurya

(r. 321–297 B.C.E.) The founder of the **Maurya dynasty**. The young Chandragupta began his empire by

overthrowing the last member of the **Nanda** dynasty and occupying the capital in **Pataliputra**, identified with the modern city of Patna in the state of **Bihar**. From there he took control of the **Ganges** River basin, moved south into the region of the **Narmada River**, and then turned his attention to northwestern India, taking advantage of the power vacuum left by the recent incursion of Alexander the Great. In 303 B.C.E. he defeated Alexander's general Seleucus Nicator in battle, then agreed to a treaty in which he received large parts of modern Afghanistan. Despite the battle, relations seem to have been friendly between the two, for Seleucus Nicator sent an ambassador to Pataliputra, **Megasthenes**, who lived there for many years. Chandragupta was reportedly advised by a brilliant **brahmin** minister, variously called **Kautilya** or **Chanakya**, who is considered the author of the *Arthashastra*. According to legend, Chandragupta renounced his throne to become a Jain monk and eventually died through ritual starvation.

## Chandramati

In Hindu mythology, the long-suffering wife of King **Harishchandra**. Harishchandra is famous for his truthfulness and integrity; in modern Hindu culture he is also the paradigm for a person who patiently endures undeserved suffering. Harishchandra's suffering grows out of the competition between the sages **Vasishtha** and **Vishvamitra**. As his family priest, Vasishtha praises Harishchandra's virtue. Vishvamitra is determined to prove Vasishtha wrong and subjects Harishchandra to a series of trials in which he loses his kingdom, his **possessions**, and has to sell himself and his family into slavery. Through all of the trials he and Chandramati have to suffer, Harishchandra retains his integrity. After enduring many hardships, including the death of their only **son**, they are eventually restored to their original happy state, including the resuscitation of their son.

## Chandrayana

("**moon's** path") Penitential rite (**prayashchitta**) lasting for one **lunar month** in which the penitent's food consumption mirrors the monthly course of the moon. A person observing this rite begins by **eating** fourteen mouthfuls of food on the first **day** of the waning moon, then one less mouthful on each successive day until the **new moon** day, when a complete fast (**upavasa**) is observed. On each successive day during the waxing moon, the penitent eats one more mouthful, finishing at fifteen on the day of the **full moon**. This is a fairly severe penance, given the scant amount of food allowed in the middle of the month. In the **dharma literature**, this penance was prescribed as an atonement for certain sorts of sexual misconduct: sexual intercourse with a woman belonging to the same **gotra** (mythic lineage), marrying a woman belonging to one's maternal grandfather's gotra, or marrying the **daughter** of one's maternal uncle or paternal aunt.

## Charaka

(1st–2nd c. C.E.?) The attributed author of the *Charaka Samhita*, which along with the slightly later *Sushruta Samhita*, is one of the two major sources for **ayurveda**, a traditional school of Indian medicine. According to tradition, Charaka was the physician at the royal court in the city of Takshashila, in modern Pakistan.

## Charaka Samhita

Along with the later *Sushruta Samhita*, one of the two major sources for the traditional Indian medical school known as **ayurveda**. Although its authorship is attributed to **Charaka**, it is more likely a compendium from earlier sources, given its reference to several different medical systems and approaches. The underlying medical framework of ayurveda is the theory of the three bodily humors—**vata** (**wind**), **pitta** (bile), and **kapha** (phlegm). Although everyone has

all three humors, each of these is composed of different elements whose varying proportions are used to explain individual body types, metabolic dispositions, and personalities. Diseases result from an imbalance of these humors—caused by one's environment or personal habits—whereas equilibrium is the state of health. The *Charaka Samhita* has been edited and translated into various languages and has served as a source for secondary studies, such as Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya, *Science and Society in Ancient India*, 1977.

## Charanadas

("slave of [God's] feet"; 1733–1782 C.E.) Founder of the **Charanadasis**, an **ascetic** religious community. Charanadas was born in the town of Dehra in the princely state of Alwar (in the modern state of **Rajasthan**). The Charanadasis are also known as the Shuka Sampraday because, according to tradition, Charanadas received **initiation** from the puranic sage **Shuka**. Charanadas formed his community in protest against the corruption and worldliness of the **Pushti Marg**, the religious community founded by **Vallabhacharya** (1479–1531 C.E.), whose members are devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Krishna**. Like the Pushti Marg, the Charanadasis are **Vaishnavas**, but their patron **deity** is not Krishna alone but also his consort, **Radha**. Charanadas countered the Pushti Marg by stressing upright and appropriate behavior and an insistence on learning. His disciples translated and wrote commentaries on the **Bhagavad Gita** and the *Bhagavata Purana*, both important **Vaishnava** texts.

## Charanadasi

**Vaishnava ascetic** sect founded by the reformer-saint **Charanadas** (1733–1782 C.E.). Charanadas formed his own community as a protest against the corruption of the **Pushti Marg**, the religious community founded by **Vallabhacharya** (1479–1531 C.E.) whose members are

devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Krishna**. Like the Pushti Marg, the Charanadasis are Vaishnavas, but their patron **deity** is not Krishna alone, but also his consort, **Radha**. The Charanadasis have stressed both learning and an upright way of life. Their main center is in Delhi, as is the **samadhi shrine** of Charanadas, their founder.

## Charanamrta

("foot nectar") Literally, the **water** (or other liquid) in which the feet of one's **guru** or images of a **deity** are bathed. The disciple or devotee (**bhakta**) consumes it as a sign of subordinate status and as a way to receive **grace** and blessings. By extension, the word can refer to any liquid for devotees to consume as a symbol of the deity's grace, whether or not it has been used for bathing (**snana**).

## Charas
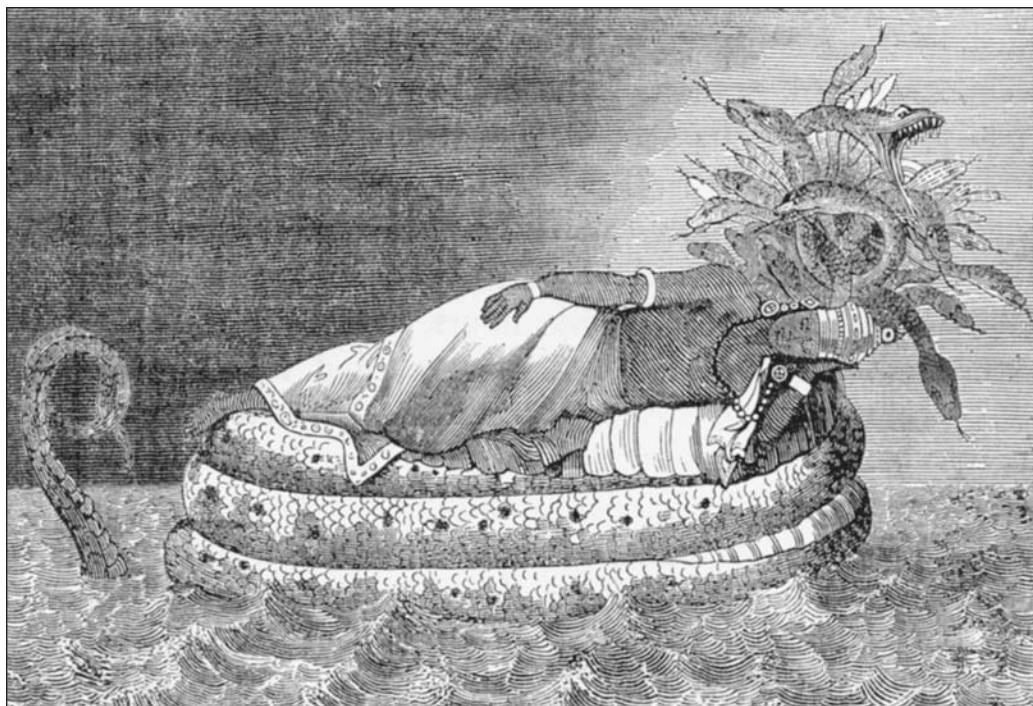
Name for hashish. This is usually mixed with tobacco and smoked in a straight pipe called a **chillum**. Smoking hashish is typical in certain segments of the **ascetic** community. For many ascetics, smoking is a social activity and a rite of hospitality as well as a religious act that emulates the god **Shiva**, whose love for the **drug** is well known. In their travels many ascetics process the marijuana that grows wild throughout the **Himalayas** into hashish to use and sell. Drug use is forbidden for most people, but among ascetics—who are deliberately marginal members of society—it is a fairly common and tolerated behavior.

## Charity

See **dana**.

## Charvaka

One of the traditional names given to the **materialist** philosophical school. Its primary assertion was that a person is identical to his or her physical body and is destroyed with the body's demise. See **materialist**.

Vishnu sleeping on a serpent couch. According to Hindu tradition, during the four months that Vishnu sleeps, the world is denied his protective powers and the Chaturmas Vrat is observed during this time.

## Chataka

In **Sanskrit** poetry and literature, the name for the **cuckoo** bird, usually invoked as a symbol of longing.

## Chatterjee, Bankim Chandra

(1838–1894) Bengali writer and Indian nationalist who was one of the major figures in the nineteenth-century revival of Bengali literature and in making the area a hotbed of opposition to British rule. As a young man, Chatterjee perceived how the influence of English language and culture was superseding that of Indian culture among educated Indians. He sought to reverse this through his writing and political activism by encouraging Indian intellectuals to rediscover their classical culture. He became a seminal figure in both literature and politics, paving the way for the poet **Rabindranath Tagore** and political activists **Aurobindo Ghose** and **Subhash Chandra Bose**. Chatterjee's most famous novel, *Anandamath*, focused on the late eighteenth-century **Sanyasi Rebellion**, in which bands of militant **ascetics**, both Hindu and Muslim, fought with the British East India Company for control of Bengal. Although historical inquiry attributes this conflict to social and economic tensions in contemporary Bengal, Chatterjee portrays it allegorically as a struggle by Mother India's loyal children to expel the British invaders. Chatterjee also wrote the words to "Vande Mataram" ("Homage to Mother [India]"), a patriotic song often described as the unofficial Indian national anthem.

## Chatti

A pilgrim shelter, particularly in the **Himalayas**. The word *chatti* is a variant form of the word for "umbrella" and was used because these shelters were often simply roofs supported by pillars, to keep the pilgrims dry in case of rain. Up until the middle of the twentieth century, many Himalayan pilgrims still traveled on foot and used a network of chattis along the pilgrimage routes. These chattis were eight to twelve miles

apart, an easy day's walk for younger pilgrims, yet manageable for the elderly. Each chatti was maintained by a nearby family, which would sell the pilgrims wood and food grains and provide them with cooking utensils. This arrangement brought income to mountain families during the pilgrimage season and freed pilgrims to carry only their personal belongings. The advent of paved roads and bus transportation has largely rendered this network obsolete, although it survives in certain place names, such as Janaki Chatti and Hanuman Chatti.

## Chatuh-Sampradayi Nagas

Collective name for four groups (**sampraday**) of militant (**Naga**) ascetics who are all devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Vishnu**. They all trace their spiritual lineage to a different **Vaishnava** religious community, each of which is connected with a major Vaishnava figure. By far the most populous and powerful of these groups is the **Shri sampraday** of the **Ramanandi** ascetics, which traces its descent through the poet-saint **Ramananda** to the southern Indian philosopher **Ramanuja**, whom they claim as Ramananda's **guru**. The **Sanaka sampraday** of the **Nimbarki** ascetics traces its spiritual lineage to the philosopher **Nimbarka**. The **Rudra sampraday** of the **Vishnuswami** ascetics traces its lineage through the philosopher **Vallabhacharya** to an earlier figure, Vishnuswami. Finally, the **Brahma sampraday** of the **Gaudiya Vaishnava** ascetics traces its spiritual line through the Bengali saint **Chaitanya** to the southern Indian philosopher **Madhva**. Each of these sampradays is differentiated not only by its founder but also by its patron **deity** or deities. The Ramanandis **worship** the god **Rama**, whereas the others worship the god **Krishna** and, to different extents, his consort, **Radha**.

Scholars doubt that these groups were ever actually connected to the people whom they claim as their founders. The distinctions among the sampradays appear to be largely academic. Given that the overwhelming majority of these ascetics are Ramanandis, the others seem important only for representing the other great Vaishnava religious figures. The distinctions between groups are only significant during the bathing (**snana**) festival known as the **Kumbha Mela**, at which they determine the order of certain groups in the bathing processions. For more information see Peter van der Veer, *Gods on Earth*, 1988.

## Chaturbhujdas

(late 16th c.) One of the **ashtachap**, a group of eight northern Indian **bhakti** (devotional) poets. The compositions of these eight poets were used for liturgical purposes by the **Pushti Marg**, a religious community whose members are devotees (**bhakta**) of **Krishna**. In the Pushti Marg's sectarian literature, all eight are named as members of the community and as associates of either its founder, **Vallabhacharya**, or his successor, **Vitthalnath**. Chaturbhujdas is claimed as an associate of Vitthalnath—an idea supported by references in his poetry—and is also said to be the **son** of **Kumbhadas**, one of the earlier ashtachap poets. In his poetry Chaturbhujdas presents himself as a companion to Krishna and his consort, **Radha,** giving latter-day devotees a picture of their daily routine.

## Chaturmas Vrat

A period of time spanning four **lunar months**, beginning on the festival of **Devshayani Ekadashi** (June–July) and ending on the festival of **Devotthayan Ekadashi** (October–November). The four months in between these festivals are considered ritually inauspicious, since during that time the god **Vishnu** is considered to be sleeping, and the protective power in the universe is less attentive. Thus people generally do not perform auspicious life cycle rites such as weddings during this period. This time also coincides with the coming of the **monsoon**, which is essential for

helping crops to grow but also brings danger from waterborne infections and venomous snakes. Chaturmas Vrat's inauspicious qualities and the difficulty of travel caused by the monsoon make this a time when wandering **ascetics** should stay in one place. Religious **worship** during this period tends to stress **rites of protection**, to shield one from these ritual and physical dangers. See also **inauspiciousness**.

## Chau

One of the classical **dance** forms of India; some of the others are **Bharatanatyam**, **Kathak**, **Orissi**, **Kuchipudi**, **Kathakali**, and **Manipuri**. Different forms of Chau are found in the border areas shared by the states of **Orissa**, **Bihar**, and **West Bengal**. In all three regions, the dancers wear masks (chau), making this type different from other classical dance forms. The expressions on the masks set a mood and conceal the dancers' faces. Consequently, Chau performers use their bodies and **gestures** to develop the moods established by their masks. The prevailing themes in Chau dance are drawn from the mythical adventures of gods and heroes, particularly the mythology of the god **Shiva**. For further information see Mohan Khokar, *Traditions of Indian Classical Dance*, 1984.

## Chaupai

("four-footed") Poetic form in northern Indian poetry. As its name suggests, the chaupai is made up of four lines. The rhyme scheme is *aabb*, which has led some to consider it a compound of two two-line segments. Based on the distinction between "heavy" and "light" syllables, each line contains sixteen metric beats arranged in a pattern of 6 + 4 + 4 + 2. A heavy syllable contains a long vowel or a consonant cluster and is counted as two metric beats; all other syllables are light and count as one beat. The chaupai is one of the most important **meters** in medieval **Hindi** literature, particularly for longer narrative works, and it is a significant meter in **bhakti** (devotional) poetry. Its most famous use appears in the *Ramcharitmanas*, the *Ramayana* retold by the poet-saint **Tulsidas**.

## Chaurasi Vaishnavan Ki Varta

("account of eighty-four Vaishnavas") Sectarian hagiography supposedly composed by **Gokulnath**, the third **guru** of the **Pushti Marg**, a religious community of **Krishna** devotees (**bhakta**) founded by the philosopher **Vallabhacharya** (1479–1531). It is more likely that the text was written by Gokulnath's disciple **Hariray**, who also wrote a commentary on the work. The text describes the lives of eighty-four paradigmatic **Vaishnavas**, all of whom were allegedly associated with the sect's first two gurus, **Vallabhacharya** and **Vitthalnath**. The text's primary purpose is to illustrate the importance of the Pushti Marg, particularly the importance of the Pushti Marg's leaders on these eighty-four religious figures. This makes it an interesting sectarian work, but it is not historically reliable.

## Chauri

A small whisk used to brush off flies and insects. The name is derived from the word for the long tail **hairs** of a yak (chamara), from which it was originally made. In ancient India the chauri was an emblem of royalty, and thus it is also often seen in statues of religious figures such as the **Didarganj Yakshi**.

## Chayagrahi

("shadow grabber") A demoness in the *Ramayana*, the earlier of the two great Hindu epics. Chayagrahi lives in the ocean and catches birds flying overhead by grasping their shadows in the **water** and pulling the helpless creatures down to her waiting jaws. This method brings her a steady food supply, but her big mistake is trying to capture the monkey-god, **Hanuman**, in this way. Hanuman

tries to leap over the ocean to **Lanka**, the capital of the **demon**-king **Ravana**, to search for his abducted mistress, **Sita**. Chayagrahi grabs him and drags him down, but he quickly kills her and continues on his way.

## Chera Dynasty

Hindu dynasty that ruled much of the modern state of **Kerala** from the second century B.C.E. to the eighth century C.E. The Cheras were in continual conflict with the **Pandyas** and the Cholas, the two other dynasties in the deep south, and were eventually absorbed when the Cholas gained control in the ninth century C.E. See also **Chola dynasty**.

## Chidambaram

("clothed in thought") Temple town in the South Arcot district of the state of **Tamil Nadu**, about 125 miles south of Madras. The town of Chidambaram is famous for the temple of the same name, dedicated to the god **Shiva** in his form as **Nataraja**, the lord of the **dance**. This temple is also renowned as containing the subtlest of the five elemental **lingas** (**bhutalingas**), the linga made from **space**. The temple is built in the classical **Dravida** style, with temple towers (**gopurams**) rising in each of the cardinal directions, and the walls enclosing the temple between them. The present temple was erected in the tenth century C.E., when Chidambaram was the capital of the **Chola dynasty**, and is reputed to be one of the oldest temples in southern India. As lord of the dance, Nataraja symbolizes the connection between religion and the arts. Nataraja is the primal dancer whose dance encompasses creation, destruction, and all things in between. Human dancers imitate him literally, by performing the dance positions he codified, and figuratively, by participating in a creative activity. The temple's eastern wall has relief carvings of the 108 basic dance positions (**karanas**) that are still central to classical Indian dance, particularly to the

**Bharatanatyam** school, which is the major dance form in Tamil Nadu. Nataraja also has a group of hereditary servants, the **Dikshitars**. According to their tradition, the **Dikshitars** were members of Shiva's heavenly host (**gana**) and accompanied him down from **heaven** when he took up residence in Chidambaram.

## Chidvilasananda

(b. Malti Shetty, 1955) Modern Hindu teacher and successor to Swami **Muktananda**. Muktananda taught a type of spiritual discipline called **siddha yoga**, the "discipline of the adepts," which stresses chanting, meditation, learning, and above all, devotion to one's spiritual master. Chidvilasananda is the current leader and preceptor of SYDA (Siddha Yoga Dham America), the organization founded by her teacher. During her childhood, her parents and other members of her family were Muktananda's disciples, and she spent much of her life in his service, eventually serving as his translator during his visits to America. She and her brother, Subhash (who later took the name Nityananda), were both designated by Muktananda as his successors, but her brother left the organization a few years after Muktananda's death. Chidvilasananda continues to travel between an **ashram** in Ganeshpuri, near Bombay, and ashrams and centers around the world.

## Childhood Rites

A collective name for the **samskaras** of early childhood, as specified in the **Dharma Shastras**, or treatises on religious duty (**dharma**). These rites include the **jatakarma** (**birth** ceremonies), **namakarana** (naming), **nishkramana** (first outing), **annaprashana** (first feeding), **chudakarana** (tonsure), and **karnavedha** (piercing the ears). Virtually all Hindu communities have ceremonies for ritually marking births and childhood, but few people perform

the rites prescribed by the Dharma Shastras other than **brahmins**. For further information see Pandurang Vaman Kane (trans.), *A History of Dharmasastra*, 1968; and Raj Bali Pandey, *Hindu Samskaras*, 1969. The former is encyclopedic and the latter more accessible; despite their age they remain the best sources for traditional Hindu rites.

## Child Marriages

Until well into the twentieth century, in many families it was traditional to marry off their children before the onset of puberty. An early marriage was deemed particularly important for **women**, lest they come of age before they were married. Some apologists claim that this practice evolved as a way to preserve the honor of Hindu girls against the depredations of Muslim raiders. Though this may have been partially true, such depredations were not widespread enough to evolve such a well-accepted social practice. Traditional Indian culture ascribes a much stronger sex drive to women than to men, and an early marriage would ensure that they did not disgrace the family under the influence of their irresistible urges. These marriages were possible because **arranged marriages** were the norm, as they remain to this day.

Many of the Hindu reformist movements that began in the late nineteenth century considered child marriages one of the "corruptions" of contemporary Hindu life and lobbied vigorously to forbid it. Modern Indian law sets the minimum age for marriage at sixteen for women and eighteen for men. These guidelines are often flouted, particularly in rural areas, where one still hears of marriages between infants. Although child marriages still occur, it is a very low-status practice in modern Indian society, associated with poverty, backwardness, and a lack of education. In contrast, men and women from the upper classes often do not marry until their late twenties,

after pursuing advanced degrees. See also **marriage ceremonies**.

## Child Widows

This term refers to girls who had been married as children and whose husbands (whether older men or boys their own age) died before the girls reached puberty and the marriage had been consummated. Although the lives of such child widows varied according to the status of their families, their lives were often quite grim, given the traditional prohibitions on widow remarriage and the strict behavioral codes mandated for widows. Reformers in the nineteenth century, such as **Ram Mohan Roy**, championed the drive to promote societal acceptance of second marriages for child widows. Due to the sharp decline in the frequency of **child marriages**, child widows are extremely uncommon in modern times. See also **marriage prohibitions**.

## Chillum

Implement used for smoking. The chillum is a graduated cylinder of baked clay that is usually about six inches long, which is about an inch in diameter at the top and half that at the bottom. A pyramid-shaped piece of clay is wedged point-down in the cylinder to cut down on the airflow. The top part of the cylinder is filled with tobacco, cannabis, or a mixture of tobacco and hashish (**charas**). Smoking is a communal activity in which the chillum is passed from one person to another. The bottom of the chillum is covered with a cloth called a **safai**, which is sometimes changed from person to person and is often dipped in **water** to mellow the smoke. Chillum etiquette holds that one should not place one's mouth directly on the bottom of the implement, which would render it impure. Because of this, the chillum is generally held between one's fingers, often in highly elaborate and symbolic ways. Among many **ascetics**, smoking the chillum is a part of daily life, a

congregational exercise, and also the act of emulating the god **Shiva**, the paradigmatic ascetic, whose love for **drugs** is well known.

## Chinmayanand, Swami

(b. **Balakrishna** Menon, 1915–1993) Modern Hindu **ascetic** and teacher. Chinmayanand became an ascetic under the influence of **Swami Shivananda**, whose articles Chinmayanand had first read while serving a prison sentence for his involvement in the independence movement. For several years he devoted himself to the study of ancient texts and became one of the leading authorities of the **Vedas**. Part of his legacy is the Chinmayanand Mission, which carried the abstract, intellectual, and peaceful message of the **Vedanta** philosophical school to the world. Another part of his legacy is the **Vishva Hindu Parishad**, a modern militant Hindu organization. He was one of its founding members in 1964, and for some years he was the only ascetic on its governing council.

## Chinmoy, Shri

(b. 1931) Modern Hindu teacher and missionary, who since 1964 has spent much of his life addressing Western audiences. His teachings are largely drawn from classical ideas on **yoga** and stress the importance of **vegetarianism**, discipline, and service to one's **guru**. His own lifestyle is austere and largely unostentatious, as an example to his followers. On one hand he is notable for his attention to the arts—painting, poetry, and music, particularly the bamboo flute—and on the other for performing prodigious feats of strength to demonstrate the power of mind over matter. He is based in New York City, although like many modern Hindu teachers, he travels throughout the world.

## Chin ("consciousness") Mudra

In Indian **dance**, **sculpture**, and ritual, a particular symbolic hand **gesture** (**mudra**) in which the tips of the thumb
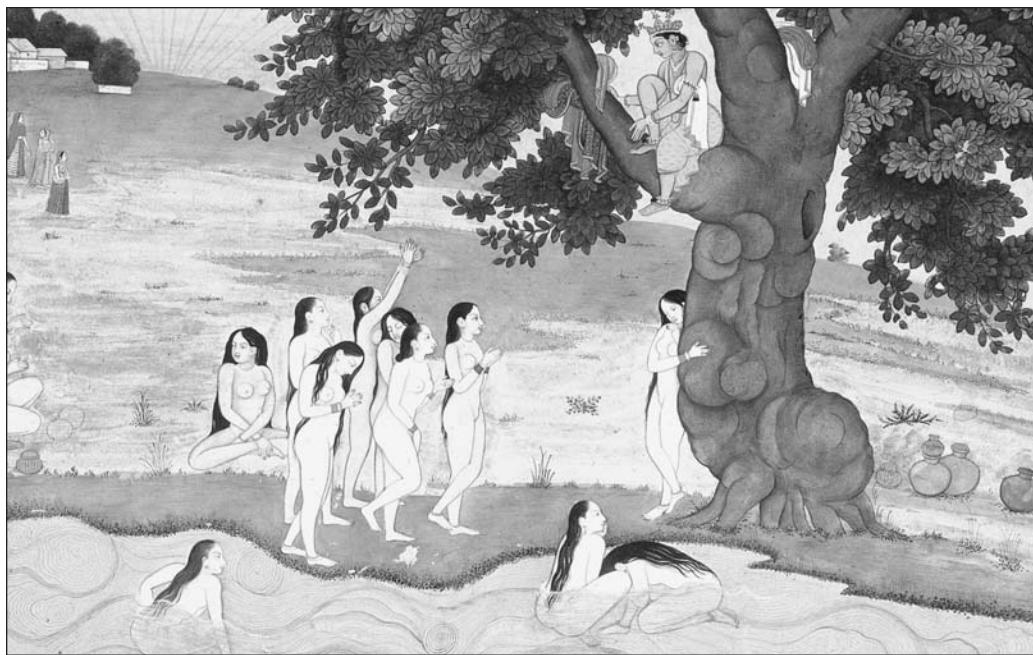
and index finger are touching, with the rest of the fingers extended and the palm facing the viewer. This is the hand gesture used to signify explanation or exposition. For this reason it is also known as the **vyakhyana** ("teaching") **mudra** and the **sandarshana** ("expository") **mudra**.

## Chinnamasta

("She whose head [masta] has been cut off [chinna]") Particular manifestation of the **Goddess**, one of the **Mahavidyas** (a group of ten powerful goddesses), and an important **deity** in the esoteric ritual tradition known as **tantra**. The image of Chinnamasta is one of the most striking in Hindu iconography: a naked headless woman often seated on a copulating couple, holding her head on a platter and gushing three streams of **blood** from her neck—two into the mouths of Chinnamasta's attendant deities and one into the lips of her own severed head. The story behind this figure is that Chinnamasta severs her own head to satisfy the demands of her attendants because they have not drunk their fill of blood in battle. This image graphically portrays the interconnections between nourishment, sex, and death and the power of the Goddess over all of these things. Although Chinnamasta is powerful, she does not have many temples dedicated to her. One of the most important is the temple of the goddess **Chintapurni**, identified as a form of Chinnamasta in the **Shiwalik Hills**. For further information see David R. Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, 1986; and Kathleen Erndl, *Victory to the Mother*, 1993.

## Chintapurni

("She who fulfills one's wishes") Presiding **goddess** of a temple in a village by the same name in the state of **Himachal Pradesh**. Chintapurni is one of the **Shiwalik goddesses**, a group of local deities in the **Shiwalik Hills** who are all considered to be manifestations

Depiction of Krishna having stolen the gopis' clothes while they were bathing.
This episode from Hindu mythology is believed to have taken place at Chir Ghat.

of a single feminine divine energy. Chintapurni is considered to be a form of the goddess **Chinnamasta**, and this temple is one of the few dedicated exclusively to her.

## Chir Ghat

("Clothing **Ghat**") A bathing (**snana**) place on the **Yamuna River** in the town of **Brindavan**, which is identified as the site for one of the most famous stories about **Krishna**. The story tells how the **gopis**, Krishna's female companions, have taken a religious vow to bathe each morning in the Yamuna during the cold months and dedicate the religious merit from this vow toward gaining Krishna as their beloved. Although their austerity is laudable, they are also bathing naked, which is taboo in Hindu culture. Krishna spies them in the **water** and climbs up in a tree with their clothes. He then refuses to return the clothes until the mortified **women** come out of the water to ask for them, symbolically demonstrating the nakedness of the soul before God and humans' inability to control the divine. A gigantic tree still stands by the Chir Ghat, which is believed to be the same tree from which Krishna humbled the gopis. As pilgrims recall the story, they tie strips of cloth to the tree to relieve the gopis' embarrassment and share in their feeling of communion.

## Chitpavan

A **brahmin jati** that is a subset of the **Maharashtri** brahmins, who were themselves one of the five southern brahmin communities (**Pancha Dravida**). Jatis were **endogamous** subgroups of traditional Indian society whose status was determined by the group's hereditary occupation. This sort of differentiation applied even to brahmins, whose role has been to serve as priests, scholars, and teachers. The core region for the Chitpavan brahmins is in western **Maharashtra**, particularly the coastline and the region around Poona. Although never very numerous, they were historically significant both as the chief ministers (**peshwas**) to the **Maratha** kings and also for producing some of the great figures in the struggle for independence: **M. G. Ranade**, **G. K. Gokhale**, **B. G. Tilak**, and **V. D. Savarkar**. Because this group of brahmins was largely located on the

Konkan coastline, they are also known as Konkanastha.

## Chitrakut

City in the Banda district of **Uttar Pradesh**, about sixty miles south and west of the city of **Allahabad**. In the *Ramayana*, the earlier of the two great Hindu epics, Chitrakut is the place in which **Rama**, the epic's hero, his wife **Sita**, and his brother **Lakshmana** live during the early part of their exile. It is here as well that Rama instructs another brother, **Bharata**, to rule as regent until the fourteen years of Rama's exile have ended.

## Chitswami

(late 16th c. C.E.) One of the **ashtachap**, a group of eight northern Indian **bhakti** (devotional) poets. The compositions of these eight poets were used for liturgical purposes by the **Pushti Marg**, a religious community whose members are devotees (**bhakta**) of **Krishna**. In the Pushti Marg's sectarian literature, all eight are also named as members of the community and as associates of either the community's founder, **Vallabhacharya**, or his successor, **Vitthalnath**. Chitswami is traditionally associated with Vitthalnath, a link confirmed by his poems written in praise of this **guru**. Aside from such explicitly sectarian compositions, Chitswami also wrote poetry in praise of Krishna, which tends to be more elaborate and uses more **Sanskrit** than his contemporaries. To date, his works have not been translated, perhaps because interest in them is limited to a small sect.

## Chittirai

First month in the Tamil **year**, corresponding to the northern Indian solar month of Mesha (the zodiacal sign of Aries, which by the Indian solar **calendar** usually falls within April and May). This name is a modification of Chitra, the fourteenth of the twenty-seven **nakshatras** in the lunar **zodiac**. See also **Tamil months**.

## Chittirai

(2) Ten-**day** festival celebrated in the southern Indian city of **Madurai** during the **Tamil month** of Chittirai (March–April). Madurai is famous for its gigantic temple dedicated to the **goddess Minakshi**, and the Chittirai festival celebrates Minakshi's marriage to the god **Shiva** in his form as Sundareshvara. According to mythology, Minakshi is a fierce goddess who vows that she will marry only a man who bests her in battle. She fights and conquers all of the kings of the **earth**, but when she approaches Shiva, she is suddenly and spontaneously stricken with modesty. The powerful warrior is transformed into a shy and bashful girl, and she becomes his wife.

Although the wedding of a goddess normally marks her domestication and subordination to her spouse, in this case Minakshi remains the more powerful **deity**. She is the patron of Madurai, with a temple dedicated to her, whereas Shiva is merely her consort. The wedding is celebrated with great festivity throughout the city, and one of the high points is the public procession of the deities around the city in the temple chariots. For further information see Dean David Shulman, *Tamil Temple Myths*, 1980; the festival is also the subject of a film, *The Wedding of the Goddess*, produced by the South Asia Center of the University of Wisconsin at Madison.

## Chokamela

(d. 1338 C.E.) Poet and saint in the **Varkari Panth**, a religious community centered around the **worship** of the Hindu god **Vithoba** at his temple at **Pandharpur** in the modern state of **Maharashtra**. Chokamela was born an **untouchable Mahar**, and he is the only untouchable among the Varkari saints. Despite Chokamela's deep devotion to Vithoba, his low social status prohibited him from ever entering the god's temple, since his very presence would have rendered it impure. The hagiographical

literature tells many tales where Vithoba comes outside to meet him. Chokamela's memorial shrine is at the steps of the temple, the same steps that marked his boundary during his life. It seems that Chokamela accepted the restrictions that came with his social status, but some of his poetry expresses social protest. For further information see G. A. Deleury, *The Cult of Vithoba*, 1960; and Eleanor Zelliot, "Chokamela and Eknath: Two Bhakti Modes of Legitimacy for Modern Change," in *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, Vol. 15, Nos. 1–2, 1980.

## Chola Dynasty

(9th–13th c. C.E.) Southern Indian dynasty whose ancestral homeland was the **Tanjore** district of **Tamil Nadu**. The earliest Chola capital was in the city of Tanjore itself, but was later moved to **Gangaikondacholapuran** under **Rajendra I** (r. 1014–1042 C.E.). The Tanjore district is in the **Cauvery** River delta and is extremely fertile rice-growing land. The Chola monarchs used this agricultural strength as the foundation for their empire. The Cholas were originally vassals of the **Pallava dynasty** but became independent late in the ninth century. In the tenth and eleventh centuries, the Cholas were the dominant power in southern India, controlling much of peninsular India and **Sri Lanka** and sending naval expeditions as far as Malaysia. The Cholas were noted for their public works, particularly the construction of massive temples in the Tanjore district and other parts of **Tamil Nadu**; one of the most impressive was the **Brhadeshvar** temple built by **Raja Raja** (r. 985–1014 C.E.). On a smaller scale, the Chola dynasty also patronized exquisite sculptures, especially **bronzes**. This dynasty's rapid rise was marked by an equally swift demise. By the middle of the thirteenth century, they had been attacked several times by the **Pandya dynasty** and were finally conquered in 1279.

## Chudakarana ("tonsure") Samskara

The eighth of the traditional life cycle ceremonies (**samskaras**). In the chudakarana samskara, the **hair** is shaved off of the child's head, although frequently a tuft of hair (chuda) is left. This is the last of the childhood samskaras, marking the ritual end of infancy, and it is still often performed in modern India, particularly by **brahmin** families. The timing for this rite is usually determined by **family custom** (**kulachara**), although in many cases it is performed when the child's age is an odd number (most commonly at one, three, or five years old). Since most Indian babies are born with hair, and hair is commonly believed to trap impurities, the chudakarana is seen as a rite of purification where the last of the residual impurities from childbirth are removed. As in many other cultures, this cut-off hair is believed to retain a powerful connection with the child. Traditional belief holds that in the wrong hands, this hair could be used to work black **magic** against the child. Given this concern, the hair is usually carefully gathered and disposed of, most often by putting it into running **water**.

## Chunar

Sandstone quarry about twenty-five miles south of modern **Benares**. This quarry is notable as the source of the stone for the pillars erected by the Mauryan king **Ashoka**. The pillars were set up on the major trade routes within his empire and were inscribed with royal proclamations known as the **pillar edicts**. See also **Maurya dynasty**.

## Churail

(perhaps from the **Sanskrit** word *cur*, meaning "to steal") Feminine malignant spirit believed to be the **ghost** of a woman who dies childless, in childbirth, or with her desires somehow unsatisfied. These frustrated desires lead such spirits to seek revenge by harming others,

particularly children, to destroy the happiness they were denied. For further information about churails and other unquiet spirits of the dead, see Lawrence Babb, *The Divine Hierarchy*, 1975; Ann Grodzins Gold, *Fruitful Journeys*, 1988; and Sudhir Kakar, *Shamans, Mystics, and Doctors*, 1991.

## Cinnabar

Common name for mercuric sulfide, which takes the form of red crystals or clumps. Cinnabar is important in Indian **alchemy**, particularly that of the mercurial (**dhatuvada**) school because it is a chemical union of the two elements representing the god **Shiva** (**mercury**) and his consort, **Shakti** (**sulfur**). According to Hindu alchemy, the world is a series of bipolar opposites in tension with one another. By unifying these opposing forces, one may achieve spiritual progress and the end of reincarnation (**samsara**). In Hindu alchemy this is done by physically consuming various substances. In this case, mercury is said to be Shiva's **semen** and sulfur Shakti's uterine **blood**; their combination and consumption is believed to spur the aspirant's progress.

## Collyrium

A salve for the eyes, traditionally made from soot, camphor, beeswax, and various fragrances. Part of its function is cosmetic—it is used to outline and define the eyes. It is also widely believed to have medicinal qualities that improve one's vision and heal various minor eye ailments.

## Commensality

This word refers to patterns of social exchange, particularly those associated with **eating**. In traditional Hindu society, the hierarchical status distinctions between different social groups were both marked and maintained by strict rules on exchanges and sharing. Traditional marriage customs illustrate the role of social groups, in which people married those who belonged to their own particular **jati** ("birth"), or social subgroup. Another arena in which these concerns were quite visible was that of food. Cooked food is believed to be extremely susceptible to ritual impurity (**ashaucha**) and can transmit impurities to the person eating it. To shield themselves from this source of impurity, groups with higher social status would not accept cooked foods from groups with lower social status. In contrast, lower-status groups would accept cooked foods from groups with higher status.

These concerns over maintaining social status set up certain eating patterns whose influence is still evident. Higher-status groups, particularly **brahmins**, would generally eat with members of their own community and only when a brahmin had cooked the food. For groups highly concerned with ritual **purity**, the best meal is one cooked at home by a family member, because this ensures the food's purity. Even in modern times, the most orthodox brahmins will eat food cooked outside the home only when it cannot be avoided. It is always considered preferable to eat food brought from home, whether one is on a long journey or merely at lunch in the office. Although in earlier times, the groups with the highest status would generally not eat with others, this custom has changed. Thus brahmin office workers may eat lunch with colleagues from many different communities, but they would never think of inviting them for a meal at their homes. For further information on the way that exchanges reveal status differences, see McKim Marriot, "Hindu Transactions: Diversity Without Dualism," in Bruce Kapferer (ed.), *Transaction and Meaning*, 1976.

## Conch Shell

With the end of its spiral removed, this was used as both a musical instrument and a weapon of war, since the sound of certain conch shells was believed to strike terror into people's hearts. This is

The architectural technique of corbelling was used to form the arched entrance to the Mukteshvar Temple in Bhubaneshvar.

one of the four objects invariably carried by the god **Vishnu** and thus one of his identifying markers. See **shankha**.

## Consecration

This term can refer to two different rites performed in the creation of Hindu images. One of these is **devapratishtha**, or "establishing the **deity**," the rites by which an image of a deity is constructed and established as an object of **worship**. The word *consecration* can also be used to refer to **pranapratishtha**, the more important ritual, in which the image is infused with the breath of life and becomes the seat for the deity.

## Coomaraswamy, Ananda

(1877–1947) Intellectual and art historian who was one of the first Indian scholars to address a predominantly Western audience. He was born in modern **Sri Lanka**, the son of a Hindu father and an English mother. Although he was trained as a geologist, by 1910 he had found his true vocation, the study of art.

Coomaraswamy was largely responsible for publicizing Hindu **miniature painting** as a genre distinct from the contemporary Muslim court painting. Due to the strength of this and other interpretive scholarly works, he became curator of Indian and Muslim art at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. He held this post from 1917 to 1931, and his catalog of the museum's collection shows painstaking and objective scholarship. In his later years, he began to publish works on aesthetics, myth, religion, and culture, focusing not only on India but also on traditional Europe.

## Corbelling

In the realm of **architecture** this term refers to the creation of a dome or arch through overlapping masonry courses. This technique was widely used in Indian temples, particularly those constructed in the **Nagara** style of architecture in **Orissa** and the rest of northern India. Corbelling was the prevailing method of creating the shape of an arch, since the true arch—in which each part is supported in tension with the others—was unknown in classical Hindu architecture.

## Coromandel

Traditional name for the southern Indian coastal region bordering the Bay of Bengal, in the modern states of **Tamil Nadu** and **Andhra Pradesh**.

## Corpse

In the Hindu worldview, a corpse is the source of the most virulent possible ritual impurity (**ashaucha**). Although Hindus accept death as an inevitable part of life, the dangers caused by a corpse cannot be ignored. The dead body must be appropriately handled, both to protect the living from danger and to help the deceased make a smooth transition to the next life. For this reason the last rites (**antyeshthi samskara**) are begun on the day of death itself. Among the earliest of these

rites is the **cremation** of the dead body, since the impurity will continue to affect those around the body until it has been consumed by **fire**. A second reason for immediate cremation is to get rid of a potential host for wandering spirits, who according to popular fears, can reanimate a corpse.

## Coryat, Thomas

(1577–1617) English traveler in India popularly known as the English **faqir**. Coryat came to India from Persia and spent several years traveling around the Moghul empire in northern India as well as residing in the Moghul court at Agra. Although at times his need for patronage made him play the role of a buffoon and flatterer, Coryat was a careful observer who was full of curiosity. He is believed to have been the first European traveler to visit the pilgrimage city of **Haridwar**, and he was impressed with the rites performed there. He is also believed to have gone into the **Shiwalik Hills** all the way to the temple at **Jwalamukhi**. Unfortunately, Coryat died of dysentery before he could record these observations, and the only available references to these later journeys come from his companion, the Reverend Edward Terry. See also **Moghul dynasty**.

## Cosmic Egg

(brahmanda) One of the traditional cosmological metaphors, which first appears in the *Markandeya Purana*. This text describes a single swollen egg floating on the **waters** of the sea of **pralaya**, or cosmic dissolution. When this egg is broken open by **Brahma**, its constituent parts (yolk, white, shell, and various membranes) form both the material universe and all the creatures in it. Although this account is clearly symbolic, it vividly expresses the Hindu conviction that all things have come from a single source, and thus the entire cosmos is an organic whole. For further elaboration see Cornelia Dimmitt and J. A. B. van Buitenen (eds. and trans.), *Classical Hindu Mythology*, 1978.

## Cosmic Time

In traditional Indian **cosmology**, time has neither beginning nor end. Instead it proceeds in unceasing cyclic alternations between creation and activity, followed by cessation and quietude. The universe thus has neither an ultimate beginning nor an ultimate end—creation will always be followed by destruction and then destruction by a new creation. Within the confines of this assumption, there are several different and sometimes competing systems for measuring cosmic time.

The largest generally accepted measure of time, spanning 4.32 billion years, is the **kalpa**, or **day of Brahma**. This is the ultimate limit for the existence of the created world, although within this period the universe undergoes periodic renewals. At the conclusion of the day of Brahma comes the universal dissolution (**pralaya**), in which the universe is completely destroyed and reabsorbed into the god **Vishnu**. The day of Brahma is followed by a night of equal length, during which the only living thing is Vishnu; the god sleeps on the back of his serpent couch, **Shesha**, which floats on the surface of the cosmic ocean. When the night of Brahma is ended, a lotus sprouts from Vishnu's navel. This lotus opens to reveal the god **Brahma**, who takes up the work of creation, and the cycle of activity begins anew. Because of his spontaneous appearance at the beginning of every cosmic age, one of the names for Brahma is **Svayambhu** ("self-born"). Unlike the Judeo-Christian concept of creation, Brahma does not create the world from nothing but merely arranges and fashions existing elements into a coherent and ordered cosmos.

The day of Brahma is broken up into smaller units according to various systems. By far the most common system is that of the four **yugas**, or cosmic ages. According to this idea, the day of

Brahma is made up of one thousand **mahayugas** ("great cosmic ages"), each of which lasts for 4.32 million years. Each mahayuga is composed of four constituent yugas, named the **Krta yuga**, **Treta yuga**, **Dvapara yuga**, and **Kali yuga**. Each of these is shorter than its predecessor and ushers in an era more degenerate and depraved. The passage of the four yugas begins with a time of sudden and dramatic renewal at the onset of the krta yuga, followed by a steady and persistent decline. Although the kali yuga is the shortest of the four ages, it is also the time of the greatest wickedness and depravity, in which any evil is possible. It is also, not surprisingly, considered to be the period in which we are now living. By the end of the kali yuga, things have gotten so bad that the only solution is the destruction and recreation of the **earth**, at which time the next krta era begins. Even though the kali yuga is the shortest age, it still lasts for 432,000 years, and the preceding yugas are two, three, and four times the length of the kali age. The increasing degeneracy of each of the four yugas is symbolized by the metals associated with them: gold (krta), silver (dvapara), bronze (treta) and iron (kali). Another indication is the status of human beings, who are said to become shorter, more wicked, and shorter-lived in each succeeding age. The paradigm of the four yugas leaves little room in traditional Hinduism for the notion of progress, since according to this system, things will never be better than they have already been. It idealizes a lost and unattainable past rather than a utopian future.

An alternate system of measuring cosmic time connects the human and the divine calendars, with one human **year** equal to a single day for the gods. The six months when the **sun** travels toward the north (**uttarayana**) is the divine day, whereas the six months when it travels south (**dakshinayana**) is the divine night. Since an Indian **solar year** is 360 solar days, a divine year would thus last for 360 human years.

The life span of Brahma is one hundred divine years and thus 36,000 human years, after which the world is destroyed and created anew.

A third system is that of the Manvantaras, or ages of Manu. This system divides the day of Brahma into fourteen equal ages, with each one lasting a little less than 309,000 years. Each age is identified by the particular divine sovereign (manu) who rules during that age. None of these three systems correspond to one another, and there is no real effort to reconcile them. This lack of correspondence indicates that their function was primarily mythic, to establish a coherent cosmic chronology and pattern rather than to describe actual events.

## Cosmology

Hindu culture has no single cosmology but rather several different systems, each of which is well established in its own right. The oldest model appears in the **Rg Veda** (10.90), the oldest Hindu religious text, and is known as the **Purusha Sukta** ("Hymn to the Primeval Man"). This hymn describes the **creation** of the world and all living beings as the result of the **sacrifice** of the primeval man (purusha). Different parts of his body become different parts of the physical universe and the traditional social groups. Another Vedic metaphor is that of the **Golden Embryo**, which is the only existing thing until it develops into **Prajapati**, the creator of the universe. A third version, that of the **Cosmic Egg**, is found in the later religious texts known as the **puranas**, which are compilations of mythology and lore. According to this image, the entire universe is originally contained in the Cosmic Egg. Once it is broken, the egg's constituent parts (shell, white, yolk, and membranes) become all of the things of the **earth**. The final cosmological image from the puranas, and perhaps the most common, begins with the god **Vishnu** floating in the sea of cosmic dissolution (**pralaya**), lying on the back of his serpent

couch, **Shesha**. When the time for creation comes, a lotus sprouts from Vishnu's navel and opens to reveal the god **Brahma**, who begins the process of creation. This process reverses at the onset of the cosmic dissolution, with Brahma being reabsorbed into Vishnu's body. Despite their differing symbols, all of these models share the conviction that the universe has come from a single source and thus that the entire cosmos is an organic whole.

Although there are many models for the origin of the cosmos, there is wider agreement about its geography. The universe is generally considered to have three tiers, and each of these tiers can have multiple levels. The visible world is considered the middle tier, sandwiched between the **heavens** of the upper world (often numbered as seven) and the realms of the underworld. Some of the latter are **hells**, whereas some of these lower worlds are simply considered to be alternate realms of existence. The visible world is often described as a series of concentric landmasses (**dvipas**) separated from each other by seven oceans (the **saptasindhu**), each composed of a different substance. The innermost of these landmasses is **Jambudvipa**, whose center is the mythical Mount **Meru**, often identified with Mount **Kailas** in the **Himalayas**. In traditional cosmology Mount Meru stands at the center of the universe and is compared to the central calyx of a lotus. Mount Meru is surrounded by mountain ranges, with a different region in each of the cardinal directions. The region south of Mount Meru is the land known as **Bharata**, the traditional name for the Indian subcontinent. Bharata is said to be superior to the other three regions of Jambudvipa because only in Bharata are religious rituals correctly performed. In its mythic geography, therefore, India is considered the center of the universe and the best possible place to live to pursue religious life. For further information see Cornelia Dimmitt and J. A. B. van Buitenen, *Classical Hindu Mythology*, 1978. See also **cosmic time**.

## Cow

Animal revered by almost all modern Hindus, although there is one small Hindu community in the state of **Kerala** that eats beef. Aside from this anomaly, reverence for the cow is one of the few unifying beliefs for almost all Hindu communities. Demands for a complete ban on **cow slaughter** have become a time-honored way for political groups to generate support from the orthodox Hindu community, although these demands carry far more weight in northern India, where a significant Muslim **minority** has few scruples about slaughtering and **eating** beef. Organized calls for such a ban began as early as the 1880s with the growth of tension between the Hindu and Muslim communities. This sentiment, generally called the **Cow Protection Movement**, has continued to the present day. Demands for a complete ban on cow slaughter have regularly surfaced since 1947, when India gained independence, and this is one of the loaded causes of Indian political life. Reverence for the cow goes to such lengths that one of the charitable acts performed by pious Hindus is to contribute to **goshalas**, institutions for old and infirm cows.

There is considerable speculation and some disagreement about the source of these feelings about the cow. Some arguments have stressed the cow's value in an agricultural society, as a source of both draft **animals** and reproducible wealth. Other arguments have stressed the cow's ability to transform agricultural waste into milk products and dung, a common fuel in much of northern India. Still others have noted the way that feelings about the cow are imbued with the symbolism of motherhood, since both are said to provide milk for a child's nourishment. This last point is probably the most important, since it is very clear that conservative Hindu feelings for the cow are based primarily on high emotional content rather than on rational considerations of costs and benefits.

Girls carry dried cow dung mixed with straw to be used as fuel.

## Cow Dung

This is considered both ritually pure and purifying, perhaps because of its origin in the sacred **cow**. A piece of ground can be purified (as when preparing a site for a ritual) by smearing it with cow dung. Cow dung is one of the ingredients in the "five products of the cow" (**pancha-gavya**), which is drunk as a means of purification from sin. In addition to its spiritual significance, cattle dung is very important for daily life in the villages of India. When mixed with clay it forms a hard, dustless, and easily cleaned surface that is preferable to an earthen floor. It is also a reliable source of fuel available to even the poorest people.

## Cow Protection Movement

General term for a grassroots conservative Hindu effort to ban the slaughter of cattle, particularly the **cow**. The traditional Hindu devotion to the cow has been articulated in calls for a ban on **cow slaughter** for more than a century. The call was first raised in 1875 by **Swami Dayanand Saraswati**, the founder of the reformist **Arya Samaj**. It continued to be a basic demand of later conservative Hindu-oriented groups, including the **Hindu Mahasabha**, the **Ram Rajya Parishad**, and the **Vishva Hindu Parishad**. The call for this ban occasionally surfaces even in contemporary times, since it carries strong support from many religiously conservative Hindus.

The cow protection demand continues to have profound political implications. Swami Dayanand Saraswati's work in the late nineteenth century coincided with the awakening of Indian political consciousness and the beginnings of the struggle to regain power from British imperial rule. Under British power, overt political dissent was subject to heavy government restrictions, and outright rebellion was impossible. Since the British did not generally interfere with "religious" issues, the demand for a ban on cow slaughter was a way for Hindus to assert and define their identity and by implication affirm that India was a Hindu land.

The Cow Protection Movement also caused friction between the Hindu and Muslim communities, since Hindus

worship cows, whereas Muslims eat them. Hindus saw Muslim beef consumption as a flagrant violation of their religious sensibilities, and Muslims saw the demand for a ban on cow slaughter as a thinly veiled attempt to reinforce Muslim status as second-class citizens. Communal relations were often particularly volatile around the annual Muslim festival of Id, at which it is traditional for each family to **sacrifice** an **animal** and in which many of the more affluent Muslim families would sacrifice cattle. As the relationship between these two communities deteriorated in the 1930s, cow slaughter (or rumor thereof) was often cited as the spark for communal riots in which hundreds of people were killed.

This tension persists in modern India, although it has rarely erupted into violence since the partition of the subcontinent in 1947. Modern India was founded as a secular state where the government does not favor any particular religious community. This founding ethos has made the Indian government reluctant to pass legislation banning cattle slaughter, despite continued calls from traditional Hindus. The Indian Muslim community, facing the reality of its **minority** status in a Hindu majority state, has had to be far more discreet about when and how such cow slaughter takes place.

## Cow Slaughter

A complete ban on cow slaughter has been one of the more durable issues taken up by Hindu interest groups, from before India gained independence in 1947 all the way up to the present day. Although debate on this issue has continuously emerged and faded, it remains a reliable hot button for stirring Hindu passions. This issue has predictably carried far more weight in northern India, where there is a significant Muslim **minority** with no religious objection to slaughtering and **eating** beef. The first widespread demand for such a ban came during the **Cow Protection Movement** in the 1930s. This movement aggravated tense communal relations between the Hindu and Muslim communities, resulting in significant bloodshed. Since independence it has been a perennial demand by religious leaders and **ascetics**, and it has been an issue in the platform of Hindu political organizations such as the **Jana Sangh**, **Shiv Sena**, **Vishva Hindu Parishad** (VHP), and **Bharatiya Janata Party** (BJP). In the past, such demands had little effect since the proponents did not have the power to implement them. As the BJP and the Shiv Sena have gained control of state and local governments, they have tried to implement this policy. In late 1995 the VHP initiated a national drive to ban cow slaughter completely. Like many of the VHP's campaigns, this was undertaken just before upcoming elections, in this case at the national level. This campaign was seen as an attempt to polarize the Hindu electorate in an effort to influence the national election.

## Creation
See **cosmology** and **cosmic time**.

## Creation Hymn
Popular name for a hymn in the **Rg Veda** (10.129), which is one of the most unusual hymns in the **Vedas**. The four Vedas are the oldest Hindu religious texts, and based on its style and content, the Rg Veda is the oldest of these. Most of the hymns in the Rg Veda are invocations addressed to various divinities. These hymns are sung to invoke and propitiate these divinities so that human beings may enjoy the good things in life. In marked contrast to the confidence and optimism found in the earlier hymns, the Creation Hymn takes a far more speculative tone. In the Creation Hymn, the poet begins by imagining a time before the existence of Being and Nonbeing, and he speculates on the origin of the world. In the end the poet ascribes all creation to a single impersonal agent, "That One" (**Tad**

Hindu cremation on the Ganges River. Although cremation is the religiously preferred way to dispose of a corpse, the relatively high cost of wood makes this difficult for poorer families.

**Ekam**). However, the poem concludes with the thought that even That One may not know the secrets of the cosmos. In its speculative tone and its admission that the ultimate answer may be unknown, it foreshadows the final stratum of the Vedic literature, the **Upanishads**.

## Cremation

For most Hindus cremation is the approved method for disposing of a dead body, although one finds **burials** in certain circumstances and subcommunities. The body is usually cremated on the day of death, often only a few hours after the person has expired. Although one could see this as a hygienic measure in a hot climate, for many Hindus the religious reasons are even more compelling. First, a **corpse** is considered to be a source of violent impurity (**ashaucha**) that is removed by destroying the body by **fire**. A second reason for immediate cremation is to get rid of a potential vehicle for wandering spirits, who according to popular fears, can reanimate a corpse.

The rites leading to cremation begin immediately after death. As for all Hindu rituals, there is great variation in different regions and communities, but the following description gives a general picture of these rites, at least in northern India: The body is bathed, laid on a bier (often made from bamboo, which is cheap, strong, and readily available), and covered with a cloth (white for a man or a **widow**, a colored sari for a married woman). In many cases the big toes are tied together with a thread, due to the belief that this prevents an alien spirit from reanimating the body. The mourners carry the bier to the **cremation ground**, chanting the traditional dirge *Ram Nam Satya Hai*, *Satya Boli Gati Hai* ("God's name is Truth, Truth spoken is Passage"). On the way, the mourners will often halt several times, not only to rest but also on the chance that the deceased was merely unconscious. When they arrive at the cremation ground (which is often by a river or source of **water**), the corpse is bathed again and set on a pyre. The chief mourner (traditionally the eldest **son**) circles the pyre, pouring water from a clay pot, which is then broken. Since poetic images often compare the ephemeral quality of human bodies to that of clay pots, this action clearly

signifies the final destruction of the body. The chief mourner then ignites the pyre and remains there while the body burns. If the skull does not crack from the heat of the fire, he is given a long bamboo stick to pierce the skull. This is believed to release the **vital winds** (**prana**) of the deceased, which have collected in the head. The chief mourner's final duty is to collect bones and ash from the pyre (**asthi-sanchayana**), often on the following day, and to immerse these remains in the **Ganges** or some other sacred river (**asthi-visarjana**).

The wooden pyre is the traditional means for cremation and remains the preferred method, despite the development of more efficient and cheaper electric crematoria. This has led to an unusual ecological problem in modern India, particularly in the big cities. Many poor people cannot afford to buy enough wood to cremate the body with a pyre but, because of tradition, are unwilling to use electric crematoria. They will perform incomplete cremations in which part of the body is left unburned. This is a bad state of affairs, both from a religious and a public health perspective, because the bodies are a source of religious impurity and contribute to the contamination of the rivers. For further information see Pandurang Vaman Kane (trans.), *A History of Dharmasastra*, 1968; and Raj Bali Pandey, *Hindu Samskaras*, 1969. For accounts of modern practice, see Lawrence Babb, *The Divine Hierarchy*, 1975; and Ann Grodzins Gold, *Fruitful Journeys*, 1988.

## Cremation Ground

Literally a place where bodies are cremated, but in Hindu culture it also has a significant symbolic meaning. The cremation ground is pervaded by associations with death and impurity (**ashaucha**), making it an intensely inauspicious place that is often believed to be inhabited by malevolent wandering spirits. The cremation ground is usually located at the boundary of a community, both to remove any contact with this source of **inauspiciousness** from everyday life and perhaps to symbolically deny the reality of death by relegating the cremation ground to the margins of the "settled" world.

One well-known exception to this rule occurs in **Benares**, where the cremation ground at **Manikarnika Ghat** is in the middle of the city. This prominence symbolically forces the inhabitants to confront the reality of death, but since Benares is also the home of the god **Shiva**, it also raises the hope that death will bring final liberation of the soul (**moksha**). Similarly, although most people avoid the cremation ground as inauspicious, certain religious adepts voluntarily choose it as their place of residence and religious practice. This may include certain types of **ascetics** who are simply emulating terrifying forms of Shiva who are said to reside in cremation grounds. Practitioners of the esoteric ritual tradition known as **tantra** may live in a cremation ground to assert the radical unity of all reality and transcend the concepts of **purity** and impurity, which they consider artificial. See also **cremation**.

## Cuckoo

(*Cuculus melanoleucus* or *jacobinus*) Indian songbird intimately connected with both love and the **monsoon** rains. The cuckoo's mating season comes during the monsoon, when its piercing calls are fancifully interpreted as *piu*, *piu* ("beloved, beloved"). These cries are said to excite the hearts of human lovers—either to passion if they are together or to bitter pain if the monsoon is keeping them apart. The cuckoo's behavior in the rainy season is supposed to reflect its love for the monsoon. According to popular belief, the cuckoo drinks only raindrops, which means that for much of the year, it is tormented by thirst. In devotional (**bhakti**) poetry, the cuckoo is often used as a symbol for the devotee (**bhakta**), who is tormented by the **deity's** absence but who waits

patiently for the divine presence. In **Sanskrit** poetry this bird is called the **chataka**; in modern dialects it is known as the kokila or koil.

## Cunningham, Sir Alexander

(1814–1893) First director of the Archeological Survey of India and the father of modern Indian archeology. Cunningham first came to India in 1831 as an officer in the Royal Engineers, but his hobby was the study of ancient India's material artifacts. This passion eventually resulted in the formation of the A.S.I., which Cunningham headed until his retirement in 1885. By surveying sites, cataloging their contents, and translating **inscriptions**, his work was fundamental to preserving India's heritage.

## Cuntarar

Tamil form of the name for the poet-saint **Sundaramurtti**.

## Curses

In Hindu mythology, one of the standard devices either to advance the story's plot or to account for some inexorable event. Such curses are often the work of sages and other spiritual adepts, but they can also be levied by any person who has perfectly fulfilled his or her social role, such as a faithful wife, loving **son**, or devoted parent. Making a curse expends the spiritual powers that a person has accumulated. At least in mythical tales, such curses invariably come true no matter what a person might do to try to prevent them. For example, in a mythic story, King **Parikshit** secludes himself on a high pillar to escape death by snakebite but is killed when a divine serpent conceals itself as a worm in a piece of fruit. Once pronounced, a curse cannot be simply nullified, although it can be modified to blunt its overall effect. For a consideration of the function of curses in Indian mythology, see Robert Goldman,

"Karma, Guilt, and Buried Memories: Public Fantasy and Private Memory in Traditional India," in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 105, No. 3, 1985.

# D

## Dabistan-I-Mazahib

("School of Manners") An outside source for the religious life of the times, and gives the earliest detailed description of the Sikhs, as well as many other contemporary religious communities. The text traditionally is ascribed to **Muhsin Fani**. Fani was a Persian who traveled through much of northern India, apparently motivated only by his intense curiosity to encounter the country's different forms of religious life. The text is also notable for the seeming absence of authorial bias—Fani reports that he had simply translated what his friends and informants had told him, and the *Dabistan's* tone seems to maintain this claim. The text has been translated by David Shea and Anthony Troyer as *The Dabistan, or School of Manners*, 1843.

## Dadhichi

A sage in Hindu mythology who is a paradigm for self-sacrifice. The gods (**devas**) and the **demons** (supernatural beings) are engaged in a long-running war, in which neither side can prevail. **Indra**, the king of the gods, finally decides to seek advice from the god **Brahma**. Brahma advises Indra that if he obtains a bone from Dadhichi's body, it can be made into a weapon that will defeat the demons. Indra is understandably uncertain that his request will be granted, but when he appears before Dadhichi, he not only gives his consent, but immediately abandons his body through yogic powers. Indra takes Dadhichi's bones, fashions a weapon from them, and successfully defeats the demons.

## Dadhikra

A divine war horse described in a few of the hymns in the **Vedas**, the oldest Hindu religious texts. The Vedas were the religious hymns of a group known as the **Aryans**, and hymns throughout the Vedas clearly show the importance of horse-drawn chariots as weapons of war. Given this importance, it is not surprising that one finds a divinized horse in these hymns, even if it is only a minor figure.

## Dadu

(1554–1603) **Sant** poet-saint and founder of the religious organization known as the **Dadupanth**. The sants were a group of central and northern Indian poet-saints who share several general tendencies: a stress on individualized, interior religion leading to a personal experience of the divine; disdain for external ritual, particularly image **worship**; faith in the power of the divine Name; and a tendency to ignore conventional **caste** (social order) distinctions. According to tradition, Dadu was born into a family of cotton-carders, a fairly low-status occupation. He is also reported to have been born a Muslim, although based on his poetry he seems to have been relatively unaffected by Islam. His songs highlight many of the aforementioned sant themes. His poems also stress nonviolence (**ahimsa**), and as a practical application of that principle, **vegetarianism**. Another prominent theme is the religious value of work, since despite his fame he is said to have carded cotton until his death.

Some of Dadu's poems give lists and categories, as if systematizing his ideas for instruction. This suggests that he envisioned an established community of disciples. According to legend, Dadu met with the Moghul emperor **Akbar**, who was so impressed by Dadu's charisma that he ceased his harming of living beings. The tale is probably fictitious, since there are similar stories for many of the sant poets, which all illustrate the

well-established theme of the temporal ruler bowing to the spiritual adept. For further information on traditional sources, see Winand Callewaert (trans.), *The Hindi Biography of Dadu Dayal,* 1988. See also **Moghul dynasty**.

## Dadupanth

Religious organization founded by the **sant** poet-saint **Dadu** (1554–1603). The Dadupanth is strongest in **Rajasthan**, the desert state in which Dadu is believed to have lived. The Dadupanth stresses religious themes common to the sant poet-saints: the rejection of ritual and image **worship** in favor of an internal search for a formless **deity**, stress on the power of the divine Name, and a belief in the relative unimportance of conventional **caste** distinctions. It also emphasizes certain points that were particularly important to Dadu himself, among them nonviolence (**ahimsa**), **vegetarianism**, and the religious value of work. The Dadupanth has always been a numerically small organization, but they are historically important because of their manuscript collections. These collections are known as the "five voices" (*panchvani*), because they contain the works of five different devotional (**bhakti**) poets: Dadu, **Kabir**, **Namdev**, **Ravidas**, and Hardas. Rajasthan's desert climate has helped to preserve these manuscripts, some of which date from the early seventeenth century. The Panchvani manuscripts are among the earliest sources for all of these poets, which makes them an important resource for the historical study of northern Indian devotional poetry. For further information on the literary resources of the Dadupanth, see Winand Callewaert (trans.), *The Sarvangi of the Dadupanthi Rajab,* 1978; and *The Sarvangi of Gopaldas*, 1993.

## Dadupanthi Nagas

Particular group of **Naga** (fighting) **ascetics** associated with the religious community (**panth**) established by the western Indian poet-saint **Dadu**. The Nagas are renunciant ascetics organized into different **akharas**, or regiments based on the model of an army. Until the beginning of the nineteenth century the Nagas' primary occupation was as mercenary soldiers, although they also had substantial trading interests; both of these have largely disappeared in contemporary times. In the bathing (**snana**) processions at the **Kumbha Mela** festivals ("Festivals of the Pot"), the Dadupanthi Nagas march with the **chatuh-sampradayi Nagas**, who are devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Vishnu**, but are considered independent of them. According to tradition, the Naga section of the **Dadupanth** was established by Sundardasa, one of Dadu's direct disciples.

## Daita

Tribal (**adivasi**) community in the modern state of **Orissa**. The Daitas are hereditary temple servants at the temple of the god **Jagannath** in the city of **Puri**. Jagannath has been brought into the larger Hindu pantheon by identifying him as a form of the god **Krishna**, but he is originally believed to have been a local, tribal **deity**. This history is partly inferred from Jagannath's relationships with the Daitas themselves, who are considered Jagannath's relatives, even though their social status is very low. This relational connection gives the Daitas several unique roles. During the annual **Rath Yatra**, a ceremonial procession in which Jagannath, his brother **Balabhadra**, and their sister **Subhadra** are processed around the city in giant wooden chariots, the Daitas convey the deities' giant wooden images from the temples to the chariots and pull the ropes that draw the carts. An even more important role comes when new images of the deities are constructed, usually every twelve or nineteen years. The Daitas carve the new images, each from a single massive log. When the new image has been completed, the oldest Daita removes a wooden plug

in the old image that seals an interior cavity. He then transfers a mysterious substance called the "life substance" to a corresponding cavity in the new image, which is sealed with another wooden plug. The Daita chosen to make this transfer is blindfolded and has his hands wrapped in layers of cloth, so he is unable to tell exactly what is transferred, and this "life substance" is considered so sacred that the person who makes this transfer reportedly dies soon afterward. After the "life substance" has been removed, the old image is considered a "**corpse**." The Daitas bury it, observe a ten-day period of ritual death impurity (**maranashaucha**), and the heirs of the deceased claim his "belongings"—primarily clothes and resin, which they sell to pilgrims. Jagannath's continuing relations with the Daitas point to his origins as a local, tribal god, and this relationship gives the Daitas continuing special privileges.

## Daiva Marriage

One of the eight ways to perform a marriage recognized in the **dharma literature**, the treatises on religious duty (**dharma**). In a Daiva marriage the father of the bride gives away his **daughter** with her ornaments to a **brahmin** (priest). The priest then officiates at a **sacrifice** sponsored by the father. According to some interpretations, the girl is given as the **dakshina**, or fee for these sacrificial services. This form of marriage was named after the gods (**devas**), and was one of the four approved (**prashasta**) forms of marriage. Even though a daiva marriage was considered an approved form, it fell out of favor because of the hint that the bride had been given as a payment for services, rather than without any conditions whatsoever. See also **Marriage**, **eight classical forms**.

## Daksha

In Hindu mythology, one of the **sons** of the god **Brahma**, and the father of the



Image of the Hindu god Daksha. His head was replaced with the head of a goat as the result of a conflict with the god Shiva.

**goddess Sati**. Sati has been given in marriage to the god **Shiva**, and Daksha's most famous mythic story has to do with this divine pair. According to legend, when Daksha feels that Shiva has not shown him proper respect, he wants to put Shiva in his place—even though in this mythic story Shiva is clearly identified as the supreme **deity**. Inflated with pride, Daksha plans a great **sacrifice** to which he invites all the other gods, but as an insult purposely excludes Shiva. When Sati learns about the sacrifice, she insists on going to it, despite Shiva's warning that it is unwise to go without an invitation. When she arrives at the sacrificial ground, and asks why her husband has been excluded, Daksha responds with a stream of abuse denouncing Shiva as worthless and despicable. Humiliated by these public insults, Sati commits **suicide**—in some versions, by leaping into the sacrificial **fire**, in others by withdrawing into a yogic trance and giving up her life. Shiva becomes furious when he hears of Sati's death, and in his rage creates the fierce deities **Virabhadra** and **Bhadrakali**. He comes storming with his minions (**gana**) to the sacrificial ground, destroys the

sacrifice, and cuts off Daksha's head. Daksha is eventually restored to life, but with the head of a goat rather than a human being. He repents of his arrogance and worships Shiva as the highest god. In this story, Daksha is a symbol for the foolish pride that eventually causes one's destruction.

In another mythic story, Daksha is portrayed in a more sympathetic light. Chandra (the **moon**) has married Daksha's twenty-seven **daughters**, but was paying attention to only one of the daughters, named **Rohini**. Daksha remonstrates with Chandra to give each of his wives equal time, and when Chandra ignores this advice, Daksha curses him to lose his luster. As Chandra begins to wane, the other gods intercede with Daksha, and implore him to modify the **curse**. At their urgent prompting, Daksha decrees that Chandra will only wane for half the month and then wax for the other half. He then directs Chandra to take a bath at the **Somnath** temple in **Gujarat** state, which will heal him from the original curse. Here Daksha is still powerful and imperious, but his actions are rooted in his concern for his daughters.

## Dakshina

("preceptor's fee") Gifts or fees given to one's teacher in return for the services rendered. The paradigm for this goes back to the **dharma literature**, or the texts on religious duty (**dharma**), which propose an idealized doctrine for the four stages (**ashramas**) of a man's life. The first of these stages is as a celibate student (**brahmacharin**), in which the young man will live in his teacher's household and commence studying the **Vedas**, the oldest Hindu religious texts. At the conclusion of his studies, the student will give his teacher dakshina as a sign of appreciation. In modern times this pattern has been extended to other contexts, particularly the arts, and it has become customary for students to give gifts to their teachers on various occasions, particularly on the **full moon**

known as **Guru Purnima**, which usually falls in June or July. Dakshina is always given in exchange for services, and is thus essentially payment that is "owed" for these services. In this aspect it is a very different mode of exchange from **dana** (charitable giving). Dana generates religious merit, but the donor receives nothing tangible in return.

## Dakshinachara

("right-hand practice") In the secret ritual tradition known as **tantra**, this is the term for a type of tantric practice that does not avail itself of any forbidden substances or promote any behavior that the orthodox would consider scandalous or objectionable. It stands in opposition to the **vamachara**, or "left-hand practice," which uses such forbidden substances in its ritual, and shows no such regard for conventional sensibilities. The most common forbidden substances are the Five Forbidden Things (**panchamakara**), so called because they all begin with the letter "m" (in the sacred language of **Sanskrit**, *makara*) **madya** (wine), **matsya** (fish), **mamsa** (meat), **mudra** (fermented or parched grain), and **maithuna** (copulation). In left-hand tantra these forbidden things are used in their actual forms, whereas right-hand practitioners substitute other more socially acceptable things for them. This is one more instance of the pervasive Hindu polarity between right and left, which carries inherent value judgments. In this case, the left-hand practitioners are seen as impure and dangerous, because they intentionally violate social boundaries, whereas the right-hand are socially respectable. For further information see Arthur Avalon (Sir John Woodroffe), *Shakti and Shakta*, 1978; Swami Agehananda Bharati, *The Tantric Tradition*, 1977; and Douglas Renfrew Brooks, *The Secret of the Three Cities,* 1990.

Temple in Dakshineshwar dedicated to the goddess Kali.

## Dakshinayana

The six months of the solar **year** in which the **sun** is reckoned as moving southward. In the Gregorian **calendar**, this is the period between the summer solstice and the winter solstice (roughly December 20 to June 20) and is based on the actual motion of the sun with respect to the **earth**. The Indian reckoning is based on the motion of the sun through the **zodiac**, which is calculated differently than in western astrology. The Dakshinayana begins on **Karka Sankranti** (the **day** the sun is thought to enter Cancer, usually July 14), and ends the day before **Makara Sankranti** (the day the sun enters Capricorn, usually January 14). The Dakshinayana is considered less auspicious than the **Uttarayana**, the six months in which the sun travels north, because the southern direction is associated with the **Yama**, the god associated with death, judgment, and punishment for evildoers.

## Dakshineshwar

Temple site about four miles north of modern Calcutta, on the eastern bank of the Hugli River. Dakshineshwar's

primary **deity** is the powerful and dangerous **goddess Kali**, although like most Hindu temples it also has images of most of the deities in the pantheon. Dakshineshwar's importance comes not from its age—the primary image was consecrated in 1855, and it is thus a relatively recent site—but through its association with the Bengali saint **Ramakrishna**, who lived there for most of his life.

## Dalit

("oppressed") Modern name for the social groups that have the lowest social status, groups that in earlier times would have been called **Harijan** or **untouchable**. This term is significant because it is the name used by low-status groups to designate themselves as members of a disadvantaged group. Adoption and popularization of this term reflects their growing awareness of the situation, and their greater assertiveness in demanding their legal and constitutional rights. In certain parts of the country, particularly in the state of **Maharashtra**, the Dalits have formed a militant organization called the Dalit Panthers, modeled after the Black Panthers in America.

## Damaru

Hourglass-shaped hand drum, which has membranes stretched over the top and bottom of the hourglass, and at the middle, two strings with a bead at the end. The drum is played by holding it by its narrow middle and rotating the hand back and forth so that the beads strike the drumheads. The pace of the rhythm (**tala**) is determined by the speed of hand movement. In Hindu iconography, this drum is almost invariably associated with the god **Shiva**. In his form as **Nataraja**, the Lord of the **Dance**, the drum signifies the rhythm by which Shiva undertakes the creation of the universe. Another iconic motif is to show the damaru hanging from Shiva's trident. In modern times this drum is often carried by **ascetics**, either because of its association with Shiva, its portability, or both. See also **iconic image**.

## Damayanti

In Hindu mythology, the **daughter** of the king of Vidarbha and the wife of King **Nala**. The story of Nala and Damayanti appears as a story within the *Mahabharata*, the later of the two great Hindu epics. It is recounted to the five **Pandava** brothers, the epic's protagonists, during a twelve-year exile in the forest as a way to keep up their spirits by telling how others had transcended misfortune.

In the story, when Damayanti comes of marriageable age, her father sends invitations to the kings of the **earth**, announcing her **svayamvara**, a rite in which Damayanti will choose her own husband. The kings of the earth come to the svayamvara to seek her hand, as do the gods (**devas**) themselves. Yet Damayanti has already decided, with the help of a swan who has praised King Nala to her, to choose Nala. The gods try to foil this by taking on physical bodies identical to Nala, so that Damayanti will not be able to tell the difference between them. As a last resort, Damayanti makes an **act of truth**, a ritual action whose efficacy is based on the **power of truth** itself. In her act of truth, Damayanti declares that she has never loved anyone but Nala, and directs the gods to resume their true forms to prove that this statement is true. The gods immediately do as she commands, compelled by the power of truth. Nala and Damayanti are married, and as a reward for her fidelity the gods give Nala various divine gifts. Hearing of the marriage, two of the rejected suitors curse Nala to lose his kingdom, and like all **curses** in Indian mythology, this eventually comes to pass. Because of the curse, Nala and Damayanti are separated and suffer long tribulations, including Nala having his body magically changed so that no one would be able to recognize him. In the end Damayanti recognizes him by

his divine gifts, which could not be hidden, and the lovers are happily reunited.

## Damodara

(*dama* "rope" + *udara* "waist") Epithet of the god **Krishna**, given in memory of a particular incident in his childhood. In an effort to curb Krishna's mischief by restricting his movements, Krishna's foster mother, **Yashoda**, uses a rope to tie her toddling boy to the heavy stone mortar used in grinding grain. The mortar's weight is more than sufficient to restrain any normal child, but for Krishna it proves no hindrance, and he proceeds to crawl about, dragging the mortar after him. At one point the mortar becomes wedged between two trees growing closely together, and Krishna pulls so hard that the trees are uprooted. After the trees fall to the ground, they immediately disappear, and in their place stand two young men. These are **sons** of the god **Kubera** who have been cursed to take the form of a tree until Krishna comes to save them.

## Dampati

("husband and wife") In Indian art and **architecture**, the figure of a married couple. These are usually portrayed as standing next to one another and are usually devoid of any sexual connotation. This is unlike the more famous **mithuna** figures, which are engaged in sexual activity.

## Dana

("giving") Charitable giving. This is a common religious practice, for it is believed to be a pious act that generates religious merit. Dana is especially prevalent at pilgrimage places and other sacred sites (**tirthas**), since the sacredness of these places is believed to magnify the consequences of any act, whether good or bad. Dana is one of the traditional paradigms for exchange, the other being **dakshina** (preceptor's fee). The difference between them is that dakshina is a fee for services, whereas

dana is given freely and brings one no tangible benefits. Aside from the intangible religious merit generated by dana, it is also a common way to get rid of any **inauspiciousness** or ill fortune, which is transferred to the receiver along with the gift. This assumption makes receiving dana karmically risky, whereas there are no such stigmas associated with dakshina. People who live solely by receiving gifts, such as beggars at pilgrimage sites, are thus in an unenviable position, since they are commonly described as "vessels" (patras) for the depositing of ill fortune. Yet this transfer of inauspiciousness is a pervasive pattern in regular society, and even within the family there are means to transfer inauspiciousness through well-established gift-giving patterns, particularly the **kanyadan**, or gift of a bride in marriage. For further information on dana and gift-giving patterns, see Gloria Goodwin Raheja, *The Poison in the Gift,* 1988.

## Danava

("descendants of Danu") In Hindu mythology, the **sons** of Danu with her husband, the divine sage **Kashyapa**. Kashyapa is the chief of the **Prajapatis**, a class of semi-divine beings, and Danu herself is the **daughter** of the demigod **Daksha**, so their children have divine **blood** from both sides of their lineage. The name Danava is a general term for all the families of **demons** (supernatural beings), or more properly, **asuras**. The asuras are powerful divine beings, who have legitimate interests of their own, but whose interests often run counter to those of human beings as well as those of the gods (**devas**). Asuras are thus usually opposed to the gods—a sense of opposition carried by the English word "demon"—but they are not perceived as inherently evil.

## Dance

In traditional Hindu culture, all of the performing arts had intimate connections

Dancers performing in the Manipuri style.

with religious life, and dance was no exception to this pattern. In their art, dancers merely follow the divine model, since in Indian mythology **Shiva** is the pre-eminent dancer; indeed, in his dancing he first creates the universe and later destroys it. Several classical dance forms can be directly tied to specific Hindu temples. The **Bharatanatyam** form developed in the temples of **Tamil Nadu** beginning at the **Brhadeshvar** temple in **Tanjore**, and is immortalized in the sculptures of the Shiva temple at **Chidambaram.** The **Orissi** style came from the temple of **Jagannath** in the city of **Puri**, on the Bay of Bengal. Some of the other classical styles were traditionally performed only in temples, or had their beginnings in religious festivals: the **Kathakali** form in the state of **Kerala**, the **Kuchipudi** form in **Andhra Pradesh**, the **Chau** form in eastern India, and the **Manipuri** form in Manipur. The only exception is the northern Indian **Kathak** form, whose birth and performance lay in a court rather than a temple setting, but which in its subject matter often treated religious themes, particularly ones drawn from devotion to the god **Krishna**.

All of these styles share a highly articulated language of **gesture** (**mudra**) and expression, through which the dancer can tell a story to the audience. As in all the classical arts, the dancer's aim is not only to entertain, but to create and convey a particular aesthetic mood (**rasa**), which will evoke a corresponding emotion (**bhava**) from the audience. Beyond these general similarities, each form has a certain characteristic and stylistic quality. Bharatanatyam, Kuchipudi, and Orissi are the most clearly related forms, but where Bharatanatyam presents a sharply geometric line, with a stiff upper body, the lines presented by Kuchipudi and Orissi are progressively softer, rounder, and more fluid. Kathakali is characterized by elaborate costumes and stage makeup, and also by its particular stress on developing and controlling facial mobility. These things facilitate ease and power of expression. Manipuri and Chau are both highly athletic forms, clearly showing the influence of folk dance, and Chau is unusual in that the dancers always wear masks, which sets a prevailing mood. Kathak is the only dance form in which the legs are kept straight; this form stresses intricate footwork in which the bells on the dancer's ankles serve as a complement and counterpoint to the drum, combined with dramatic turns and spins.

As mentioned above, all the dance forms except for Kathak developed in some sort of religious context. In many of these latter cases, dance was an **offering** presented to the **deity**, and was primarily performed for the deity's entertainment, although the other

spectators could enjoy it, as well. Although different schools have different typologies, the most pervasive distinction is between "pure" dance (**nrtya**), conveying nothing beyond the dancer's skill in movement, and "acting" dance (**natya** or **abhinaya**), in which the dancer tells some sort of story. Until the twentieth century, the dancers were usually temple servants known as **devadasis**. The devadasis were officially married to the temple's deity and performed various ritual services in the temples as his "wives," but they could have liaisons with other men as they wished. Any children from these liaisons would also be in the service of the temple—their **sons** as musicians, and their **daughters** as dancers. At times this arrangement degenerated into common **prostitution**, but in many cases it was recognizably different. These **women** had status and property of their own, even though their status was unusual, and thus marginal. In the twentieth century the dance performance site has moved from the temple to the stage, which has had a number of effects on transforming it from a form of **worship** to a performing art. For further information on the history of the dance and its particular manifestations, see Mohan Khokar, *Traditions of Indian Classical Dance*, 1984. For a masterful analysis of the devadasis, see Frederique Apffel Marglin, *Wives of the God-King*, 1985.

## Danda

("stick") A symbol of authority in traditional Hindu culture. On one hand, this stick referred to royal authority and was visibly evident as a scepter or mace, but was considered emblematic of the king's obligation to maintain social order by inflicting punishment on evildoers. This rule through punishment (**dandaniti**) was the king's role and duty in traditional Indian ideas of kingship, for without such rule normal social life would be impossible. In a different context, the staff can be a symbol of **ascetic** authority. Among the **Dashanami Sanyasis**, a group of **ascetics** who are devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva**, the ascetics with the highest status carry a staff as a sign of their authority, and are known as **Dandi Sanyasis**.

## Danda Hasta

In Indian **dance**, **sculpture**, and ritual, a particular hand **gesture** (**hasta**), in which the arm and hand are extended straight forward, like a stick (**danda**).

## Dandakaranya

A particular forest (aranya) in the *Ramayana*, the earlier of the two great Indian epics. This is where the god **Rama**, the epic's protagonist; his wife **Sita**; and his brother **Lakshmana** live during the latter part of their fourteen years in exile, in their **ashram** (abode) in the village of **Panchavati**. Many of the epic's pivotal events take place in this forest: Rama and Lakshmana's humiliation and mutilation of the demoness **Shurpanakha**, their destruction of the **demon** army led by her brothers **Khara** and **Dushana**, and Sita's abduction by Shurpanakha's third brother **Ravana**, the demon-king of **Lanka**. The Dandaka forest's actual location is uncertain, since many of the events in the *Ramayana* cannot be set in any particular place. One traditional location for Panchavati, however, is just outside of the city of **Nasik** in the state of **Maharashtra**.

## Dandaniti

("rule through the stick") In the **dharma literature**, or the texts on religious duty (**dharma**), dandaniti is the preservation of social order by inflicting punishment on evildoers. This rule through punishment was the king's role and duty in traditional Indian ideas of kingship, for without such rule it was believed that normal social life would be impossible.

## Dandasana

("staff-posture") One of the sitting postures (**asana**) described in commentaries to the **Yoga Sutras** (aphorisms on yoga). In this position, the upper body is erect, the arms are straight with the hands flat on the ground and pointing forward, and the legs are outstretched with the big toes, ankles, and knees touching one another.

## Dandavat ("stick-like") Pranam

Type of reverential salutation in which the person lies prostrate on the ground with the arms extended (hence the comparison between the body and a stick). This shows the highest reverence of all greetings, since one's entire body is in contact with the ground.

## Dandi Sanyasi

Among the **Dashanami Sanyasis**, or the **ascetic** devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva**, the Dandi Sanyasis are the most prestigious of the three general ascetic types; the others being the **Paramahamsa** and the **Naga Sanyasis**. Dandi Sanyasis take their name from the staff (**danda**) that they are given at their ascetic **initiation** and that they carry for the rest of their lives as a sign of ascetic restraint. The danda is always kept off the ground to maintain its **purity**. The Dandi Sanyasis tend to put the highest stress on the importance of **Sanskrit** (sacred language) learning and uphold the traditional social and cultural values it propounds. Of the ten Dashanami divisions, Dandis tend to belong to those divisions that will only initiate **brahmins**—that is, the **Saraswati**, **Ashrama**, and **Tirtha** divisions, and also some sections of the Bharati division. In many cases, Dandi Sanyasis are initiated as ascetics only after having completed the other three **stages of life** (**ashramas**), fulfilling the idealized pattern in the **dharma literature**, the texts on religious duty. Thus, their ascetic status does not come only from the strictness of their ascetic observance, for which

they are rightly famous. It also reflects the continuing influence of their former "worldly" status, which was supposedly left behind upon ascetic initiation, and their adherence to traditional idealized cultural patterns. The philosopher **Shankaracharya**, traditionally named as the Dashanami order's founder, was himself believed to be a Dandi Sanyasi. This pattern of leadership still continues, since even now Dandi Sanyasis are invariably chosen for the **Shankaracharyas**, the religious leaders who preside over the four monastic centers (**maths**). These centers supposedly were established by the philosopher Shankaracharya, and in many cases these present leaders have been lifelong ascetics, as Shankaracharya is believed to have been. For further information see Dana Sawyer, "Monastic Structure of Banarsi Dandi Sadhus," in Bradley R. Hertel and Cynthia Ann Humes (eds.), *Living Banaras*, 1993.

## Dan Lila

One of the types of divine play (**lila**) between the god **Krishna** and his devotees (**bhakta**). In this lila, the adolescent Krishna intercepts the **gopis**, his **cow**-herding female friends, who are on their way to the city of **Mathura** to sell their butter and curds. Krishna refuses to let them pass until they give him some as a gift (**dana**). The story of this lila is often presented in religiously oriented theatrical presentations, which are themselves known as lilas ("plays"), since their function is to reveal the work of the divine. This lila is but one instance in a long history of butter thievery. For further information see John Stratton Hawley, *Krishna: The Butter Thief*, 1983.

## Dantavaktra

In the ***Mahabharata***, the later of the two great Hindu epics, Dantavaktra is an **asura** or **demon** king who is the rebirth of **Vijaya**, one of the gatekeepers of the god **Vishnu**. Vijaya has been cursed to be reborn three times as an

asura and to be killed each time by Vishnu. In his previous incarnations Vijaya is born as **Hiranyakashipu**, who is killed by the **Man-Lion avatar** (one incarnation of the god Vishnu) and as **Kumbhakarna**, who is killed by Vishnu's **Rama avatar**. When Dantavaktra is killed by **Krishna**, the **curse** is broken, and Vijaya returns to his rightful place.

## Darshan

("seeing") By far the most common religious act in popular modern Hinduism, darshan designates direct eye contact between the devotee (**bhakta**) and the image of a **deity**, which is considered to be a conscious, perceiving being. Such intimate interaction is a way to communicate with the deity on a personal basis, which is similar to the stress on the individual found in **bhakti** (devotional) religiosity. For further information see Diana Eck, *Darsan*, 1985.

## Darshan

(2) ("perspective") In the context of Indian **philosophy**, this is the word most often used to designate a philosophical "school." The word itself comes from the verb "to see," and thus can be loosely translated as a "point of view," "perspective," or "[way of] seeing." In a diverse and competitive philosophical culture, this is a neutral way to describe a philosophical position, whether or not one agrees with it.

## Dasa ("servant") Bhava

The second of the five **modes of devotion** (system of devotion to a **deity**) to God that were most prominently articulated by **Rupa Goswami**, a devotee (**bhakta**) of the god **Krishna** and a follower of the Bengali saint **Chaitanya**. Rupa used differing types of human relationships as models for differing conceptions of the link between deity and devotee. These five modes showed growing emotional intensity, from the peaceful (**shanta**) sense that comes from realizing one's complete identity with **Brahman**, or Ultimate Reality, to conceiving of God as one's master, friend, child, or lover. The Dasa Bhava is the second of these, in which devotees considered themselves as servants and the deity as their master. This second mode of devotion should be understood in light of the relationship between masters and servants in Indian society, which goes far beyond that of employer and employee in modern American society. A family's servants will often stay with a family for many years and in some cases, such service becomes hereditary. Longtime servants become virtual members of the family; they are respected, trusted, and sometimes regarded as advisers.

## Dashamukha

("ten-faced") In the ***Ramayana***, the earlier of the two great Indian epics, this was one of the epithets of **Ravana**, the **demon**-king of **Lanka**. This name is descriptive, since Ravana has ten heads.

## Dashanami

("ten names") Collective name for the ten divisions among the **Sanyasis**, an **ascetic** order supposedly founded by the great philosopher **Shankaracharya**, whose members are devotees of the god **Shiva**. These ten divisions are each distinguished by a different name, which is taken as a surname by an ascetic after his **initiation** in the division. These ten names are **Giri** ("mountain"), **Parvata** ("mountain"), **Sagara** ("ocean"), **Saraswati** (the **goddess** of learning), **Bharati** ("India"), **Puri** ("city"), **Aranya** ("forest"), **Vana** ("forest"), **Tirtha** ("crossing-place"), and **Ashrama** ("hermitage").

Although all of the ten divisions are Dashanami Sanyasis, there are internal status differences based on the distinction between three ascetic classes: **Dandi**, **Paramahamsa**, and **Naga**. The **Dandi Sanyasis**, named for the staff (**danda**) that they must always carry,

have the strongest connection with classical **Sanskrit** (sacred language) learning, are the strictest in their ascetic practices, and tend to be the most conservative in their social views. Dandi Sanyasis often follow ascetic initiation only after having completed the other three **stages of life** (ashramas), and thus fulfill the idealized pattern in the **dharma literature**, the texts on religious duty. Dandi Sanyasis were virtually always **brahmins** (priests) before becoming ascetics, and almost all Dandis belong to the Dashanami divisions that will only initiate brahmins—that is, the Saraswati, Ashrama, Tirtha, and some sections of the Bharati divisions. The remaining Dashanami divisions will admit members from all four of the traditional social classes: brahmins, **kshatriyas**, **vaishyas**, and **shudras**. Members from the first three groups, known as "**twice-born**" because they are eligible for the adolescent religious initiation known as the "second birth," are initiated as Paramahamsa Sanyasis, whereas shudras are initiated as **Naga**, or militant ascetics. Thus, despite the supposed loss of identity among ascetics after formally "renouncing" the world, one can see the continuing influence of a person's former worldly status.

These ten divisions are collected into four larger organizational groups: **Anandawara**, **Bhogawara**, **Bhuriwara**, and **Kitawara**. Each of these groups has two or three of the ten Dashanami orders, and each is centered in one of the four sacred centers (**maths**) supposedly established by Shankaracharya. Each of these four groups is also associated with one of the four **Vedas**—the oldest Hindu sacred texts, a different geographical quarter of India, a different "great utterance" (**mahavakya**), and a different ascetic quality.

## Dasharatha

In the ***Ramayana***, the earlier of the two great Indian epics, Dasharatha is a king of the **Ikshvaku** dynasty and the father of **Rama**, the epic's protagonist.

Dasharatha is generally portrayed as a good king, but like many characters in Indian mythology, his ultimate destiny is governed by the result of a **curse**, whose effects he is unable to avoid. As a young man, Dasharatha is very fond of hunting. On one occasion, he blindly sends an arrow to the spot where he hears the sound of an **animal** drinking at a stream. When he investigates, he is horrified to discover a young man struck by his arrow, with the water pot he had been filling by his side. With his dying breaths the young man informs Dasharatha that he is the sole source of support for his blind parents and commands Dasharatha to inform them of his death. Dasharatha is a man of honor and fulfills the boy's last request. When the boy's father hears the story, he angrily curses Dasharatha to die in similar grief, bereft of his **sons**.

For many years it seemed as if this curse would not come true, since Dasharatha had no sons, even though he had three wives: **Kausalya**, **Kaikeyi**, and **Sumitra**. Dasharatha sponsors various religious rites for the **birth** of sons, and finally commissions the sage **Rishyashringa** to perform a great **sacrifice**. At the rite's conclusion, a shining figure emerges from the sacrificial **fire**, places a pot of milk-rice before Dasharatha, and directs him to feed it to his wives. Dasharatha divides the contents of the pot between Kausalya and Kaikeyi, each of whom give some to Sumitra. In due time Kausalya bears Rama, Kaikeyi gives birth to **Bharata**, and Sumitra (by virtue of receiving a share from each of her co-wives) bears the twins **Lakshmana** and **Shatrughna**.

As his sons grow into manhood Dasharatha is blissfully happy, and the memory of the curse fades from his mind. As a young man, Rama shows his prowess and goodness, and Dasharatha decides to anoint him as the heir-apparent. Yet the night before this ceremony, the curse finally comes to fruition. During the preparations preceding Rama's investiture, the mind of his stepmother Kaikeyi has been slowly

poisoned by the whisperings of her maid **Manthara**. Manthara convinces Kaikeyi that she and her son Bharata will be mere slaves after Rama is crowned the heir-apparent. This prompts Kaikeyi to take drastic action. Many years before, Dasharatha promised Kaikeyi two blessings as reward for her help in winning a great battle. She has never asked for these, but she now requests that Rama spend fourteen years in forest exile, and that her own son, Bharata, shall rule in his place. Dasharatha pleads with Kaikeyi to change her mind, but she is adamant that her wishes have to be granted if Dasharatha will retain the unbroken family honor. Dasharatha later pleads with Rama to disobey him and take over the kingdom by force, but Rama refuses this as it is an unrighteous action. Rama leaves for the forest, thus upholding the family honor, but in his sorrow at being separated from Rama, Dasharatha dies of a broken heart.

## Dashavatar

("ten descents") Collective name for the ten **avatars** (incarnations on **earth**) of the god **Vishnu**. In each case, Vishnu takes form to restore the cosmic equilibrium when it has been thrown out of balance by the action of a particular **demon**. See also **avatar**.

## Dashavatara Stotra

("Hymn to the Ten **Avatars**") The opening canto of the ***Gitagovinda***, a twelfth-century lyric poem written by the poet **Jayadeva**. The *Gitagovinda* is an allegory of the union of the human soul with the divine, described through the story of the god **Krishna** and his human lover **Radha**. At the narrative level, this tale describes the couple's initial passionate lovemaking, followed by jealousy, anger, and estrangement. It concludes with their reconciliation and an even more passionate reunion.

Although it is preceded by a short introduction, the Dashavatara Stotra is the text's true beginning. The



The Dashavatara Stotra is the opening song in the *Gitagovinda*, a twelfth-century lyrical poem that tells the story of the god Krishna and his human lover Radha.

Dashavatara Stotra is a hymn paying homage to the ten avatars or earthly incarnations of the god Krishna, each of whom has been responsible for preserving the cosmos in a time of crisis. Jayadeva uses this opening hymn to remind his readers that the Krishna of his story is no mere mortal lover—even though the story employs the language and images commonly found in **Sanskrit** love poetry—but rather the lord and master of the universe, who has saved it from destruction again and again. The context supplied by the images in this opening hymn alert the reader that this text is not merely a love story.

Jayadeva is unusual in describing the god Krishna as the source of the ten avatars, since Krishna is more commonly considered an avatar of the god **Vishnu**. This theological difference stems from Jayadeva's connection with the **Jagannath** temple in the city of **Puri**. Jagannath is said to be a form of Krishna, but it is generally accepted that

Jagannath was originally an autochthonous ("of the land") **deity** who happened to be Puri's local deity. Identifying him with Krishna was a way to assimilate Jagannath into the Hindu pantheon. For Jayadeva, Jagannath-Krishna is thus the supreme deity, not an avatar, and the place usually occupied by Krishna in Jayadeva's enumeration of the avatars is taken by Krishna's brother, **Balarama**. For the text of the Dashavatara Stotra and the *Gitagovinda*, see Barbara Stoller Miller (ed. and trans.), *The Love Song of the Dark Lord*, 1977.

## Dasyu

("slave") The name used for non-**Aryan** peoples in the **Vedas**, the earliest Hindu sacred texts. The words Aryan and Dasyu are an "us" and "them" opposition—in essence, the people who composed the Vedas called themselves Aryans, and referred to the "outsiders" as Dasyus. Although one cannot be certain whether these names refer to a particular group of people, or any group of all, one theory is that the Aryans were a people who had migrated from outside of India, and the Dasyus were the indigenous people in northern India. The Vedas describe the Dasyus as living in fortified cities, some of which were destroyed by the god **Indra**. Some readers have interpreted this image as the Aryans' destruction of the **Indus Valley** cities, but there is little historical record for such spectacular conquests.

Other hymns in the Vedas describe the Dasyus as dark-skinned and noseless, which is generally taken to mean flat-nosed. This has led some to identify the Dasyus with the **Dravidian** language speakers who now live in southern India, since some of them share these characteristics. According to this belief, the Dravidian language speakers would have been gradually displaced toward the south as the Indo-Aryan language speakers—in short, the Aryans—came into India from the north. One piece of linguistic evidence for this comes from modern Pakistan, in which a small group of people speak Brahui, which is a member of the Dravidian language family. This Brahui-speaking community is entirely surrounded by people speaking Indo-Aryan languages, and the simplest theory for this anomaly is that these Brahui speakers are an isolated linguistic fragment of that earlier time. These theories are intriguing, but it is naive to read the Vedas as an objective historical account, or even to assume that any of its references correspond to events outside the sacred world to which they were the key.

## Dattatreya

In the religious texts known as the **puranas**, Dattatreya is a famous **ascetic** and is considered to be a partial **avatar** (incarnation) of the god **Vishnu**. Many modern ascetics consider him a paradigm for **asceticism**, and Dattatreya has actually been installed as a **deity** in certain places associated with ascetics, such as Mount **Girnar**. Dattatreya's mother is **Anasuya**, and he is born after she has done a great favor to the gods. According to the story, a faithful wife named Silavati curses the **sun** not to rise, and in consequence the creatures of the **earth** are greatly troubled. Anasuya succeeds in persuading Silavati to recall her **curse**, and in their gratitude, the gods **Brahma**, Vishnu, and **Shiva** inform her that she may ask for whatever she wants. Anasuya requests that each be born as one of her **sons**, and this is granted: Vishnu is born as Dattatreya, Shiva as **Durvasas**, and Brahma as Chandra.

## Datura

(from **Sanskrit** word *dhattura*) Name for a genus of plants known as the thornapple, which is a distant relative of the potato. The datura plant contains poisonous alkaloids, which when consumed in small quantities produce intoxication, and in larger quantities, sickness and death. Devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva** eat the datura plant's swollen

Seed of the datura, or thorn-apple. Devotees of the god Shiva eat the intoxicating seedpods, which can be lethal if consumed in large amounts.

seedpods as **intoxicants**, in imitation of their patron divinity's narcotic revels. Needless to say, because of its danger, datura must be consumed with great care, and under the direction of someone who knows its nature.

## Daughters

The status of female children varies widely in Hindu society, based on regional customs, the position of the social subgroup (**jati/caste**) to which a family belongs, and the particular circumstances of individual families. In general, although the **birth** of a daughter is a welcome event, it brings greater responsibility than the birth of a son. Parents have a religious duty to arrange a daughter's marriage, and this is still taken very seriously, since her marriage is seen as the key to her continued material prosperity, as well as her fulfillment as a human being. The gift of a daughter (**kanyadan**) in marriage brings the parents immense religious merit, but also an onerous economic obligation. Arranging a marriage in modern India usually involves considerable time, anxiety, and expense. The last comes not only from the expenses of the wedding ceremonies, but also from the practice of giving a **dowry** (gift to the groom's family) with the bride, which is still quite common. In many poor families, the birth of multiple daughters is often seen as a disaster, since their families will be unable to marry them properly.

Aside from the expense and trouble, in many parts of India daughters are often seen as "temporary" members of their natal families. After their marriages they will live in their marital homes and become part of their marital families, whereas their brothers will bring their brides into their natal home and will live there for the rest of their lives. It is upon these **sons** and their wives that the parents will depend for support in their old age, as well as for the performance of ancestral rites after their deaths. This is the traditional pattern throughout much of India; although as the forces of modernity have changed the joint family, it has become more common for husbands and wives to live separately from their parents. This pattern also shows considerable local variation. For example, because the **brahmin** community in southern India is so small, cross-cousin marriage is fairly common there, and in this circumstance a woman is actually moving from one branch of her family to another.

These economic and social factors have sometimes led to unfortunate consequences. Consciously or unconsciously, one often finds that sons are favored over daughters in many significant ways: in their access to education; in their opportunities, which are deemed more important for men because of their need to support a family; in Hindu **inheritance** laws (in which sons get a much larger share, under the presumption that they will be supporting a family); and in poorer families, in which sons are favored for even more basic needs such as food and access to medical care. Despite these general patterns, it must be emphasized that many families treat all their children with

equal love and care. This is particularly true in contemporary times, and given the trend toward smaller families, the birth of a daughter is cause for just as much rejoicing as the birth of a son. See also **arranged marriage**.

## Day, Structure of

In some sense, most divisions of time are arbitrary, which is a feature that appears in several different dimensions of the traditional Indian divisions of the day. The twenty-four hours of the solar day can be divided using several different measures of time, some of which do not exactly correspond with one another, and these differing times can also be subject to judgments about their symbolic values. In one system, the day is divided into eight equal periods (**prahars**) of three hours each. These eight periods mark the general progress during the day and night, with the first of these prahars ending at sunrise. Shorter units of time are reckoned in periods of about twenty-four minutes called **ghatikas**, of which there are sixty in every twenty-four hours. The ghatika supposedly takes its name from the clay pots (ghata) that were used to make water-clocks; these pots measured time by the amount of water that dripped through a small hole. Two ghatikas make a **muhurta**, of which there are thirty during each twenty-four hours. The reckonings of the day in prahars and ghatikas thus do not exactly correspond to one another, since each prahar has 7.5 ghatikas. Based on this, it would seem that the former marks the more general divisions of each day and the latter more specific time periods.

The other way in which the times of day can be viewed is with regard to their symbolic value. The most auspicious time of day is the "Time of **Brahma**" (**Brahma muhurta**), the period immediately before sunrise. This is reckoned the best time of the entire day for **worship**, meditation, or any type of religious practice. Although this is named a muhurta, and thus should be limited to forty-eight minutes, the Brahma muhurta is often thought to encompass the entire three hours in the day's first prahar. Hence, it is not unusual for devout religious people to arise around 3 A.M., to take advantage of this period. In contrast, the immediately preceding prahar (roughly midnight to 3 A.M.) is the most inauspicious in the day, a time when spirits and **demons** are loose. Sleep is the most appropriate activity for this time; other activities are appropriate only when absolutely necessary. The only time religious practices are done during this time is when they are part of an all-night ceremony (jagaran), or a continuous reading (**akhand path**) of a religious text. In following the most inauspicious and chaotic period with the most auspicious, the cycle of the day (as well as the **year**) mirrors that of the cosmos, whose gradual and continuing degeneration are suddenly replaced with complete renewal and regeneration. See also **Cosmology** and **Cosmic Time**.

## Dayabhaga

("division of **inheritance**") Pivotal legal text, written by the Bengali scholar **Jimutavahana** (early twelfth century). As its name would indicate, the *Dayabhaga* was concerned with matters of inheritance, partition, and the division of property, and it eventually became the primary legal code for the entire Bengal cultural region. The inheritance pattern in the *Dayabhaga* stresses succession, which is very different from the predominant Hindu pattern of survivorship. Survivorship vests all surviving males in the male line with equal shares of the family property, but gives no inheritance to **women**. Under this arrangement, the death of a male heir automatically increases the share of all the other surviving males, whereas their share decreases when another male is born. Under the succession model in the *Dayabhaga*, **sons** do not become shareholders of the family property at **birth**, but upon the death of their father. If a son happens to die before his father, the

son's heirs (including his wife and **daughters**) become inheritors, not in their own right, but as representatives of the deceased heir. Under the *Dayabhaga*, **widows** and daughters can thus have a share in family property, and they are allowed to act as agents in their own right. In theory this arrangement seems far more advantageous to women, but in fact it had some gruesome consequences. When the British first settled in Bengal in the late eighteenth century, they were horrified by the prevalence of **sati**, the rite in which a widow would be burned on her husband's funeral pyre. It seems that sati was not nearly so common in many other parts of India, and one theory is that this rite was the family's way to ensure that their daughter-in-law—who was an outsider to the family—would not be able to gain control over any of their ancestral property.

## Dayanand Saraswati

(1824–1883) Nineteenth-century reformist **ascetic** and founder of the **Arya Samaj**, a reformist Hindu organization. The late nineteenth century was an era of sweeping social, economic, and religious change in northern India, and the Arya Samaj was an authentically Hindu response to these forces. Dayanand's mission for the Arya Samaj was to reform and revitalize Hinduism by purging it of the "false practices" that had gradually crept in. Swami Dayanand's fundamental assumption was that ultimate religious authority lay only in the ancient scriptures called the **Vedas**, and that any contemporary religious practices not found in the Vedas were mistaken, odious, and deserved to be abandoned. This stance allowed him to attack many of the "social evils" plaguing nineteenth-century Hinduism, such as child marriages, **sati** (the rite in which a **widow** would be burned on her husband's funeral pyre), "idolatrous" image **worship**, untouchability, a ban on widow remarriage, and the unequal

status of **women**. In claiming that such practices were "corrupt," Dayanand had found not only a viable strategy for reform, but a way to undercut the claims of Christian missionaries, who pointed to such evils as evidence that Hindu religion was inferior to Christianity.

Unlike its predecessor, the **Brahmo Samaj**, which was heavily influenced by Christianity, the Arya Samaj was a Hindu response drawing from purely Hindu sources. Dayanand belonged to the first generation of Hindus aiming to reassert the greatness of Hinduism as opposed to the Christian missionary challenge, and much of his writing is militantly anti-Christian. One sign of his crusading spirit is his support for the ceremony of purification (**shuddhi**), through which Hindus who had become members of other religious communities were received back into the Hindu community. Although the Arya Samaj claimed that they were simply getting back to the **Veda**, the ultimate aim was not to reclaim that long-gone era, but to develop a form of Hindu religious life more compatible with "modern" times. Thus, even though Dayanand was "traditionalist" in his emphasis on the Vedas, he was radical in insisting that the Vedas should be accessible to all people, including groups such as women and the **shudras**, or the lowest social group, both of whom had traditionally been forbidden to read or even hear it. During his ministry Dayanand spoke throughout India, attacking any and all religions not rooted in the Vedas, including contemporary Hinduism. His eloquence, charisma, and commitment brought him considerable success, but also many enemies, and he was eventually assassinated by poisoning. For further information see Dayanand Saraswati, *Autobiography of Swami Dayanand Saraswati*, K. C. Yadav (ed.), 1978; Ganga Prasad Upadhyaya (trans.), *Light of Truth*, 1960; and Arvind Sharma, "Swami Dayananda Sarasvati," in Robert D. Baird (ed.), *Religion in Modern India*, 1998.

## Day of Brahma

The Day of Brahma, or **kalpa**, is the largest generally accepted measure of time in Indian **cosmology**, and spans 432 million years. This time period is the ultimate limit for the existence of the created world, although within it the universe undergoes periodic renewals. At the conclusion of the Day of Brahma comes the universal dissolution (**pralaya**), in which the created universe is completely destroyed and reabsorbed into **Vishnu**. The Day of Brahma is followed by a night of equal length, during which the only living thing is the god Vishnu, who sleeps on the back of his serpent couch, **Shesha**, and floats on the surface of the cosmic ocean. When the Night of Brahma is ended, a lotus sprouts forth from Vishnu's navel, which opens to reveal the god **Brahma**, and with the new Day of Brahma the universe begins anew.

The Day of Brahma can be divided into smaller units based on two different methods. One of these divides the Day of Brahma into fourteen equal ages, in which each age is identified by the particular divine sovereign (**Manu**) who rules during that age. Another divides the Day of Brahma into one thousand **mahayugas**, each of which has four constituent **yugas** (units of **cosmic time**), each shorter than the last. See also **Cosmic Time**.

## Deathbed Rites

General term for the rites done for a dying person. These rites have a twofold purpose: to purify the person's body, and, more importantly, to calm the mind. The first is generally done by applying holy substances, such as **Ganges water** or a **Tulsi** leaf. In some cases, the dying person will also hold the tail of a **cow**, since according to popular mythology this will enable the person to cross the **Vaitarani River**, the river leading to the afterlife. The emphasis on calming the dying person's mind comes from the belief that one's dying thoughts have enormous karmic ramifications for future lives. Ideally, the dying person should be calm and composed, since any sort of fear or agitation is believed to have negative consequences. One method to help promote such calmness is to read passages from religious texts, whether to remind the hearer of the body's impermanence, or to have the last thing one hears be the name of God. At the moment of death the dying person is often placed on the **earth**—perhaps so that the earth can absorb the impurity (**ashaucha**) of the **corpse**, or perhaps as a symbol that whatever a person's status in life, all human beings eventually share the same fate. After death the rites associated with **cremation** begin, which are the next set of rites in the series known as the **antyeshthi samskara** ("last rites").

## Death Rites

See **antyeshthi samskara**.

## Deccan

A region of the Indian subcontinent. In its broadest usage, this word can refer to all of India south of the **Vindhya Mountains**, the range that divides northern and southern India. More specifically, this term denotes the dry and hilly plateau in the northern and eastern parts of the region south of the Vindhyas, bounded on the east and west by the highlands known as the Eastern and Western **Ghats**. In Hindu cultural terms, the Deccan is a transitional cultural area between the northern Indian plain and the deep south.

## Deer

In Hindu iconography, an **animal** strongly associated with the god **Shiva**, particularly in his form as **Pashupati**, the "Lord of Beasts." In many of the four-armed images of Shiva, one of the upper arms will have the figure of the deer emerging from it, symbolizing his control over all life. In Hindu **bhakti** (devotional) poetry, the musk deer is often used as a symbol for an ignorant,

unenlightened person. According to this image, just as the deer does not recognize that the heady scent of musk comes from its own body, but rushes all over the forest in search of it, so are human beings ignorant of God inside and ever close to them, but looking outside themselves in search of the divine.

## Dehu

Town in the Pune district of **Maharashtra** state, sixty-five miles east and south of Bombay. It is most famous as the home of the poet-saint **Tukaram**, one of most important figures in the **Varkari Panth**. The Varkaris are a religious community centered around the **worship** of the Hindu god **Vithoba**, at his temple at **Pandharpur** in modern Maharashtra. Varkari religious practice centers primarily around two annual pilgrimages in which all the participants arrive in Pandharpur on the same day. Tukaram still symbolically travels to Pandharpur twice each year; a **palanquin** (palkhi) bearing his sandals is at the head of the procession bearing his name.

## Deities

This is a word with various possible meanings in different contexts. On one hand, it can refer to the gods (**devas**). These are beings who live in one of the heavenly realms, by virtue of their past good **karma** (actions), but who are still subject to the law of karma and who therefore must someday be reborn in a lower state. This word can also refer to the Supreme Reality, which can best be designated as "God," although the Hindu imagination has given it various names: **Brahman**, the **Goddess**, **Vishnu**, **Shiva**, **Ganesh**, and a host of other deities in the pantheon, including **village deities**.

## Demons

The Hindu mythic universe has various classes of supernatural beings, some of which are perpetually at odds with one another. The most prominent conflict is between the suras ("gods") and another class of divine beings called asuras ("not-gods"). Aside from the asuras, there are other powerful beings such as **rakshasas**, **pisacas**, and **vetalas**, which have greater or lesser malevolence toward the gods and human beings. The English word most often used to denote all these divine adversaries is the word "demon." Although this is a convenient label and avoids the need for unfamiliar **Sanskrit** terminology, it also carries inappropriate and misleading associations. The word "demon" carries connotations of absolute and radical evil, as well as willful opposition to a single supreme divinity. Neither assumption is appropriate in the Hindu mythic universe, which is polytheistic, or believing in more than one god. This polytheistic universe has a host of divine beings, whose individual interests may well conflict with those of the gods, and whose mutual opposition may spill over into open war. This does not make such opponents, or "demons," inherently evil, but rather the opponents of the Hindu gods, from whose perspective Hindu mythology is clearly recounted. These "demons" may also be ill-disposed toward humans, but they are not necessarily or inherently so. Perhaps the clearest recognition of their status is that despite their occasional opposition to the gods, they are never completely destroyed, but simply demoted to a more appropriate status. For example, when the "demon" **Hiranyakashipu** is destroyed by **Vishnu's Man-Lion avatar**, he is succeeded by his **son Prahlada**. In the same way, after the god **Rama** kills **Ravana**, the "demon" king of **Lanka**, Rama appoints as successor Ravana's brother **Vibhishana**. Asuras and other supernormal beings thus have a legitimate place in the Hindu mythic world, and as long as they do not overreach themselves and throw the world into imbalance, they are allowed to remain.

## Deogarh

Small town in the extreme southern part of the state of **Uttar Pradesh**, seventy miles south of the city Jhansi, in a part of Uttar Pradesh almost completely enclosed by the state of **Madhya Pradesh**. It is famous as the site for one of the few surviving temples from the **Gupta dynasty**, a fifth-century temple dedicated to **Vishnu** as the **Dashavatar** ("Ten Incarnations"). The temple itself is a masonry cube about twenty feet on each side, topped by a ruined tower that would have originally been about forty feet high. In its modest size and square construction, this temple shows little resemblance to the Hindu temples of a later age. However, it prefigures later **architecture** in its magnificent carvings: in the images carved in panels on the side walls, around the temple's single door, and on friezes at the top of the walls. The portrayal of the divine figures in these carvings is identical to that done centuries later, which indicates that the images used to represent these **deities** were already fixed at the time the temple was built.

## Deoghar

("God's home") Sacred site (**tirtha**) in the southeastern corner of the modern state of **Bihar**, about 130 miles southeast of the city of Patna. Deoghar is famous throughout India as the site for a temple to the god **Shiva**, in his form as **Vaidyanath**, the "Lord of Physicians." Vaidyanath is one of the twelve **jyotirlingas**, a group of sacred sites deemed especially holy to Shiva, and at which Shiva is believed to be uniquely present. Deoghar hosts an enormous religious gathering on the festival of **Shivaratri** (February—March) and during the **lunar month** of **Shravan** (July—August), both of which are times deemed particularly sacred to Shiva. On both occasions, pilgrims draw **water** from the **Ganges** at Sultanganj, more than sixty miles from Deoghar, and then walk to Deoghar to present the water as an **offering** to Shiva. This particular observance combines devotion to God with the willingness to suffer hardship; it is often performed to fulfill a vow made when asking for some divine favor. As in many Hindu holy places, pilgrim traffic peaks at Deoghar at certain festival times and at other times of the **year** drops off to almost nothing.

## Deoras, Balasaheb

(1915–1996) Third sarsanghchalak ("Supreme Leader") of the **Rashtriya Svayamsevak Sangh** (RSS), a conservative Hindu organization whose express purpose is to provide the leadership cadre for a revitalized Hindu India. The RSS is a highly autocratic organization that lays great stress on obedience to authority, thus the sarsanghchalak wields virtually complete power over it. During Deoras's tenure from 1973 to 1994, he took a much more activist stance than his predecessor, M.S. **Golwalkar**, particularly in promoting the growth of the RSS's affiliate organizations, in giving the RSS an orientation to social service, and in actively seeking to recruit members and establish **shakhas** (branches) in all parts of the country. For further information see Walter K. Andersen and Shridhar D. Damle, *The Brotherhood in Saffron*, 1987; Tapan Basu et al., *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags*, 1993; and Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*, 1996.

## Deshastha

The model for traditional Indian society was as a collection of **endogamous** subgroups known as **jatis** ("birth"). These jatis were organized (and their social status determined) by the group's hereditary occupation, over which each group had a monopoly. This sort of differentiation applied even to **brahmins**, whose role has been to serve as priests, scholars, and teachers. The Deshastha brahmin jati is a subset of the **Maharashtri** brahmins, who were themselves one of the five southern brahmin communities

(**Pancha Dravida**). The core region for the Deshastha brahmins is in the **Deccan** region in **Maharashtra**, whereas the other major subcommunity, the **Chitpavan** or Konkanastha, is found on the coast.

## Deshnok

Small village in the Bikaner district in the state of **Rajasthan**, roughly twenty miles south of the city of Bikaner. Deshnok is famous for the temple to the **goddess Karni Mata**, in which thousands of **rats** have been given sacred status and are treated as **deities**, in the belief that they are Karni Mata's **sons**.

## Deul

(probably a form of *deva*, "**deity**") In the temple **architecture** of the state of **Orissa**, this is the name for the beehive-shaped tower under which the image of the temple's primary deity resides. Unlike the architecture in other parts of northern India, in which a series of towers (**shikharas**) gradually led up to the tallest tower, Orissan temples tend to have a fairly long and low entrance porch (**jagamohans**) and an extremely high deul, with this difference in visual forms accentuating the contrast between the two.

## Deva

The word deva literally means "shining one," although the most common (and often most appropriate) translation is "god." This word is an epithet for any superhuman being, although it can also be used figuratively for any person of high status, such as a king or a **brahmin** (priest). The notion of "gods" in Hinduism must be understood in light of the generally assumed context of reincarnation (**samsara**), which assumes that a person can be reborn in many different realms of reality. Some of these are realms of punishment where people atone for the effects of their bad **karma**, while others are realms of pleasure (the **heavens**) where people enjoy the results of their good karma. The devas are the inhabitants of these heavens, and are thus "gods," since gods, by definition, live in heaven.

Yet all these gods are still subject to the vicissitudes of reincarnation—even **Indra**, the ruler of heaven. **Birth** in heaven is based on one's good karma, which is inevitably diminished by enjoying the rewards of life in heaven, just as a savings account is depleted by continuing withdrawals. When their good karma has been exhausted, even the gods are subject to rebirth in other realms. So even though these gods are superhuman, they are still subject to the law of reincarnation. There is thus a qualitative difference between these gods (the devas) and the so-called Great gods, such as **Vishnu**, **Shiva**, and the **Goddess**. These latter **deities** are seen by their devotees (**bhakta**) as totally outside the realm of **space**, time, and the causes and effects of karma, and thus correspond more directly to the Judeo-Christian notion of "God," as the ultimate power in the universe.

## Devadasi

("[female] servant of the lord") Name for a class of **women** kept in temples as singers and dancers in the service of the temple's presiding **deity**, to whom they were usually considered to be "married." Their special status prevented them from marrying human husbands, although in many cases they would form long-term liaisons with prominent local men. Any **daughters** born from such liaisons would in turn be dedicated to the temple, while **sons** would be trained as musicians. In many cases, devadasis had unusual legal rights, such as the ability to own, manage, and transfer property, which for most women were vested only in their husbands. At best, these devadasis were literate and cultured women, whose talents brought them considerable status, while at worst (as was often the case in the nineteenth century) they were prostitutes whose services enriched the temple. The latter

situation prompted the British to formally ban this practice, despite their general reluctance to interfere in Hindu religious affairs.

## Devaki

In Hindu mythology, the god **Krishna's** mother. Krishna is considered the eighth **avatar** (incarnation) of the god **Vishnu**, and like all of the avatars, he comes down to **earth** to restore the cosmic balance by destroying the forces of evil that are upsetting it. Devaki is the niece of King **Kamsa**, the evil king of **Mathura**, and on the day she is married a heavenly voice proclaims that her eighth child will kill Kamsa. Kamsa seeks to destroy this prophecy by imprisoning Devaki and her husband, **Vasudeva**, killing each of their children as they are born. Devaki's seventh child is magically transferred to the womb of her co-wife, **Rohini**, and is born as **Balarama**. At the **birth** of the eighth child, **Krishna**, the locked gates magically open, and a deep sleep falls over all the guards, allowing Vasudeva to spirit the infant child to his foster parents, **Nanda** and **Yashoda**.

## Devanagari

Name for the most common northern Indian script, in which the sacred **Sanskrit**, modern **Hindi**, and Marathi languages are commonly written to this day. It is a descendant of the ancient **Brahmi** script, and from it developed the scripts used for the modern **Bengali**, **Gujarati**, Oriya, and Punjabi languages. Its most characteristic feature is that the top element of most letters is a horizontal line, which, when the letters are written together, causes the letters to "hang," like laundry from a clothesline. Its name literally means "[script of the] city of the gods," and according to one theory, it was given this name because it was developed in **Benares**, one of the holiest cities in India.

## Devapratishtha

("establishing the **deity**") Rite by which the image of a deity is established in a temple and consecrated for **worship**. The image itself must be constructed according to carefully defined sculptural and artistic canons that date back to the early centuries of the common era, as the sculptures at the **Deogarh** temple clearly show. The image, temple site, and the performers must be purified before the rite begins, and this **purity** must be maintained throughout the entire rite—which can last for days—to ensure that the image remains pure. All parts in the transmission and physical **installation** of the image are carefully done, but the climactic rite is the **pranapratishtha**, in which the image is infused with the breath of life and becomes the seat for the deity. After this point, the image is considered to be ritually "alive," and must receive regular worship and ministrations.

## Devaprayag

("divine confluence") Sacred town (**tirtha**) in the northern part of the state of **Uttar Pradesh**, in the **Himalaya** Mountains about sixty miles up the **Ganges** from the city of **Haridwar**. Devaprayag is sacred because it is at the confluence of the **Bhagirathi** and **Alakananda** rivers, the largest Himalayan tributaries of the Ganges. Devaprayag is the final such river confluence in the Himalayas, and it is at this confluence that the Ganges is definitively formed as one indivisible sacred stream.

## Devar

In the northern Indian joint family, the term designating a husband's younger brother. The traditional Indian joint family is headed by a husband and wife. The couple's **sons**, the sons' wives, and unmarried **daughters** live with them. The married daughters live with their husbands' joint families. The joint family is not just a group of people living together. The good of the family is given
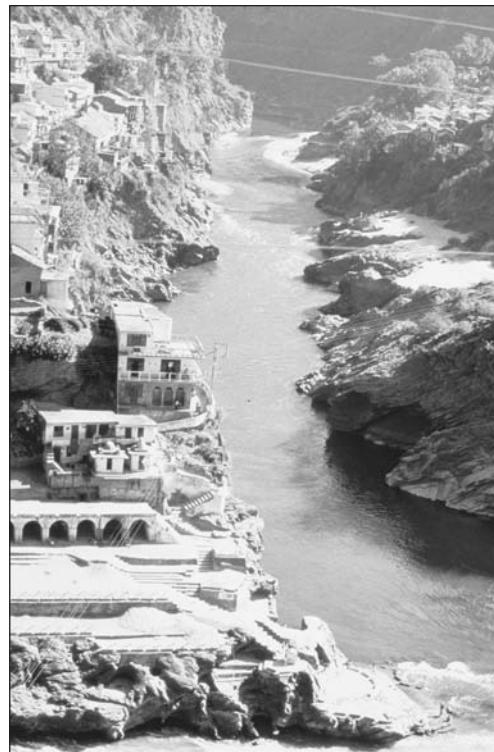
higher value than any individual's desires. Traditional Indian society was highly status-conscious, a trait reflected not only in the traditional hierarchical conception of society, but also in similar conceptions within the family. Based on these assumptions, there are different words for all sorts of relationships in the Indian family. These words are based partly on a person's age in relation to the speaker, whether he is related by blood or by marriage, and whether blood relatives come from the mother's or the father's side of the family. Since a woman's devar is younger than her husband, he is considered a person of less exalted status, and thus someone with whom she may have a more familiar "**joking relationship**."

## Devara Dasimayya

Tenth-century devotee (**bhakta**) of **Shiva**, who was much admired by **Basavanna** and the other **Lingayat** leaders. According to tradition Dasimayya earned his living as a weaver, but spent most of his energies propagating the **worship** of Shiva. He encountered particular opposition from the Jains and the **Vaishnavas**, about which there are many miraculous tales, but he also served as a missionary to jungle tribes. For further information see A. K. Ramanujan (trans.), *Speaking of Siva*, 1973.

## Devaram

Name for the collected hymns of the poet-saints **Appar**, **Sambandar**, and **Sundaramurtti**. These were the most important of the **Nayanars**, a group of sixty-three **Shaiva** poet-saints who lived in southern India between the seventh and ninth centuries. Along with their **Vaishnava** counterparts, the **Alvars**, the Nayanars spearheaded the revitalization of Hindu religion versus the Buddhists and the Jains. Both the Nayanars and the Alvars stressed passionate devotion (**bhakti**) to a personal god—**Shiva** for the Nayanars, **Vishnu** for the Alvars—



The town of Devaprayag. It is considered sacred because it lies at the confluence of the Bhagirathi and Alakananda Rivers, the two largest tributaries of the Ganges in the Himalayas.

and conveyed this devotion through hymns sung in the **Tamil language**. Appar and Sambandar were the first of the Nayanars, and Sundaramurtti was the last. Although the hymns in the Devaram are devotional, they form the basis for the philosophical school known as **Shaiva Siddhanta**, and are thus considered the holiest of the Tamil Shaivite texts. The hymns are also marked by opposition and hostility to non-Hindu traditions, particularly the Jains, with whom the Nayanars were apparently contesting for influence and patronage.

## Devasena

In southern Indian mythological tradition, Devasena is the wife of the god **Skanda**, in his southern Indian form as **Murugan**. Following the pan-Indian custom of **arranged marriage**, Devasena is given in marriage to Skanda by **Indra** (king of the gods) and the other

Hindu gods. After his marriage, Skanda contracts a "love-marriage" with the tribal girl **Valli**. Skanda's two wives thus symbolize both sides of his identity—Valli bears witness to his connection with the land, and his ultimate roots as a tribal **deity**, while Devasena shows his assimilation into the larger Hindu pantheon.

## Devayajna

("**sacrifice** to the gods") One of the Five Great Sacrifices (**panchamahayajna**) that is prescribed in the texts on religious duty (**dharma literature**). These Five Great Sacrifices are prescribed daily religious observances for a "**twice-born**" householder, that is, a householder who has been born into one of the three twice-born groups in Indian society—**brahmin**, **kshatriya**, or **vaishya**—and who has received the adolescent religious **initiation** known as the "second birth." Each of the five sacrifices (**yajna**) is directed toward a different class of beings—from the Absolute Reality down to **animals**—and is satisfied by different actions. The devayajna is directed toward the gods and is satisfied by **homa**, the **offerings** of clarified butter into the sacred **fire**. In the time since these texts were composed, Hindu life has undergone significant changes, and since most Hindu homes no longer maintain a sacred fire, this particular rite has been largely omitted.

## Devimahatmya

("Greatness of the **Goddess**") The earliest and most important mythic source for the cult of the Goddess as the supreme divine power. The *Devimahatmya* is itself a section of a larger **Sanskrit** (sacred language) text, the *Markandeya Purana*, and is generally accepted to have been composed in the **Narmada River** region in the fifth or sixth century. The *Devimahatmya* is most notable for its assertion that God is female. This notion has no clear source in the earlier Hindu tradition, in which female **deities** exist but are insignificant. This conviction must have existed at some level, because it emerges fully developed in the *Devimahatmya*, and the idea must have spent some time developing before its full fruition in this text.

The *Devimahatmya* itself is a text of 700 verses, hence its other common name, the *Durgasaptashati* ("700 verses to **Durga**"). The text begins with a frame story, in which a king and a merchant, each beset by worldly trials, seek refuge in the peace of the forest. There they meet a sage, who listens to each of their stories, and explains that all of their troubles are due to Mahamaya (an epithet of the Goddess). This is an epithet for the Goddess as the wielder of illusion, who is the sole power behind the universe. When pressed for further details, the sage tells three mythic stories, each describing the salvific activity of the Goddess. These three tales form the bulk of the text and the basis for the **worship** of the Goddess.

The first story retells the myth of the **demons Madhu** and **Kaitabha**, who are born from the god **Vishnu's** earwax during the period of cosmic dissolution (**pralaya**). As the creation of the world begins anew, a **lotus** sprouts from Vishnu's navel. It opens to reveal the creator-god **Brahma**, who is immediately menaced by Madhu and Kaitabha. The story of these two demons also appears in the mythology connected with Vishnu, but there are significant differences in this version. In all versions of the myth, Brahma appeals for help, and Vishnu eventually slays the demons. But in the *Devimahatmya*, Brahma's hymn of praise is to the Goddess, who in her form as **Yoganidra** ("sleep of **yoga**") has lulled Vishnu into a cosmic stupor, rendering him unable to come to Brahma's aid. Pleased by Brahma's praise, the Goddess withdraws her influence over Vishnu, he awakens and slays the demons.

The second story centers around the buffalo-demon **Mahishasura**, who is so

powerful that none of the gods can conquer him. One day, when the gods are recounting their defeats at the demon's hands, each of the gods begin to give off a great radiance. This radiance collects into a single glowing mass, and from it the figure of the Goddess emerges. This myth portrays the Goddess as the concentrated essence of all the gods, and thus superior to any one of them. This motif is accentuated by each of the gods giving her a copy of their weapons, so that symbolically she wields all of their **divine powers**. The Goddess takes up arms against Mahishasura and his army, and after a terrifying battle, slays him.

The third story also portrays the Goddess as a warrior-queen. In this episode, she fights and destroys the demon armies of **Shumbha** and **Nishumbha**, along with their minions **Chanda**, **Munda**, and **Raktabija**. This story is notable for the first appearance of the fierce goddess **Kali**, who springs forth from the forehead of the Goddess as her anger personified. Kali helps the Goddess to defeat the demon armies by stuffing them into her mouth and consuming them. Kali is also instrumental in destroying the demon Raktabija, who has been granted the wish that whenever a drop of his **blood** falls to the ground, it will be transformed into another full-sized copy of himself. This makes him impossible to kill by conventional means. Kali is able to thwart this special power by drinking Raktabija's blood before it reaches the ground. As with the second book, this story has extended descriptions of battlefield carnage.

All of these stories describe the Goddess as the supreme divine power, far superior to the male gods in the pantheon. The frame story ends with an extended hymn of praise to the Goddess, and descriptions of the benefits gained from her worship. Both the king and the merchant begin to worship her, and after three years both are granted their desires. The king asks for a larger and unconquerable kingdom, alluding to the Goddess's power to bestow worldly wishes. The merchant, however, requests final liberation, showing his awareness of her power over illusion, and the ultimate spiritual goal. For further information see Thomas B. Coburn, *Devi Mahatmya*, 1984.

## Devotee
See **bhakta**.

## Devotthayan Ekadashi
Festival falling on the eleventh **day** (**ekadashi**) of the bright (waxing) half of the **lunar month** of **Kartik** (October–November). This is celebrated as the day on which the god **Vishnu** awakens from his four-month slumber, having fallen asleep on **Devshayani Ekadashi** ("eleventh day festival") in **Ashadh** (June–July). When Vishnu has arisen from sleep, the ritually dangerous **chaturmas** ("four-month") period is over, and auspicious life-cycle rites such as weddings and the **sacred thread** ceremony ("adolescent **initiation**") may be performed again.

## Devshayani Ekadashi
Festival falling on the eleventh **day** (**ekadashi**) of the bright (waxing) half of the **lunar month** of **Ashadh** (June-July). This is celebrated as the day on which the god **Vishnu** falls asleep on his serpent couch **Shesha**, and remains sleeping for four lunar months, waking up on **Devotthayan Ekadashi**. This four-month period (**chaturmas**) is considered unlucky and ritually dangerous, since it is a period when the god is considered to be insensible. Weddings are generally not performed during this period, nor is any other life-cycle rite that can be postponed. This festival coincides with the advent of the rainy **season**, and the ambivalence connected with the rains can be seen here. On one hand, the rains are essential to the crops, and thus foster life and fertility. On the other hand, the rains also bring all too real dangers from snakes, scorpions, and gastrointestinal infections.

## Dhanga

(d. 1003) A monarch in the **Chandella dynasty**, most famous for committing religious **suicide** by drowning himself at **Allahabad**, at the confluence of the **Ganges** and **Yamuna** rivers. The **inscription** that records this event mentions that Dhanga did this at the end of his life—when he had lived more than one hundred years—while meditating on the god **Rudra**, a form of **Shiva**, and further notes that by committing suicide Dhanga gained final liberation of the soul (**moksha**). This description clearly shows that religious suicide was a highly structured religious act, the object of which was to help the performer die in a calm and composed state of mind, ideally with one's last thoughts focused on a **deity**. A crucial element in this ritual was the statement of purpose (**samkalpa**), in which the performer would state the benefit desired from his performance. Dhanga's statement of purpose is almost certainly the basis for his assertion that he attained final liberation, since this claim is not verifiable in any other way.

## Dhangar

The model for traditional Indian society was a collection of **endogamous** subgroups known as **jatis** ("birth"). These jatis were organized (and their social status determined) by the group's hereditary occupation, over which each group had a monopoly. In traditional central Indian society, the Dhangars were a Hindu jati whose hereditary occupation was herding sheep and goats. They are particularly associated with the state of **Maharashtra**.

## Dhanus

("bow") In Hindu iconography, the bow is a weapon associated with several Hindu **deities**. It has strong mythic associations with the god **Shiva**, who in one of his mythic exploits destroys the Three Cities (**tripura**) with a single arrow. It is also commonly associated with the god **Rama**, whose unfailing arrows slay **Ravana**, the **demon**-king of **Lanka**. Aside from these, it is also one of the weapons commonly carried by powerful forms of the **Goddess**, such as **Durga**. The reason for this can be found in her charter myth in the *Devimahatmya*, in which the Goddess is formed from the collected radiance of all the gods and receives duplicates of all their weapons.

## Dhanvantari

In Hindu mythology, Dhanvantari is the physician of the gods and is credited as the founder of **ayurveda**, a traditional system of Indian medicine. Dhanvantari is born when the **gods** and **demons** (supernatural beings) churn the Ocean of Milk to produce the nectar of immortality. In the course of their churning, many precious things are produced, including the **goddess Lakshmi**, the wishing-**cow Kamadhenu**, and the **Kaustubha** jewel. As the churning reaches its climax, Dhanvantari himself emerges from the ocean bearing the pot of **amrta**, the nectar of immortality that has been the ultimate product of the whole endeavor. See also **Tortoise avatar**.

## Dharamshala

("abode of **dharma**") A no-frills rest house for pilgrims. Dharamshalas were often built by pious donors (this was endowed as a religious act), to provide pilgrims not only with a basic place to stay during their pilgrimage, but also a place with a wholesome religious atmosphere. The facilities at a dharamshala are generally quite basic, and well below the standard set by a hotel—in many cases it is a nearly bare room in which the pilgrims cook, eat, and sleep, often on their own bedding. Until well into the twentieth century, pilgrims were under no obligation to pay anything for staying, although on departing they were expected to leave a donation according to their means and inclination. In

most cases dharamshalas now have set rates for lodging, but they are always cheaper than hotels since the amenities tend to be less. There is also a marked difference in their general atmosphere and clientele. Most dharamshalas still strive to promote and maintain a wholesome religious atmosphere: by having a temple in the building; by holding **worship** in the morning, evening, and on special occasions; and by sponsoring scriptural readings, lectures, and other religious activities. These activities help to create a religious community, and those who are seeking this during their journey will strive to stay in such places.

## Dharana

("concentration") In the **ashtanga yoga** (system of religious discipline) first codified by the philosopher **Patanjali**, dharana is the sixth of the eight elements of yoga practice. Along with **dhyana** and **samadhi**, dharana is one of the three parts known as the "inner discipline" (**samyama**), the culmination of yogic training. Dharana is described as steadfastness of mind. It is the ability to focus on any object, whether a part of the body or an external object, and to keep the mind steadily focused there. This is training for one's mind and one's awareness and is an essential prerequisite for focused meditation.

## Dharma

One of the four **purusharthas**, or **aims of life**, the others being **artha** (wealth, power, and prosperity), **kama** (desire), and **moksha** (liberation). The concept of dharma is so fundamental to Hindu culture that it cannot be adequately translated by any single English word—possible translations are "religious law," "religious duty," "duty," "religion," "law," or "social order." The root meaning for the word dharma comes from a verb meaning "to support" or "to uphold." Dharma is thus that which supports or upholds society, which shows why all



Kama, the god of desire. He is one of many gods who carry a dhanus, or bow. The five different arrows in Kama's arsenal each produce a different emotion in the people they strike.

the aforementioned translations could make sense in context. Dharma provides the overall regulatory framework for life in the world and gives a sense of ultimate purpose to keep one's life in balance. Although Hindu culture sanctions the pursuit of both power (artha) and pleasure (kama), it is always assumed that both of these will be regulated by an underlying commitment to dharma, to keep one's life integrated and balanced.

The **dharma literature**, primarily the **Dharma Sutras** (aphorisms on religious duty) and **Dharma Shastras** (treatises on religious duty), was largely concerned with laying down guidelines for an organized and orderly society, and these guidelines take into account many possible factors. Although these texts spoke of an eternal (**sanatana**) dharma, and of certain common duties (**sadharana dharma**) incumbent on all human beings, the most important thing for any person was one's personal dharma (**svadharma**). One's svadharma provided a well-defined social status and role, based on one's social status (**varna**), **stage of life** (ashrama), and gender (the

particular dharma for **women** was **stridharma**). These texts were almost certainly composed by **brahmin** (priests) men, and reveal everything about how these men thought things should be, but are far less reliable with regard to actual social practices. The men who composed this literature presupposed an unequal society, in which **birth** into high or low status groups was determined by the nature of one's **karma** (actions), whether good, bad, or mixed. Although various groups had unequal status, they were all necessary for society to function harmoniously, and true virtue lay in meticulously fulfilling one's prescribed social role. Doing so faithfully was not only a source of religious merit, but if one did one's obligations dispassionately from a sense of duty, it was also described as one of the three paths for liberation of the soul, the path of Action (**karmamarga**). For further information see Pandurang Vaman Kane (trans.), *A History of Dharmasastra*, 1968; and K. S. Mathur, "Hindu Values of Life: Karma and Dharma," in T. N. Madan (ed.), *Religion in India*, 1991.

## Dharma

(2) A **deity**, seen as the personification of dharma as religious duty. In the *Mahabharata*, the latter of the two great Hindu epics, the five **Pandava** brothers, who are the epic's protagonists, all have divine fathers, and the eldest brother **Yudhishthira** is the **son** of Dharma. Yudhishthira and his brothers belong to a kingly (**kshatriya**) family, but Yudhishthira himself shows great concern for truth, righteousness, and compassion. None of these are proverbial kshatriya qualities, which tend to stress courage and martial valor, and Yudhishthira's qualities are usually explained by invoking the influence of his divine father. A different sort of Dharma cult arose in medieval Bengal, from the commingling of Buddhist, Muslim, and Hindu ideas. In this cult Dharma was worshiped as the formless single supreme Lord (probably reflecting the influence of Islam), but the **worship** of Dharma contained many similarities with Bengali Hindu rituals. For further information see Shashibhushan B. Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cults*, 1962.

## Dharma Literature

Many texts are explicitly or implicitly concerned with the question of **dharma**, or religious duty. These begin with the **Vedas**, the oldest Hindu sacred texts, which are believed to articulate the eternal (**sanatana**) dharma. The first major texts explicitly devoted to dharma are the **Dharma Sutras**, texts written in an aphoristic (**sutra**) style between the seventh and second centuries B.C.E. At least in theory, the Dharma Sutras were all connected with particular schools of the Veda, and were thus primarily intended as a manual for behavior for members of that school alone. The Dharma Sutras were followed by the **Dharma Shastras**, in which the material in the Dharma Sutras was expanded and put into verse; these latter texts included instructions for all members of society and were thus intended to be "legal" in their import. Among the earliest was the Manava Dharma **Shastra** (**Manu Smrti**), which was composed around the turn of the common era. The process of rethinking and expanding this legal tradition through commentary has continued until present times, although the most significant works were completed by the sixteenth century.

## Dharmaputra

("son of **Dharma**") One of the epithets of **Yudhishthira**, the eldest of the five **Pandava** brothers. The Pandavas are the protagonists in the *Mahabharata*, the later of the two great Hindu epics. In the epic, Yudhishthira and his brothers are the **sons** of various **deities**, magically born when their mothers use the power of a **mantra** (sacred sound). Yudhishthira's father is the god Dharma, the guardian of righteousness. His paternity is used to explain

Yudhishthira's concern with truth and righteousness, which are defining qualities in his character. These are not usually considered to be kingly (**kshatriya**) values, which stress courage and martial valor.

## Dharmaraja

("King of Righteousness") Colloquial name for **Yama**, god of death and presiding **deity** of the underworld. Yama is responsible for judging and punishing the dead, and this threat of punishment, at least in popular belief, makes people avoid committing evil. This name is also one of the epithets of **Yudhishthira**, the eldest of the five **Pandava** brothers, since his father is the god **Dharma**, the guardian of righteousness.

## Dharmashastra

A general term to denote the study of **dharma** (religious duty), whether referring specifically to the actual texts (**Dharma Shastras**), or the treatises on religious duty or more generally to the extensive commentary-like literature on these texts. Although the Dharma Shastras are generally believed to have been written between the second century B.C.E. and the early centuries of the common era, this literature continued to be written until modern times. The literature detailed views on legal matters, such as crime and punishment, civil law, contracts, and rules of evidence. It also concerned matters of social order. The most extensive catalog of all these sources is a five-volume set by Pandurang Vaman Kane (trans.), *A History of Dharmasastra*, 1968.

## Dharma Shastras

("Treatises on **Dharma**") In its most particular sense, this word refers to a particular set of **Sanskrit** texts. These texts were explicitly written to give guidelines for the organization of society, and for correct human behavior in that society. The Dharma Shastras were written soon after the **Dharma Sutras** (aphorisms on religious duty) and are clearly modeled on them, but have several important differences. With regard to form, the Dharma Sutras are written in prose, whereas the Dharma Shastras are written in simple verse. The language of the Dharma Shastras is close to classical Sanskrit, and the writers were trying to make their texts clear and easy to understand. In their content, the Dharma Shastras treat the same general subjects as the Dharma Sutras, but they place far more emphasis on working out the practical details of a social life, particularly the duties and functions of the king.

The final difference is their connection with the earlier Vedic literature. The Dharma Sutras were conceived as the final element of a **Kalpa Sutra** (complete handbook of religious practice), along with the **Shrauta Sutras** (prescriptions for Vedic rituals) and the **Grhya Sutras** (prescriptions for domestic rites). Each Kalpa Sutra was associated with one of the **Vedas** (the oldest sacred Hindu texts), and thus the "family property" of the particular **brahmins** (priests) connected with that Veda. A particular Dharma Sutra was thus associated with a particular group of brahmins, and was primarily intended as a manual for their behavior. In contrast, the Dharma Shastras purported to lay down rules for all members of society. They show little concern for ritual matters, and no connection with any particular Vedic school, but rather profess to lay down universal truths. In keeping with this emphasis, the surviving Dharma Shastras are all attributed to mythical sages—**Manu**, **Yajnavalkya**, and **Narada**—whereas the Dharma Sutras are given human authorship. The Dharma Shastras thus mark the study of dharma (**dharmashastra**) as a discipline distinct from the earlier Vedic literature, and applied to society as a whole.

## Dharma Sutras

("aphorisms on **dharma**") The earliest texts specifically devoted to dharma—

rules of conduct for various social groups, moral duties, rights, and obligations. These were composed as collections of aphorisms, some so brief that they virtually presuppose commentary, and were written between the seventh and second century B.C.E. According to theory, the Dharma Sutras were the third and final part of a **Kalpa Sutra** (complete handbook of religious practice), which would also contain prescriptions for Vedic rituals (**Shrauta Sutras**) and domestic rites (**Grhya Sutras**). Each Kalpa Sutra was theoretically connected with one of the four **Vedas**, the oldest Hindu religious texts, and was thus the "family property" of the **brahmins** (priests) connected with that Veda. A particular Dharma Sutra was associated with a particular group of brahmins and was primarily intended as a manual for their behavior.

The real picture is far more complex, since more than twenty collections of Dharma Sutras have been identified, although the most important are attributed to sages and writers **Apastamba**, **Gautama**, **Vasishtha**, **Baudhayana**, and the god **Vishnu**. These Dharma Sutras were an attempt to provide an ordered way of life by delineating each person's rights and duties depending on his or her social status (**varna**) and **stage of life** (ashrama). These texts were the basis for the later **Dharma Shastras** (treatises on religious duty), which expanded the sutras, put them into verse, and were intended to serve as an actual code of law for the members of the community.

## Dharna

Name for a rite intended to compel another party to address one's grievances; the rite is usually adopted when all other options have failed. The word *dharna* comes from the **Sanskrit** (sacred language) verb that means "to hold" or "to maintain." One element in the dharna rite is just that—the persistent public presence of the supplicant in proximity to the people to whom he or she is appealing. Thus, an aggrieved civil

servant in modern India may hold a dharna near the Parliament building in Delhi, and in some cases people have camped there for months in an effort to publicize their plight and mobilize public opinion. In the same way, people may hold a dharna at the temple of a **deity** to seek guidance or help; the most prominent example of this is at the **Tarakeshvar** temple in the state of **West Bengal**.

Aside from persistent presence, dharna's other common characteristic is self-inflicted suffering, usually done through fasting (**upavasa**) or other forms of **ascetic** self-denial. Pilgrims to Tarakeshvar refrain from **eating** or drinking until the god **Shiva** grants them a vision, although in practice the temple priests often limit such exertions to three days. On the political level, **Mohandas K. Gandhi** perfected the "fast unto death" as a tool to help attain his political ends. One of the cultural assumptions that helps make such self-inflicted suffering persuasive is the ancient Hindu belief that by voluntarily enduring physical suffering (**tapas**) one can generate spiritual and magical power. The other working assumption that makes the dharna effective comes from the declaration at the rite's beginning. On the human level, dharnas are usually undertaken to address very specific perceived injustices, which are made public at the start. It is generally believed that should the person performing dharna die, then the person against whom the dharna had been held will be assessed the karmic demerit for causing that person's death. Such dharnas are generally only undertaken when one has no other alternative. Because of this assumption, they remain a powerful resource, even in contemporary times.

## Dhatuvada

Hindu branch of the Indian tradition of **alchemy**, which seeks to transform, transmute, and perfect the body through the use of various chemicals with the ultimate goal of rendering the

Dhobis, or washermen, cleaning clothes by beating them on stone slabs.

body immortal. Just as both Hindus and Buddhists appropriated the idea of **yoga** (act of discipline), both traditions also have alchemical schools. The Dhatuvada school stressed seeking bodily perfection solely through consuming **drugs** and potions, particularly ones compounded from **mercury** and **cinnabar**. This is theoretically different from the Buddhist **Rasayana** school, since the latter is said to use such material means only to prolong life until the body can be transmuted through meditation, ritual, and yoga. The conceptual foundation for Hindu alchemy is its analysis of the world as a series of bipolar opposites, and the conviction that unifying these opposing forces brings spiritual progress and the end of reincarnation (**samsara**). The governing metaphor for this combination of opposites is the union of **sun** and **moon**. In keeping with this bipolar symbolism, both the sun and the moon are connected to other opposing principles through an elaborate series of associations. The sun is identified with heat, drying power, **fire**, the **goddess Shakti**, and menstrual **blood**; the moon with coolness, healing power, **water**, the god **Shiva**, and **semen**. In alchemical practice, the two essential chemical elements are mercury and **sulfur**—the former identified with Shiva's semen, and the latter with Shakti's uterine blood. Through properly mixing and consuming these elements, the impure body is purified and refined, eventually rendering it immortal.

Modern descriptions of this practice invariably warn that it should only be carried out under the direction of one's **guru** (spiritual teacher); otherwise these combinations will be harmful. This warning is not surprising, since by itself mercury is a deadly poison. For further information see Shashibhushan B. Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cults*, 1962; and David Gordon White, "Alchemy: Indian Alchemy," in Mircea Eliade (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 1993.

## Dhenuka

In Hindu mythology, a fierce **demon** (supernatural being) who appears in the form of a **cow** (dhenu). Dhenuka is only one of the demons slain by the god **Krishna**—this time in concert with his brother **Balarama**—during Krishna's childhood in the village of **Brindavan**. In these episodes, Krishna dispatches the most ferocious demons as if it were child's play, which in one sense it is. Krishna's presence in the world, and his interaction with his devotees (**bhakta**), is considered to be a **lila** ("play"), and the ease with which he handles these demons attests to this playful revelation of his divine nature. For further consideration of this theme, see David R. Kinsley, *The Sword and the Flute*, 1975.

## Dhobi

A washerman, traditionally one who has cleaned clothes by getting them wet and

then beating them on a stone slab. As with all the occupations in traditional India, this was a hereditary occupational group (**jati**), although the names used to designate them are different from region to region. They were typically believed to be of low status, since they habitually handled clothes rendered impure by sweat and other bodily fluids.

## Dhrshtadyumna

In the *Mahabharata*, the later of the two great Hindu epics, Dhrshtadyumna is the **son** of King **Drupada** and the brother of **Draupadi**, King Drupada's **daughter**. Dhrshtadyumna and Draupadi are magically born by emerging from a sacrificial **fire**. Their father sponsors this rite of **sacrifice** to give **birth** to a hero who will kill **Drona**, who has taken away half of Drupada's kingdom after being insulted by Drupada. Drona accepts the boy as a pupil and teaches him the martial arts. Even though a heavenly voice has announced that the boy will eventually kill him, he does this under the conviction that fate cannot be avoided. Dhrshtadyumna is instrumental in arranging Draupadi's marriage to the five **Pandava** brothers, the epic's protagonists, and he fights on their side during the Mahabharata war. Dhrshtadyumna fights fiercely in the war and eventually kills Drona by cutting off his head, thereby avenging his father's defeat. Yet his triumph is short-lived, for that very night Dhrshtadyumna is killed by Drona's son **Ashvatthama**, who secretly gains entry to the Pandava camp and kicks Dhrshtadyumna to death.

## Dhrtarashtra

In the *Mahabharata*, the later of the two great Hindu epics, the **son** of the sage **Vyasa** and queen **Ambika**. Dhrtarashtra and his stepbrother **Pandu** are the result of a desperate attempt to preserve the royal line of King **Shantanu**, after Shantanu's son **Vichitravirya** has died without heirs. Upon Vichitravirya's death, his mother **Satyavati** calls upon her oldest son, Vyasa, to sleep with Ambika and her sister, **Ambalika**, in the hope that the **women** will conceive. According to tradition Vyasa is very ugly, and each woman involuntarily reacts when Vyasa appears in her bed. Ambika covers her eyes, causing her son Dhrtarashtra to be born blind, and Ambalika turns pale, causing her son **Pandu** to be born with an unnaturally pale complexion. Despite his disability, Dhrtarashtra assumes the throne after Pandu's abdication; the latter renounces the world after being cursed by the sage **Kindama**. Pandu's two wives have five **sons**, known as the **Pandavas**, and Dhrtarashtra and his wife **Gandhari** have one hundred sons, collectively known as the **Kauravas**. The ultimate source of conflict in the *Mahabharata* stems from the conflict between these two royal lines, each of which has a legitimate claim to rule.

Dhrtarashtra does little to forestall this struggle. Although he is generally portrayed as a good person, he is also weak and unable to contain the ambitions of his eldest son, **Duryodhana**. Here Dhrtarashtra's blindness is not just literal, but also symbolic, as he lacks the vision and clarity that would have allowed him to recognize the breakdown between these two families and to therefore take steps to avoid it. His disability not only keeps him on the margin of daily life, but is also a sign of his inability to influence the course of events, whatever his feelings about them. One of the few times that he actually shows force is when he offers boons to **Draupadi** (**daughter** of King **Drupada**) after her humiliation by Duryodhana and his brother **Duhshasana**, through which she regains freedom for herself and her husbands.

Because of his blindness, Dhrtarashtra does not actually fight in the **Mahabharata** war, but receives regular reports from his bard **Sanjaya**, who has the ability to see events at a distance. After the Kauravas are defeated, he goes with Gandhari and several others to live in

Ascetics gather around a dhuni, a smoldering fire used to stay warm and perform ascetic rituals.

seclusion in the forest. Six years later he is killed in a forest **fire**.

## Dhruva

("fixed") In Hindu mythology, a boy who is a symbol for the unrelenting pursuit of a goal. Dhruva is a king's **son**, but for some unknown reason his father favors Dhruva's half-brother over Dhruva. Distressed by this insult, Dhruva takes a vow to attain a place above all others, and goes off to the forest to perform austerities (**tapas**). After enduring bodily mortifications for eons, the god **Vishnu** appears to Dhruva to grant him a boon. In response to Dhruva's request for a place above all others, Vishnu promises Dhruva that after his death he will be installed as the **Pole Star**, the pivot around which all the other stars in the sky will turn. Even now this star is known by that name in India.

## Dhuni

(from **Sanskrit** *dhu*, "to ignite") A smoldering **fire** that is kept burning by ascetics. This fire serves multiple purposes in **ascetic** life: It is a means to stay warm in cold climates, a means to perform physical **asceticism** by withstanding heat, particularly in the summer, and its care and tending is also a form of religious observance. The dhuni is a natural gathering place, and for many ascetics it is the center of ascetic life, providing heat for warmth, a fire for cooking and making tea, and coals for lighting the **chillum**, a straight pipe used to smoke tobacco mixed with hashish (**charas**). The fire itself is seen as the **deity Agni** in material form. Agni is a witness to the conversation around the dhuni, which should be of a serious and spiritual nature. The dhuni's sacred character can be seen by certain restrictions that were designed to maintain its **purity**: one should not blow directly on the fire (lest some saliva should contaminate it), but through a tube used for this purpose; one should keep clean the boundary around the dhuni (usually of made of hardened clay); and one should not touch this boundary

with one's feet. Certain ascetic centers have a long history of a continuous fire. One such example is the sacred village **Triyuginarayan** in the **Himalayas**, where a fire is claimed to have been burning for the past three cosmic ages (**yugas**).

## Dhupa

("incense") The eleventh of the sixteen traditional **upacharas** ("**offerings**") given to a **deity** as part of **worship**, which follows the model of treating a deity as an honored guest. In this offering, the deity is offered incense to enjoy the scent. The underlying motive here, as for all the upacharas, is to show one's love for the deity and minister to the deity's needs.

## Dhushmeshvar

Another name for the form of the god **Shiva** known as **Ghrneshvar**. This is one of the twelve **jyotirlingas**, a group of sacred sites (**tirthas**) deemed especially holy to Shiva, and at which Shiva is believed to be uniquely present. This site is located in **Maharashtra** state. See **Ghrneshvar**.

## Dhvani

("echo") In poetics—whether secular or sacred—the suggestion or connotation brought out by the poet's language. Indian literary theorists paid great attention to this notion, since attention to it allowed the poet to exercise much greater emotive depths than the surface meanings of the words would indicate and pack a much deeper range of images and associations into even a very short verse.

## Dhyana

("meditation") In the **ashtanga yoga** (eight-point discipline) first arranged by the philosopher **Patanjali**, dhyana is the seventh of the eight elements of yoga practice. Along with **dharana** ("concentration") and **samadhi** ("trance"), dhyana is one of the three parts known

as the "inner discipline" (**samyama**), the culmination of yogic training. Dhyana is described as an extension of dharana, in which the fixed concentration upon an object acquired in dharana is continued and extended without break. In more colloquial modern usage, the word dhyana can be used to describe any sort of focused meditation.

## Dhyanashloka

("meditation verse") A verse or verses specifying the physical attributes of a **deity** to give the worshiper a mental image upon which to meditate. Dhyanashlokas are particularly important in the esoteric ritual tradition known as **tantra**, in which one of the aims is to replace all outward acts of **worship** with mental activities. In this highly ritualized context, the dhyanashlokas provide both a form and a focus for one's interior worship.

## Diaspora Populations

Although the vast majority of Hindus live in their traditional homeland of South Asia, particularly in India and **Nepal**, there is also a long history of Hindus settling in other lands. By about the fourth century C.E., Hindu traders had spread Indian influence throughout Southeast Asia, where the monuments at the **Angkor** temple complex and the culture of **Bali** bear witness to its presence. In the past century, poverty and overcrowding in certain parts of India (especially **Bihar**) led many of these traders to sign up as agricultural contract laborers in **Fiji**, **South Africa**, East Africa, the **West Indies**, **Mauritius**, and even **Sri Lanka**. All of these places have substantial Hindu communities, although their local status differs. In some of these places Indians are considered equal citizens with the indigenous peoples, and in others, such as Fiji, they suffer legal obstacles. Aside from agricultural labor, another possibility for mobility and advancement came through serving in the British army or

civil service in other parts of the British Empire, such as Singapore or Hong Kong. Finally, the liberalization of immigration and nationalization laws since the end of World War II has led to the formation of a substantial Hindu community in North America, both in Canada and the United States.

## Didarganj Yakshi

Statue found in 1919 in Didarganj, a village near Patna in the state of **Bihar**. The image is believed to date from the third century B.C.E. and is thus a product of the **Maurya dynasty**. The statue is of a voluptuous female figure, bare to the waist, wearing abundant jewelry and bearing a yak-tail whisk (**chauri**), which was a contemporary sign of authority. It is believed to be a statue of a **yakshi**, a class of nature-spirits connected with fertility and prosperity. It is notable as one of the earliest known stone statues, and there is speculation that this may have come through contact with the Greeks. The figure itself is masterfully rendered in highly polished **Chunar** sandstone from the sandstone quarries near **Benares**; the sharply detailed rendering of her clothing and jewelry conveys the illusion of softness and swelling of the bare flesh.

## Digambara

("**space**-clad," i.e., naked) In a general **ascetic** context, this can refer to any ascetic who is completely naked, which is a sign of having renounced all **possessions** and all worldly conventions. Among the **Bairagi Nagas**, or renunciant ascetics who are devotees (**bhakta**) of **Vishnu** and who formerly made their living as traders and mercenary soldiers, the Digambaras are one of the three **Naga anis** ("armies"), the others being the **Nirmohis** and **Nirvanis**. In earlier times these anis were actual fighting units, but in modern times are mainly important for determining bathing (**snana**) order in the bathing processions at the **Kumbha Mela** ("Festival of the Pot"). Of the three, the Digambaras are by far the most important, and at the time of the Kumbha Mela take precedence over the others.

## Diksha

("**initiation**") A religious initiation involving the reception of secret religious teachings; the term is said to be derived from the verb *dis*, "to point out." The word diksha carries a different sense from the life-cycle rite known as **upanayana**, the adolescent religious initiation that is the ritualized "second birth" conferred on young men from the three "**twice-born**" groups—that is, **brahmin** (priestly), **kshatriya** (martial), or **vaishya** (mercantile). Both are religious initiations, and both involve the creation of new capacities and entitlements. Yet diksha is not a rite usually seen as a transition point in the life cycle, but a religious initiation in which the initiate gains secret knowledge from a religious teacher (**guru**), usually given in the form of the verbal formulas known as **mantras**. Whereas upanayana takes place while a boy is an adolescent, the time for diksha is based not on physical age, but on a person's willingness and readiness. Diksha is a particularly important concept in the ritual tradition known as **tantra**, in which such personalized initiations are the way of transmitting the tradition from master to student.

## Dikshanama

("**diksha** name") Name given to a person after receiving **initiation** (diksha), as a way of acknowledging and reinforcing the new identity created by the act of initiation. Sometimes, as in the case of **ascetic** initiation, the initiate's former name will be replaced with the dikshanama. In other cases the name will be kept secret, as a source of hidden power.

## Dikshitar

Southern Indian **brahmin** (priest) sub-community. The Dikshitars are an extremely small community and are found mainly in the temple-town of **Chidambaram** in the state of **Tamil Nadu**. They are the hereditary servants at the temple of **Nataraja**—the god **Shiva** in his form as the "Lord of the **Dance**." According to their own mythic understanding, the Dikshitars were members of Nataraja's heavenly host (**gana**) when he lived in **heaven**. They accompanied Nataraja when he came down to **earth**, where they still serve him.

## Dilip

In Hindu mythology, one of the figures in the charter myth describing how the river **Ganges** descended from heaven to **earth**. Dilip is the great-grandson of King **Sagar**, and the father of the sage **Bhagirath**, who finally accomplishes this task. The story begins with King Sagar, whose 60,000 heroic **sons** made the mistake of insulting the sage **Kapila**, and have been burned to ash by the **fire** of Kapila's yogic powers. Kapila tells Sagar's grandson **Anshuman** that the souls of his dead uncles will find peace only when the Ganges River (which is considered to be the material form of the **goddess Ganga**) comes down from heaven and touches their ashes. After this, the family labors unceasingly to do this; Anshuman and Dilip die with this goal unrealized, but Bhagirath finally brings it to fruition by performing **asceticism** until the gods agree to send the Ganges to earth.

## Dindi

Pilgrim group in the **Varkari Panth**, a religious community that is centered around the **worship** of the god **Vithoba** at his temple at **Pandharpur** in modern **Maharashtra**. The primary Varkari religious practice is taking part in two annual pilgrimages, in which all the participants arrive in Pandharpur on the same day. On this pilgrimage, pilgrims travel in groups called dindis. Dindis are often made up of people from the same neighborhood or area and are usually formed along **caste** lines. During the pilgrimage, members of a dindi travel as a unit, walking and singing devotional hymns together during the day, and cooking and camping together at night. These dindis thus create smaller subcommunities within the larger pilgrim body.

## Di Nobili, Roberto

(1577–1656) Jesuit priest and missionary who spent much of his life in **Madurai** in southern India. Di Nobili came to India to convert Indians to Catholicism and to facilitate his attempt at following the Jesuit pattern of learning the local languages, in this case **Sanskrit** (sacred language) and Tamil. He also strove to understand local culture and to gain the ritual authority that came with **brahmin** (priestly) status by emulating brahmin practices (**vegetarianism**, modes of dress, etc.), as a way to spread the Gospel more effectively. He was a perceptive and careful observer, but his writings remained unpublished during his lifetime. They have only been recently rediscovered. See also **Tamil language**.

## Dipa

("lamp") The twelfth of the sixteen traditional **upacharas** ("**offerings**") given to a **deity** as part of **worship**, following the model of treating the deity as an honored guest. In this action, the deity is given an offering of light by waving a lighted lamp before it. This rite more commonly goes by the name of **arati**, a word that is often used to denote worship in general. The underlying motive here, as for all the upacharas, is to show one's love for the deity, and to minister to the deity's needs.

## Directions

In traditional Hindu reckoning, each of the primary and intermediate directions

A man performs the dipa ritual, offering a lamp before the image of a deity.

is associated with a particular divinity, which is believed to rule over this direction and to be the guardian associated with it. See **Guardians of the Directions**.

## Divine Life Society

Religious organization founded in 1936 by **Swami Shivananda**. It is headquartered at the Divine Life **Ashram**, just outside the holy city of **Rishikesh** on the river **Ganges** in the state of **Uttar Pradesh**. Although Shivananda himself died in 1963, the society is still quite active in spreading the ways of Hindu life: through **yoga** (self-discipline) training programs at the Divine Life Ashram; through publishing religious texts, both traditional scriptures and the teachings of Swami Shivananda; through establishing religious centers throughout the world; and through various social service projects in India itself. Swami Shivananda was a **Dashanami Sanyasi** (**ascetic**) in the **Saraswati** division, which is one of the divisions that admits only **brahmins** (priests). The Swami's brahmin background comes through in

the organization's teachings, which stress **vegetarianism**, rigorous spiritual development, an emphasis on learning, and a strict moral code. For all these reasons the organization is widely respected in Indian society, despite having a significant number of foreign practitioners.

## Divine Powers

When a single divinity is deemed to be the supreme power in the universe, he or she is generally said to wield five overarching divine powers: creation, ordering and maintaining the cosmos, destruction, concealment, and giving **grace** (divine self-revelation). The first three powers describe the relationship between the **deity** and the physical universe, whereas the fourth and fifth focus on the deity's relationship with individual devotees. By using the power of concealment, the deity becomes hidden in creation, and thus human beings are kept in ignorance. This power of concealment is often also described as the deity's **maya**, or the power of illusion that keeps human beings from

perceiving the divine reality that lies behind all things. This power of illusion is so strong that the only way human beings can break through it is through the deity's grace, the final power. This grace is an act of divine self-revelation, in which the deity shreds the concealing veil of illusion and reveals himself or herself to human beings.

## Divorce

Until the twentieth century, formal divorce did not exist in traditional Hindu society. This absence was undoubtedly rooted in the Hindu perspective on marriage. Marriage was seen as a permanent binding of husband and wife (or more precisely, assimilating her identity to his), in a way that ruled out a dissolving of the marriage while both members were still living. When a wife failed to bear children, the husband would sometimes take a second wife, but the original marriage would remain intact. Among the lower social classes, who were often less concerned with maintaining group status through appropriate behavior, husbands and wives would simply abandon their spouses for other partners, but this was strictly forbidden among "respectable" people.

Divorce is legally available in modern India, but social and cultural factors continue to weigh against it. Various factors make many **women** in unhappy marriages reluctant to sue for divorce: lack of support from their natal families, who are often more interested in trying to make the marriage work; the inability to earn a living on their own; and the near certainty that their husband's families will be awarded custody of their children, if they have any. Although attitudes are slowly changing, it is also still difficult for divorced women to remarry.

## Divya Prabandham

("Divine Composition") Shorter name for the **Nalayira Divyaprabandham**, the collected hymns of the **Alvars**. The

Alvars were a group of twelve **Vaishnava** poet-saints (devotees of the god **Vishnu**), who lived in southern India between the seventh and tenth centuries. In conjunction with their **Shaiva** (devotees of the god **Shiva**) counterparts, the **Nayanars**, the Alvars spearheaded the revitalization of Hindu religion vis-à-vis the Buddhists and the Jains. Both the Alvars and the Nayanars stressed passionate devotion (**bhakti**) to a personal god—Vishnu for the Alvars, Shiva for the Nayanars—and conveyed this devotion through hymns sung in the **Tamil language**. In the southern Indian religious community known as the **Shrivaishnavas**, the collected hymns of the Alvars have such high status that they are known as the "Tamil Veda"—that is, the religious texts in the Tamil language which carry the authority of the **Veda**, the oldest Hindu religious texts.

## Diwali

One of the most important festivals in the Hindu religious **year**, which falls on the **new moon** in the **lunar month** of **Kartik** (October–November). This festival is dedicated to **Vishnu's** wife **Lakshmi**, a **goddess** who represents wealth, prosperity, and good fortune. According to popular belief, on this night of the new moon Lakshmi roams the **earth**, looking for households in which she will be welcomed, and which she will render prosperous by her presence. People spend the days before Diwali cleaning, repairing, and whitewashing their homes to make them suitable for welcoming the goddess. On the evening of Diwali people open all their doors and windows to facilitate her entry and place lights on their windowsills and balcony ledges, as an invitation to the goddess. In earlier times these lights would be clay lamps or candles, but today strings of electric lights are also widely used. It is from these lights that Diwali gets its name, as a shortened form of Dipavali (**dipa** "light" + *avali* "series"). The charter myth for

Bright, spinning lights decorate homes and streets during the festival of Diwali.
According to Hindu tradition, these lights welcome Lakshmi, a goddess who embodies good fortune.

displaying these lights describes how a poor old woman somehow gained a royal boon that all houses but hers would remain unlit on the night of Diwali. When Lakshmi wandered the land she went to the only house that was lit to welcome her. Because of Lakshmi's presence, the old woman's troubles quickly ceased.

Lakshmi's strong associations with money and good fortune account for several other practices often found on Diwali. For many traditional merchant families, Diwali is observed as the beginning of the fiscal year. All outstanding debts and obligations must be cleared up beforehand, for on Diwali new account books are begun. In some cases the account ledgers are themselves ceremonially worshiped on this day and are seen as material manifestations of Lakshmi. Another common practice is **gambling**, although in most cases it is done within the family, and for small stakes. During the rest of the year gambling is condemned as a potential drain on one's wealth, but doing so on Diwali reaffirms the connection between money and Lakshmi's favor, here in the guise of Lady Luck. Diwali is also an occasion for **eating** sweets—the more the better—and celebrating the advent of the new year by shooting off fireworks. India's loose regulation of fireworks gives celebrants access to rockets and crackers of truly impressive size, and in the larger cities people celebrate the holiday with such zeal that it sounds like an artillery barrage.

## Dog

In general, the dog is considered an extremely unclean and impure **animal**. Today, keeping dogs as pets in India is a practice that is gaining favor. Traditionally, however, Indian dogs roamed the streets as scavengers, eating whatever they could find, including each other. Such promiscuous eating habits render them ritually impure, even aside from the vermin and disease that they often harbor, particularly rabies. Aside from their practical importance as scavengers, the dog is also the animal vehicle of **Bhairava**, a wrathful form of

the god **Shiva**. Bhairava's symbolic association with an unclean animal clearly shows his marginal status in the pantheon—he is powerful, but also feared, because he is not bound by normal rules.

## Doha

Metrical form in northern Indian **bhakti** (devotional) poetry, made up of two lines of twenty-four metric beats, divided unevenly after the thirteenth beat. The metric pattern for the first line is 6 + 4 + 3, with the second line being 6 + 4 + 1. The method of counting the metric beats is based on the distinction between "heavy" and "light" syllables. A heavy syllable is any syllable with a long vowel or a consonant cluster and is reckoned at two metric beats; all other syllables are reckoned as light, and reckoned as one. Aside from the metric pattern, there are rules about how each half line should end—that the three metric beats ending the first line cannot be a heavy syllable (two beats) followed by a light one (one beat)—which means that it must either be a light syllable followed by a heavy one, or three light ones—and that the line's final syllable must be light. These conventions still leave a great deal of fluidity, and the doha is one of the most important poetic forms for poets writing in **Braj Bhasha** (the language of **Krishna** devotion) and **Avadhi** (a dialect of medieval **Hindi**). At times the doha can stand alone, as in the epigrams of the poet-saint **Kabir**, which have become proverbial sayings in much of modern India. The doha was also used in conjunction with verses in other meters, as in the *Ramcharitmanas*. In this vernacular rendition of the epic *Ramayana*, written by the poet-saint **Tulsidas**, the doha usually comes after four verses in the **chaupai** (four-line) **meter**, and serves to sum up what has transpired in the preceding verses.

## Dom

The model for traditional Indian society was as a collection of **endogamous** subgroups known as **jatis** ("birth"). These jatis were organized (and their social status determined) by the group's hereditary occupation, over which each group has a monopoly. In traditional northern Indian society, the Doms are a jati whose hereditary occupation was cremating **corpses**. They have extremely low social status because of their habitual contact with dead bodies, considered the most violently impure objects of all. Despite their low status, some of the Doms are unbelievably wealthy, particularly the ones who control the **cremation ghats** in the city of **Benares**, for without their cooperation, a body cannot be burned. The word *ghat* refers to any flat area on the bank of a river. In most cases ghats are used as places for bathing (**snana**), but in some other cases they are also places for burning bodies, so that the ashes can be placed in the river to ritually "cool" them.

## Dorasamudra

Capital city of the **Hoysala dynasty**, who ruled the region in southern part of the state of **Karnataka** from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries. Today Dorasamudra is known by the name of **Halebid** and is a village about sixty miles north and west of the city of Mysore. Although largely uninhabited, the site is known for a magnificent collection of temples, in particular the **Hoysaleshvar Temple**, dedicated to the god **Shiva** in his form as Lord of the Hoysalas. The Hoysala temples were built out of a particular type of stone—variously described as chlorite schist, steatite, or soapstone—that was quite soft when newly quarried, but gradually hardened with exposure to air. This initial malleability made the stone easy to carve, and facilitated the lush detail that characterizes these temples.

## Dowry

In the strictest terms, this word is used in modern Indian society to designate any wealth transferred from the bride's family to the groom's as a condition for the marriage to occur. As with most marriages around the world, Hindu marriages often involve giving gifts to the couple, but Indians themselves draw distinctions between different categories of gifts. It is customary for the bride's parents to give her gifts of clothing and jewelry for her wedding, according to their means. This practice is attested in the **dharma literature's** (text on religious duty) description of the **Brahma marriage**. This is one of the eight recognized ways to perform a marriage and describes the bride as richly adorned. These gifts are her personal property, and serve both to give the bride some wealth of her own and as a last resort for the family. It is also common for the bride's family to give gifts to the groom and his family, of which the greatest is the "gift of a virgin" (**kanyadan**), i.e., the bride herself. In many cases, the newlyweds also receive gifts from other relatives, particularly when they are setting up a household. Both of these sorts of gifts carry no stigma in Indian society and in the popular mind are not considered "dowry."

Unfortunately, not all wedding "gifts" fall into these categories. Most marriages in India are still arranged by the parents, who are operating under differing imperatives. For the bride's parents, marrying off their daughter is a religious duty, which is over and above their natural inclination to provide for their daughter. This gives the groom's parents a distinct advantage, since they "take" the bride, and this advantage can give rise to ugly and even tragic situations. The parents of a young man with a promising career can usually expect larger and richer gifts from the bride's family, since her future will be more secure. In many cases these gifts are neither asked for nor negotiated, but simply given as part of the exchange between two families of equal status. In the worst cases, the groom's family presents a list of demands, which the bride's family is expected to fulfill as a condition for the marriage. Given the pressure to marry off their **daughters**, the bride's parents may promise more than they are actually able to "deliver." One consequence of this failure is the much-publicized **dowry deaths**, in which the bride is killed.

Most decent people in India recoil at the notion of "selling" their **sons** to the highest bidder, or of using his marriage as an opportunity for the family to get rich. At the same time, it is generally accepted that marrying one's daughter will entail considerable effort and expenditure, and that at her wedding one should give appropriate gifts. It is from these assumptions that the evils of dowry stem, and can be exploited by unscrupulous people.

## Dowry Death

Name given to a particular type of violent crime against **women**. According to the much-publicized pattern, it is the killing of a new bride by her in-laws, either for failing to bring enough **dowry** with her into the marriage, or when her parents could not deliver the dowry that had been promised. In many cases these women were killed by being doused with kerosene and lit, since this could be passed off as an accidental death suffered while cooking. These murders received great publicity in India and abroad in the mid-1980s, in part because of their calculated and horrific nature. The aforementioned pattern simplifies the issues, however, by reducing it to a question of money. It is true that there have been many cases in which women have been killed solely for financial reasons—that is, for not bringing enough dowry. Yet many of the victims of these so-called dowry deaths had been married for years, and their deaths are better explained as the result of an escalating pattern of

domestic violence, rather than a calculated extortion and murder.

## Draupadi

In the *Mahabharata*, the later of the two great Hindu epics, Draupadi is the **daughter** of King **Drupada**, and the wife of all five **Pandava** brothers, the epic's protagonists. This literary reference to **polyandry** (the marrying of one woman to several brothers) is interesting, since it seems to have been extremely rare throughout Indian history, and the epic has to give an explanation for how this happened. Draupadi's father vows that he will give his daughter in marriage only to the man who can lift a giant bow, and then hit a target suspended in the air. This feat is child's play for **Arjuna**, one of the Pandava brothers and the world's greatest archer, and he wins Draupadi as his wife. The wedding party returns home, but while they are still outside, their mother **Kunti** calls out that whatever they have won must be shared between them. To obey their mother, each of the brothers marry Draupadi. They agree that each will live with her for a year, during which time the others shall not attempt to see her.

Draupadi's most famous scene in the epic comes after her husband **Yudhishthira** has wagered and lost her in a game of dice. Yudhishthira has been **gambling** with his cousins **Duryodhana** and **Duhshasana**, who seize Yudhishthira's gaming ineptitude as an opportunity to win the kingdom all to themselves. After the loss, Duhshasana comes to Draupadi's chamber and drags her by her **hair** back to the gambling hall. Her pain and humiliation are compounded by the fact that she is in the middle of her menstrual period and is not allowed to change her stained robe. In the gambling hall Draupadi is paraded and humiliated before the crowd like an **animal** at auction, and her property status is emphasized when Duryodhana offers her his thigh (the euphemism for the genitals) as her place to sit. The final

insult comes when Duhshasana tries to disrobe Draupadi by unwinding her sari. Here the god **Krishna** enacts a miracle: No matter how much cloth Duhshasana pulls away, Draupadi remains fully clothed. Stunned and confused, he finally gives up.

Shocked by her humiliation, Duryodhana's father **Dhrtarashtra** asks Draupadi to choose a boon. She chooses freedom for her husbands, although they eventually agree to spend a period in exile. Even before this incident there has been tension between the Pandavas and their cousins. With these insults to Draupadi, however, the seeds of discord are more deeply sown. Because Duhshasana has dragged her by the hair, Draupadi vows to leave her hair unbound until she can wash it in Duhshasana's **blood**, while her husband **Bhima** takes an oath to avenge Duryodhana's insult by smashing Duryodhana's "thigh." Draupadi's hunger for revenge and uncompromising hatred for these two are a major force driving the remainder of the epic, pushing all the parties toward the inevitable fratricidal war.

## Dravida

One of the three developed styles in medieval Hindu temple **architecture**; the others being the **Nagara** and the **Veshara**. The Dravida style is primarily found in southern India, particularly in the modern state of **Tamil Nadu**. Whereas the temple tower in the Nagara style stresses an unbroken verticality, culminating in one high peak, towers in the Dravida style are composed of a series of horizontal tiers, emphasizing the successive layers. Although earlier southern Indian temples have as their focus one central tower, as at the **Rajrajeshvar Temple** in the city of **Tanjore**, the focus shifted in about the twelfth century to the building of walls around the temple's complex perimeters. These walls had enormous **gopurams** or central gateways at the cardinal

points, which were usually the temple's tallest structures by far. The enclosed area inside the temple complex was often enormous, as in the estimated 500 acres at the temple of **Shrirangam**, but most of the construction was only a single story. (There would be taller towers over the temple's primary images, however.) In the developed examples of the Dravida style, this lessened emphasis on soaring height was compensated by its enormous horizontal spread. The best examples of this later type are the Ranganathaswamy temple in Shrirangam, and the **Minakshi** temple in **Madurai**.

## Dravida

(2) **Brahmin** (priestly) group that is one of the five southern brahmin communities (**Pancha Dravida**). As their name would indicate, the core region for the Dravida brahmins is in deep southern India, in the modern states of **Tamil Nadu** and **Kerala**. The most illustrious of the Dravida subcommunities are the **Nambudiris**, among whom the great philosopher **Shankaracharya** is believed to have been born.

## Dravidian

In the strictest linguistic sense, the word Dravidian is the name for a particular family of languages in which the primary members are the four southern Indian languages: **Tamil**, Telegu, **Kannada**, and Malayalam. Aside from these four languages, all located in the southernmost part of the subcontinent, another language in the Dravidian family is Brahui. This is spoken by a small and fairly isolated population in modern Pakistan, far from any other Dravidian language speakers, and completely surrounded by people speaking Indo-**Aryan** languages. One theory to explain this irregularity is that the Dravidian languages were originally spoken all over the subcontinent, but were gradually displaced toward the south as Indo-Aryan language speakers—better known as the Aryans—came into India. According to



Built in the Dravida architectural style, the Minakshi Temple contains enormous gopurams, the gateways to the temple grounds.

this theory, the Brahui-speaking community is an isolated remnant of that earlier time, which somehow managed to remain intact.

This notion also affects how southern Indians form their identities. The word *Dravidian* can be used to denote a southern Indian or any person whose mother tongue is one of the four primary Dravidian languages. For southern Indians with a strong regional identity, it is a way for them to distinguish themselves from northern Indians and the "imperialism" of northern Indian culture. It is also used with an underlying tone of pride, that as Dravidians they are descendants of the subcontinent's original inhabitants.

## Dreams

As symbol and reality, dreams have multiple uses in Hindu thought. Philosophically, dreams are often used as examples to illustrate the illusory nature of the world as it is perceived. Just as a dream disappears when one

wakes up and is perceived to have been unreal the entire time, so does the everyday understanding of the world disappear when one has perceived the ultimate truth. In quite a different understanding, the dream state is the second of the states of consciousness mentioned in the **Mandukya Upanishad**, or one of the religious texts known as the **Upanishads**. In the Upanishads, the dream state is the first step in turning one's awareness away from the outside world and into one's Self, where all sense of ego is lost. Waking consciousness is further away from one's Self than the dream state. The four-step pattern in this upanishad, and in others as well, is from waking consciousness, to dreams, to deep sleep, and from there to the realization of the eternal Self.

On quite another level, dreams are an important part of religious life in popular Hinduism. They are often believed to give **omens** for the future, which may be interpreted as favorable or unfavorable, according to the dream's content and context. Dreams are also seen as providing a channel for communicating with spirits, **ghosts**, **village deities**, and other nonhuman spiritual beings. Unquiet spirits of the dead will often appear to family members in dreams to reveal what they need to find peace. The same process is often found with village deities, who usually manifest themselves to specific people in the village, either to give warnings or to make demands.

## Drona

In the *Mahabharata*, the later of the two great Hindu epics, Drona is famous as a teacher of all the arts of war, but particularly for teaching archery. He is the martial preceptor to both the **Pandavas** and the **Kauravas**, the two royal factions whose battle for power is at the heart of the *Mahabharata*. Drona is the **son** of the sage **Bharadvaja**, born through an involuntary seminal emission when the sage sees a celestial nymph (**apsara**). Drona's skill in weapons is gained from the god **Vishnu's Parashuram avatar**, who bequeaths both his weapons and his skills to Drona as a boon. Drona's skill as an archer is legendary, as is his prowess as an archery teacher. Among his pupils he has a particular fondness for **Arjuna** (a **Pandava** brother), whose commitment and concentration so outstrip his peers that Drona promises Arjuna that he will be the world's greatest archer. This support for Arjuna can be seen in the story of **Ekalavya**, a tribal boy whom Drona refuses to teach because of his low status, but who becomes Arjuna's equal as an archer by worshiping a clay statue of Drona. When Drona discovers this, he demands that Ekalavya give him his right thumb as a preceptor's fee, to ensure that no one will be Arjuna's equal.

During the Mahabharata war, Drona fights valiantly on the side of **Duryodhana** (eldest son of **Dhrtarashtra**), but is finally killed by King **Drupada's** son **Dhrshtadyumna**. In the epic, Drupada and Drona have a long history of conflict. They have lived together as students, but after their student life ends Drupada becomes the king of **Panchala**, whereas Drona is so poor he cannot afford to feed his family. On one occasion, when Drona asks Drupada for alms, Drupada upbraids him most insultingly. Drona vows revenge, and after teaching the arts of war to the Pandavas and Kauravas, Drona demands Drupada's kingdom as his teacher's fee (**dakshina**) from his students. When Drupada is defeated, Drona takes half of his kingdom; Drupada vows to get revenge on Drona. Drupada subsequently performs a great **fire sacrifice** to give **birth** to a son who will kill Drona. Out of the fire come two luminous children, one of whom is Dhrshtadyumna, and the other his sister, **Draupadi**.

## Dropsy

Bodily condition in which the body retains excess **water**, and in consequence swells up. In several hymns in the **Vedas**, the oldest Hindu religious texts, dropsy is described as the punishment levied by the god **Varuna** for speaking falsehood. Varuna was conceived as the guardian of cosmic order (**rta**), and intentionally false speech was considered the paradigm of **anrta**, the destructive force that ran counter to the ordering force of rta. In this case the punishment was seen as fitting the crime, as if one had been metaphorically inflated by the lies one had told.

## Drshtanta

("example") In Indian **philosophy**, the examples that are one of the required elements in the accepted form of an inference (**anumana**). These examples were provided as further evidence to prove the reason (**hetu**) given to support the hypothesis. As a rule, there had to be two such examples. One was a positive example (**sapaksha**) to show that similar things happened in comparable cases, and the other was a negative example (**vipaksha**) to show that this did not happen in other cases. In the most common example of an inference, "There is **fire** on the mountain, because there is smoke on the mountain," the sapaksha could be "like kitchen" (a place with both fire and smoke), and the vipaksha "unlike lake" (a place without fire or smoke). The purpose of both examples is to support the reason given, by showing that this reason gives sufficient cause to support the theory.

## Drugs

The attitude toward drugs in Hindu society shows the incredible variation for which the Hindu religion is famous. In general, the use of drugs is zealously condemned among "respectable" people, as is anything leading to a potential loss of control. Yet Hindu mythology also portrays the god **Shiva** as regularly consuming **intoxicants**, particularly **bhang**, a preparation made primarily from marijuana, and **datura**, a genus of plants containing poisonous alkaloids. Given this mythic example, some of Shiva's devotees (**bhakta**) do the same as a variety of religious practice. Many ascetics regularly spend much of their day smoking hashish (**charas**) mixed with tobacco, although this is not always viewed as normal **ascetic** practice. There are also particular times and places when consumption of drugs is more accepted, even among "normal" people. Consuming bhang is a fairly common element in the celebration of certain festivals, such as **Shivaratri** ("Night of Shiva") and **Holi** (the festival of reversal). It is also sometimes consumed when people are on pilgrimage, and government-regulated stands selling bhang can be found at several important pilgrimage places (**tirtha**), including **Benares**, **Puri**, and **Haridwar**. Despite this more widespread use in particular specialized contexts, there are many people who do not use drugs under any circumstances and would never consider doing so. Such rigid refusal is still only one part of the "orthodox" picture, in which one can find many different attitudes.

## Drupada

In the *Mahabharata*, the later of the two great Hindu epics, Drupada is the king of the **Panchala** region, and the father of **Dhrshtadyumna** and **Draupadi**. Much of Drupada's life is absorbed by his struggle with **Drona**, who has been one of Drupada's fellow students. After their course of studies is finished, Drupada assumes his throne and lives quite lavishly, whereas Drona is so poor that he cannot even afford to feed his family. In distress, Drona approaches Drupada for help, reminding him of their past connection. Drupada arrogantly dismisses him, telling him that such ties are of no consequence. Drona swears that he will get revenge, and after teaching the arts of war to the **Pandavas** and **Kauravas**,

the two royal factions whose battle for power is at the heart of the *Mahabharata*, demands Drupada's kingdom as his preceptor's fee (**dakshina**). After Drupada is defeated, Drona takes half of his kingdom, whereupon Drupada swears revenge. He performs a great **sacrifice** to give **birth** to a **son** who will kill Drona. Two children emerge from the sacrificial **fire**: Dhrshtadyumna, who eventually kills Drona; and Draupadi, who becomes the wife of all five **Pandavas**. During the Mahabharata war, Drupada fights on the side of the Pandavas, his sons-in-law. He is eventually killed in battle by Drona but is later avenged by his son Dhrshtadyumna, who kills Drona.

## Duhshasana

In the *Mahabharata*, the later of the two great Hindu epics, Duhshasana is one of the hundred **sons** of **Dhrtarashtra**, who are collectively known as the **Kauravas**. The heart of the *Mahabharata* is the struggle for power between the Kauravas and their cousins the **Pandavas**, and the latter are the epic's protagonists. Duhshasana is most infamous for his misbehavior toward the Pandavas' common wife **Draupadi** after the eldest Pandava, **Yudhishthira**, loses everything—including Draupadi—in a game of dice. Duhshasana drags Draupadi into the **gambling** hall by her **hair** and with her garments stained by her menstrual **blood**; he also attempts to disrobe Draupadi by pulling off her sari, but is frustrated here by the god **Krishna**, who miraculously makes Draupadi's sari infinitely long.

Duhshasana's behavior in this incident only fans the enmity between the two families. Draupadi's husband **Bhima**, the Pandava brother renowned for his physical strength, vows to avenge this insult by ripping open Duhshasana's chest and drinking his blood, whereas Draupadi vows that she will leave her hair unbound until she can wash it in Duhshasana's blood. During the Mahabharata war Duhshasana fights with his brother **Duryodhana** and is eventually killed by Bhima, after which both Bhima and Draupadi fulfill their dreadful vows. As an extra measure of revenge before killing Duhshasana, Bhima tears off the hand that had held Draupadi's hair and beats Duhshasana with his own severed limb.

## Durga

("inaccessible, impassable") A particular form of the Hindu Mother **Goddess**, although the name is often used as a more general title for the mother goddess in her fierce and powerful form. As depicted in images and pictures, Durga rides on a **lion** and holds in her eight hands the weapons of all the gods. Both of these features correspond to the description of the great goddess in the *Devimahatmya*, the earliest and most important mythic text used for the **worship** of the Goddess as the supreme **divine power**. The general identification of Durga with this great Goddess is underscored by the *Devimahatmya*'s other common name, the *Durgasaptashati* ("The 700 [verses] on Durga"). As a form of the great Goddess, Durga is a major divinity in the Hindu pantheon and in modern Hindu life. The eighth **day** in the waxing and waning halves of the **lunar month** are considered sacred to her, and her rites are practiced on those days. Her most important festivals are the Nine Nights (**Navaratri**), which occur in both the spring and the fall. In each of these festivals Durga is worshiped in her nine forms (**Navadurga**), one on each consecutive night. The variety of goddesses as which she is worshiped again shows us how Durga is conceived as the embodiment of the Goddess in all her forms.

## Durgasaptashati

("700 [verses in praise of] **Durga**") Another name for the *Devimahatmya*, the earliest and most important mythic text for the **worship** of the **Goddess** as

Worshipers immerse an image of the goddess Durga in the Yamuna River, near New Delhi. Durga is depicted riding a lion and holding a weapon in each of her eight hands.

the supreme **divine power**. It has this name because the text is 700 verses long, and Durga is one of the common names designating this powerful goddess. The *Devimahatmya* is well-known for its assertion that God is female. This is a notion with no clear source in the earlier tradition, where female **deities** were insignificant. The text begins with a frame story, but the bulk of the work is three stories describing the salvific activity of the Goddess, who is portrayed as far superior to the pantheon's male gods. See ***Devimahatmya***.

## Durvasas

In Hindu mythology, a sage who is a partial incarnation of the god **Shiva**. Durvasas is the son of **Anasuya**, who for her influence in persuading another woman to remove a curse has been given boons by the gods **Brahma**, **Vishnu**, and Shiva. Anasuya requests that each be born as one of her **sons**, and Vishnu is born as **Dattatreya**, Shiva as Durvasas, and Brahma as Chandra. As a mythic figure, Durvasas is noted for his **magic** powers, which are not surprising given his background. He is also known for his bad temper and for his tendency

to curse anyone who makes him angry. One victim of his wrath is the maiden **Shakuntala**, who in her reverie on her newfound love with King **Dushyanta** does not notice and pay homage to Durvasas. She is cursed that her love would completely forget her. In another case Durvasas curses all the gods to be subject to old age and death. This is provoked by an "insult" from **Indra's elephant Airavata**, which had flung a garland given by Durvasas to the ground. As with most **curses** in Hindu mythology, neither of these curses can be withdrawn, but their severity is reduced by mitigating conditions. Shakuntala is told that King Dushyanta will remember her if she shows him some sign of their relationship, which she does. The gods can avoid old age and death by obtaining and consuming the nectar of immortality (**amrta**).

As with all the sages, Durvasas can also grant wonderful boons to people with whom he is pleased. One such beneficiary was **Kunti**, one of the heroines in the epic *Mahabharata*. Durvasas gives Kunti a powerful **mantra** (sacred sound), which will allow her to have a child by any of the gods simply by thinking about him. As soon as Kunti receives this mantra, she tests it while looking at the **sun**, and immediately bears the golden child **Karna**. In her panic at unexpectedly becoming a mother—she is still unmarried, and understandably concerned about what people might think—she puts the child in a box and abandons him in the **Ganges**. After her marriage to **Pandu** (son of the sage **Vyasa** and queen **Ambalika**), this mantra is the only way that she is able to have children, since Pandu has been cursed to die the moment he sleeps with one of his wives. She uses this mantra to bear **Yudhishthira**, **Arjuna**, and **Bhima**, then teaches it to her co-wife **Madri**, who bears **Nakula** and **Sahadeva**. Thus, through the gift of Durvasas, all the **Pandava** brothers—the epic's protagonists—are children of the gods.

## Duryodhana

In the *Mahabharata*, the later of the two great Hindu epics, Duryodhana is the eldest **son** of King **Dhrtarashtra**, and thus the leader of the **Kauravas**, one of the two royal factions whose struggle for power is at the heart of the epic. Duryodhana and ninety-nine brothers are born in an unusual manner. Their mother **Gandhari** gives **birth** to a great lump of flesh, which is divided and put into one hundred pots of clarified butter. In these pots the lumps develop into infants. At the moment Duryodhana is born there are a host of evil **omens**, and when the court astrologers are asked to interpret these, they conclude that Duryodhana will be the ruin of the country and his family, and that it will be better to abandon him to the elements. Fatherly feelings prevent Dhrtarashtra from doing this, which sets the stage for the final conflict. Even though the major force driving the epic's plot is the animosity between Duryodhana and his cousins, the **Pandavas**, and this ends with the Kauravas being utterly destroyed, it would be inaccurate to paint Duryodhana as an unredeemable villain. He is less evil than ill-starred— proud, stubborn, unwilling to admit his mistakes, and after a certain point, unwilling to grant his cousins any advantage. These character flaws are magnified by the lack of strong guidance from his father Dhrtarashtra, and eventually spell his doom.

The rift between the cousins develops early, inflamed in part by the fact that the Pandavas are more heroic than Duryodhana and his brothers. As a child, **Bhima**, the Pandava brother best noted for his prodigious strength, used to whip all hundred Kauravas at once. Needless to say this does not endear him to them. Later in adolescence, when their archery teacher, **Drona**, requests the capture of King **Drupada** as his preceptor's fee, the Pandava brother **Arjuna** succeeds in doing this, whereas Drupada defeats Duryodhana in battle.

Another rift grows when the Pandavas contest the right of Duryodhana's friend **Karna** to take part in an archery match, claiming that Karna's unknown parentage makes him unfit to compete with kings. Duryodhana skirts that issue by proclaiming Karna as the King of **Anga**, but by then the bad **blood** between the cousins is well-established.

This bad blood becomes apparent in many different plots. Duryodhana first tries to kill the Pandavas by building a flammable **house of lac** for them, which is then set on **fire**. The Pandavas, however, are able to escape unharmed. Duryodhana later entices **Yudhishthira** (a Pandava brother) into a game of dice. Yudhishthira wagers and loses everything that he has, including himself, his brothers, and their common wife **Draupadi**. After this loss Duryodhana and his brother **Duhshasana** publicly humiliate Draupadi, after which Bhima swears a solemn oath to kill them both. Dhrtarashtra gives the Pandavas their freedom, which they promptly lose in yet another game of dice. The outcome of this loss is that the Pandavas agree to spend twelve years in exile in the forest, and live incognito for the thirteenth, with the condition that if they are discovered in the thirteenth year the cycle will begin anew.

Despite the best efforts of Duryodhana's spies, the Pandavas manage to escape detection during the thirteenth year, and at its conclusion send envoys to Duryodhana to claim their share of the kingdom. Perhaps emboldened by Yudhishthira's comment that he and his brothers will be satisfied with a mere five villages, Duryodhana replies that he will not give them enough land to put under the point of a needle. In the face of such stubbornness and injustice, the Pandavas prepare for war to claim what is rightfully theirs. During the war Duryodhana fights valiantly, but in the eighteen days of battle sees his forces disintegrate around him. His final battle is with Bhima, who in exchange for Duryodhana's earlier insult to Draupadi (he had directed her to sit on his thigh, which was a euphemism for the genitals), smashes Duryodhana's thigh with his mace, killing him.

## Dushana

In the **Ramayana**, the earlier of the two great Indian epics, Dushana is one of the brothers of the demon-king **Ravana**. Together with his brother **Khara**, Dushana tries to avenge the honor of their sister **Shurpanakha**, whose ears and nose have been cut off by **Rama's** brother **Lakshmana**. In a fierce battle with their **demon** (supernatural being) army, Rama destroys the army and kills Khara and Dushana. Seeing the failure of her two brothers, Shurpanakha goes to Ravana to beg for vengeance. Ravana realizes he cannot kill Rama in battle but resolves to avenge his sister by kidnapping **Sita**, wife of Ravana. This sets in motion the plot of the latter part of the epic.

## Dushyanta

In the **Mahabharata**, the later of the two great Hindu epics, Dushyanta is a king of the **Lunar Line** and the husband of **Shakuntala**. Their romance is also described in **Kalidasa's** drama **Abhijnanashakuntala**. Dushyanta meets Shakuntala, who is living in a forest **ashram** (abode of an **ascetic**), while he is hunting in the forest. They fall in love and are married by their mutual consent. After a short time Dushyanta has to return to his kingdom, with Shakuntala to follow soon after. In the meantime, Shakuntala has been cursed by the sage **Durvasas** that her beloved will completely forget her, although Durvasas later modifies the **curse**, and says that Dushyanta will remember everything if Shakuntala can show him any proof of their union. The bulk of the story in both episodes is concerned with Shakuntala's trials and tribulations as she strives to regain her rightful place as queen. In both versions, Dushyanta is a minor character, but clearly an essential one.

In Kulu, people celebrating the festival of Dussehra carry temple images in procession through the streets.

## Dussehra

(variant of Dashahara, "ten days") Festival celebrated on the tenth **day** of the bright (waxing) half of the **lunar month** of **Ashvin** (September–October), and one of the most important celebrations in the **year**. The festival celebrates the victory of good over evil, and is also known as Vijaya Dashami ("Victory Tenth"). The festival has two charter myths, both of which mark the ultimate triumph of good over evil. One charter comes from the mythology of the **Goddess**, and marks this as the day on which **Durga** (form of the Hindu Mother Goddess) slays the buffalo-**demon Mahishasura**. This episode comes from the ***Devimahatmya***, and is the central theme of the text—the goddess is born to destroy Mahishasura when the gods cannot, and the struggle between the two is the climax of the text. Since the nine days preceding Dussehra are the fall **Navaratri**, the "nine nights" spent in **worship** of the Goddess, it seems reasonable that the tenth and concluding day would be marked by the climactic moment in the *Devimahatmya*, the most important source of mythology for the Goddess.

The other charter myth for this festival comes from an entirely different source, the mythology of **Rama** (the seventh incarnation of **Vishnu**). This is celebrated as the day on which Rama slays **Ravana** (demon-king of **Lanka**) and regains **Sita** (wife of Rama) from captivity. This victory is symbolized by burning huge effigies of Ravana and his **son**

Meghanada (an epithet of **Indrajit**) on the night of Dussehra, and these effigies often contain fireworks to enhance their pyrotechnic capacity. This time of year is often celebrated with dramatic enactments of the *Ramayana* (the **Sanskrit** epic), known as the **Ram Lila**. In some cases this lasts for ten days, ending on Dussehra; in other cases (as in the Ram Lila in **Benares**, the sacred city on the banks of the **Ganges** River) it will last an entire month, with Dussehra marking the death of Ravana.

Dussehra is a highly auspicious day, and popular tradition holds that anything begun on this day will succeed. Dussehra is thus a favored occasion for initiating any important projects, beginning endeavors, or forming organizations, even if it is only a token beginning. Dussehra also marks the beginning of the cool **season**, when the end of the hot weather and the monsoon rains bring better conditions for military action. Both charter myths have connections with battle and conquest, and in earlier times Dussehra was particularly celebrated by the royal and martial classes. On Dussehra it was customary for soldiers to worship their weapons. Given the festival's martial associations and the guarantee that all things initiated on that day would be successful, it was also the day of choice for rulers to send out their armies to invade neighboring territories. Even today one of the most spectacular celebrations is in Mysore, where the ruler presides over this festival in his ritual position as king, even though he no longer rules. The other great celebration is in **Kulu**, where all the **deities** in the region journey to Kulu to celebrate this festival (along with hordes of their human retainers).

## Dvadashakshara Mantra

("[the] twelve-syllable **mantra**") Twelve-syllable mantra (sacred sound) used in parts of the **Vaishnava** community. The mantra is "***Om** namo bhagavate narayanaya*" ("*Om*, Homage to the blessed **Narayana**").

## Dvaitadvaita Vedanta

One of the branches of **Vedanta**, the philosophical school claiming to reveal the ultimate (anta) teaching of the ancient sacred texts known as the **Vedas**. Dvaitadvaita Vedanta's founder and most important figure was the fourteenth-century philosopher, **Nimbarka**. Nimbarka stressed the **worship** of the god **Krishna** and his companion **Radha** as a divine couple, but on a philosophical level he was attempting to find some middle ground between the monism of the **Advaita Vedanta** school and the dualism of the **Dvaita Vedanta** school. The former claimed that a single Ultimate Reality—called **Brahman**—lay behind all things, and that all things were merely differing forms of this single reality. The latter emphasized the utter distinction between God as Ultimate Reality on the one hand, and the world and human souls on the other. Nimbarka stressed that the world and souls were dependent on God, in whom they exist and with whom they had a subtle connection. Nimbarka thus supported the philosophical doctrine called **parinamavada**, which stressed the real transformation of the divine and the capacity of human beings to transform themselves back to their divine status.

## Dvaita ("dual") Vedanta

One of the branches of **Vedanta**, the philosophical school claiming to reveal the ultimate (anta) teaching of the ancient sacred texts known as the **Vedas**. Dvaita Vedanta's founder and most important figure was the philosopher **Madhva**, who lived in southern India in the thirteenth century. Madhva's basic theory is the utter transcendence of God, and this conviction leads him to suggest a philosophical position known as dualism. Dualism asserts a qualitative difference between God in his transcendence and the corruptions of material things. According to Madhva, God is completely different from human Selves and the material world, even though

both of these come from God and depend on Him for their continuing existence. In this dualism, Madhva differs sharply from the major school of Vedanta, **Advaita Vedanta**. The Advaita school upholds a philosophical position known as monism, which is the belief that a single Ultimate Reality—called **Brahman**—lies behind all things, and that all things are merely differing forms of this single reality. Whereas Advaita collapses all things into one thing, Madhva firmly insists on maintaining differences.

Madhva's stress on dualism leads him to clarify these differing types of things, which is known as the "fivefold difference": the difference between God and the Self, between God and the world, between individual Selves, between Selves and matter, and between individual material things. Even though each Self is believed to contain an aspect of God, this fundamental difference gives the Self only a limited capacity for religious life. This limited power means that final liberation of the soul comes solely through the **grace** of God, who alone has the power to effect it. Final liberation is conceived both as freedom from rebirth and as the soul's opportunity to remain in the divine presence forever.

With its stress on God's utter transcendence and the emphasis on grace as the sole vehicle for salvation, Madhva's Dvaita Vedanta has often been compared to the theology of John Calvin. Madhva even stated that the world had three classes of beings: those eventually destined for liberation (**muktiyogas**), those destined for eternal rebirth (**nityasamsarins**), and those destined for eternal damnation (**tamoyogas**). Like Calvin, Madhva did not see these categories as promoting **fatalism**, but rather that the prospect of never attaining liberation could urge one to the faith necessary to pursue an active religious life. For further information see Karl H. Potter (ed.), *Presuppositions of India's Philosophies*, 1972; and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore (eds.), *A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy*, 1957.

## Dvapara Yuga

Particular age of the world in one of the reckonings of **cosmic time**. According to traditional belief, time has neither beginning nor end, but alternates between cycles of creation and activity, followed by cessation and quietude. Each of these cycles lasts for 4.32 billion years, with an active phase known as the **Day of Brahma**, and the quiet phase known as the Night of Brahma. In one reckoning of cosmic time, the Day of Brahma is divided into one thousand **mahayugas** ("great cosmic ages"), each of which lasts for 4.32 million years. Each mahayuga is composed of four constituent **yugas** (units of cosmic time), named the **Krta Yuga**, **Treta Yuga**, Dvapara Yuga, and **Kali Yuga**. Each of these four yugas is shorter than its predecessor, and ushers in an era more degenerate and depraved. By the end of the Kali Yuga, things have gotten so bad that the only solution is the destruction and recreation of the **earth**, at which time the next Krta era begins.

The Dvapara Yuga is thus the third of the four yugas contained in a mahayuga, and lasts for 864,000 years. The metal associated with the Dvapara yuga is **bronze**—less valuable than the gold and silver associated with the earlier ages, but better than the iron of the Kali yuga. This is popularly believed to be the cosmic age in which the god **Krishna** appeared on earth.

## Dvarapala

("door-protector") Guardian images placed on either side of the entrance to a Hindu temple. These figures are usually portrayed as minor celestial beings and conceived as the protectors of the sacred space inside. Since any Hindu temple is first and foremost the home for the **deity** within, and since both kings and gods often used the same symbols to display and reinforce their

status, it is not surprising that the deities would have some "servants" guarding theirs door and restricting access to them, in the same way as their human counterparts.

## Dvija

("**twice-born**") Name for a member of the three "twice-born" groups in Indian society, that is, a **brahmin** (highest in status), **kshatriya** (second in status to brahmins), or **vaishya** (third in status to brahmins). This name exists because these groups are ritually eligible to receive the adolescent religious **initiation** called **upanayana**, which is often described as the "second birth." See **twice-born**.

## Dvipas

According to traditional mythic geography, the visible world is composed of a series of seven concentric dvipas, a word that literally means "islands," but can be translated to "landmasses." All but one of these are named after particular plants. At the center is **Jambu** ("Rose-apple") **dvipa**, followed by **Plaksha** ("fig-tree") **dvipa**, **Salmala** ("silk-cotton tree") **dvipa**, **Kusha** ("kusha grass") **dvipa**, **Krauncha** ("curlew") **dvipa**, **Shaka** ("Teak") **dvipa**, and at the outermost edge, **Pushkara** ("blue lotus") **dvipa**. Each of these lands is separated from its neighbors by one of the seven oceans (the **saptasindhu**), with each ocean composed of a different substance. The innermost ocean, as experience shows, is composed of salt **water**, the ones beyond this are of sugar cane juice, wine, ghee, yogurt, milk, and sweet water, respectively. At the center of Jambudvipa (and thus the world) is Mount **Meru**, which is compared to the central calyx of a lotus, and is surrounded by the dvipas as its petals. The physical world is thus seen as a symmetrical whole, with the land of India (in the southern part of Jambudvipa) positioned at the symbolic center.



Dvarapala, or gatekeeper, statue at the entrance of the Brhadeshvar Temple in Thanjavur. These statues depict minor deities that protect the space inside.

## Dwara

("door" or "gateway") Among the **Bairagis**, renunciant ascetics who are devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Vishnu**, the word *dwara* is used to denote a branch or subsect of a particular order. Each dwara is named after its **ascetic** founder, who was himself usually a noted disciple of the larger order's founder. For example, the **Nimbarki** ascetics are one of the four established orders among the militant **Vaishnava** ascetics known as the **chatuh-sampradayi Nagas**, along with the **Ramanandis**, the **Vishnuswamis**, and the Madhva Gaudiya (**Brahma sampraday**) ascetics. The Nimbarkis themselves are divided into nine dwaras, or subsects, each named after the dwara's founder. The division of ascetics by means of dwaras is another means of subdividing ascetic orders, and creating even more sharply defined ascetic identities and loyalties.

## Dwaraka

Sacred city (**tirtha**) on the western coast of **Gujarat**, on the shore of the Arabian Sea. In mythic terms, Dwaraka is most famous as the capital city for the god **Krishna's** kingdom, at which he is believed to have lived in the years following the **Mahabharata** war. Dwaraka's most important site is the Dwarakanath Temple, dedicated to Krishna in his form as the "Lord of Dwaraka." Dwaraka is also one of the **four dhams** ("divine abodes"), sacred centers that approximately define the geographic boundaries of India; the three others are **Badrinath**, **Puri**, and **Rameshvaram**. Dwaraka is also the site of the **Sharada math**, one of the four **Dashanami Sanyasi maths** (monastic centers) supposedly established by the philosopher **Shankaracharya**. The Sharada math is the headquarters of the **Kitawara** group of the Dashanami Sanyasis, one of the four major organizational groups, with each one centered at one of the maths. As with many other Hindu sacred sites, Dwaraka is sanctified by a network of mythic and religious associations.

## Dyaus

A minor **deity** in the **Vedas**, the oldest and most authoritative Hindu religious texts. Dyaus is a god associated with the sky, but his character is not well-developed, since even at the time of the Vedas he had been largely eclipsed by other gods. Dyaus is part of the oldest layer of Indo-**Aryan** deities, as evidenced by the Greek form of his name, Zeus.

# E

## Earth

In Hindu mythology, Earth is considered a **goddess**. The notion that India is a sacred land is one of the most deeply rooted elements in Hindu life, and many of India's mountains, rivers, and other geographical features are considered gods and goddesses. This belief extends to Earth itself. In the **Vedas**, the oldest Hindu sacred texts, Earth appears as the goddess **Prthivi**, who is lauded for her fertility, her nurturing capacity, and her firmness in supporting all things. Prthivi almost always appears in conjunction with **Dyaus**, a male **deity** associated with the sky, whose name is a cognate form of the Greek god Zeus. Sky and Earth thus form the divine couple, with the rain from the sky fertilizing and energizing the earth.

In later mythology the figure of Prthivi is supplanted by the goddess Bhudevi ("Earth Goddess"), who is considered to be one of the wives of the god **Vishnu**. Bhudevi is less frequently associated with fertility and nurturing; her primary function is as a supplicant to galvanize the world-rescuing activity of Vishnu. When the wicked become too oppressive, or a **demon** becomes too powerful and disrupts the cosmic order, Earth cries out to Vishnu for help, and Vishnu obligingly restores the cosmic balance. One example of this is the **Boar avatar**, in which Earth herself is rescued from bondage by Vishnu. For further information see David R. Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses,* 1986.

## Earth

(2) In its material form, one of the five **elements** in traditional Indian **cosmology**, the others being **water**, **fire**, **wind**, and **akasha**. In some philosophical schools, each of the elements is paired with one of the five senses; in this case earth is associated with smell. The element earth is also associated with certain bodily functions, especially the elimination of solid wastes.

## Eating

Throughout the world the act of eating is imbued with cultural significance and cultural messages, and Hindu culture makes no exception. Given the strong emphasis on **purity**, Hindus pay significant attention to the preparation and consumption of food. Factors such as whom one eats with, who may prepare one's food, and what types of food one will eat and how it should be prepared all send messages about the social status of an individual or a community. The groups with the highest status, particularly **brahmins**, are the strictest with regard to their dining habits. For the most part, such high-status groups adhere to a principle known as **commensality**—that is, only eating food cooked by members of their social group. With regard to the content of one's diet, the great divide is between vegetarian and nonvegetarian. An exclusively vegetarian diet indicates higher status, and among nonvegetarians there are status gradations depending on what types of meat one eats. For orthodox Hindus, every meal is a potential source of ritual contamination and must be carefully monitored. Food cooked in water is seen as far more susceptible to pollution (**ashaucha**) and greater care is taken in accepting it, whereas food fried in oil or ghee is believed to be much more resistant to pollution and thus a lesser source of ritual danger. From a religious perspective, the safest meal of all is the meal that is cooked and eaten at home. See also **Vegetarianism**.

## Eclipses

Without exception, eclipses are considered highly inauspicious and ritually

dangerous times. As in many other cultures, Indian astronomers were able to figure out the motion of the **moon**, and thus could predict both solar and lunar eclipses fairly accurately. The traditional mythic explanation for eclipses comes from the story of the **Tortoise avatar**, in which the **gods** and **demons** agree to join forces to churn the Ocean of Milk into the nectar of immortality, which they will then share. The gods manage to trick the demons out of their share, but as the gods divide it among themselves, the demon **Sainhikeya** slips into their midst in disguise. As Sainhikeya begins to drink, the **sun** and moon alert the god **Vishnu** to Sainhikeya's presence, and Vishnu quickly uses his discus to cut off the demon's head. Yet since the demon drank some of the nectar, both his head and trunk become immortal, with the head becoming **Rahu** and the trunk becoming **Ketu**. Rahu has particular enmity for the sun and moon, the **deities** responsible for his demise, and tries to swallow them whenever he meets them in the **heavens**. He always succeeds, but since he no longer has a body to digest them, they escape unharmed through Rahu's severed neck.

This association with Rahu makes eclipses inauspicious and ritually dangerous times, and in popular culture eclipses are believed to emit malevolent rays that have a physical quality. Many people respond to this danger by remaining indoors for the duration of an eclipse. During an eclipse, people will often perform **rites of protection**, including giving donations (**dana**) as a way to give away potential bad luck. Pregnant **women** must take particular care, lest the **inauspiciousness** of the time affect the growing child. Some believe that pregnant women should lie completely motionless during an eclipse, fearing that the child will be born missing the body part corresponding to the one that the woman moved. After the eclipse, people bathe (**snana**) and perform other rites of purification to remove any possible lingering taint of impurity (ashaucha) or bad luck.

## Eighteen Minor Works

(Padinenkilkanakku) Name given a collection of early Tamil works of literature, which was complete by the late fifth century C.E. All of these works have a moral emphasis and aim to inculcate ethical or religious values in the hearers. The two most famous examples in this collection are the ***Tirukkural*** and the ***Naladiyar***.

## Ekadashi

(eleventh **day**) Hindu religious life is primarily based on the lunar **calendar**, in which the **year** contains twelve **lunar months**, each of which is divided equally into "dark" (waning) and "bright" (waxing) halves. Ekadashi is the name of the eleventh day in both the waning and the waxing half of the lunar month. Certain days during each half of the lunar cycle are deemed sacred to particular gods and goddesses, and these are days for special **worship**. The ekadashi or eleventh day in each half of the lunar month is deemed sacred to the god **Vishnu**. With one exception, each of the twenty-four ekadashis has a separate name, charter myth, prescribed rites, and promised result for fulfilling it. Pious Vaishnavas observe each of these twenty-four festival days. In their order of occurrence throughout the year, the ekadashis are: **Papamochani** Ekadashi and **Kamada** Ekadashi during the lunar month of **Chaitra**, **Baruthani** Ekadashi and **Mohini** Ekadashi during the lunar month of **Baisakh**, **Achala** Ekadashi and **Nirjala** Ekadashi during the lunar month of **Jyeshth**, **Yogini** Ekadashi and **Devshayani** Ekadashi during the lunar month of **Ashadh**, **Kamika** Ekadashi and **Putrada** Ekadashi during the lunar month of **Shravan**, **Aja** Ekadashi and **Parivartini** Ekadashi during the lunar month of **Bhadrapada**, **Indira** Ekadashi and **Papankusha** Ekadashi during the

lunar month of **Ashvin**, **Rambha** Ekadashi and **Devotthayan** Ekadashi during the lunar month of **Kartik**, **Utpanna** Ekadashi and **Mokshada** Ekadashi during the lunar month of **Margashirsha**, **Saphala** Ekadashi and **Putrada** Ekadashi during the lunar month of **Paush**, **Shattila** Ekadashi and **Jaya** Ekadashi during the lunar month of **Magh**, and **Vijaya** Ekadashi and **Amalaki** Ekadashi during the lunar month of **Phalgun**. Of these ekadashis, some are more important to the general populace than others, particularly Devshayani and Devotthayan Ekadashis, which mark the rainy **season** "sleep" of Vishnu during the **chaturmas** period. The only ekadashi to appear twice is Putrada ("son-giving") Ekadashi. This promises that faithful observance will bring the **birth** of a son, and its reappearance clearly points to the traditional preference for **sons** over **daughters**.

## Ekalavya

In the *Mahabharata*, the later of the two great Hindu epics, Ekalavya is a figure who illustrates the pervasive reach of the **caste** system. Ekalavya is a tribal boy who wants to learn archery from **Drona**, the royal archery teacher, but is refused because of his low **birth**. Undaunted, Ekalavya makes a clay image of Drona, treats it as his teacher, or **guru**, and through assiduous practice and devotion to his guru becomes the most skilled archer on the earth. When **Arjuna**, a young warrior-king and Drona's best student, discovers this, he becomes jealous and complains to Drona, since Drona has promised Arjuna that no one will surpass him as an archer. Drona asks Ekalavya how he has become so skillful. When he learns that Ekalavya has worshiped Drona's image as his guru, Drona notes that he is entitled to a preceptor's fee (**dakshina**). As his fee he requests Ekalavya's right thumb, a gift that will considerably diminish Ekalavya's shooting abilities. Ekalavya fulfills Drona's wish

without hesitation, but from that day is no longer better than Arjuna.

## Ekmukhi Rudraksha

A particular type of **rudraksha**, which is a bead made from the dried seed of the tree *Elaeocarpus ganitrus*. The rudraksha is considered sacred to the god **Shiva**, and is often strung into garlands and worn by his devotees (**bhakta**). The seed itself is typically round, with a knobby pitted surface and a natural channel in the middle through which a thread can be easily drawn. It has natural divisions running from top to bottom, which divide the seed into units known as "faces" (mukhi). The Ekmukhi Rudraksha is one in which the dividing lines running from top to bottom are completely absent, making the whole seed a single and undivided piece. Such a rudraksha is extremely rare, as well as holy, for it is believed to be a manifestation of **Shiva** himself in material form. Their rarity also makes them extremely valuable, and street sellers routinely counterfeit them by carving reproductions out of pieces of wood, often with the symbol *Om* on one side.

## Eknath

(1533–1599) Poet and saint in the **Varkari Panth**, a religious community that worships the Hindu god **Vithoba**, at his temple at **Pandharpur** in the modern state of **Maharashtra**. Eknath was a **brahmin** who lived most of his life in the city of **Paithan**, which was an important trading and political center. Today, there is a shrine to Eknath in Paithan. In keeping with his birth as a brahmin, Eknath was highly learned in traditional Sanskritic lore. His best-known work is a translation into Marathi of the eleventh chapter of the **Bhagavata Purana**, a sectarian religious text that is the most important for the **worship** of the god **Krishna**. Yet Eknath also seems to have been intensely conscious of the spiritual capacities of the lower **castes** and the way in which social boundaries could be

leveled by devotion. In short poems known as **bharuds** he speaks in a variety of voices, including those of untouchables, Muslims, and **women**. Traditional accounts of his life describe him as treating **untouchable** devotees (**bhakta**) as his equals, and even **eating** and drinking with them. Such flagrant transgression of social boundaries brought trouble from more orthodox brahmins—who are portrayed as the villains in these traditional accounts—but on each occasion Eknath managed to escape being outcasted by them, often through divine intervention. For further information see G. A. Deleury, *The Cult of Vithoba*, 1960; Justin E. Abbott, *The Life of Eknath*, 1981; and Eleanor Zelliot, "Chokamela and Eknath: Two Bhakti Modes of Legitimacy for Modern Change," in *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 1980, Vol. 15, Nos. 1–2, 1980. See also **Sanskrit**.

## Ekoddishta

"Intended for one [person]." A particular type of **shraddha** or memorial service for the dead, which is performed for the benefit of a single person. An ekoddishta shraddha can be performed as a series of sixteen **offerings** performed during the first **year** after the person's death. These sixteen offerings are more commonly collapsed into a single rite performed on the eleventh **day** after death, the day after the ten-day period of ritual impurity (**maranashaucha**) has come to an end.

## Elements

Traditional Indian **cosmology** holds that there are five basic elements, four of which are similar to those found in medieval European conceptions: **earth**, **fire**, **water**, and **wind** (as moving air that is perceptible to human beings). The fifth element, **akasha**, has no readily understandable correlate to European ideas. It is generally translated as "**space**" and is considered to pervade the environment around us, filling the empty spaces. An unusual feature in Indian cosmology is that each of these elements is associated with a particular sense: earth with smell, fire with sight, water with taste, wind with touch, and akasha with hearing.

## Elements, Subtle

The subtle elements (**tanmatras**) are one of the stages in the **evolution** of the world and the human being in the **Samkhya** philosophical school. The subtle elements are the basis for the formation of the five gross elements: **earth**, **air**, **fire**, **wind**, and **akasha**. See **tanmatras**.

## Elephant

In ancient India, one of the emblems of royalty, in part because an elephant's prodigious appetite would soon bankrupt any individual pretending to have the wealth of royalty. Elephants also appear in the Hindu pantheon: The divine elephant **Airavata** is the **animal** vehicle of **Indra**, and the god **Ganesh** has an elephant's head on a human body, a souvenir of his conflict with **Shiva**.

## Elephanta

Island in the harbor outside the city of Bombay, most famous for its temple to **Shiva** by the same name. The date of the temple's construction is disputed, but is generally ascribed to the seventh or eighth century C.E. Elephanta is a rock-cut cave temple, in which the sandstone hillside was carved away to form the temple itself, and the images of the **deities**. This follows the general pattern of the rock-cut temples at **Ellora** in **Maharashtra** and required careful planning, since carving errors could not be corrected. The Elephanta shrine displays images of Shiva in his various forms: as Lord of the **Dance** (**Nataraja**), as the Lord of **Asceticism** (Yogishvara), as Bearer of the **Ganges** (Ganghadhara), as the pillar-shaped form known as the **linga**, and as the combination of male

Stone columns carved into the entrance of a cave in Ellora.

and female known as **Ardhanarishvara**. The central image, and by far the most famous, is the three-headed, eighteen-foot-tall image of Shiva as **Maheshvar**, the "great Lord." The face on the left shows his horrific and destructive facet as **Bhairava**, the face on the right his benevolent, creative facet as **Uma**, whereas the center face shows him as Tatpurusha—blissful, eternal, and transcending the ephemeral affairs of the world. Although the primary image is virtually untouched, many of the others sustained damage from Portuguese imperialists who considered the images idolatrous and used them for target practice. For further information see Pramod Chandra, *Elephanta Caves, Gharapuri*, 1970.

## Ellora

Historical site in modern **Maharashtra**, about twenty miles north of Aurangabad. It is world famous for a group of thirty-three rock-cut temples, which were sculpted between the fourth and tenth centuries C.E. Twelve of the caves have Buddhist images, and these tend to be the oldest; four of the caves are Jain, and the remaining seventeen are Hindu. In each case, the caves were created by excavating into the volcanic stone outcrop of the hillside, carefully cutting away the stone to leave finished images. Several of the Hindu caves have images of exceptional artistic quality. The most famous is the eighth century **Kailasanatha** Temple for which the entire hillside was cut away, leaving the temple behind, looking as if it had been built there from the ground up.
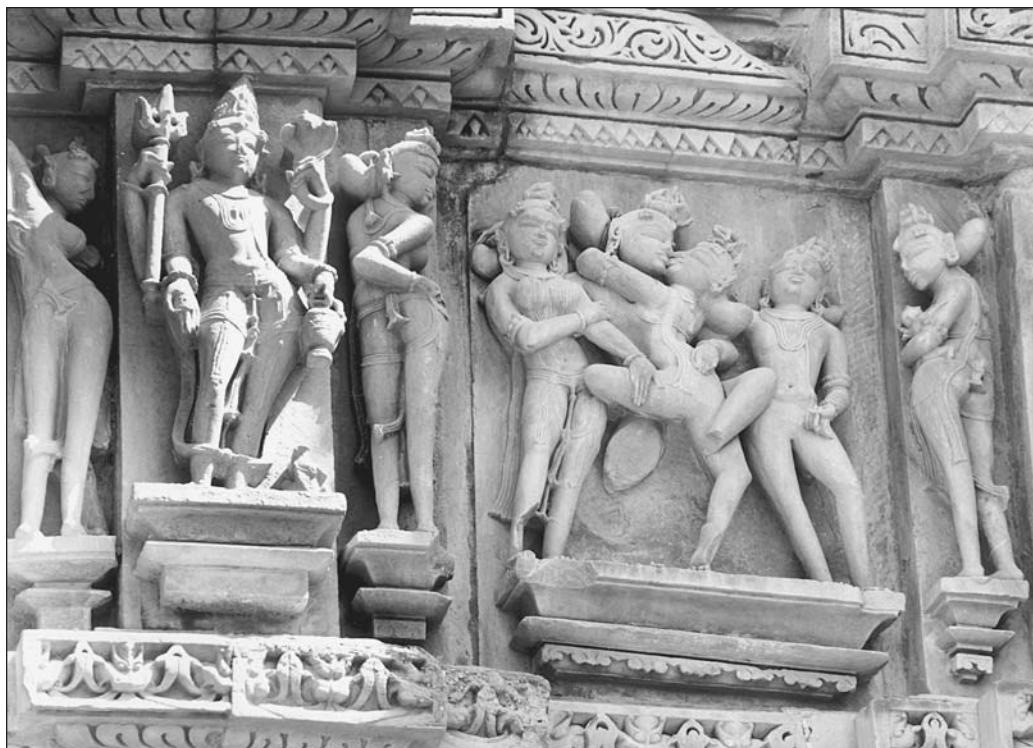
## Endogamy

In an anthropological sense, a marriage pattern in which members of a particular social group marry only members of the same group. In northern India, traditional marriages tend to be endogamous with regard to the **jati** (hereditary occupational group), and exogamous with regard to the village community and the **gotra** (mythic family lineage).

## Eroticism

Although Hindu religious life is often associated with detachment and

Erotic sculptures decorate the facade of the Kandariya Mahadev Temple in Khajuraho.

renunciation, Hindu culture has also fostered considerable eroticism, which has a recognized place in everyday life. One example of this is the ***Kama Sutra***, a well-known "manual" on the art of love, which is but one example of a literary genre called ratishastra, or "treatises on [sexual] pleasure." Other examples of eroticism in the culture can be seen in the sculptures carved on the temples **Konarak** and **Khajuraho**, and in the amount of attention given to poetry on love. In Hindu culture **kama** ("desire," particularly sexual desire) is one of the purusharthas, or **aims of life**, with the others being **artha** (wealth), **dharma** (religious duty), and **moksha** (final liberation of the soul). Erotic pleasure is thus recognized as a legitimate goal, as long as it is kept in proper perspective. Although renunciation is one of the great themes in Hindu life, nonrenunciation has been stressed at least as strongly.

In modern popular Hindu culture, eroticism is expressed through the esoteric ritual tradition known as **tantra**, in which sexual union is a symbol for liberation. Sexual intercourse is sometimes incorporated as an actual element in tantric ritual, as the most notorious of the **panchamakara** or "Five Forbidden Things." Although tantric practice has strong popular associations with illicit sexuality, such acts are always performed within a strict ritual context. In tantric practice, the ultimate aim is not to satisfy one's carnal desires, but to demolish the dualism between sacred and profane that is ultimately a sign of ignorance. The act of ritualizing normally taboo behavior is one way to destroy this duality, as well as a way to emphasize the superiority of tantric practice over other forms of religious life. In such practice, the adept is also imitating **Shiva**, who is himself both the perfect **yogi** and the model husband.

## Erotics, Texts on

One of the established genres in Indian literature was ratishastra, or "treatises on [sexual] pleasure," of which the

best-known is the ***Kama Sutra***. Sexual pleasure was seen as an established part of human life, which did not have to be hidden, and for which no excuses were necessary. **Kama** (as both "desire" and "sexual desire") was one of the purusharthas or **aims of life**. Satisfying one's desires was seen as a legitimate goal and considered a good thing, insofar as the pursuit did not interfere with other ends. The texts on erotics analyzed and classified sexuality in terms of aesthetic experience, as well as a vehicle for physical pleasure. For its sophisticated practitioners, such well-defined sexuality was intended to provide fulfillment for both partners, and here the literature is unusual for giving **women** equal desire and equal pleasure.

## Error, Theories of

Indian philosophical schools give serious consideration to the questions of how and why people make errors in judgment. Although these schools may cite seemingly mundane examples, such as mistaking the silvery flash of a seashell for a piece of silver, investigating judgment errors is ultimately rooted in religious goals. Specifically, the religious goal is to gain true awareness of the actual nature of things, and through this to bring about final liberation of the soul (**moksha**) from the karmic cycle of reincarnation (**samsara**). Each school's answers to the question of truth and falsity reveal fundamental differences about the understanding each has of the inherent nature of things, which have clear implications for bondage and liberation. Although the differing schools disagree on the mechanics of "how" one sees silver instead of a shell, there is general agreement about why such a mistake takes place. This and other errors are rooted in the karmic predispositions stemming from **avidya**, most specifically the greed that prompts human beings to look for items of value. Far more explanation can be found in the individual entries, but in brief there are six major theories of error.

In the **Prabhakara** branch of the **Mimamsa** school, the theory is **akhyati** or "nondiscrimination," in which the source of error is the inability to make sharp distinctions. The theory in the **Naiyayika** school is **anyathakhyati**, the "discrimination of something else," in which the mind projects an erroneous perception (**pratyaksha**) onto another object. The Mimamsa philosopher **Kumarila** explains error as **viparitakhyati** or "contrary discrimination," in which the source of error is a bad assessment of an object's similarities and differences. The **Samkhya** school propounds the theory of **sadasatkhyati**, or "discrimination of the unreal as the real," in which the source of error is merely an extension of the original error to distinguish between the two basic realities, **purusha** and **prakrti**. **Ramanuja**, founder of the **Vishishthadvaita Vedanta** school, propounds the theory of **satkhyati**, "discrimination of the real," in which one correctly perceives the silvery flash, but makes an incorrect assumption based on this. The final theory of **anirvachaniyakhyati** or "indescribable discrimination," is advanced by the **Advaita Vedanta** school; according to this, one illusory perception is superimposed on another conventionally true but ultimately illusory perception. For further information see Bijayananda Kar, *The Theories of Error in Indian Philosophy*, 1978; and Karl H. Potter (ed.), *Presuppositions of India's Philosophies*, 1972.

## Ethics
See **dharma**.

## Evil Eye
See **nazar**.

## Evolution
Fundamental doctrine of the **Samkhya** school of Indian **philosophy**. The Samkhya school uses a theory of evolution to explain the human perception of

an inner world of subjective experience and the objective outer world, which it argues are not true aspects of the real, or essential, world. Samkhya metaphysics posits two principles as the essence of the universe, **purusha** and **prakrti**. Purusha is pure awareness, which is conscious but inactive and unchanging. Prakrti is primal matter which, in its most basic form, is an equilibrium of three different unconscious forces (**gunas**): **sattva** (goodness), **rajas** (passion), and **tamas** (decay). According to the Samkhya, the conflation and confusion of purusha and prakrti is the basic cause for the bondage of the soul to the cycle of reincarnation (**samsara**)— where purusha is seen as if it is acting, and prakrti is seen as if it is conscious. While this misunderstanding does not effect purusha, it causes prakrti to undergo an evolutionary process, in which this primal matter becomes increasingly differentiated, leading to further confusion of the nature of the universe. The first stage of evolution is called **mahat** ("great one") and occurs when the original equilibrium between the three gunas has been disturbed; mahat is also known as **buddhi**, which is conceived as the cognitive faculty necessary for thought. The mental processes facilitated by buddhi spur the development of **ahamkar** ("I-making"), in which one finds the first feelings of ego-consciousness. With the rise of this subjective feeling comes the division into subjective and objective worlds: on one hand, ahamkar evolves the five subtle elements (**tanmatras**), the precursors of the gross **elements**, and on the other it evolves into the eleven faculties: five **jnanendriyas** or sense organs, five **karmendriyas** or organs of action, and the mind as the eleventh. At liberation this process of evolution happens in reverse, with the many successively devolving into the one. As in most Indian philosophical systems, liberation comes when correct understanding has replaced a mistaken one. For further information see Gerald Larson and Ram Shankar

Bhattacharya (eds.) *Samkhya,* 1987; and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore (eds.), *A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy*, 1957.

## Expiation
See **prayashchitta**.

# F

## Fables
See *Panchatantra*.

## Fallacies
In defining the parameters for what is and is not a valid argument, certain types of arguments have been dismissed outright by Indian logicians, since these arguments are held to be based on invalid premises. The key flaw shared by these objectionable arguments is the fallacy known as **self-residence**, in which the cause and its effect are the same thing. Varieties of this fallacy include **reciprocal dependence**, a **vicious circle**, and an **infinite regress**. The presence of any of these fallacies is sufficient grounds to dismiss an argument as invalid.

## Fallacies of Inference
See **Hetvabhasa**.

## Family Custom
(**kulachara**) Hindu religion is fluid enough that a family's customary practices can heavily influence a person's individual religious life. For example, family custom plays an important role in **worship**. The Hindu pantheon contains many different gods, and the one that an individual worships as "God" is often strongly influenced by the family's practice, although other factors such as personal inclination can also play a role. Family custom also plays an important role in setting parameters for religious practice, both in everyday religious life, and in setting rules for performing the rituals of the life cycle. For example,

many families have a customary age for performing the **chudakarana samskara**, the "tonsure" or head-**shaving** rite of passage that marks the definitive end of infancy. Some families perform this in the first year, others in the third, or the fifth, or even the seventh. Religious practice varies widely among families, although it tends to be very stable within families, since this is one of the ways in which families create a distinctive identity for themselves.

## Family Deity
See **kuladevata**.

## Family Relationships
Hindus consider the family the basis of society. The idealized Hindu family is a multigenerational joint family, composed of elderly parents, their adult **sons**, and their sons' families. The sons are considered the core of the family, since the **daughters** will live with their husbands' families after marriage and are considered to belong to them. When the families become too large, or tensions between brothers develop to an unbearable level, these joint families divide into smaller households, upon which the general pattern continues. Hindu families have different names for all possible family relationships. These differing names reveal the exact nature of the relationship and the person's precise relationship in the family—as one example, although in English the word "aunt" can designate the sister of either one's father or one's mother, there are different names for both in northern Indian languages. Some of this is related to the higher status connected with the father's or the husband's side of the family, and some of it has to do with proximity, since these relatives are more likely to be living with one another in a joint family or close by. These differences mark the lines of importance in Indian families, which give greater emphasis to the father's side. One noteworthy term is the word for the wife's

brother (**sala**), which in modern times often serves as a term of abuse.

## Fani, Muhsin

(ca. mid-17th c.) Traditionally thought to be the author of the ***Dabistan-i-Mazahib*** ("School of Manners"), which was probably written about 1665. The Dabistan is an invaluable outside source for the religious life of the times and gives one of the earliest descriptions of the Sikhs, as well as many other contemporary groups. Fani was a Persian, and a Parsi by birth, who came to India because of his intense curiosity about religious life, and his desire to see whatever he could. He is believed to have been a careful observer and relatively objective. He states that he had simply translated (into the Persian in which the text was written) what his friends and informants had told him, and the text seems to support this claim.

## Faqir

(variant of *fakir*, from the Arabic *poor*) In the strictest sense of the word, this refers to a Muslim **ascetic**, as is hinted by the Arabic origin of the word. Colloquially, the word has been used much more broadly, as an appellation for any ascetic (witness Winston Churchill's characterization of **Mohandas Gandhi** as a "half-naked faqir"). Both usages are still current in modern India. Although since the partition of India in 1947 the word more commonly designates a Muslim, Hindu ascetics still describe someone who is detached from all things and dependent on God for support as a "faqir **baba**."

## Fasting

See **upavasa**.

## Fatalism

Philosophical position attributed to the **Ajivika** school. The Ajivikas believed that all things were preordained by an impersonal destiny (**niyati**), and

therefore that one's conscious actions had no effect on one's future. Although this position would seem to undercut any reason for religious practice, the Ajivikas were also noted for performing strict **asceticism**, in the belief that they were only doing what had been predetermined for them. For further information see Arthur Llewellyn Basham, *History and Doctrines of the Ajivikas,* 1981.

## Fathers, World of the

The earliest reference to the transmigration of souls, which is found in both the **Brhadaranyaka Upanishad** (6.2) and the **Chandogya Upanishad** (5.10), makes a qualitative distinction between two different paths for the soul. The path to the **world of the gods** ultimately led to the **sun**, and the person traveling it did not return again; the path to the world of the fathers led to the **moon**, and the person traveling it was eventually reborn on **earth**. The leitmotiv running through all the **Upanishads** is the need for individual spiritual realization, and this is the key to getting on the path to the world of the gods. Those who gain such realization attain the final and ultimate end, whereas those who simply do good deeds will return to earth, although their good deeds will give them karmic benefits.

## Festival Calendar

Since few festivals are celebrated by all Hindus, establishing a single festival calendar is problematic. Festival celebrations are subject to the same differing forces that drive the rest of Hindu life. On one hand, there are significant regional differences in the celebration of festivals, and on the other there are major sectarian variations. Some of the sectarian festivals may be celebrated within particular regions or they may be celebrated across the nation. It is also true that the general public is aware of most festivals—by virtue of these days being public holidays, or being marked

on the calendar—but far fewer people celebrate any particular festival as a religious holiday. Finally, some holidays are so significant that they are celebrated by almost everyone, although here too some people will observe them with far greater energy. For example, although the **Goddess** festival known as the fall **Navaratri** is celebrated throughout the country, it is kept with particular gusto in Bengal, where the cult of the Mother Goddess is particularly important.

With these considerations in mind, the festival calendar for the lunar **year** is given below, with the holidays given in order during the successive **lunar months**. The purpose in this entry is only to lay out the order of these festivals during the year; further details for the lunar months and each festival can be found in the individual entries.

- **Chaitra** (March–April)
  **Papamochani Ekadashi**, Spring Navaratri, **Ram Navami**, **Kamada Ekadashi**, **Hanuman Jayanti**, **Chittirai.**

- **Baisakh** (April–May)
  **Shitalashtami, Baruthani Ekadashi, Akshaya Trtiya, Parashuram Jayanti, Narsingh Jayanti, Baisakhi, Mohini Ekadashi, Buddha Purnima.**

- **Jyeshth** (May–June)
  **Achala Ekadashi, Savitri Puja, Ganga Dashahara, Nirjala Ekadashi.**

- **Ashadh** (June–July)
  **Yogini Ekadashi, Rath Yatra, Devshayani Ekadashi, Guru Purnima, Chaturmas Vrat.**

- **Shravan** (July–August)
  **Nag Panchami, Kamika Ekadashi, Tulsidas Jayanti, Putrada Ekadashi, Raksha Bandhan, Shravan Vrat.**

- **Bhadrapada** (August–September)
  Kajari Teej (**Teej**), **Bahula Chauth, Janmashtami, Radhashtami, Aja Ekadashi**, Hartalika Teej (Teej), **Ganesh Chaturthi, Rishi Panchami,**

**Onam**, **Parivartini Ekadashi**, **Anant Chaturdashi.**

- **Ashvin** (September–October)
  **Pitrpaksha**, **Indira Ekadashi**, Fall Navaratri, **Dussehra** (Vijaya Dashami), **Papankusha Ekadashi**, **Valmiki Jayanti.**
  - **Kartik** (October–November)
  **Karva Chauth**, **Rambha Ekadashi**, **Narak Chaturdashi**, **Diwali**, **Govardhan Puja** (**Annakut**), **Devotthayan Ekadashi**, **Tulsi Vivah**, **Kartik Purnima.**

- **Margashirsha** (November–December)
  **Bhairava Jayanti**, **Utpanna Ekadashi**, **Mokshada Ekadashi.**

- **Paush** (December–January)
  **Saphala Ekadashi**, Putrada Ekadashi.

- **Magh** (January–February)
  **Sakata Chauth**, **Shattila Ekadashi**, **Mauni Amavasya**, **Vasant Panchami**, **Bhishma Ashtami**, **Jaya Ekadashi**, **Ravidas Jayanti**, **Pongal**, **Magh Mela**, **Float Festival.**

- **Phalgun** (February–March)
  **Janaki Navami**, **Vijaya Ekadashi**, **Shivaratri**, **Amalaki Ekadashi**, **Holi.**

The festival calendar is further complicated by the fact that the lunar year begins on the first **day** of the bright (waxing) half of the lunar month of Chaitra. This creates an unusual situation since, at least in northern India, the lunar months end on the **full moon**, making the two weeks of the waning moon the first half of the lunar month. The waning fortnight in Chaitra comes at the end of the lunar year, and the waxing fortnight that follows is the first fortnight of the following year. Thus, the month of Chaitra is both the first and the last month of the lunar year.

Depiction of the god Vishnu's Fish avatar. Vishnu takes this form to protect living creatures from floods that engulf the earth.

## Feticide

This refers to selective **abortion** of female fetuses, which was made possible by the advent of reliable prenatal sex determination technology. This practice is driven by the desire for **sons** in Hindu culture, a desire spurred by economic, social, and religious concerns. Selective abortions were outlawed in India in 1995.

## Fiji

One of the countries with significant Hindu **diaspora populations**. Indians were first brought to Fiji in 1879 as indentured laborers to work in the sugarcane fields. In the 1990s Indians comprised about 45 percent of Fiji's population. Despite their near parity in terms of population, Indians in Fiji have been legally relegated to a **minority** role and for the most part have been prohibited from owning land. The split between the Indian and Fijian communities became transparent in 1987, when

a military coup ousted a Parliament dominated by Indians, and installed a native Fijian as prime minister. Because of these restrictions, many Indians still work as tenant farmers for Fijian landlords, but they also play an important role as shopkeepers and professionals.

## Fire

One of the five **elements** in traditional Indian **cosmology**, the others being **earth**, **wind**, **water**, and **akasha**. In some philosophical schools, each of the elements is paired with one of the five senses. Fire is associated with sight, since the eye's action in apprehending a visual object is compared to flame darting out and scorching something. Within the body, fire is also associated with digestion, which is generally conceived of as "cooking" the foods in the digestive system.

## Fish Avatar

The first of **Vishnu's** ten full **avatars** or "incarnations" on **earth**. Each avatar appears when the cosmos is in crisis, usually because of a **demon** (asura) who has grown disproportionately strong, and whose power is throwing the universe out of its natural balance. According to the doctrine of the avatars, Vishnu takes material form when the earth has fallen out of equilibrium, to destroy the source of evil and restore the cosmic balance.

The tale of the fish avatar begins in the distant past, when the righteous king **Manu** discovers a small fish in the **water** he holds between his cupped hands as he performs the **tarpana** or water-**offering** rite for his ancestors. The compassionate king puts the tiny fish into a pot of water, but the fish soon outgrows it. As the fish keeps growing, Manu transfers it to larger and larger vessels, and finally puts the fish into the **Ganges**. When the fish grows too large for the Ganges and has to be put into the ocean, Manu realizes that the fish is

Vishnu himself, and begins to sing Vishnu's praises.

The fish then informs Manu that the destruction of the world is imminent—first through blazing fire that will scorch all life, then through floods that will turn the entire earth into a single cosmic sea. Vishnu informs Manu that the gods have built a boat from the **Vedas**, and directs Manu to collect all the creatures of the earth and put them on the boat for safekeeping. He promises Manu that all the creatures on this boat will survive the coming destruction, and when the world returns to normal with the advent of the **Krta Age**, Manu will be the ruler of the earth.

Manu does as he has been directed, and when the destruction of the world is imminent, Vishnu appears in the form of a great horned fish. Manu ties the boat to the fish's horn and, protected by Vishnu's power, all the beings on the boat survive to repopulate the earth.

## Five Forbidden Things
See **panchamakara**.

## Float Festival
Festival celebrated in the city of **Madurai** in the southern Indian state of **Tamil Nadu**, on the **full moon** in the **lunar month** of **Magh** (January–February). This is the birthday of King **Tirumalai Nayak** (r. 1623–1659), during whose reign large parts of Madurai's **Minakshi** Temple was built. During the festival the **goddess** Minakshi and her consort Sundareshvara (an epithet of **Shiva**) are taken in procession to an artificial lake east of Madurai, where they are put on richly decorated floats and drawn back and forth over the lake's waters.

## Flood, Legend of
See **Fish avatar**.

## Four Dhams
("[divine] abodes") Four major pilgrimage sites in the four geographical corners of India, which lay out the boundaries of India's sacred geography: **Badrinath** in the **Himalayas**; the city of **Puri** in the east, on the Bay of Bengal; **Rameshvaram** in the south; and **Dwaraka** in the west. Each site is associated with one of the four **Sanyasi maths** all supposedly founded by the great philosopher **Shankaracharya**: Badrinath has the **Jyotir math** in the town of **Joshimath** (about thirty-five miles south of Badrinath), Puri has the **Govardhan math**, Dwaraka has the **Sharada math**, and Rameshvaram has the **Shringeri math** (in Shringeri). The first three of these maths are close to their associated sacred sites (**tirthas**), but Shringeri is about 450 miles away from Rameshvaram.

## Four Great Crimes
In the **dharma literature**, four actions are deemed such heinous offenses that the person performing them becomes an outcast from society. These four actions are murdering a **brahmin** (**brahmahatya**), stealing a brahmin's gold (**steya**), drinking **liquor** (**surapana**), and **adultery** with the wife of one's **guru** (**gurutalpaga**). Aside from expulsion from society, another indication of the gravity of these acts was that their penalties were so severe that they normally ended in death, and in some cases this outcome was specifically prescribed. In addition to prescribing such punishments for the actual offenders, the dharma literature also prescribed expulsion for anyone who knowingly associated with such people for a period longer than one **year**.

## Four States of Consciousness
A hierarchy of states of experience that is first outlined in the **Mandukya Upanishad**. In its description, the upanishad moves from greatest duality to utter nonduality; these four states are

also correlated with the phonetic elements of the sacred sound *Om*. *Om* symbolizes the four states of consciousness and is the sum and quintessence of them all. The first stage of consciousness is waking consciousness, in which one perceives both subject and object; then dreaming, in which one's experience is totally subjective; then deep sleep, in which (until waking) even consciousness of oneself as subject has been lost. The final state is so removed from human experience that it cannot be designated by language, and so is simply called "the fourth" (**turiya**). In the Mandukya Upanishad, this fourth state is clearly identified as the ultimate truth, the **atman** or inner Self, knowledge of which brings final liberation of the soul.

## Friday

(Shukravar) The fifth **day** of the Hindu **week**, whose presiding **planet** is **Venus** (**Shukra**). Friday is also the day of the week dedicated to the **Goddess** and is thus potentially a powerfully auspicious day. Although the Goddess can be worshiped in many forms, one of the most popular in northern India is **Santoshi Ma**. **Worship** of Santoshi Ma has spread dramatically since its origin in the mid-1970s.

## Full Moon

(Purnimasa or Purnima) In northern India, the full moon is the final **day** of the **lunar month**, whereas in southern India it is often considered the midpoint. In either case, the full moon carries associations of fullness, completion, and abundance and is always an auspicious time. One sign of its **auspiciousness** is the commonly accepted belief that the religious merit generated from rites performed on the day of a full moon is equal to rites performed for an entire month. There are festivals associated with the full moon of each lunar month, but the most important are in **Baisakh** (**Buddha Purnima**), **Ashadh** (**Guru Purnima**), **Shravan** (**Raksha Bandhan**), **Kartik** (**Kartik Purnima**), and **Phalgun** (**Holi**).

## Funerary Rites

See **deathbed rites**, **antyeshthi samskara**, and **shraddha**.

# G

## Gada

("club") In Hindu iconography, one of the identifying objects carried by the god **Vishnu**, along with the conch shell (**shankha**), lotus (**padma**), and discus (**chakra**). In the *Mahabharata*, the later of the two great Hindu epics, the gada is also the weapon of choice for **Bhima**, one of the five **Pandava** brothers who are the epic's protagonists. Of these five brothers, Bhima is noted for his prodigious size and strength, which gives him obvious advantages in wielding the gada.

## Gadge Maharaj

(1876–1956) Modern **ascetic** teacher and religious preceptor in the **Varkari Panth**, a religious community centered around the **worship** of the Hindu god **Vithoba** at his temple at **Pandharpur** in the modern state of **Maharashtra**. Gadge Maharaj got his name from the clay pot (gadge) that was his only **possession**, signifying his rejection of all wealth and worldly entanglements. Gadge had been born into a **caste** of washermen, who are considered a low status group since their everyday work brings them in contact with other people's soiled garments. In his teachings, Gadge not only stresses the importance of devotion to God—the hallmark of the **bhakti** (devotional) movement—but also advocates temperance, poverty, and **vegetarianism**.

## Gahadavala Dynasty

(r. 1089–1194) Northern Indian dynasty whose core region was the western and central parts of the Gangetic plain. The Gahadavalas were a short-lived and transitional dynasty who filled a political vacuum during the tumultuous years following the turn of the first millennium. During this period the Gangetic plain was plagued by political instability and was regularly subjected to Muslim raids. The Gahadavalas supplanted the **Rashtrakutas**, whom they conquered in 1089, and consolidated their power through the middle **Ganges** basin. In 1194 the Gahadavalas were defeated by the Ghurids, an Afghani Muslim dynasty. Following their defeat, most of the Gahadavala territory became part of the Ghurid empire.

## Gaja Hasta

A particular hand **gesture** (**hasta**) used in Indian **dance**, **sculpture**, and ritual. In the gaja ("elephant") hasta, the arm is extended straight out, with the hand gently curving down; the curved arm is fancifully compared to the trunk of an **elephant**.

## Gajendramoksha

("release of the **elephant**-king") The name of a particular incident in Hindu mythology involving a battle between king **Indradyumna**, in the form of a giant elephant, and a **Gandharva** (celestial musician) named **Huhu**, in the form of a giant crocodile. Both Indradyumna and Huhu have assumed these forms as the result of a **curse**. Indradyumna has been cursed by the sage **Agastya**, who becomes angry when the meditating king fails to greet him with proper respect. Huhu has been cursed by the sage Devala, when the amorous **water** play between Huhu and some celestial damsels has disturbed the sage's meditation.

The struggle between the two **animals** begins when the elephant comes to the water to drink and the crocodile grabs him by the leg. The crocodile attempts to pull the elephant into deeper water while the elephant struggles to break free. The pair are so evenly

matched that neither can best the other. After the battle has raged for a thousand years the god **Vishnu** appears, kills the crocodile, and restores Indradyumna to his previous form. The story thus takes its name, the "release of the elephant king," because Indradyumna was freed from the crocodile's grasp and the effects of the curse.

## Galta

A village in the state of **Rajasthan**, a few miles east of Jaipur, the capital. Galta is most famous for its connection with the **Bairagi Naga** ascetics, renunciant trader-soldiers who were devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Vishnu**. According to Bairagi tradition, in 1756 a conference took place at Galta in which the different groups of Bairagi Naga ascetics were welded into one cohesive military unit called the **Ramanadis** or "army of Ram" under the leadership of a Bairagi named Balanand. Balanand organized the Ramanandis into three **anis** or armies—the **Digambara** Ani, **Nirvani Ani**, and **Nirmohi Ani**—which are still the major Bairagi divisions. According to tradition, this unification was necessary because of continual attacks by the Naga class of the **Dashanami Sanyasis**, a competing group of renunciant trader-soldiers who were devotees of the god **Shiva**. The dispute occurred during the festival **Kumbha Mela**, ostensibly over precedence in the bathing (**snana**) procession, which was a sign of relative status. However, an underlying cause may have been power and control of an area's resources.

The exact circumstances under which the armies of Ram were formed are difficult to determine. Independent sources clearly show that the Bairagis became more cohesively organized during the late eighteenth century and that some of these bairagi bands were using their mobility, resources, and power to engage in long-distance trading. However, the decentralized nature of **ascetic** life makes the summary formation of such an army highly unlikely, unless this was the final fruition of an already existing trend.

## Gambling

A practice with a long history in Indian culture, but that has almost always been portrayed in a negative light by Hindu texts. The earliest reference appears in the **Rg Veda**, the oldest Hindu religious text, in a hymn often described as "The Gambler's Lament." The hymn is a gambler's first-person account of the ways in which his obsession with gaming ruined his life. It ends with a warning to the listener not to be seduced by gambling's siren song. Gambling is also negatively portrayed in the ***Mahabharata***, the later of the two great Hindu epics. A passion for gaming is the only fault afflicting **Yudhishthira** (the eldest of the five **Pandava** brothers who are the epic's protagonists), but it brings disastrous results. In a dice game with the kingdom's most skillful player, **Shakuni**, Yudhishthira loses his kingdom, his brothers, and even himself; as a result of the game, he and his brothers have to go into exile.

These mythic models mirror the attitudes toward gambling in Hindu society. Sober and upright Hindus have generally avoided games of chance, since they are not a stable or respectable way to risk one's capital or earn a living. The only time that prudence and caution can be legitimately disregarded is on the festival of **Diwali**, which is sacred to **Lakshmi**, the **goddess** of wealth and prosperity. Gambling is a traditional part of the Diwali celebrations, used to pay homage to Lakshmi in her guise as Lady Luck. Diwali is most often celebrated in people's homes, and thus any gambling will take place with one's family and close associates, and with purely nominal betting. Aside from Diwali, gambling is strictly proscribed in polite society, and even on Diwali its disruptive capacities are strictly contained.

## Gana

("host") In Hindu mythology, a collective term for a group of minor gods who are the god **Shiva's** servants and attendants. The members of this gana are often represented in frightening forms—smeared with ash, bearing skulls and weapons, physically malformed, and grinning and laughing horribly. The members of the gana are Shiva's followers, supporters, and minions, who are ready to do his bidding when commanded. The leader of the gana is the god **Ganesh** ("Lord of the Host").

## Ganapati

("Master of [**Shiva's**] host") Another name for the god **Ganesh**. See **Ganesh**.

## Gandaki River

One of the tributaries of the **Ganges**, it flows southward from **Nepal**, joining the Ganges at the city of Patna in the state of **Bihar**. Although the river's source is now extremely poor, in the time of the Buddha it contained major urban centers, particularly the city of **Vaishali**.

## Gandhari

A character in the *Mahabharata*, the later of the two great Hindu epics. Gandhari is the wife of the blind king **Dhrtarashtra** and the mother of the **Kauravas**, a group of boys who are the epic's antagonists. Gandhari shows her devotion to her blind husband by always covering her eyes with a blindfold, thus sharing his sightlessness. As is often the case in Hindu mythology, her **sons** are born in an unusual manner. Gandhari receives a blessing (**ashirvad**) from the sage **Vyasa** that she will give **birth** to one hundred sons. Soon after, she becomes pregnant. However, her pregnancy lasts for more than two years. When she grows impatient and tries to hasten the delivery, she gives birth to a great lump of flesh. Vyasa advises Gandhari to divide the lump and place each piece in a pot of clarified butter (ghee). Eventually the pots break open, revealing one hundred handsome boys and a single **daughter**, Dussala.

All of Gandhari's children are killed by her nephews the Pandavas in the Mahabharata war. Just as Gandhari is about to **curse** the Pandavas, Vyasa reminds her that her sons' deaths are the result of their own misconduct. After the war, Gandhari retires to the forest with her husband and a few others. They live in retirement for six years before they are killed in a forest **fire**.

## Gandharva

In Hindu mythology, a class of demigods who are celestial singers and musicians. The gandharvas occasionally interact with humans. One of their divine gifts is the ability to bestow good singing voices to girls. Since the Gandharvas are always watching from above, they are considered to be the witnesses in a Gandharva marriage, one of the eight forms of marriage recognized in the **dharma literature**. The gandharva marriage was a marriage contracted by consensual sexual intercourse. See also **Marriage, eight classical forms**.

## Gandharva Marriage

One of the eight forms of marriage recognized in the **dharma literature**, the treatises on religious duty. A **Gandharva** marriage takes place when a man and woman have sexual intercourse by mutual consent, but without consulting anyone else. The marriage is so named because gandharvas, who are demigods and celestial musicians, are said to be the witnesses. Although the gandharva rite created a valid marriage, it was considered one of the four reprehensible (**aprashasta**) forms of marriage because it was done without parental consent, performed without religious rituals, and was rooted in lust. These marriages were recognized not to sanction and legitimize promiscuous behavior, but to provide the woman with the legal status of a

wife. Although **Sanskrit** literary sources are replete with Gandharva marriages—perhaps the most famous being the marriage of King **Dushyanta** and **Shakuntala**—it is doubtful that this form was ever widely practiced. See also **marriage, eight classical forms**.

## Gandhi, Mohandas K.

(1869–1948) Leader of the Indian National Congress, one of the architects of the struggle for Indian independence, and one of the best-known Indians in history. Gandhi was born in **Gujarat**, where his father was a minister to one of the native princes. Shortly after Gandhi's father died, the British ousted the ruling prince for mismanagement, and the family lost their position. Gandhi was sent to London to study law, and during this time he came into contact with a variety of new ideas that would strongly influence his future. Ironically, one of these influences was the **Bhagavad Gita**, an important Hindu religious text from which he drew continuing inspiration in his later life. After returning to India in 1891, Gandhi failed in his attempt to set up a law practice in Bombay, and he went back to Gujarat. In 1894 Gandhi traveled to **South Africa** to do some work for a Muslim trading firm. He intended to be gone only a short time, but ended up staying in South Africa for twenty years. During this time he discovered his true calling, political activism. This was sparked by his own experience of racial discrimination—being thrown out of a railway car reserved for "whites only"—and was fueled by the social, political, and legal disadvantages suffered by South Africa's 40,000 Indians, most of whom were illiterate agricultural workers. During his time in South Africa, Gandhi developed and refined his basic tactics: mass non-cooperation, nonviolent resistance, willingness to face imprisonment, and skillful use of the print media to influence public opinion. In 1914 he returned to India, where he soon became one of the leading figures in the struggle against the British—first for home rule, and finally for outright independence.

Gandhi's deeply held moral principles shaped his entire career. He saw his political activism not as a vehicle for personal advancement, but as a means for selfless action for the welfare of the world. This stress on selfless action drew heavily on the message of the Bhagavad Gita, in which the god **Krishna** recommends a similar path to his friend and devotee (**bhakta**), **Arjuna**. Throughout his life Gandhi remained committed to nonviolence. Gandhi felt strongly that the nature of any goal would be influenced by the means by which it had been attained. Another of his fundamental principles was truth, as seen in his insistence that evil and injustice had to be resisted, even by violence when all other means had failed. A third essential tenet was self-control, which he considered the prerequisite to leading others. His commitment to his principles gave him the strength to endure imprisonment, injury, and more than thirty years of struggle with the British government; it also moved him to campaign against many other injustices, particularly the notion of untouchability.

When independence finally arrived in 1947 it was tainted by the partition of British India into India and Pakistan, fueled in part by Muslim concerns about their **minority** status in an independent Hindu India. The partition sparked a massive exodus, in which fifteen million people migrated from one country to the other. It also sparked unspeakable communal violence, in which an estimated one million people died. Despite his best efforts, Gandhi was unable to prevent partition or to create good relations between the two countries. Within six months of independence, Gandhi was assassinated by **Nathuram Godse**, a Hindu nationalist who felt that Gandhi was being too soft on Pakistan.

Gandhi had critics and opponents throughout his career, many of whom felt that he did not deserve the sainthood that people attributed to him.

Mohandas K. Gandhi in 1931.

A sculpture of the god Ganesh from the village of Khajuraho. As "Lord of Obstacles," Ganesh has the power to remove or bestow difficulties.

Among his critics were **B. R. Ambedkar**, who felt that Gandhi had used the untouchables as pawns in negotiations with the British because he opposed letting the untouchables separate from the larger body politic. His critics also included **Subhash Chandra Bose**, who advocated an armed struggle against the British, and **Vinayak Damodar Savarkar**, a Hindu nationalist who was Godse's inspiration. For further information see Mohandas K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography*, 1993; Louis Fischer, *Gandhi*, 1954; Mark Juergensmeyer, "Saint Gandhi," in John Stratton Hawley (ed.), *Saints and Virtues,* 1987; and Sudhir Kakar, "Gandhi and Women," in *Intimate Relations*, 1990.

## Gandhi Jayanti

Indian national holiday falling on October 2, celebrating the **birth** of **Mohandas Gandhi**. Perhaps because Gandhi is a relatively recent figure, or because the event is a national holiday, this celebration is one of the few that is

marked according to the common era **calendar**, rather than the lunar calendar that is used to determine most Hindu festivals.

## Gandiva

In the *Mahabharata*, the later of the two great Hindu epics, Gandiva is the name of the bow carried by **Arjuna**. Arjuna is the world's greatest archer and the third of the five **Pandava** brothers, the *Mahabharata*'s protagonists. Gandiva was originally fashioned by the god **Brahma** and is given to Arjuna by the god **Varuna** (identified with the ocean) at the request of another **deity**, **Agni** ("**fire**"). Agni makes this request because he wants to "eat" (burn) the **Khandava forest**, but is afraid of interference in the form of rain from the god **Indra**, ruler of the storm. Arjuna uses the bow to create a canopy of arrows that shields the forest from Indra's storms, thus allowing Agni to consume the forest in peace. Arjuna uses this bow for many years. At the end of his life he returns it to Varuna by throwing it into the sea.

## Ganesh

("Lord of [**Shiva's**] Host") **Elephant**-headed god who leads Shiva's horde of divine followers; another name for Ganesh is Ganapati. Ganesh is usually portrayed as short and fat, with a bowl of sweets and his **animal** vehicle, the **rat**, close by. Among the items most often portrayed in his hands are a lotus (padma) and his own broken tusk. He also often holds a noose and an elephant goad (**ankusha**), which symbolize his power to restrain or move obstructing forces.

Although Ganesh is worshiped as a primary **deity** by a small sectarian community, the **Ganpatyas**, most Hindus **worship** him as a subsidiary deity along with their principal divinities. Ganesh's importance in Hindu life, however, is far greater than his relatively minor place in the pantheon. Hindus consider Ganesh

as "Lord of Obstacles" (Vighneshvar), who has the power both to remove and to bestow difficulties, depending on whether or not a person has pleased him. Hindus invoke Ganesh at the start of any important undertaking—whether it is performing a religious ritual, starting a business, performing a marriage, building a home, or even taking a school examination—so that through his **grace**, potential obstacles may be removed or avoided and the undertaking will proceed smoothly and successfully. This power over obstacles is symbolized both by his elephant head and his animal vehicle, the rat. The elephant's strength allows it to break down any impediments, while the rat is able to slip through the smallest cracks to gain access to locked places. Ganesh's **aniconic image** is the threshold, the transitional strip dividing and separating different spaces, which further symbolizes his power to control transitions from one state to another.

Ganesh is considered to be the **son** of the god **Shiva** and his wife **Parvati**, but he is born in an unusual manner. One day when Parvati is bathing (**snana**), she forms a child from the dirt from her body, animates him, and directs him to permit no one to enter her bathing place. When Shiva comes to the door Ganesh bars his way, and in the ensuing battle Shiva cuts off Ganesh's head. Parvati is so upset that Shiva promises to replace the missing head with the head of the first animal he encounters, which happens to be an elephant. Upon reviving Ganesh, Shiva appoints him as the leader of his troop of followers. As a further boon, Shiva tells Ganesh that he will be worshiped before any other deity.

Ganesh's elephant head has a broken tusk, and there are differing myths recounting how this happened. In one story it comes from an altercation with the **Parashuram avatar**, who tries to enter Shiva's chambers while Ganesh is guarding the door. According to another account, the injury is self-inflicted. In a fit of rage at the **moon**, Ganesh breaks off his tusk and throws it at the moon. According to tradition, Ganesh uses this tusk as a pen to write down the text of the epic *Mahabharata* as it is dictated by the sage **Vyasa**. For further information on Ganesh and his cult, see Paul Courtright, *Ganesa*, 1985; other information can be found in works on Hindu mythology.

## Ganesh Chaturthi

Festival falling on the fourth (chaturthi) **day** of the bright or waxing half of the **lunar month** of **Bhadrapada** (August–September), dedicated to the **worship** of the god **Ganesh**. This festival is observed throughout India, but is particularly celebrated in **Maharashtra**. During this festival clay images of Ganesh are consecrated and worshiped. At the festival's end the images are carried in procession for ceremonial immersion in bodies of **water**—whether the sea, a river, or the village pond.

Although Ganesh is a relatively minor **deity** in the Hindu pantheon, his role as the Lord of Obstacles (Vighneshvar) makes him important in everyday life, since his involvement can either further or hinder one's efforts. For this reason, Ganesh is always worshiped at the start of any endeavor and at the beginning of all religious ceremonies. While Ganesh plays an important role in people's everyday lives, the festival Ganesh Chaturthi gained prominence in Maharashtra for political reasons. **Bal Gangadhar Tilak**, one of the most important figures in the nineteenth-century Hindu renaissance, promoted the celebration of Ganesh Chaturthi as a visible way to assert and celebrate a Hindu nationalist identity during the time of British imperial rule. Given the power of British rule, outright rebellion was simply impossible, and the British government heavily restricted all forms of political dissent. The Ganesh festival provided a way to circumvent these restrictions, since the British had a long-standing policy of not interfering with religious observances. The celebration

of this festival in Maharashtra, particularly the processions to immerse the images in the sea, became an important theater to demonstrate and affirm Hindu cultural and political identity.

## Ganga

In Hindu mythology, the **goddess** whose material form is the **Ganges** River. The Ganges is sacred because the river is considered to be a goddess who has the power to take away the sins of those who bathe (**snana**) in her. There are numerous legends to explain her origin. The best-known is the tale of King **Bhagirath**, who by his **ascetic** practice succeeds in bringing the Ganges down from **heaven** to **earth**. Bhagirath is the great-great-grandson of King **Sagar**, whose 60,000 **sons** had been burned to ash by the sage **Kapila's magic** power after they had erroneously accused Kapila of being a thief. Kapila later tells **Anshuman**, King Sagar's grandson and sole surviving descendant, that the only way to bring peace to the souls of Sagar's sons is to bring the Ganges down from heaven to earth. Anshuman strives unsuccessfully to do this, as does his son **Dilip** after him. Dilip's son Bhagirath takes their efforts to heart and retires to the **Himalayas**, where he performs **asceticism** until the gods finally agree to send the Ganges down to earth. Yet Bhagiratha's efforts are not yet over. Next, he has to gain the favor of the god **Shiva**, so that Shiva will agree to take the shock of the falling river on his head. Otherwise, its force will destroy the earth. When all is finally in place, the Ganges falls to earth onto the head of Shiva. Bhagirath leads Ganga out of the mountains to the sea, where she touches his ancestors' ashes and they finally find peace. This myth highlights both the salvific touch of the Ganga and her intimate association with the last rites (**antyeshthi samskara**) for the dead.

According to another story, the Ganges comes down to earth because of a curse pronounced during a family quarrel between **Vishnu** and his wives
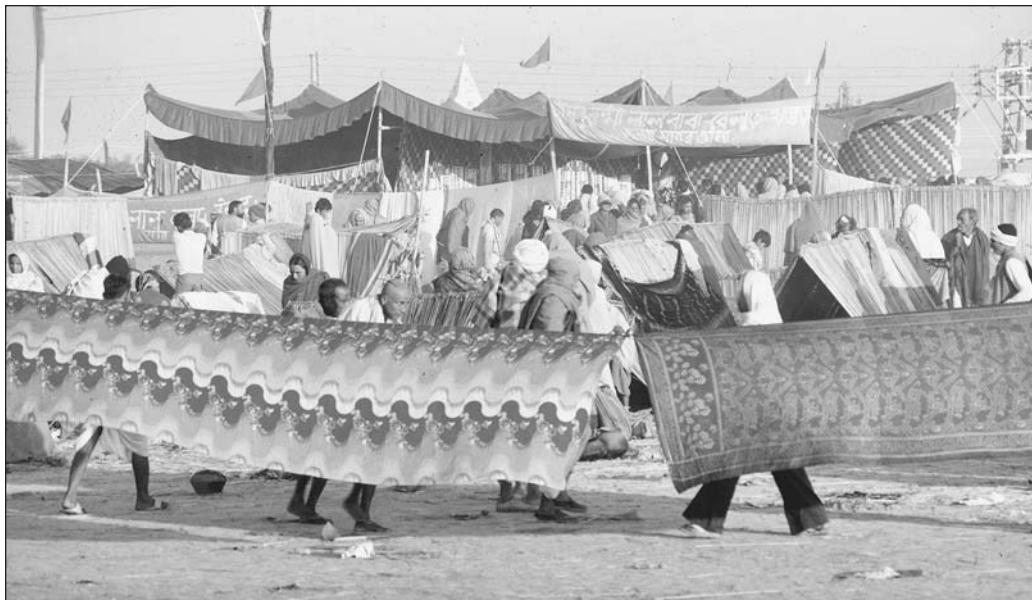
Ganga, **Lakshmi**, and **Saraswati**. When one day Ganga and Vishnu begin exchanging lustful glances in public, Saraswati gets angry and begins to beat Ganga. As Lakshmi tries to stop her, Saraswati let loose a string of **curses**: that Vishnu will be born as a stone (the **shalagram**), that Lakshmi will be born as a plant (the **tulsi** plant), and that Ganga will be born as a river and take the sins of the world on her. In the struggle, Saraswati is cursed to become a river. Vishnu sweetens Ganga's curse by telling her that she will be considered very holy on earth and have the power to remove people's sins. Vishnu also tells her that she will fall from heaven onto the head of the god **Shiva** and become his consort.

## Ganga Dashahara

Festival celebrated on the tenth **day** of the bright or waxing half of the **lunar month** of **Jyeshth** (May–June), which marks the day that the **goddess Ganga** is believed to have descended from **heaven** to **earth** to become the **Ganges** River. The primary religious rite performed on this day is bathing (**snana**) in sacred rivers, particularly the Ganges.

## Ganga Dynasty

(11th–15th c.) Eastern Indian dynasty that ruled the coastal strip on the Bay of Bengal in the modern states of **Orissa** and **Andhra Pradesh**. Although the Ganga dynasty was never more than a regional power, it left an artistic legacy in a series of stunning temples in modern Orissa. The Ganga dynasty was responsible for the temple to the god **Jagannath** in the city of **Puri** and the **Sun Temple** at **Konarak**, built by king Narasimhadeva (r. 1238–1264). The dynasty also built temples scattered throughout the modern city of **Bhubaneshvar**, including the temple to the god **Shiva** as Tribhuvaneshvar, "the Lord of the Triple World," from which the city takes its name.

Street fair in Ganga Sagar.

## Gangaikondacholapuran

Temple town in the eastern part of **Tamil Nadu**, about forty-five miles north and east of the city of **Tanjore**. This was one of the temples in the Tanjore region built by the Chola kings during their era of preeminence between the ninth and thirteenth centuries. The temple at Gangaikondacholapuran was built in 1025 by King **Rajendra I** (r. 1014–1042) to commemorate his march to the **Ganges** in 1023 after vanquishing the king of Bengal. One of the images outside the temple door shows the kneeling Rajendra being garlanded by the god **Shiva** and his wife **Parvati**, doubtless intended to give Rajendra divine support for his entitlement to rule. See also **Chola dynasty**.
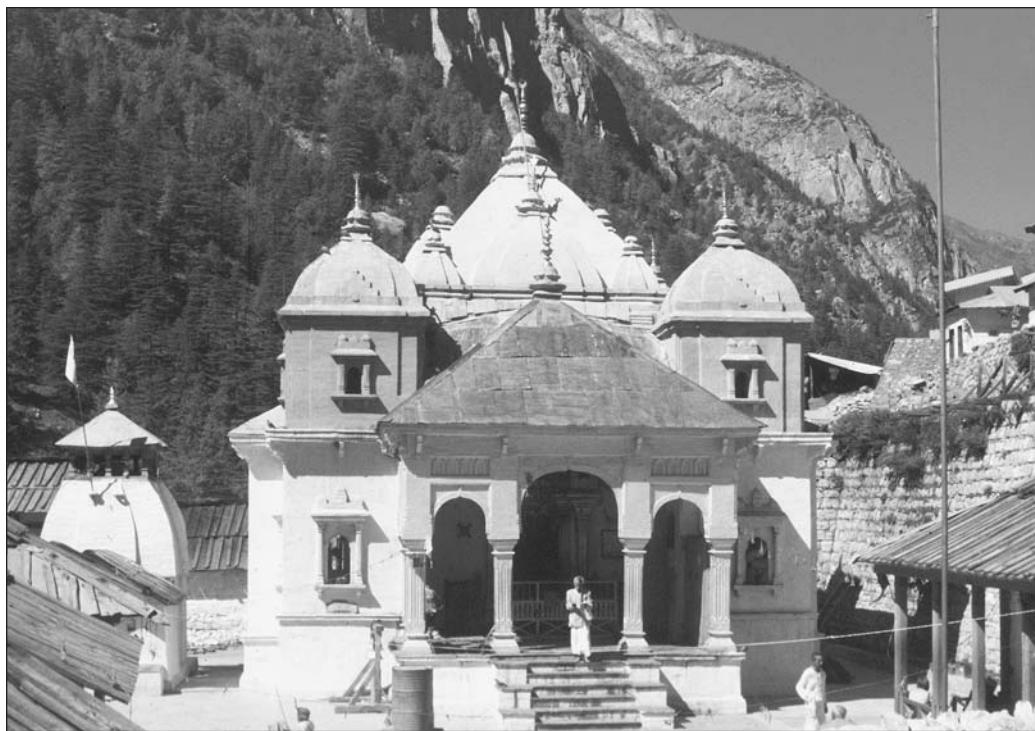
## Ganga Sagar

Sacred site (**tirtha**) on **Sagar** Island, which is located at the outer edge of the Hugli River delta in the Bay of Bengal. Ganga Sagar is where the **Ganges** River merges with the sea (sagar). As with all the places where the Ganges makes some natural transition, this spot is considered especially holy. Ganga Sagar's biggest festival comes on **Makara Sankranti**, the **day** in January when the **sun** resumes its northward course. On this day, hundreds of thousands of pilgrims come to bathe (**snana**). The site is also famous for a temple to the irascible sage **Kapila,** whose fiery power incinerates the 60,000 **sons** of King Sagar and sets in motion a series of events leading to King **Bhagirath** bringing the Ganges down to **earth**.

## Ganges

Northern Indian river that has its source in various small rivers in the Himalaya Mountains. It comes onto the northern Indian plain at the city of **Haridwar**, flows east across the state of **Uttar Pradesh** to the city of **Allahabad**, where it unites with the **Yamuna River**, and then flows east through the states of **Bihar** and **West Bengal** before joining the sea at **Ganga Sagar**. At 1,560 miles in length, the Ganges is shorter than many other major rivers, but for Hindus no river carries greater religious significance. To pious Hindus the Ganges is not merely a river, but the **goddess Ganga** come down from **heaven**, and by whose touch they are purified of all sin and defilement. For the Ganges no superlatives are spared—every drop is sacred, every inch along its banks is

Temple in Gangotri. Located in the Himalayas,
Gangotri is traditionally considered the source of the Ganges River.

holy, and one gains great religious merit by seeing it, drinking from it, touching it, or merely by thinking about it. It is also considered the best place to perform certain rites for the dead.

Hindu devotion to and reverence for the Ganges has established it as a place of unique importance. The religious importance of the Ganges is reflected in the religious practices connected with it and the many well-known pilgrimage places (**tirtha**) that are found on its banks, particularly the city of **Benares**. The Ganges is considered the paradigm for the sacred river. Other Indian sacred rivers, such as the **Godavari** and the **Cauvery**, are claimed to "be" the Ganges—that is, one can gain the same religious benefits from bathing (**snana**) in them that one gains by bathing in the Ganges.

## Gangotri

Sacred site (**tirtha**) in the **Himalayas** at the headwaters of the **Bhagirathi** River, one of the Himalayan tributaries of the **Ganges**. Ritually speaking, Gangotri is considered to be the source of the Ganges, although the river's actual source is the glacier at **Gaumukh**, another twelve miles upstream. Its high altitude also means that it is only accessible between late April and October, after which it is closed for the winter months. One ritual center in Gangotri is the river itself, in which pilgrims bathe (**snana**), braving the frigid waters. The other center is the temple to the **goddess Ganga**, first built about 250 years ago by the Gurkha monarch Amar Singh Thapa and restored in the late nineteenth century by the royal house of Jaipur. By the side of the river is a large stone slab, on which the sage **Bhagirath** is said to have performed his austerities to bring the Ganges down to **earth**. As with all the places where the Ganges makes some transition, Gangotri is considered particularly holy. Its sanctity is amplified because it is difficult to get to and is only accessible during the summer months.

## Ganika

("harlot") In Hindu mythology, a figure who serves as an example of the boundless power of God's **grace** and the ease with which one can be saved by even unconscious devotion. Ganika is a notorious prostitute who devotes little time or attention to religious life. Her only pious act is to teach her pet parrot to repeat the name of the god **Vishnu**, and in trying to teach it she repeats the divine name over and over again. This continual repetition of the name is enough to gain Vishnu's grace. Upon Ganika's death, Vishnu's servants rescue her from the minions of Death and convey her to his celestial realm, **Vaikuntha**.

## Ganpatya

Sectarian Hindus who **worship** the god **Ganesh** as their primary **deity**. Most Hindus pay considerable homage to Ganesh, in part because his status as "Lord of Obstacles" (Vighneshvar) gives him power to help or hinder human endeavors. However, he is usually worshiped as a secondary deity. The Ganpatyas, in contrast, venerate Ganesh as their primary deity and worship no other deities. Most of the Ganpatyas live in the state of **Maharashtra**, where a network of shrines centered around the city of Pune and the nearby village of Chinchvad serves as their sacred center. The Ganpatya sect was founded by the sixteenth-century figure Moraya Gosavi, whose spiritual **initiation** came through a series of visions of Ganesh. One of his visions revealed that partial incarnations of Ganesh would be born in Moraya's family for seven generations. For further information see Paul Courtright, *Ganesa*, 1985.

## Garbhadhana Samskara

The first of the sixteen traditional life-cycle ceremonies (**samskaras**) performed at important moments throughout one's life. The Garbhadhana Samskara was performed to ensure the conception of a child. This rite was performed on a specific **day** following the onset of the wife's menstrual period, although different sources specify different days. Although part of this rite obviously involved sexual intercourse between husband and wife, as a whole it was meant to create a sacred context for the act of procreation.

## Garbhagrha

("womb-house") In traditional Hindu **architecture**, the garbhagrha is the inner sanctum of a temple, which contains the image of the temple's primary **deity**. In the **Nagara** architectural style found in northern and eastern India—in which the whole temple building culminates in one highest point—the garbhagrha was located directly below the summit of the highest tower (**shikhara**). In the **Dravida** style found in southern India—in which the temples are shorter, but tend to sprawl over vast areas—the garbhagrha's location is marked by a tower higher than the rest of the roof.

## Garhmukteshvar

Sacred site (**tirtha**) on the **Ganges** River in the Ghaziabad district of the state of **Uttar Pradesh** about sixty miles due east of Delhi. Garhmukteshvar's primary temple is dedicated to the god **Shiva** in his form as the "Lord of Liberation" (mukteshvar), but the site's major importance comes from its location on the Ganges as a place for bathing (**snana**) and performing memorial rites (**shraddhas**) for the dead. Large crowds gather there to bathe on festival days, particularly on **Kartik Purnima**, the **full moon** in the **lunar month** of Kartik (October–November).

## Garhwal

In the most technical sense, Garhwal is the name of a particular hill district in the northern Indian state of **Uttar Pradesh**. Garhwal is more commonly used as the name for a cultural region in the Uttar Pradesh hills, made up of the

districts of Garhwal, TehriGarhwal, Dehra Dun, Chamoli, and **Uttarkashi**. The Garhwal region contains all the major tributaries of the **Ganges**: the **Bhagirathi**, the **Mandakini**, the **Pindara**, and the **Alakananda**. It also contains many of the holiest sacred sites (**tirthas**) in the **Himalayas**, including **Yamunotri**, **Gangotri**, **Kedarnath**, and **Badrinath**. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, under the patronage of the king of the state of Tehri, the region was also one of the centers for the **Pahari** school of **miniature painting**.

## Garibdas

(early 18th c.) Founder of the **Garibdasi** religious community. Garibdas was born in the Rohtak district in what is now the state of **Haryana**. Garibdas did not have a human **guru**. Instead, he claimed to have received his religious **initiation** from the poet-saint **Kabir**, who appeared to him in a **dream**. Garibdas was a householder, as were his immediate disciples. Under one of their later leaders the Garibdasis renounced their **possessions** and became an **ascetic** community. Garibdas preached and taught on a number of subjects and was a well-respected and influential religious reformer.

## Garibdasi

Religious community founded by the religious reformer **Garibdas** (early 18th c.). The Garibdasi community was originally made up of householders, but was fundamentally altered by one of the later leaders, Swami Dayaludasa. Under his direction, the community renounced their **possessions** and became an **ascetic** sect. The Garibdasis have more than one hundred centers in northern India, mainly concentrated in the regions of **Uttar Pradesh** and **Haryana** around present-day New Delhi, where Garibdas lived during his life.

## Garuda

A mythical bird, often portrayed as an Indian kite or eagle. All of the Hindu **deities** have **animal** "vehicles," who are their symbols and their associates. Garuda is considered the vehicle for the god **Vishnu**. As Vishnu's vehicle, Garuda reflects some of the protective, life-affirming qualities associated with Vishnu. Garuda is the **son** of the sage **Kashyapa** and the divine maiden **Vinata**. The most famous story associated with Garuda explains the proverbial antipathy between eagles and snakes. Vinata has given **birth** to a line of eagles, whereas her sister **Kadru** has engendered a line of serpents. One day the sisters get into an argument about the tail color of a certain celestial horse—Vinata argues that it is white and Kadru asserts that it is black. They finally agree that the person who is wrong will become a slave to the other. To ensure her victory, Kadru persuades a number of her children to hang from the back of the horse, which from a distance makes the white tail appear to be black. When Vinata sees the black snakes, she accepts her defeat and has to serve Kadru under extremely harsh conditions for many years. When Garuda learns what has happened, he embarks on an endless program of killing snakes.

## Gauda

One of the five northern **brahmin** communities (**Pancha Gauda**); the other four are the **Kanaujias**, the **Maithilas**, the **Utkalas**, and the **Saraswats**. Gauda brahmins are most numerous in the western half of northern India, particularly in the western parts of the states of **Uttar Pradesh** and **Madhya Pradesh**, in the state of **Haryana**, and in the state of **Rajasthan**.

## Gaudapada

(5th c.?) Philosopher and textual commentator traditionally said to be the grand-teacher of the philosopher **Shankaracharya**. Shankaracharya maintained that Gaudapada was a

proponent of **Advaita Vedanta**, one of the **six schools** of classical Hindu **philosophy**, despite Gaudapada's similarities to certain Buddhist positions. Gaudapada's most famous work is a commentary on the sacred text called the **Mandukya Upanishad**.

## Gaudapada

(2) (5th–8th c.) Philosopher and commentator in the **Samkhya** school, one of the **six schools** of classical Hindu **philosophy**. Gaudapada is best known for his commentary on the *Samkhyakarikas*, the foundational text of the Samkhya school, which is ascribed to the philosopher **Ishvarakrishna**.

## Gaudiya Vaishnava

Religious community founded by the Bengali saint **Chaitanya** (1486–1533). It takes its name from the ancient name for Bengal (**Gauda**), and its stress on the **worship** of the god **Vishnu**. The community's religious practices and beliefs are founded in Chaitanya's ecstatic devotionalism. He asserted that the path to religious ecstasy is the repetitive recitation of **Krishna's** name, often while singing and dancing in the streets. Chaitanya's religious charisma gained him many followers, of whom the most important were the **Goswamis**—the brothers Rupa and **Sanatana**, and their nephew **Jiva**. At Chaitanya's command the Goswamis went to live in **Brindavan**, the village where Krishna is believed to have grown up. The Goswamis' descendants live there to this day. In Brindavan, the Goswamis set about organizing and systematizing the philosophical foundation of Chaitanya's ecstatic experience. Although they conceived of themselves as Chaitanya's servants, they are equally important in the community's development. The Goswamis' key philosophical doctrine was **achintyabhedabheda**, the idea that there was an "inconceivable identity and difference" between the Supreme Divinity (Krishna) and the human being that renders the soul simultaneously identical to and different from the divinity. The Gaudiya Vaishnava community is also famous for its exhaustive analysis of devotion (**bhakti**) as an emotional experience. They enumerated the different ways to experience the love of god as five **modes of devotion**. For further information see Sushil Kumar De, *Early History of the Vaishnava Faith and Movement in Bengal*, 1961.

## Gaumukh

("cow's mouth") Sacred site (**tirtha**) high in the **Himalayas**. It is located at the glacier that is the actual source of the **Bhagirathi** River, one of the tributaries of the **Ganges**. Gaumukh is twelve miles upriver from **Gangotri**, the place that is ritually celebrated as the source of the Ganges. In popular Hindu belief, the Ganges is believed to issue from the mouth of a **cow**, hence the name.

## Gauna

This is the name for the ceremony of taking a new bride into her marital home for the first time. The addition of a new bride marks an important change for a family and is a time of both opportunity and danger. On one hand, it carries the potential for great blessings, since it is assumed that the bride and groom will soon begin a family. On the other hand, it also carries the threat of danger since the addition of a new person to the family brings the potential for disruption. The bride and her new family perform various rituals to ensure that her addition to the family will be auspicious and harmonious.

## Gaura

Festival celebrated in central India that climaxes on the first **day** of the bright or waxing half of the **lunar month** of **Kartik** (October–November), the day after the festival of **Diwali**. The Gaura festival celebrates the marriage of the god **Shiva** and the **goddess Parvati**.

The Gauri-Shankar is a bead that is formed when two seeds grow together naturally. Worn by devotees of the god Shiva, it is believed to be a manifestation of the union of Shiva and his wife Parvati.

## Gaurava

("[needless] complexity") In Indian logic, one of the faults to be avoided in constructing and pursuing an argument. According to the principle of "simplicity" (**laghava**), when one is presented with two equally plausible theories, one should choose the theory that is easier to understand and makes the fewest assumptions. The primary criterion in evaluating any argument is the validity of the argument itself, and it is only after this has been satisfied that one may raise objections based on complexity or simplicity.

## Gauri

("fair") Epithet of the **goddess Parvati**, wife of the god **Shiva**. According to a story from the ***Shiva Purana***, a sectarian text recounting the mythology of Shiva, Parvati takes offense when Shiva refers to her as **Kali** ("black"). She performs harsh physical austerities (**tapas**) to accumulate the power to rid herself of her dark complexion. When this is accomplished, she receives the epithet Gauri to signify her new and lightened complexion. This story illustrates the pervasive religious belief that physical hardship can give one spiritual and even magical powers, a conviction that is still found in contemporary India. This brief story also reveals the stigma that Indian society attributes to people with dark complexions—a prejudice that persists in modern times.

## Gaurikund

Village and sacred site (**tirtha**) in the **Himalaya** Mountains of the state of **Uttar Pradesh**. Gaurikund is located about ten miles downstream from the headwaters of the **Mandakini** River, which is itself one of the Himalayan tributaries of the **Ganges**. Gaurikund is the end of the motorable road on the way to **Kedarnath**, and after this pilgrims must travel on foot. Gaurikund's mythic charter is connected with the god **Shiva** and his wife **Parvati**. Parvati is said to have performed harsh **asceticism** at Gaurikund in order to gain Shiva as her husband; after a long time Shiva is pleased with Parvati, reveals himself to her, and the two become lovers in that place. According to local geography, the place at which Parvati lived during this time is marked by a group of hot springs, which are another of Gaurikund's attractions.

## Gauri-Shankar

A particular variety of **rudraksha**, a bead made from the dried seed of the tree *Elaeocarpus ganitrus*, which is considered sacred to **Shiva**. The rudraksha is often strung into garlands and worn by Shiva's devotees (**bhakta**). The Gauri-Shankar rudraksha is made when two seeds grow together naturally. Although the Gauri-Shankar is not as rare as certain other beads, it is unusual enough to command a fairly good price. The Gauri-Shankar is revered as a natural manifestation of the divine couple, the **goddess Parvati** (Gauri) and the god Shiva (Shankar). It thus represents the total presence of divinity in its eternal and its dynamic aspects: Shiva as knowledge and Parvati as **Shakti** or power.

## Gautama

(6th c. B.C.E.) In Hindu mythology, one of the seven sages whose name marks a clan "lineage" (**gotra**); the others are

**Kashyapa**, **Bharadvaja**, **Vasishtha**, **Bhrgu**, **Atri**, and **Vishvamitra**. All **brahmins** are believed to be descended from these seven sages, with each family taking the name of its progenitor as its gotra name. In modern times, these gotra divisions are still important, since marriage within the gotra is forbidden. A new bride adopts her husband's gotra after her marriage as part of her new identity.

Gautama is most famous as the husband of **Ahalya**. When he discovers that the god **Indra** has slept with Ahalya, he curses his wife to turn into stone and curses Indra to have a thousand vulvas on his body. Both **curses** are later modified to reduce their severity. Ahalya is turned to stone, but returns to life when touched by the god **Rama's** foot, whereas Indra's body becomes covered with a thousand eyes. See also **marriage prohibitions**.

## Gautama

(2) (3rd c. B.C.E. ?) Indian philosopher who is traditionally cited as the author of the **Nyaya Sutras**, the foundation of the **Nyaya** philosophical school. The Nyaya school is one of several schools that seek to explain the cause of human bondage in the cycle of reincarnation (**samsara**) and how it can be overcome.

## Gaya

Sacred site (**tirtha**) and city in the modern state of **Bihar** and capital of a district by the same name. According to Hindu mythology, this is the place where the god **Vishnu** sacrifices a powerful **demon** named **Gayasura**, having promised the demon that the space covered by his body will be the holiest spot on **earth**. Gaya is best known as a site to perform various rites for the dead, particularly the memorial rites known as **shraddhas**. Its sanctity is so well known that it draws people from all over the eastern part of India.

## Gayasura

In Hindu mythology, the name of a very powerful asura (**demon**). Gayasura performs harsh **asceticism** (**tapas**), spurred by the traditional Indian assumption that to voluntarily endure physical suffering brings one spiritual and magical powers. Gayasura's powers grow so large that all the gods become concerned that he might become powerful enough to overthrow them. As the gods' fears grow, the god **Vishnu** advises the god **Brahma** to convince Gayasura to allow his body to be sacrificed. Vishnu promises Gayasura that the place where he dies will become holier than all the sacred sites (**tirthas**) in the world. The spot where Gayasura's body lies becomes the holy place known as **Gaya**, which by virtue of Vishnu's boon is claimed to be holier than all other places on earth. See also **magic**.

## Gayatri Mantra

A particular verse from the **Rg Veda** (3.62.10), the oldest Hindu religious text; this verse is written in the poetic **meter** named gayatri, hence its name. The verse itself is an invocation to the **sun** and can be translated "let us meditate on the sun, most excellent of all the **deities**, may he inspire our minds." Reciting the Gayatri mantra is part of the morning and evening **worship** (**sandhya**) prescribed for every "**twice-born**" man who has received the adolescent religious **initiation** known as the "second birth." An important part of this initiation is the transmission of this **mantra** to the young man. Although the Gayatri must be recited every **day**, it should not be recited over **water**; in earlier times this was one reason why many orthodox Hindus were reluctant to travel abroad.

## Gayawal

**Endogamous** group of pilgrimage priests (**pandas**) who live in **Gaya**, a pilgrimage place (**tirtha**) famous as a site for rites for the dead. Each Gayawal family

has exclusive hereditary rights to serve all the pilgrims whose ancestral homes lie in a particular region or regions, regardless of where those pilgrims may be living at the time. As at all pilgrimage sites, pilgrims are supposed to be served only by their hereditary family priest. This monopoly gives the Gayawals greater leverage in negotiating fees with their pilgrim clients, who are in a vulnerable position since most of them have come to perform rites for dead relatives. The Gayawals are notorious for their rapaciousness, greed, and general lack of learning. These qualities render them somewhat debased by **brahmin** standards, as does the fact that they make much of their income from the dead, which is considered inauspicious. In fairness to the Gayawals, the relative power derived from this monopoly is also balanced by a sense of hereditary obligation to their clients— the perennial issue is never whether the clients will be served, but how much they will have to pay.

## Gemstones

In Hindu astrology, gemstones are used to strengthen, neutralize, or counteract the celestial influence of certain **planets**. Hindu astrology recognizes nine planets, each of which is associated with a particular gemstone: **sun** (ruby), **moon** (pearl), **Mars** (coral), **Mercury** (emerald), **Jupiter** (topaz), **Venus** (diamond), **Saturn** (sapphire), **Rahu** (agate), and **Ketu** (turquoise). Each of these nine planets is considered to be a minor **deity** and to have a distinct personality and characteristics. When deciding which gemstones to wear, one must make certain astrological considerations, particularly the position of the planets in one's **natal horoscope** (janampatrika), which is believed to reveal each planet's influence. These gemstones are worn in rings, with the base of the stone in contact with the skin to give the gemstones their efficacy over their planetary counterparts.

## Gesture, in Dance and Drama

Gestures in Hindu **dance** and drama are divided in two categories: **hasta**, which are broad positions of the arms and hands; and **mudra**, which are stylized hand gestures, usually with specific meanings.

## Ghanta

A handbell. These bells typically have a long straight handle projecting upward from the top and are usually rung with the bell part projecting from the bottom of the closed hand. Ringing bells is an important element in Hindu **worship** (**puja**) and its pleasing sound is one of the sixteen traditional **offerings** (**upacharas**) given to the **deity** as part of worship. Many different deities are pictured with bells in Hindu iconography, but it is particularly associated with the **goddess Kali**, whose roaring voice is equated with a tolling bell.

## Ghat

In its broadest meaning, a ghat is a bathing (**snana**) place by a body of **water**, such as a river, lake, or pond. The word ghat is also commonly used to refer to the permanent structures that have been built at these bathing places. They usually include a flat area at the water's edge, where people can walk, stand, or sit. A set of steps leads from the platform into and below the surface of the water. Constructing a ghat is often considered a pious act that generates religious merit. This is particularly true in pilgrimage places (**tirtha**), where ghats are often centers for public religious life.

## Ghatika

In traditional Indian timekeeping, a ghatika is a period of twenty-four minutes. There are sixty in each twenty-four hour **day**. The ghatika gets its name from the clay pots (ghata) that were used to make **water**-clocks; these water-clocks measured the time by allowing

water to drip out from the pot through a small hole.

## Ghatotkacha

In the *Mahabharata*, the later of the two great Hindu epics, Ghatotkacha is a **son** of **Bhima**, one of the five **Pandava** brothers who are the epic's protagonists. Ghatotkacha's mother is a **rakshasi** (female **demon**) named Hidambi; Bhima's carnal relations with a nonhuman being are one sign of his earthy and unsophisticated personality. As the offspring of a rakshasi and the strongest Pandava, Ghatotkacha is a massive physical specimen. He is a staunch ally to the Pandavas all his life and fights valiantly on their behalf during the war between the Pandavas and their cousins the **Kauravas**, destroying large parts of the Kaurava army. He fights several times with the hero **Karna**, but is finally killed when Karna uses a **magic** weapon known as **Vaijayanti Shakti**.

## Ghora

("terrifying") Term used to refer to Hindu **deities** in their frightful, terrifying, and powerful aspects, as opposed to their benevolent (**saumya**) manifestations. This distinction is particularly applicable to the god **Shiva** and the forms of the **Goddess**, both of whom can appear in either form, and devotees (**bhakta**) can focus their **worship** on either aspect.

## Ghosts

Popular Hindu culture generally accepts the existence of ghosts and spirits, particularly of people who have died a violent or untimely death. Despite the virtually universal belief in reincarnation (**samsara**), it is generally accepted that the spirits of people who have died such deaths linger near where they lived during their lives. Ghosts will usually reveal themselves through disturbances, misfortunes, or by appearing to family members in visions or dreams. The family
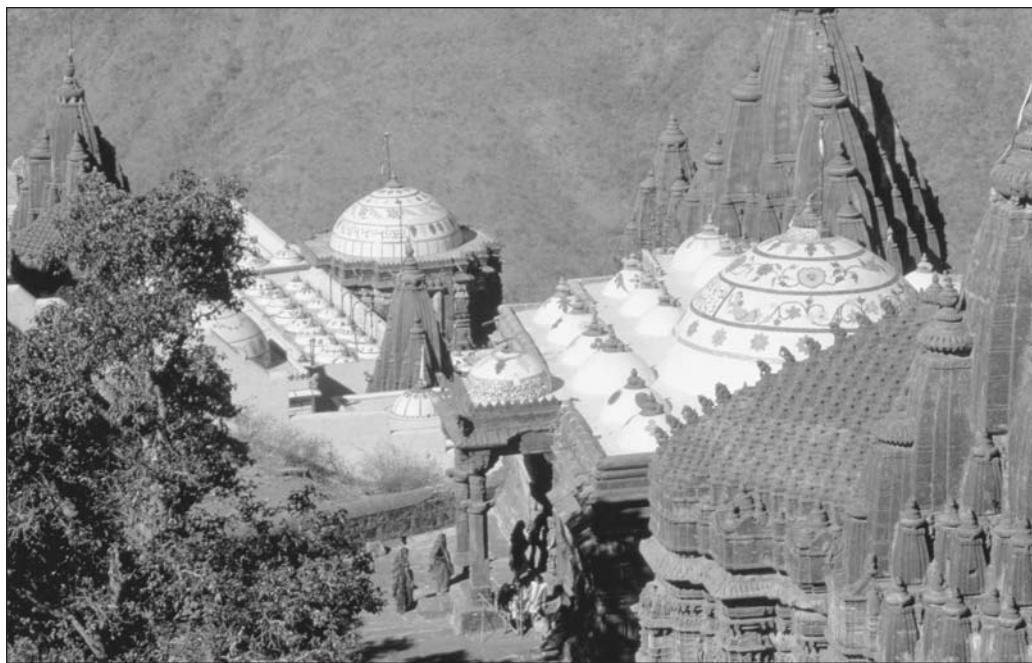
will then take measures to appease the spirit. Sometimes this is done by sponsoring rituals or ceremonies. Other times a family may prepare a shrine for the ghost to inhabit. Such ghosts are usually believed to have unsatisfied desires—either they died prior to getting married or having children, or they started major enterprises they were unable to finish. People who have lived long lives and fulfilled all the major human goals will not become ghosts.

## Ghrneshvar

("Lord of Compassion") One of the twelve **jyotirlingas**, a group of images of the god **Shiva** that are deemed particularly holy and powerful. Shiva is believed to be uniquely present at these places. This particular jyotirlinga is located in the village of **Velur** in the state of **Maharashtra**, and is also known as Dhushmeshvar. This site is unusual because the form of Shiva that resides here is known by two different names and has no unequivocal charter myth. At none of the other jyotirlingas is there any doubt about the presiding **deity's** form or how it came to be there. This indicates that Ghrneshvar is a minor site, perhaps one simply filling out the catalog of the jyotirlingas to get the number up to twelve. Despite this apparent lack of importance, Ghrneshvar is arguably the most-visited of the jyotirlingas. It is only a few miles from the world famous cave temples at **Ellora** and is a regular stop on the local tourist circuit. The temple is fairly small but is well kept and very impressive. Male visitors are required to remove their shirts before entering Shiva's presence.

## Giri Dashanami

One of the ten divisions of the **Dashanami Sanyasis**, renunciant ascetics who are devotees (**bhakta**) of **Shiva**. The Dashanamis were supposedly established by the ninth-century philosopher **Shankaracharya**, in an effort to create

Jain temple in Girnar. Settled atop a hill, Girnar is an ancient site
that is sacred to both Hindu and Jain religious communities.

a corps of learned men who could help to revitalize Hindu life. Each of the divisions is designated by a different name—in this case, giri ("mountain"). Upon **initiation**, new members are given this name as a surname to their new **ascetic** names, thus allowing for immediate group identification.

Aside from their individual identity, these ten "named" divisions are collected into four larger organizational groups: **Anandawara**, **Bhogawara**, **Bhuriwara**, and **Kitawara**. Each group has its headquarters in one of the four monastic centers (**maths**) supposedly established by Shankaracharya. Each of the four groups is also associated with one of the four **Vedas**—the oldest Hindu sacred texts, a different geographical quarter of India, a different great utterance (**mahavakya**), and a different ascetic quality. The Giri Dashanamis belong to the **Anandawara** group, which is affiliated with the **Jyotir math** in the Himalayan town of **Joshimath**.

## Giridhara

("mountain-lifter") In Hindu mythology, a youthful and heroic form of the god **Krishna**. According to the story, as a young man Krishna observes that the village elders make yearly **offerings** to **Indra**, the god of the storm. After some persuasion, Krishna manages to convince the elders that instead of making offerings to Indra, who is too far off in **heaven** to do them any good, they should offer them instead to Mount **Govardhan**. This mountain looms over their village as a symbol of their prosperity, and since Krishna's devotees (**bhakta**) consider this mountain to be another form of Krishna, he is actually persuading the elders to make offerings to him. Indra is furious when he discovers what has happened, and unleashes a violent storm that threatens to wash away the village and destroy all the inhabitants. To protect the villagers and their cattle from harm, Krishna lifts up Mount Govardhan, and holds it over their heads as an umbrella to protect them from the rain. After seven days, Indra admits defeat, and Krishna emerges as the hero of the village. This

story illustrates the gradual eclipse of the older Vedic **deities**. The figure of Krishna as Giridhara is widely worshiped in **Rajasthan** and is particularly noteworthy as the "chosen deity" (**ishtadevata**) of the poet-saint **Mirabai**.

## Girnar

Sacred site (**tirtha**) on a hill outside the city of Junagadh in the state of **Gujarat**. Girnar has been a holy site for at least 2,000 years and remains an important place for several religious communities. The hill's summit is an important pilgrimage site for the Jains and has a cluster of Jain temples, some of them dating back to the twelfth century. It also has a long history as a center for Hindu ascetics—the Brahmachari **Sanyasis** (**Brahmacharin**) have an **ashram** there, and the summit is said to have a set of footprints left by **Dattatreya**, a famous mythic figure who is considered a partial **avatar** of the god **Vishnu** and a paradigm for **asceticism**. Girnar is the site of a large Hindu **ascetic** gathering on **Kartik Purnima**, the **full moon** in the **lunar month** of Kartik (October–November).

## Gitagovinda

("Govinda's Song") Lyric poem written in the twelfth century by the poet **Jayadeva**. Written in an era when vernacular languages were becoming the prevalent vehicle for devotional religiosity, the *Gitagovinda* is one of the last great devotional (**bhakti**) texts composed in **Sanskrit** and is an exquisite example of Sanskrit poetry. According to tradition, Jayadeva was associated with the temple to **Jagannath** in the eastern Indian city of **Puri**, and his wife Padmavati was a dancer at the same temple. The *Gitagovinda* is a devotional poem to the god Jagannath. The text was obviously meant to be sung, since its twenty-four cantos are set in various differing musical modes (**ragas**), each of which conveys a different emotion. The text has also been expressed through

dance for at least 500 years in the **Orissi** dance style that originated in the Jagannath temple. The *Gitagovinda* is still used in the daily **worship** of Jagannath and occupies a position held by no other literary text.

The *Gitagovinda* is an allegory of the union of the human soul with God. This union is described through the story of the love between the god **Krishna** and his human consort **Radha** as they experience an initial flush of passion, followed by jealousy, separation, reconciliation, and reunion. Although Jayadeva's text lavishly employs the images from Sanskrit love poetry, it is far more than a romantic novel. The poem was written to show that Krishna is the lord of the entire universe. The first cantos after the introduction, the **Dashavatara Stotra**, pay homage to Krishna in his ten avatars or earthly incarnations (**Dashavatar**), each of whom is instrumental in preserving the cosmic equilibrium. Although Krishna is considered an **avatar** of the god **Vishnu** in many parts of the Hindu tradition, Krishna is the supreme **deity** for Jayadeva. The place usually occupied by Krishna in the enumeration of the avatars is taken by Krishna's brother, **Balarama**. The song that follows continues this theme, giving the divine attributes of Krishna as Vishnu, and further emphasizing that the entire *Gitagovinda* describes the deity's divine play (**lila**).

Having set the appropriate context in the opening songs, Jayadeva's text returns to a more conventional tale of romantic love. The next chapter describes the symbols of spring, which are intended to evoke a mood of love. Yet this mood is marred by Radha's jealousy when Krishna sports with a troop of cowherd girls, for she desires Krishna for herself alone. She withdraws and sits apart, sulking and despondent, only to burst into rage when Krishna comes to meet her, bearing the signs of another **erotic** liaison. Her anger and dismissal make Krishna realize what he has done. He eventually succeeds in dispersing her anger, and convinces Radha of his

love. They reconcile and make passionate love. The text ends by describing their love play in the afterglow, in which Radha orders Krishna to ornament her as she wishes, showing her complete power over him.

As a text, the *Gitagovinda* can be read on many different levels simultaneously. The themes of love, betrayal, and reconciliation speak easily to everyday human experience, but the theological and mystical levels are always present. In the end, deity and devotee (**bhakta**) are described as needing and loving one another. Neither is complete without the other. Radha's demand for exclusive love is at first denied, but in the end her persistence and conviction are rewarded. The *Gitagovinda* has been masterfully translated by the late Barbara Stoller Miller as *The Love Song of the Dark Lord*, 1977.

## Goa

One of the smallest states in modern India. It lies between the states of **Maharashtra** and **Karnataka** on the shore of the Arabian Sea. Goa was a Portuguese colony for more than 400 years and did not become a part of the Indian union until 1961, when India engineered a nearly bloodless takeover. Goa still retains much of its Portuguese influence—in its food, easygoing pace, and the continuing presence of Roman Catholicism—which makes it one of the most unusual cultural areas in India. For general information about Goa and all the regions of India, an accessible reference is Christine Nivin et al., *India*. 8th ed., Lonely Planet, 1998.

## Gobind Deo Mandir

A temple built in 1590 in **Brindavan**, the town believed to be the god **Krishna's** childhood home. The temple is dedicated to **Krishna** in his form as the "Divine Cowherd." From an architectural perspective, the temple is unique for its vaulted ceiling, which is seldom found in Hindu temples. The temple's interior and exterior are also notable for their almost complete lack of figural ornamentation, which is extremely unusual. The temple is close to the major road connecting Agra and Delhi. These are the two major political centers of the Moghul empire (1525–1707), whose rulers were Muslims. Since many orthodox Muslims believe that figural representations are idolatrous, particularly in places of **worship**, the temple's austere style may have been an attempt to avoid inciting Muslim iconoclasm. There is evidence of conflict between Hindus and Muslims at this site since the few figures inside the temple, carved into the lintels of door and windows, have had their heads broken off. See also **Moghul dynasty**.

## Godana

("gift of a **cow**") In Hindu religious practice, gift giving (**dana**) is common and believed to be a pious act that generates religious merit. Godana is the gift of a cow, usually to a **brahmin**. Traditional religious texts highly laud the gift of a cow, both as a charitable act and as a way to expiate one's sins. However, since many of these texts were written by brahmins, one can detect a hint of self-interest.

## Godavari

River running from west to east in central India. The Godavari's headwaters lie in the state of **Maharashtra** on the inland side of the western Ghats. It meanders through that state to **Andhra Pradesh**, where it enters the Bay of Bengal. The Godarvi is traditionally considered one of India's seven sacred rivers, along with the **Ganges**, **Yamuna**, **Cauvery**, **Saraswati**, **Narmada**, and **Indus**. The Godavari has special status in central India, where it is often referred to as the "Ganges"—the most sacred river for Hindus. Although its entire length is considered sacred, the Godavari's most important religious sites are all in the west: **Nasik**,

A shrine in the Godavari River near the riverbank of Nasik.

**Tryambakeshvar**, and **Paithan**. See also **ghat**.

## Goddess

India is home to a host of different goddesses. Although goddesses differ greatly in demeanor and character, they are all generally seen as expressions of a single underlying female **deity**. This vision of the goddess coincides with the characteristic Hindu practice that allows for multiple manifestations of a divinity, while at the same time asserting his or her underlying reality as a single entity. Many of India's goddesses are the deities of a specific site, who might be worshiped only in that specific place. Yet as these local goddesses are all mythically linked as differing forms of a single great Goddess, the sacred sites (**tirthas**) are also connected with this great Goddess. The sites, called **pithas** or "benches," form a sacred network stretching throughout the entire subcontinent.

The origins of the goddess cult in India are uncertain. Excavations of cities of the **Indus Valley civilization** have unearthed female figures with enormous breasts, hips, and buttocks. These figures resemble the Venus of Willendorf found in Bronze Age Europe and suggest that there was some kind of cult associated with **women's** fertility. Some interpreters have seen the Indus Valley figures as proof that the cult of the Mother Goddess originated in the Indus Valley civilization, but hard evidence supporting this claim is slim. Another reason some interpreters believe that goddess **worship** must have come from the indigenous Indian culture is that the deities mentioned in the **Vedas**, the oldest Hindu religious texts, are almost exclusively male. The female goddesses in the Vedic hymns are infrequent and unimportant—**Ushas** (the dawn), **Prthivi** (the **earth**), and **Nirriti** (death and destruction). But somehow female divinities were elevated from virtual obscurity and became conceived as the reigning power in the universe.

The cult of the great Goddess appears fully formed, seemingly out of nowhere, in about the fifth century. She first appears in the text known as the ***Devimahatmya*** ("greatness of the Goddess"), which is itself a section of the

*Markandeya Purana*. The depth and subtlety of her characterization in this text leads scholars to infer that this cult had existed for some time, perhaps as a secret religious community open only to initiates. The goddess in the *Devimahatmya* is a powerful, independent female force and is able to do what the gods cannot. She is created from the collected radiance (tejas) of all the gods, and comes into the world to kill a demon against whom the gods have struggled in vain. The *Devimahatmya*'s three different episodes portray her in three different divine personas: as **Mahasaraswati** in the slaying of the **demons Madhu** and **Kaitabha**, as **Mahalakshmi** in slaying a demon named **Mahishasura**, and as **Mahakali** in the battle against the demon generals **Shumbha** and **Nishumbha**.

Many of India's goddesses are the patron deities of particular locales, and are considered unique to that place. The **Shiwalik goddesses**, for example, are unique to particular sites in the **Shiwalik hills**. At the same time, all of these goddesses are considered different manifestations of the same divine energy. According to the sites' charter myth, each site is associated with a particular body part of the primeval goddess. The myth tells of the death of **Sati**, who commits **suicide** when her father **Daksha** insults her husband **Shiva**. Shiva picks up Sati's body and wanders the earth, carrying her on his shoulders. In his grief Shiva neglects his divine duties, and the world begins to fall into ruin. The other gods beg **Vishnu** for help, lest the world be destroyed. Vishnu uses his razor-sharp discus to cut off pieces of Sati's body, until finally there is nothing left. When the body is completely gone, Shiva goes to the mountains, where he becomes absorbed in meditation. Wherever a part of Sati's body falls, that place becomes a **Shakti Pitha** ("seat of the Goddess"), sanctified to the Goddess in a particular form. The number of these places differs from source to source—some list fifty-one, and others 108. Whatever the number, the sites are

spread throughout the subcontinent, from Baluchistan in modern Pakistan, to **Assam** in the far east, to deep in southern India. Each Shakti Pitha is associated with a particular body part of the great Goddess, has a particular presiding female deity, and has a particular **Bhairava** as a consort to that goddess. From this perspective, the entire subcontinent is seen as a single cohesive unit, with the network of sites connected to one another as are the parts of the body. Different places may claim the same body part, the result of the drive to establish a site and to give it prestige. For example, Sati's vulva, the most powerfully charged part of the female body, is usually accepted to have fallen at **Kamakhya** in Assam, but the same claim is made at **Kalimath** in the **Himalayas**. There is no single authoritative list of sites and competing claims are not uncommon. Many Hindus seem unconcerned with the seeming inconsistency of having the same body parts claimed by different sites; perhaps this reflects the conviction that the Goddess is behind them all, and that the specifics are therefore less important.

While some goddesses are only worshiped in their particular locale, such as the goddesses found in the Shiwalik hills, other goddesses have become more widely worshiped, and some have become pan-Indian. In the pantheon, the Goddess generally appears in two widely differing types of manifestations. At times she appears as a wife and mother, in forms such as **Parvati**, **Lakshmi**, and **Saraswati**. Although these married goddesses are not completely powerless, they tend to be benign, benevolent, and auspicious. Her other manifestation is in forms such as **Durga** and **Kali**, whose male consorts are considered subordinate to them. These independent manifestations of the Goddess have the power to help their devotees (**bhakta**), but they are also volatile and potentially dangerous, since their power is sometimes unleashed without control. Cultural observers have suggested that this dual perspective represents

cultural perspectives on Indian women, particularly the belief that women's procreative capacities should be channeled through the safe, confining bounds of marriage. Married women, as wives and mothers, are auspicious, life-giving, and life-sustaining because their creative power has been regulated under male control. Unmarried women remain a source of danger, particularly to the family's prestige, since the quickest way to ruin a family's good name is through the corruption of its women.

## Godman

Colloquial name for a particular type of charismatic Hindu **ascetic**. As religious figures, godmen are generally characterized by a high-profile presence, by their ability to attract attention and support from the larger Indian society, and by their claims to advanced spiritual attainments. They sometimes claim to possess **magic** powers—such as the ability to heal, read minds, foretell the future, or to influence future events—which are exhibited to prove the godman's spiritual attainments. Godmen often come from outside the established ascetic orders and may have never even taken formal ascetic **initiation**. They are able to flourish in the Indian religious "free market," which recognizes and rewards religious charisma. Godmen typically dwell in their own **ashrams** rather than one belonging to an order. Although most of them acknowledge a **guru** or religious preceptor, their success stems more from their personal qualities than the strength of their spiritual lineage. In recent years a number of these godmen have cultivated large numbers of foreign disciples, which can bring both wealth and enhanced prestige. One contemporary example of such a godman is **Sathya Sai Baba**, whose ashram is in **Puttaparthi** in the southern state of **Andhra Pradesh**. For an example of one person's encounters with a variety of these figures, see Peter Ludwig Brent, *Godmen of India*, 1972.

## Gods, World of the

The earliest reference to the transmigration of souls is found in both the **Brhadaranyaka Upanishad** (6.2) and the **Chandogya Upanishad** (5.10). These texts make a qualitative distinction between two different paths. The path to the world of the gods ultimately led to the **sun**, and the person traveling it did not return again, whereas the path to the **world of the fathers** led to the **moon**, and the person traveling it was eventually reborn on earth. The leitmotiv of the **Upanishads** is the need for individual spiritual realization, which is the key to getting on the path to the world of the gods. Those who gain this realization attain the final and ultimate end, whereas those who simply do good deeds will return to earth, although their good deeds will give them karmic benefits. See also **karma**.

## Godse, Nathuram

(1912–1948) Hindu nationalist figure who is most famous as the assassin of **Mohandas Gandhi**. Godse was a devoted follower of **Vinayak Damodar Savarkar**, whose articulation of Hindu nationalism equated Hindu identity and Indian patriotism. Savarkar and his followers saw the partition of India in 1947 as the "vivisection" of Mother India, dividing her into India and Pakistan. Like many of Savarkar's followers, Godse was enraged by Gandhi's post-partition efforts to protect Indian Muslims and to influence the Indian government's policy toward Pakistan, particularly his hunger strike to force the Indian government to transfer to Pakistan a large sum of money that had been promised. Filled with the conviction that Gandhi had to be stopped, Godse intercepted Gandhi on the way to a prayer meeting, touched his feet as a sign of respect, and then shot him three times. Godse was tried and executed for his action and is sometimes cited as a martyr by the most ardent contemporary nationalists.

## Gokarna

("**cow's** ear") Sacred site (**tirtha**) in the state of **Karnataka** on the shore of the Arabian Sea, just south of Karnataka's border with the state of **Goa**. Gokarna is most famous for a temple to the god **Shiva** in his form as Mahabaleshvara, the "exceedingly powerful Lord." According to the site's charter myth, Shiva intends to perform the work of creation, but before he begins he becomes rapt in meditation in the depths of the earth. The god **Brahma** grows impatient with the delay and carries out the work of creation himself. Shiva is enraged when he discovers what has happened and is about to force his way up through the earth, which will create a terrible cataclysm. The earth appears to Shiva in the form of a cow, who begs him to rise to the surface through her ear. It is claimed that a cave at Gokarna is the remnant of that passage through which Shiva rose.

## Gokhale, Gopal Krishna

(1866–1915) College professor, legislator, and reformist Hindu, who worked for much of his life with his older contemporary, **Mahadev Govind Ranade**. Unlike Ranade, whose position as a judge barred him from active political involvement, Gokhale spent the last fifteen years of his life as a legislator. Thirteen of these years were spent as Bombay's Indian representative to the Imperial Legislative Council, the highest lawmaking body in India. Like Ranade, Gokhale sought to influence British policy by working within established institutions, in this case through the British colonial government. This willingness to compromise brought him opposition from leaders such as **Bal Gangadhar Tilak**, who advocated stiffer, even violent opposition to British rule.

## Gokulnath

(1551–1640) The third **guru** of the religious community known as the **Pushti Marg**. Gokulnath inherited the mantle of leadership from his father **Vitthalnath**, who was the successor to his father **Vallabhacharya**, the community's founder. During his tenure Gokulnath helped solidify the religious community and paid particular attention to its organization. He is best known for compiling several hagiographic works describing the careers of his father and grandfather, to provide an appropriately reverent picture for their followers. Gokulnath was also the moving force behind a text named the ***Chaurasi Vaishnavan ki Varta*** ("Account of eighty-four Vaishnavas"), although the actual text was probably compiled by Gokulnath's disciple **Hariray**. This text is a sectarian hagiography describing the lives of eighty-four paradigmatic **Vaishnavas**, all of whom—at least according to the text—were associates and disciples of Vallabhacharya and Vitthalnath. The text's real purpose is not to provide a biography, but to illustrate the importance of the Pushti Marg and its leaders.

## Golden Embryo

One of the earliest cosmological myths. It first appears in the **Rg Veda** (10.121), the oldest Hindu religious text. According to this account, the universe originally consisted of the Golden Embryo (Hiranyagarbha). The Golden Embryo stirred and evolved into **Prajapati**, the creator of all things and ruler over all creatures. In this story, as with most other accounts of Hindu **cosmology**, the cosmos originates from a single source and is thus an organic whole.

## Golwalkar, Madhav Sadashiv

(1904–1973) Second sarsanghchalak ("Supreme Leader") of the **Rashtriya Svayamsevak Sangh** (RSS). The RSS is a conservative Hindu organization whose express purpose is to provide the leadership cadre for a revitalized Hindu India; for most of its history it has characterized its mission as cultural, rather than

religious or political. Golwalkar is a pivotal figure in RSS history. He took office in 1940 upon the death of its founder, **Dr. K. B. Hedgewar**, and guided it through the tumultuous years surrounding India's independence. After **Mohandas Gandhi's** assassination by the Hindu nationalist **Nathuram Godse** in 1948, the RSS and several other organizations were briefly banned. Despite initial suspicions, the RSS has never been implicated in Gandhi's death. During the ban the RSS continued to function underground, and many of its leaders became more politically active, a trend that Golwalkar had earlier discouraged. When the ban was rescinded in 1949, the RSS began to exercise greater influence by forming and sponsoring affiliated organizations, such as trade unions, student organizations, charitable institutions, and political parties. This trend continued throughout the rest of Golwalkar's tenure, although he was far less activist than his successor, **Balasaheb Deoras**. For further information see Walter K. Andersen and Shridhar D. Damle, *The Brotherhood in Saffron*, 1987; and Tapan Basu et al., *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags*, 1993.

## Gond

Tribal (**adivasi**) community in central India. The Gonds are concentrated in the state of **Madhya Pradesh**, particularly in the hills on both sides of the **Vindhya Mountains**, in the Kaimur Range at the eastern border of Madhya Pradesh and **Uttar Pradesh**, and in the **Ramgarh** Hills on the border of Madhya Pradesh, **Orissa**, and **Bihar**. Like most tribal peoples, they tend to be quite poor and eke out a living from subsistence agriculture.

## Gopala
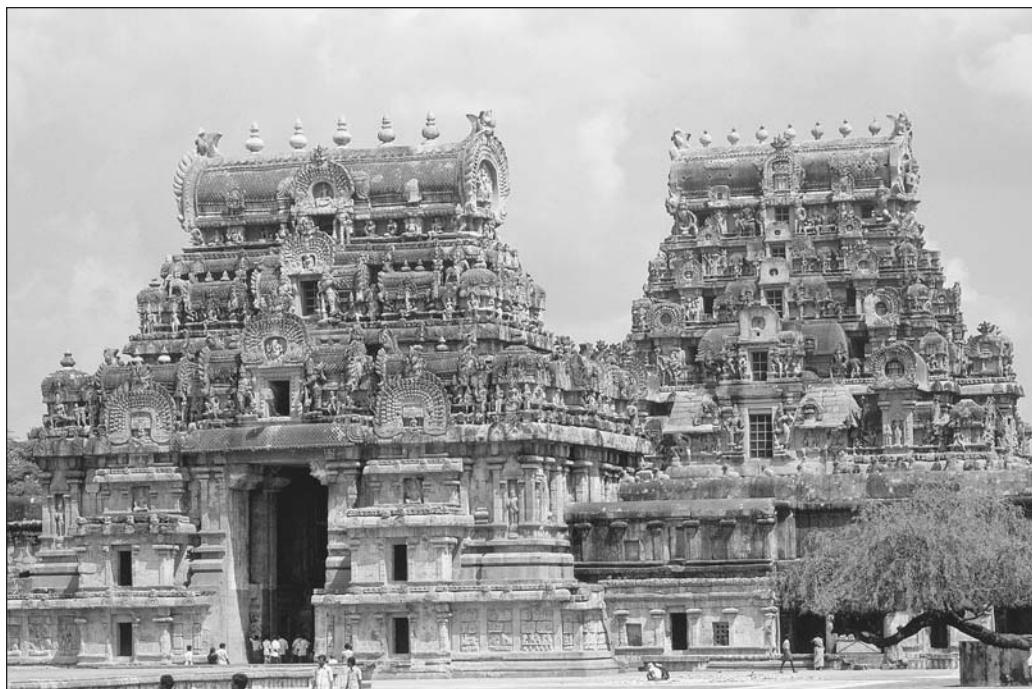
("protector of cows") Epithet of the god **Krishna**, reflecting his childhood occupation as a cowherd. See **Krishna**.

## Gopi

(feminine of *gopa*, "**cow**-keeper") In Hindu mythology, the gopis are the cow-keeping **women** who are the god **Krishna's** companions in **Braj**, the region south of Delhi in which Krishna is believed to have spent his early life. The gopis are the simple village women of Braj, who keep the village cows, churn the milk into butter for sale, and provide Krishna with an adoring and familiar presence as he grows up. They exclaim over his beauty as an infant and they endure his boyhood pranks—particularly his continual theft of their hard-earned butter. When he becomes an enchanting adolescent, they respond to the nightly call of his flute to join him in the circular **dance** (**ras lila**) on the shores of the river **Yamuna**. Although the gopis are completely devoted to Krishna and love him above all else, their relations with him are also devoid of any affectation or awe. The gopis are simple country women, and they treat Krishna as one of their own. For example, they feel no qualms about scolding him when he has stolen their butter. Their intimate but unaffected relationship with Krishna makes them paradigms for the ideal devotee (**bhakta**). For his part, Krishna is said to prefer this sort of natural and spontaneous relationship to any sort of calculated **worship**. Krishna loves Braj more than any other place on **earth** because the people there treat him as one of their own.

## Gopichand

Princely protagonist of *The Song of Gopichand*, an allegorical adventure that is much beloved throughout northern India and has even spread to Bengal where it is called ***The Song of Manik Chandra***. The story tells of the trials of Gopichand, who loses his kingdom through the vicissitudes of fate but eventually regains it after numerous trials and setbacks. Aside from the song's story, it is also embedded with the ideas of the **Nathpanthis**, an **ascetic** community supposedly founded by

Towering gopurams mark the gateways to the Brhadeshvar Temple in Tanjore.

**Gorakhnath**. Some members of this community believed that perfecting their bodies through **yoga** would make them immortal. This idea appears in the song through its description of Gopichand's mother Mayana, who has power over Death himself. In some versions of the story Mayana's religious preceptor is identified as a low-**caste** sweeper, while in others it is the sage Gorakhnath himself. Two versions of this song have been translated by G. A. Grierson in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, the first published in 1878 and the second in 1885.

## Gopuram

In the **Dravida** style of temple **architecture**, which was mainly prevalent in southern India, gopurams are the ornate temple gateways in the center of the temple's perimeter walls. Temples built in the Dravida style tend to be shorter than temples built in the northern Indian **Nagara** style, but compensate for this by stretching over vast areas, often forming towns in their own right. There are usually four gopurams, one for each of the cardinal directions; in some cases these gopurams are ten stories tall and can be seen for miles from the surrounding countryside. The gopurams were originally fortified gateways built to restrict access to the temple, but in present times their function is more decorative. By dominating the skyline around the temple—much like spires of Gothic cathedrals—gopurams are a pronouncement about the power of the resident **deities** (and their client rulers); they have also helped to educate the faithful, since they are usually covered with sculptures detailing mythological themes.

## Gora

(1267–1397?) Poet and saint in the **Varkari Panth**, a religious community centered around the **worship** of the Hindu god **Vithoba** at his temple at **Pandharpur** in modern state of **Maharashtra**. According to tradition, Gora was a potter, which by the standards of the time was a very low-status occupation; Gora's inclusion as one of the Varkari saints helps underscore the

devotional (**bhakti**) conviction that **birth** status was less important than genuine love of God. Gora is reported to have lived most of his life at Teradhoki village in the state of Maharashtra, but since he is a minor Varkari figure, little is known about his life. For further information see G. A. Deleury, *The Cult of Vithoba*, 1960; and Justin E. Abbott and Narhar R. Godbole (trans.), *Stories of Indian Saints*, 1982.

## Gorakhnath

(13th c.?) Medieval **yogi** and wonder-worker who is the founder of the **Nathpanthi ascetics**. There is little doubt that Gorakhnath was a historical person, and his teacher was named **Matsyendranath** (also known as Minanath). However, the accounts of his life tell of him performing so many miracles and wonders that they cannot be taken as factual. He is generally believed to have lived early in the thirteenth century, since the Maharashtrian poet-saint **Jnaneshvar** (1275–1296?) described his own spiritual preceptor as one of Gorakhnath's disciples.

Tradition regards Gorakhnath not only as a magician and a wonder-worker, but also as the author of the *Gorakhshatakam*. This text is a religious manual that gives instruction on a specific type of **yoga** practiced by Nathpanthi ascetics. The ultimate goal of this yogic practice is to transform the perishable elements in the physical body into immortal elements. Whether or not Gorakhnath authored this text, the spiritual instructions therein are consistent with those of the Nathpanthi ascetics who claim to be his disciples. According to legend, Gorakhnath and his most accomplished followers have never died, and their victory over death is a sign of their spiritual accomplishment. The most complete source on Gorakhnath and his followers, despite its age, is George Weston Briggs, *Gorakhnath and the Kanphata Yogis*, 1973; and Shashibhushan B. Dasgupta,

*Obscure Religious Cults*, 1962. See also **Maharashtri**.

## Gorakhnathi

**Ascetic** community who claim to be the disciples of sage **Gorakhnath** and claim to have conserved his teachings. These ascetics are also known as the **Nathpanthis**. See **Nathpanthi**.

## Gorakhshatakam

("Gorakh's Hundred") Text attributed to the sage **Gorakhnath**. Although his authorship is ultimately unprovable, its teachings are consistent with those of the **Nathpanthi ascetics** who claim to be his disciples. In at least one of its forms, as translated by Briggs, the text has 101 verses, not 100 verses as the title suggests. The *Gorakhshatakam* gives instruction on the type of **yoga** practiced by the Nathpanthi ascetics in which the major motif is the union of polar opposites. It begins with instruction on the structure of the **subtle body**, an alternate physiological system that resides on a different plane of existence than gross matter, but possesses certain correspondences to the material body. The subtle body is visualized as a set of six psychic centers (**chakras**) running roughly along the course of the spine. Above and below these centers are the bodily abodes of the two divine principles, **Shiva** (awareness) and **Shakti** (power). The aspirant aims to awaken a latent spiritual energy residing in the shakti called **kundalini** and move it to union with the Shiva principle at the crown of the head. The ultimate aim of this practice is to gain control over the forces that affect the body, allowing one to become purified and immortal.

## Gosain

Vernacular form of the **Sanskrit** word *goswami* ("master of the senses"). Although this epithet could be used to refer to any **ascetic**, during British colonial rule in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it was most commonly

used to denote certain subgroups among the **Sanyasis**, the ascetic devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva**. The name was particular to Sanyasis at the low end of the ascetic status scale, such as the **Nathpanthis** or the **Naga** (militant) Sanyasis, who were often recruited from the lower classes of society.

## Gosala Maskariputra

(5th c. B.C.E.?) According to tradition, a philosopher who was a contemporary of the Buddha. Gosala is believed to be the founder of the **Ajivikas**, an extinct religious community whose philosophical position is generally described as **fatalism**. In the Buddhist and Jain literature he is generally referred to as Makkhali Gosala ("**cow**-shed"), referring to his lowly birth.

## Goshala

("abode of cows") In modern India, a goshala is a rest home for aged, infirm, and unproductive cows, where they can live for the rest of their lives in peace and happiness. Goshalas are usually established and supported as acts of religious merit, to provide for cows that would either be slaughtered or abandoned. These institutions are built as a sign of respect for cattle, which is one of the most pervasive ideas in Hindu culture.

## Goswami, Jiva

(ca. late 16th c.) A pivotal figure in the **Gaudiya Vaishnava** religious community, along with his uncles **Sanatana Goswami** and **Rupa Goswami**. Although the Gaudiya Vaishnavas were founded by the poet-saint **Chaitanya**, it was the Goswamis who brought order and systematic thinking to Chaitanya's ecstatic devotionalism. The Goswamis were southern brahmins by origin, but their family had resettled in northern India. Their lives were transformed when Rupa and Sanatana met Chaitanya. Chaitanya dispatched the brothers to **Brindavan**, the village where the god **Krishna** is believed to have spent his

childhood, with instructions to settle there and reclaim it as a holy place. The three Goswamis lived there for several decades, reclaiming the sacred sites (**tirthas**), having temples built, and above all providing the ideas and institutions that defined the Gaudiya Vaishnava community. Jiva was a versatile scholar who wrote on many different aspects of **Vaishnava** devotion, but is best known for his works on metaphysics, which provide the community's basic philosophical underpinnings. For further information see Sushil Kumar De, *Early History of the Vaishnava Faith and Movement in Bengal, from Sanskrit and Bengali Sources*, 1961.

## Goswami, Rupa

(ca. mid-16th c.) A disciple of the Bengali saint **Chaitanya**, a pivotal figure in the establishment of the **Gaudiya Vaishnava** community, along with his brother **Sanatana Goswami**, and his nephew **Jiva Goswami**. Although the Gaudiya Vaishnavas were founded by the poet-saint Chaitanya, it was the Goswamis who brought order and systematic thinking to Chaitanya's ecstatic devotionalism. Records indicate that the Goswamis were **brahmins** whose families originally hailed from the **Karnataka** region. The family had settled in Bengal, where Rupa and Sanatana were in the service of a local Muslim ruler. However, their lives were transformed when Rupa and Sanatana met Chaitanya. Chaitanya dispatched the brothers to **Brindavan**, the village where the god **Krishna** is believed to have spent his childhood, with instructions to settle there and reclaim it as a holy place. The three Goswamis lived there for several decades, reclaiming the sacred sites (**tirthas**), having temples built, and above all providing the ideas and institutions that defined the Gaudiya Vaishnava community. Rupa was a passionate devotee (**bhakta**) of Krishna, but also had interests as a dramatist and a scholar. In addition to

writing poetry as a vehicle for expressing devotion to Krishna, he also focused on analyzing **bhakti** as an emotional experience. He is most famous for enumerating the five **modes of devotion**, explaining the different possible ways to experience the love of God. For further information see Sushil Kumar De, *Early History of the Vaishnava Faith and Movement in Bengal*, 1961; and Shrivatsa Goswami, "Radha" in John Stratton Hawley and Donna Wulff (eds.), *The Divine Consort*, 1982.

## Goswami, Sanatana

(ca. mid-16th c.) A disciple of the Bengali saint **Chaitanya**, and a pivotal figure in the establishment of the **Gaudiya Vaishnava** community, along with his brother **Rupa Goswami** and his nephew **Jiva Goswami**. Although the Gaudiya Vaishnavas were founded by the poet-saint Chaitanya, it was the Goswamis who brought order and systematic thinking to Chaitanya's ecstatic devotionalism. Records indicate that the Goswamis were **brahmins** whose families originally hailed from the **Karnataka** region. The family had settled in Bengal, where Rupa and Sanatana were in the service of a local Muslim ruler. However, their lives were transformed when Rupa and Sanatana met Chaitanya. Chaitanya dispatched the brothers to **Brindavan**, the village where the god **Krishna** is believed to have spent his childhood, with instructions to settle there and reclaim it as a holy place. The three Goswamis lived there for several decades, reclaiming the sacred sites (**tirthas**), having temples built, and above all providing the ideas and institutions that defined the Gaudiya Vaishnava community. Sanatana was more of a devotee (**bhakta**) than a scholar. This is evident in his written works, which tend to be either devotional songs or commentaries on religious texts. Sanatana's most famous text is the *Hari-bhakti-vilasa* ("The delight of devotion to Hari"), for which he wrote a commentary as well.

For further information see Sushil Kumar De, *Early History of the Vaishnava Faith and Movement in Bengal*, 1961.

## Gotra

A word for exogamous lineages. Lineages are particularly stressed among **brahmins**, although the status associated with some lineages sometimes led other **twice-born** groups to adopt them as well. The word literally means "**cow** pen," and by extension the family is associated with a particular herd of cattle. Brahmins were believed to be descended from the seven sages—**Kashyapa**, **Vasishtha**, **Bhrgu**, **Gautama**, **Atri**, **Bharadvaja**, and **Vishvamitra**—with each family taking as its gotra the name of the sage believed to be its progenitor. The only situation in which it was really important was in marriages, since marriage within the gotra was forbidden. After marriage, a woman would adopt the gotra of her husband as part of her new identity. Since this practice was observed by brahmins, having a gotra became something of a status symbol. This led other twice-born groups to imitate the brahmins and adopt gotras as well.

## Govardhan

Sacred mountain in the western part of the **Mathura** district of the state of **Uttar Pradesh**. According to Hindu mythology, this was the mountain that the god **Krishna** held up as an umbrella over the **Braj** region to protect its inhabitants from the storms generated by the wrath of **Indra**, god of the storm. According to the traditions of the **Pushti Marg**, a religious community founded by **Vallabhacharya** (1479–1531), a particular image of Krishna called **Shrinathji** was discovered by Vallabhacharya on Mount Govardhan, after Krishna revealed its location to the saint in a **dream**.

## Govardhan Math

One of the four **maths** or sacred centers traditionally believed to have been established by the great philosopher **Shankaracharya**; the others are the **Sharada math**, **Shringeri math**, and **Jyotir math**. These four sacred centers are each associated with one of the four geographical corners of the Indian subcontinent; the Govardhan math is in the eastern quarter, in the city of **Puri** on the shores of the Bay of Bengal. Shankaracharya is traditionally cited as the founder of the **Dashanami Sanyasis**, the most prestigious Hindu **ascetic** order. The Dashanami ("ten names") ascetics are devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva** and are divided into ten divisions, each with a different name. These ten divisions are organized into four larger organizational groups—**Anandawara**, **Bhogawara**, **Bhuriwara**, and **Kitawara**—each of which has two or three of the ten divisions and is associated with one of the four sacred centers. Of these, the Govardhan math is associated with the Bhogawara group.

## Govardhan Puja

Festival celebrated on the first **day** of the bright (waxing) half of the **lunar month** of **Kartik** (October–November), the day after the festival **Diwali**. The charter myth for this festival comes from the mythology of the god **Krishna**, and this festival is celebrated mainly in the **Braj** region south of modern Delhi, where Krishna is said to have lived. According to legend, this is the day that Krishna lifted up Mount **Govardhan** to protect the people of Braj from the storms sent by the god **Indra**. Indra was angry because Krishna had persuaded the village elders to make **offerings** to Mount Govardhan, rather than to Indra. Krishna held up the mountain as an umbrella for an entire **week**, after which Indra admitted defeat. On this day pilgrims circle Mount Govardhan on foot. The mountain is seen as a physical manifestation of Krishna himself, and because of Krishna's association with cattle, they also adorn and **worship cows** and **bulls**. In memory of the offerings given to Mount

Govardhan in that story, as well as the mountain of offerings (particularly milk-based sweets) that are prepared for celebration in modern times, the festival is also known as **Annakut** ("mountain of food").

## Govinda

("gaining cows") Epithet of the god **Krishna**, referring to his childhood in **Braj** as a cowherd. See **Krishna**.

## Govindswami

(late 16th c.) One of the poets of the **ashtachap**, a group of eight northern Indian **bhakti** (devotional) poets. The compositions of these eight poets are used for liturgical purposes by the **Pushti Marg**, a religious community whose members are devotees (**bhakta**) of **Krishna**. The Pushti Marg named all eight poets as members of the community and associates of either the community's founder, **Vallabhacharya**, or his successor **Vitthalnath**. Govindswami is believed to have been an associate of Vitthalnath. In his poetry, Govindswami writes from the perspective of a companion (**sakhi**) to Krishna's consort **Radha**, and in this voice not only gives a picture of the divine activities, but also an extremely detailed picture of everyday village life.

## Grace

The notion of divine grace has been and remains vitally important in Hindu devotional religiosity (**bhakti**), although it is perceived differently among the various devotional movements in Hinduism. In the Tamil devotionalism that marked the earliest articulation of the bhakti movement, the two major religious groups, the **Alvars** and the **Nayanars**, both stressed the utter transcendence of their chosen god and the gulf between God and human beings. In this understanding, grace became something only God could give freely. Only God had the power to transform human beings and bring their souls to final liberation—a notion of grace not far removed from Christian ideas. Within the **Shrivaishnavas**, a later southern

The Grand Bassin, a mountain lake on the island of Mauritius. Just before the festival of Shivaratri, crowds of people gather at this lake and draw water to offer to the god Shiva.

Indian religious community, there was a debate whether liberation was primarily achieved through one's faith or one's works. The **Tengalai** school favored faith and argued that liberation came from God alone. In contrast, the **Vadagalai** school favored a person's works and countered that humans had to respond to divine grace in order for their souls to gain final liberation. The importance of divine transcendence and omnipotence, as articulated by Tamil devotionalism, has remained an important part of Hindu piety, even to the present time.

Southern Indian bhakti tended to express the **deity**-devotee (**bhakta**) relationship using images of master and servant. Northern Indian bhakti, particularly that which focused on the gods **Rama** and **Krishna**, stressed other images of this relationship: friend and friend, parent and child, lover and beloved. These differing conceptions necessarily influenced the notion of grace, ranging from the idea of God as other and saving power to the sacred quality coming from sharing everyday interactions. In the latter, grace is manifested through being able to take part in God's divine play (**lila**), to play with God, and thus take part in the divine world. In this model, God is immanent rather than transcendent, and divine activity comes in the guise of sharing the ordinary activities of human life. All of these models can be found in modern Hindu religious life, although certain ones are more strongly associated with particular groups or religious communities.

## Grammarians

Philosophical school based in the teachings of **Bhartrhari** (7th c. C.E.). The Grammarians conceived of **Brahman**, the Ultimate Reality, as being manifested in sound, particularly the sound of the spoken word. They centered their cult around the word *Om*, a word that is described as the source of all things in the **Mandukya Upanishad**, an early speculative text. For further information see Harold Coward and K. Kunjunni Raja (eds.), *The Philosophy of the Grammarians,* 1990.

## Grand Bassin

Mountain lake in the southern part of **Mauritius**, an island in the Indian Ocean 1,200 miles east of the east African coast. The Hindu population of Mauritius have established sacred sites (**tirthas**) in the landscape that often

relate or correspond to sacred landscape features on the Indian subcontinent. Grand Bassin is a remote and high lake, which the Hindus on Mauritius call the **Ganges** River. In the days before the festival of **Shivaratri** (February–March), great crowds of people come to Grand Bassin. They bathe (**snana**) in the lake, **worship** at the temples surrounding it, and then draw pots of **water** from the lake and carry them on foot back to their homes. The pilgrims time their departures to arrive at their homes on the evening of Shivaratri, and the water is offered to the god **Shiva** in their local temple. This sort of rite can be found in several places in India, most notably at **Vaidyanath** in **Bihar**.

## Grhastha

("householder") In the **dharma literature**, which gives instruction on religious practice and duties, a grhastha is a "householder." According to the dharma literature, the grhastha is the second of the four **stages of life** (ashramas) in the life of a man born into one of the three **twice-born** groups—**brahmin**, **kshatriya**, or **vaishya**—which have the highest religious and social status in Indian society. The householder stage is preceded by that of the **brahmacharin** or celibate student, and succeeded by the **vanaprastha** or forest-dweller, and the **sanyasi** or wandering **ascetic**. In practical terms, for most men the householder stage is the final stage of life, since most men do not choose to move beyond it. The householder stage begins with marriage, and leads to raising and supporting a family. This stage is an active and fruitful time of life, and the householder is indispensable to society since his labors and resources support those in the other three stages of life. This is also the only stage of life in which sexual intercourse is not explicitly forbidden, since the general fruitfulness of this stage of life is expressed through pro-

creation. A householder is permitted to pursue three of the traditional **aims of life** (purushartha): wealth (**artha**), desire (**kama**), and religious duty (**dharma**). Given the depth and richness of the householder's life, it is not surprising that many men have little inclination to move on to the two other stages.

## Grhya Sutras

("aphorisms on domestic [rites]") The name given to texts that outline correct procedures for domestic religious ceremonies, in particular the daily rites connected with the domestic sacred **fire**, and the life-cycle rites known as the **samskaras**. The latter rites span the time before **birth** to the memorial **offerings** after death and are still observed by many pious Hindus, although the rites have been modified over time. In theory, a Grhya **Sutra** should be one part of a **Kalpa Sutra**, which should also contain prescriptions for Vedic rituals (**Shrauta Sutras**) and for appropriate human behavior (**Dharma Sutras**). In reality this doesn't always seem to be the case, since aside from the three complete surviving **Kalpa Sutras**, there are at least six other Grhya Sutras, indicating that these texts were composed independently. See also **Veda**.

## Guardians of the Directions

A collection of eight **deities**, each associated with one of the four cardinal and intermediate directions. In their traditional order, the deities are as follows: **Indra** for the east; **Agni** for the southeast; **Yama** for the south; **Nirriti** for the southwest; **Varuna** for the west; **Vayu** for the northwest; **Kubera** for the north; and **Shiva** for the northeast. Most of these are deities who were important in the **Vedas**, the earliest Hindu religious texts. Except for Shiva, they were replaced as traditions changed and have become minor deities in modern

Hindu religious life. These eight deities protect the directions with which they are associated. Each direction also carries certain associations because of its presiding deity. For example, south is generally considered an inauspicious direction because it is associated with Yama, the god of death.

## Gudimallam Linga

A particular **linga**, or symbolic form of the god **Shiva**. It is reliably dated from the second century B.C.E. and is arguably the oldest existing Hindu image. It is named after the place in which it is found, the village of Gudimallam, which is in the southeastern corner of the state of **Andhra Pradesh**, near the border with **Tamil Nadu**. Despite its venerable age, the linga is still enshrined in its original temple and remains an object of **worship**. The linga itself is a five-foot pillar of polished stone, which bears a four-foot-high carving of Shiva on its front side. The sculptural work is quite detailed and shows several surprising features. Shiva's **hair** is woven into a turban-like shape, rather than in the usual matted locks. Shiva has only two arms, rather than the multiple arms one commonly finds in later images. He carries a ram in his arms, rather than a **deer**—the only **sculpture** in which a ram appears. Finally, the figure of Shiva has no **sacred thread** (yajnopavit), which became commonplace later. The linga is also notable for the detailed work at the top of the pillar, which exactly models the head of an erect penis. This is also a departure from later iconography, in which the top of the linga is usually smoothly rounded. Although linga worship should be interpreted symbolically as an homage to the power behind the universe, the object's form is clearly phallic.
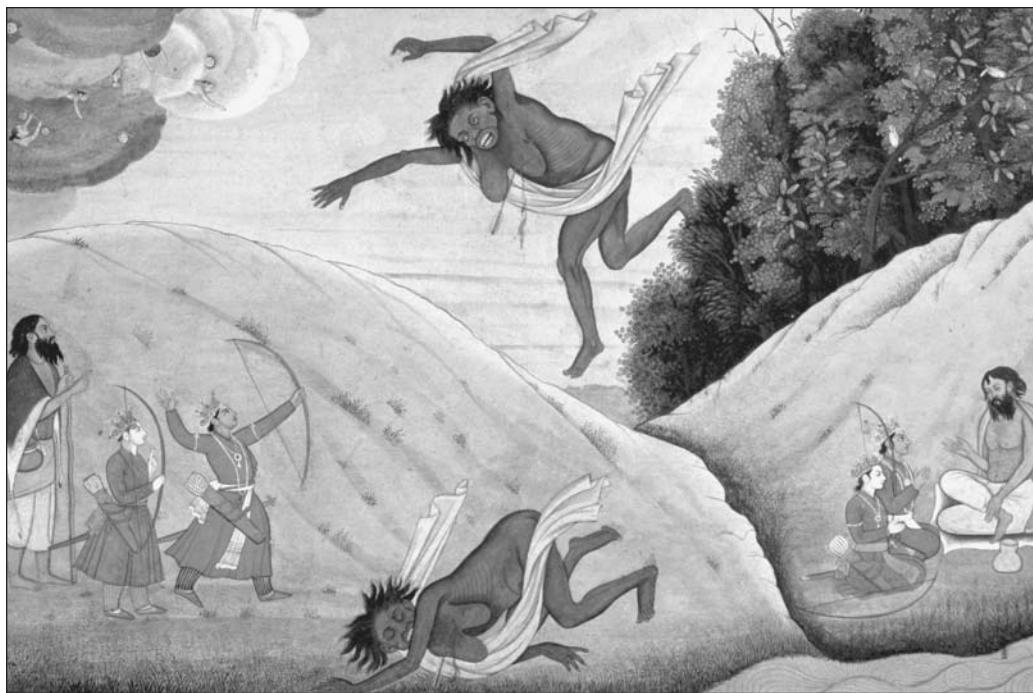
## Guha

In the **_Ramayana_**, the earlier of the two great Indian epics, Guha is the king of the Nishadas, a tribe who lived on the banks of the **Ganges** River. When the god **Rama** goes into exile with his wife **Sita** and his younger brother **Lakshmana**, they pass through Guha's kingdom. Guha arranges for a boat to take them to the other side of the Ganges and personally conveys the three over to the other side. Although Guha is of very low social status, his humble services are accepted because of his sincere devotion to Rama. In the _Ramayana_ of **Tulsidas**, a later vernacular rendition of the _Ramayana_ that emphasizes the power of devotion, Guha symbolizes how sincere devotion can transcend all social boundaries.

## Gujarat

Modern Indian state, located on the Arabian Sea at the border with Pakistan. Gujarat is one of the so-called linguistic states formed after Indian independence to unite government people with a common language and culture (in this case, **Gujarati**). It was formed in 1960 by splitting what was Bombay into the present states of Gujarat and **Maharashtra**. Gujarat's presence by the sea has given the area a long history as a trading center, beginning as the port of **Lothal** in the **Indus Valley civilization**, one of the earliest, highly developed urban cultures.

Most of the Indians who migrated to Kenya, Uganda, and other parts of East Africa are Gujaratis; substantial numbers of Gujaratis have migrated to the United Kingdom and the United States, especially New York City. Gujarat is also famous as the birthplace of **Mohandas Gandhi**. The **Sabarmati Ashram** near the city of Ahmedabad in Gujarat was his home base during much of the struggle for independence. Gujarat is also famous for several prominent holy places:

Guler was the birthplace of the Pahari style of miniature painting.
This Pahari painting depicts the god Rama killing a female demon.

**Dwaraka**, which is the site of **Krishna's** mythical kingdom, as well as the location of the **Sharada math** of the **Dashanami Sanyasis** religious community; **Somnath**, which is one of the twelve sites where **Shiva**, in his first manifestation as the **jyotirlinga**, came to **earth**; and **Girnar**, which is famous as a dwelling-place for **ascetics**. For general information about Gujarat and all the regions of India, an accessible reference is Christine Nivin et al., *India*. 8th ed., Lonely Planet, 1998.

## Gujarati

One of the five southern **brahmin** communities (**Pancha Dravida**); the other four are the **Maharashtris**, **Karnatas**, **Andhras**, and **Dravidas**. As their name indicates, the core region for Gujarati brahmins is the modern state of **Gujarat**.

## Gujjar

In traditional northern Indian society, the Gujjars were a **jati** whose hereditary occupation was herding cattle, buffalo, and other livestock. Jatis were **endogamous** subgroups in traditional Indian society that were organized (and their social status determined) by the group's hereditary occupation.

## Guler

Historical site in the **Shiwalik hills**, the foothills of the Himalaya Mountains. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries these hills were the home to many small kingdoms, which served as important sites for the development of arts and culture. In Guler, the **Pahari** style of **miniature painting** first appeared in its developed form. The developed Pahari style differs from the earlier **Rajasthani** style in its emphasis on more linear drawing—perhaps influenced by

European art—and a more restrained use of color, both of which tend to give the paintings a more lyrical feel.

## Guna

("quality") A fundamental concept that originated in the **Samkhya** philosophical school, but has become one of the key ideas in the Hindu worldview. The word *guna* literally means "strand," and by extension a "quality," of which there are believed to be three: **sattva** ("goodness"), **rajas** ("passion"), and **tamas** ("darkness"). According to the Samkhyas, in the time before the **evolution** of **prakrti** (primal matter), these three qualities were in perfect equilibrium. As mental activity began to disturb the balance, prakrti evolved into the subjective self and the objective world. All things and beings in the world have these three basic qualities, but their nature and tendencies differ according to the differing proportions. The quality sattva is always positive and carries associations with goodness, truth, wholesomeness, health, cognitive thought, and deep-rooted religious life. The quality tamas is always negative and is associated with darkness, ignorance, sloth, spoilage, and death. Rajas can be either positive or negative, depending on the context. It is negative when one becomes a slave to one's passions, blinding one to careful and conscious thought. However, one's passions can also help to engender activity and industriousness. Although much of Samkhya metaphysics has been long discredited, the notion of all things drawing their tendencies from the differing proportion of these three gunas has become an accepted part of Indian culture.

## Gupta Dynasty

(ca. 350–550) Northern Indian dynasty whose ancestral homeland was in the lower **Ganges** River basin. The Gupta capital was initially at **Pataliputra**, identified with the city of Patna in the modern state of **Bihar**, but was later moved to the city of **Allahabad**, which lies at the confluence of the Ganges and **Yamuna** rivers. At its zenith under **Chandra Gupta II**, the Guptas controlled all of northern India and modern Pakistan, as well as the eastern **Coromandel** Coast all the way south to modern Madras. The Gupta reign is associated with an efflorescence of Indian culture, and with the revival of Hinduism in northern India. The force behind both of these trends was the royal patronage of the Gupta kings. According to tradition, one of their court poets was **Kalidasa**, who is considered the greatest **Sanskrit** poet. The Guptas are also characterized as ardent devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva**, a devotion they displayed through temple building and religious endowments. Aside from Chandra Gupta II, the dynasty's most famous rulers were his father **Samudra Gupta** and his grandfather **Chandra Gupta I**.

## Guptakashi

("hidden **Kashi**") Village and sacred site (**tirtha**) in the **Himalaya** Mountains of the state of **Uttar Pradesh**. Guptakashi is located on the **Mandakini** River, one of the Himalayan tributaries that combine to create the **Ganges** River. The site's charter myth is connected to the **Pandavas**, the five brothers who are the protagonists of the epic *Mahabharata*. According to local legend, the **Pandavas** went to **Benares** (also known as Kashi) seeking an audience with the god **Shiva**, but Shiva slipped away and hid in Guptakashi. Guptakashi's two holiest sites are temples to Shiva. At one of these temples, Shiva is worshiped in his form as **Vishvanath**, the "Lord of the Universe," who is the presiding **deity** at the most important temple in Benares. The other is dedicated to his form as **Ardhanarishvara**, in which the left side of the image has female form, dress, and ornamentation, whereas the right side is male. The local claim that Guptakashi is a "hidden" Kashi shows the fluidity of the Indian sacred landscape, in which

the sacredness of one place can be appropriated by another. This is a way to claim some of the splendor of Kashi as a sacred site and to attribute power to a much smaller and more remote site.

## Gurjara-Pratihara Dynasty

(7th–11th c.) Northern Indian dynasty that filled the political void created by the collapse of the **Pushyabhuti dynasty** late in the seventh century. Like the Pushyabhutis, the Gurjara-Pratiharas initially had their capital at the city of **Kanyakubja**, on the **Ganges** River in eastern part of the state of **Uttar Pradesh**. At its peak early in the eighth century, the Gurjara-Pratiharas controlled most of the Indian subcontinent north of the **Vindhya Mountains**, and the Ganges basin well into **West Bengal**. The dynasty was weakened when the kingdom split in two in the mid-eighth century, with the Gurjaras reigning over the kingdom's western part from their capital at **Ujjain** and the Pratiharas remaining in Kanyakubja. Both kingdoms were engaged in constant warfare with the **Rashtrakuta** dynasty, which controlled central India south of the Vindhya Mountains; they were also harassed by Muslim raiders from modern day Afghanistan. The Gurjara kingdom was conquered by the **Chandella dynasty** in 1019 and became restricted to the lower Ganges basin. It finally disappeared about 1050 C.E.

## Guru

("heavy") In its most commonly accepted meaning, a guru is a spiritual teacher or religious mentor; in an extended sense the word can refer to any teacher. The term is often used in the arts, where the relationship between master and disciple is still a vital part of learning. The relationship between guru and disciple (**shishya**) is one of the most fundamental and enduring facets of Hinduism and is the accepted model for the transmission of religious teaching, tradition, and authority. Aside from transmitting knowledge, the guru-disciple connection also assumes a close and trusting relationship. The guru takes responsibility for the disciple's development, based on an assessment of the disciple's strengths, inclinations, and capacities, while the disciple faithfully follows the guru's direction. The literal meaning of the word guru is "heavy," indicating the impression they have on the lives of their students—weighty and marked. As a guiding presence, a guru is considered indispensable for true spiritual attainment. This is particularly true of secret traditions such as **tantra**, in which the guru's transmission of authority gives the disciple the necessary **adhikara** or "qualifications" for practice.

## Guru

(2) **Sanskrit** term for the **planet Jupiter**. It is called Guru ("heavy") because it is considered the heaviest and most important planet in one's horoscope.

## Guru Maharaj Ji

(b. 1957) Modern religious teacher and founder of the Divine Light Mission. In the early 1970s, Guru Maharaj Ji enjoyed phenomenal but fleeting success during a tour of the United States. Maharaj was the fourth **son** of Hans Ji Maharaj, a respected religious figure who founded the Prem Nagar **Ashram** in **Haridwar**, a sacred city on the **Ganges** River in the state of **Uttar Pradesh**. Maharaj's father died when he was eight, after which his mother announced that Maharaj had inherited his father's mantle. As with many modern Hindu missionary figures, Maharaj's religious message stressed the need for devotion to an enlightened master, which he claimed to be. At fourteen, he came to the United States to considerable success. It quickly dissipated when he and his mother disagreed over his lifestyle and his marriage to an American woman. He later reconciled with his family, but not before his mother had named his eldest brother Satpal as successor to the family line.

## Guru Purnima

Religious holiday falling on the **full moon** (**purnima**) in the **lunar month** of **Ashadh** (June–July). Guru Purnima is a day of respect and reverence to one's **guru**, a word that has historically indicated a religious preceptor, but is used now for any teacher, adviser, or mentor. In the **dharma literature**, a young man is to spend his adolescence as a member of his guru's household, receiving room, board, and instruction. In return he renders to his guru obedience and loyalty. On Guru Purnima, a guru's students are directed to enshrine and **worship** their guru as a **deity**, giving their guru gifts and fees, according to their means. Modern Hindus celebrate this day in various ways, depending on the type of guru they have. Although some religious preceptors are enshrined and worshiped, this practice is not always performed. However, modern Hindus still celebrate this day by paying particular honor and homage to their teachers. This day falls on the full moon, which is associated with completion and perfection—the same qualities that gurus are considered to have. This day is also known as **Vyas** Purnima, since the sage **Vyasa** was renowned as a great guru.

## Gurutalpaga

("going to the **guru's** bed") In the **dharma literature**, which outlined rules for religious duty and appropriate behavior, Gurutalpaga was one of the **four great crimes** that made one an outcast from society. This particular offense was committed by having sexual relations with the wife of one's guru or religious teacher. Since the disciple is considered a member of the guru's family and must treat the guru with reverence and loyalty, this was obviously a serious breach of trust. Since these disciples are adolescent men and many of their gurus may have had wives much younger than themselves, such proximity could have easily generated serious temptation and required a strict prohibition to maintain appropriate relationships. The gravity of this offense can be seen by the penances prescribed for its expiation (**prayashchitta**). According to the dharma literature, the offender could either tear off his genitals, or embrace the red-hot statue of a woman while lying on a red-hot iron bed. In either case it was expected that this expiation would result in his death, although the texts always note that death blots out the offense.

## Guruvayur

Sacred site (**tirtha**) in the Thrussoor district in the southern Indian state of **Kerala**, a short distance inland from the Arabian Sea. Guruvayur is most famous for a temple to the god **Vishnu**, worshiped in his form as **Krishna**, and the temple's main image is of Krishna as a young boy just past toddler age. According to the temple's charter myth, the image at Guruvayur was originally at Krishna's mythic kingdom in the city of **Dwaraka**, on the Arabian Sea in the northern Indian state of **Gujarat**. When Dwaraka was destroyed by floods, the image was saved from destruction by **Guru**, the **planet Jupiter**, and **Vayu**, the god of **wind**. These two **deities** brought the image to Kerala, and in their honor the place was named Guruvayur. Guruvayur's mythic charter also describes the site's power to heal ailments such as rheumatism and leprosy. This healing power is a great attraction in modern times, not only for people with rheumatism, skin diseases, and other afflictions, but also for childless **women** seeking children and pregnant women seeking an easy delivery and a happy child.

## Gyan Vapi

("well of knowledge") A well that is the sole part of the original **Vishvanath** temple in the city of **Benares**. The temple's name refers to the god **Shiva** in his form as Vishvanath, "Lord of the Universe," and was one of the most sacred Hindu sites in medieval India. In 1669 the armies of the Moghul emperor

**Aurangzeb** razed the temple and built a mosque in its place. Although the temple's destruction is usually portrayed as an act of Muslim iconoclasm, according to Gyan Vapi's account, Aurangzeb may have also intended it as a political message to punish local rebellion. According to local legend, the image of Shiva as Vishvanath was thrown into the well to protect it from desecration, and it remains there to this day.

## Gyan Vapi, Battle of

Battle reportedly fought in **Benares** by the **Naga ascetic** warriors of the **Mahanirvani Akhara**. According to a handwritten book in the **akhara's** archives, in 1664 the akhara's soldiers won a great victory near the **Gyan Vapi** well. This document simply states that the **Sanyasis** were victorious against the forces of "the Sultan," although historians have inferred that this figure was the Moghul emperor **Aurangzeb**. If the story is true, this battle may have been a contributing factor in Aurangzeb's decision to raze the **Vishvanath** temple in 1669. In light of this claim, it is possible that the temple's destruction was motivated not simply by intolerant iconoclasm, but by the desire to inflict punishment for resistance and rebellion.

# H

## Hair

According to traditional Hindu notions regarding **purity** and impurity (**ashaucha**), head and facial hair trap and retain ritual impurity. In ordinary cases this impurity is removed by simple washing in running **water**, just as for the rest of the body. In cases of particularly violent impurity, such as that connected with death (**maranashaucha**), men will often conclude the period of impurity by completely **shaving** both their heads and beards. They may also have their nails cut, probably reflecting that conviction that any dispensable parts of the body should be removed as a way to get rid of any residual impurity.

Shaving the head is also the major feature in the **chudakarana**, the tonsure ceremony that marks the ritual conclusion of infancy to remove any residual impurities left from childbirth. Among adults such head shaving is usually restricted to men; **women** usually offer a token lock of hair as a symbol for the whole, although women may have their heads shaved to fulfill a religious vow. While shaving the head is fairly common, shaving the body hair is not—the **Sanskrit** language has different words for these two types of hair, and they are considered to be different things entirely.

## Hala

("plow") In Hindu iconography, the branch of study concerned with the representation of various figures, the hala is an ordinary Indian plow, which represents farming; it is also considered a weapon. The hala is most often associated with the **avatars** of the god **Vishnu**, but

the only figure who always bears it is **Krishna's** brother **Balarama**, for whom one of the epithets is **Haladhara** ("bearing a plow").

## Haladhara

("bearing a plow") Epithet of **Balarama**, elder brother to the god **Krishna**. Balarama was given this name because of his strong associations with farmers and farming, and also because he occasionally used the plow itself as a weapon.

On one occasion he is said to have menaced the **Yamuna River** with his plow when he was displeased with the course she was taking. This threat to dig a new channel for her induced the Yamuna her to change her course to one with which Balarama was happier.

## Halahala

In Hindu mythology, the name of the deadly poison produced when the gods and **demons** churn the Ocean of Milk. The gods and demons churn the ocean to produce **amrta**, the nectar of immortality. Yet their action produces not only the amrta, but also its antithesis, the halahala poison. This is an event of great peril, since if left unchecked this poison is so powerful that it will destroy the **earth**. The poison is neutralized by the god **Shiva**, who holds it in his throat without swallowing it. The poison turns his throat blue, hence one of his epithets is **Nilakanth**, "the blue-throated [one]." See also **Tortoise avatar**.

## Halebid

Village in the southern Indian state of **Karnataka**, about sixty miles northwest of the city of Mysore. As at its sister city, **Belur**, Halebid is known for a magnificent collection of temples from the **Hoysala dynasty**, who ruled western Karnataka from the eleventh to thirteenth centuries C.E. The most notable site at Halebid is the magnificent **Hoysaleshvar Temple**,

Ruins of the city of Hampi. These structures were once a part
of the capital of the powerful Vijayanagar empire.

dedicated to **Shiva** in his form as Lord of the Hoysalas.

At both Belur and Halebid, the temples were built from a particular type of stone—variously described as chlorite schist, steatite, or soapstone—that is quite soft when newly quarried, but gradually hardens with exposure to air. This initial malleability makes the stone easy to carve, and resulted in the lush detail characteristic of Hoysala temples.

Architecturally speaking, Hoysala temples have certain unique features: a central hall connecting three star-shaped sanctuaries, and temple towers (**shikharas**) composed of well-defined horizontal tiers, rather than the continuous upward sweep characteristic of the northern Indian **Nagara** architectural style.

## Hampi

Deserted city in central **Karnataka**, about 170 miles northwest of the state's capital, Bangalore. Hampi was the capital of the Vijayanagar empire (1336–1565 C.E.), which at its peak in the early sixteenth century controlled most of the Indian peninsula south of the **Narmada River**. The empire's wealth primarily stemmed from its control of the spice and cotton trade—both highly valuable commodities at the time—and the city of Hampi was built on a scale to reflect its importance. The empire came to an abrupt end after the battle of **Talikota** in 1565, when the last Vijayanagar king, Rama Raja, was defeated by a coalition of Muslim sultans from further north in the **Deccan**. The city was sacked by the invading sultans, and has been deserted ever since. See also **Vijayanagar dynasty**.

## Hamsa

The name for the Barheaded Goose (*Anser indicus*), a bird with several important symbolic associations; the most significant is **purity** and transcendence, since the bird's color is largely white. It flies at very high altitudes, and it is reputed to nest in Lake **Manasarovar** in the high **Himalayas**, the region believed to be the land of the gods. Since it is popularly believed to be able to separate milk and **water**—

drinking for former, and discarding the latter—the hamsa is also a symbol for a discriminating person, who is able to take counsel from many different people, and to separate the good from the bad.

Perhaps because of these associations, the hamsa is also the name for a particular type of Hindu **ascetic**. The Hamsa ascetics were described as peripatetic—they were directed to stay no more than one night in a village or five nights in a town. They were also directed to perform different sorts of ascetic practices, such as subsisting on **cow's** urine or dung, fasting (**upavasa**) for a month at a time, or observing the **chandrayana** rite, a fast in which one increases and decreases one's food consumption according to the waxing and waning of the **moon**.

## Hanuman

Monkey-headed Hindu god. Hanuman originally appears in the ***Ramayana,*** the earlier of the two great Indian epics, where he is described as a minister of the monkey king **Sugriva** and a devoted servant of **Rama**, the god-king who is the epic's protagonist. Despite Hanuman's seemingly minor place in the Hindu pantheon, he is an enormously popular **deity** in modern India, because he gives humans a god essentially like themselves (or as they would like to be) but on a greater scale and with greater capacity.

Hanuman is said to have been born of a union between the **wind**-god, **Vayu**, and the nymph **Anjana**. After his **birth** the infant Hanuman is continually hungry, and one day he attempts to eat the **sun**. **Indra**, the king of the gods and ruler of **heaven**, is incensed at Hanuman's action, and strikes the infant with a thunderbolt, breaking his jaw (hanu). Vayu becomes very angry upon learning of his **son's** injury and ceases to perform his usual activities. Since in Indian physiology winds are responsible for all internal functions—including digestion, respiration, and elimination—Vayu's
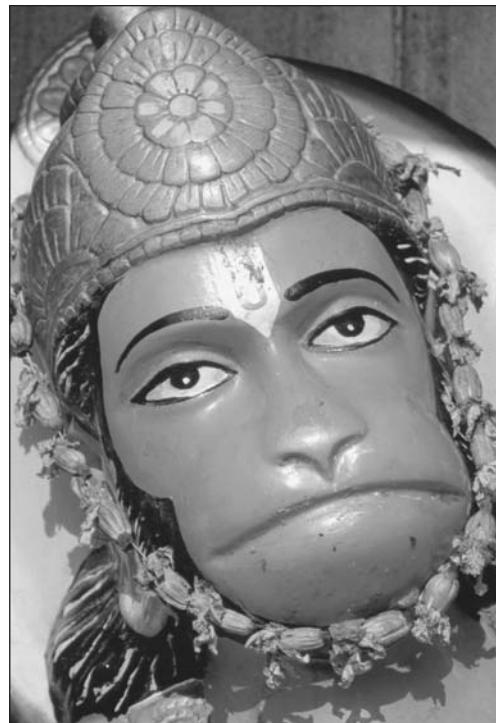


Image of Hanuman, a monkey-headed god who is a devoted servant of the god Rama. He plays a pivotal role in the Hindu epic the *Ramayana*.

strike means that no one can live a normal life. After a short time the gods realize their predicament and beg Vayu for forgiveness; he is placated when each of the gods promises to give Hanuman a divine gift.

By virtue of these divine gifts, Hanuman gains great powers. He is immensely strong, and his image portrays him with bulging muscles. He is also skilled as a healer, both through his skill with herbs and natural medicines, and his magical abilities to protect people from evil supernatural beings. Among his most unusual divine gifts are the power to live as long as he likes and to choose the time of his death.

His greatest virtue, and many would say the real source of his power, is his devotion (**bhakti**) to Rama. In the *Ramayana*, Hanuman plays a pivotal role in advancing the story. Hanuman is sent out with a troop of other monkeys to search for **Sita**, Rama's kidnapped wife, and after a long and arduous search finally finds her imprisoned in the kingdom of **Lanka**.

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Hanuman plays an even greater role in the ***Ramcharitmanas*** (a vernacular version of the *Ramayana* written by **Tulsidas**), in which he is transformed from a powerful monkey servant to the devotee (**bhakta**), whose only aim is to serve Rama with loving devotion. This devotion precludes any type of worldly attachment, including marriage and family, and Hanuman remains a model for a religious lifestyle stressing celibate **asceticism**. In Indian culture, **celibacy** is perceived as a source of power, since it prevents the loss of a man's vital forces that takes place with ejaculation.

Yet for Hanuman's devotees, his greatest virtue is not his strength, but his ability to act as an intermediary to Rama, who is usually perceived as far more remote from human affairs. Because Hanuman is also a devotee, people feel an affinity and kinship with him, even though his powers are far greater than theirs. In fact, they believe that messages conveyed by Hanuman have a better chance of reaching Rama's presence and getting action. In a text aptly named the "Letter of Petition" (***Vinaya Patrika***), the poet-saint Tulsidas appoints Hanuman as his messenger, in the full confidence that his plea will be heard in the divine court. Hanuman's intimate access to **divine power**, his own undeniable strengths, and his perceived accessibility and sympathy have all combined to make him one of the most widely worshiped deities in India, and one who crosses sectarian boundaries.

Because of his service to Rama, he is usually counted as a **Vaishnava** or devotee of the **Vishnu**. Yet in an interesting twist, Hanuman is also considered to be an **avatar** or "incarnation" of the god **Shiva**, and is thus revered by the **Shaivites**, Shiva's devotees. As a protective deity, Hanuman is often worshiped on astrologically inauspicious days, to keep these inauspicious forces at bay. His prodigious strength, celibate lifestyle, and single-minded devotion have made him the patron deity of Indian wrestlers, who strive to imitate him as they train.

Finally, he plays an important role as a healer and sustainer. On one hand, he is famous as an exorcist, helping people get rid of evil spirits. On the other, he preserves life for those who know his special **mantra**, which gives them the power—as he had—to choose their time of death. Given his importance in modern Hindu life, Hanuman is only now receiving the attention he deserves. For more information see Sudhir Kakar, *Shamans*, *Mystics*, *and Doctors,* 1982.

## Hanuman Chalisa

("**Hanuman's** forty") Forty poetic stanzas in praise of the god Hanuman, written in **Hindi**. A signature line (**bhanita**) at the end of the text attributes it as written by the poet-saint **Tulsidas** (1532–1623), best known as the composer of the ***Ramcharitmanas***, a vernacular version of the epic ***Ramayana***.

Short texts like the *Hanuman Chalisa* are often sung as a devotional act, or as an established part of **worship**, and in many cases people can recite the text by heart. The text is written in the **chaupai meter**, the predominant meter in the *Ramcharitmanas*.

The text begins with a description of Hanuman's physical features, then relates his devotion to **Rama** and his heroic deeds in the *Ramayana*. The closing verses reiterate Hanuman's power, promise benefits as a result of the recitation of the verses, and reclaim Tulsidas's wish that Hanuman will reside in his heart.

## Hanuman Jayanti

Festival of the god **Hanuman's** birthday. In southern India, this is celebrated on the **full moon** in the **lunar month** of **Chaitra** (March–April), whereas in northern India it is more commonly celebrated on the fourteenth **day** of the dark (waning) half of the lunar month of **Kartik** (October–November). This latter date reflects the date of **Shivaratri**, the

most important festival of **Shiva**, which is celebrated on the fourteenth day of the waning half of the month **Phalgun** (usually in February). The two festivals are associated because Hanuman is sometimes deemed an **avatar** or "incarnation" of Shiva, come to **earth** to serve the god-king **Rama**.

Although Hanuman's primary mythic importance is as a faithful and powerful servant of Rama, in everyday religious life Hanuman is a very important **deity**, with a wide following. His birthday has no prescribed celebrations, but usually his devotees (**bhakta**) often mark it with **worship**, festive processions, and devotional reading of religious texts, particularly the *Hanuman Chalisa* and the *Ramayana*.

## Hara

("taking away," "Destroyer") Epithet of the god **Shiva**. See **Shiva**.

## Harappa

Ancient city and archeological site on the Ravi River in Pakistan, about one hundred miles southwest of the modern city of Lahore. Harappa is one of the cities of the **Indus Valley civilization**, a highly developed urban culture that flourished in the Indus Valley region between the fourth and third millennia B.C.E. Harappa and **Mohenjo-Daro** have been the most extensively excavated of these cities, although archeological work is proceeding in some of the others, and the similarities between these different cities have revealed a great deal about this civilization's material culture.

## Hare Krishnas

Colloquial name for the International Society for **Krishna** Consciousness (**ISKCON**). See **ISKCON**.

## Hari

(probably derived from the **Sanskrit** verb *hr*, "taking away [evil]") Epithet of the god **Vishnu**, particularly in his **avatar** or "incarnation" as the god **Krishna**. See **Vishnu** and **Krishna**.

## Haridasa

(ca. late 16th c.) Poet, singer, and devotee (**bhakta**) of the god **Krishna**, who founded the sect known as the Haridasis. According to tradition, Haridasa was the teacher of Tansen, the consummate musician at the court of the Moghul emperor **Akbar**. Most of the songs of Haridasa describe the love between **Radha** and Krishna. See also **Moghul dynasty**.

## Haridwar

Sacred city (**tirtha**) on the **Ganges** River about 140 miles northeast of Delhi. Haridwar is one of India's **Seven Sacred Cities**. Dying in one of these cities is believed to ensure the final liberation of one's soul. It is located on the edge of the **Shiwalik Hills**, the foothills to the **Himalayas**, and is the place where the Ganges is believed to leave the mountains and enter the northern Indian plain. As with all the places where the Ganges makes some natural transition, Haridwar is considered especially holy, and has been a pilgrimage destination since at least the sixth century, when the Chinese pilgrim **Hsuan Tsang** reported enormous pilgrim crowds.

Haridwar's primary importance is as a bathing (**snana**) place, and it draws large crowds on festival days. For centuries it has been an important site for performing **asthi-visarjana**, the last of the funerary rites (**antyeshthi samskara**), in which the ashes of the deceased are immersed in the Ganges. Haridwar is also important as the gateway to the pilgrimage sites in the **Garhwal** region of the Himalayas, and during the pilgrim season (April–October) it serves as an important transit and supply point to places farther up in the mountains.

Finally, Haridwar has a long history as a dwelling place for ascetics. It is a major center for several **ascetic** groups,

Crowds gather in Haridwar to bathe in the Ganges River.

particularly the **Naga** class of the **Dashanami Sanyasis**, trader-soldiers who are devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva**. It also serves as the winter quarters for many ascetics who spend their summers in the Himalayas. The presence of so many ascetics has had a profound effect on the city's general character, both in the hundreds of **ashrams** that are spread throughout the city, and in the prohibitions on the sale of eggs, meat, and **liquor**.

## Harihara

(early 14th c.) The founder of the Vijayanagar ("city of victory") empire, established in 1336, which ruled over much of southern India for the following two centuries. The empire took its name from the capital city that Harihara built near the city of **Hampi** in the modern state of **Karnataka**.

As a boy, Harihara was captured by soldiers of the Bahmani sultanate to the north, and had converted to Islam in captivity, which rendered him an outcast in the eyes of traditional Hindus. As a man, Harihara was sent to regain the southern region for the sultanate, but instead used the opportunity to establish his own kingdom. After gaining power, Harihara reconverted to Hinduism, despite having become an outcast through his acceptance of Islam. His example not only shows the fluidity of religious identity in early medieval India, but also Hindu pragmatism in relation to the ruling powers. Although Harihara had earlier become an outcast, his power as ruler gave him the authority to reconvert without orthodox opposition. See also **Vijayanagar dynasty**.

## Harihara

(2) A **deity** seen as a combination of the gods Hari (**Vishnu**) and Hara (**Shiva**). Behind this hybrid deity lay the conviction that both of these divinities were differing manifestations of the same **divine power**.

This underlying unity was represented in several different ways. One way was to create a figure whose right half had the attributes of Shiva, and whose left half had those of Vishnu. Another method, found most often in modern poster art, is to display both Vishnu and Shiva in their full forms, riding on their respective animal vehicles. Vishnu's **elephant** and Shiva's **bull** are conjoined at the

head, in a way that one can discern the heads of both **animals**, but only one can be perceived at any given moment. Both the elephant-bull and the divided figure show that Vishnu and Shiva are manifestations of the same divine energy, and that the particular deity one perceives depends on one's perspective at the moment. The joint Harihara figure presents an important religious truth, but this idea is far too abstract to become popular or widespread. In their everyday religious lives people have tended to **worship** one or the other of these deities, rather than their idealized union.

## Harijan

("child of God") Name used by **Mohandas Gandhi** (1869–1948) to designate those social groups formerly known as **untouchables**. The name reflected Gandhi's conviction that these people were human beings like any others, and thus children of God.

Unfortunately, the word *harijan* can also carry a pejorative sense in modern India. It is used for any child whose father is unknown—with the child's paternity ascribed to God—and is thus a euphemism for "bastard." In modern times, the people whom Gandhi called Harijans prefer to used the name **dalit** ("oppressed"), since they feel that this more accurately describes their social status.

## Hariray

(mid-17th c.) A noted disciple of **Gokulnath** (1551–1640 C.E.), the third **guru** of the **Pushti Marg**, a religious community founded by his grandfather **Vallabhacharya**.

Aside from being a disciple, Hariray is considered Gokulnath's scribe. He is the commentator on a text called the ***Chaurasi Vaishnavan ki Varta*** ("Account of eighty-four Vaishnavas"), and probably compiled the text itself under Gokulnath's direction. This text describes the lives of eighty-four **Vaishnavas**, or devotees (**bhakta**), of the god **Vishnu**, all associates and disciples of Gokulnath's father **Vitthalnath** or his grandfather Vallabhacharya. The text's real purpose is not to provide biographies of these figures, but to illustrate the importance of the Pushti Marg and its leaders. Besides the *Chaurasi Vaishnavan ki Varta*, a number of poems are also attributed to Hariray, but these may be the work of a later figure.

## Harishchandra

In Hindu mythology, a king who is famous for his truthfulness and integrity. In modern Hindu culture, he has become the symbol for someone who patiently endures undeserved suffering.

Harishchandra's suffering is a result of the long-standing feud between the sages **Vasishtha**—his family priest—and **Vishvamitra**. When Vasishtha praises the virtue of Harishchandra, Vishvamitra becomes determined to prove him wrong. Disguised as an old **brahmin**, Vishvamitra conjures up an imaginary **son** using his magical powers and gets Harishchandra to promise that he will give whatever is necessary for the boy's wedding.

When the time comes to redeem this promise, Vishvamitra demands Harishchandra's kingdom. Vishvamitra expects that the king will balk at this demand, but Harishchandra immediately fulfills it. Vishvamitra then remarks that when giving a gift to a brahmin it is customary to give a gift of money (**dakshina**) and demands a large sum. To raise this amount, Harishchandra first sells his wife (**Chandramati**) and son into slavery and finally sells himself to an outcast, who puts him to work burning bodies at the **cremation ground**.

After enduring these miseries for some time, Harishchandra's son is bitten by a snake and dies. When Chandramati brings the body to be burned, he does not recognize her. He refuses to cremate the boy until the cremation fee is paid, since this will

cheat his master of his rightful income. Chandramati has no money for the fee, and after listening to her lamentations Harishchandra recognizes her and becomes doubly miserable. The couple finally decides that **suicide** is their only escape from their misery and make a pyre on which to burn themselves. When Harishchandra is about to light the pyre, the gods appear before them, praising his righteousness and his commitment to his word, and Harishchandra's outcast master is revealed as **dharma** ("righteousness") incarnate. Harishchandra's son is restored to life, his kingdom is restored back to him, and everyone lives happily ever after.

## Harivamsh

(d. 1552) Poet, singer, and founder of the **Radhavallabh** religious community, which is based on the figure of **Radha**. Initially portrayed as the god **Krishna's** human consort, she was later considered his adulterous mistress. The Radhavallabh community took a very different perspective, stressing Radha's nature as a **deity**, her equality and identity with Krishna, and her status as his lawful wife. The Radhavallabhs focused on the love (hit) of Radha for Krishna, and because of this emphasis the poet is also known as "Hit Harivamsh."

Harivamsh's poetry treats many of the traditional themes found in Krishna devotionalism, but from the perspective of a female companion (**sakhi**). He compiled a collection of eighty-four poems known as the *Hit-chaurasi*, which are notable both for their highly Sanskritized language and for their incorporation of the **alamkara** ("poetic ornamentation") tradition of earlier **Sanskrit** poetry. For further information see Charles S. J. White, *The Caurasi Pad of Sri Hit Harivams*, 1977.

## Harivamsha

("lineage of Hari") A text traditionally considered to be an appendix to the *Mahabharata*, the later of the two great Hindu epics. The *Harivamsha* is one of the important **puranas**, which describe the mythology of the Hindu **deities**, as well as many other facets of popular Hindu life.

In particular, the *Harivamsha* is devoted to the mythology of the god **Krishna** (also known as Hari). It is especially important for the traditional stories connected with Krishna's childhood in the **Braj** region, for which it is the earliest identifiable source. The episodes described in the *Harivamsha* are further developed in the ***Bhagavata Purana***, a later work that is considered the most influential text for the cult of Krishna.

## Harsha

(r. 606–647) Ruler in the Pushyabhuti line, a dynasty whose capital was the city of **Kanyakubja** in eastern **Uttar Pradesh**. Harsha is generally considered the greatest Pushyabhuti ruler; he controlled a large part of northern India and to some extent restored the glory of the **Gupta dynasty** (350–550).

Historically, Harsha's reign is well-documented, in part by the Chinese pilgrim **Hsuan Tsang**, whose account gives invaluable information about Indian life at that time. Harsha was an able and energetic ruler who spent much of his later life evaluating the condition of his empire. He was also a cultured and literate man—he was the author of three **Sanskrit** plays—whose court was graced by significant literary figures, especially the playwright **Bana**. After his death, his kingdom quickly disintegrated when he died without an heir. See also **Pushyabhuti dynasty**.

## Harshacharita

("The Deeds of **Harsha**") A drama written by the playwright **Bana** (7th c.), which chronicles the emperor Harsha's rise to power. Bana was a member of Harsha's court, and thus a contemporary; his tale contains some evident exaggeration, but also a great deal of

historical detail. Bana was a careful observer, and the detailed descriptions in the *Harshacharita* give significant information about courtly and everyday life in his times.

## Hartalika Teej
Hindu **women's** festival also known as **Teej**. See **Teej**.

## Haryana
Modern Indian state that surrounds Delhi, the nation's capital, in every direction but the east. Haryana is one of the so-called linguistic states formed after Indian independence, to unite people with a common language and culture (in this case, **Hindi**) under one state government. Haryana was created in 1966, from the Hindi-speaking regions of the former **Punjab** state. It has traditionally been an important agricultural region, since the land is fertile and productive, but more recently it has also benefited from the attempt to create "satellite cities" around Delhi, in order to spread out the development in the capital region. These efforts have greatly raised the land values in the areas closest to the capital. Aside from this localized land boom, Haryana is a largely rural state.

Haryana's major religious sites, which are right next to one another, are **Kurukshetra** and **Thanesar**. The former is cited as the battleground for the war described in the epic *Mahabharata*; the latter is named as the place that the god **Shiva** was worshiped by the **Pandavas**, the *Mahabharata*'s protagonists.

From a true historical perspective, the level plains around the town of Panipat have seen three decisive battles that influenced the course of Indian history. In 1526, Babar, a central Asian monarch who had been displaced from his own homeland in Afghanistan, crushed the Lodis to end the Lodi dynasty and establish his own **Moghul dynasty**. In 1556 Babar's grandson **Akbar** decimated the Sur dynasty, which

had temporarily occupied the Moghul capitals at Delhi and Agra, and thus reestablished Moghul rule. In 1761 an invading Afghan army defeated the **Marathas**, ending the period of Maratha territorial expansion. For more information, an accessible reference is Christine Nivin et al., *India*. 8th ed., Lonely Planet, 1998.

## Hashish
See **charas**.

## Hasta
("hand") In Indian **dance**, **sculpture**, and ritual, a hasta is a particular hand position. In some cases, this hand position may have symbolic meaning, as in **varada** hasta or the "gift-giving" **gesture**; in other cases the hasta's name may simply describe the shape of the hand, as in **kataka** hasta, in which the tips of the fingers are loosely joined to the thumb. In the context of dance, all of these gestures have been given multiple symbolic meanings, and the dancer can use these gestures to tell a story through her gestures.

There is some overlap in meaning between the words hasta and **mudra** ("seal"), which are both used to describe hand gestures, and the two are sometimes used interchangeably. Of the two, mudras tend to be more strictly defined, and to be far more stylized than hastas. They stress the positions of the fingers, rather than of the entire hand; the fingers are always in very specific positions. Mudras always have very specific symbolic meanings.

## Hastinapur
Archeological site about sixty miles northeast of Delhi. This site has yielded pottery and other artifacts believed to be from the ninth to sixth centuries B.C.E., which would make them contemporary with the latest parts of the **Vedas**, the earliest Hindu religious texts. In the *Mahabharata*, the later of the two great Hindu epics, Hastinapur is the capital of

the **Kauravas**, a group of one hundred brothers who are the epic's antagonists. Although the name of the site and the place named in the epic matches, nothing has been found to provide a connection between these two.

## Hatha Yoga

System of religious discipline (**yoga**) based on a series of bodily postures known as **asanas**. Practicing this yoga is widely believed to provide various physical benefits, including increased bodily flexibility and the ability to heal chronic ailments. Yet in the **Yoga Sutras** written by **Patanjali**, the earliest systematic treatment of yoga, these asanas are only one part of an eight-step program that also includes such practices as breathing exercises and meditation. The purpose of hatha yoga is to train and strengthen the body so that the practitioner can sit comfortably in meditation. Although Hatha yoga's emphasis is on the body, it assumes a spiritual and religious context that in contemporary times has often been either evaded or ignored—leading some Hindus to disparage such yoga as simply a technique to develop better sexual control.

A more esoteric meaning of hatha yoga comes from the **Nathpanthi ascetics**, who understand hatha yoga as referring to processes in the **subtle body**. The subtle body is an alternate physiological system believed to reside on a different plane of existence than the actual body, but with certain correspondences to the actual body. It is visualized as a set of six psychic centers (**chakras**) running roughly along the course of the spine; above and below these centers are found the two divine principles, **Shiva** (awareness) and **Shakti** (power), the latter as the latent spiritual energy known as **kundalini**. The aspirant aims to combine kundalini with the Shiva principle at the crown of the head; through this union, the physical body will become immortal.

According to the Nathpanthis, the phoneme *ha* refers to the **sun**, a symbol for Shakti, and the phoneme *tha* to the **moon**, which is a symbol of Shiva. Hatha yoga is interpreted as the union of the sun and moon—that is, these two centers of power are believed to exist in the subtle body.

## Heavens

In Hinduism, there are believed to be many additional planes of existence besides the visible earthly realm. These other planes of existence include the heavens, which are realms of reward, pleasure, and enjoyment. Beings are born in heaven as a reward for their past good deeds, and the life of the gods living in these heavens is invariably described as long and pleasurable. Yet heaven is not permanent, and when one's karmic merit is exhausted and one's stay in heaven is done, one inevitably descends from heaven to take birth in a lower form.

In general, heaven is viewed as a distraction to serious religious life. Birth in heaven comes only through accumulating and expending an enormous amount of religious merit generated by past good deeds, and thus is a tremendous drain on one's accumulated spiritual resources. Furthermore, once one has been born in heaven, life is so easy and carefree that people generally feel no inclination to engage in religious life. For both reasons, life in heaven is considered a goal to which people should not aspire.

## Hedgewar, Dr. K. B.

(1889–1940) Founder and first supreme leader (sarsanghchalak) of the **Rashtriya Svayamsevak Sangh** (RSS), which he formed in the central Indian city of **Nagpur** in 1925. The RSS is a conservative Hindu organization formed for the express purpose of providing leadership for a revitalized Hindu India; for most of its history it has characterized its mission as cultural, rather than religious or political.

The character of Dr. Hedgewar and the RSS are inextricably linked to the turbulent years immediately after World War I, and the profound dislocation in Indian society that came with the struggle for independence. In his youth, Hedgewar had been involved in the independence movement, and for some time even supported **Mohandas Gandhi's** Congress Party. But by the early 1920s, he had become disillusioned with Gandhi's methods. He had also been deeply influenced by the Hindu nationalist **Vinayak Damodar Savarkar**, whose central thesis was that the Hindus were a nation, despite their profound regional, social, linguistic, and religious differences.

On the festival of Vijaya Dashami (**Dussehra**) in 1925, Hedgewar formed the RSS to help create this Hindu nation by unifying Hindus previously separated by divisions of **caste** and class. This date is highly significant, since according to popular Hindu belief any endeavor begun on Vijaya Dashami will invariably succeed. Hedgewar led the RSS until his death, fifteen years after the organization was founded.

Aside from training a leadership corps, the RSS was also formed to protect Hindu interests. On one level, it endeavored to do this by developing more assertive, tough members, and by training them to use traditional weapons such as the wooden staff. On quite another level, the RSS has a long history of charitable work with refugees and victims of natural disasters, and one of its missions is service to the Hindu community.

In either case the RSS has often been perceived as anti-Muslim—until 1977, non-Hindus were barred from being members—and many of its members view the Muslim community as aliens in India, if not actual enemies. Throughout his life, Hedgewar kept the RSS strictly aloof from politics, and his insistence that it was a cultural and character-building organization helped keep it from being banned by the British. Under its banner as a cultural organization, the RSS spread from the state of **Maharashtra** to other parts of India, aided in part by deteriorating Hindu-Muslim relations in the years prior to independence in 1947. For further information see Walter K. Andersen and Shridhar D. Damle, *The Brotherhood in Saffron*, 1987; Tapan Basu et al., *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags*, 1993; and Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*, 1996.

## Hells

In Hinduism there are believed to be many additional planes of existence besides the visible earthly realm. These alternate planes of existence include the hells, which are conceived of as places of punishment for one's past misdeeds.

Traditional Hindu accounts describe the hells in great detail, often linking particular sorts of punishments to particular sinful actions. Just as with **heavens**, life in a hell is ultimately an impermanent state, although the time of punishment is usually described as enormously long and incredibly painful. Still, when the time of punishment is done and one's bad deeds have been expiated, one will be reborn in a higher form.

Needless to say, **birth** in any of the hells is something to be avoided if at all possible, and for this reason people are urged to perform penances (**prayashchitta**) for their sins while they are still living, so that the consequences of these sins may not burden them in their next lives.

## Hemp

Colloquial name for *Cannibus indica*, more commonly known as marijuana. In earlier times the plant's long fibers were used in the manufacture of rope and cloth. In contemporary times it is mainly used for its narcotic properties, either by crushing and processing the leaves to make **bhang** or by collecting the plant's resins as hashish (**charas**).

The use of hemp as a narcotic is illegal, except for specific places and times, including certain pilgrimage sites and festivals. However, many ascetics continue to smoke hashish regularly.

## Hero-Stones

Monuments erected on the site where a person met a heroic death. These stones are known as **viragal**. See **viragal**.

## Hetu

("reason") In Indian **philosophy**, this is an important part of formulating an inference (**anumana**). In this context, the word has two differing meanings, one general, the other more obscure.

The accepted form for an inference has three terms: a hypothesis (**pratijna**), a reason (hetu), and examples (**drshtanta**); each of these three have their own constituent parts. In its most general sense, the word *hetu* refers to the reason or evidence that supports the assertion in the initial hypothesis. For example, the hypothesis that a mountain is on **fire** would be supported by the reason that there is smoke on the mountain.

In a narrower sense, hetu can also refer to the part of a reason that proves the hypothesis. For example, if one proves the statement "the mountain is on fire" with the reason "the mountain has smoke," the part of the reason that indicates that there is smoke is the hetu.

## Hetvabhasa

This is the term for a fallacious argument. For a valid inference (**anumana**), certain conditions must be met, or the inference will be invalid. The accepted form for an inference has three central terms: the first is a hypothesis (**pratijna**), which contains a subject class (**paksha**) and a thing to be proved (**sadhya**); the second is a reason (**hetu**) giving evidence for the hypothesis; and last come examples (**drshtanta**), which give further evidence for the hypothesis. In the stock example, the hypothesis that "there is **fire** on this mountain" is making a certain claim

(sadhya)—namely, that there is fire—about a certain class of things (paksha)—namely, this mountain. The inference's second part gives the reason (hetu) "because there is smoke on this mountain," which also makes a claim about the subject class—namely, this mountain.

One condition necessary for a valid inference is for the subject class to fall within the reason given, so that in all cases the reason would apply to it. The statement "there is fire on this mountain because there is smoke on that mountain" is an example where the subject class and the reason given are clearly separate.

Yet the most important condition for a valid inference is that the reason given must account for every case of the thing to be proved, such that it cannot be explained in any other way. This is known as pervasion (**vyapti**) and is a critical test for the hetu. For the Indian logicians, claiming that smoke implied the presence of fire was a valid inference, since smoke was always produced by fire.

On the other hand, the claim that fire implied the presence of smoke was invalid. This was because the logicians could name a case in which fire was not invariably accompanied by smoke, and thus failing this requirement of "pervasion"—the case of the red-hot iron ball, which was considered fiery, but not smoky. This counterexample is known as an **upadhi** ("obstruction"). It gives an example when one thing does not inevitably bring another, and thus shows that the hetu fails to pervade the sadhya, since there is a class of fiery things that do not smoke. For further information see Karl H. Potter (ed.), *Presuppositions of India's Philosophies*, 1972.

## Hijra

Name for a class of male transvestites, most of whom have undergone self-**castration** as a ritual renunciation of their sexuality. Hijras often serve as homosexual prostitutes, and they are an established feature of the decadent underside in most Indian cities. Their

Panorama of the Himalayas in Nepal. Hindus consider the Himalaya mountains sacred since they are believed to be home to the gods.

most important social function is to sing and **dance** at houses in which a male child has been born, although they may also be called to perform on other auspicious occasions.

Their ritual role in connection with births shows a strong association with fertility, and at any function their presence is believed to confer health and prosperity on the sponsoring family, for which the hijras will demand appropriate compensation. At the same time, the life of the hijras seems fraught with contrary notions: Although they are ritually associated with fertility, they are themselves sterile, and their sexuality is nonprocreative. Though they are associated with **auspiciousness** and prosperity, they are a socially marginal group with very low social status. For the only reliable study to date, see Serena Nanda, *Neither Man Nor Woman*, 1999.

## Himachal Pradesh

("Himalayan State") Modern Indian state located in the Himalayan region between the state **Jammu** and **Kashmir** and the kingdom of **Nepal**. Himachal Pradesh was created in 1966 when the former state of **Punjab** was divided into Punjab, **Haryana**, and Himachal Pradesh. As its name implies, Himachal Pradesh is a mountain state, with its lower regions in the **Shiwalik Hills** and its upper regions in the high **Himalayas**. Most of the state's people live in the long, fertile river valleys between the mountain ranges, and in the hot **season** its hill stations provide welcome relief from the scorching heat.

Himachal is the home for seven of the nine **Shiwalik goddesses**. These seven goddesses are all the presiding **deities** of a particular site, and some of them have become quite important in northern Indian religious life. Himachal Pradesh is also home to a spectacular **Dussehra** festival in the town of **Kulu**, at which all the gods in the Kulu Valley are brought to Kulu to honor the god **Rama** on his victory over the **demon**-king **Ravana**. For general information, an accessible reference is Christine Nivin et al., *India*. 8th ed., Lonely Planet, 1998.

## Himalaya

A minor **deity** who is the personified form of the Himalaya Mountains. Although the Himalaya Mountains are one of the defining features of the Indian subcontinent, the deity Himalaya has a very insignificant place in Indian mythology. His most important role is as the father of the **goddess Parvati**, who when she reaches maturity is married to the great god **Shiva**. Himalaya is described as exceedingly wealthy, because of the mineral riches that the mountains contain. See also **Himalayas**.

## Himalayas

("abode of the snow") Mountain range that arcs across the northern border of India, although the only Indian states with significant Himalayan regions are **Jammu** and **Kashmir**, **Himachal Pradesh**, **Uttar Pradesh**, and, further east, Sikkhim.

In a Hindu religious context, the Himalayan regions in the first three states are the most significant; the mountains in these three contiguous states are all part of an extended Himalayan cultural region, fronted by the **Shiwalik Hills**. They are considered sacred, both as the literal abode of the Hindu gods (in particular **Shiva**, who is believed to live on Mount **Kailas**) and also as the source of sacred rivers such as the **Ganges**, **Yamuna**, and **Indus**. These high mountains are also a traditional home for Hindu ascetics wishing to renounce the everyday world and search for personal spiritual realization; the physical hardships these **ascetics** must endure in the mountains are also believed to generate spiritual power.

Given their religious importance, the Himalayas are full of sacred sites (**tirthas**); among the most important are **Amarnath**, **Yamunotri**, **Gangotri**, **Kedarnath**, **Badrinath**, and **Nanda Devi**.

## Hindi

Modern Indian language classified as a member of the Indo-European language family; Hindi is the "official" language of the Republic of India. Hindi is spoken throughout most of northern and central India as a second or "link" language and as a "mother" tongue in much of the states of **Uttar Pradesh** and **Madhya Pradesh**. It is also one of the broadcast languages for the television and radio networks run by the Indian government and by virtue of these mediums can be found throughout the nation.

As with many of India's regional languages, Hindi has a long history as a literary language, particularly in an earlier version known as **Braj Bhasha**, which was the dominant language in which northern Indian devotional (**bhakti**) poetry was written. The slow demise of **Sanskrit** in contemporary times has helped make Hindi an important language for fiction, learned scholarship, and writing on Indian culture.

In modern India, speaking a certain language often carries political implications, since an important factor in preserving regional identities has been the stress on maintaining one's regional language. For this reason, many people are not about to let Hindi replace their regional languages. This sentiment is particularly marked in southern India, where the imposition of the Hindi language is decried as a new form of imperialism.

## Hindu Mahasabha

Hindu religious and political organization, formed at the 1915 **Kumbha Mela**, a gigantic religious festival. The Hindu Mahasabha was originally formed to help foster Hindu causes, such as a call for a complete ban on **cow slaughter**, promoting the use of the **Hindi** language in the **DevaNagari** script, and addressing the problem of **caste** discrimination.

In the early 1920s, the movement became more overtly political and by the early 1930s espoused an unabashed Hindu nationalism, exemplified by its leader, **Vinayak Damodar Savarkar**. The dark underside of this Hindu nationalist crusade was a pronounced animus toward Muslims, which was only strengthened by the deteriorating relations between the two communities in the years preceding World War II.

Although the Hindu Mahasabha was eager for official recognition by the ruling British government and sought to be recognized as the sole legitimate speaker for the Hindu community, these hopes were never realized. The British government included them in talks only after negotiations with the Indian National Congress Party had broken down, and cut relations with the Mahasabha after fences had been mended with the Congress.

After independence in 1947, the

party's image was damaged by its association with **Mohandas Gandhi's** assassin, **Nathuram Godse**. It continued to field political candidates until the early 1960s, but never gained significant political power. For further information see Kenneth W. Jones, "Politicized Hinduism: The Ideology and Program of the Hindu Mahasabha," in Robert D. Baird (ed.), *Religion in Modern India*, 1998.

## Hindutva

("Hindu-ness") An idea first propounded by the political activist **Vinayak Damodar Savarkar**. It first appeared in a pamphlet titled *Hindutva/Who is a Hindu?* and is the fundamental basis of modern Hindu nationalism.

Savarkar's thesis was that the Hindus were a nation, despite their sharp regional, cultural, linguistic, and religious differences; furthermore, he defined a Hindu as anyone who considered India both fatherland and holy land. This loose definition was broad enough to encompass all of the variety found in Indian Hindu culture. But it was also clearly reaching for the lowest common denominator. For most Indians, identity is invariably based on concrete regional, linguistic, or sectarian grounds, rather than an abstract notions of being "Hindu."

Yet it is important to note who this loose definition excludes—Muslims and Christians, India's most visible **minorities**, who are marginalized by virtue of their "alien" holy lands. By this definition, Hindus "belong" in India simply by virtue of who they are, whereas Muslims and Christians, no matter how long their families may have lived in India, are always considered to be outsiders.

Hindutva ideology is a fundamental assumption of the **Rashtriya Svayamsevak Sangh** (RSS), a contemporary conservative Hindu organization, and the organizations that are affiliated with the RSS, particularly the **Vishva Hindu Parishad**, and to a lesser extent the **Bharatiya Janata Party**. Hindutva ideals are also a prominent feature of parties such as the **Shiv Sena**, which combine Hindu and regional identity. For further information see Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*, 1996.

## Hinglaj

Sacred site (**tirtha**) located on the coast of the Arabian Sea in the Baluchistan Province of modern Pakistan. Hinglaj is one of the **Shakti Pithas**, a network of sites located throughout the subcontinent that are sacred to the **goddess Sati**. Each Shakti Pitha marks the site where a body part of the dismembered goddess fell to earth, and then took form as a different goddess; in the case of Hinglaj, the body part was the crown of Sati's head. Hinglaj is the furthest west of all the Shakti Pithas, and thus represents the furthest boundaries of the traditional Hindu cultural area.

The presiding goddess at Hinglaj is known by various names, the most common being Hinglaj Devi. She is considered an extremely powerful goddess—partly because of her dangerous location on the periphery of India, but also because the crown of the head (**brahmarandhra**) is considered the highest and most powerful part of the **subtle body**.

The subtle body is an alternate physiological system believed to reside on a different plane of existence than the actual body, but with certain correspondences to the actual body. It is visualized as a set of six psychic centers (**chakras**) running roughly along the course of the spine. Above and below these centers are found the two divine principles, **Shiva** (awareness) and **Shakti** (power)—the latter at the base of the spine, and former in the crown of the head.

Because of Hinglaj's association with mastery of the subtle body, a visit to her shrine was considered essential for anyone striving for perfection in **yoga**. By

the 1800s the area around her shrine had become completely dominated by Muslims and thus well outside the Hindu culture area. To travel outside of this area is to risk loss of one's Hindu identity. To counter the danger of traveling outside this area, it became traditional for **ascetics** who had gone there on pilgrimage to be branded with her symbol on their return to India, as a way to purify them and remake them as Hindus. The political tensions between India and Pakistan since their independence in 1947 have made it almost impossible for Hindu pilgrims to visit the shrine. For further information see George Weston Briggs, *Gorakhnath and the Kanphata Yogis*, 1973. See also **pitha**.

## Hiranyagarbha

One of the earliest Hindu cosmological myths. See **Golden Embryo**.

## Hiranyakashipu

In Hindu mythology, Hiranyakashipu is a **demon** king who is killed by the god **Vishnu**, in his **avatar** or incarnation as a **Man-Lion**. As a result of his harsh physical **asceticism**, Hiranyakashipu gains a series of **divine powers**, which render him virtually invulnerable: notable of these powers is that he cannot be killed by man or beast, by day or by night, and neither inside nor outdoors.

Protected by these powers, Hiranyakashipu first conquers the entire **earth** and then drives the gods from **heaven**, growing prouder and more oppressive as his power increases. He particularly oppresses his **son Prahlada**, who despite his father's power remains a sincere devotee (**bhakta**) of Vishnu. Incensed at the thought that someone refuses to **worship** him, Hiranyakashipu finally gives Prahlada the ultimatum to worship him or die.

Prahlada calls on Vishnu for help, and Vishnu appears in the form of a Man-Lion—a man from the torso down, with the head and shoulders of a lion—which is neither man nor beast. The Man-Lion seizes Hiranyakashipu in the palace doorway, which is neither inside nor out, at twilight, which is neither day nor night, and uses his sharp claws to tear out the demon's entrails, killing him. The story of Hiranyakashipu is meant to illustrate the danger of pride, and the mythic reality that no power, however powerful, can keep one from the consequences of one's evil deeds.

## Hiranyakeshin

(4th c. B.C.E.?) Sage, writer, and commentator, also considered a disciple of the writer **Apastamba**. Apastamba is the author of a type of text known as a **Kalpa Sutra**. He is only one of three authors, along with **Baudhayana** and **Hiranyakeshin**, whose surviving works contain all three elements prescribed for a Kalpa Sutra: prescriptions for Vedic rituals (**Shrauta Sutras**), for domestic rites (**Grhya Sutras**), and for appropriate human behavior (**Dharma Sutras**).

All three of these men belonged to the same school, the Taittiriya school of the **Black Yajur Veda**. According to tradition, Baudhayana was the oldest, Apastamba his disciple, and Hiranyakeshin Apastamba's disciple. This chronology is supported by the texts themselves, since Baudhayana's text is much less organized than the others, and more archaic in its language.

## Hiranyaksha

In Hindu mythology, Hiranyaksha is a **demon** king who is killed by the god **Vishnu**, in the latter's **avatar** or incarnation as a **Boar**. Hiranyaksha has performed harsh physical **ascetic** practice (**tapas**) and as result, gained various **divine powers**. He eventually grows so powerful and proud that he spirits away the **earth** herself, hiding her at the bottom of the cosmic ocean. It is at such times of cosmic crisis that Vishnu takes form on earth, to restore the equilibrium

of the cosmos through his actions. Vishnu takes the form of a giant boar and dives to the bottom of the ocean, where he slays Hiranyaksha, places the earth on the tip of his tusk, and lifts her from the waters. With the reappearance of the earth, the process of creation resumed. See also **Boar avatar**.

## Hitopadesha

("beneficial teaching") A well-known moralistic story that is drawn from *Panchatantra*, a set of moralistic fables aimed at conveying practical and worldly wisdom. The *Hitopadesha* was compiled in the twelfth century as an introductory reader to **Sanskrit**.

The frame story for the both of these texts describes a king who is distressed by his **sons'** lack of learning and good moral character; these doubts lead to grave misgivings about their abilities to be good and fair rulers after his death. He resolves this problem by hiring a teacher who teaches the boys using fables, often with several shorter fables embedded in a longer tale. The *Hitopadesha* was intended to give pragmatic advice about how to be successful in the real world and maintains that caution and self-interest are the keys to success in life.
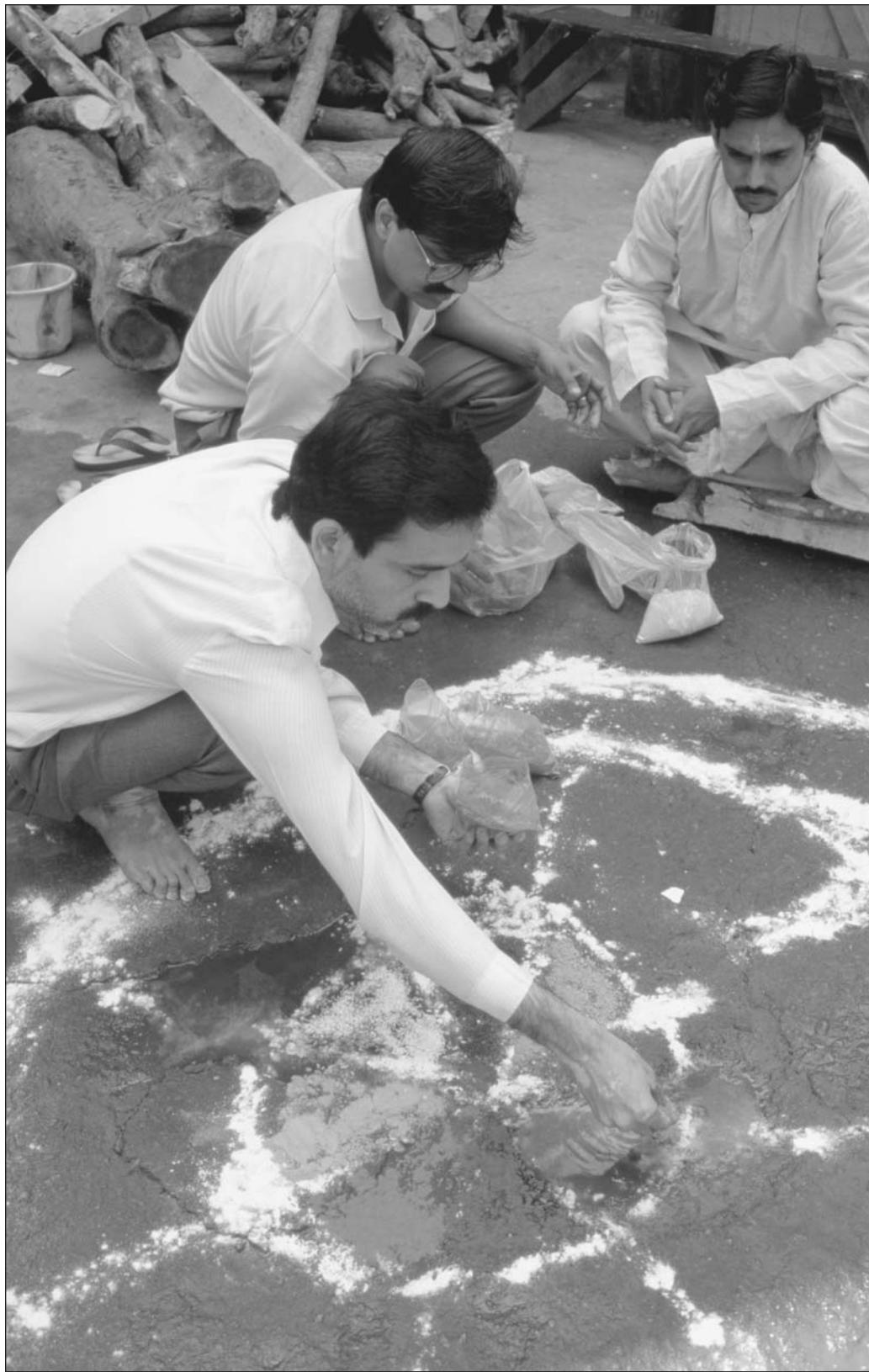
## Holi

Major religious festival celebrated on the **full moon** in the **lunar month** of **Phalgun** (February–March), which in northern India comes very close to the end of the lunar **year**. Holi is essentially a festival of reversal and is celebrated with great enthusiasm throughout much of India. As the lunar year's final major festival, the celebrations for Holi mirror the pattern of cosmic dissolution found in other units of time, whether the solar **day** or the basic unit of **cosmic time**, the **mahayuga**. In this pattern, the order in the cosmos steadily deteriorates until all order finally disappears, but after a certain time is suddenly, completely, and perfectly reformed.

The festival of Holi is celebrated in two parts: a bonfire on the evening before Holi, and the "festival of colors" on the morning of Holi itself. Material for the bonfire is collected in the weeks before Holi and although the things put on this bonfire pile are supposed to be old and worn-out (with the symbolism of getting rid of the old), much newer things are often put on it as well, and this is a time in which people guard their **possessions** carefully.

The days before Holi see the breakdown of various social taboos. In his *The Divine Hierarchy*, author Lawrence Babb reports the use of **obscenity** and bawdy discourse during this time, including stamping the word "penis" all over town using stamps carved from potatoes. As Holi gets closer, pranks such as pelting passersby with water balloons become more and more common. Such behavior is ultimately harmless, but is still completely unacceptable in ordinary times and symbolizes the coming cosmic dissolution. On the night of Holi, the bonfire is lit, symbolizing the destruction of the old, and people may direct obscenities toward the **fire** as a vehicle for getting rid of enmities from the previous year. Mythologically, the bonfire comes from the burning of the **demon Holika**, who tries to trick her brother **Prahlada** into being burned on a bonfire, but is herself consumed by the flames.

The morning after the bonfire is the high point of Holi, the "festival of colors." For weeks before Holi, the shops in the markets display mounds of powders in various colors, most commonly in vivid greens, reds, and purple; the colors are used as powder, or are mixed with water. People play with the colored water using syringes or balloons. In the gentlest type of play, each person takes a small pinch of colored powder and gently applies it to the other person's forehead. Needless to say, the play with colors can often become much rougher, with people smearing and soaking each other with colors, dyeing each other's clothing in multiple hues, and often staining the skin for weeks afterward.

The evening before the festival of Holi, men in Delhi arrange
colored powders to prepare the site for a bonfire.

This and all other Holi-related antics are always described as "play" (khel), and the operating assumption is that one cannot become angry with the people with whom one is playing, no matter how outrageous the behavior or how pointed the insults. The festival of Holi is the one day in the year when the boundaries of the usual social hierarchy are completely disregarded, along with the taboos on physical touching that are primarily based on the inherent concern for ritual **purity**. Another characteristic of Holi is that it is one of the few occasions when socially respectable people consume **bhang**, an intoxicating preparation made from ground-up marijuana.

The morning passes in a welter of noise, confusion, and color, with (at street level) absolutely no rules, symbolizing the chaos of cosmic dissolution. Yet in the afternoon, cosmic (and social) order are suddenly restored. People take baths, change into new clothes, and go out visiting without fear of being colored, and any person bold enough to pelt someone with dyes at this time is subject to severe disapproval.

In recent times, particularly in the larger cities, the license associated with Holi has been taken as an opportunity for all sorts of antisocial behavior: public drunkenness, molesting **women**, destroying property, and the chance to settle old grudges by physically harming people. The chaos is so intense that in larger cities many people stay in their houses on Holi, "playing" with members of their immediate family in the gentler spirit that is characterized as "true" Holi.

Given the threat to public order, the government has taken some action, but the very nature of the holiday makes it difficult to regulate—since it is a festival of reversal, the government is one more force to be disregarded on that morning. Various government agencies have also tried to discourage the practice of making bonfires, although here the concern stems from worries about deforestation rather than the breakdown of social order. For further information see McKim Marriot, "The Feast of Love," in Milton Singer (ed.), *Krishna: Myths, Rites, and Attitudes*, 1966; and Lawrence Babb, *The Divine Hierarchy*, 1975.

## Holika

In Hindu mythology, the wicked sister of the **demon**-king **Hiranyakashipu**. Holika helps Hiranyakashipu try to kill his son **Prahlada**, who is a steadfast devotee (**bhakta**) of the god **Vishnu**. Because of a **divine power**, she cannot be harmed by **fire**. She tricks Prahlada into sitting on her lap in a bonfire, expecting that she will be unharmed and he will die. Fortunately Vishnu transfers her power from Holika to Prahlada, and she is consumed by the fire, while he remains completely unscathed.

The myth of the burning of Holika is the model for the bonfires for the festival of **Holi**. On a mythic level, the bonfire symbolizes the triumph of good over evil; on another level, since the materials in the fire are supposed to be old and broken things, the bonfire symbolizes getting rid of one's baggage from the previous **year**, and starting anew.

## Holkar, Ahalya Bai

(r. 1761–1795) Hindu queen in the Holkar dynasty. The family ruled one of the successor states resulting from the breakup of the **Maratha** empire, whose capital was in the central Indian city of Indore.

She came to power at a time when the influence of the **Moghul dynasty** had been greatly reduced and moved to fill the political vacuum that this created. During her long reign she managed to wield genuine political power over much of north-central India. She also served as a highly visible royal patron at several Hindu pilgrimage sites, including **Benares**, where she funded the reconstruction of the **Vishvanath** temple, and **Haridwar**, where she is said to have paid for the construction of a **ghat**, which is a structure that leads to a sacred bathing (**snana**) area. For further

information see Govind S. Sardesai, *A New History of the Marathas*, 1986.

## Homa

In its most specific meaning, homa refers to the "**sacrifice** to the gods" (**devayajna**), which is one of the Five Great Sacrifices (**panchamahayajna**) prescribed in the **dharma literature**, or texts on religious duty. Homa refers to the act of making **offerings** of clarified butter into a sacrificial **fire**, a rite that is directed toward satisfying the gods. Today, the word homa is often used with a far more general meaning, to refer to any religious rite in which offerings are placed in the sacred fire.

## Homosexuality

Although homosexuality is not unknown in Indian culture, it has never had a very prominent presence. The ***Kama Sutra*** contains a brief account of homosexual oral sex and the classes of men who performed this, but it is little more than a passing mention.

In modern times, the male transvestites known as **hijras** often serve as homosexual prostitutes, and they are an accepted if marginal presence in Indian life.

Although according to the dominant Hindu ethos the search for pleasure—of any kind—is an **aim of life** (purushartha), other factors have channeled the expression of sexual desire in other directions, especially toward traditional marriage. One of these is the general desire for progeny, particularly **sons**; another is the notion of the family as the basic unit for social life. In addition, the traditional male concern with losing vitality through seminal emission is a reason to abstain from sexual relations. Finally, the cultural assumption that ultimate wisdom comes only when one has renounced all desires would have affected sexual desire of all kinds.

## Hookswinging

One of the more extreme vows performed by devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Skanda** during the annual pilgrimage at **Kataragama**, in the southern part of the island of **Sri Lanka**. This vow is performed in return for finding healing from physical ailments or deliverance from distress. Those keeping this vow inserted hooks into their back and thigh muscles; ropes are attached to these hooks, and the devotees are suspended over the heads of passersby.

These ardent devotees are reportedly rewarded for their suffering with a state of ecstasy in which they feel no pain and suffer no bleeding. In this state, they are also believed to be mouthpieces for the god Skanda, and other pilgrims seek their advice for every conceivable kind of problem. For further information see Paul Wirz, *Kataragama*: *The Holiest Place in Ceylon,* 1966; and Bryan Pfaffenberger, "The Kataragama Pilgrimage," in *Journal of Asian Studies,* Vol. 28, No. 2, 1979.

## Horoscope

See **natal horoscope**.

## Horse Sacrifice

See **ashvamedha**.

## Hotr

Type of priest mentioned in the **Brahmana** literature, one of the later strands in the sacred literature known as the **Vedas**. The Brahmanas largely functioned as manuals describing how to perform sacrificial rites—which primarily involved burning **offerings** in a sacred **fire**. These rites were so complex that they required specialized ritual technicians: the hotr, the **adhvaryum**, the **udgatr**, and **brahman**. Of these, the hotr was the sacrificial priest who recited the verses from the **Rg Veda** that were used in the **sacrifice**.

## House of Clay

Realm of punishment described in a verse in the **Rg Veda** (7.89), the earliest Hindu religious text. As described in this verse, the House of Clay is a place to which evildoers—particularly those guilty of speaking falsely—will be sent by the god **Varuna**, who is considered the guardian of righteousness and cosmic order (**rta**).

As its name indicates, the House of Clay is a gloomy and joyless place. What is notable in the original verse is the lack of any notion of reincarnation (**samsara**), which later became a central Indian assumption. At the time it was seen as an undesirable and permanent state after death.

## House of Lac

In the *Mahabharata*, the later of the two great Hindu epics, this is one of the stratagems through which the epic's antagonist, **Duryodhana**, tries to kill the five **Pandava** brothers, who are his cousins and the epic's protagonists. Duryodhana builds the Pandavas a magnificent palace, without telling them that it is constructed completely of lac, a highly flammable substance. After the Pandavas have settled into the palace, Duryodhana has his minions set it on **fire** in an effort to burn them alive. The Pandavas are saved by the sagacity of their uncle **Vidura**, who not only warns them of the danger, but has constructed an underground passage allowing them to escape from the house and a tunnel to convey them far away without being discovered. When the house is set afire, the Pandavas escape through the tunnel and for some time are safe from Duryodhana, since they are presumed to have died in the fire.

## Hoysala Dynasty

(11th–14th c.) Southern Indian dynasty that ranged over the southern part of the southern Indian state of **Karnataka**. The capital city was **Dorasamudra**, which is now called **Halebid**.



Sightseers at the Hoysaleshvar Temple in Halebid. The temple is known for the detailed and elaborate stone carvings that ornament its facade.

The Hoysalas were originally hill chiefs who were vassals to the **Chalukyas** (a central Indian dynasty that ruled from the seventh to eighth century C.E.), but who became independent in 1093. At their peak they ruled much of the states of Karnataka and northern **Tamil Nadu**, but by the beginning of the fourteenth century had seen their power decline. By the middle of the century, their kingdom had been annexed by the Sangamas, whose capital was at Vijayanagar.

The Hoysalas are most famous for the magnificent temples they constructed at the cities of **Belur** and Halebid, which are treasure-houses of medieval southern Indian **sculpture**.

## Hoysaleshvar Temple

Largest and most magnificent of the Hoysala temples at **Halebid**, the dynasty's capital city; the temple itself was built in 1141–1182. The Hoysaleshvar Temple is dedicated to the god **Shiva**, in his form as "Lord of the Hoysalas."

Hoysala temples were built from a particular type of stone—variously described as chlorite schist, steatite, or soapstone—that is quite soft when newly quarried, but gradually hardens with exposure to air. This initial

malleability makes the stone easy to carve and facilitated the lush detail characteristic of Hoysala temples. The Hoysaleshvar Temple is known for the quantity of lush detail, which surpasses other Hoysala temples. See also **Hoysala dynasty**.

## Hrshikesha

("Lord of the Senses") Epithet of the god **Vishnu**, particularly in his **avatar** or incarnation as the god **Krishna**. See **Vishnu** and **Krishna**.

## Hsuan Tsang

(605–664) Chinese Buddhist scholar and translator, whose account of his extended stay in India (629–645) provides one of the few reliable sources for Indian life in that period.

Hsuan Tsang's purpose in coming to India was to find reliable copies of the Buddhist scriptures, which had become severely garbled and corrupted during their transmission to China. He was a highly learned man and during his stay spent years studying in Buddhist educational institutions, particularly the Buddhist university at Nalanda. He traveled all over northern India and because of his piety and learning was honored by the kings he met, including the Emperor **Harsha**. For further information see his *Si-yuki: Buddhist Records of the Western World*, Samuel Beal (trans.), 1969.

## Huhu

In Hindu mythology, Huhu is a particular **gandharva**, or celestial musician. He has the misfortune to displease a Hindu sage, when his amorous **water** play with some celestial damsels breaks the sage's meditation. The sage curses Huhu to become a giant crocodile, and he remains in this state for many years. The crocodile preys on the creatures in the lake, and one day seizes the leg of a giant **elephant**. This elephant is really King **Indradyumna**, who has also assumed this form as the result of a **curse**. The elephant and the crocodile struggle for one thousand years, so evenly matched that neither can best the other. Huhu is finally released from his curse when the god **Vishnu** himself comes down from **heaven** and kills him. See also **Gajendramoksha**.

## Human Sacrifice

The practice of human sacrifice was uncommon in the history of Hindu religious life, but not unknown. One of the common mythic motifs in the **worship** of certain fierce and powerful **deities** is for devotees (**bhakta**) to offer their own heads to the **Goddess** as the ultimate sacrifice and act of devotion, but experts are uncertain how frequently this rite was performed. One mythic example of this is the **demon**-king **Ravana**, who cuts off nine of his ten heads before the god **Shiva** grants him **divine power**. The resolve to commit this action is also attributed to the Bengali saint **Ramakrishna**, although the goddess **Kali** intervened before he could carry it out.

The one place where human sacrifice was undoubtedly a regular practice was at the temple of the goddess **Kamakhya** in **Assam**. This temple is one of the **Shakti Pithas**, a network of sites sacred to the Goddess that spreads throughout the subcontinent. Each Shakti Pitha marks the site where a body part of the dismembered goddess **Sati** fell to **earth**, taking form there as a different goddess. In this case, the body part was Sati's vulva, and the presence of such a highly charged part of the female body made Kamakhya a very powerful goddess.

When the new temple was dedicated in 1565, she was reportedly offered the heads of 140 men, and this practice continued until the British halted it in 1832. The men offered as human sacrifices were reportedly volunteers, who believed that they had been called by her to do this; in the time between announcing their intention

to be sacrificed and their deaths they were treated as virtual divinities, since they were considered to have been consecrated to the goddess. For further information see E. A. Gait, *A History of Assam*, 1963. See also **pitha**.

## Humors, Bodily
See **tridosha**.

## Hundi
In earlier times, the name for a letter of credit issued from a mercantile house. By the early 1800s, these letters functioned as a virtual currency, since in some cases they would pass through twenty or thirty transactions before being returned for payment. Hundis are significant because they allowed families to transact business over large areas without having to actually carry large sums of money with them and thus helped to foster long distance trade.

In modern times, this is also the most common term for a temple collection box, where visitors deposit their **offerings**.

## Hygiene
Orthoprax Hindus (that is, Hindus who stress correct religious practice) lay great stress on cleanliness of their bodies and their immediate environment. Although to the outside eye this scrupulous attention would seem to indicate a concern for hygiene, these actions are performed primarily to protect and retain religious **purity**.

In many cases, concerns for hygiene and purity overlap, as in the pervasive practice of bathing (**snana**) and the regulations concerning bodily cleanliness. Both of these simultaneously remove dirt and impurity (**ashaucha**), but in other cases these concerns clearly diverge.

One example of this divergence is the way that household refuse is often simply put out in the street—a prac-tice that keeps the home pure and clean, but which fosters unhygienic conditions directly outside the home. Another example of this disjunction can be seen in the traditional use of **cow dung** as a purifying substance, or the way that the **Ganges** River is always considered pure, even in its lower reaches where it is full of sewage and industrial effluents. These examples clearly show that purity and hygiene are very different concepts and that, from a religious perspective, purity is by far the more important of the two.

## Hypergamous Marriage
A marriage in which the wife comes from a group with lower social status than the husband. Although the ideal Hindu marriage is between a man and woman of equal social status, hypergamous marriage was admitted as a possibility in the **dharma literature**, although it was not encouraged. In most cases, it was specified that a man's first wife should be of equal social status, but that he was then permitted to marry **women** of lower status.

In modern India, where the predominant form of marriage is still **arranged marriage**, most marriages are still between men and women of equal status. However, a hypergamous marriage is likely to generate less opposition than a hypogamous marriage, where a woman marries a man from a lower status group. In the dharma literature, hypergamous marriage was known as anuloma, "with the **hair**" (i.e., in the natural direction).

## Hypogamous Marriage
A marriage in which the wife comes from a group with higher social status than the husband. Such marriages were strictly forbidden in the **dharma literature**, and this prohibition illustrates the role of **women** in determining a group's social status.

It is deemed acceptable for women to marry people of higher social status (**hypergamous marriage**), because it is believed that they are improving the status of their group by becoming associated with a higher status group. Marriage to a man of lower status was strictly forbidden, since the exchange of women implies some sort of equality between the two groups, and thus drags the community's status down. In the dharma literature, hypogamous marriage was known as pratiloma, "against the **hair**" (i.e., in an unnatural direction). For further information see Jadunath Sarkar, *A History of the Dasanami Naga Sanyasis*, 1958.

# I

## Iconic Image
A pictorial or representational likeness of a **deity**, such as a statue or picture. This is in contrast with an **aniconic image**, in which there is no such representational image, and the connection between image and deity is symbolic.

## Ida Nadi
One of the vertical channels (**nadi**) in the traditional conceptions of the **subtle body**. The subtle body is an alternate physiological system believed to reside on a different plane of existence than the actual body, but with certain correspondences to it. It is visualized as a set of six psychic centers (**chakras**) running roughly along the course of the spine, connected by three parallel vertical channels. Above and below these centers are found **Shiva** (awareness) and **Shakti** (power), the latter as the latent spiritual energy known as **kundalini**.

The ida nadi is the vertical channel on the left side of the body. As with the rest of the subtle body, the ida nadi has certain symbolic correspondences; in particular, it is identified with the **moon** and is thus visualized as being light in color.

## Ikshvaku
In the **Ramayana**, the earlier of the two great Indian epics, Ikshvaku was a king who was the founder of the **Solar Line**. The Solar Line is one of the two great Indian mythic lineages in ancient India, along with the **Lunar Line**; the most illustrious members of the Solar Line were the god-king **Rama** and his brothers. Ikshvaku is the grandson of Vivasvan (**Surya**), the **sun**, and thus he and his offspring are descendants of the sun.

## Ilangovadigal
Poet traditionally named as the author of the **Tamil epic** poem **Shilappadigaram** ("The Jeweled Anklet"). The poem highlights several themes important to Hindu culture, particularly the need for kings to be righteous in their judgments, and the power gained by a wife through devotion to her husband.

The main characters in the poem are a young couple, Kannaki and Kovalan. When Kovalan is executed because of a tragic misunderstanding, his wife Kannaki pronounces a **curse** on the city of **Madurai**, which causes many of the citizens to die before Kannaki retracts it at the behest of Madurai's patron **goddess**.

Ilangovadigal is believed to have lived in the first or second century C.E., a date that makes his authorship improbable, since the poem was probably written several centuries later.

## Impalement
One of the favored means of execution that seems to have been particularly prevalent in ancient southern India. To impale someone is to kill them by piercing them with a sharp stake.

The most stunning instance is reported to have taken place in the city of **Madurai**, where 8,000 Jain **ascetics** were impaled by one of the kings in the **Pandya dynasty**, after the latter had renounced Jainism to become a **Shaiva**, that is, a devotee (**bhakta**) of **Shiva**. A tradition persists that the ultimate responsibility for this can be traced to the **Nayanar** saint **Sambandar**, who had converted the king and whose surviving poetry shows a deep animus for the Jains. If this report is true, it also indicates one of the rare cases of **religious persecution** in Hindu India, which on the whole has been remarkably tolerant of differing ways of religious life.

Depictions of this mass impalement can be seen in **murals** painted at the **Minakshi** temple in Madurai—whose construction far postdates the alleged event—as well as in popular art of different kinds.

## Impurity
See **ashaucha**.

## Inauspiciousness
This concept refers to events or conditions that in their very essence hinder or are inimical to life, prosperity, and general well-being. Along with **purity** and impurity (**ashaucha**), **auspiciousness** and inauspiciousness are fundamental categories in Hindu life.

Inauspicious conditions can be caused by a variety of factors. At times the inauspiciousness lies in the very moment itself—in an hour or **day** considered to be unlucky, in unusual events such as **eclipses**, or in astrological conjunctions that are considered inherently unlucky. In such "dangerous" times, one's activities should be severely curtailed, except for things that are absolutely necessary. Certain normally innocuous activities can become inauspicious in conjunction with particular times, and at these times such activities should be avoided.

Inauspiciousness can also arise from certain conjunctions in one's **natal horoscope**, or from erecting a home or building in an inappropriate place. As a quality, inauspiciousness is conceived of as a physical entity that is generated by certain conditions, and which then attaches to individuals, families, or larger communities.

Some of these inauspicious conditions can be avoided by refraining from certain activities at certain times, yet there are certain conditions that cannot be avoided—in particular, the inauspiciousness arising from eclipses or other astrological conjunctions. Whereas impurity (**ashaucha**) can be removed or destroyed through purification, inauspiciousness can only be transferred from one person to another, most often through the medium of gifts (**dana**). For more information see Gloria Goodwin Raheja, *The Poison in the Gift,* 1988; and David F. Pocock, "The Evil Eye," in T. N. Madan (ed.), *Religion in India*, 1991.

## Independence Day
Indian national holiday celebrated on August 15—one of the few holidays celebrated according to the solar **calendar**—which marks the date in 1947 on which India gained independence from Great Britain.

## Indigenous Aryan Theory
The theory that the **Aryans** were indigenous to the Indian subcontinent, rather than immigrants from other lands. The word Arya ("noble") is the name used for themselves by the people who composed the **Vedas**, the earliest Hindu religious texts.

Nineteenth-century European scholarship discovered structural relationships between **Sanskrit** and classical European languages and speculated that all these languages came from a common parent. Based on further analysis, these researchers hypothesized that people speaking this parent language originated in central Asia, somewhere near the Caspian Sea. From there, some went west to Europe, some went southwest to Turkey, and some went south toward Iran, and later to India. The conclusion that these Indian pilgrims came from Iran is based on comparisons between the Avesta and the Veda, the Iranian and Indian religious texts. These texts show broad linguistic similarities, and thus indicate that the people speaking the languages were closely related. This entire theory is thus based solely on the observed similarities between languages, and assumptions about how it changed.

Indigenous Aryan theory supporters reject this claim and maintain that the

Aryans are the original inhabitants of India, and as proof point to the artifacts found in the **Indus Valley civilization**, an ancient urban network in northeastern India. Both of these claims are highly tenuous and do not address the philological evidence behind the original Aryan theory. The Indigenous Aryan theory has political implications that have helped to spur its growth. Some supporters are reacting against the Aryan migration theory's perceived colonialist bias, since the theory was developed by Europeans and assumes that the dominant groups in modern India must have come from outside. Other supporters of this theory are the proponents of **Hindutva**, who claim that all Indians are "really" Hindus, and thus one social group, whatever their particular religious beliefs. This assertion has profound political implications in modern India, where Christians and Muslims are not only religious communities, but social and political ones. By connecting Hindu identity and good Indian citizenship, Hindutva proponents are marginalizing Christians and Muslims as outsiders.

## Indira Ekadashi

Festival falling on the eleventh **day** (**ekadashi**) of the dark (waning) half of the **lunar month** of **Ashvin** (September–October). As with all the eleventh-day observances, this is dedicated to the **worship** of **Vishnu**, on this day in his form as the **Shalagram**. Most Hindu festivals have certain prescribed rites, usually involving fasting (**upavasa**) and worship, and often promise specific benefits. This ekadashi falls during the **pitrpaksha**, the fortnight dedicated to the ancestors, and faithfully observing this festival day is believed to result in the rescue of millions of one's forebears from woeful incarnations and bring them rebirth in **heaven**. The name "Indira" is an epithet of **Lakshmi**, Vishnu's wife.



Depiction of the god Indra, king of heaven and one of the eight guardians of the earth.

## Indra

One of the oldest and most powerful Hindu **deities**. His status has changed over the years and this evolution shows how Hinduism has transformed.

In the earliest Hindu scriptures, the hymns in **Rg Veda**, Indra is the Vedic deity *par excellence*. As with most Vedic deities, Indra is associated with certain natural phenomena, in this case the power of the storm; he was seen as inhabiting the region (**antariksha**) between the **earth** and sky, the region where storms take place. In many ways Indra seems a paradigm for the virtues and powers celebrated in the Vedas, and (as many have inferred) celebrated as virtues by the Aryans themselves. Indra is the invincible warrior and the performer of great deeds.

One of the central hymns in the Rg Veda (1.32) describes Indra's battle with the serpent **Vrtra**, who is finally killed and cut into pieces, allowing the pent-up waters that Vrtra has blocked to flow freely over the land.

Indra is a drinker of the intoxicating beverage **soma**, whose influence leads him to expanded reveries on his own greatness; he is the ultimate man's man in a culture that is usually believed to have stressed manly virtues. Of the 1,028 hymns in the Rg Veda, nearly a quarter are devoted to Indra, who is described as the power encircling the earth.

Some of Indra's attributes and functions remain constant as the Hindu tradition changed and developed. In later Hindu mythology, Indra's realm is still the atmospheric region between the earth and sky, and he is still considered the god of the storm, the bestower of rain, and the wielder of the divine thunderbolt. Indra is also one of the eight **Guardians of the Directions**, holding sway over the eastern quarter.

Yet some things about Indra changed around the first millennium; most importantly, Indra has been "demoted" to being merely the ruler of the heavenly realms and the king of the gods. Far from being the supreme, unchallenged power in the universe, his position is much more precarious, for he is seen as affected by the workings of **karma**. Indra is actually subject to replacement when he is spiritually exhausted or when a challenger on earth grows spiritually strong enough to unseat him. Many of the stories in the classical **Sanskrit** texts have their plot advanced by Indra's throne becoming hot (a sign that a human being is gaining the power to replace Indra), and with Indra taking some action to counter this threat. In cases where the challenger is a celibate **ascetic**, whose source of power is the power of renunciation, Indra usually dispatches an **apsara** (divine nymph) whose heavenly charms can seduce the ascetic and by destroying his **celibacy** destroy his power as well. In other cases the threat can come from people completing one hundred great sacrifices; here Indra somehow forestalls the hundredth **sacrifice**, as he does by stealing the sacred horse of King **Sagar**. Indra is the lord and ruler of the gods, but his position can only be retained by keeping a sharp eye on all possible threats.

This loss of "divine" position is seen by the way Indra is portrayed in certain mythic tales. In the story of **Ahalya** he is portrayed as a lecher and an adulterer, seducing Ahalya by assuming the form of her husband, the sage **Gautama**. When Gautama discovers what has happened, he curses Indra to have a thousand vulvas on his body, although the **curse** is later modified to give Indra a thousand eyes. Indra's helplessness before his own lust and his inability to withstand Gautama's curse are sure signs that his divine position has slipped.

Although he is still regarded as the bestower of rain and the wielder of the thunderbolt, another indication of his diminished power can be seen in his encounter with the adolescent god **Krishna**. When Krishna persuades the village elders to cease making **offerings** to Indra, the latter sends torrential rains that threaten to destroy the village. In the face of this threat, Krishna calmly lifts Mount **Govardhan**, and for seven days and nights holds it over their heads to block the rain. Although Indra expends all his strength, he is unable to prevail against the adolescent Krishna, clearly demonstrating where the real divinity lies.

In the *Mahabharata*, the later of the two great Hindu epics, Indra is revealed to be the divine father of **Arjuna**, one of the five **Pandava** brothers who are the epic's protagonists. Arjuna shares his father's strengths and weaknesses; he is heroic and gallant, the archetypal warrior who relishes the clash of battle and is unceasing in defense of his personal and family honor. He can also be selfish, egocentric, and boorish, and has many extramarital liaisons, some of which produce offspring. Both are wonderful warriors, if that is what is needed at the time, but they lack other qualities to make them productive in times of peace. This story of Indra and Arjuna is further evidence that Indra has fallen from the most important deity to a minor one who is not an object of **worship**.

## Indradyumna

In Hindu mythology, a righteous king who is a great devotee (**bhakta**) of the god **Vishnu**. He has been cursed to become a giant **elephant** by the sage

**Agastya**, who becomes angry when the king, deep in meditation, fails to greet the sage with proper respect. After much pleading, Agastya decrees that the **curse** will be broken when Vishnu touches the elephant on the back. As a result of this curse, Indradyumna roams the **earth** as an elephant for many years.

On one occasion when he is drinking at a lake, his hind leg is seized by a giant crocodile. The crocodile is actually a **gandharva** or celestial musician named **Huhu**, whom another sage had cursed to become a crocodile. Their struggle lasts for a thousand years, with the elephant unable to get free, and the crocodile unable to overpower the elephant. Finally Vishnu himself appears, kills the crocodile, and restores Indradyumna to his previous form. The release of Indradyumna from both the curse and the crocodile is known as **Gajendramoksha**, the "release of the elephant king."

## Indrajit

("Conqueror of **Indra**") In the *Ramayana*, the earlier of the two great Indian epics, Indrajit is the **son** of the **demon**-king **Ravana** by his wife **Mandodari**. In some later versions of the *Ramayana*, he is portrayed as the son of the god **Shiva** himself, born after his mother had married Ravana. Like his father, Indrajit is a great devotee (**bhakta**) of Shiva, and because of his devotion Shiva teaches Indrajit how to make himself invisible. For a warrior, this power is obviously very valuable, and through it Indrajit is able to conquer Indra's heavenly realm and take Indra as a prisoner back to **Lanka**, hence his name.

The god **Brahma** goes to Lanka, the kingdom of Ravana, to arrange for Indra's release, in return for which Indrajit demands physical immortality. When he is told that this is impossible, Indrajit requests a different power—that when he performs a certain **sacrifice** he will receive horses and a chariot so that he can kill whatever enemy he faces, and while in the chariot he cannot be killed.

When the god-king **Rama** and allies are storming Lanka, in an effort to regain Rama's kidnapped wife **Sita**, Indrajit begins to perform this sacrifice. Warned about this danger by Brahma, Rama sends his brother **Lakshmana** to interrupt it. Lakshmana successfully disrupts the sacrifice, and in the ensuing battle kills Indrajit.

## Indrani

(Feminine form of **Indra**) The wife of the god Indra, the ruler of **heaven**. Perhaps reflecting Indra's diminished status in later Hindu mythology, Indrani is not a prominent figure. Her only important role is as an object of desire in the story of **Nahusha**, who through his meritorious deeds has displaced Indra as the king of heaven. Nahusha assumes that he is entitled to Indrani as well as Indra's throne, and makes advances toward her. For his hubris, the sage **Agastya** curses Nahusha to be reborn as a giant serpent.

## Indraprastha

The name given to the earliest of the cities built on the site now occupied by modern Delhi; Indraprastha was built on the banks of the **Yamuna River**, in the southeastern part of modern Delhi.

In the *Mahabharata*, the later of the two great Hindu epics, Indraprastha is named as the capital of the **Pandavas**, the five brothers who are the epic's protagonists. According to the epic, the city is built after their uncle, King **Dhrtarashtra**, has divided his kingdom between the Pandavas and his own **sons**, the **Kauravas**.

Although the epic is replete with descriptions of Indraprastha, there is little hard connection between the archeological site and events described in the epic.

## Indus

River whose source lies in the high **Himalayas**, but which flows through

Pakistan for most of its length. The Indus is traditionally considered one of the seven sacred rivers of India—the others are the **Ganges**, **Yamuna**, **Godavari**, **Saraswati**, **Narmada**, and **Cauvery**—although in modern times this has diminished, especially since the creation of Pakistan in 1947 rendered it inaccessible to most Hindus.

Despite its diminished religious significance, the Indus remains important from a historical perspective, since many archeological sites from the **Indus Valley civilization** have been discovered on its banks.

## Indus Valley Art

Despite the plethora of artifacts that have been recovered from the cities of the **Indus Valley civilization**, objects that could be interpreted as works of art are surprisingly sparse. No traces of decoration have been found inside or outside the buildings, nor has any monumental **architecture** been discovered.

The art objects that have been found in **Harappa**, a city on the Ravi River in Pakistan, have all been on a smaller scale: several stone statues of male torsos, the head and torso of a bearded man, a copper statue of a young woman naked except for bangles and jewelry (said to be a "dancer," because her arms and legs are lifted), statues of **women** with elaborate headdresses believed to be icons for a Mother **Goddess** cult, and the images of plants, **animals**, and humans carved on the **Indus Valley Seals**. The latter show delicate and quite realistic work, indicating a great deal of skill in working the stone, as well as the ability to make realistic figural images.

## Indus Valley Civilization

(3000–2000 B.C.E.) An ancient and highly developed urban culture, so named because the first two sites discovered, **Mohenjo-Daro** and **Harappa**, both lie on the **Indus** River in what is now Pakistan. Further searching has uncovered other sites along much of the Indus, as well as a web of settlements stretching east to the upper **Ganges** basin, south through the modern state of **Gujarat** and into modern **Maharashtra**, and along the coast of modern Pakistan. The greatest concentration of these settlements has been found along the banks of the Ghaggar River, a small and seasonal watercourse that runs through the state of **Rajasthan**. Some historians claim that it is the bed of the ancient **Saraswati River**. Evidence from the sites seems to indicate that the sites further to the south developed later, but remained vital after the cities in the Indus River Valley, particularly Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, had fallen into oblivion. The discovery of these sites in the early twentieth century prompted significant historical revision, since before then it had been generally assumed that the people known as the **Aryans** were the earliest developed culture in India.

The most striking feature of these cities is their uniformity—their general city plan was nearly identical from place to place (although they differed in scale), the bricks used throughout all the cities were exactly the same size, and there was a standardized set of weights and measures. Each of the cities also had a large central granary, which stored the grain necessary to feed such a sizable urban population. Such evident uniformity over such long distances bears clear witness to a strong and centralized government, which some analysts have speculated was religious in nature.

Another striking feature of all the cities was an advanced sanitation system. All the houses had channels for **water**, and an elaborate network of drains and sewers ran throughout the city, even in those sections where the houses were the smallest, and people presumably the poorest. Mohenjo-Daro also has a great tank built of brick and sealed with pitch, which the archaeologists have dubbed the "Great **Bath**." Why were the people who built these cities so concerned with sanitation and bathing?

Ruins in Mohenjo-Daro. These structures are some of the earliest discovered evidence of the Indus Valley civilization, a society believed to have emerged around 3000 B.C.E.

Some experts believe this reflected religious concern for ritual **purity**, rather than hygiene.

Many of the artifacts from these cities are remarkably well preserved, and give us a fairly comprehensive picture of their material culture: what they ate (wheat and barley were the primary food grains), what they wore (cotton), which **animals** they had domesticated (cattle, fowl, goats, sheep, pigs, donkeys, and dogs), and the implements of everyday life.

Archeological excavations have also found more than 2,000 small seals, which are assumed to have served as the insignia for mercantile families. Many of the seals bear writing, although it has never been deciphered, as well as realistic pictures of animals and human beings. Three of the seals display a horned figure sitting with his upper legs splayed and his heels touching one another. Some viewers have cited the figure on these seals as proof that the Indus Valley culture is the ultimate source for the god **Shiva**, a figure who does not appear in the **Vedas**, the earliest Hindu religious texts, but who later becomes one of the primary Hindu **deities**. In the same way, recovery of several statues of **women** with grossly exaggerated female characteristics—breasts, buttocks, and genitalia—have prompted others to claim that this culture was the source for the later Hindu cult of the Mother **Goddess**.

One of the controversies connected with the Indus Valley culture is what people were living there and whether their descendants still live in India. The generally accepted theory among Western scholars describes a period of contact between the people in these cities and a

pastoral group of outsiders called the Aryans. The language of the Aryans, **Sanskrit**, shows certain structural relationships with classical European languages and even closer connections to the Avesta, religious texts of ancient Iran. Based on an analysis of the relationships between these languages and the rate at which these languages have changed, scholars have inferred that all these languages came from a common mother language, and that people speaking this parent language originated in central Asia, somewhere near the Caspian Sea. From there, some went west to Europe, some went southwest to Turkey, and some went south toward Iran, and later to India. This entire theory is thus based almost solely on the observed similarities between languages and assumptions about the rate of linguistic change—some of which are necessarily arbitrary.

The one piece of material evidence for this theory comes in the remains of horses found at the Indus Valley sites. The horse was an established part of Aryan life, according to references based on the Aryan religious texts, the Vedas, whereas it seems to have been absent from the Indus Valley cities—it is not portrayed on any of the carved seals, which show many other animals, and the only bones that have been recovered from the Indus Valley cities are found in the most recent archeological strata. This theory describes a period of contact and possible conflict between the Aryans and Indus Valley peoples, after which the Aryan culture and religion became the dominant force in Indian life. The Indus Valley cities were completely forgotten until they were excavated in the early twentieth century.

The Aryan migration theory accounts for the dissemination of various languages, but is not universally accepted. Many modern Indians subscribe to the **Indigenous Aryan** (IA) **theory**, which contends that the Aryans are the original inhabitants of India, and as proof points to the artifacts found in the Indus Valley civilization. Some IA supporters are

reacting against the Aryan migration theory's perceived colonialist bias, since the theory was developed by Europeans and assumes that the dominant groups in modern India must have come from outside. Other supporters are the proponents of **Hindutva**, who identify being Hindu with being an Indian. The IA theory allows Hindutva proponents to claim that all Indians are "really" Hindus and thus one social group, whatever their particular religious beliefs. This assertion has profound political implications in modern India, where Christians and Muslims are not only religious communities, but social and political ones. By connecting Hindu identity and good Indian citizenship, Hindutva proponents are marginalizing Christians and Muslims as outsiders.

Such claims are intriguing, but there is slim evidence for them. The real truth is that researchers have recovered lots of material objects, but what these things mean is open to interpretation. At the very least, we know that this culture flourished for about a thousand years. Its final collapse—because of a prolonged drought, according to one theory—took place around 2000 B.C.E. For further information see Walter Ashlin Fairservis, *The Roots of Ancient India,* 1975.

## Indus Valley Religion

Although some experts have made definitive claims about the religion of the **Indus Valley civilization**, it must be remembered that all these claims are highly speculative, since they are solely based on the remains from the cities. Artifacts such as grains, animal bones, traces of fabric, and building foundations give us a good basis for knowing about the material life of this culture—what people ate, what they wore, and the types of dwellings they lived in.

The notion of religion, however, is far more abstract. It is thus not only harder to infer what types of religion were practiced from the artifacts that have been

recovered, but these same artifacts can also be used as evidence for widely differing conclusions. The objects themselves are mute and can be interpreted in many ways. Still, among these objects are several artifacts that are intriguing.

Among the artifacts found at sites in the Indus Valley civilization have been ceramic female figures with grossly exaggerated female characteristics—breasts, buttocks, and genitalia. These figures strongly resemble the Bronze Age European image known as the "Venus of Willendorf," which has been associated with the **worship** of female fertility and procreative power. Given these similarities, it seems likely that a similar cult existed in the Indus Valley civilization. The statues give no indication of how widespread this cult was—whether it was related to fertility cults in other places or was simply a parallel development. There is no proof that this cult was the basis for the later Hindu worship of the **Goddess** as the supreme reality. Any such claims are making broader inferences from this limited material evidence—at best, such claims are highly speculative; at worst, they are irresponsible and driven by an underlying agenda.

The other intriguing artifacts from the Indus Valley civilization have come from seals, of which several hundred have been found. Many of the seals have pictures of **animals** or objects from everyday life, but three of the seals from **Harappa** bear the image of a horned figure sitting cross-legged on a small platform. Some viewers have described this figure as a "Proto-Shiva," since it has several features associated with the Hindu god **Shiva**—the sitting posture is associated with the practice of **yoga**, and the figure's horns indicate his form as Pashupati, the "Lord of Beasts."

Proponents of this theory point to the Indus Valley culture for the roots of Shiva, rightly noting that although Shiva becomes prominent in later Hinduism, he is virtually absent from the Vedic pantheon. Virtually the only place that Shiva appears is in the **Shvetashvatara Upanishad**, one of the latest of the mystical texts known as the **Upanishads**, which describes the god **Rudra**—later identified with Shiva—as the supreme power in the universe.

Although it is possible that the worship of Shiva lies in the Indus Valley culture, anyone not inclined to believe this at the outset will be hard-pressed to find this particular evidence persuasive. There is also mysterious writing on the seals, and if and when this writing is deciphered these relationships may become clearer. See also **Veda**.

## Indus Valley Seals

The most enigmatic objects from the **Indus Valley civilization** are small square or rectangular-shaped pieces of soapstone, which are believed to have been official seals for merchants and other individuals. Archaeologists have unearthed more than two thousand of these seals, which generally combine a pictorial image with an inscription. Most of the seal images are common domestic **animals**, particularly the **bull**, but a few portray mythical beasts such as a unicorn, or even more intriguing human figures. One well-known example of the latter shows a human figure—perhaps a mythic hero—strangling a **tiger** with each hand. Other figures include a horned man, in one case standing in front of a table and in another sitting in a **yoga**-like position. He is sometimes identified as an early form of the god **Shiva** and cited as evidence that this **deity's** cult came from the Indus Valley cities.

Far less is known about the seal **inscriptions**, since the writing system for these inscriptions has never been deciphered, although many different theories have been advanced. One reason for the disagreement is the division of opinion regarding the Indus Valley culture itself. Those who believe that Indus Valley culture preceded the arrival of the **Aryans**, and was distinct from it, tend to look for evidence in the **Dravidian** language family, which

is linguistically distinct from the Indo-Aryan language family. Those who espouse the **Indigenous Aryan** view, which identifies the Indus Valley culture with that of the Aryans, tend to seek their evidence in the earliest **Sanskrit** texts known as the **Vedas**.

None of these theories have proved irrefutable, and part of the difficulty in deciphering this script comes from the inscriptions themselves. Linguists have identified 419 different symbols, which seems too many for the script to be alphabetic, but too few for each of these symbols to stand for a single word, as is the case in Chinese. The seals' small size also means that these inscriptions tend to be extremely short. Such brevity makes the text difficult to understand, since one lacks the contextual patterns that a longer text would supply. In their efforts to decode these inscriptions, linguists are working with a series of short and unrelated textual fragments. The script could probably be definitively deciphered with the discovery of a bilingual inscription, but in the absence of such a key, the problems may prove to be insurmountable. For further information see F. Raymond Allchin, *The Archaeology of Early Historic South Asia*, 1995; and Romila Thapar, *Interpreting Early India*, 1992. For the Indigenous Aryan viewpoint, see David Frawley, *The Myth of the Aryan Invasion of India*, 1994; and *Vedic Aryans and the Origins of Civilization*, 1997.

## Infanticide

The practice of parents killing their child is uncommon and subject to sharp condemnation. In some cases these infants are illegitimate, and infanticide or abandonment is an attempt to avoid the social repercussions of what is considered an immoral act.

There are several examples of this practice in Hindu mythology, of whom the best known is **Kunti**. Kunti has been given a **mantra** by the sage **Durvasas**, which gives her the power to conceive and bear children by the gods. On a whim, Kunti impulsively uses the mantra to invoke the **Sun**, by whom she conceives and bears her son **Karna**. In her panic at unexpectedly becoming a mother—she was still unmarried, and understandably concerned about what people might think—she puts the child in a box and abandons him in the **Ganges**.

In other cases, infants are killed by their parents because of the family's desperate poverty. Almost without exception, the children killed in such cases are **daughters**. If caught, the parents would be subject to a murder charge. But infanticide is often hard to prove if a baby was not born in a hospital, where births are formally registered. For poor families, daughters are often seen as a tremendous financial burden, because the expense that will be necessary to arrange their marriages is often more than people can pay. This attitude toward daughters is also reinforced by the traditional Indian marriage pattern, in which a family's **sons** bring their brides into the family home, continue the joint family, and care for their parents in their old age. Since after marriage daughters become members of their husband's family, they are often seen as "temporary" residents in the homes of their parents. For further information see Elizabeth Bumiller, *May You Be the Mother of a Hundred Sons*, 1990.

## Inference
See **anumana**.

## Infinite Regress

In Indian logic, one of the **fallacies** to be avoided in constructing an argument. An infinite regress is not only an infinite series, but one in which there is no final cause to make it happen or not happen.

A standard Western example of an infinite regress is the man who informs the philosopher that the world is supported on the back of a giant tortoise. Upon being asked what supported the

tortoise, the man replies, "another tortoise." Several similar queries bring the same reply, until in frustration the man bursts out "It's no use trying to trick me—after this, it is tortoises all the way down!"

In an Indian context, the infinite regress fallacy is seen as an extended case of the fallacy of **self-residence**, and equally objectionable.

## Inherence

In the **Nyaya** philosophical school, inherence (**samavaya**) is the name for a weak relational force that is assumed to connect objects and their attributes—for example, connecting the color red with a particular ball, and thus making the ball red. See **samavaya**.

## Inheritance

Traditional Hindu law has several different patterns for inheritance. A few communities in southern India practice **matrilinear succession**, in which inheritance is passed through the mother's line.

In much of the rest of India, inheritance is patrilineal. Patrilineal inheritance takes two major forms, according to the prescriptions found in two major legal texts: the ***Dayabhaga*** in the region of Bengal; and throughout much of the rest of India, variants on the ***Mitakshara***.

The *Mitakshara* vests joint family property only in males born into the male line. All males have equal shares in the family property, although the head of the family is normally in charge of administering it. Under this arrangement, the death of a male heir automatically increases the share of all the other surviving males, whereas the **birth** of a male decreases this share. The *Mitakshara* gives **women** no right to inherit family property, although women generally have rights to personal wealth (**stridhan**) that was theirs to bequeath and inherit.

The *Mitakshara* system was based on the principle of survivorship, under which only living people could inherit property. The ***Dayabhaga*** model stresses succession, under which **sons** do not become shareholders of the family property at birth, but upon the death of their father. If a son happens to die before his father, the son's heirs (including his wife and **daughters**) become inheritors, not in their own right, but as representatives of the deceased heir.
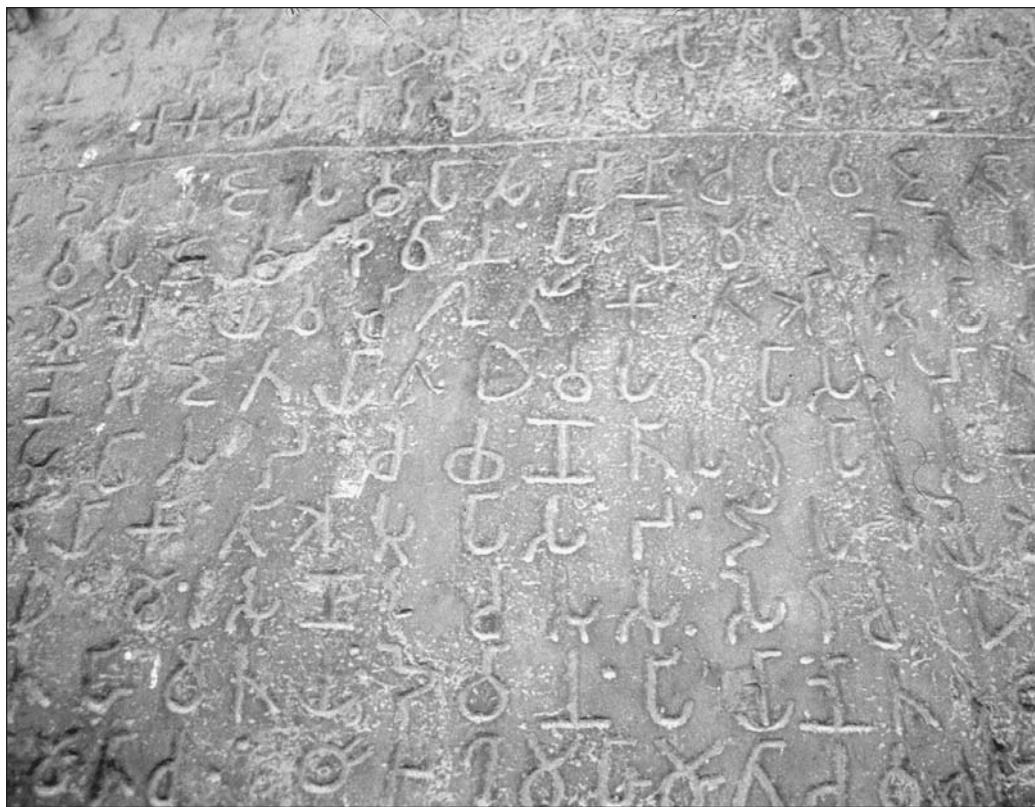
Under the *Dayabhaga* model both **widows** and daughters could have a share in family property, and they are allowed to act as agents in their own right. In theory this seems far more advantageous to women, but in fact it is believed to have had some gruesome consequences. When the British first came to Bengal late in the eighteenth century, they were horrified by the prevalence of **sati**, the rite in which a widow would be burned on her husband's funeral pyre. Based on admittedly incomplete evidence, it seems that sati was not nearly so common in many other parts of India. One theory to explain this discrepancy is that sati was the family's way to keep their daughter-in-law—who was an outsider to the family—from being able to gain control over their ancestral property.

## Initiation

In general, an initiation is a ritual in which a person is given certain new rights, capacities, and responsibilities. In a Hindu religious context, there are two important rites of religious initiation.

One of these is the **upanayana samskara**, an adolescent religious initiation performed on a "**twice-born**" male—that is, a member of the **brahmin**, **kshatriya**, or **vaishya** group—which is also known as the "second birth."

The other rite of initiation, **diksha**, is conferred on a person at the pleasure of a **guru** or religious preceptor and has no limitations on who or when it can be received.

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Inscription of the edits of Ashoka.

## Inscriptions

The oldest Hindu inscriptions are the edicts of **Ashoka**, which were either carved on rock faces or on stone pillars; many of these inscriptions are still readable today, despite being more than two thousand years old. Inscriptions on pillars were ordered by rulers, and were concerned with more sweeping issues, probably due to the inscriptions' public quality and their often monumental nature.

Aside from stone, the inscriptions were often done on copper plates. These were often used to record land grants, deeds, and other sorts of bequests, since their permanence made them more preferable than paper for safeguarding property rights. In themselves such inscriptions generally contain very specific historical information, which can help to fill out more general knowledge about their time.

## Installation

This is a general term that refers to the rites for both constructing and establishing the image of a **deity** in a temple setting (**devapratishtha**), and for ritually "awakening" the image so that it becomes a seat for the deity (**pranapratishtha**).

## Intentional Language

General term for a cryptic and coded language (**Sandhabhasha**) intended to conceal information from people who have not been initiated into that particular religious group. See **Sandhabhasha**.

## Intercalary Month

The Hindu ritual **year** is largely based on a lunar **calendar**, whose twelve **lunar months** are finished in about 354 solar days (as opposed to our 365-**day** calendar). This disparity with the solar calendar means that each lunar year begins eleven days earlier than the previous

lunar year. The discrepancy meant that the two calendars would increasingly diverge, such that (for example) "spring" festivals could occur at any time of the year.

It has been resolved by the addition of an intercalary month about every 2½ years—more precisely, every thirty-two months, sixteen days, one hour and twenty-six minutes. This intercalary month can take place during any of the year's twelve lunar months and takes the name of the regular lunar month preceding it.

As an unusual phenomenon, the extra month is generally seen as a ritually dangerous time, and one of its common epithets is the "impure month" (**malamasa**). During this month it is believed that one should not initiate any new projects, or perform any religious ceremonies whose timing is fluid and can be postponed, particularly marriages. **Worship** is highly encouraged during this time and keeping religious fasts and giving charity (**dana**) are also thought to be highly efficacious.

All of these are means of countering the **inauspiciousness** of this calendrical time—fasts and worship are ways to gain divine favor and protection, while charity acts as a channel to remove any potential bad fortune, by transferring it to the recipient.

When this extra month comes in the lunar month of **Ashadh**, it is called **Purushottama Mas**, and especially marked by the devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Vishnu** as a time for worship and other spiritual exercises.

## Internal Sacrifice

In general, a type of **worship** in which concrete external actions have been replaced by internal and purely mental ones. See **antaryaga**.

## Intoxicants

In general, Hindu culture condemns anything that could lead to loss of control, including intoxicants such as alcohol and mind-altering **drugs**. The level of disapproval associated with these substances depends on the substance itself and the circumstances under which it is consumed. For example, consumption of distilled spirits ("foreign **liquor**") is seen as a sign of adopting outside values, while consuming undistilled, fermented beverages such as "country liquor" and **toddy** is considered a low-class activity. However, there are a handful of Hindu temples at which liquor is the everyday **offering** to the **deity** and worshipers consume it as **prasad**, the sanctified food or drink that carries the deity's blessing.

The attitude toward intoxicating drugs is also complex. Although they are also subject to general disapproval, Hindu mythology portrays **Shiva** as regularly consuming both **bhang**, made from crushed marijuana, and the intoxicating **datura** plant. Some of Shiva's devotees (**bhakta**) do the same in emulation of their chosen deity, and many **ascetics** regularly smoke hashish (**charas**) mixed with tobacco, a habit interpreted by some as an intentional separation from the normal social system. Consuming bhang is a fairly common feature of certain religious festivals, such as **Shivaratri** and **Holi**, although there are many people who abstain.

## Isha ("Lord") Upanishad

At eighteen verses, one of the shortest of the early speculative texts known as the **Upanishads**; the name of this upanishad comes from the first word of the text. It is believed to be one of the late upanishads due to its brevity, its composition in verse rather than prose, and the use of verses that appear in other upanishads. As with many of the later upanishads, the Isha Upanishad propounds a loosely defined monism, in which the source of all things is ascribed to a single power. This power can be discovered through a flash of mystic insight when the seeker is able to

transcend the illusion that objects are unconnected and recognize the one real power in the universe. The insight is believed to give a definitive understanding into the workings of the universe and to bring the individual final release of the soul (**moksha**) from the cycle of reincarnation (**samsara**).

## Ishitvam

("superiority") One of the eight superhuman powers (**siddhi**) traditionally believed to be earned when a person reaches a high degree of spiritual attainment. This particular power stems from the control over matter (**prakrti**), which along with **purusha** are the two principles of the **Samkhya** philosophical system. This control over primal matter allows one to create, destroy, and rearrange material objects.

## Ishtadevata

("chosen **deity**") The specific Hindu divinity that an individual has chosen for more or less exclusive **worship** and devotion. In many cases, this choice is done without denying the existence of the other Hindu deities, although they are sometimes interpreted as secondary manifestations of the ishtadevata. On the whole, Hindus have been willing to acknowledge a plurality of divine names and forms, but each person generally directs attention and worship to only one of these deities. The particular deity one worships is ultimately a matter of personal choice, although family and regional loyalties usually play a strong role in this choice.

## Ishvara

("lord") Primarily an epithet of the god **Shiva**, especially when the word is used at the end of compound names, such as **Rameshvar**, "the Lord of **Rama**," or **Mahakaleshvar**, "the Lord of Death." In its more general meaning as "lord," ishvara can also be part of the name taken by earthly rulers, such as the **Chalukya** monarch **Someshvara** (r. 1242–1268).

## Ishvarakrishna

(4th c.) Indian philosopher who is traditionally cited as the author of the *Samkhyakarikas*, a collection of sayings that explain the basic position of the **Samkhya** philosophical school. The Samkhya school is one of the **six schools** in traditional Hindu **philosophy**, and its position is an atheistic philosophical dualism, in which two fundamental principles, **prakrti** ("nature") and **purusha** ("person"), are the source of all things.

## Ishvara Puri

(c. 1500) Ecstatic devotee (**bhakta**) of the god **Krishna**, who is famous as the **guru** of the Bengali saint **Chaitanya**. Little is known about Ishvara Puri's background, although his surname "Puri" indicates that he took formal **ascetic initiation** in the Puri branch of the **Dashanami** Sanyasis. After meeting Ishvara Puri in 1508 in the pilgrimage town of **Gaya**, Chaitanya was fired with devotion to Krishna, and he began to perform the public ecstatic recitations of Krishna's name that have become an established element in the religious life of the community that claims him as its founder, the **Gaudiya Vaishnavas**. See also ISKCON.

## ISKCON

Acronym for the International Society for **Krishna** Consciousness, a Hindu missionary community commonly known as the Hare Krishnas. This name comes from ISKCON's emphasis on the importance of repeating the divine name, particularly the formula known as the **mahamantra** ("Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare"). ISKCON was founded by A. C. Bhaktivedanta **Prabhupada**, and its religious roots lie in the **Vaishnava** piety of his native Bengal. The Bengali Vaishnava tradition has long emphasized the importance of publicly chanting Krishna's name, particularly in the **Gaudiya Vaishnava** community founded by the Bengali saint **Chaitanya**.

ISKCON comes out of this Bengali tradition, but in other ways it shows tensions that mark it as a twentieth-century phenomenon. Its strong missionary activities make it a highly unusual Hindu religious organization, as does its membership—Prabhupada founded ISKCON in New York City, most of ISKCON's members are Western converts from Judaism and Christianity, and the bulk of its missionary activities have been performed outside of India. The roots of ISKCON's membership, and the general fervor associated with converts, have led to some theological contradictions. On one hand, ISKCON doctrine tends to denigrate human capacity, putting the emphasis on the saving power of God's **grace**. On the other hand, ISKCON devotees (**bhakta**) believe that they gain religious merit by living a rigorously regulated lifestyle that mandates a strict vegetarian diet, abstinence from **liquor** and nonmedicinal **drugs**, sexual activity only for procreation, and a well-established daily religious routine; many devotees also adopt Indian clothing and **hair** styles. In these two opposing emphases—complete surrender to God's grace, and strict adherence to a prescribed "holy" lifestyle—ISKCON shows surprising parallels to evangelical Christianity. Since Prabhupada's death in 1977, the organization has been run by these Western converts, and thus ISKCON can be characterized as a "countercultural" Euro-American phenomenon, despite its Indian origins. ISKCON has a significant presence in **Brindavan**, the village celebrated as Krishna's childhood home, where the group has built a magnificent temple; they are also active in **Mayapur** in Bengal, which they claim as Chaitanya's birthplace. After a period of growth in the 1970s, ISKCON had serious legal problems in the 1980s, including losses in civil suits and allegations of money laundering and murder. For a sympathetic perspective on the movement, see Larry Shinn, *The Dark Lord,* 1987; and Robert D. Baird (ed.), *Religion in Modern India*, 1998. See also **vegetarianism**.

# J

## Jabali

A famous sage in Hindu mythology and **son** of the sage **Vishvamitra**. Despite his biological origins, Jabali eventually becomes associated with his father's sworn enemy, the sage **Vasishtha**. As a member of Vasishtha's group, Jabali becomes one of the advisers to King **Dasharatha**, the father of the god-king **Rama** in the epic *Ramayana*.

## Jada

("inert," "insentient") In a philosophical context, the word *jada* is used to designate physical matter, which is inert and devoid of cognitive functions. In a more extended sense, the word can refer to any person completely lacking religious capacities, sensibilities, or interest, and who is, thus, from a religious perspective, simply inert.

## Jagadamba

("Mother of the Universe") Epithet of the **Goddess**, highlighting her creative and generative capacities. See **Goddess**.

## Jagadisha

("Lord of the Universe") Epithet of the regional **deity Jagannath**, and by extension the god **Vishnu**, to whom Jagannath has been connected as a form of **Krishna**, the eighth **avatar** or incarnation of Vishnu. Jagadisha is the name given to Jagannath in the **Dashavatara Stotra**, the opening hymn in the *Gitagovinda*, a lyric devotional poem composed by the poet **Jayadeva**. In modern northern India, the name Jagadisha is used in one of the most popular and best-known devotional hymns, the Jagadisha **Arati**, a hymn directed more particularly to Vishnu.

## Jagamohan

In the temple **architecture** of **Orissa**, one of the major forms of the northern Indian **Nagara** style, the jagamohan is the entrance porch to the temple, which provides a transitional space between the outside world and the sacred space further in. In Orissan temples, the jagamohan tended to be low and squat, in sharp contrast to the **deul**, or main internal area, a beehive-shaped tower under which the image of the temple's primary **deity** resided.

## Jagannath

("Master of the Universe") Presiding **deity** of the Jagannath temple in **Puri**. Puri is and has long been a major center for Hindu culture, a circumstance that has underlined and reinforced Jagannath's importance as the city's presiding deity. Although Jagannath is identified as a manifestation of the god **Krishna**, his roots lie elsewhere. He is generally considered to be an autochthonous ("of the land") deity, who was originally the local deity of Puri but who has been assimilated into the wider pantheon as a form of Krishna, and therefore, by extension, a form of **Vishnu**. This assimilation shows Jagannath's importance and influence in the local setting, since he could not be simply marginalized. It is also an example of the **Vaishnava** tendency for such assimilation, most often through the doctrine of the **avatars** or divine incarnations.

In the Puri temple and other iconographic representations, Jagannath invariably appears as a member of a trio: Jagannath (Krishna) appears on the right, his brother **Balabhadra** (**Balarama**) is on the left, and the smaller figure in the center is their sister **Subhadra**. This triadic grouping and the depiction of a female figure are very
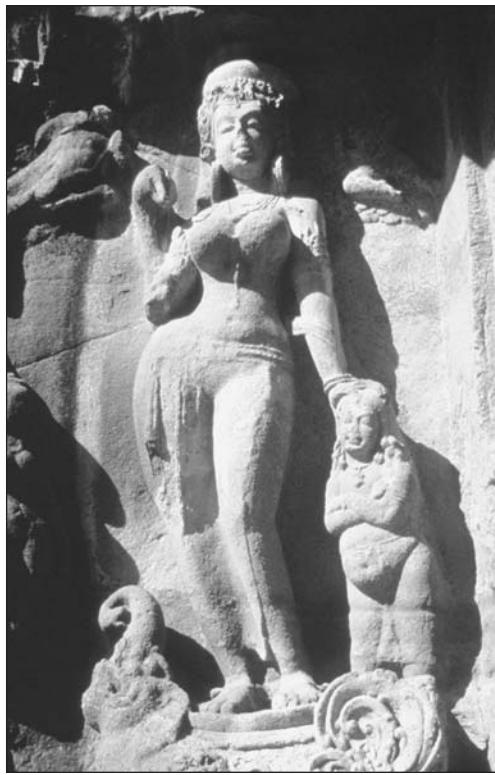
unusual in Krishna devotion, as is the form of these images, which clearly come from a folk or tribal tradition. All three deities are made from logs so roughly cut that the facial features are almost indistinguishable, their arms are unnaturally short and stubby, and the images are brightly painted. Each of these peculiar elements is seen as further evidence of Jagannath's indigenous roots. A final piece of evidence for his local origins is seen in his connection with his hereditary servants, the **daitas**, a tribal people who are considered virtually **untouchable**. Despite their marginal status in conventional society, the daitas are responsible for sculpting new images of the trio when they are periodically replaced. The daitas also consider Jagannath their blood relative, further pointing to his ambiguous roots.

The myth explaining these images is based on the virtuous King **Indradyumna**. Indradyumna has a vision of Vishnu in a **dream**, in which Vishnu directs the king to make an image of Jagannath from an enormous log that he has found. While the king is wondering how to do this, a mysterious man appears, who is actually **Vishvakarma**, the architect of the gods. The mysterious man offers to carve the statues, on the condition that he will not be disturbed until he is finished. He then disappears into his workroom for two weeks, but the people are mystified by what he is doing, since they hear no sounds of carving. This seeming inactivity piques the people's curiosity, and finally one of the queens prevails on the king to look inside. When the king opens the door, he finds no one there, and the statues only half-finished. In another dream that night, the king is ordered to paint and consecrate the statues as they are, and this form has reportedly remained the same ever since. For further information on the history and influence of Jagannath, by far the best source is Anncharlott Eschmann, Hermann Kulke, and Gaya Charan Tripathi, *The Cult of Jagannath and the Regional Tradition of Orissa*, 1978.

## Jageshvar

Temple complex and sacred site (**tirtha**) in the village with the same name, located in the Kumaon foothills of the **Himalayas** in the state of **Uttar Pradesh**. The Jageshvar temple complex contains 124 different temples, concentrated in an area about the size of a football field. Virtually all of these temples are dedicated to some form of the god **Shiva**, and the few that house other **deities** are either temples to the **Goddess**—considered to be Shiva's wife—or in one case to the god **Hanuman**, who is sometimes considered an **avatar** or incarnation of Shiva. Most of these temples are extremely small—either an open image of Shiva's aniconic symbol, the **linga**, or a temple building no larger than a telephone booth. The three largest most important temples are to Shiva in his forms as **Kedarnath**, as **Mrtyunjaya** ("Conqueror of Death"), and as Jageshvar, from which the site gets its name. The name Jageshvar means "The Wakeful Lord" and signifies that this particular form of Shiva is always alert to the needs of his devotees (**bhakta**) and will quickly fulfill any request.

Local tradition claims that Jageshvar is one of the twelve **jyotirlingas**, a network of sites deemed especially sacred to Shiva, and at which Shiva is uniquely present. This claim is not supported by the traditional list of the jyotirlingas, but Jageshvar has been a pilgrimage site for more than a thousand years. The Mrtyunjaya temple has been dated to the eighth century C.E., while the Jageshvar temple was built about two centuries later. Since that time, further building at the Jageshvar complex has come through patronage by several different groups of hill kings, most recently those of the Chand dynasty, who ruled the region between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries. The temple complex's indisputable antiquity, its association with royal power, and its identity as a place where Shiva readily grants one's wishes, have all combined to make it the most important pilgrimage place in the Kumaon region.

Sculpture of the goddess Ganga, the Ganges River, who is also known as Jahnavi.

## Jahnavi

("**daughter** of **Jahnu**") Epithet of the **Ganges** River, which Hindus consider to be the physical form of the **goddess Ganga**. The name Jahnavi refers to an incident during her creation in which she encounters Jahnu, a great **ascetic** who has amassed great power through performing harsh physical **asceticism** (**tapas**). After the Ganges has been brought down to **earth** by the sage **Bhagirath**, but before she makes her way to the ocean, the playful river picks up and carries away Jahnu's belongings while the sage is meditating nearby. Jahnu is enraged at this disrespect; to punish Ganga, he drinks all of the **water** in the river. When the gods realize what has happened, they are very concerned. They somehow manage to placate Jahnu, and the sage agrees to release her. The problem then is how to release the Ganges in a way that will not defile her, since vomiting her up or voiding her as urine are both unacceptable. In the end, Jahnu bypasses this dilemma by releasing her through his ear. She continues on her way to the sea, but acquires the name Jahnavi by virtue of being "born" from Jahnu.

## Jahnu

In Hindu mythology, an **ascetic** who has amassed great power by performing harsh physical **asceticism** (**tapas**). One day while Jahnu is deep in meditation, his belongings are picked up and carried away by the river **Ganges** (believed by Hindus to be the physical form of the **goddess Ganga**), who has recently come down from **heaven** and is being led to the sea by the sage **Bhagirath**. Jahnu is enraged at this disrespect; to punish Ganga, he drinks all of the **water** in the river. When the gods realize what has happened, they are very concerned. They somehow manage to placate Jahnu, and the sage agrees to release her. The problem then is how to release the Ganges in a way that will not defile her, since vomiting her up or voiding her as urine are both unacceptable. In the end, Jahnu bypasses this dilemma by releasing her through his ear. She continues on her way to the sea and acquires the name **Jahnavi** by virtue of being "born" from Jahnu.

## Jaimini

(4th c. B.C.E.?) Figure traditionally cited as the author of the **Mimamsa Sutras**, the central texts of the **Purva Mimamsa** school, one of the **six schools** of Indian **philosophy**. The Mimamsa school is most concerned with the examination and pursuit of **dharma** ("righteous action"). In their pursuit of dharma, the Mimamsa also believed that all necessary instructions were contained in the **Vedas**, the oldest Hindu religious texts. Given these twin assumptions, much of Mimamsa thought is devoted to the principles and methods of textual interpretation used to unlock the instructions that they were confident the Vedas contained.

## Jajman

Common form of the **Sanskrit** word **yajamana**, "patron of the **sacrifice**." From the time of the earliest Vedic sacrifices, there was a sharp distinction between the people who performed the sacrifice (basically hired technicians) and the people who actually paid the money to sponsor it and were considered the rite's true beneficiaries. In contemporary times, *jajman* is the term used by **pandas**, the priests at pilgrimage places (**tirtha**), to refer to their pilgrim clients, with whom they have a hereditary relationship. This usage admits the reality that the pilgrims are their patrons, since the priests' livelihood comes from serving them, but the term also carries associations of mutual obligation. Pandas are entitled to fees from their pilgrim clients but must also render services to them, while pilgrims are bound to uphold this hereditary relationship but can depend on their pandas for help.

## Jallianwala Bagh

A park (bagh) in the center of the northern Indian city of Amritsar at which several thousand people were killed or wounded in 1919. A crowd had gathered at this park despite a strict ban on public meetings established the day before. The British officer in charge, General Dyer, interpreted the gathering as willful defiance of the law and commanded his men to fire on the crowd. This incident was highly significant in the struggle for Indian independence (finally achieved on August 15, 1947), for it undercut British claims that their presence was necessary to keep the country from chaos and, in the minds of many Indian leaders, removed any moral authority by which the British could justify their rule.

## Jamadagni

In Hindu mythology, a great sage and father of **Parashuram avatar**. Like many sages, Jamadagni is a man of explosive and incendiary temper. In one of the most famous episodes, when his wife **Renuka** returns home late because she has spent some time watching a king and his wife sport in the **water**, Jamadagni orders his **sons** to kill her. All of them refuse except Parashuram, who cuts off his mother's head. Jamadagni is pleased with Parashuram and tells him to choose whatever reward he wants. Parashuram requests that his mother be restored to life again, which she is.

Jamadagni is also famous as the owner of a divine **cow** that can provide all sorts of food on demand. The local king grows covetous of the cow and offers to buy it. When Jamadagni refuses to sell her, the king's men grow angry, kill Jamadagni, and take the cow back to the palace. It is in retaliation for this heinous act that Parashuram attempts to exterminate the kingly class (**kshatriyas**) from the face of the **earth**.

## Jambhavan

In the **Ramayana**, the earlier of the two great Indian epics, Jambhavan is one of the ministers of **Sugriva**, king of the monkeys. Jambhavan is generally described as a bear, although in some sources he is said to be a monkey. In the search for **Rama's** kidnapped wife **Sita**, it is Jambhavan who convinces the monkey-god **Hanuman** to attempt to jump over the ocean to **Lanka**, reminding Hanuman of his **birth**, deeds, and the divine boons he has been given. Although at first Hanuman doubts his ability, he is convinced by Jambhavan's encouragement and, with a mighty spring, leaps over the sea to Lanka, where he eventually discovers Sita.

## Jambudvipa

("rose-apple") In traditional mythic geography, the first and innermost of the seven concentric landmasses (**dvipas**) making up the visible world. At the center of Jambudvipa stands Mount

**Meru**, the center of the entire universe. Mount Meru is surrounded by mountain ranges, and the part of Jambudvipa south of Mount Meru is the land known as **Bharata**, the traditional name for the Indian subcontinent. See also **Cosmology**.

## Jambukeshvar

Sacred site (**tirtha**) and southern Indian temple-town near the city of **Tiruchirappalli** in the state of **Tamil Nadu**, directly opposite the great temple complex of **Shrirangam**. The temple at Jambukeshvar is dedicated to the god **Shiva** in his role as "Lord of the Rose-Apple (jambu) Tree;" the image of Shiva is placed under one of these trees. Jambukeshvar is also one of the **bhutalingas** ("elemental **lingas**"), a network of five southern Indian sites sacred to Shiva. In each of these sites Shiva is represented as a linga, the pillar-shaped object that is his symbolic form, and at each site the linga is believed to be formed from one of the five primordial **elements** (bhuta)—**earth**, **wind**, **fire**, **water**, and **space** (**akasha**). At Jambukeshvar, Shiva's image is associated with water, and the linga is set into a pool created by a natural spring.

## Jammu

One of the three distinct cultural areas in the modern Indian state of Jammu and **Kashmir**; the other two are western Kashmir and Ladakh. Jammu and Kashmir is a former princely state once ruled by the Dogras, a small regional dynasty. Although the Dogra kings were Hindus, they ruled over the **minority** populations of the mostly Muslim Kashmiris and the mostly Buddhist Ladakhis; this ethnic and religious division continues in modern times. The Jammu region is geographically part of the northern Indian plain, and the surrounding regions south of the **Shiwalik Hills** are Hindu majority regions. However, Jammu is also in close proximity to the

**Punjab**, the center of Sikhism, a monotheistic religion that combines elements of Hinduism and Islam; consequently Jammu is also home to a significant Sikh population. By far the most celebrated shrine in the Jammu region is the one dedicated to **Vaishno Devi**, a **goddess** who is reputed to grant all of one's wishes. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Jammu was also one of the centers for the **Pahari** school of **miniature painting**. Aside from being the name of this region, Jammu is also the name of the region's largest city, the state's traditional winter capital. For general information about Jammu and all the regions of India, an accessible reference is Christine Nivin et al., *India*. 8th ed., Lonely Planet, 1998.

## Janabai

(d. c.1350) Female poet and saint in the **Varkari Panth**, a religious community centered around the **worship** of the Hindu god **Vithoba** at his temple at **Pandharpur** in the modern state of **Maharashtra**. According to tradition, Janabai came to Pandharpur with her parents when she was seven but refused to go home with them, saying that she wanted to remain close to the Lord. She became the servant of another Varkari saint, **Namdev**, who made her a member of his circle of devotees (**bhakta**). Janabai is famous for her devotional songs, which remain popular today. For further information see Justin E. Abbott and Narhar R. Godbole (trans.), *Stories of Indian Saints*, 1982; and G. A. Deleury, *The Cult of Vithoba*, 1960.

## Janaka

The foster father of the **goddess Sita**. He discovered her one day while plowing a furrow in a field. In Hindu mythology, Janaka is the paradigm of the sage-king, a person who despite his wealth and position was as perfectly dispassionate as any **ascetic** living in the forest.

## Janaki Navami

Festival falling on the ninth **day** (navami) of the dark (waning) half of the **lunar month** of **Phalgun** (February–March). This festival celebrates the **birth** of **Sita**, wife of the god king **Rama** and heroine of the epic *Ramayana*. Sita is not born in the usual manner, but is found by King **Janaka** in a furrow as he plows a field (hence the name Janaki, a female form of Janaka). As the wife of Rama, himself an **avatar** or incarnation of the god **Vishnu**, Sita is believed to be a form of **Lakshmi**, Vishnu's wife. In her absolute devotion to her husband, Sita is considered a model for Indian **women**; women performing the prescribed religious rites for this day are promised children and prosperity.

## Janakpur

City and sacred site (**tirtha**) in the western part of **Nepal**, seven miles north of the border with the Indian state of **Bihar**. Janakpur is said to be the capital of King **Janaka**, a noted sage and the foster father of the **goddess Sita** in the *Ramayana*, the earlier of the two great Hindu epics. According to tradition, Janaka's capital was destroyed during the war described in the *Mahabharata*—the other great Hindu epic—and disappeared without a trace. The present site of Janakpur dates from the early eighteenth century and is said to have been discovered by two **Vaishnava** devotees (**bhakta**), Chaturbhuj Giri and Sur Kishor. Chaturbhuj Giri had a vision of the god **Rama** in a **dream** and was directed to dig beneath a banyan tree. When he did, he found four images of **Vishnu**, each in a differing divine manifestation. Sur Kishor was a great devotee of Sita, and through her agency discovered the spot as well. Other **ascetics** began to come to this site, which is still an important stop on the annual pilgrimage cycle of the **Ramanandi** ascetics. The ascetics were followed by shepherds and merchants, and the town of Janakpur gradually grew



Janaki Mandir in Janakpur, Nepal. This temple marks the site where the goddess Sita first appeared.

up from there. For extensive treatment of this site and the veracity of these stories, see Richard Burghart, "The History of Janakpur," in *Kailash,* Vol. 6, No. 4, 1978.

## Janamjeya

In Hindu mythology, the **son** of King **Parikshit**; Janamjeya rules after his father's untimely death from the bite of the serpent **Takshaka**. Janamjeya has a pronounced hatred of serpents because of Takshaka's role in his father's death, and during his reign he performs a great **sacrifice** known as the Sarpasatra, through which most of the snakes on **earth** are killed. Takshaka manages to stop the sacrifice before all of the earth's serpents are completely wiped out by pleading with a **brahmin** to help him. The brahmin comes to Janamjeya's sacrifice as a guest and requests that the sacrifice be stopped. Since, according to tradition, a brahmin guest's request cannot be refused, Janamjeya is compelled to curtail the rite.

## Janardana

("exciting his devotees") Epithet of the god **Krishna**. See **Krishna**.

## Jana Sangh

Modern Indian political party, founded in 1951 by Shyam Prasad Mookerjee. Despite Mookerjee's earlier roots in the **Hindu Mahasabha**, a Hindu nationalist organization, the Jana Sangh's leadership largely came from workers dispatched by another conservative Hindu organization, the **Rashtriya Svayamsevak Sangh** (RSS). By the mid-1950s the Jana Sangh had become the political arm of the RSS, with RSS members filling most of the party's important positions. In its political platform the Jana Sangh espoused many populist Hindu causes, such as a ban on **cow slaughter** and the **prohibition** of alcoholic beverages, but the party was also noted for its sympathetic orientation toward farmers, who formed one of its important constituencies. The Jana Sangh's high point came in the 1977 general elections, when it won ninety-three seats in Parliament. It was the largest single party in the coalition of political parties that ousted Indira Gandhi's Congress Party and ended their two years of martial law. This triumph quickly turned to failure: the Janata government dissolved over the so-called dual-membership controversy, which was rooted in concerns over Jana Sangh members simultaneously being members of the RSS. Legislators from other parties saw this as creating a conflict of interest and were also wary of their government being directed by the RSS, which was considered a Hindu chauvinist organization. These outside legislators demanded that Jana Sangh members renounce all RSS ties, which the latter were unwilling to do. All attempts at compromise eventually failed, and after the Congress Party came back to power in 1980, the Jana Sangh legislators and other remnants of the Janata government formed a new party, the **Bharatiya Janata Party**. For further information see Walter K. Andersen and Shridhar D. Damle, *The Brotherhood in Saffron,* 1987; and Bruce Desmond Graham, *Hindu Nationalism and Indian Politics,* 1990.

## Janeu

The **sacred thread** worn by all "**twice-born**" (dvija) men, as a visible symbol of having undergone the adolescent religious **initiation** known as the "second birth." The janeu is a circular cord made of three strands (in which each cord also has three strands), which is worn over the left shoulder, crossing the body to fall on the right hip. See **sacred thread**.

## Jangama

("moving") Priestly subgroup in the Virashaiva or **Lingayat** community, whose members are mainly concentrated in the southern Indian state of **Karnataka**. The Virashaivas are a devotional community who stress the **worship** of **Shiva** as the only real **deity**; aside from being essentially monotheistic, they have also rejected all forms of image worship except for Shiva's symbol, the **linga**. The Virashaivas were founded by the poet-saint **Basavanna**, partly in rebellion against the prevailing **caste** system, and he created the jangamas as a parallel priesthood to care for his community's members. The major function of the jangamas is to officiate at lifecycle ceremonies for the members of the community, such as **birth**, coming-of-age, marriage, and death. Jangamas may be married and raise families, but this Virashaiva subcommunity also serves as the major source of recruits for the celibate Virashaiva monks (**viraktas**), who have the highest status as religious leaders in the community.

## Janmashtami

Festival on the eighth **day** (ashtami) of the dark (waning) half of the **lunar month** of **Bhadrapada** (August–September), which is celebrated as the god **Krishna's** birthday. As with all

holidays connected with Krishna, this festival is particularly observed in the **Braj** region, where Krishna is supposed to have lived, although it is also celebrated throughout the country. Devotees (**bhakta**) often stay up late into the night, since Krishna is said to have been born at midnight, and the observances are often punctuated with singing, chanting, parades, and dramas enacting events in Krishna's life. It is during the month around Janmashtami that the dramas known as the Krishna **lilas** are presented in the town of **Brindavan**, traditionally believed to have been Krishna's childhood home.

According to tradition, Krishna is the eighth **son** of **Devaki** and **Vasudeva**. He is born in a prison in the city of **Mathura** in which his parents are held by Devaki's brother, the wicked king **Kamsa**. Kamsa has imprisoned the pair in an attempt to thwart the prophecy that he will be killed by his sister Devaki's eighth son. Kamsa has killed all of Devaki's older children at **birth** and intends to do the same with Krishna, but when Krishna is born wondrous things begin to happen: the jailers fall into a deep sleep, the locked prison doors miraculously open, and Vasudeva is able to spirit the infant out of the prison to the home of the couple who will become his foster parents, **Nanda** and **Yashoda**. Vasudeva returns that night, bearing Yashoda's new-born baby girl, who is really the **goddess Bhadrakali** in disguise. The next morning Kamsa kills the child by dashing her against a stone, but from the body arises a fearsome form of the Goddess, who taunts Kamsa by telling him that the person who will slay him has already escaped.

## Japa

("muttering," "whispering") Individual recitation, usually the repeated utterance of a particular **mantra** or divine name(s), often while using a string of beads (**mala**) to perform a definite number of such repetitions. Such recitation is usually performed as an individual religious act, in a tone of voice audible to the reciter but not others who may be present. Japa is a particularly important practice in Hindu traditions stressing the benefits of reciting the divine name—such repetitions are believed to have gradual spiritual benefits. Japa is particularly stressed in the **Gaudiya Vaishnavas** community founded by the Bengali saint **Chaitanya**, where public recitation of the divine name is an important part of religious life.

## Jaratkarava Artabhaga

One of the sage **Yajnavalkya's** interviewers in the **Brhadaranyaka Upanishad**, one of the earliest of the **Upanishads**. The third chapter of this upanishad presents a series of questioners, each trying to test Yajnavalkya's assertion that he is the best **brahmin** of all. Artabhaga finally questions Yajnavalkya about the human sense faculties and their realms of action, and eventually asks what happens to a person after death. Yajnavalkya draws him aside in private, and talks to him about **karma** ("action"), in what is generally regarded as the oldest reference to this fundamental Indian religious idea.

## Jaratkaru

In Hindu mythology, a sage famous not only for his **asceticism** and knowledge but also because he illustrates the importance of male children in Hindu culture. Jaratkaru is a lifelong **ascetic** with no intention of marrying until he has a vision of his ancestors suspended over one of the **hells** by a grass rope, through which a **rat** (time personified) is gradually gnawing. His ancestors inform Jaratkaru that his failure to have a **son** means that the lineage will end with him, along with the rites performed for the deceased in that lineage, and that they will then fall into hell. To forestall this disaster, they instruct Jaratkaru to marry and beget a son.

Jaratkaru is initially hostile to this idea, but later specifies that if a woman

also named Jaratkaru is found and given to him as alms, he will marry her. His conditions eventually reaches the **Naga** (snake) king **Vasuki**, who has a sister by this name. The marriage is performed under the condition that if she displeases Jaratkaru, he will leave her. Given Jaratkaru's ascetic past, it is not surprising that things did not work out between them. After being married several months, his wife has the dilemma of allowing Jaratkaru to sleep past sunset, which will make him late for his evening prayers, or to wake him and risk his displeasure. She chooses the latter; Jaratkaru is displeased with her and leaves despite her entreaties. Some time later the wife Jaratkaru gives **birth** to a son, Astika, and thus the sage's obligations are fulfilled.

## Jat

One of the hundreds of subgroups of traditional Indian society known as **jatis** ("birth"). Each jati was associated with—and held a monopoly over—a particular occupation, and that occupation determined the social status of the jati's members; this system led to the modern **caste** system. The Jats are a northern Indian jati whose members are spread through many of the states of northern India, particularly **Haryana**, **Punjab**, **Uttar Pradesh**, and **Rajasthan**. In the Punjab the Jats are evenly split between Hindus and Sikhs, but in other areas the community is solidly Hindu. The Jats' hereditary occupation is farming, and they are often described as tough and resilient peasants; these qualities have also made them superior soldiers, both in the service of the British Empire and in independent India.

## Jata

A long matted lock of **hair**. Ascetics often wear their hair in jatas for a number of religious and symbolic reasons. On one level, the uncut hair is a symbol of renunciation; its unkempt, matted quality demonstrates the **ascetic's**

distance from worldly concerns with order and propriety. On another level, ascetics wear jatas in imitation of the god **Shiva**, the paradigmatic ascetic, who is always portrayed wearing his hair in matted locks. Although jatas are most commonly worn by devotees (**bhakta**) of Shiva, some strict renunciants who are devotees of the god **Vishnu** also favor this hairstyle. Finally, from a non-religious perspective, jatas are simply a very low-maintenance hairstyle. They are usually rubbed with wood ash to keep them relatively neat; as the hair grows the jatas simply become longer, and in many cases they can be neatly twisted into a crown, or **jatamakuta**, on the top of the head.

## Jatakarma Samskara

The fourth of the traditional life-cycle ceremonies (**samskaras**). The first three were to be performed before and during **pregnancy**, while the jatakarma samskara was to be performed immediately after the **birth**. This ceremony had several elements, but the most prominent were uttering the word "vak" ("speech," a synonym for **Saraswati**) into the child's ear and feeding the child honey, ghee, and other items believed to bring good luck. This samskara is seldom performed in modern times, although there are many other rites connected with birth that are intended to protect the mother and child and to kindle the child's potential.

## Jatamakuta

A crown (makuta) made of matted locks of **hair** (**jata**) twisted together and bound on top of the head. In Hindu iconography the jatamakuta is most closely associated with the god **Shiva**, who is the paradigmatic **ascetic** and always wears his hair in matted locks. In modern times, the jatamakuta is still a hairstyle associated with many ascetics, both **Shaiva** and **Vaishnava**.

An ascetic in Haridwar with his hair in matted locks (jata).
This hairstyle marks the wearer as a person who is detached from worldly concerns.

## Jatayu

A virtuous vulture in the ***Ramayana***, the earlier of the two great Indian epics. When **Rama's** wife **Sita** is kidnapped by the **demon**-king **Ravana** and is being spirited away in Ravana's aerial chariot, Jatayu makes a valiant effort to rescue her. In his battle with Ravana, Jatayu's wings are cut off; the force of his subsequent fall left him near death. With his dying breaths he informs Rama and Rama's brother **Lakshmana** of what has happened, and identifies Ravana as Sita's kidnapper. Although Jatayu fails to rescue Sita, he is critical to the plot of the epic because he gives Rama the crucial information he needs to begin to searching for her.

## Jati

("birth") A traditional social subgroup in Indian society. There were hundreds of these groups, considered exogamous because strict taboos existed against marrying outside one's jati—people belonging to different jatis were looked upon as different "species" of people. Jatis were usually defined by the subgroup's traditional occupation, which they and they alone had the right to practice. The jatis were hierarchically arranged in society, based on the perceived **purity** or impurity (**ashaucha**) of their occupations, and this hierarchy formed the basis for the traditional Hindu social structure known as the **caste** system.

## Jatra

Vernacular form of the **Sanskrit** word **yatra** ("journey"). The word yatra is most often used to describe journeys to far-away places, whereas jatra is used to denote visits to spots within the immediate region.

## Jauhar

A mass **suicide** in which **women** and children threw themselves on a bonfire to protect the family from dishonor when the men were defeated or killed in battle. Jauhar was considered the women's counterpart to death in combat. If their husbands and fathers were heavily outnumbered and faced certain death in battle, women would perform a mass suicide after the men left their fortresses. This phenomenon was most closely associated with the desert state of **Rajasthan**, which has strong martial traditions and a great stress on the importance of family honor. It is particularly associated with the **Rajasthani** city of Chittorgarh, where jauhars occurred in 1303, 1535, and 1568.

## Jaya

In Hindu mythology, one of the gate-keepers of the god **Vishnu's** heavenly abode, **Vaikuntha**, who, with his brother **Vijaya**, is cursed to be born three times as a **demon** (asura) and to be killed each time by Vishnu. The sage **Sanaka** places this **curse** on them when they prevent him from seeing Vishnu. In their first **birth** the two are born as **Hiranyaksha** and **Hiranyakashipu**, who are killed by the **Boar avatar** and the **Man-Lion avatar** respectively. In their second incarnation they are born as **Ravana** and **Kumbhakarna**, who are both killed by Vishnu's **Rama avatar**. In their final birth they incarnate as **Shisupala** and **Dantavaktra** and are killed by Vishnu's **Krishna avatar**. After the conditions of the curse have been fulfilled, they return to their duties as Vishnu's gatekeepers.

## Jayadeva

(12th c.) Poet and author of the *Gitagovinda*, a lyric devotional poem that uses the separation and eventual reunion of the lovers **Krishna** and **Radha** as a metaphor for the union of the human soul with God. According to tradition, Jayadeva lived at the temple of the god **Jagannath** in the city of **Puri**, where his wife Padmavati was a dancer. She is said to have been the first to **dance** to Jayadeva's songs as an **offering** to Jagannath, and the *Gitagovinda* has been sung and danced as a regular part of temple **worship** up to the present time. For further information see Barbara Stoller Miller (ed. and trans.), *The Love Song of the Dark Lord*, 1977.

## Jayadratha

In the ***Mahabharata***, the later of the two great Hindu epics, Jayadratha is a king who is married to the princess Dussala. Dussala is the only sister of the **Kauravas**, a group of one hundred brothers who are the epic's antagonists. Jayadratha once sought the hand of **Draupadi**, and because of his bitterness at having lost her to the warrior **Arjuna**, he opposes Arjuna and his brothers, the **Pandavas**, for the rest of his life. During the Mahabharata war between the Pandavas and the Kauravas, Jayadratha takes the side of the Kauravas and is eventually killed by Arjuna. At Jayadratha's **birth** a celestial voice has prophesied that the head of the person who causes Jayadratha's head to fall to **earth** will split into a hundred pieces. Mindful of this, Arjuna, a peerless archer, cuts off Jayadratha's head with an arrow in such a way that it lands in the lap of Jayadratha's father, Brhatkaya. Brhatkaya is so startled that he allows the head to fall from his lap to the ground, and his own head breaks into a hundred pieces.

## Jaya Ekadashi

Festival falling on the eleventh **day** (**ekadashi**) of the bright (waxing) half of the **lunar month** of **Magh** (January–February). As are all eleventh-day obser-vances, this festival is dedicated to the **worship** of **Vishnu**, on this day particu-larly in his form as **Krishna**. Most Hindu festivals have certain prescribed rites, usually involving fasting (**upavasa**) and worship, and often promise specific benefits for faithful performance:

faithfully observing the "**jaya**," or "victory," festival is said to ensure that one's desired goal will be attained.

## Jayapala

(d. 1001) One of the last kings of the **Pratiharas**, a northern Indian dynasty whose capital was in **Kanyakubja** on the **Ganges** River. By Jayapala's time the divided Hindu kingdoms in northern India were being threatened by the Turkish emirs, especially **Mahmud of Ghazni**, who had settled in modern-day Afghanistan. Jayapala was defeated and captured in battle with Mahmud and subsequently committed **suicide**; a short time later, Jayapala's **son Anandapala** suffered a crushing defeat, leaving a nearly complete collapse of power in northern India. Because of this absence of any effective opposition, Mahmud was able to indulge in almost yearly campaigns of pillage and plunder.

## Jayarashi

(7th c.?) Author of the *Tattvopaplavasimha*, one of the only surviving texts of the **materialist** philosophical school. One of the philosophical peculiarities of the materialist school was that they accepted only perception (**pratyaksha**) as a reliable **pramana**, or means by which people can gain true and accurate knowledge. In his text, Jayarashi argued against the reliability of inference (**anumana**) as one of the pramanas by refuting the concept of cause and effect. To make an inference, such as inferring the result an action will bring in the future based on the result it brought in the past, one must believe that the cause-and-effect model is reliable.

## Jejuri

Town in the Pune district of the central Indian state of **Maharashtra**, about forty miles south and east of the city of Pune. Jejuri is primarily noted as the site of the primary temple to **Khandoba**, an important Maharashtrian regional **deity** who has been brought into the pantheon of gods as an **avatar**, or incarnation, of the god **Shiva**.

## Jhanki

("glimpse") A momentary "glimpse" of the divine, in which the devotee (**bhakta**) gains momentary access to the **world of the gods**. Jhankis are most often conveyed through the performing arts: through the mental images created when devotional poetry is read, recited, or sung, or through the images presented in religious **dance**, drama, or film. During these momentary encounters, the devotee comes briefly into the presence of the **deity**, sharing the deity's world. This stress on the opportunity to experience a brief physical presence in the deity's world is particularly strong in the **Vaishnava** devotionalism connected with the gods **Krishna** and **Rama**. **Worship** of these deities often stresses visualization of the deity's life and everyday actions as a way for devotees to gain access to that divine world. Devotees of both deities have created plays, or **lilas**, to aid them in this process: for Rama, they are the **Ram Lilas**, which are performed throughout India during the autumn festival **season**, and for Krishna, they are the Krishna Lilas, performed during the annual **monsoon** season in **Brindavan**, Krishna's childhood home.

## Jimutavahana

(early 12th c.) Author of the ***Dayabhaga***, a legal text primarily concerned with **inheritance**, partition, and the division of property. It eventually became the primary legal authority for the Bengal cultural region; areas outside Bengal were usually governed by a different legal text, the ***Mitakshara***. One of the major differences between these texts concerns the nature of inheritance. The *Mitakshara* stresses inheritance by survivorship, in which only living males can inherit property, whereas the *Dayabhaga* stresses inheritance by succession, in which a dead man's heirs can inherit in his name.

## Jiva

("life") In philosophical and **Vaishnava** (devotees of the god **Vishnu**) discussion, jiva is the name used for the embodied soul of a human being. In a more general sense, the word can refer to any living being.

## Jivacchraddha

("**Shraddha** for a living [person]") A particular type of shraddha, or memorial service for the dead, although in this case it is performed for a person who is still living. In many cases, a person performs the Jivacchraddha for himself if he has no **sons** to fulfill the responsibility or if he suspects that the rite may not be performed properly after his death. The person performing this rite makes a small figure of sacred **kusha** grass, representing the person for whom the shraddha is being performed, and then proceeds with the normal shraddha ceremony.

## Jivanmukta

In Indian **philosophy**, a person who has attained final liberation of the soul while still living (**jivanmukti**) and who continues to live in a state of liberation. The concept of the jivanmukta is essential in many branches of **Advaita Vedanta**, one of the **six schools** of classical Indian philosophy. The Advaita school upholds a philosophical position known as monism, which is the belief that a single Ultimate Reality known as **Brahman** lies behind all things, and that all things are merely differing forms of that reality. For Advaita proponents, the problem of human bondage is that human beings, blinded by **avidya** or mistaken understanding, do not recognize this ultimate unity, but mistakenly persist in seeing the world as made up of separate and diverse things. The possibility of attaining jivanmukta status is essential to the Advaita school because it supports their belief that bondage and liberation are attained not by doing or becoming anything, but rather by replacing a mistaken understanding with a correct one. After this has happened one will continue to live, but because of the radical change in consciousness one's life will never be the same.

## Jivanmukti

("liberation while living") In later Indian **philosophy**, the notion that one can attain final liberation of the soul while still living and continue to live after that in a liberated state. The **jivanmukta** (one who is liberated while still living) is an important claim for many of the subschools of **Advaita Vedanta**, one of the **six schools** of classical Indian philosophy. The Advaita school upholds a philosophical position known as monism, which is the belief that a single Ultimate Reality known as **Brahman** lies behind all things, and that all things are merely differing forms of that reality. For Advaita proponents, the problem of human bondage is that human beings, blinded by **avidya** or mistaken understanding, do not recognize this ultimate unity. Liberation is not attained by "doing" anything or by becoming something that one is not, but by realizing what has always been the case, and thus exchanging a mistaken understanding for a correct one. Although this cognition forever changes how a person perceives the world, it brings no ontological changes, meaning that on a physical level one continues to exist as before, until the **karma** that has created one's present body is exhausted. For further information see Karl H. Potter (ed.), *Advaita Vedanta up to Samkara and His Pupils*, 1981.

## Jnana

In Indian philosophical thought, a word with different meanings in different contexts. The word *jnana* is derived from the verb "to know," and one of its meanings, at least in a perceptual context, is "awareness." In a more abstract sense it stands for what it means to truly "know" something;

along with **karmamarga** and the **bhaktimarga**, the **jnanamarga** is one of the paths to liberation of the soul mentioned in the **Bhagavad Gita**. In this latter context, an appropriate translation might be "wisdom" or "realization," since this is not the sort of "knowledge" that comes from reading a book or receiving instruction, but instead reflects profound understanding gained through great effort.

## Jnanakarmasamucchaya

("combination of awareness and action") Religious discipline for ending the bondage and reincarnation (**samsara**) of the soul, which was advocated by members of the **bhedabhada** ("identity-in-difference") philosophical school. According to this school, correct awareness (**jnana**) and ritual action (**karma**) were both necessary elements in gaining final liberation of the soul. The preparatory step was to perform meritorious ritual actions—fasting (**upavasa**), **worship**, and pilgrimage—to weaken one's negative karmic dispositions, such as greed, anger, and ignorance. These weakened dispositions were later completely destroyed through meditation. The assumptions behind this path were attacked by other philosophical schools, particularly the **Advaita Vedanta** school, which minimized the value of ritual action and claimed that final liberation came from awareness alone.

## Jnanamarga

("Path of Realization") One of Hinduism's three generally accepted paths to gain final liberation of the soul, along with the Path of Devotion (**bhaktimarga**) and the Path of Action (**karmamarga**). While the bhaktimarga stresses devotion to God and the karmamarga emphasizes selfless action in the world, the jnanamarga stresses realizing the ultimate identity of one's individual Self (**atman**) and Ultimate Reality (**Brahman**). This realization is usually described as coming in a flash of insight, which may take years of effort to attain but which fundamentally shifts one's perspective on the world.

## Jnana ("knowledge") Mudra

A particular symbolic hand **gesture** (**mudra**) in Indian **dance**, **sculpture**, and ritual. In the jnana mudra, the tips of the thumb and index finger are touching, with the palm and hand held across the region of the heart. As its name clearly shows, it is used to indicate a profound understanding of the basic workings of the universe.

## Jnanasambandhar

Honorific epithet for the **Nayanar** poet-saint **Sambandar**. See **Sambandar**.

## Jnanendriya

("organ of awareness") In Indian **philosophy**, jnanendriya refers to any of the sense organs, traditionally considered to be the eyes, ears, tongue, nose, and skin.

## Jnaneshvar

(1275–1296?) Poet and saint who is the first great figure in the **Varkari Panth**, a religious community centered around the **worship** of the Hindu god **Vithoba** at his temple at **Pandharpur** in the modern state of **Maharashtra**. According to tradition, Jnaneshvar was an outcaste **brahmin**. He incurred this penalty because his father was a lapsed **ascetic**—he left his wife to become an ascetic, only to rejoin his family at his **guru's** command. Jnaneshvar came from a very religious family: His sister **Muktibai** is revered by the Varkaris in her own right, and his elder brother **Nivrttinath** is supposed to have been a "spiritual grandson" of the great ascetic **Gorakhnath**. Varkari tradition makes clear that Jnaneshvar lived much of his life in the town of **Alandi**, but the truth of the accounts of many events associated with his life is questionable—for example, he is said to have caused a buffalo to

recite the sacred text known as the **Veda** in order to humble the pride of the local **brahmin** priests. Jnaneshvar's greatest work was the ***Jnaneshvari***, a Marathi-language commentary on the **Bhagavad Gita**, one of the most influential Hindu religious texts. He is also famous for his songs in praise of Vithoba, which the Varkaris still sing today. For further information see G. A. Deleury, *The Cult of Vithoba*, 1960; and Justin Abbott and Narhar R. Godbole (trans.), *Stories of Indian Saints*, 1982.

## Jnaneshvari

Marathi-language commentary on the **Bhagavad Gita**, one of the most influential Hindu religious texts. The *Jnaneshvari* was composed by the Maharashtrian poet-saint **Jnaneshvar**, whose intentions in writing it were to make the Bhagavad Gita accessible to the common people, who were not able to read the text in the original **Sanskrit**, and to give his own learned interpretation of the text's contents. This emphasis on giving ordinary people full access to religious life was one of the consistent themes in the (devotional) **bhakti** movement and, like many other figures, Jnaneshvar is reported to have faced considerable opposition from the **brahmin** priests, who thought that such advanced teachings should not be revealed to the common public.

## Jogi

(variant of **yogi**, "adept") An epithet for various sorts of **ascetics**. It often refers to the **Nathpanthis**, followers of the teacher **Gorakhnath**. Their designation as "jogis" comes from the fact that the practice of **yoga**, particularly **hatha yoga**, is one of the major emphases in their religious life. The term may also refer to the **Aghoris**.

## Joking Relationships

Within the traditional Hindu joint family, the types of relationships within a single generation differ markedly according to family status, particularly among the family's adult brothers and their wives. As the eventual head of the family, the oldest brother is usually portrayed as a serious and grave authority figure, toward whom everyone must act with respect. The eldest brother's wife is also given considerable respect, but she is also said to share a "joking relationship" with her husband's younger brothers, as do all wives with their husband's younger brothers. Whereas **women** are expected to behave decorously toward relatives with higher status, joking relationships have much greater freedom of expression. These are usually characterized as full of banter and casual conversation that would be inappropriate with a person of higher status.

## Jones, Sir William

(1746–1794) Founder of the Asiatic Society of Bengal and one of the fathers of modern Indology. Jones came to Calcutta from England in 1783 as a Supreme Court judge during the governorship of Warren Hastings, considered one of the founders of the British Empire in India. He was employed by the East India Company, who, in its pursuit of trade and profit, acquired political power over regions of India. Jones immediately applied himself to the study of **Sanskrit**, in part to discover the particulars of traditional Hindu law, since the East India Company's general policy was to allow different religious communities to be governed by their own traditional laws. Jones was a linguistic genius who had mastered the current and classical European languages, as well as Persian. He immediately recognized Sanskrit as a distant relative of Greek and Latin, and through his influence the serious study of Sanskrit texts began. From a legal perspective, his most important work was a translation of the laws of **Manu** (**Manu Smrti**). This was one of the most important texts in the **dharma literature** and prescribed ideal rules and regulations for all sorts of human conduct. This

translation was intended to give the British some idea of classical Hindu law, but they failed to realize that this text was composed not as a legal manual but as a guide to religious life. Jones died at age forty-eight from an inflammation of the liver. His translation was published posthumously.

## Joshimath

Town and sacred site (**tirtha**) in the **Himalayas** on the banks of the **Alakananda River**, in the Chamoli district of the state of **Uttar Pradesh**. Joshimath is the location of the **Jyotir math**, one of the four **maths**, or dwelling places for **ascetics**, supposedly established by the philosopher **Shankaracharya**. The Jyotir math is home to **Dashanami Sanyasis**, or **twice-born** renunciant ascetics. According to local legend, the Jyotir Math is the place where Shankaracharya attained the ultimate realization and composed his commentaries on the Hindu scriptures. Aside from the Jyotir math, Joshimath is famous for its connection to a temple dedicated to Narasimha, the god **Vishnu's Man-Lion avatar**. This temple was also reportedly established by Shankaracharya and contains several stunning sculptural images. Joshimath is an important transit point on the road to the temple at **Badrinath**, and it is also the winter seat of Badrinath's presiding **deity**, where he (symbolically represented by a traveling image) resides and is worshiped during the winter months, when Badrinath becomes snowbound and inaccessible. See also **Narasimha avatar**.

## Juggernaut

Anglicized form of **Jagannath**, who is the presiding **deity** of the temple with the same name in the eastern Indian city of **Puri**. The word "juggernaut," which in general English usage refers to anything that requires blind devotion or horrible **sacrifice**, comes from a widespread myth surrounding the procession of Jagannath, or Juggernaut, and his two siblings around Puri during the **Rath Yatra** each summer. The cars that carry them in the procession are enormous—Jagannath's measures forty-five feet high and thirty feet wide, and travels on sixteen wheels that are seven feet high—and are drawn by ropes pulled by hundreds of people. One of the staple fictions of British colonial lore described Jagannath's frenzied devotees (**bhakta**) committing **suicide** by throwing themselves under the car's wheels, in order to die in the sight of the god. Despite the legendary status of such stories, suicides of this sort were in fact extremely uncommon: most of those who died under the wheels of the Juggernaut procession were pulling the ropes when they lost their footing, fell into the cars' path, and were prevented from escaping by the crushing crowds.

## Juna ("Old") Akhara

Name of one of seven subgroups of the **Naga** class of the **Dashanami Sanyasis**, renunciant ascetics who are devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva**. The subgroups are known as **akharas** and are similar to regiments of an army. Until the beginning of the nineteenth century the Nagas were primarily mercenary soldiers but were also active in merchandise trading; neither of these characteristics applies in contemporary times. Members of the Juna Akhara revere the sage **Dattatreya** as their "tutelary **deity**," the primary deity from which they learn; each of the akharas have different tutelary deities. Some accounts say **Bhairava** was the patron deity of the Juna Akhara in earlier times, which would explain the fact that the group is also known as the Bhairava Akhara. The literal meaning of the present name and its connection with Bhairava imply that it is very old. In contemporary times it is a large organization found only in northern India. In some places it is given low status for admitting members from the lower social classes.

Up until the middle of the present century, the Juna Akhara marched with the **Niranjani Akhara** in the bathing (**snana**) processions during the **Kumbha Mela** and was thus considered a subsidiary part of that akhara. For most of this century the Junas were upset that they held subordinate status despite the fact that they have far more members than any other akhara. The Junas began their attempt to gain the status of a separate procession with the 1903 **Haridwar** Kumbha Mela, but were not accorded this position until 1962. The akharas agreed that during a Haridwar Kumbha Mela, the Junas would lead the **Sanyasi** processions for the bathing on the festival of **Shivaratri**. However, the Niranjanis would be first for the other two major bathing days—the **new moon** in **Chaitra** and the Kumbha bath on April 14. This arrangement broke down at the 1998 Kumbha Mela in Haridwar, when the Junas demanded that they be allowed to go first at the Chaitra bath as well, based on their status as the largest akhara. On the day of the second bath, this disagreement erupted into a full-scale riot between **ascetic** groups and police in which many people were hurt. There was great worry that such violence would recur on the main bathing day, but the day came off without incident when the Juna Akhara boycotted the bathing processions.

## Jupiter

In Hindu astrology, a planet associated with knowledge, power, and good character. In **Sanskrit**, Jupiter's name is **guru**, and its importance in Hindu astrology reflects the importance of the guru or religious figure in Hindu religious life. Jupiter is the most powerful of the benevolent **planets**—the others are the **sun**, **moon**, **Mercury**, and **Venus**—although for each person Jupiter's powers vary according to its place in the **natal horoscope**, or alignment of the heavenly bodies at the time of **birth**, and the influence of friendly or hostile planets. During the **week**, Jupiter presides over **Thursday** which, because of the planet's astrological powers, is considered an auspicious, or lucky, **day**.

## Jutha

In its most general sense, jutha refers to any food that has come into contact with saliva. Such contact is believed to render that food impure and unfit for anyone else to eat. Since **eating** is traditionally done with one's fingers, any food on one's plate after one has begun to eat is considered contaminated by association, even if it has not yet been taken into one's mouth. As with all bodily fluids, saliva is considered particularly impure, a substance that "imprints" food with the nature of the person eating it. Eating food from the same plate is a sign of extreme closeness—most commonly done by husband and wife, but also by very close friends. Conversely, eating another's person's leftovers is a sign of extreme status difference—it is done only by people who are desperately poor, by disciples as a sign of devotion to their **guru** or religious leader, or by devotees (**bhakta**) receiving **prasad** or sanctified food, the vehicle for **grace** from their chosen **deity**.

## Jwalamukhi

("flame mouth") Presiding **deity** of the Jwalamukhi shrine in the state of **Himachal Pradesh**, and one of the nine **Shiwalik goddesses**. According to the site's mythic charter, Jwalamukhi is one of the **Shakti Pithas**, a network of sites sacred to the **goddess** that spreads throughout the Indian subcontinent. Each Shakti Pitha marks the site where a body part of the dismembered goddess **Sati** fell to **earth**, taking form there as a different goddess; in the case of Jwalamukhi the body part was Sati's tongue. The human tongue is an extremely powerful part of the body—connected with speech, **eating**, and sex—and thus Jwalamukhi is considered a very powerful shrine. The cave containing the shrine has a small vent of natural gas, which has been lit for as long as people can remember. This flame is believed to be a self-manifested (**svayambhu**) form of the Goddess, here in the form of her tongue. For further information see David R. Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, 1986; and Kathleen Erndl, *Victory To The Mother*, 1993. See also **pitha**.

The Mahakaleshvar Temple in the city of Ujjain. This site contains one of the twelve jyotirlingas, pillar-shaped images that mark places where the god Shiva is believed to have appeared in a shaft of light.

## Jyeshth

According to the lunar **calendar**, by which most Hindu religious festivals are determined, Jyeshth is the third month in the lunar **year**, usually falling in May–June. This is considered the first month in the hot **season**: The weather in this month is scorchingly hot and bone dry. The major holidays in Jyeshth are **Achala Ekadashi**, **Savitri Puja**, **Ganga Dashahara**, and **Nirjala Ekadashi**.

## Jyotirlinga

("**linga** of light") In several different mythic sources, the first manifestation of the god **Shiva** is described as a giant

pillar of **fire**, which stretches above the **heavens** and below the **earth**. The gods **Brahma** and **Vishnu** try to find this pillar's top and bottom but cannot. When they admit their failure, the figure of Shiva emerges from the pillar of light and blesses them. Shiva's devotees (**bhakta**) believe that there are twelve sites in India where this jyotirlinga came down to earth; these twelve sites are deemed extraordinarily holy, and at each of them Shiva is believed to be uniquely present. At each of these sites the primary image is a linga, the pillar-shaped image that is a symbolic form of Shiva. Each of these lingas is considered a different manifestation of Shiva, and these twelve sites each take the name of the linga that is their presiding **deity**. The other eleven manifestations of Shiva and their locations are: **Somnath** and **Nageshvar** in the state of **Gujarat**; **Kedarnath** in the **Himalaya** Mountains; **Vishvanath** in the city of **Benares**; **Vaidyanath** in the state of **Bihar**; **Mahakaleshvar** in the central Indian city of **Ujjain**; **Omkareshvar** in the state of **Madhya Pradesh**; **Bhimashankar**, **Ghrneshvar**, and **Tryambakeshvar** in the state of **Maharashtra**; and **Rameshvar** in the state of **Tamil Nadu**.

## Jyotir Math

One of the four maths or sacred centers traditionally believed to have been established by the great philosopher **Shankaracharya**; the others are the **Sharada math**, **Shringeri math**, and **Govardhan math**. These four sacred centers are each associated with one of the four geographical corners of the Indian subcontinent; the Jyotir math is in the northern quarter, in the town of **Joshimath** in the state of **Uttar Pradesh**, high in the Himalaya Mountains. Shankaracharya is traditionally cited as the founder of the **Dashanami Sanyasis**, the most prestigious Hindu **ascetic** order. The Dashanami ("ten names") ascetics are devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva** and are separated into ten divisions, each with a different name. These

ten divisions are organized into four larger groups—**Anandawara**, **Bhogawara**, **Bhuriwara**, and **Kitawara**—each of which has two or three of the ten divisions, and each of which is associated with one of the four sacred centers. Of these, the Jyotir math is associated with the Anandawara group of the Dashanamis.

## Jyotisha

In its most general usage, the word *jyotisha* refers to astrology. The word itself is derived from *jyotis* ("light," and by extension the heavenly bodies) and is concerned with the movement of the celestial bodies, their varying configurations, and the divisions of time that are derived from them. This attention to the **heavens** is a very old cultural concern, for jyotisha is one of the six **Vedangas**, the auxiliary branches of knowledge connected with the sacred scriptures known as the **Vedas**. As one of the Vedangas, jyotisha was concerned with identifying appropriate days and times to perform Vedic sacrifices.

Even in modern times, many traditional Hindus take astrology very seriously, based on the assumption that the results of one's previous **karma** lead one to be born at a particular moment. One's **natal horoscope**, or the positioning of the celestial bodies at the time of **birth**, thus provides a karmic "itinerary" indicating where one has been and what one might expect in the future. People frequently consider astrology when making important decisions, particularly in arranging marriages—to determine the couple's compatibility, to see whether any trouble is lurking ahead, and to arrange an auspicious or lucky time for the ceremony itself. In the same way, some Hindus will consult an astrologer before beginning any important undertaking, to be sure that the work will begin at an auspicious time and will therefore be more likely to succeed.

The basic principles of Indian astrology are very similar to those of Western astrology. The **zodiac** signs are nearly identical. However, the two systems

have a different method for determining each sign's starting point, causing some discrepancies between the two systems. Aside from the **sun**, **moon**, and five visible **planets** in Western astrology, Indian astrology has two additional planets, **Rahu** and **Ketu**, which are both considered inauspicious and malevolent. In addition to the twelve signs of the solar zodiac, Indian astrology also has a lunar zodiac with twenty-seven "lunar mansions" (**nakshatras**), each of which has particular qualities. Although at the most basic level astrological reckoning is fairly simple, it can quickly become highly complex and is thus generally left to professional astrologers. This is still a viable profession throughout much of India, since the generally accepted belief that some times are **auspicious** and others **inauspicious** means that ordinary people will hire specialists to keep them informed of these times.

# K

## Kabandha

("headless trunk") A **demon** in the *Ramayana* (the earlier of the two great Hindu epics) who attacks the god-king **Rama**, the epic's protagonist, and Rama's brother **Lakshmana**. In a previous life Kabandha has been a king of the **gandharvas**, or celestial musicians; but in a battle with the god **Indra**, Kabandha's head is pushed down into his body. When Kabandha requests some means by which he can eat, Indra places a mouth in Kabandha's belly. Indra tells him that the **curse** will be broken when Rama and Lakshmana cut off his arms.

As Rama and Lakshmana travel through a forest, searching for Rama's kidnapped wife **Sita**, they are set upon by Kabandha, who grabs each of them in one of his long arms. Finding they could not escape, Rama and Lakshmana each slash off one of his arms, and with his dying breaths Kabandha asks the brothers to burn his body. As the body is burning, the gandharva king arises from the fire in his previous form and advises the brothers to seek help from the monkey-king **Sugriva**.

## Kabir

(mid-15th c.?) A poet who is widely regarded as one of the greatest northern Indian religious figures. Kabir is among a group of central and northern Indian poet-saints known as **Sants** who shared several tendencies: emphasis on individualized, interior religion leading to a personal experience of the divine; disdain for external ritual, particularly image **worship**; faith in the power of the divine Name; and a tendency to ignore hierarchical distinctions between castes. Kabir strongly adhered to these beliefs—in his writings he uncompromisingly attacks any sort of religious practice based on habit or tradition, including **asceticism**, special modes of dress, fasting (**upavasa**), image worship, **caste**, and scripture.

In his poetry, Kabir identifies himself as belonging to a caste of weavers (julaha), and according to tradition he supported himself through this occupation. Kabir's history makes it difficult to link him with a particular religion. In Arabic, the name Kabir ("Great") is one of the names given to Allah in the Qur'an, identifying him as a Muslim. However, his poetry reveals his great knowledge of Hindu religious life. It is generally believed that the members of Kabir's julaha community were recent converts to Islam who had not yet been fully assimilated. Kabir's poetry, however, clearly shows that he considered himself neither Hindu nor Muslim. Part of Kabir's popularity undoubtedly stems from his blunt, passionate affirmation that real religious attainment is only gained by internal, individual experience of the divine, to which he gives the name **Ram**. This is not the god-king who is the hero of the *Ramayana*, but a name for the indescribable, absolute Supreme Reality. Both of these emphases reflect the influence of the **Nathpanthi** ascetics, who also stressed internal experience and **yoga**.

In one of his songs, Kabir once boasted that he had been so absorbed in the divine that he had never put pen to paper. His songs remain popular even today, and many of his shorter epigrams have become proverbial sayings. Kabir's oldest attested poetry survives in three major collections: one in the **Adigranth**, the Sikh scripture also known as the "Primal Book"; one collected by the **Dadupanth**, the religious organization founded by the Sant poet-saint **Dadu**; and the *Bijak*, which was compiled by the **Kabirpanth**, a religious community that claimed Kabir as its **guru** (religious preceptor). The significant differences

among these collections indicate that they have no single source. For further information see Charlotte Vaudeville (trans.), *Kabir*, 1974; Linda Hess and Shukdev Singh (trans.), *The Bijak of Kabir*, 1983; John S. Hawley and Mark Juergensmeyer (trans.), *Songs of the Saints of India*, 1988; Nirmal Dass, *Songs of Kabir from the Adi Granth*, 1991; and David Lorenzen, *Kabir Legends and Ananta-Das's Kabir Parachai*, 1991.

## Kabirpanth

Religious community whose members are followers of the northern Indian poet-saint **Kabir**. Some Kabirpanthis are **ascetics**, and some are householders. The group's most important center is located in **Benares** (where Kabir is believed to have lived) and houses an ascetic community. Although in his poetry Kabir rejects ritual, **worship**, and reliance on anything but one's own unmediated experience—a context implying the practice of **yoga**—the Kabirpanth has taken on all of these conventional religious trappings. The community's sacred text is the *Bijak*, a collection of poems and epigrams attributed to Kabir. Its sacred centers have pictures of Kabir, who has become an object of worship. Elaborate rituals are performed on certain prescribed days. This situation is ironic because it appears that many of the practices Kabir condemned have been adopted by the community professing to follow his teachings. Given Kabir's continual emphasis on the need for unmediated personal experience of the divine, the notion that he would be seen as the founder of a sect would itself have been outrageous to him. For further information see David Lorenzen, "Traditions of Non-Caste Hinduism: The Kabir Panth," in *Contributions to Indian Sociology,* Vol. 21, No. 2, 1987.

## Kadambari

**Sanskrit** romance novel authored by the writer and dramatist **Bana** (7th c.), who was a contemporary of the northern Indian emperor **Harsha**. The love story between the main characters, a princess named Kadambari and a prince named Chandripida, is but one element of the book's complex plot. The *Kadambari* was left unfinished at Bana's death. It gives a detailed picture of Indian life during Bana's time.

## Kadru

In Hindu mythology, the daughter of the divine sage **Daksha** and sister of **Vinata**. Kadru gives birth to a line of serpents, whereas her sister's children are born as eagles, the most famous of whom is **Garuda**. The well-known hostility between these species is attributed to a conflict between Vinata and Kadru: one day they are arguing about the tail color of a certain celestial horse, with Vinata arguing that it is white and Kadru asserting that it is black. The disagreement becomes more intense until they finally agree that whoever is wrong will become a slave to the other. To ensure her victory, Kadru persuades a number of her snake children to hang from the back of the horse. From a distance the tail appears to be black. (Some of her children disapprove of such dishonesty and refuse to participate. In revenge Kadru curses them to die in the snake-killing **sacrifice** performed by King **Janamjeya**.) When Vinata sees the black snakes, she believes she has been defeated and serves Kadru under extremely harsh conditions for many years. Vinata is finally rescued by her son Garuda, who discovers the fraud behind Vinata's defeat and embarks on a program of killing snakes that has never stopped.

## Kaikeyi

In the *Ramayana*, the earlier of the two great Indian epics, Kaikeyi is the second wife of King **Dasharatha**, the mother of **Bharata**, and foster mother to **Rama**, the epic's protagonist. Kaikeyi is directly responsible for one of the most

Mount Kailas, overlooking the Chiu Monastery in Tibet. Kailas is considered to be the mythic Mount Meru, home of the god Shiva and the center of the universe.

villainous acts in the *Ramayana*: She forces Rama into fourteen years of exile in the forest, a major event in the epic's plot. Despite her evil action, she is not considered an evil person, but rather a person who acts out of love for her **son** yet who is burdened with extremely bad judgment and bad advice. When Dasharatha announces that he intends to anoint Rama as the heir to the throne, Kaikeyi is as happy as everyone else. Rama has always respected her as much as his own mother, **Kausalya**, and has treated Bharata as his equal. But as the day of the ceremony approached, Kaikeyi's mind is slowly poisoned by her maid, **Manthara**. Manthara convinces Kaikeyi that after Rama has been crowned the heir-apparent, she and Bharata will be treated as little more than chattel, or objects, if they are allowed to live at all.

Kaikeyi's concern for her son leads her to drastic action. Many years before, Dasharatha gave Kaikeyi two boons, or rewards, for her help in winning a great battle. She has never redeemed these boons, but now demands that Dasharatha exile Rama to the forest for fourteen years and crown Bharata as ruler in his place. Dasharatha pleads with Kaikeyi, but she does not change her mind. He is finally forced to grant her wish. Kaikeyi's request brings her disgrace not only from her husband, who curses her for separating him from Rama, but also from her son. Bharata rebukes Kaikeyi for depriving Rama of what is rightfully his, and refuses to rule until Rama orders him to serve in his place during the exile. The only person who does not condemn her is Rama, whom the epic portrays as serenely happy to obey his parents' commands, whatever they might be.

## Kailas

Himalayan peak in southwestern Tibet renowned as a pilgrimage place (**tirtha**) for both Hindus and Buddhists. In Hindu mythology, Kailas is believed to be Mount **Meru**, the center of the universe. It is also believed that the top of

Mount Kailas is the place where the god **Shiva** makes his home. For both Hindus and Buddhists, the central act of pilgrimage to Kailas is to walk around the mountain, thus symbolically traversing the entire earth. The journey begins at **Manasarovar**, a lake near the mountain's base, which in Hindu mythology is esteemed as the lake of the gods. Many factors combine to make the sixty-five-mile circuit an extremely difficult journey: The area is extremely remote, the climate is harsh and unforgiving even in June (the customary pilgrimage time), and the circuit itself is physically strenuous, with its highest point over 19,000 feet above sea level. Storms can suddenly arise at any time of the year, and pilgrims who are unprepared can easily die of exposure. Given these difficulties, relatively few people perform this pilgrimage; it raises the status of those who do. For many years Chinese prohibition**s** on travel in Tibet made it impossible for people to undertake this pilgrimage. Since the early 1990s these rules have been relaxed and small groups of religious pilgrims are again making the sacred journey.

## Kailasanatha

The largest and most famous of the rock-cut temples at **Ellora** in the state of **Maharashtra**; the temple is dedicated to the god **Shiva** in his form as the "Lord of Mount **Kailas**." The temple was constructed late in the eighth century by kings of the **Rashtrakuta dynasty** and completed during the reign of Krishna I. The Kailasanatha temple is modeled after other contemporary temples: its main elements are an outer gateway, an assembly hall, and a central shrine (**garbhagrha**) surrounded by a processional path (**pradakshina**) to smaller shrines. It is set on a high platform base topped with a ninety-six-foot-high spire representing Mount Kailas in the **Himalayas** and covered with decorative carving. The amazing point about this temple is that the entire structure is a **sculpture**—workers carved it out of a single rock outcropping, starting at the top and working down. It is estimated that during construction, the builders had to remove three million cubic feet of stone from the temple and the excavated courtyards surrounding it. See also **caves, artificial**.

## Kaitabha

In Hindu mythology, one of two **demons** who attempt to kill the god **Brahma** (the other is **Madhu**). The story is recounted in several mythic sources, with some important differences among them. All versions agree that Madhu and Kaitabha are born from the god **Vishnu's** earwax during the period of cosmic dissolution (**pralaya**). As the creation of the world begins, a lotus sprouts from Vishnu's navel. It opens to reveal the creator-god, Brahma, who is immediately attacked by Madhu and Kaitabha. In all versions of the myth, Brahma appeals for help. Vishnu tricks the demons (who are strong but not too bright) and slays them. The difference comes in the **deity** to whom Brahma appeals for help. The story first appears in the mythology of Vishnu; here Brahma invokes that deity. Yet this same story also appears in the *Devimahatmya*, the earliest mythic source for the cult of the Mother **Goddess** as the supreme divine power. In this version, Brahma's hymn of praise is to the Goddess, who in her form as **Yoganidra** ("sleep of **yoga**") has lulled Vishnu into a cosmic stupor, rendering him unable to come to Brahma's aid. Pleased by Brahma's praise, the Goddess withdraws her influence over Vishnu; he awakens and slays the demons.

## Kaivalya

("isolation") In **Samkhya** and **Yoga**, two of the **six schools** of Hindu **philosophy**, kaivalya is the state of final liberation. A person who has attained kaivalya has fully comprehended the difference between two important principles: the conscious but inert **purusha**, which is identified as the Self, and the active but

unconscious **prakrti**. According to Samkhya metaphysics, confusion between these two eternally distinct principles triggers the **evolution** of subjective consciousness and the exterior world, in which the eternal Self becomes the witness to repeated rebirths. Of the two schools, Samkhya provides the theoretical explanation for bondage and liberation of the soul, whereas Yoga provides the method to liberation. The purpose in performing **yoga** is to help the person distinguish between these two principles, removing obstructions to understanding, particularly the karmic tendencies rooted in egoism. According to the **Yoga Sutras**, the foundational text for the Yoga school, those who can distinguish between these two principles and discern the soul's identity with the purusha attain independence from all external causes, mastery over all states of being, and omniscience. For further information see Gerald Larson and Ram Shankar Bhattacharya (eds.), *Samkhya: A Dualist Tradition in Indian Philosophy*, 1987; and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore (eds.), *A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy*, 1957.

## Kajari Teej

One of two festivals called **Teej**. See **Teej**.

## Kala

In **Sanskrit** and its daughter languages, a word that can mean both "time" and "death." Kala is used as one of the alternate names for the god **Yama**, the lord of death and the master of all living beings.

## Kalahasti

Temple and sacred site (**tirtha**) in the southern state of **Andhra Pradesh**, about fifty miles east of the town of **Tirupati** and 125 miles northwest of the city of Madras. Kalahasti is famous as one of the **bhutalingas** ("elemental lingas"), a network of five southern Indian sites sacred to the god **Shiva**. At each of these sites Shiva is worshiped as a **linga**, the pillar-shaped object that is his symbolic form, and at each site the linga is believed to be formed from one of the five primordial **elements** (bhuta)—**earth**, **wind**, **fire**, **water**, and **space** (**akasha**). Kalahasti's linga is associated with the element of wind, and the manifestation of Shiva there is Kalahasteshvar, the "Lord of Kalahasti."

Kalahasti is also one of the **Shakti Pithas**, a network of sites throughout the subcontinent that are sacred to the **Goddess**. Each Shakti Pitha marks the site where a body part of the dismembered goddess **Sati** fell to earth, taking form there as a different goddess; in the case of Kalahasti the body part was Sati's left shoulder. Kalahasti's sanctity is thus reinforced by having two highly powerful and sacred sites to two different **deities**. See also **pitha**.

## Kalamukha

("black face") Extinct monastic sect whose members were devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva** and whose name may refer to their practice of marking their heads with a black streak. Little is known about their doctrines or practices. While there are contemporary literary references to the **Kapalikas**, another extinct Shaivite **ascetic** community, the only sources for the Kalamukhas are a series of **inscriptions**. From these inscriptions we know that the Kalamukhas were strongest in the **Karnataka** region, although they were also present in other southern Indian regions. They flourished between the ninth and thirteenth centuries.

## Kalasha

("pitcher") In the **Nagara** style of temple **architecture** predominantly found in northern India, the kalasha is an inverted vase-shaped piece that crowns the temple towers (**shikharas**). In many cases, kalashas were made of gold to provide a decorative contrast above the stone. The kalasha on the highest tower typically has a banner fluttering from it. The

architectural symbolism in Hindu temples corresponds to the structure of human body, so the kalashas stand for the crown of the head, the highest and purest part of the body. They are also a symbol of the highest human religious potential.

## Kalhana

(12th c.) Kashmiri poet and author of the *Rajatarangini* ("River of Kings"), a poetic chronicle of the kings of **Kashmir**. Kalhana's chronicle is an unusually descriptive and accurate history of Kashmir and its political, social, and religious institutions. The text's only shortcoming is that it pays little attention to the outside world. Kalhana's historical emphasis is unusual for Indian writers, and his chronicle is one of the few indigenous Indian histories.

## Kali

("black") Incomprehensibly fierce and powerful divine form of the Mother **Goddess**. Kali is the awful, uncontrolled power of the divine in its most terrifying aspects. She is consistently associated with images of **blood**, death, and destruction; her dwelling place is the **cremation ground**. Her iconography portrays her as clothed with severed heads and limbs, and her form is lean, gaunt, and haggard, with lolling tongue and lips smeared with blood. Paradoxically, millions of Kali's devotees (**bhakta**) refer to her as "mother."

Kali's roots are uncertain, but she is generally assumed to be an autochthonous ("of the land") **deity**. Her dark color—associated with low social status, her preference for dwelling in inaccessible places, and her **worship** by Indian aboriginal tribes and people at the margins of society, all seem to point to origins as a local goddess, perhaps of tribal people. Some early **Sanskrit** dramas, such as the poet **Bhavabhuti's** *Malatimadhava*, mention fierce goddesses who received **offerings** of blood from their devotees.

This same motif was a central element in the stories about the **Thugs** in the nineteenth century.

One of Kali's earliest descriptions comes in the **Devimahatmya**, the earliest known source for the notion that God is feminine. One of the *Devimahatmya's* episodes describes the birth of Kali (in her form as **Mahakali**) as the anger of the Goddess incarnate. In the story, Kali first destroys the **demon** armies by stuffing them into her mouth and eating them whole, symbolizing her all-consuming power to destroy. Her other feat in this text is the destruction of **Raktabija**, a demon who receives the boon that any drop of his blood that falls to the earth will instantly turn into a clone of him—a boon that renders him practically unconquerable. Kali defeats him by drinking his blood as it is shed until it is completely gone. Both of these episodes reinforce her image as a terrifying and powerful goddess, her destructive capacity, and her associations with substances and practices normally considered to be defiling. As Kinsley notes, Kali can also be seen as a symbolic statement that human life is uncertain and that tragedy and misfortune can occur without warning, despite the best-laid plans.

Worship of Kali has followed two paths, one in agreement with these horrific images and one in contradiction to them. On one hand, Kali has been an important deity for practitioners of the secret, ritually-based religious practice known as **tantra**. The tantras describe reality as resulting from the interaction between polar opposites, symbolized in the deities of **Shiva** (consciousness) and **Shakti** ("power"). Shiva provides the ordering principle and is the Ultimate Reality, but Shakti provides the energy and dynamism that actually makes things happen. Consequently, goddesses take on an important role in tantric practice. Among these goddesses Kali stands preeminent, perhaps because she is the most radical articulation of feminine power and can thus be seen as bringing the greatest power to bear on

Image of the goddess Kali. Her fierce power is represented by the symbols of death and destruction that surround her: skulls, fire, her blood-smeared tongue, and severed heads and limbs.

behalf of her devotees. Her power over all things and Shiva's helplessness without this power is symbolized by the images of Kali standing over the prostrate Shiva, clearly in a dominant position. In this tradition, the tantric expert is seen as a heroic figure who gains power from the goddess.

The tantras also stress the reconciliation of opposites as a way to destroy all conceptual dualism and affirm the ultimate unity of the entire universe. To carry this out, tantric rituals may include practices involving substances normally forbidden, such as the so-called **Panchamakara**, or "Five Forbidden Things," as a way to affirm the provisional nature of all judgments of **purity** and impurity (**ashaucha**). Again, Kali is the quintessential tantric deity, since her iconography and mythology involve things normally considered impure: drinking blood and receiving **animal sacrifices**, living in the cremation ground, and clothing herself with severed limbs.

The other dominant image for the worship of Kali is as a mother. This image is preeminent in the Bengal region, and has become widely established there during the past few hundred years. This image of Kali is rooted in Indian images of motherhood, which are greatly idealized in terms of a mother's devotion to her children. The central belief is that if a devotee approaches Kali as a submissive child, ready to take whatever blows she gives, she will ultimately turn her awesome forces toward protecting her devotee. Kali's most famous devotees are the nineteenth-century Bengali figures **Ramprasad** and **Ramakrishna**; the former is famous for a poem in which he states that there are bad children but never a bad mother.

Religious adepts such as Ramprasad and Ramakrishna have been able to maintain this tension between Kali's horrific persona and her image as a mother, but in popular devotion this tension has been largely lost. Modern images of Kali tend to sweeten or ignore her horrific aspects, often portraying her

as young, beautiful, and almost benevolent. For more information on Kali, see David R. Kinsley, *The Sword and the Flute,* 1975; and *Hindu Goddesses*, 1986.

## Kalibangan

Archeological site in the western state of **Rajasthan**, a short distance from the border with Pakistan. Kalibangan is one of the cities of the **Indus Valley Civilization** and is part of cluster of cities in what many archaeologists believe was the **Saraswati River** valley, although at present the river disappears into the desert. The site at Kalibangan is nearly as large as the cities at **Harappa**, **Mohenjo-Daro**, and **Lothal**. The city plan is virtually identical to the others, thus revealing the scope of this mysterious ancient culture.

## Kalidasa

(5th c. ?) Generally considered the greatest **Sanskrit** writer, noted both for his command of the language and his ability to evoke poetic emotion (**rasa**) in his listeners. There is little definite information about Kalidasa's life; even the dates of his birth and death have been widely debated. According to legend, Kalidasa was an illiterate village boy. As a joke he was presented as a suitor for a learned princess who had vowed that she would only marry a man who could defeat her in a silent debate—that is, a debate using gestures instead of words. Kalidasa "defeated" the princess through coincidence and mutual misunderstanding and became her husband. When the princess discovered the depths of Kalidasa's ignorance, she threw him out of the house, ordering him not to return until he had become educated. In desperation he went to a temple of the **goddess Kali** and was about to offer himself as a **human sacrifice**, when Kali appeared to him and gave him absolute mastery of **Sanskrit**. Upon his return, his wife is reported to have asked him, "Have you gained proficiency in [Sanskrit] speech?" ("Asti

kascit vagviseshatah?"). Kalidasa gave his answer over time, using the three words in his wife's question as the first words of his three greatest works—*Kumarasambhava*, *Meghaduta*, and *Raghuvamsha*. He is also the author of the dramas *Abhijnanashakuntala*, *Vikramorvashiya*, and the *Malavikagnimitra*. These works reportedly gained him the patronage of king **Vikramaditya**, with whose court Kalidasa is traditionally associated.

Legend also recounts that Kalidasa's miraculous gift of learning caused his death. Since his wife had spurred his search for learning, Kalidasa thought of her as his **guru** or religious teacher. Out of respect, he refused all sexual relations with her. Enraged at his refusal, she cursed him to meet his death at the hands of a woman. Many years later, a king composed a line of verse and offered a large prize to the person who could compose the best ending. Kalidasa heard about this contest while enjoying the company of a courtesan and effortlessly composed the perfect ending. In her greed for the prize, the courtesan stabbed and killed Kalidasa. Although her crime was discovered and she was punished, this legend illustrates the Hindu belief in the unstoppable power of fate, particularly when driven by a **curse**.

## Kalighat

Temple dedicated to the goddess **Kali** in the southern section of modern Calcutta. This temple is several hundred years old and is considered one of the most important temples in Calcutta. The city's name is supposedly an anglicized version of the temple's name. Local tradition claims that Kalighat is one of the **Shakti Pithas**, a network of sites sacred to the **Goddess**. Each Shakti Pitha marks the site where a body part of the dismembered goddess **Sati** fell to **earth**, taking form there as a different goddess; in the case of Kalighat the body part was one of Sati's toes. See also **pitha**.

## Kalika Devi

Name of both a shrine in the **Shiwalik Hills** (foothills of the **Himalayas**) and of its presiding **deity**. Kalika Devi is one of the nine **Shiwalik goddesses** and is believed to be a form of the **goddess Kali**. The temple itself is in the town of **Kalka**, on the road between the cities of Chandigarh and Simla. As is the case with many of the other Shiwalik goddesses, the image of Kalika Devi is a natural stone outcropping. This is considered a self-manifested (**svayambhu**) form of the **Goddess**. Unlike many of the other Shiwalik goddesses, the **Hindi** literature on this shrine does not claim that the temple is one of the **Shakti Pithas**, a network of sites sacred to the Goddess, mythically connected as places where a body part of the dismembered goddess **Sati** fell to **earth**. Instead, the literature simply commends the temple for its power and majesty. The literature does note, however, that local priests claim it as the place where Sati's hair fell to earth. This illustrates both the influence that pamphlet literature can have in channeling pilgrim traffic and the need to tie one's site into the network of the Shakti Pithas.

The stone outcropping that forms Kalika Devi's image is considered to be her head. According to tradition, Kali took the form of a beautiful woman and came to the temple to sing festive songs during the festival of **Navaratri**. The local monarch was so smitten by her voice and beauty that he asked her to marry him. Enraged at this insult, Kali cursed the king to lose his kingdom. As a further sign of her displeasure, she caused the temple image to begin sinking into the earth. At the plea of an ardent devotee, she allowed the head of the image to remain visible. See also **pitha**.

## Kalimath

("**Kali's** Dwelling") Village and sacred site (**tirtha**) in the **Himalaya** mountains of **Uttar Pradesh** state. Kalimath is located on a small tributary of the

**Mandakini** River about ten miles from the village of **Guptakashi**; the Mandakini is one of the Himalayan tributaries that combine to create the **Ganges**. According to local tradition, Kalimath is one of the **Shakti Pithas**, a network of sites sacred to the **Goddess**. Each Shakti Pitha marks the site where a body part of the dismembered goddess **Sati** fell to **earth**, taking form there as a different goddess. Local sources claim that Kalimath is the place where Sati's vulva fell to earth. It took form there as the goddess Kali, thus associating a highly charged female body part with a powerful and often dangerous form of the Goddess. The temple's image of the Goddess is extremely unusual—a brass plate a little more than a foot square, whose center is cut out in a small triangle, an aniconic symbol of the Goddess. This plate supposedly covers a pit—a clear symbol of the part of Sati's body which is supposed to have fallen there—but the area under the plate is deemed so sacred that looking under it is forbidden.

The claim that Kalimath is the place where Sati's vulva fell to earth illustrates the fluidity of the Indian sacred landscape. There is a much more widely accepted tradition associating this specific body part with the temple of **Kamakhya** in **Assam**. Such competing claims are not uncommon in the Indian sacred landscape, since people often make these claims to enhance their particular site's sanctity and prestige. It is notable that many Hindus seem little concerned with such apparent inconsistencies, perhaps stemming from the conviction that a single Goddess lies behind all her individual manifestations. See also **pitha**.

## Kalivarjya

The name for a collection of about fifty-five acts "to be avoided in the **Kali** [Age]," the last age in the cycle of **cosmic time** after which it is believed the world will be destroyed and recreated. This was one of the strategies used by **brahmin** scholars to forbid certain religious practices that were prescribed in the sacred literature but were no longer acceptable because of changing ideas. The Kalivarjya prohibitions first appear in texts around the twelfth century C.E. Some of the practices considered acceptable in earlier times but prohibited during the Kali age include certain **animal sacrifices** prescribed in the **Vedas** (the earliest Hindu religious texts) and **suicide** by a person suffering from a terminal illness. For further information see Pandurang Vaman Kane (trans.), A *History of Dharmasastra*, 1968.

## Kaliya

In Hindu mythology, a thousand-headed serpent who is defeated by the adolescent god **Krishna** in one of the earliest acts foreshadowing the god's future greatness. Kaliya has settled into a deep pool in the **Yamuna River**, rendering the pool and its surroundings uninhabitable because of the noxious poison he constantly emits. One day as Krishna and his companions tend the cows, Krishna decides to get rid of Kaliya. Despite his friends' pleas, Krishna climbs to the top of a tall tree and dives deep into the pool. A tremendous battle ensues. Krishna finally subdues Kaliya by dancing on his hoods, stamping each of the serpent's heads until blood runs out of Kaliya's mouths. Kaliya's wives beg Krishna to spare his life, and Krishna grants this request but banishes him to a more appropriate place. His mercy mirrors the Hindu world view that even beings such as Kaliya have a rightful place in the world. Although problems arise when such beings are in the wrong place, these can be corrected by sending them to a more appropriate one. For further elaboration of this idea, See John Stratton Hawley, "Krishna's Cosmic Victories," in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 47, No. 2, 1979.

Image of the god Vishnu's Kalki avatar. It is believed that Vishnu will appear in this form at the end of the world.

## Kali Yuga

A particular age of the world in one of the reckonings of **cosmic time**. According to traditional belief, time has neither beginning nor end, but alternates between cycles of creation and activity, followed by cessation and quietude. Each of these cycles lasts for 4.32 billion years, with the active phase known as the **Day of Brahma**, and the quiet phase as the Night of Brahma. In one reckoning of cosmic time, the Day of Brahma is divided into one thousand **mahayugas** ("great cosmic ages"), each of which lasts for 4.32 million years. Each mahayuga is composed of four yugas, the **Krta Yuga**, **Treta Yuga**, **Dvapara Yuga**, and Kali Yuga. Each of these four **yugas** is shorter than its predecessor and ushers in an era more degenerate and depraved. By the end of the Kali Yuga, things have gotten so bad that the only solution is the destruction and re-creation of the **earth**, at which time the next Krta era begins.

Kali Yuga is the last of the four yugas, lasting for "only" 432,000 years. It is also considered to be the most degenerate yuga, symbolized by its identification with iron—a metal that is sometimes useful, sometimes harmful, not particularly precious, and whose black color is associated with **Saturn**, the malevolent **planet**. Kali Yuga is considered the time when human wickedness runs rampant, virtue virtually disappears, and the world is inexorably falling into ruin. Hindus believe that the Kali Yuga began with the commencement of the great war described in the epic *Mahabharata*, and not surprisingly, it is the age in which we now live.

## Kalka

Town in the Ambala district of the state of **Haryana**, about ten miles north and east of Chandigarh. Kalka is famous as the site of the temple of **Kalika Devi**, who is considered to be a form of the **goddess Kali** and is one of the nine **Shiwalik goddesses**.

## Kalki Avatar

The tenth **avatar** or incarnation of the god **Vishnu**, and the only one of these incarnations who has not yet appeared. In traditional art, Kalki is portrayed as riding a white horse and brandishing a sword. It is believed that he will come at a time when the state of the world has completely degenerated. His arrival will signal its imminent destruction; his purpose will be to purify the world by destroying the wicked.

## Kalpa

The largest unit of **cosmic time**, equivalent to 4.32 billion years. According to one concept, the kalpa is broken up into one thousand **mahayugas**, each lasting 4.32 million years. The kalpa, or **Day of Brahma**, is the longest conceived measure of time and is used to determine the duration of the universe. After the kalpa is complete, it is followed by an equally long "Night of Brahma," a period of universal dissolution (**pralaya**).

## Kalpa

(2) ("proper," "fit") One of the six **Vedangas**, auxiliary branches of knowledge connected with the **Vedas**, the oldest Hindu religious texts. The Kalpa section prescribes the rites connected with the Vedic rituals and gives rules for performing ceremonial and sacrificial acts. The other Vedangas are **vyakarana** (**Sanskrit** grammar), **chandas** (Sanskrit prosody), **nirukta** (etymology), **shiksha** (correct pronunciation), and **jyotisha** (auspicious times for sacrifices).

## Kalpa Sutras

("aphorisms on sacred law") An important class of **smrti** or "remembered [literature]." The Kalpa Sutras were first composed around the sixth century B.C.E. The sutras were collected to provide a unified religious and legal worldview. According to the general scholarly consensus, the theory used to associate these sutras imposed an appearance of conceptual order on what was more likely an organic development of Hindu religious law. The Kalpa Sutras are all attributed to famous sages. In theory each Kalpa **Sutra** contains three separate parts: prescriptions for Vedic rituals (**Shrauta Sutras**), prescriptions for domestic rites (**Grhya Sutras**), and prescriptions for appropriate human behavior (**Dharma Sutras**). The real picture is far more complex since only three sutras contain all three parts and are attributed to a single author. The three surviving Kalpa Sutras are attributed to the sages **Apastamba**, **Baudhayana**, and **Hiranyakeshin** and are all associated with the same school, the **Black Yajur Veda**. There are many other collections that have one or another of these parts, but not all three. Each of the Kalpa Sutras is also theoretically connected with one of the four **Vedas**, the earliest Hindu religious texts. However, it is likely that this claim was made to give authority to the collection.

## Kalpataru

("wishing-tree") Extensive collection of writings on matters relating to religious law, compiled by the scholar **Lakshmidhara** in the middle of the twelfth century. The *Kalpataru* is one of the earliest examples of commentarial literature known as **nibandhas** ("collections"). The nibandhas were collections of Hindu lore, in which the compilers drew references on a particular theme from the **Vedas**, **dharma literature**, **puranas**, and other authoritative religious texts. Then they compiled these excerpts into a single volume. Each of the *Kalpataru*'s fourteen volumes is devoted to a particular aspect of Hindu religious life, including daily practice, **worship**, gift-giving (**dana**), vows, pilgrimage, penances (**prayashchitta**), purification, and final liberation of the soul (**moksha**). As one of the earliest nibandhas, the *Kalpataru* formed a model for later writers and was also an important resource for them. Lakshmidhara's writing is unusual because he used very few sources for his work—primarily the epic ***Mahabharata*** and a few of the sectarian collections known as puranas. Unlike later commentators, he does not cite the Vedas, the earliest Hindu religious texts, or the prescriptions found in the dharma literature. His text also consists mostly of these excerpted passages with very little commentary of his own, whereas later nibandha writers often give voluminous explanations.

## Kalpavas

("residence for a **kalpa**") Strict religious vow taken during the annual **Magh Mela** festival in the city of **Allahabad** during the **lunar month** of **Magh** (January–February). Allahabad is located at the confluence of two sacred rivers, the **Ganges** and the **Yamuna**. The festival's primary religious act is bathing (**snana**) at this confluence. Although most people stay at this festival only a brief time, kalpavasis, or people taking the kalpavas vow, do not leave

the site of the festival for the entire month. Kalpavasis also take vows to live a strict **ascetic** lifestyle, which includes daily baths in the Ganges, a restricted diet, particular dress and **worship**, and attendance at the religious gatherings known as **satsang**.

## Kalpeshvar

Temple and sacred site (**tirtha**) in the **Garhwal** region of the **Himalayas**, about ten miles down the **Alakananda River** from **Joshimath**. The temple's presiding **deity** is the god **Shiva** in his manifestation as Kalpeshvar, the "Lord of the Cosmic Age." The Kalpeshvar temple is one of the **Panchkedar**, a network of five sites in the Garhwal region that are sacred to Shiva; the other four sites are **Kedarnath**, **Rudranath**, **Tungnath**, and **Madmaheshvar**. Shiva is believed to dwell in the Himalayas. This network of five sites is seen as a symbolic representation of his body. Kalpeshvar represents Shiva's matted locks (**jatas**).

## Kalyanamandapam

("marriage hall") One of the common architectural features of southern Indian temples built in the **Dravida** style. The kalyanamandapam is a hall where the images of the temple's primary **deity** and that deity's spouse could be ceremonially united on festival days to symbolize their married state.

## Kama

In Indian **philosophy**, one of the four purusharthas, or **aims of life**, with the others being **artha** (wealth, power, and prosperity), **dharma** (righteousness), and **moksha** (liberation). The most basic meaning of kama is "desire," with strong overtones of sexual desire, but kama can also refer to all types of attraction, including aesthetic pleasure from the arts. The most famous treatise on the fulfillment of kama is the *Kama Sutra*, which details the satisfaction of sexual desires. When pursued within the boundaries of righteous action, or dharma, desires and their satisfaction are recognized as a normal, acceptable part of life. It is when this governing force is absent that the search for pleasure becomes inappropriate and destabilizing.

## Kama

(2) Minor **deity** identified as the personification of kama ("desire"). Kama is comparable to the Greek deity Eros and carries similar responsibility for igniting human sexual attraction and sensual desire. Kama is represented as a young man riding on a parrot, armed with a bow and arrows. The bow is a stalk of sugar cane, the bowstring a line of buzzing bees; his five arrows are five different flowers, each bringing a different emotional effect to the person it pierces. The five flowers and emotions are: lotus, infatuation; **ashoka**, intoxication (with love); mango, exhaustion; jasmine, pining; blue lotus, paralysis. Kama's iconography carries strong associations with spring, and the spring **season** (personified as another minor deity, Vasant) is perceived as Kama's friend and ally in awakening desire through the regeneration of the natural world and the showy display of spring blossoms.

The most famous episode in Kama's mythology begins with the ascent to power of a **demon** named **Taraka**, who can only be killed by a son of **Shiva**. Taraka seems impossible to defeat, since Shiva has no sons and is in deep meditation, grieving over the death of his wife **Sati**. The other gods ask Kama to shoot Shiva with an arrow of desire so he will marry the **goddess Parvati** and produce a son. Kama creeps up on Shiva and shoots him with an arrow. When Shiva realizes who has disturbed his meditation, he releases a stream of fire from the third eye in the middle of his forehead, instantly burning Kama to ashes. Through Shiva's **grace**, Kama is eventually brought back to life. One of Kama's epithets or alternate names is Ananga, or "bodiless," because of the loss of his

body (and the fact that desire seems to strike in unseen ways). Despite being destroyed by Shiva and seemingly foiled, in the end Kama achieves his goal. His attempt to draw Shiva out of his meditation succeeds, and eventually Shiva marries Parvati. For more information on the interplay between Shiva and Kama, see Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Siva*, 1981.

## Kamada Ekadashi

**Ekadashi**, or eleventh-day, festival of the bright, waxing half of the **lunar month** of **Chaitra** (March–April). Most Hindu festivals have certain prescribed rites usually involving fasting (**upavasa**) and **worship**, and often promise-specific benefits for faithful performance. As promised by its name ("wish-granting"), faithfully observing this festival will fulfill one's desire (**kama**), whatever it may be.

## Kamadhenu

In Hindu mythology, a **goddess** in the form of a **cow** (dhenu) who has the power to grant all one's wishes (**kama**). The Kamadhenu is considered the mother of all cattle. She is associated with giving gifts of food, and thus is an extension of the gifts of food given by all cows. In Hindu mythology, Kamadhenu is the property of the sage **Jamadagni**. Her theft by a local king prompts Jamadagni's son, **Parashuram avatar**, to circle the earth twenty-one times, in an attempt to wipe out the **kshatriya** (kingly) class.

## Kamakhya

("desiring eyes") A particular manifestation of the Mother **Goddess**, whose temple on **Nilachal Hill** overlooks the Brahmaputra River just outside the city of Guwahati in **Assam**. This temple is one of the **Shakti Pithas**, a network of sites that spreads throughout the subcontinent and is sacred to the Goddess. Each Shakti Pitha marks the site where a body part of the dismembered goddess **Sati** fell to earth, taking form there as a different goddess. The Kamakhya temple is the place where Sati's vulva fell to earth. Its image of the goddess is a natural cleft in the rock, around which the temple has been built. Since Kamakhya sprang from the most sexually charged part of the female body, it is no surprise that she is believed to be extremely powerful. Like many powerful goddesses, her productive capacity must be constantly recharged through receiving sacrifices, especially the **blood** of living beings. In modern times the usual **sacrifice** is a goat, but in earlier times the **offering** of **human sacrifices** is well documented. Kamakhya was reportedly offered 140 men when her present temple was consecrated in 1565. This practice continued until the British halted it in 1832. The men offered as human sacrifices were reportedly volunteers who believed that they had been called by her to do this. In the time between announcing their intention to be sacrificed and their deaths, they were treated as virtual divinities, since they were considered to have been consecrated to the goddess. For further information see George Weston Briggs, *Gorakhnath and the Kanphata Yogis*, 1973. See also **pitha**.

## Kamakotipith

An important center for the **Dashanami** sect of **Sanyasi** ascetics, located in the southern Indian city of **Kanchipuram**. According to local tradition, the Kamakotipith was the first and most important of the **maths** or monastic centers, established by the philosopher **Shankaracharya**, who later established four other centers at **Joshimath**, **Puri**, **Shringeri**, and **Dwaraka**. This claim to primacy has generated fierce controversy. Opponents who support one of the other four maths, not only deny Kamakotipith's place as the first of the maths, but also assert that Kamakotipith is only a branch of the Shringeri math. Support for these claims can be drawn from the symbolism connected with the number four—the four cardinal directions, the four sacred texts known as

**Vedas**, and the four organizational groups of the Dashanami Sanyasis themselves. The number four symbolizes completion and totality, which makes a fifth sacred center problematic. Despite their possible merit, these contentions have not diminished Kamakotipith's status. It has a long history as an **ascetic** center, and its head monk is routinely considered one of the Shankaracharyas, the most important modern Hindu religious leaders. Kamakotipith's importance probably reflects the importance of Kanchipuram itself, which was such a significant sacred and political hub that any ascetic center located there could gain considerable authority.

## Kamalakanta

(d. 1820) Bengali poet, devotee (**bhakta**) of the **goddess Kali**, and teacher and practitioner of the secret, ritually-based religious practice known as **tantra**. Kamalakanta spent most of his life as the **guru** and learned adviser (**pundit**) of the king of Burdwan, a region northwest of modern Calcutta, whose capital is also named Burdwan.

## Kamandalu

A water pot traditionally used by **ascetics**, usually having a removable lid for ease in filling and a spout for pouring. Kamandalus may be made from various materials, such as gourds, wood, metal, or baked clay. They are generally wider than they are tall, making them stable and less likely to tip over. In India's climate, water is an obvious necessity. Even ascetics with very few **possessions** will generally have some means to carry and store it. Aside from satisfying their physical needs, water is an important element in ascetic religious life, since it is often an **offering** used in **worship** as well as the preferred medium for bathing (**snana**) and other rites of purification. This religious importance makes the kamandalu a powerful object in its own right. A kamandalu is considered especially significant when it has been used for years by a noted ascetic—objects kept in close proximity to such a person are believed to be charged with their spiritual power. In modern times, kamandalus are still important ritual objects, but their practical function has largely been replaced by screw-top plastic vessels.

## Kama Sutra

("manual on desire") By far the most famous of the ancient **erotic** manuals, traditionally attributed to the sage **Vatsyayana**. This text is usually associated with an exhaustive catalog of sexual positions and pleasures, but in fact it goes far beyond this stereotype. Vatsyayana was interested in exploring desire in all its manifestations. The text begins with a consideration of the four **aims of life** (purushartha): worldly goods (**artha**), desire (**kama**), religious duty (**dharma**), and liberation of the soul (**moksha**). Vatsyayana argued that since desire was one of the established goals of human life, its pursuit was thus a good thing, as long as this pursuit did not interfere with the others.

Having established the legitimacy of desire, Vatsyayana then discussed how to foster it. The *Kama Sutra*'s second book contains the text's best-known material, the discussion and categorization of various types of sexual union. It begins by characterizing types of sexual endowment, both male and female. Next it describes different sorts of embracing, kissing, scratching, and biting as symbols of passion, along with sexual positions and oral sex. This is followed by chapters on gaining a wife, attracting other men's wives (which the text discourages, except in cases where one's passion is "too strong"), courtesans, and general remarks on the nature of attraction.

The text is a manual for all phases of erotic life in which sex can be refined into a vehicle for aesthetic experience as well as pure carnal pleasure. The *Kama Sutra* is also notable for its perspective
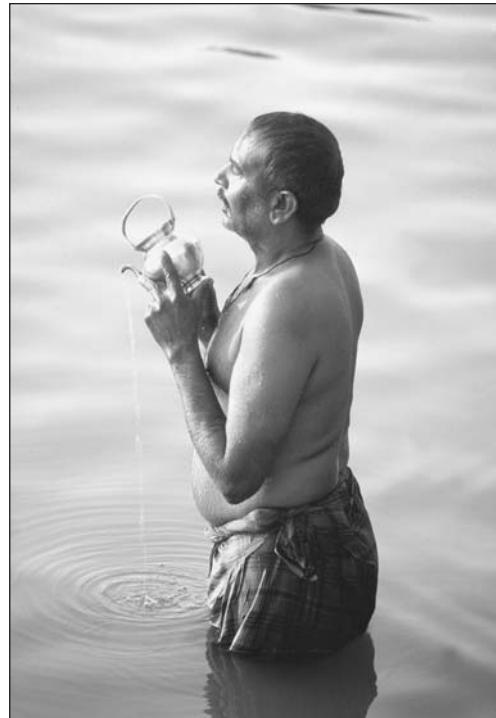
on **women**, who are seen as having equal sexual desire and gaining equal pleasure. The ultimate aim is the sexual satisfaction of both partners, rather than one partner simply serving the other. The *Kama Sutra* has been translated many times.

## Kamavasayitvam

("suppression of desire") One of the eight superhuman powers (**siddhi**), traditionally believed to be conferred by high spiritual attainment. This power gives one the ability to control desires. It also means that any declaration one makes, such as pronouncing a blessing (**ashirvad**) or a **curse**, will inevitably come to pass. The basis for this latter power seems to stem from the absence of individual desire in such a person, meaning that person will never be motivated by self-interest. This power reflects the pan-Indian belief that by renouncing everything, one can eventually gain power over everything.

## Kamban

(9th c.) Southern Indian poet most noted as the author of the Tamil-language version of the **Ramayana**, the earlier of the two great Hindu epics. Kamban's text is known as the **Kamba Ramayana**, and remains popular in modern times. As with all vernacular translations of the *Ramayana*, Kamban did not simply translate **Valmiki's Sanskrit** epic from Sanskrit to a more common language, but adapted and even added to it as he saw fit. Of particular interest is his heroic portrayal of the **demon**-king **Ravana**, who is the villain in the original story. This shift may reflect feelings of regional pride, since Kamban was a southern Indian and Ravana's kingdom of **Lanka** is generally identified as the island of **Sri Lanka** in the Indian Ocean, southeast of the Indian mainland.



A kamandalu is used to hold water for use in religious rites.

## Kamba Ramayana

**Tamil language** version of the **Ramayana**, the earlier of the two great Hindu epics. The *Kamba Ramayana* was written in ninth century by the southern Indian poet **Kamban**. As with all vernacular renditions of the *Ramayana*, Kamban did not simply translate **Valmiki**'s **Sanskrit** epic, but adapted and added to it as he saw fit. Of particular interest is his heroic portrayal of **Ravana**, the **demon**-king, who is the villain in the original story. This shift may reflect feelings of regional pride, since Kamban was from southern Indian. Ravana's kingdom of **Lanka** is generally identified as the island of **Sri Lanka** in the Indian Ocean, southeast of the Indian mainland.

## Kamika Ekadashi

Festival falling on the eleventh day (**ekadashi**) of the dark, waxing half of the **lunar month** of **Shravan** (July–August). As with all eleventh-day observances, Kamika Ekadashi is

dedicated to the **worship** of **Vishnu**. Most Hindu festivals have certain prescribed rites usually involving fasting (**upavasa**) and worship, and often promise specific benefits for faithful performance. The name Kamika means "desiring," a theme supported by the charter myth. According to this story, the **brahmins** in a certain village refuse to perform religious rites for a landowner guilty of murdering another brahmin. The landowner is freed from that sin by observing the Kamika Ekadashi and is thus able to have the desired rites performed.

## Kamsa

In Hindu mythology, the wicked king of **Mathura** who is considered the brother of **Devaki**, the god **Krishna's** mother, and thus Krishna's uncle. According to legend, Kamsa is born when a **demon** takes the form of **Ugrasena**, Devaki's father, and under this guise has intercourse with Kamsa's mother.

On Devaki's wedding day, a divine voice warns Kamsa that his sister's eighth child will eventually kill him. In an effort to prevent this prophecy, he kills all of Devaki's children as soon as they are born. Yet on the night Krishna is born, a deep sleep falls over the inhabitants of the palace, the locked doors magically open, and the infant is spirited away to the home of his foster parents, **Nanda** and **Yashoda**. When Kamsa finds out what has happened, he first sends his men to kill all the newborn children in the country. When that attempt fails to destroy Krishna, Kamsa sends various demon assassins, such as **Putana**, **Shakata**, **Trnavarta**, **Keshi**, and **Bakasur**. Krishna dispatches all of these with ease, and Kamsa eventually has to try other strategies. He announces a grand festival and dispatches his chariot to pick up Krishna and his brother **Balarama**, who by then have grown into adolescents. Kamsa's plan is to lure the brothers to the festival grounds where they can be killed in a "friendly" match with some experienced wrestlers. The two boys derail this plot by killing the wrestlers, after which Krishna leaps up into the royal box and kills Kamsa as well.

## Kamya Karma

("desiderative [ritual] action") One of three general categories of ritual action, the others being **nitya karma** and **naimittika karma**. Kamya karma is a ritual performed solely for the performer's desire (**kama**) to obtain the benefits of this action. Unlike the other two categories, which must be performed at specific times or occasions, this one is completely voluntary and based solely on the desire for its benefits. One example of a kamya karma is religious pilgrimage, which one is not required to do but which is believed to generate religious merit. Another example would be performing a particular **vrat**, or religious vow, which might be done daily, weekly, monthly, or yearly.

## Kanada

(2nd c. B.C.E.?) Philosopher who is traditionally named as the author of the ***Vaisheshika Sutras*** and founder of the Vaisheshika philosophical school, one of **six schools** of Hindu **philosophy**. Kanada's date is uncertain, but he is believed to have lived after the third century B.C.E. In its earliest form, the Vaisheshika school followed a doctrine of atomism, asserting that there are simple building blocks that cohere to form complex objects. This cohesion also attaches objects to their qualities. As Vaisheshika combined with the **Nyaya** school, another of the six schools, the Vaisheshikas gradually adopted the Nyaya idea of God as the regulating force behind these atomic relations.

## Kanauj

Small city on the **Ganges** River, about fifty miles upstream from the city of Kanpur. Kanauj is now insignificant, but the city, formerly known as **Kanyakubja**, was once one of the most important in

northern India. Its existence is documented as early as the sixth century B.C.E. The city was an important stop on the trade route running through the Ganges basin. It is referenced in Ptolemy's *Geography*, written around 150 C.E. Kanauj was also an important political center; in the early seventh century it was the capital of the **Pushyabhuti dynasty**, ruled by the emperor **Harsha**. In later centuries the **Pala**, **Rashtrakuta**, and **Gurjara-Pratihara** dynasties fought over the city, with the Gurjara-Pratihara eventually gaining control. After suffering an attack by **Mahmud of Ghazni** in 1017 C.E., Kanauj seems to have gone into permanent decline. Its modern legacy is being the location of the dominant branch of **brahmins** in the Gangetic Plain. They call themselves **Kanaujia** brahmins.

## Kanaujia

One of the five northern **brahmin** communities (**Pancha Gauda**); the other four are **Gauda**, **Maithila**, **Utkala**, and **Saraswat**. Kanaujia brahmins trace their origin to the city of **Kanauj**. Kanaujia brahmins are found in greatest density in the eastern section of the state of **Uttar Pradesh**, near the city of Kanauj; subgroups can be found throughout **Bihar**, Bengal, **Madhya Pradesh**, and the inland regions of **Orissa**.

## Kanchipuram

Temple-town and sacred site (**tirtha**) about forty miles southwest of the city of Madras in the state of **Tamil Nadu**. Kanchipuram is important as one of India's **Seven Sacred Cities**. Dying in one of these cities is believed to bring final liberation of the soul (**moksha**). At differing times Kanchipuram served as a capital for the **Pallava**, **Chola**, and **Vijayanagar** kings; each of these dynasties left its mark in the city's **architecture**. Kanchipuram is filled with temples, many of them magnificent examples of the southern Indian **Dravida** architectural style.

Kanchipuram's importance as a political center and its concentration of temples, brahmins, and scholars made it one of the greatest centers of Hindu life, learning, and religion.

Kanchipuram is also noted for its temples to each of the three major Hindu **deities—Vishnu**, **Shiva**, and the **Goddess**. The Vaikuntaperumal Temple is dedicated to Vishnu in his form as "Lord of **Vaikuntha**," his celestial realm. The Goddess is worshiped as Kamakshi ("desiring eyes"). Kamakshi is identified with the goddess **Kamakhya**, whose temple in **Assam** is the most powerful of all the **Shakti Pithas**.

Shiva is worshiped at the Kailasanatha temple, in his manifestation as the "Lord of Mt. **Kailas**," and at the Ekambareshvar temple. The image of Shiva at the former site is one of the **bhutalingas** ("elemental lingas"), a network of five southern Indian sites sacred to the god Shiva. In each of these sites Shiva is worshiped as a **linga**, the pillar-shaped object that is his symbolic form. At each site the linga is believed to be formed from one of the five primordial **elements** (bhuta)—**earth**, **wind**, **fire**, **water**, and **space** (akasha). The Kanchipuram linga is associated with the element of earth, the humblest but most essential of all.

Another reason for Kanchipuram's prominence is its long tradition as a center for **asceticism**. Kanchipuram's **Kamakotipith** is an ancient center for the **Dashanami** sect. Its leader is considered to be one of the **Shankaracharyas**, the most important contemporary Hindu leaders. According to local tradition the Kamakotipith was the first and most important of the **maths**, or monastic centers, established by the philosopher **Shankaracharya**, who later established four other centers at **Joshimath**, **Puri**, **Shringeri**, and **Dwaraka**. This claim to primacy has generated fierce controversy, with opponents not only denying Kamakotipith's place as the first of the maths, but also asserting that Kamakotipith is only a branch of the Shringeri math. Some

Vaikuntaperumal Temple in Kanchipuram.

support for these claims can be drawn from symbolism connected with the number four—the four cardinal directions, the four sacred texts known as **Vedas**, and the four organizational groups of the Dashanami Sanyasis themselves. The number four symbolizes completion and totality, which makes a fifth sacred center problematic. Kamakotipith reflects the importance of Kanchipuram as a significant sacred and political hub in which any **ascetic** center could gain considerable authority. See also **pitha**.

## Kandariya Mahadev

The largest of the temples at **Khajuraho** in the state of **Madhya Pradesh**. It is dedicated to the god **Shiva** in his manifestation as "**Skanda**'s Lord"; Skanda is another **deity** who is considered to be Shiva's son, and the general of Shiva's army. The Kandariya Mahadev temple was built by the kings of the **Chandella dynasty** between 1025 and 1050. It was constructed at the end of the wave of creativity that produced all of the Khajuraho temples. It is the best-developed example of the Khajuraho branch of the **Nagara** architectural style, in which all of the temple's smaller towers lead to and culminate in one central tower directly over the sanctuary. Like most of the temples at Khajuraho, the Kandariya Mahadev temple is covered with **erotic sculpture**—perhaps as a symbol for union with the divine, perhaps as a religious affirmation of every aspect of human existence.

## Kandarpa

Epithet of the god **Kama**, a minor **deity** identified as the personification of kama ("desire") who is comparable to the Greek deity Eros. See **Kama**.

## Kangra

The name of a town and district in the state of **Himachal Pradesh**; the town was formerly the capital of a small hill kingdom with the same name. Kangra is famous for the temple of **Vajreshvari Devi**, one of the nine **Shiwalik goddesses**. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Kangra's status as a courtly center brought in patronage for the **Pahari** school of **miniature painting**.

## Kanha

Epithet of the god **Krishna**. The name Kanha is actually a form of the name Krishna, modified in the transition between **Sanskrit** and vernacular language. See **Krishna**.

## Kanhaiya

Epithet of the god **Krishna**. As with the name Kanha, Kanhaiya is actually a form of the name Krishna that has been modified in the transition between **Sanskrit** and vernacular language. See **Krishna**.

## Kankhal

City and sacred site (**tirtha**) three miles south of the city of **Haridwar** in the state of **Uttar Pradesh**. Kankhal is most famous for the **Daksha Mahadev** temple, dedicated to the god **Shiva** in his form as "**Daksha's** Lord." This temple's charter myth is one of the most famous of all the stories of Shiva. Daksha is one of the sons of the god **Brahma** and the father of **Sati**, the **goddess** whom Daksha gives in marriage to Shiva. When Daksha feels that Shiva has not shown him proper respect, he plans a great **sacrifice** to which he invites all the gods, but purposely excludes Shiva. When Sati asks why her husband has been excluded, Daksha responds with a stream of abuse, denouncing Shiva as worthless and despicable. Humiliated, Sati commits **suicide**. Shiva is furious when he hears of Sati's death, and in his rage creates the fierce **deities Virabhadra** and **Bhadrakali**. He then comes storming with his minions (**gana**) to the sacrificial ground, completely destroying the sacrifice, and cuts off Daksha's head. Daksha is eventually restored to life, repents his foolish pride, and asks Shiva to remain at that site forever, which he agrees to do.

There are numerous smaller temples near the Daksha Mahadev temple, some of which are dedicated to figures associated with this story, such as Virabhadra. Across the street from the Daksha temple is a large **ashram**, or religious community, built by devotees (**bhakta**) of the Bengali mystic **Anandamayi Ma**. The ashram also contains her **samadhi shrine**, or **burial** place.

## Kannada

One of the four **Dravidian** languages, along with **Tamil**, Telegu, and Malayalam; all four languages are spoken in southern India. Kannada is the predominant language in modern **Karnataka**, one of the "linguistic" states, formed after Indian independence in 1947 to unite people with a common language and culture under one state government. Despite its recent political significance, Kannada has a long history as a literary and cultural language and is particularly important as the language for the devotional (**bhakti**) poetry of the **Lingayat** religious community. See also **Tamil language**.

## Kanphata

("split ear") Colloquial name for the **Nathpanthi** sect of **ascetics**, who are followers of the sage **Gorakhnath**. This particular name stems from the Nathpanthi's most characteristic feature: When a Nathpanthi ascetic is ready for final **initiation**, the cartilage in his ears is slit with a razor to insert the large earrings by which members of this group are easily identified. See **Nathpanthi**.

## Kanvar

A bamboo pole with baskets or receptacles suspended from each end. In earlier times a kanvar would have been a natural way for people to carry heavy loads. Its major use today is for religious rites in which pilgrims carry **water** from one place to offer to a **deity** in another. The kanvar is the device by which the water is kept elevated the entire way. This keeps the water's original **purity** unbroken, preserving it as an appropriate **offering** for a deity. The most famous example of this rite is at the temple of **Vaidyanath** in the state of **Bihar**. It is also found at temples in **Haridwar** in **Uttar Pradesh**, **Tarakeshvar** in **West Bengal**, and the hills of **Maharashtra**.

## Kanyadan

("gift of a virgin") In its most specific sense, the kanyadan is the part of the traditional wedding ceremony in which the bride's father (or guardian) formally transfers her to her husband's family. In a more general sense, the word refers to giving a **daughter** in marriage to another family. This "gift" is believed to be highly commendable for the father, since the bride is supposed to be given without

The city of Kanyakumari, at the confluence of the Indian Ocean, Arabian Sea, and Bay of Bengal.

asking for anything in return. At the same time, the status difference between the bride's family (as wife "givers") and the groom's (as wife "takers") can make this "gift" an extremely expensive proposition for the bride's family. See **Dowry**.

## Kanyakubja

("[city of] humpbacked maidens") Ancient name for the site now known as **Kanauj**, which was the capital for several northern Indian dynasties in the latter half of the first millennium. The name *Kanyakubja* comes from a tale about a king who has a hundred daughters. One day the daughters' games disturb the meditation of a local sage who is filled with desire for them. The king worries about angering the sage and promises him one of his daughters in marriage. Ninety-nine of his daughters flatly refuse to marry the sage because of his advanced age and gruff demeanor, but the youngest agrees to do so in obedience to her father. The sage accepts the youngest daughter and curses the others to become humpbacked so they will never be able to marry.

## Kanyakumari

("virgin girl") City and sacred site (**tirtha**) at the extreme southern edge of the state of **Tamil Nadu**, at the confluence of the Indian Ocean, Arabian Sea, and Bay of Bengal. Kanyakumari is important as a bathing (**snana**) place. Kanyakumari is also the name of the site's major **deity**, a local **goddess** who has been assimilated into the pantheon as a manifestation of the goddess **Parvati**. According to local tradition, Kanyakumari set her heart on marrying **Shiva**; when this was prevented she vowed to remain a perpetual virgin (kanya). Her manifestation here is clearly different from all the other forms of Parvati, who are invariably married to Shiva, yet Kanyakumari's unmarried status also gives her independent power.

## Kapala

A human skull. In Hindu art, a skull is often carried by the god **Shiva**, who uses it as a vessel to hold his food and drink. As with many of Shiva's attributes, such as the snakes he wears as jewelry and the ash from the **cremation ground** with which he smears his body, the skull-bowl is a sign of Shiva's untamed nature

and his aloofness from the standards and concerns of everyday life. Use of a skull-bowl has also been adopted by some **Shaiva** ascetics, both past and present, in imitation of this myth. The skulls are usually taken from cremation grounds; the upper skull is separated to be made into a bowl.

## Kapalamochana

("releasing the skull") Bathing (**snana**) tank and sacred site (**tirtha**) in the northern section of the city of **Benares**. According to Hindu mythology, when the wrathful **deity Bhairava** cuts off the fifth head of the god **Brahma**, insulting the god **Shiva**, the skull sticks to Bhairava's hand as a visible sign of his crime. Bhairava visits all the holy places of the earth trying to get rid of the skull, but to no avail. When he arrives in Kapalamochana, the skull spontaneously drops from his hand, liberating him from his crime. This act indicates that Kapalamochana is the holiest place on earth.

## Kapalika

Extinct monastic sect of Shaivite ascetics, or devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva**. Although none of the Kapalikas' own written records have survived, there are numerous descriptions of them by other **ascetic** groups and by dramatists of their time such as **Bana** (7th c.) and **Bhavabhuti** (8th c.). The sources describe the Kapalikas as worshiping the god Shiva in his wrathful form as **Bhairava** and as emulating Bhairava's characteristics: wearing their hair long and matted, smearing their bodies with ash (preferably from the **cremation ground**), and carrying a club and a skull-bowl (**kapala**). The Kapalikas are cited as indulging in forbidden behavior—drinking wine, eating meat, using cannabis and other **drugs**, performing **human sacrifice**, and enjoying orgiastic sexuality. Needless to say, most of the available sources do not approve of them.

David Lorenzen argues that despite the disapproval of their contemporaries, all the Kapalika practices must be seen in the context of **tantra**. Tantra is a secret, ritually-based religious practice that its initiates believe is far more powerful and effective than ordinary religious **worship**. One of its most essential themes is the ultimate unity of everything that exists. From a tantric perspective, to affirm that the entire universe is one principle—often, conceived as the activity of a particular **deity**—means that the adept must reject all concepts based on dualistic thinking. One way to do this is to partake of the "Five Forbidden Things" (**panchamakara**), consciously breaking societal norms forbidding illicit sexuality and consumption of **intoxicants** and non-vegetarian food. This is always done within a carefully defined ritual setting, in a conscious effort to sacralize what is normally forbidden.

Seen in this context, the Kapalikas' behavior is shocking but becomes more understandable. Lorenzen also speculates that in performing such behaviors (which may have only taken place during religious ceremonies), the Kapalikas were identifying themselves with their chosen deity, Bhairava. In the Hindu pantheon Bhairava is known for his uncontrolled excesses, particularly for cutting off one of the heads of the god **Brahma**, for which he has to perform severe penances (**prayashchitta**). In this understanding, the Kapalikas' practices are not motivated by hedonistic self-gratification but by the desire to imitate their chosen deity. The only developed source on the Kapalikas is David Lorenzen, *The Kapalikas and the Kalamukhas*, 1972.

## Kapalin

("skull-bearer") The name for any **ascetic** bearing a human skull, either as a **begging** bowl or as a piece of ascetic paraphernalia. Such ascetics are devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva** in his terrible form. Their use of the skull is a

symbol that, like Shiva, they have transcended all earthly concerns of **purity**, impurity (**ashaucha**), and conventional standards of what is and is not appropriate.

## Kapha

("phlegm") Along with **vata** ("air") and **pitta** ("bile"), one of the three bodily humours (**tridosha**) in **ayurveda**, the traditional system of Indian medicine. Every person has all three of these humours, but usually one is dominant; this marks a person in certain ways, particularly with regard to health, digestion, and metabolism. Kapha is associated with the **elements** of **earth** and **water**, since phlegm has both liquid and solid characteristics. It provides solidity and fluidity. Those who exhibit this humor are said to be strong, healthy, and have great stamina. At the same time, this solidity can take the form of inertia and fatigue; "phlegmatic" people must do their best avoid these tendencies.

## Kapila

A powerful and ornery sage in Hindu mythology. Kapila's most famous mythic exploit occurs in the story of the Descent of the **Ganges**. King **Sagar** is on the verge of completing his hundredth horse **sacrifice** (**ashvamedha**). This will give him enough religious merit to claim the throne of **Indra**, king of the gods. Indra forestalls this threat by stealing the sacrificial horse and tying it outside Kapila's **ashram**. Sagar dispatches his sixty-thousand sons to find the horse. When they finally locate it at Kapila's ashram, they find the sage deep in meditation. The sons assume that the sage's meditation is a ploy to keep from having to answer their questions, so they begin to abuse him physically. Kapila becomes extremely angry. The accumulated power generated by his long **asceticism** (**tapas**) is released like fire, burning the sixty-thousand sons to ash. Kapila later informs Sagar's sole surviving descendant, **Anshuman**, that the only way to

bring peace to the souls of the departed is to bring the Ganges down to earth and have their ashes touched by her waters. Fulfilling this condition galvanizes several generations of Sagar's descendants—Anshuman, **Dilip**, and **Bhagirath**—until the last is finally successful in bringing the river to earth.

## Kapila

(2) Philosopher cited as the traditional founder of the **Samkhya** philosophical school, one of the **six schools** of Hindu **philosophy**. Little is known about him; much of what is known has a legendary tone that makes its value as historical data questionable. Kapila may have lived in the seventh century B.C.E. If this is true, Kapila would have lived about a thousand years earlier than **Ishvarakrishna**. The latter is the first Samkhya figure from whom we have a well-attested text, the *Samkhyakarikas*, which is the foundational text for the school.

## Kapilavastu

Ancient city in southern **Nepal**, just over the Indian border from the state of **Bihar**. Buddhist sources identify it as the capital city of Buddha's father, King Suddhodhana of the Shakya tribe. Kapilavastu was part of the thriving urban network in that region of India during the fifth century B.C.E.

## Kapu

Traditional Indian society was modeled as a collection of **endogamous**, or intermarried, subgroups known as **jatis** ("birth"). These jatis were organized (and their social status determined) by the group's hereditary occupation, over which each group held a monopoly. In traditional society, the Kapus were farmers. In much of modern **Andhra Pradesh**, particularly the region bordering modern **Tamil Nadu**, the Kapus are the dominant landholding group.

## Karana

In Indian **philosophy**, the name for an instrumental cause, or the cause by which another thing is accomplished. An example often given by the **Nyaya** philosophical school states that when a potter connects two pot-halves using a stick, the stick is the instrumental cause for the creation of the pot. In **Sanskrit** grammar, the word karana has a parallel sense; it designates the word in a sentence that shows how the action is accomplished.

## Karandamakuta

("basket-crown") A small crown in the shape of a basket, notable for its lack of ornamentation. In Hindu art, the karandamakuta is the head covering worn by a lesser **deity**. In contrast, the **kiritamakuta** worn by the god **Vishnu** is much larger and more elaborately decorated, in keeping with his status as one of the predominant deities in Hindu religious life.

## Karka Sankranti

Date on the Indian **calendar** marking the **sun's** transition into the zodiacal sign of Cancer, and thus, the beginning of the **dakshinayana**, the six months in which the sun is traveling toward the south. In Western astrology this happens during the summer solstice (around June 21), but in Indian reckoning it occurs around July 14. The discrepancy arises due to the different ways in which the two systems mark the beginning of the astrological **year**. In Western astrology the beginning of the year is based on the sun's position in relation to the **earth** and occurs during the vernal equinox (around March 21). In Indian reckoning the starting point of the **zodiac** comes when the sun intersects the midpoint of a group of stars named Ashvini, and is based on the position of the sun with regard to fixed stars. Karka Sankranti is not marked by significant observances, unlike **Makara Sankranti,** which occurs six months earlier, marking the beginning of the sun's northward journey (**uttarayana**). The southern direction is associated with the god **Yama**, who is death personified. Thus, this southward movement is considered less **auspicious** than its northward counterpart.

## Karma

("action") The notion of karma and its connection with reincarnation (**samsara**) are perhaps the most fundamental concepts in Indian thought and are ideas shared by all Indian religions: Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, and Sikh. Although the literal meaning of karma is "action," it is believed to encompass words and thoughts as well as deeds. The basic assumption behind the notion of karma is that of a dynamic universe, in which any action that one takes will have consequences that will eventually affect oneself. In the simplest explanation, good actions will have good consequences, and evil actions will have evil consequences, in an extended chain of cause and effect. Since thoughts are considered actions, this determination of "good" and "evil" actions also takes into account one's motives—a laudable action performed for an ignoble motive is still a laudable action, but will not generate as much merit as the same action performed for a pure motive.

Karma is seen as a purely physical process, much like the law of gravity. It does not require a divine overseer, although in devotional Hinduism, God is generally seen as having the power to nullify one's past karma. The effects of one's actions may come either in this life or in future lives. The former case is easy to believe, since most people accept that their actions have consequences, but the latter case is much more difficult to support with concrete evidence. Since the general tone of one's life is seen as more important than a few isolated acts, one might compare the idea of karma with the notion of a person's "character." Both are determined by one's habitual

The Himalayan town of Karnaprayag.

ways of thinking and acting, and entail an overall assessment of a person. For further information see Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty (ed.), *Karma and Rebirth in Classical Indian Traditions*, 1980; and K. S. Mathur, "Hindu Values of Life: Karma and Dharma," in T. N. Madan (ed.), *Religion in India*, 1991.

## Karmamarga

("path of action") One of Hinduism's three generally accepted paths to gain final liberation of the soul (**moksha**), along with the Path of Devotion (**bhaktimarga**) and the Path of Wisdom (**jnanamarga**). Bhaktimarga stresses devotion to God, and the jnanamarga stresses the realization of the ultimate identity of one's individual Self (**atman**) and Ultimate Reality (**Brahman**). Karmamarga emphasizes selfless action performed for the benefit of others.

## Karmendriya

("organ of action") In Indian **philosophy**, any of the five organs through which human beings act on their environment, traditionally considered to be: voice, hands, feet, and the organs of elimination and generation.

## Karna

In the **Mahabharata**, the later of the two great Hindu epics, Karna is the eldest of the **Pandava** brothers, although he is not aware of his true identity until a few days before his death. He is born when his mother, **Kunti**, in a moment of youthful impulsiveness, looks upon the **sun** while reciting a **mantra**, giving her the power to have a son by any of the gods. She is immediately visited by a shining figure, who leaves her with an equally shining son. Distraught and desperate at the birth of this child, which as an unmarried woman she feels she cannot keep, she puts him in a box and abandons him in the **Ganges**.

The child is adopted by the charioteer, **Adhiratha**, who raises Karna as his own son. Karna later comes to the court of King **Dhrtarashtra**, where he becomes friends with the king's son,

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**Duryodhana**, the epic's antagonist. While at court, Karna begins a lifelong conflict with **Arjuna**, one of the five Pandava brothers. Arjuna's comments about Karna's unknown parentage are meant to deny Karna the recognition he deserves as Arjuna's equal. As do all the princes, Karna studies with **Drona**, the archery master. When Drona refuses to teach Karna the secret of the **Brahma** weapon Karna wants to use to kill Arjuna, Karna goes to the sage **Parashuram avatar** for this instruction. He presents himself as a **brahmin**, since Parashuram hates the **kshatriya** (ruling) class and refuses to accept any of them as students.

Parashuram teaches Karna all that he wants to know. During this period, however, Karna receives two **curses** that ultimately determine his fate. Karna kills a brahmin's **cow**, so the brahmin curses him to have his chariot wheel stick in the mud and be killed upon it by his enemy. The second curse comes from Parashuram. One day as Parashuram sleeps with his head in Karna's lap, a beetle bores into Karna's thigh, which in the epic is a euphemism for the genitals. Despite the pain and blood, Karna remains still so he will not disturb his sleeping **guru**. When Parashuram awakens, he realizes that Karna's tolerance for pain means that he is a kshatriya, thus Karna has gained instruction under false pretenses. Parashuram curses Karna that at the critical moment, he will forget everything he has learned. Both of these curses eventually come true; despite fighting with great valor in the Mahabharata war, Karna is killed by Arjuna when the wheel of his chariot is stuck in the mud.

On the eve of the great war, Karna's mother, Kunti, comes to him and reveals his true identity and implores him to return and fight alongside his brothers. Karna refuses, saying that things have gone too far for such measures, but promises Kunti that he will not harm any of his brothers except for Arjuna, whom he has sworn to kill. In his decision Karna is also bound by his loyalty to Duryodhana, whose friendship and support for many years overrides any

obligation to a family he has just discovered. As a man willing to stand by his friends and his principles, even in a cause he knows to be flawed, Karna endures as one of the tragic heroes of the *Mahabharata*.

## Karnaprayag

Himalayan town and sacred site (**tirtha**) at the confluence of the **Alakananda** and **Pindara** rivers, in the Chamoli district of the state of **Uttar Pradesh**. As with all the other river junctions in the **Garhwal** region, this is considered an especially holy place. Local tradition ascribes the site's name to the *Mahabharata* hero **Karna**, who is believed to have worshiped the **sun** at this place. In return he received a suit of armor that could not be pierced and a quiver of arrows that could never be exhausted.

## Karnata

Southern Indian brahmins who make up one of the five southern **brahmin** communities (**Pancha Dravida**); the other four are **Gujarati**, **Maharashtri**, **Andhra**, and **Dravida**. The core region for the Karnata brahmins is the modern state of **Karnataka**.

## Karnataka

One of the four southern Indian states, whose inhabitants speak a **Dravidian** language, in this case **Kannada**. Karnataka is one of the "linguistic" states formed after India's independence in 1947, intended to unite people with a common language and culture under one state government. The state was largely formed from the former kingdom of Mysore. In medieval times, Karnataka was the seat of important Hindu kingdoms, particularly the **Hoysala** and **Vijayanagar** dynasties; these dynasties built cities at **Belur**, **Halebid**, and **Hampi**, which are now important archeological sites. Karnataka is also the home of the **Lingayats**, devotees (**bhakta**) of **Shiva**, whose missionary work eventually squeezed out the thriving Jain community.

Sculptures decorate the Virupaksha Temple in Pattadakal,
one of many historical sites in the state of Karnataka.

Jain monuments, such as the massive statue at Shravanabelgola, still stand. Karnataka also contains important Hindu holy places, such as **Shrirangapatnam** and **Shringeri math**. Even though much of the state's economy is still highly agricultural, Karnataka's capital, Bangalore, is a worldwide center for computer software development. For general information about Karnataka and other regions of India, see Christine Nivin et al., *India*. 8th ed., Lonely Planet, 1998.

## Karnavedha ("ear-piercing") Samskara

The ninth of the sixteen traditional life-cycle ceremonies (**samskaras**), in which an infant's ears were pierced. This rite was done not only for ornamentation but also for protective purposes. According to **Sushruta**, the author of one of the oldest Indian medical texts, piercing the ears protected children against certain ailments. Although in modern times most young girls have pierced ears, this practice is far less common for boys, suggesting that ornamentation has taken precedence over protection.

## Karni Mata

Presiding **deity** of the temple by the same name in the village of **Deshnok** in the state of **Rajasthan**. Karni Mata is a local form of the Mother **Goddess**; her name refers to the place where an ear (karni) of the dismembered goddess **Sati** fell to earth. The temple is unusual in that it is inhabited by thousands of rats, which are considered Karni Mata's sons. According to the local tradition, Karni Mata's son drowned in a local pond. When she tried to influence **Yama**, the god of death, to give her son a favorable rebirth, she was told that he had already been reborn as a **rat**. At her request, Yama allowed all of her male descendants to be born as rats in the temple at Deshnok. Yama agreed that in the next life the rats would be reborn as family members of the temple's servants. According to this myth, the rats and the temple priests are all members of one extended family.

## Karpatri Maharaj, Swami

A modern-day **ascetic** noted for the strictness of his ascetic practices. His name comes from his habit of using his hands

(kara) as the vessel (patra) in which he received the food he took as alms. This is considered one of the strictest ascetic practices, since the amount of food one can receive in this way is fairly small. The lack of an **eating** vessel indicates complete renunciation of material **possessions**. Swami Karpatri was also known for his conservative political views. After Indian independence in 1947, he was one of the founders of the political party **Ram Rajya Parishad** ("Organization for Ram's Reign"). The party's basic assertion was that people had to follow the division of status and labor found in the traditional **caste** system in order to have a smoothly working society. Aside from this conservative social platform, the party also backed Hindu causes such as the demand for a total ban on **cow slaughter**. Despite being a **Sanyasi** who had renounced the world, Swami Karpatri still maintained some residual attitudes from his former life. He had been born a **brahmin**; even after renouncing the world, he would only take food from brahmin houses. Swami Karpatri exemplifies how many ascetics still retain connections with the "everyday" world—both in retaining some concern for their former status and in taking organized political action to promote causes reflecting deeply entrenched Hindu values.

## Kartigai

Eighth month in the Tamil **year**, corresponding to the northern Indian solar month of Vrschika (the zodiacal sign of Scorpio), which usually falls within November and December. The existence of several different calendars is one clear sign of the continuing importance of regional cultural patterns. One way that the Tamils retain their culture is by preserving their traditional **calendar**. Tamil is one of the few regional languages in India with an ancient, well-established literary tradition. See also **Tamil months**, **Tamil Nadu**, and **Tamil language**.

## Kartik

According to the lunar **calendar**, by which most Hindu religious festivals are deter-

mined, Kartik is the eighth month in the lunar **year**, usually falling within October and November. In northern India, Kartik coincides with the harvest when the weather is quite pleasant. Kartik is one of the most ritually important months of the year; its major festivals include **Karva Chauth**, **Rambha Ekadashi**, **Narak Chaturdashi**, **Diwali**, **Govardhan Puja** (**Annakut**), **Devotthayan Ekadashi**, **Tulsi Vivah**, and **Kartik Purnima**.

## Kartik Purnima

Festival during the **full moon** in the **lunar month** of **Kartik** (October–November), celebrated as a bathing (**snana**) festival. During the festival, an early morning bath in the **Ganges** or any other sacred river is believed to provide the bather with exceptional religious merit. People often journey to sacred rivers to take advantage of this opportunity. Also on this day, Sikhs celebrate the birthday of their religious leader, Guru Nanak, born in 1469.

## Karttikeya

("**son** of the Krttikas") Epithet of the god **Skanda**, considered the son of **Shiva**. Skanda is not born in the usual manner but develops when **Shiva's semen** falls into the **Ganges** River. The name *Karttikeya* comes from the six minor goddesses known as the Krttikas, who are the deified form of the constellation Pleiades. After Skanda is born, these goddesses become his foster mothers and nurse him, which in Indian culture is believed to create a mother-child bond. So that none of the goddesses will feel slighted, Skanda sprouts six heads, allowing him to nurse from all of them at the same time.

## Karva Chauth

Religious vow (**vrat**) observed on the fourth (chauth) day of the dark, waning half of the **lunar month** of **Kartik** (October–November). Karva Chauth is taken by married **women** to ensure their husbands' health, prosperity, and long life. There are many such vows in which women's observances and sacrifices are

channeled into maintaining the welfare and prosperity of the family. Although such vows are voluntary in the strictest sense, there is great social pressure for women to perform them, thus fulfilling their expected role as "good" wives. Karva Chauth is a very strict vow; women observing it neither eat nor drink until they see the **moon** rising that evening. When the moon appears, the women offer water to it and then are permitted to drink. On this evening, women may also **worship** the **deities Shiva** and **Parvati** (the divine example of a happily married couple) and **Karttikeya**, their son. Women also give each other small pots (karva) filled with sweets, hence the festival's name.

The charter myth for this observance tells how a young bride, while performing this fast at the home of her birth, grows faint and nearly lifeless. Her brothers are so worried about her health that one of them climbs into a tree with a lantern, while the others convince her that the light is coming from the rising moon. The young woman is greatly relieved, but as soon as she drinks water her husband falls down dead. Her brothers eventually have to confess what they have done. As the woman lays lamenting her newly gained widowhood, she is discovered by the **goddess** Parvati, who assures her that her husband will be restored to life if she faithfully observes Karva Chauth the following year. The young woman does as she is told and regains her husband.

This tale contains significant cultural information, particularly on people's differing obligations. A brother's duty is to protect his sister. A wife's primary duty is to her husband, and her efforts should be devoted to his welfare. As in many such tales, the consequences of failing to keep a religious observance are swift and severe, and the rewards from faithfully performing it are equally grand.

## Kashi
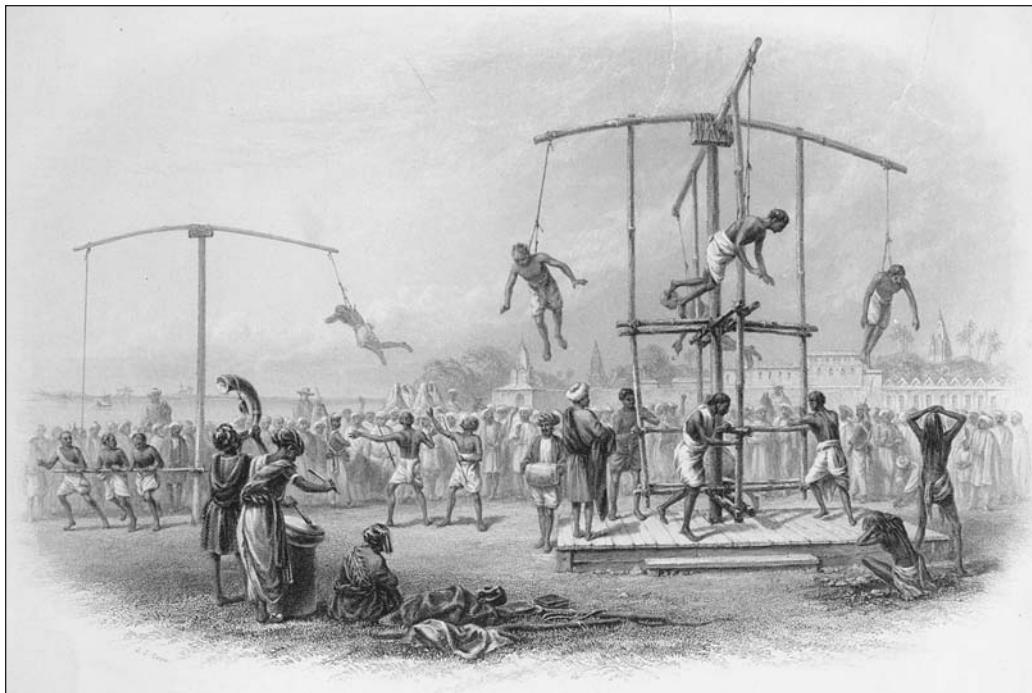
("shining") One of the traditional names for the city of **Benares**. Benares is mentioned in the list of the **Seven Sacred Cities**, where death brings final liberation of the soul. In a more strict local sense, the name *Kashi* designates the largest of the three traditional sacred zones in Benares. It includes everything within the **Panchakroshi Yatra** road, a circuit around the city that marks the outer limit of the region. The name Kashi refers to the mythic story of the **jyotirlinga**, the "pillar of light" in which the god **Shiva** is said to have first appeared. According to tradition, the pillar of light did not just land in Kashi but was itself a form of Kashi, thus indicating the city's sanctity over all other places on **earth**.

## Kashmir

One of the three distinct cultural areas, along with **Jammu** and Ladakh, in the modern Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. Jammu and Kashmir is a former princely state, in which the Hindu Dogra kings also ruled over the **minority** populations of the mostly Muslim Kashmiris and the mostly Buddhist Ladakhis. Since Indian independence in 1947, this ethnic and religious division continues to be a source of trouble, and nowhere more than in Kashmir. At independence, Pakistan attempted to take the region by force and claimed a section of Kashmir. In the time since then, India and Pakistan have fought several wars over it; Pakistan claims it by virtue of their shared religion of Islam; India claims it by virtue of a document signed by the last of its kings, Maharaja Hari Singh. The Kashmiris themselves have been caught in this regional clash, and their demands for greater self-determination have been largely ignored. After the 1986 state elections, which were widely regarded as rigged, tensions in Kashmir came to a boil. Since 1990 the tension has turned into an open rebellion, assisted by covert aid from Pakistan.

Most Kashmiris became Muslims during medieval times. Before that time the region was a Hindu cultural area. Kashmir still has some stunning examples of early Hindu **architecture**, such as the **sun temple** at **Martand**, a temple to the god **Shiva** at **Pandrenthan**, and the shrine to Shiva at **Amarnath** cave which

Some pilgrims to the sacred site of Kataragama participate in extreme ascetic practices, such as swinging from hooks that are pierced through their backs.

is still an important pilgrimage site. Kashmir also has a minority Hindu population, known as the Kashmiri Pandits. Recent troubles have prompted many of them to migrate south to other parts of India. Although these two communities profess different religious beliefs, they share a common language and sense of Kashmiri identity and culture. For general information about Kashmir and regions of India, see Christine Nivin et al., *India*. 8th ed., Lonely Planet, 1998.

## Kashyapa

In Hindu mythology, Kashyapa is the chief of the **Prajapatis** (a class of semidivine beings) and the father of **Garuda**, the divine eagle who serves as the animal "vehicle" for the god **Vishnu**. Kashyapa is also one of the Seven Sages whose names mark exogamous clan "lineages" (**gotra**); the others are **Gautama**, **Bharadvaja**, **Vasishtha**, **Bhrgu**, **Atri**, and **Vishvamitra**. All **brahmins** are believed to be descended from these seven sages, with each family taking the name of its progenitor as its gotra name. In modern times, gotras are still important, since marriage within the gotra is forbidden. After her marriage, the new bride adopts her husband's gotra as part of her new identity. See also **marriage prohibitions**.

## Kataka Hasta

In Indian **dance**, **sculpture**, and ritual, a particular hand **gesture** (**hasta**), in which the tips of the fingers are loosely joined to the thumb, to create a ring (the word *kataka* literally means "bracelet"). This hasta is common in the images of Hindu goddesses, but also serves a useful purpose: a fresh flower may be inserted in her hand every day.

## Kataragama

Sacred site (**tirtha**) located in the extreme southeastern part of **Sri Lanka** that is dedicated to the god **Skanda** in his southern Indian manifestation as **Murugan**. The site is notable for being outside of the Indian mainland and as an important place of **worship** for both Hindus and Buddhists. According to

mythic tradition, the site was established when Skanda went hunting in the jungles of Sri Lanka, fell in love with a tribal woman named **Valli**, and vowed to remain forever in her home. As the son of the god **Shiva**, Skanda is a powerful **deity** in the Hindu pantheon. His relationship with Valli shows his accessibility and his love for his devotees (**bhakta**).

The annual Kataragama pilgrimage in July–August is a theater to demonstrate these qualities: Many people come seeking healing from physical ailments or deliverance from distress, while others come to fulfill vows for benefits already received. Such vows often take the form of extreme self-mortification—by carrying the **kavadi**, a yoke held in place by hooks piercing the flesh; by piercing the tongue or cheeks with tiny arrows, one of the symbols of Skanda; or by hanging from hooks embedded in the back and thighs. These ardent devotees are reportedly rewarded for their suffering with a state of ecstasy in which they feel no pain and suffer no bleeding. In this state of ecstasy, the devotees are also believed to be mouthpieces for the god Skanda. Other pilgrims seek their advice for every conceivable kind of problem, under the assumption that Skanda will give them the most appropriate answer. For further information see Paul Wirz, *Kataragama*: *the Holiest Place in Ceylon,* 1966; and Bryan Pfaffenberger, "The Kataragama Pilgrimage," in *Journal of Asian Studies,* Vol. 28, No. 2, 1979.

## Katha

("conversation") Genre of public religious address based on recitation and exposition of a religious text. Katha is most often associated with the *Ramcharitmanas*, a version of the epic *Ramayana* written by the poet-saint **Tulsidas**, but may be used to explain other religious texts as well. Kathas may be delivered in a number of ways: The speaker may go through large parts of the text, give detailed analysis and commentary on a very small portion of the text, select passages from throughout the text to illustrate a particular theme, or present a completely spontaneous and free-floating exposition. For listeners, attending such events is not only aesthetically satisfying but also considered to be a form of **satsang** or religious association. Such gatherings were (and are) one of the major ways in which illiterate people memorize large parts of these primary texts. For further information see Philip Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text,* 1991.

## Kathak

One of the classical **dance** forms of India; some of the others are **Bharatanatyam**, **Orissi**, **Kuchipudi**, **Kathakali**, and **Manipuri**. Like much of traditional Indian culture, classical dances are identified with certain regions; Kathak is primarily found in northern India. Traditionally, Kathak descended from the **ras lilas** of **Braj**, devotional dances illustrating events from the life of **Krishna**. This claim has little historical support and may simply reflect the desire to root all of the Indian arts in religion. It is not disputed, however, that Kathak developed as an art form in the courts of the northern Indian princes, where it was performed for the entertainment of the monarch and his guests. In time, two major Kathak centers developed: Jaipur, famous for spectacular footwork; and Lucknow, known for its attention to acting. Stylistically, Kathak is marked by an upright posture, with the legs kept straight. The dance emphasizes rapid, rhythmic foot patterns, rhythms accentuated by strings of bells worn on the dancer's ankles and complemented by multiple turns; the torso is kept fairly immobile. As with all forms of Indian dance, Kathak includes a well-developed "vocabulary" of facial expressions and gestures of the arms and hands that

allow the dancer to convey a great range of emotions to the audience. For further information see Mohan Khokar, *Traditions of Indian Classical Dance*, 1984.

## Kathakali

One of the classical **dance** forms of India; some of the others are **Bharatanatyam**, **Orissi**, **Kuchipudi**, **Kathak**, and **Manipuri**. Like much of traditional Indian culture, classical dances are identified with certain regions; Kathakali is primarily found in **Kerala**. Unlike many of the other classical forms, Kathakali did not develop in a temple setting. It appeared as a developed style in the seventeenth century, although it is rooted in folk and religious dramas dating from centuries before. Kathakali has traditionally been danced only by men—the **women's** form in Kerala is **Mohini Attam**. A Kathakali performance is one of the most dramatic spectacles in the Indian arts. Part of this drama comes from the dancers' training, stressing controlled facial mobility to facilitate ease and power of expression. The dancers wear flamboyant costumes and headdresses. The most striking feature of all is elaborate makeup— the heroes' faces are painted a vivid green, with fluted ridges made of rice paste attached to their cheeks, while villains are painted in green and red and have knobs of pith attached to their chins and foreheads. Stylistically, the dance moves between athletic jumps and majestic turns, with religious texts forming the dominant source for stories. As with all Indian dances, Kathakali has a well-developed "vocabulary" of **gesture** and facial expression, which makes it possible for the dancers to engage in complex storytelling. As with all other classical dances, Kathakali has undergone certain changes in the past generation, spurred by a shift in the venue from temple courtyards to stage performance. For example, a planned stage performance requires a well-organized "program" and a designated time frame, whereas in earlier times Kathakali performances would often last all night long. For further information see Mohan Khokar, *Traditions of Indian Classical Dance*, 1984.

## Katha Upanishad

One of the later and more developed **Upanishads**, the speculative religious texts that form the latest stratum of the oldest Hindu sacred texts, the **Vedas**. As with most of the Upanishads, the Katha Upanishad investigates profound questions, in particular the nature of the Self (**atman**). The text tells the story of a boy, **Nachiketas**, whose father sends him to Death in a fit of anger. Nachiketas goes to Death's abode, but finds no one. He waits for three days before Death returns. To make amends for ignoring a **brahmin** guest—which the text describes as a serious sin— Death gives Nachiketas three boons, or wishes. Nachiketas uses the first boon to be restored to his father's house and the second to receive instruction in performing a sacrificial **fire**. With the final boon, he asks what happens to a person after the death of the body. Death first tries to evade the question, then tries to bribe Nachiketas with other gifts. When the boy insists on an answer, Death begins to reveal his secrets; these revelations make up the bulk of the text. Death's secrets focus mainly on the reality of the Self, its eternal and indestructible nature, its subtle qualities, and the difficulties in realizing it. The Self is the ultimate truth, and to know it is to know the only thing that really matters.

## Katyavalambita Hasta

In Indian **dance**, **sculpture**, and ritual, the name of a particular hand **gesture** (**hasta**) in which the arm hangs down beside the body and the hand rests on the hip in a relaxed manner.

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## Katyayana Smrti

One of the **smrtis** or "remembered" texts, a class of literature deemed important but less authoritative than the other textual category, the **shrutis** or "heard" texts. This smrti is attributed to the sage Katyayana and is an example of one of the **Dharma Shastras**, manuals prescribing rules for correct human behavior and ideal social life. Unlike the **Dharma Sutras**, which are ascribed to recognizable individuals, the Dharma Shastras are usually credited to mythic sages as a strategy to reinforce the authority of these texts. Katyayana's complete text has not survived, although more than one thousand verses have been compiled from later works. Katyayana's text was the first to focus on the rights of **women**: he gave particular attention to women's personal property (**stridhan**), both to explain their powers and to prescribe rules for its **inheritance** when a woman died.

## Kaurava

In the **Mahabharata**, the later of the two great Hindu epics, the Kauravas are the hundred sons of King **Dhrtarashtra** and the epic's antagonists to the **Pandava** protagonists. The Kauravas receive their name as descendants of Kuru, an ancestor of King **Shantanu**. As in many cases in Hindu mythology, the Kaurava sons are born in an unusual manner. Their mother, **Gandhari**, receives a blessing (**ashirvad**) from the sage **Vyasa** that she will give **birth** to one hundred sons. Her **pregnancy** lasts for over two years. When she grows impatient and tries to hasten the delivery, she gives birth to a great lump of flesh. Vyasa advises Gandhari to divide the lump and place each piece in a pot of clarified butter (ghee). In due time, each of the 101 pots break open to reveal one hundred handsome boys, as well as a single daughter, Dussala. Of these hundred sons, the most important are the two eldest, **Duryodhana** and **Duhshasana**.

## Kausalya

In the **Ramayana**, the earlier of the two great Indian epics, Kausalya is the first wife of King **Dasharatha** and the mother of the god-king **Rama**.

## Kaustubha

In Hindu mythology, the gem that the god **Vishnu** wears on his chest. The Kaustubha jewel is one of the precious things produced by churning the ocean of milk. Other products include the **goddess Lakshmi**, the **Kamadhenu** or wishing-**cow**, and the nectar of immortality (**amrta**). Vishnu's **possession** of the Kaustubha jewel is a symbol of his power and his mastery over the universe. See also **Tortoise avatar**.

## Kautilya

According to tradition, Kautilya was the author of the **Arthashastra** ("Treatise on Power"), a text which is a handbook on the exercise of royal power. The ruler portrayed in the *Arthashastra* cares little for ideals or **dreams**, but rather is willing to do whatever is necessary to remain in power. Aside from his authorship of the *Arthashastra*, Kautilya is also identified as the Machiavellian **brahmin** minister who orchestrated **Chandragupta Maurya**'s rise to power, but there are serious doubts that these Kautilyas are the same person.

## Kavadi

A bamboo yoke topped with semicircular splints of bamboo that is carried on a devotee's (**bhakta**) shoulders during certain festivals devoted to the god **Murugan**. A kavadi is usually decorated with flowers, pictures, ribbons, and other ornaments. A devotee carrying a kavadi is inviting Murugan to descend and rest upon it, bestowing his **grace** through divine **possession**. Carrying a kavadi is usually done to fulfill a vow often made when asking Murugan for some favor, such as healing or deliverance from other distress. This can be

an extremely strenuous rite: Fully loaded kavadis sometimes weigh one hundred pounds. The carriers sometimes secure the kavadis by using metal hooks stuck into the flesh of their backs and chests. Carrying the kavadi is seen as an act of devotion and can be found wherever the **worship** of Murugan is popular: in southern India, at **Kataragama** in **Sri Lanka**, in Malaysia, and in **South Africa**.

## Kaveri River
See **Cauvery**.

## Kavi
A word that most literally means "wise man," but more commonly refers to a "poet" or "bard." This secondary meaning comes from the pan-Indian assumption that the purpose of such poetic writers was not merely to entertain but to educate and to uplift.

## Kavikarnapura
(mid-16th c.) Author of one version of the ***Chaitanya-Charitramrta*** ("Nectar of Chaitanya's Deeds"), an account of the life of the Bengali saint **Chaitanya**. Kavikarnapura's text was written in 1542, nine years after Chaitanya's death, when the effort to declare Chaitanya a saint had already begun. Kavikarnapura freely acknowledges his debt to an earlier biography of Chaitanya, written by **Murari Gupta**. He diverges from the earlier text by portraying Chaitanya as an incarnation of **Krishna**, descending to earth to bestow **grace** on ordinary mortals. As with the other traditional accounts of Chaitanya's life, the author does not claim this to be an "objective" biography but instead a hagiography written by a passionate devotee (**bhakta**).
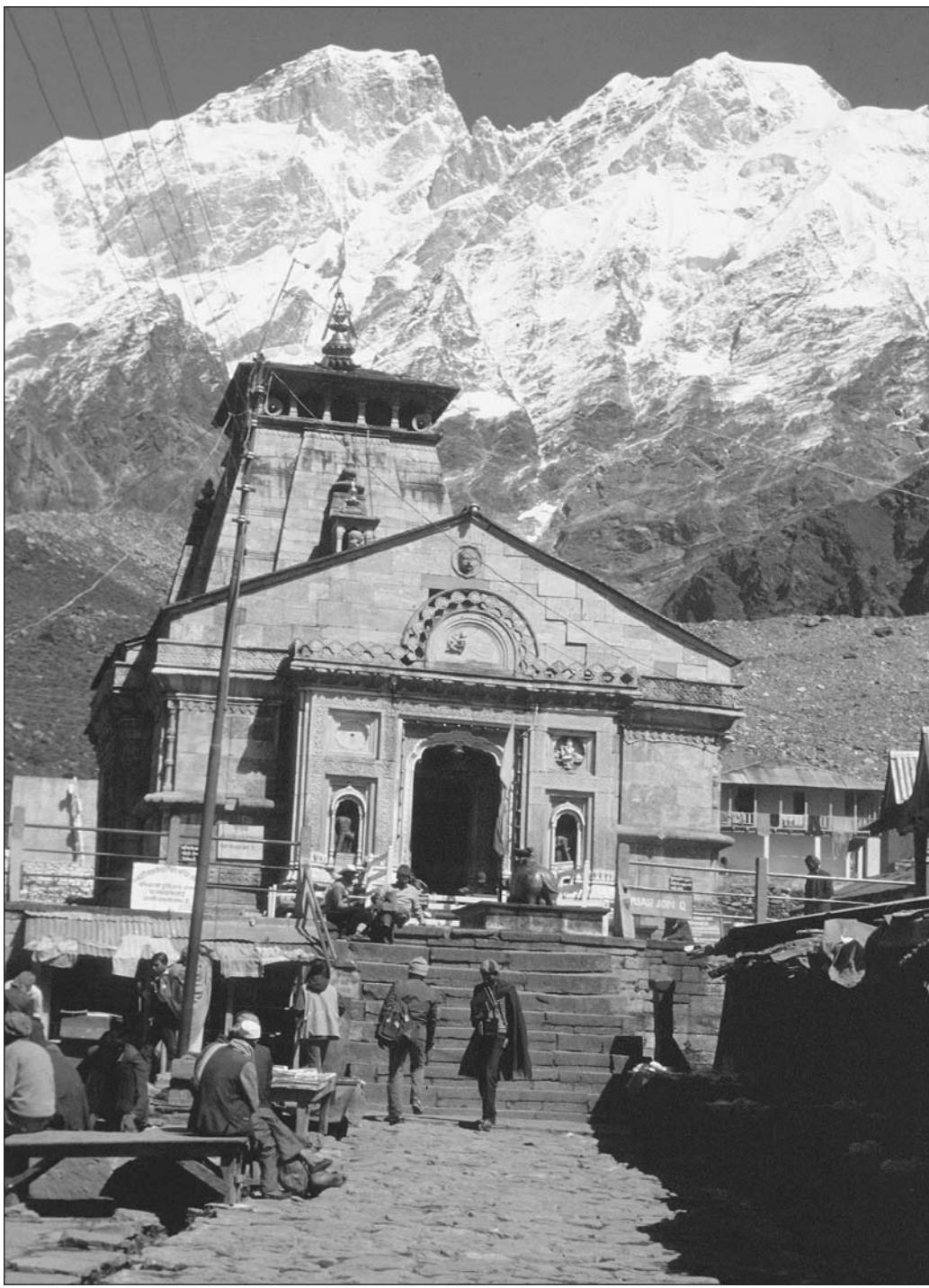
## Kavitavali
("series of poems") The final poetic work of the poet-saint **Tulsidas** (1532–1623?). In the ***Kavitavali***,

Tulsidas gives a condensed version of the epic ***Ramayana*** as well as poems in which he clearly speaks in his own voice. Evidence in the text indicates that it was completed after 1615. The poems are written in the **savaiya** and **kavitt** meters, which are longer, more complex, and less accessible than the meters used in most of Tulsidas's earlier works. The *Kavitavali* is divided into seven sections, paralleling the internal structure of the *Ramayana*, but the bulk of the *Kavitavali*'s poems are in the last two sections. One of these is the "Lankakhand," which describes the climactic battle symbolizing the struggle between good and evil; in this section the kavitt **meter** is used to render vivid battle scenes. The final book is the "Uttarakhand," comprising more than half of the entire work. In this last section, Tulsidas has written some autobiographical verses and reiterates themes found throughout much of his work: the degeneracy of the present age (**Kali Yuga**), a stress on devotion as the only means of salvation, and the power inherent in God's name, through which any obstacles can be overcome. Parts of this latter section sound pessimistic, perhaps reflecting the trials of advancing age, but through it all comes a note of hope that the author's trust in God's saving power will not ultimately be in vain.

## Kavitt
A particular **meter**, or rhythm pattern, in **Hindi** poetry. Verses composed in the Kavitt meter have four lines of thirty-one syllables each, with the break in each individual line often coming after the sixteenth syllable. This is an unusually long meter, thus lending itself well to extended descriptions employing alliteration; in his ***Kavitavali***, the poet-saint **Tulsidas** uses this meter with great affect to describe battle scenes.

At an altitude of almost 12,000 feet in the Himalaya Mountains, pilgrims traveling to the sacred site of Kedarnath must climb a steep path and contend with unpredictable weather.

## Kavya

("related to **kavis**") The most general name for courtly poetry or poetic prose, most often composed in the **Sanskrit** language. Such kavya was usually written and performed in a court setting, where innovative reworking of traditional forms was valued more highly than originality or self-revelation. The primary building block in such poetry

was the two-line verse, which was a self-contained unit with regard to meaning. Verses were composed in meters ranging from four to twenty-six syllables per half-line, and were ornamented with various **alamkaras** ("figures of speech") in an effort to convey the mood (**rasa**) appropriate to the subject matter. Poetic forms range from single-verse epigrams, such as those of **Bhartrhari**, to extended epic poems (**mahakavyas**), most notably those of **Kalidasa**. Although such poetry contains frequent references to religious life, it was primarily intended for entertainment rather than moral encouragement, an emphasis which reflects the court atmosphere in which it was composed. The singular exception to this trend is the *Gitagovinda* of **Jayadeva**, a text said to have been composed at the **Jagannath** temple in **Puri**, which focuses on devotion to the god **Krishna** as lord of the universe.

## Kayasth

Traditional Indian society was modeled as a collection of **endogamous**, or inter-marrying, subgroups known as **jatis** ("birth"). The jatis were organized (and their social status determined) by the group's hereditary occupation, over which each group held a monopoly. The Kayasths worked as scribes and recorders. They were mostly associated with maintaining business and mercantile records, accounting, and keeping businesses running smoothly and profitably.

## Kedarnath

Village and sacred site (**tirtha**) in the **Himalayas** at the headwaters of the **Mandakini River**, one of the tributaries of the **Ganges**. The village is named for its presiding **deity**, who is the god **Shiva** in his manifestation as the "Lord of Kedar." Shiva is present at Kedarnath in the form of a **linga**, a pillar-shaped image. The Kedarnath linga is deemed one of the twelve **jyotirlingas**, a network

of sites deemed especially sacred to Shiva. Kedarnath's sanctity is only matched by the difficulty in getting to it. Its high altitude—close to 12,000 feet—means that it is only accessible between late April and October, a characteristic also of **Yamunotri**, **Gangotri**, and **Badrinath**, the three other major Himalayan pilgrim sites. A trip to Kedarnath preserves some of the difficulty formerly associated with Himalayan pilgrimage. Pilgrims travel the last ten miles on foot or horseback, during which the path climbs five thousand feet. Those braving the trek must contend with the unpredictable mountain weather, but may also be rewarded with spectacular vistas. The temple of Kedarnath is surrounded by mountain meadows and shaded by mountains capped with snow year-round.

The Kedarnath linga is a natural ridge of stone considered to be a self-manifestation (**svayambhu**) of Shiva, and is considered to be unusually powerful. The particular shape of this linga is tied to Kedarnath's charter myth. One version of this story is connected to the five **Pandava** brothers, who are the protagonists in the *Mahabharata*, the later of the two great Hindu epics. The Pandavas make their final journey into the Himalayas, searching for a vision of Shiva. They finally see him at a distance, but when they try to get closer, Shiva takes the form of a **bull** and begins running through the snow. The bull burrows into a snow bank. When the Pandavas follow, they find the body of the bull in the snow. The ridge of rock that forms the Kedarnath linga is considered to be the hump of this bull. The bull's head continues traveling over the hills, eventually stopping in **Nepal**, where it takes form as **Pashupatinath**.

A completely different charter myth draws on the traditional belief that Shiva makes his home high in the mountains. This myth identifies the **Panchkedar** (a network of five Shiva shrines in the **Garhwal** region) with five parts of Shiva's body, thus connecting the deity with the land itself and making the land

holy. Of these five, Kedarnath is identified as Shiva's back, **Madmaheshvar** his navel, **Tungnath** his arm, **Rudranath** his face, and **Kalpeshvar** his matted locks (**jata**).

## Kena ("By Whom?") Upanishad

One of the shorter of the early speculative texts known as the **Upanishads**, whose name comes from the first word of the text itself. The Kena Upanishad is unusual in that the first two sections are written in verse, and the third and fourth in prose. This change gives the text a somewhat disjointed feel, despite its brevity, and raises the possibility that it is a compilation of two earlier texts. As with many of the later upanishads, the Kena Upanishad propounds that the ultimate source of all reality is ascribed to a single power that can only be discovered through a flash of mystic insight. The verse sections describe this power: "It is conceived of by one who does not conceive of it, it is not conceived by one who conceives, it is not known by those who think they know it, it is known by those who think they do not know it" (verse 2.3). The prose sections are very different, narrating an encounter between a mysterious being (**Brahman** personified) and several of the primary gods in the earlier Vedic literature—**Indra**, **Agni**, and **Vayu**. Despite all their efforts, the gods are unable to exercise their respective powers of storm, fire, and wind, showing that their divine power is not independently theirs, but is derived from Brahman.

## Kerala

One of the four southern Indian states, whose inhabitants speak a **Dravidian** language, in this case Malayalam. Kerala occupies the narrow strip of land between the Western Ghats and the Arabian sea, in the region formerly known as the **Malabar** coast. Kerala is one of the "linguistic" states formed after Indian independence in 1947, to unite people with a common language and culture under one state government. It was created from the Malayalam-speaking regions of the former Madras state, plus the princely states of Travancore and Cochin. Kerala has always been important as a trading center. The desire for its spices and sandalwood have brought merchants from the Middle East for thousands of years. In modern times it has had India's first elected communist government, and is the only Indian state to have 100 percent adult literacy. Kerala's most famous sacred site is the temple of **Aiyappa** at **Shabari Malai**. By custom the annual pilgrimage to the site is restricted to men as well as women past childbearing age. For general information about Kerala and other regions of India, see Christine Nivin et al., *India*. 8th ed., Lonely Planet, 1998.

## Keshanta ("shaving the beard") Samskara

The thirteenth of the sixteen traditional life-cycle ceremonies (**samskaras**). The ceremony was performed by a young man in the **brahmacharin** (celibate student) **stage of life** and marked the first time he shaved his beard. According to tradition, this rite was followed by giving a gift to the teacher, ideally a **cow**. By ritualizing his first shave, the keshanta samskara was a way to mark the young man's changing status. After this he was responsible for remaining clean-shaven, as one more of the rules for maintaining ritual **purity**. In modern times this rite is no longer observed. See also **shaving**.

## Keshava

([One with] "Flowing **Hair**") Epithet of the god **Krishna**. See **Krishna**.

## Keshi

In Hindu mythology, Keshi is one of the assassins sent by **Kamsa**, the **demon**-king of **Mathura**, in an attempt to kill his nephew, the child-god **Krishna**. In the form of a savage horse, Keshi attacks

Krishna. Krishna easily fends him off and kills him, earning himself the name of **Keshimanthana**, "destroyer of Keshi."

## Keshimanthana

("destroyer of **Keshi**") Epithet of the god **Krishna**. Keshi is one of the demon assassins sent by Krishna's uncle **Kamsa** to kill the child Krishna. Keshi appears in the form of a horse, but Krishna easily destroys him, as he does all the other **demons**.

## Keshini

In Hindu mythology, one of the wives of King **Sagar**. Through a sage's boon, Keshini and her co-wife **Sumati** are given a choice in the number of children they will bear—one will bear a single son through whom the lineage will continue, whereas the other will bear sixty thousand **sons** who will die before they have any offspring. Keshini chooses the former, and through her son **Asamanjasa** the line of King Sagar is preserved. Her descendants are particularly important, since her great-great-grandson is the sage **Bhagirath**, who succeeds in bringing the river **Ganges** from **heaven** to **earth**.

## Ketu

A malevolent "**planet**" in Hindu astrology (**jyotisha**), and was originally the body of a **demon**. According to the story, the gods and the **demons** join forces to churn the ocean of milk to obtain the nectar of immortality. The gods manage to trick the demons out of their share. While the gods drink the nectar, the demon **Sainhikeya** slips into their midst in disguise. As the demon begins to drink, the **sun** and **moon** alert **Vishnu**, who uses his discus to cut off the demon's head. Sainhikeya's two halves become immortal, since they have come into contact with the nectar. The severed body becomes Ketu, and the severed head becomes another malevolent planet, **Rahu**. Ketu is not regarded as a physical planet, but as the descending node of the moon, or the place where it intersects the ecliptic while passing southward. Ketu is also associated with comets and fiery meteors, generally considered signs of ill **omen**. See **Tortoise avatar**.

## Khadga

("sword") In Hindu iconography, the sword is an object associated with a variety of **deities**. It carries strong associations with **Kali**, symbolizing the cutting off of her devotees' (**bhakta**) ignorance. Sometimes it is literally used to cut off heads of the **animals** sacrificed to her. The sword is also carried by other images of the **Goddess**, including **Durga** and **Santoshi Ma**, as well as certain images of **Shiva** and **Vishnu**.

## Khajuraho

Small village in the Chattarpur district of the northern state of **Madhya Pradesh**, renowned for a magnificent collection of temples built about a thousand years ago by the **Chandella dynasty**. It is unclear why these temples were built in such an inaccessible place, although its remote location is believed to have spared the temples from iconoclasm during Muslim incursions. The most famous Hindu temples at the site are the **Kandariya Mahadev**, **Lakshmana**, and **Vishvanath**. There are many smaller temples to other Hindu **deities** and several Jain temples as well.

The temples at Khajuraho were built in the northern Indian **Nagara** style. The building replicates a sacred mountain with the highest point directly over the primary image. The outside of the temples were decorated with sculptural images, and the most famous of these depict women in various explicit sexual encounters. The significance of the **erotic** sculptures is much debated. Some claim that the sculptures sanction carnal pleasure as a religious path, while some interpret them to represent human union with the divine. Still others view them as teaching that the desire for

pleasure must be transcended to attain the divine. For further information see Benjamin Rowland, *The Art and Architecture of India*, 1971.

## Khandava Forest

In the ***Mahabharata***, the later of the two great Hindu epics, the Khandava forest is consumed by **Agni**, a god whose material form is **fire** itself. According to the story, Agni becomes sick and is advised that he can only be healed by eating the creatures in the Khandava forest, many of whom are enemies of the gods. Agni makes seven attempts to "eat" the forest, but is always thwarted by the storm-god **Indra**, who rescues the forest by dousing it with rain. Agni is perplexed and solicits the help of the god **Krishna** and his companion **Arjuna**, the world's greatest archer. To help Agni, Arjuna is given the **Gandiva** bow and an inexhaustible quiver of arrows. When Agni again begins to burn the forest, Arjuna keeps off the rain by shooting a flight of arrows so thick that it forms a canopy over the forest. In this way Agni is cured of his illness.

## Khandoba

Regional **deity** worshiped in the central Indian **Deccan** region, particularly in the states of **Maharashtra** and **Karnataka**. Originally believed to be a local deity, Khandoba is now considered to be an **avatar**, or incarnation, of the god **Shiva**; he takes this form to destroy two **demons** named Mani and Malla. After killing the demons he is persuaded to reside at a temple in **Jejuri**, Maharashtra, from where his **worship** spread throughout the region. Khandoba is an important popular deity because he is believed to grant people's wishes, particularly in response to vows. For further information see John M. Stanley, "Special Time, Special Power: The Fluidity of Power in a Popular Hindu Festival," in *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 1, 1977.

## Khara

In the ***Ramayana***, the earlier of the two great Indian epics, Khara is one of the brothers of the demon-king **Ravana**. With his brother **Dushana**, Khara tries to avenge the honor of their sister **Shurpanakha**, whose ears and nose have been cut off by **Rama's** brother **Lakshmana**. In a fierce battle, Rama destroys the demon army, killing Khara and Dushana. Seeing the failure of her two brothers, Shurpanakha goes to their brother Ravana to demand vengeance. Ravana realizes he cannot kill Rama in battle, but resolves to avenge his sister by kidnapping **Sita**, an action which drives the plot for the latter part of the epic.

## Kharoshthi

("ass-lip") Name for one of the ancient scripts used in the **inscriptions** of the emperor **Ashoka** (r. 269–232 B.C.E.), the greatest figure in the **Maurya dynasty**. Ashoka's empire encompassed all of the subcontinent (except the deepest parts of southern India) and parts of modern Afghanistan. Ashoka's **Rock Edicts** and **Pillar Edicts** are the earliest significant Indian written documents, giving invaluable information about contemporary social, political, and religious life. The Kharoshthi script was used exclusively in the northwestern part of Ashoka's empire and was clearly derived from the Aramaic alphabet used in Achaeminid Persia. Although the script was modified to adapt it to the sounds of Indian languages, it clearly shows Persian cultural influence. It was far less pervasive than **Brahmi** script and had virtually disappeared from India by the early centuries of the common era.

## Khatvanga

A club or staff topped with a human skull, it is one of the characteristic objects in Hindu iconography. At times the shaft of the staff was made from another human bone, such as a thigh or an arm bone. This symbol is most closely associated with the god **Shiva**. Its use

reflects his marginal, uncontrolled nature and his utter disconnection with the conventional values of ordinary society. It is still sometimes carried by ascetics, for whom Shiva is the model **ascetic**, and a paradigm for emulation.

## Khetaka

("shield") In Hindu iconography, the shield is associated with a variety of **deities**, including the **Goddess**, **Shiva**, and **Vishnu**. The shield is often found in images in which the figure carries a sword (**khadga**).

## Kichaka

In the *Mahabharata*, the later of the two great Hindu epics, Kichaka is the brother-in-law of King **Virata**. King Virata is host to the five **Pandava** brothers (the epic's protagonists) during the year that they go incognito after twelve years of forest exile. During this time, Kichaka becomes attracted to **Draupadi**, the Pandavas' common wife, who serves as an attendant to one of the royal ladies. Kichaka continues his advances despite her protests and strikes her when she tries to escape. One of Draupadi's husbands, **Bhima**, is livid when he discovers what has happened. He tells Draupadi to arrange a secret meeting with Kichaka, on the pretense of surrendering to his desires. Bhima disguises himself as Draupadi and when Kichaka arrives, Bhima kills him with his bare hands.

## Kimpurusha

Another name for the mythical **animals** known as **Kinnara**. See **Kinnara**.

## Kindama

In the *Mahabharata*, Kindama is a forest-dwelling sage, whose **curse** on King **Pandu** advances the epic's plot. Although celibate in his human form, Kindama occasionally uses his **magic** powers to transform himself and his wife into animals, so that they can experience sexual pleasure. On one occasion,

as Kindama and his wife are in the form of deer, King Pandu shoots the copulating pair with an arrow. In their dying moments the sage and his wife revert to their human forms. The sage curses the horrified Pandu to die the moment he takes his wife in an amorous embrace.

Since Pandu is childless, he abdicates the throne in favor of his blind brother **Dhrtarashtra** and becomes a celibate renunciant. Pandu's wives, **Kunti** and **Madri**, eventually bear children through magical means. The struggle for power between their children and **Duryodhana**, Dhrtarashtra's son, is the epic's pivotal conflict.

## Kinnara

("What, Man?") Mythical creatures described as either having the head of a horse and the body of a human being, or the head of a human being and the body of a horse. The Kinnaras are described as servants of **Kubera**, a minor **deity**. Kubera is one of the **Guardians of the Directions**, a group of eight deities believed to rule the cardinal and intermediate directions. He is the ruler over the northern direction, and thus identified as living in the **Himalayas**, where the Kinnaras also live. The Kinnaras are usually considered identical to the mythical creatures known as the Kimpurushas.

## Kiritamakuta

A high crown, sometimes topped with a knob, studded with jewels and other ornamentation. In Hindu iconography the kiritamakuta is associated with the god **Vishnu**, particularly in his manifestation as **Narayana**. For Vishnu, the kingly imagery conveyed by this crown reinforces his claim to be ruler of the universe.

## Kirtan

("repeating") A type of devotional singing or chanting of short verses which are usually different renditions of the divine name. This is often done in a

Ruins of the Sun Temple in Konarak. Built during the Ganga dynasty,
the temple was designed in the shape of the chariot believed to carry the sun.

call and response fashion—the leader sings one line, and the listeners repeat it. The primary emphasis in this rite is the repetition of the divine name. As the identifying mark of the divinity, the Name is believed to contain the **divine power**, benefiting those who hear it as well as those who speak it. Kirtan is especially popular among the devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Vishnu**, who historically have put greater stress on the theology of the Name. Kirtan is a common activity during congregational meetings known as **satsang**, the "company of good people," believed to have beneficial spiritual effects on those who take part in them.

## Kirtimukha

("mask of glory") In Indian **architecture**, a kirtimukha is a decorative motif in the form of a devouring leonine monster. It often appears as the main decorative element on a temple tower or as a protective element over doorways.

## Kishkindha

In the ***Ramayana***, the earlier of the two great Indian epics, Kishkindha is a forest-kingdom ruled by monkeys. The monkey-king, **Bali**, rules when **Rama** (the epic's protagonist) first comes to Kishkindha with his brother, **Lakshmana**, searching for Rama's kidnapped wife **Sita**. Bali is killed by Rama, and is succeeded by his brother **Sugriva**, Rama's ally. Sugriva sends his subjects on a wide-ranging search for Sita. One of them, **Hanuman**, eventually discovers her being held prisoner on **Lanka**.

## Kitawara

One of four major organizational groups of the **Dashanami Sanyasis**, renunciant ascetics who are devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva**; the other three divisions are **Bhuriwara**, **Bhogawara**, and **Anandawara**. Each of these groups has its headquarters in one of the four monastic centers (**maths**) supposedly established by philosopher **Shankaracharya**. Each of the groups are associated with one of the four **Vedas**, one of the "great utterances" (**mahavakyas**) expressing the ultimate truth, a particular **ascetic** quality, and several of the ten Dashanami divisions. The Kitawara group is affiliated with the **Sharada math** in **Dwaraka**, and is thus

connected with the western quarter of India. The Kitawara's Veda is the **Sama Veda**. Their mahavakya is "tattvamasi" ("That thou art") and their ascetic quality is to eat very little. The Dashanami divisions associated with this group are **Tirtha** and **Ashrama**.

## Koil

(also known as Koyal) One of the names for the Indian **cuckoo**. See **cuckoo**.

## Kokila

One of the names for the Indian **cuckoo**. See **cuckoo**.

## Konarak

Village on the Bay of Bengal in the state of **Orissa**, about forty miles east of the state capital, **Bhubaneshvar**. Konarak is famous for its **Sun Temple**. Now in ruins, the temple was built by king Narasimhadeva (r. 1238–1264), a monarch in the **Ganga dynasty**. The entire temple was intended to be a likeness of the sun's chariot. Twelve great wheels were carved on the sides at the temple's lowest level; in front of the temple are statues of several colossal horses. As at **Khajuraho**, the temple's lower levels are covered with **erotic** carvings, giving rise to diverse interpretations: Some claim the carvings sanction carnal pleasure as a religious path, while some interpret them allegorically as representing human union with the divine. Others view them as teaching that the desire for pleasure must ultimately be transcended to attain the divine.

The temple was built on a massive scale. According to one estimate, the massive central spire would have been over 200 feet high. It is uncertain whether this spire was ever completed, since the sandy soil at its base would have been unable to support the weight of such an enormous structure. This unstable soil has been the greatest contributor to the temple's increasing deterioration. The primary structure left at the site is the **jagamohan** (assembly hall). During the nineteenth century, the hall was filled with sand in an effort to prevent further collapse. For further information see Roy Craven, *Indian Art*, 1997.

## Konkanastha

Another name for the **brahmin** community of the **Chitpavan**, a name that signifies their historical home on the Konkan coastline in the states of **Goa** and **Maharashtra**. See **Chitpavan**.

## Korravai

Fierce form of the **Goddess**, worshiped in southern India and originally believed to have been an autochthonous ("of the land") **deity**. Korravai is associated with the hunt and the battlefield, and thus with **blood**, death, and carnage. Perhaps because of these associations, she was later identified with other fierce manifestations of the Mother Goddess, particularly the goddess **Kali**.

## Koshala

In the ***Ramayana***, the earlier of the two great Indian epics, this is the name of the region along the banks of the river Sarayu in which **Rama's** father, King **Dasharatha** rules.

## Kota

City on the Chambal River in the modern state of **Rajasthan**, about 100 miles south of Jaipur. Before India's independence, Kota was the capital of a small kingdom with the same name. Kota was one of the centers of the **Rajasthani** style of **miniature painting**, a genre used to depict Hindu religious themes, particularly incidents in the life of **Krishna**. The Kota style is considered a derivative of the **Bundi** style because Kota was ruled by a junior member of the Bundi royal family. Both styles are marked by their attention to nature, shown by detailed depictions of trees surrounding the paintings' subjects. The

Kota style is marked by elements of the landscape looming out of proportion, giving the pictures a lush feel. For further information see W. G. Archer, *Indian Painting*, 1957; and *Indian Painting in Bundi and Kotah*, 1959.

## Kratu

In Hindu mythology, one of the six **sons** of **Brahma**, all of whom become great sages. All are "mind-born," meaning that Brahma's thoughts are enough to bring them into being. The other five sages are **Marichi**, **Angiras**, **Pulastya**, **Pulaha**, and **Atri**.

## Krauncha ("Curlew") Dvipa

In traditional mythic geography, Krauncha is the fifth of the seven concentric landmasses (**dvipas**) making up the visible world. See also **cosmology**.

## Kraunchanishadana

("curlew-sitting") One of the sitting postures (**asanas**) described in commentaries to the **Yoga Sutras**. The Yoga Sutras are attributed to the sage **Patanjali** and give the earliest instruction of yoga. The Kraunchanishadana posture begins in **dandasana** or "stick-posture," in which one sits with the upper body erect, the arms straight with the hands flat on the ground and pointing forward, and the legs outstretched. From this posture one of the legs is folded back to the outside, with the heel pressed against the outer thigh. The other leg is raised straight up and pressed against the torso, with the hands clasped at the bottom of the foot.

## Krishna

Hindu **deity** usually considered as the eighth **avatar** or incarnation of the god **Vishnu**; in certain religious contexts, however, as in the *Gitagovinda*, he is described as the ultimate deity and the source of all the avatars. In either case, Krishna is one of the major deities in the modern Hindu pantheon. Part of his popularity may stem from the extraordinary breadth of his manifestations, allowing his devotees (**bhakta**) to **worship** him in many different ways. His earliest appearance comes in the *Mahabharata*, the later of the two great Hindu epics, where he is a friend and adviser to the five **Pandava** brothers who are the epic's protagonists. His epic portrayal is highly complex, and his character is not always truthful or good. He is a regal king and heroic warrior, a cunning opponent, and a Machiavellian politician with his own underlying agenda. Here Krishna plays the role of a trickster, although late in the story, in the section of the epic known as the **Bhagavad Gita**, he eventually drops the mask to reveal himself as the supreme deity.

The later sectarian literature, particularly the *Harivamsha* and the *Bhagavata Purana*, virtually ignore this exalted, royal figure, preferring to concentrate on Krishna's birth, childhood, and adolescence. This latter stratum of Krishna's mythology has been clearly imposed on the earlier, heroic image, rendering Krishna a character with unusual mythic depth. Religiously speaking, the image of Krishna as child and lover has been far more important than the stern and somewhat amoral hero.

The characters in the story of Krishna's life, including his parents, friends, and companions, are not aware of his divinity, and throughout the story they confront many surprises and bewildering events. However, none of these plot twists surprise the readers, since they are aware that all of the characters are taking part in Krishna's divine play (**lila**). According to tradition, Krishna is the eighth **son** of **Devaki** and **Vasudeva**. He is born in a prison in the city of **Mathura**, where his parents have been confined by his uncle, the wicked king **Kamsa**. On Devaki's wedding day, a divine voice warns Kamsa that her eighth child will eventually kill him. In an effort to forestall this prophecy, he puts the couple in prison, and kills all of

Devaki's children as soon as they are born. Kamsa intends to do the same with Krishna, but when Krishna is born, a deep sleep falls on all the jailers, the locked prison doors are miraculously opened, and Vasudeva is able to spirit the infant out of the prison to the home of his foster parents, **Nanda** and **Yashoda**. Vasudeva returns that night, bearing Yashoda's newborn baby girl, who is really **Bhadrakali**, the **Goddess**, in disguise. The next morning Kamsa kills the child by dashing it against a stone. From the body arises the Goddess, who taunts Kamsa, telling him that the person who will slay him has escaped.

Krishna lives happily at Nanda and Yashoda's home. His mythic images from that early time stress either his persona as the adorable child or unexpected feats of strength and heroism. As an infant he is placed under a cart, which he strikes with his foot and kicks into the air; he also slays a variety of **demon** assassins sent by his uncle Kamsa, most notably **Putana**, **Keshi**, and **Trnavarta**. During all these feats his companions are amazed but never realize that divinity is in their midst. Nor, for that matter, do his foster parents. In one story Yashoda looks in Krishna's mouth when he has been eating some dirt and sees the entire universe inside it. Through the workings of Krishna's power of illusion (**maya**), she immediately forgets the whole incident. The themes of forgetfulness and hidden divinity are central to Krishna's childhood mythology. The people in **Braj** treat Krishna with easy familiarity, because they are unaware of his true identity. Krishna is said to prefer this sort of natural interaction over all other worship.

As a boy Krishna becomes known for his mischief, particularly his penchant for stealing butter from the **gopis** (milk-maids), although when he is caught he can usually manage to charm his way out of punishment. His adolescence is marked by two heroic episodes—driving off the serpent **Kaliya**, and defeating the storm-god **Indra** by holding up Mt.



Depiction of Krishna, an incarnation of the god Vishnu.

**Govardhan**—and by the development of his persona as a lover. On moonlit, autumn nights, he plays his flute **Murali** on the banks of the **Yamuna River**. Hearing its irresistible call, the village women rush to meet him, whiling away the night in the circle **dance** known as the **ras lila**. Although she is not mentioned in the earliest texts, **Radha** appears as Krishna's special companion and consort, symbolizing the relationship between deity and devotee using the imagery of lover and beloved.

Some parts of Krishna's mythology relate episodes from later in his life, including his return to Mathura, the slaying of Kamsa, taking his rightful place as ruler, and marrying **Rukmini** and a host of other wives. The earlier strands of his mythic identity—the king, hero, and cunning diplomat portrayed in the *Mahabharata*—can be tied in here, to make it seem like the account of a single life. Some of the most poignant devotional (**bhakti**) poetry details the exchange between Krishna's female devotees, the gopis, and **Uddhava**, Krishna's companion sent back from

Mathura. Uddhava reassures them that Krishna is the indwelling God and is omnipresent. For the gopis, this abstract concept is a poor substitute for the sweet boy they know so well. Their attention remains focused on the charming child of Braj, who never grows up, never grows old, and who invites his devotees to share his world.

The worship of Krishna emphasizes relationship and communion, both with the deity and one another. In the most elaborate forms of worship, Krishna's devotees envision themselves as entering Krishna's world and spending the day doing the ordinary activities of a village cowhand, such as getting up, eating, taking the cows to pasture, and bringing home the cows. Some devotional manuals give detailed daily calendars, for which the devotees can visualize themselves going to particular places and doing particular things at certain times—building a relationship with God through sharing the mundane parts of everyday life. Another common practice is communal singing, usually collections of the divine names known as **kirtans**, as a way to build relationships and communion among the devotees.

Another feature of Krishna's character and worship is the notion of lila or "play." As David R. Kinsley points out, the infant Krishna dispatches the demon assassins as a form of play, and they never pose any serious threat. His relationship with the people of Braj is also a sort of play. He comes as the divine presence in their midst, but keeps them completely unaware of this, occasionally hinting at it through his wondrous deeds, but unwilling to ruin their natural interactions with him by revealing their difference in status. In the same way, he is believed to be active in the lives of his devotees, always present, but dropping only teasing hints of his presence. Finally, lila is the name for a series of dramas performed during the **monsoon season** in the town of **Brindavan**. These productions, known as the ras lila, are not mere drama but combine both liturgy and drama. Krishna and his companions are played by local **brahmin** boys. While in costume, the boys are believed to have become the characters they portray. Part of the program is worship. The players, known as **svarups** ("own-forms"), gather on stage to give **darshan** to the audience. The most common religious act in modern popular Hinduism, darshan allows direct eye contact between the devotee and the image of a deity, which is considered to be a conscious, perceiving being. The second part of the program is the lila, a rendition of some episode in Krishna's mythology. The audience participates by virtue of its presence, making Krishna's lila part of present-day experience by performing or attending these productions. Given his stature as a Hindu deity, there are many works on Krishna. For further information see Milton Singer (ed.), *Krishna*, 1966; David R. Kinsley, *The Sword and the Flute,* 1975; Barbara Stoller Miller, *The Love Song of the Dark Lord,* 1977; and John Stratton Hawley, *Krishna*: *The Butter Thief,* 1983. See also **Vaishnavism**.

## Krishnadas

(early 16th c.) One of the **ashtachap**, a group of eight northern Indian **bhakti** (devotional) poets. The compositions of these eight poets were used for liturgical purposes by the **Pushti Marg**, a religious community of devotees (**bhakta**) of **Krishna**. In the Pushti Marg's sectarian literature, all eight are also named as members of the community and as associates of either the community's founder, **Vallabhacharya**, or his successor **Vitthalnath**. Traditionally, Krishnadas is associated with Vallabhacharya. Little is known about Krishnadas, although traditional accounts hold that he was born in 1497. His poetry describes the physical beauty of Krishna as an object of aesthetic enjoyment. Within the Pushti Marg, he is remembered as a capable administrator and a defender of the sect's interests in **Brindavan**,

Krishna's childhood home, against the followers of **Chaitanya**.

## Krishnadas Kaviraj

Author of the most influential version of the *Chaitanya-Charitramrta* ("Nectar of Chaitanya's Deeds"), an account of the life of the Bengali poet-saint **Chaitanya**, written about ninety years after Chaitanya's death. **Krishnadas's** text is the latest and most developed biography of Chaitanya and focuses mainly on Chaitanya's later life, particularly his visit to **Brindavan**, the northern Indian village were the god **Krishna** is supposed to have spent his childhood. This text is marked by the philosophical influence of the three **Goswamis—Rupa**, **Sanatana**, and **Jiva**—whose ideas played a major role in shaping Chaitanya's religious followers, the **Gaudiya Vaishnavas**. As with the other traditional accounts of Chaitanya's life, this text does not purport to give an "objective" biography, it is rather a hagiography (an idealizing and idolizing portrait) written by a passionate devotee (**bhakta**).

## Krishna Deva Raya

(r. 1509–1530) Most important ruler in the **Vijayanagar dynasty**, the last of the great southern Hindu kingdoms. During his rule, Vijayanagar reached its zenith. Krishna Deva Raya defeated the Deccani sultans to the north, although he reinstated them as vassals. He conquered the eastern coast all the way to **Orissa** and maintained good trading relationships with the newly-arrived Portuguese, although he refused to become involved in their politics. His reign was a time of artistic achievement and general prosperity, evident in the artifacts of the time. His successors were not as successful, however. Less than forty years after his death, the coalition of the Deccani sultans defeated Rama Raja at the battle of **Talikota**. The Vijayanagar kingdom was completely destroyed.

## Krishna Janam Bhumi

Site in the city of **Mathura** believed to mark the spot where the god **Krishna** was born. The present temple was completed in the 1960s, but the site itself is very old. One of the most religiously volatile sites in all of India, the new temple abuts the Shahi Idgah, a mosque built on the base of an earlier Krishna temple. According to one tradition, Muslim iconoclasts destroyed four successive temples at the spot now occupied by the mosque, marking the exact location of Krishna's **birth**. This claim seems doubtful since the mosque was built in 1661, and the temple it is said to have replaced was destroyed by the Moghul emperor **Aurangzeb** in 1669. In the 1980s the Krishna Janam Bhumi was one of the three sites selected by the activist **Vishva Hindu Parishad** to be reclaimed as a Hindu holy place, along with the **Vishvanath** temple in **Benares**, and **Ayodhya's Ram Janam Bhumi**. In all of these places, mosques were claimed to have been built on the site of an important Hindu temple, although only the first two have historical evidence that this occurred. During the 1990s there have been several campaigns to reclaim the Krishna Janam Bhumi, but to this point the campaigns have generated little support. Given the popular backlash after the 1992 destruction of the **Babri Masjid** in **Ayodhya**, the government has been far more restrictive on the activities it allows at such disputed sites. For further information see Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*, 1996. See also **Moghul dynasty**.

## Krishnamishra

(late 11th c.) Author of the **Sanskrit** drama *Prabodhachandrodaya* ("Rising of the **moon** of wisdom"), an allegory celebrating the triumph of **Vaishnava** piety. The play is noted for the third act, in which four representatives of non-Vaishnava sects appear: a **materialist**; a Jain monk; a Buddhist monk; and a **Kapalika**, a member of an **ascetic**

community who worshiped the god **Shiva**. The last is portrayed as depraved, indulging in meat, wine, and sexual gratification, as well as having a penchant for violence. Although the reader may safely assume that this is a biased perspective, it is instructive in the attitudes it reveals toward ascetics and all non-Vaishnava religious groups.

## Krishnamurti, Jiddu

(1895–1986) Modern Indian thinker whose teachings centered on the necessity for personal realization through critical self-awareness. His teaching had strong roots in his own life experience. When he was fourteen years old, one of the leaders of the Theosophical Society, Annie Besant, proclaimed him to be an incarnation of the future Buddha Maitreya. He later repudiated these claims, and for the rest of his life stressed the need to examine and question all authority, including himself. Much of his life was spent in Europe and the United States, where his books and lectures found their primary audience. For further information see Pupul Jayakar, *Krishnamurti: A Biography*, 1986.

## Krishna Paksha

The dark or waning half of a **lunar month**.

## Krishna River

River running from west to east in south central India. Its headwaters lie in **Maharashtra** on the inland side of the Western Ghats. It meanders through **Karnataka** and **Andhra Pradesh**, fortified by the **Bhima River** and the **Tungabhadra River**, before entering the sea in the Bay of Bengal. The temple of the god **Vithoba** in the town of **Pandharpur**, considered the most important sacred site (**tirtha**) on the whole river, lies on the Bhima River.

## Krittikas

In Hindu mythology, the Krittikas are a group of six minor goddesses who are the personification of the constellation Pleiades. Their important mythic appearance is as the foster mothers of the god **Skanda**. Skanda is considered the son of the god **Shiva**, but is born in an unusual way. When Shiva and **Parvati** are disturbed while making love, Shiva inadvertently spills his **semen** on the ground. In Indian culture semen is seen as a man's concentrated essence. Because he is a **deity**, Shiva's semen is inordinately powerful, capable of destroying the **earth**. The semen is first held by the god **Agni**, who is **fire** personified, but it proves too powerful for him. Agni puts the semen in the river **Ganges**. After 10,000 years, a shining child is discovered in the reeds along the riverbank. The child is discovered by the Krittikas, each of whom wants to nurse him. To oblige them, the child Skanda grows five extra heads. As a mark of their care, one of his epithets is **Karttikeya**.

## Krpacharya

In the *Mahabharata*, the later of the two great Hindu epics, Krpacharya is a famous archer who teaches both the **Pandavas** and the **Kauravas**, the two competing families in the epic. Krpacharya is a supporter of the Kaurava leader **Duryodhana**. During the year the Pandavas spend in hiding, he sends spies to try to find them. In the Mahabharata war he fights on the side of the Kauravas. His most important act is setting fire to the Pandava camp during the night attack following the Pandava victory. All those trying to flee the flames are killed. After the war he stays for some time at the court of **Yudhishthira**, the eldest Pandava brother, but later renounces the world to live in the forest.

## Krta Yuga

A particular age of the world in one of the reckonings of **cosmic time**. According to traditional belief, time has neither beginning nor end, but alternates between cycles of creation and activity, followed by cessation and quietude. Each of these cycles lasts for 4.32 billion years; the active phase is known as the **Day of Brahma**, and the quiet phase as the Night of Brahma. In one reckoning of cosmic time, the Day of Brahma is divided into one thousand **mahayugas** ("great cosmic ages"), each of which lasts for 4.32 million years. Each mahayuga is composed of four constituent yugas, named the Krta Yuga, **Treta Yuga**, **Dvapara Yuga**, and **Kali Yuga**. Each of these four yugas is shorter than its predecessor and ushers in an era more degenerate and depraved than the preceding one. By the end of the Kali Yuga, things have gotten so bad that the only solution is the destruction and recreation of the earth, at which time the next Krta era begins.

The Krta Yuga is the first of the four yugas, and at 1,728,000 years, it is by far the longest. It is also considered to be the best of all the yugas, symbolized by gold, the most valuable of all metals. In a dice game played in ancient India, the side designated Krta was the one for the winning throw, representing the best possible option. In the mythic descriptions of the Krta Yuga, people live extremely long times, are of tremendous physical stature, and by nature, are completely virtuous.

## Kshanika ("momentary") Linga

A type of **linga**, the pillar-shaped object symbolizing the god **Shiva**. A kshanika linga is temporarily made for immediate **worship**, from whatever materials are at hand—whether earth, sand, grain, butter, or any other substance that can be heaped and molded. This use of temporary images reveals an important aspect of Hindu religious life—that although God is everywhere, many human beings tend to work better when they have a



The Krishna River runs across south central India, from Maharashtra to the Bay of Bengal.

concrete focus for their religious attention. This being so, God deigns to come into the humblest objects, if they are created with him (or her) in mind.

## Kshatriya

In traditional Hindu social theory, the kshatriyas were the second most influential of the four major social groups (**varnas**). The kshatriyas' function was ruling, protecting, and creating social order so that the other varnas could carry out their tasks. This image is reflected in the creation story known as the **Purusha Sukta**. The kshatriyas are described as being created from the Primeval Man's shoulders and associated with strength and power. In actual practice, the kshatriya **varna** may have been the most permeable of all, since any person with the power to rule was usually given *de facto* kshatriya status, which could be solidified by a fictitious genealogy in the following generations. Perhaps the best example of this phenomenon is the subgroup known as the **Rajputs** ("king's **sons**"), who at varying

times ruled large sections of northern and western India, but whose origins are unclear and obscure.

## Kshemaraja

(11th c.) Kshemaraja was the primary disciple of **Abhinavagupta**, the Kashmiri writer famous for his works on poetics and aesthetics, and a pivotal figure in the development of **Trika** Shaivism. Based on a tantric philosophy, Trika Shaivism states that the sole true reality is the god **Shiva**, who is both supreme god and the source of the emanations that constitute the material of the universe. Final liberation of the soul (**moksha**) comes through a process of "recognition" (**pratyabhijna**) in which one realizes that the entire universe is all a manifestation of Shiva alone. Here one "recognizes" something that has always been true, but until that time has been obscured by a mistaken understanding. Kshemaraja continued the development of the Trika school. His most famous work is the *Svacchandatantra*. See also **tantra**.

## Kubera

In Hindu mythology, a minor **deity** who is one of the eight **Guardians of the Directions**, serving as guardian over the northern quarter. Kubera is said to live in the Himalaya mountains, where he is served by mythical creatures such as **yakshas**, **nagas**, and **kinnaras**. He is enormously fat, and because of all the mineral wealth contained in the mountains, he is enormously wealthy. Kubera is the half-brother of the **demon**-king of **Lanka**, **Ravana**, and **Kumbhakarna** and **Vibhishana**. All four are sons of the demigod Vishravas, but Kubera has a different mother. Despite their relationship, Ravana steals Kubera's aerial chariot, the **Pushpak Viman**. Because of Ravana's notorious misdeeds, Kubera supports the god-king **Rama's** efforts to conquer Ravana.

## Kubja

("hunchback") In the mythology of the god **Krishna**, Kubja is a hunchbacked woman whom Krishna meets while journeying to the city of **Mathura** to reclaim his kingdom. Kubja carries a jar of expensive salve that is meant for the king, but when Krishna asks her for some, she willingly gives it to him. As a reward for her generosity and devotion, Krishna straightens her spine, turning her into a gorgeous young woman.

## Kuchela

("badly dressed") Another name for **Sudama**, one of the god **Krishna's** childhood friends. See **Sudama**.

## Kuchipudi

One of the classical **dance** forms of India; some of the others are **Bharatanatyam**, **Kathak**, **Orissi**, **Kathakali**, and **Manipuri**. Like much of traditional Indian culture, classical dance shows strong regional identification; Kuchipudi is primarily found in **Andhra Pradesh**. As with much of Indian dance, Kuchipudi has its roots in religious life. It was developed in the village of Kuchipudi as part of a religious festival. The Maharaja of Golconda was so pleased with the dance that he awarded the village as a gift to the **brahmin** families there, with the condition that they continue to nurture the art, which their descendants have done. Stylistically, the dance shows the influence of Bharatanatyam, and like all Indian dance, it shows the well-developed vocabulary of **gesture** that is drawn from the classical manuals. At the same time, the form is softer and less geometric than Bharatanatyam, showing the influence of folk traditions. The language for the dance-dramas is Telegu, reflecting the local culture. As with all classical dances, Kuchipudi has undergone certain changes in the past generation, spurred by the shift to stage performance as the dance's primary venue. One of the most significant

changes has been to open the dance to women. For further information see Mohan Khokar, *Traditions of Indian Classical Dance*, 1984.

## Kulachara

("family practice") Any religious practice restricted to a family, either a group of blood relatives or people sharing a common religious or sectarian lineage. The authority given to kulachara allows for almost infinite variation in religious practice, particularly in the absence of any established religious hierarchy which has the authority to render judgments on such practices. For most Hindus, such family practice is the predominant influence shaping their individual religious lives.

## Kuladevata

("family deity") The particular deity worshiped by a family, whether this "family" be blood relatives, or people who share the same religious lineage, sect, or region. In most cases, the kuladevata will be one's primary deity.

## Kulashekhara

(9th c.) One of the **Alvars**, a group of twelve poet-saints who lived in southern India between the seventh and tenth centuries. All the Alvars were devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Vishnu**, emphasizing passionate devotion (**bhakti**) to a personal god, conveyed through hymns sung in the **Tamil language**. According to tradition, Kulashekhara was the king of the Travancore region in modern **Kerala**. His religious commitment grew so strong that he eventually abdicated his throne. For further information see Kamil Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature,* 1975; and John Stirling Morley Hooper, *Hymns of the Alvars*, 1929.

## Kulu

The most important city in the Kulu Valley in the state of **Himachal Pradesh**. The city of Kulu is famous for its

**Dussehra** festival. Dussehra celebrates the victory of the god **Rama** over the **demon**-king **Ravana**; it is a celebration of the victory of good over evil. Kulu's festival centers around the figure of Rama from the Raghunathji temple in the nearby village of Dhalpur. When Rama is brought to the festival site in his temple car, he is celebrated by hundreds of **deities** who have come from temples up and down the Kulu Valley, as well as the people who have gathered to see the deities and the spectacle of their procession. The deities' actions are carefully choreographed according to well-established rituals.

## Kumara

("youth") Epithet of the god **Skanda**, who is usually portrayed in the form of a young boy. See **Skanda**.

## Kumara Gupta I

(r. 415–454) The fourth important ruler of the **Gupta dynasty**, who managed to keep his northern Indian empire intact for most of his reign. At the end of his reign, he had to contend with incursions in the west by the central Asians, known as the Hunas. While in battle with them, he was killed. Pressure from the Hunas continued in the years following Kumara Gupta's death and was one of the important factors causing the eventual collapse of the Gupta empire several generations later.

## Kumarapala

(r. 1143–1172) Jaina king of the **Chalukya dynasty** in **Gujarat**, who was so committed to nonviolence that he imposed heavy fines on people who killed fleas and other vermin.

## Kumarasambhava

("**Birth** of the Prince") One of the finest poetic works written by **Kalidasa**, who is generally considered the greatest classical **Sanskrit** poet. The *Kumarasambhava* is an epic poem

based on a mythological theme. It begins by describing the ascendancy of a **demon** named **Taraka**, who receives a divine boon that he can only be killed by a son of **Shiva**. The poem describes the extended courtship of Shiva and **Parvati**, their marriage, and ends with an account of their lovemaking. The text ends before the birth of the god **Skanda**, who in other mythical accounts of this tale kills Taraka. This abrupt ending has led some interpreters to consider the play unfinished. Others simply view these later events as a foregone conclusion, by which the poet does not waste his hearers' time.

## Kumarila

In Indian **philosophy**, one of the two great seventh-century commentators of the **Mimamsa** philosophy, one of the **six schools** of Hindu philosophy; the other great commentator was **Prabhakara**. The Mimamsa school was most concerned with the examination and pursuit of **dharma** ("righteous action"), for which members believed all necessary instructions were contained in the **Vedas**, the oldest Hindu religious texts. Consequently, much of Mimamsa thought is concerned with principles and methods of textual interpretation to uncover and interpret the Vedic instructions. Although both Kumarila and Prabhakara were committed to discovering the boundaries of dharma by interpreting the Vedas, there are significant differences in their philosophical positions, which show up most clearly in their **theories of error**.

Prabhakara begins with the assumption, similar to the **Nyaya** concept of **inherence** (**samavaya**), that there is a relatively weak correspondence between an object and its attributes. An example of this would be the relation of the color red to a particular ball, such that the ball is said to be red. According to Prabhakara, false beliefs result from **akhyati** ("nondiscrimination"). This occurs when a person observes two different things with the same attributes

and concludes that they are the same. Kumarila is closer to the **bhedabhada** ("identity and difference") philosophical position, which holds that all things have both identity and difference with all other things. Kumarila explains error as **viparitakhyati** ("contrary perception"), in which one mistakenly pairs up the similarities between two things, rather than noting their differences. For example, a person mistakenly believes that a shell with a silvery color is actually a piece of silver because he or she chooses to focus on the similarities between the shell and silver rather than the differences. People are impelled to make these choices by karmic formations, such as greed for silver.

## Kumbhadas

(early 16th c.) One of the **ashtachap**, a group of eight northern Indian **bhakti** (devotional) poets. The compositions of these poets were used for liturgical purposes by the **Pushti Marg**, a religious community whose members are devotees (**bhakta**) of **Krishna**. In the Pushti Marg's sectarian literature, all eight poets are named as members of the community and as associates of either the community's founder, **Vallabhacharya**, or his successor, **Vitthalnath**. Kumbhadas is traditionally associated with Vallabhacharya. Little is known about Kumbhadas, although it is believed that he was born in 1469. His poetry describes the five **modes of devotion** described by **Rupa Goswami**, particularly the mode known as **madhurya** ("honeyed"). Madhurya describes the relationship between **deity** and devotee, using the language of lover and beloved, in which each has passionate love for the other.

## Kumbhakarna

("Pitcher-eared") In the *Ramayana*, the earlier of the two great Indian epics, Kumbhakarna is the brother of **Ravana**, the **demon** ruler of **Lanka**. As his name indicates, his dominant facial feature is his prominent ears. Kumbhakarna is a reincarnation of **Vijaya**, **Vishnu's**

gatekeeper, who has been cursed to be reborn three times as a demon, killed by the god Vishnu each time. Kumbhakarna and his brothers have performed harsh **asceticism** (**tapas**) in their youth to gain boons from the gods. When the god **Brahma** finally comes to give him boons, Kumbhakarna means to demand "nirdevatvam" (that he cannot be conquered by any of the gods). At the critical moment he is foiled by the **goddess Saraswati**, who has power over speech. She dances on his tongue and confuses his speech, causing him to request "nidravatvam" (sleepiness). Because of this slip of his tongue, Kumbhakarna will sleep for six months at a time, wake up to gorge himself with food and drink for a short time, and then fall asleep again. Some of the dramatic tension in the battle portions of the *Ramayana* pertains to the violent efforts to rouse Kumbhakarna, so that he can take part in the battle. Once awakened he fights valiantly, but is eventually killed by **Rama**.

As is true for all the **demons**, Kumbhakarna is not wholly evil. Before engaging in battle with Rama's army, he rebukes Ravana for kidnapping Rama's wife, **Sita**. He also notes that as the younger brother it is his duty to uphold the family honor. Here we find the demon Kumbhakarna upholding idealized Indian family values—the younger brother is supposed to support and defend his elder brother's interests as a way to keep the family intact. This same virtue is in Rama's younger brothers, **Lakshmana** and **Bharata**. Despite their enmity, the epic's "heroes" and "villains" have significant shared values.

## Kumbhakonam

One of the many temple-towns in the **Tanjore** district of the state of **Tamil Nadu**, reflecting the district's importance as the home of the **Chola dynasty** kings. Kumbhakonam has several large temples. Built in the **Dravida** architectural style, the temple buildings are of modest height, cover an immensely large area, and are surrounded by a boundary wall with massive towers (**gopurams**) over each wall's central gateway. Kumbhakonam's most famous site is not a temple, but a temple bathing (**snana**) tank. A festival is held at the tank every twelve years, at which time the water in the tank is believed to become the **Ganges**. An estimated 400,000 people attended this event in 1992; tragically, forty-eight people were killed in a stampede. Outside the town is the **Swami Malai** temple, one of the six temples to the god **Skanda**.

## Kumbha Mela

("Festival of the Pot") A religious festival celebrated in four different locations: **Haridwar**, **Allahabad**, **Ujjain**, and **Nasik**. The first two sites are by far the most important, with Allahabad considered the holiest of all. Attendance at these festivals is great. In 1998, ten million people were in Haridwar on the climactic day. Both of these sites also host an **Ardha** ("half") **Kumbha Mela**, generally six years after the full Kumbha Mela, which are smaller in scale, but can still draw millions of pilgrims. At Ujjain and Nasik, the full Kumbha Melas are not as well attended than at the other two sites.

The Kumbha Mela is a bathing (**snana**) festival; it is for this reason that all the Mela sites are found near rivers. The Kumbha Mela's primary actors are ascetics from all over South Asia who come to bathe in the sacred waters. According to tradition, the Kumbha Mela was organized by the great philosopher **Shankaracharya** to promote regular gatherings of learned and holy men, as a means to strengthen, sustain, and spread Hindu religious beliefs. The Kumbha Mela is also a time for these ascetics to display their status vis-à-vis one another. At each site, the order in which the different **ascetic** sects bathe is strictly enforced—the most important sects bathe first. In more recent times, this order has been

The bathing procession in Haridwar during the Kumbha Mela festival.
The differing ascetic orders proceed toward the holy waters according to a traditionally sanctioned order.

enforced by the government. In earlier times, it was the subject of much dispute, often degenerating into armed conflict as different ascetic sects vied with one another for the place of pride.

The time for each Kumbha Mela festival is determined astrologically, based on the positions of the planet **Jupiter**, the **sun**, and the **moon**. The Mela is held at Haridwar when Jupiter is in Aquarius (Kumbha) and the sun enters Aries; at Allahabad when Jupiter is in Taurus and the sun and moon are in Capricorn; at Ujjain when Jupiter is in Leo and the full moon appears in the **lunar month** of **Baisakh**; and at Nasik when Jupiter is in Leo during the lunar month of **Shravan**. These alignments occur about every twelve years.

The charter myth for the Kumbha Mela is taken from the story of Churning the Ocean of Milk. After the ocean has been churned and the nectar of immortality (**amrta**) has been extracted, the gods and their **demon** opponents begin to quarrel over the pot of nectar. The gods snatch the pot and make off with it, but the person carrying the pot grows tired, and in twelve days of carrying it sets it on the ground four times—namely, at the four sites where the Mela is held. In each place a bit of the nectar splashes on the ground, sanctifying the site. According to popular belief, at each Kumbha Mela's most propitious moment, the waters in which people are bathing become the nectar of immortality, and all those who bathe in these waters gain immeasurable religious merit.

Kumbha Mela is considered the largest religious festival in the world. Arrangements for the Melas at Haridwar and Allahabad are made by the government of **Uttar Pradesh**, coordinating transportation, drinking water, and sanitation for millions of pilgrims, as well as building temporary cities for the visitors. Ascetics come from all over the subcontinent, some staying for months. Many religious organizations set up booths in an effort to publicize their message.

Recently the government has begun using the Mela to promote ideas such as family planning and cleaning up the

**Ganges**, as well as promoting the Mela as tourism, spurring economic development. This combination of business and religion has roots in the past; in the early nineteenth century, the annual spring bathing fair at Haridwar was also a trading fair, particularly for horses. For many people, the opportunity to view the spectacle of the Mela is at least as strong an inducement as the promise of bathing away their sins. See also **Tortoise avatar**.

## Kumhar

Traditional Indian society was as a collection of **endogamous** subgroups (in which marriage is decreed by law to occur only between members of the same group) known as **jatis** ("birth"). Jatis were organized (and their social status determined) by the group's hereditary occupation, over which each group held a monopoly. The Kumhars' hereditary occupation was making pottery.

## Kunbi

Traditional Indian society was as a collection of **endogamous** subgroups (in which marriage is decreed by law to occur only between members of the same group) known as **jatis** ("birth"). Jatis were organized (and their social status determined) by the group's hereditary occupation, over which each group held a monopoly. The Kunbis' traditional occupation was farming. They were the dominant landholding community in **Gujarat**.

## Kundalini

("spiral") Kundalini, the latent spiritual power that exists in every person, is one of the most fundamental concepts in **tantra**. It is the most vital element in the **subtle body**, an alternate physiological system believed to occupy a different plane of existence than gross matter, but which has certain correspondences to the material body. The subtle body is a set of six psychic centers (**chakras**), visualized as multi-petaled lotus flowers running along the spine and connected by three vertical channels. Each of the chakras symbolize human capacities, subtle elements (**tanmatras**), and sacred sounds. Above and below the chakras are the bodily abodes of the god **Shiva** (awareness) and the **goddess Shakti** (power), the two divine principles through which the entire universe has come into being. The underlying assumption behind this concept is the homology (or the similarity based on the common origin) of macrocosm and microcosm, an essential Hindu belief documented in the texts of the **Upanishads**.

The kundalini is an aspect of the universal Shakti present in all human beings; it is visualized as a snake coiled three times around the **muladhara chakra**, the lowest of the psychic centers. Although kundalini can be found in all people, it is usually dormant, symbolized by its coiled state. The object of the religious disciplines (**yogas**) involving the subtle body is to awaken and uncoil the kundalini, drawing it up through the subtle body's central channel (**sushumna**), piercing through the chakras on its way. Kundalini's ascent represents the awakening of spiritual energy. This awakening must be carried out under a **guru**'s supervision to prevent the aspirant from unknowingly arousing uncontrollable forces. As each chakra is pierced, it is believed to bring either the destruction of obstructions or the awakening of new capacities. When fully extended, the kundalini rises to the microcosmic realm of Shiva, the **sahasradalapadma** at the crown of the head, to unite with Shiva in perpetual bliss. For further information see Arthur Avalon (Sir John Woodroffe), *Shakti and Shakta*, 1978; Swami Agehananda Bharati, *The Tantric Tradition*, 1977; and Douglas Renfrew Brooks, *The Secret of the Three Cities*, 1990.

## Kundalini Yoga

The religious discipline (**yoga**) focusing on the **kundalini**, the latent spiritual

power that exists in every person. Through a combination of yoga practice and ritual action, it is believed that the kundalini is awakened and rises through the **chakras** in the **subtle body**. This action brings further spiritual capacities and, ultimately, final liberation (**moksha**) of the soul. One of the claims for kundalini yoga is that it is much quicker than other means of spiritual development, harnessing more powerful forces. For this same reason, it is viewed as more hazardous, and should be done only under the supervision of one's religious preceptor (**guru**). According to tradition, those who engage these forces without proper supervision risk unleashing forces they cannot control, possibly bringing on insanity or death.

## Kunti

In the ***Mahabharata***, the later of the two great Hindu epics, Kunti is the elder wife of King **Pandu**, and the mother of **Yudhishthira**, **Arjuna**, and **Bhima**. None of these children are actually Pandu's sons; they have been magically conceived through the effect of a **mantra** given to Kunti by the sage **Durvasas**. The mantra gives the woman who recites it the power to call down any of the gods and conceive a son equal in power to the god himself.

Kunti receives this mantra before her marriage. In a moment of youthful impulsiveness, she recites it while looking at the **sun**. She is immediately visited by a shining figure who leaves her with an equally shining son. Distraught and desperate at the **birth** of this illegitimate child, she puts him in a box and abandons him in the **Ganges** River. The child is adopted by the charioteer **Adhiratha** and grows up to be the heroic **Karna**.

Kunti's other three sons are born after her marriage, with Pandu's blessing: Yudhishthira from the god **Dharma**, who is righteousness personified; Arjuna from the storm-god **Indra**; and Bhima from the **wind**-god **Vayu**. Although these three grow up to be heroic and kingly figures, they

develop a violent hatred for Karna because of his unknown parentage. One of the *Mahabharata*'s tragic themes is this bitter rivalry between men who do not know they are brothers. Their hostility is especially difficult for Kunti, aware of Karna's identity. She knows that the problems are rooted in her impulsiveness and cowardice. On the eve of the great Mahabharata war she goes to Karna, reveals his identity to him, imploring him to return and fight with his brothers. Karna refuses, saying that he has taken a vow to kill Arjuna, but he will not harm her other sons. After the war Kunti becomes a recluse, living in the forest with several other people of her generation. After living there for some years, she is killed in a forest fire.

## Kurma Avatar

The Kurma avatar is considered the second **avatar** or incarnation of the god **Vishnu**. Taking the form of a tortoise, he helps the gods churn the Ocean of Milk so that they can obtain the nectar of immortality (**amrta**). See **Tortoise avatar**.

## Kurmasana

("tortoise-posture") One of the sitting postures (**asanas**) used in **yoga**; also a posture in which images of the **deities** are portrayed in Hindu iconography. As described in commentaries on the **Yoga Sutras**, this posture has the legs crossed with the feet tucked under the thighs, and the crossed heels forming a cavity around the scrotum. In Indian iconography, the Kurmasana is sometimes represented at the base of a statue by an actual carving of a tortoise, forming the base on which the image is placed. In modern yoga manuals this posture is described as a sitting position in which the upper body is bent forward, with the arms extended sideways under the outstretched legs, so that person looks vaguely

like a tortoise, with a head, "shell" (the trunk), and four outstretched limbs.

## Kurukshetra

City and sacred site (**tirtha**) in the northern part of the state of **Haryana**, about ninety miles due north of Delhi. In Hindu mythology, Kurukshetra is the site of the climactic battle in the *Mahabharata*, the later of the two great Hindu epics. This battle is still discussed as if it was a recent event. Kurukshetra is also famous as a bathing (**snana**) place. A bathing pool attracts hundreds of thousands of pilgrims during **eclipses**, at which time it is believed to contain all the sacred waters of India.

## Kusha

In the *Ramayana*, the earlier of the two great Indian epics, Kusha is one of the twin sons of **Rama**, the epic's protagonist. After their mother, **Sita**, has been cast into exile at the **ashram** of the sage **Valmiki**, Kusha is born in an unusual fashion. One day when Sita takes her son **Lava** to bathe in the river, Valmiki notices that the child is gone and fears that it has been seized by a wild animal. To spare Sita's motherly feelings, he creates an identical child out of kusha grass. When Sita returns with Lava, his twin is given the name Kusha. Later, Lava and Kusha go with Valmiki to Rama's court in **Ayodhya**. It is in Rama's court that they first recite the epic poem composed by Valmiki, the *Ramayana*. After Rama gives up his throne, he divides his kingdom between Lava and Kusha.

## Kusha ("Kusha Grass") Dvipa

In traditional mythic geography, Kusha or "Kusha grass," is the fourth of the seven concentric landmasses (**dvipas**) making up the visible world. See also **cosmology**.

## Kutichaka

("delighting in staying in the house") One the of four types of Hindu ascetics. The basis for these four types was their livelihood, which in practice has been much less important for **ascetic** identity than sectarian or organizational affiliation. The Kutichaka is the least prestigious of the four, with the others being (in order of increasing status) **Bahudaka**, **Hamsa**, and **Paramahamsa**. The Kutichaka is described as an ascetic who resides in a house (kuti) erected by himself or his sons and begs for food from his sons and relatives.

# L

## Laghava

("simplicity") In Indian logic, one of the general principles in constructing and pursuing an argument. According to the principle of "simplicity," when one is presented with two equally plausible theories, one should choose the theory that is easier to understand and makes the fewest assumptions. The primary criterion in evaluating an argument is the validity of the argument itself. Only after this has been satisfied may one raise objections based on complexity or simplicity.

## Laghima

("lightness") One of eight superhuman powers (**siddhi**) believed to be conferred by high spiritual attainment. This particular power gives one the ability to become as light as one desires, bestowing the ability to fly.

## Lajpat Rai, Lala

(1865–1928) Lawyer, reformer, and militant Hindu nationalist. Born to a humble Punjabi family, Lajpat Rai became wealthy from his legal work. By the age of thirty-five, he was able to devote all of his earnings to public work. He joined the **Arya Samaj** while still in his teens and supported Lahore's Dayanand Anglo-Vedic College, which was founded in 1889. At the turn of the century he was active in a variety of social and educational endeavors. He eventually entered politics. He actively resisted British rule, which brought him several prison terms. Unlike many of his contemporaries, he refused to advocate violence. His commitment to politics ultimately cost him his life; he died from injuries sustained in a beating by the police while leading a demonstration in Lahore.

## Lakshmana

In the **Ramayana**, the earlier of the two great Indian epics, Lakshmana is one of King **Dasharatha's** sons by his wife **Sumitra**, and the younger half-brother of **Rama**, the epic's protagonist. Throughout the *Ramayana* Lakshmana is the model younger brother, existing only to serve and support Rama. When Rama is banished to the forest for fourteen years, Lakshmana follows him like a shadow for the entire time: first living as a forest **ascetic**, searching for Rama's kidnapped wife **Sita**, then fighting heroically in the battle with **Ravana's** army; finally he returns to serve Rama at his court in **Ayodhya**.

Many of the characters in the *Ramayana* are paradigms for Indian cultural values. Lakshmana (as with his brother **Bharata**) symbolizes the ideal younger brother. In northern India, brothers are the heart of the joint family. They remain at home, whereas after marriage, sisters live in their marital families. The eldest brother in every generation eventually becomes the head of the joint family. Carrying primary authority and responsibility for the family as a whole, the eldest cannot succeed without the cooperation of his younger brothers who must acknowledge and support his authority. In his service to Rama and his complete disregard for his own needs, Lakshmana is a dutiful younger brother.

Despite his bravery, valor, and total loyalty to Rama, Lakshmana is far from perfect. He lacks Rama's judgment and forbearance, and tends to act before he thinks. For example, when Bharata pursues the two brothers after they have gone into exile, Lakshmana leaps to the conclusion that Bharata is seizing the opportunity to kill them, to clear his own way to the throne. Lakshmana prepares to attack Bharata, but Rama's reasoning forestalls a potential tragedy.

Lakshmana's most serious lapse of judgment is with **Shurpanakha**, a **demon** princess and sister to Ravana, the demon-king of **Lanka**. When she makes amorous advances toward Lakshmana, he first ridicules her and then mutilates her. Ravana kidnaps Rama's wife, Sita, to gain a measure of revenge against the brothers. Like all of the characters in the *Ramayana*, Lakshmana is neither good nor evil—he has many virtues, but also some very real flaws.

## Lakshman Jhula

Sacred site (**tirtha**) along the **Ganges** in the Tehri district of the state of **Uttar Pradesh**, roughly five miles upriver from the city of **Rishikesh**. The site takes its present name from a swinging footbridge (jhula) that spans the Ganges. The local charter myth describes Lakshman Jhula as the place where **Rama** and **Lakshmana** live as ascetics late in their lives, atoning for the sin of brahminicide, which they incurred by killing **Ravana** and his brothers (who are considered **brahmin demons**). Today, the area is famous for the Svargashrama of **Swami Shivananda**, part of a network of **ashrams** along its banks.

## Lakshmi

("good fortune," "prosperity") Hindu **goddess** and wife of the god **Vishnu**. According to tradition, Lakshmi is created when the ocean of milk is churned to yield the nectar of immortality. Just as butter is the refined essence of milk, so Lakshmi is the refined essence of the primordial ocean, representing all the best things that come from it. Lakshmi is associated with wealth, good fortune, and prosperity, and is considered the embodiment of all these things. Images of Lakshmi usually depict her with the lotus and the **elephant**, both of which are associated with good fortune. Many images show gold coins falling from her hands, symbolizing wealth.

These potent associations make Lakshmi an extremely important force



Thirteenth-century sculpture of the goddess Lakshmi. She is considered the embodiment of wealth, prosperity, and fortune.

in Hindu life. Lakshmi exercises her power by her mere presence—when she comes, she brings prosperity and good fortune; when she leaves, these benefits leave with her. Given Lakshmi's power, people are understandably eager to please her, especially since she has the reputation for being capricious and fickle in her relationships with human beings—a reputation that reflects a realistic appraisal of life's vicissitudes. Lakshmi's capriciousness and her reputation for being somewhat spiteful make people extremely careful in their dealings with her, to avoid insulting her, even if unintentionally.

Lakshmi's primary annual festival is **Diwali**, when she is believed to roam the earth. People spend the days before Diwali cleaning, repairing, and whitewashing their homes, making them

suitable for welcoming the goddess. On the evening of Diwali, people open all their doors and windows (to facilitate her entry) and place lights on their windowsills and balcony ledges to invite her in. **Gambling** is a common practice during Diwali. Gambling is usually condemned as a pernicious habit, but during Diwali it reaffirms the connection between money and Lakshmi—here in her guise as Lady Luck.

Despite her capricious relationships with human beings, Lakshmi is considered to be the model wife, particularly in her devotion and subordination to her husband. When Lakshmi and Vishnu appear together, she is significantly smaller, signifying her subordinate status. Another common image of the couple shows Lakshmi massaging Vishnu's feet, and thus her wifely subordination. Lakshmi is not only the model for human wives but is also believed to be incarnate in each of them. Married **women** are believed to embody the good fortune of the household. It is generally accepted that households in which they are not honored will never be prosperous. For more information on Lakshmi and all the goddesses of Hinduism, see David R. Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, 1986. See also **Tortoise avatar** and **ocean, churning of the**.

## Lakshmibai

(d. 1858) Queen of the small kingdom of Jhansi in the southern part of the state of **Uttar Pradesh** and a leader in the 1857 struggle against the British, known as the "Mutiny" or the "First War of Indian Independence." Lakshmibai's kingdom was the victim of expanding British power. The British colonial government had pronounced the "doctrine of lapse" edict, annexing any kingdom in which the ruler had died heirless. Lakshmibai's husband died in 1853. Although he had adopted a son just before his death, the British refused to recognize the **adoption** and sought to annex the kingdom. Lakshmibai was one of the leaders during the 1857 rebellion; she died in battle.

She was eulogized as a patriot and proponent of Indian independence, and because of her power and martial ability, she is considered a manifestation of the powerful **goddess Durga**.

## Lakshmidhara

(ca. mid-12th c.) Scholar, commentator, and author of the ***Kalpataru***, one of the earliest examples of commentary literature known as **nibandhas** ("collections"). The nibandhas were compendia of Hindu lore, compiling themes from the **Vedas**, **dharma literature**, **puranas**, and other authoritative religious texts, into a single volume. Each of the *Kalpataru*'s fourteen volumes is devoted to a particular aspect of Hindu life, such as daily practice, **worship**, gift-giving, vows, pilgrimage, penances (**prayashchitta**), purification, and liberation (**moksha**). As one of the earliest nibandhas, the *Kalpataru* served as a model for later writers. Lakshmidhara's work is unusual in that he uses very few sources for his work—primarily the epic ***Mahabharata***, and a few of the sectarian compendia known as puranas. Unlike later commentators, he does not cite the **Vedas**, the earliest Hindu religious texts, or the prescriptions found in the dharma literature. His text consists almost solely of excerpted passages, with very little commentary of his own, whereas later nibandha writers often give voluminous explanations.

## Lakshmi-Narayan Temple

A modern temple in Delhi just west of Connaught Place. It was built in 1938 by **Ghanshyamdas Birla**, the patriarch of a prominent industrialist family. Although the temple is dedicated to the god **Vishnu** and his consort **Lakshmi**, it is more commonly called the "Birla temple" after its patron. Since Lakshmi is considered the bestower of wealth, and the temple was built by a businessman, this dedication is hardly surprising. Aside from his religious endowments, Ghanshyamdas Birla was also the major

financial support behind the Indian National Congress, the political party led by **Mohandas Gandhi** which struggled to gain Indian independence. Since the day it was built the temple has been open to people of all castes and communities, upholding the denial of untouchability that was one of Gandhi's most important crusades.

## Lakulisha

(2nd c.?) Legendary founder of the **Pashupata** religious community, a group of renunciant ascetics whose patron **deity** was the god **Shiva**. Lakulisha appears to have been an important influence in the development of other Shaivite ascetics, such as the **Kapalikas** and the **Kalamukhas**. He has been identified as an incarnation of **Shiva**. Many statues have been identified as Lakulisha's image; he is portrayed as a naked **yogi** with a staff in one hand and a citron in the other, with penis erect, either standing or sitting in the lotus posture (**padmasana**). For further information see David Lorenzen, *The Kapalikas and the Kalamukhas*, 1972.

## Lal Ded

Another name for the Kashmiri poet-saint **Lalleshvari**. See **Lalleshvari**.

## Lalitaditya

(8th c.) One of the few kings of the **Kashmir** region who was able to affect the politics of the northern Indian plain, partially due to the fragmented state of the Hindu kingdoms there. Lalitaditya's armies pushed into the **Ganges** River valley, successfully halting the advance of the Arab forces in the **Punjab** region. His successors were unable to retain these gains.

## Lallavakyani

("Lalla's Sayings") Corpus of poetry ascribed to the Kashmiri poet-saint **Lalleshvari**, a devotee (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva**. The poems in this collection allude to the difficult circumstances of her early life, and the domestic problems that induced her to leave her marital home. They also describe her encompassing devotion to Shiva, whom she describes as the only true source of happiness. These poems have been translated into English, but all the editions are quite old: see Sir George Grierson and Lionel D. Barnett, *Lalla Vakyani*, 1920; and R. C. Temple, *The Word of Lalla, the Prophetess*, 1924.

## Lalleshvari

(14th c.) Devotional (**bhakti**) poet-saint also known as Lal Ded, who is one of the most popular poets in **Kashmir**. Lalleshvari was a devotee (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva**; her songs focus on her devotion to him. Like many other female devotional exemplars, she had a difficult time integrating her marriage with her commitment to her chosen **deity**. According to tradition, her mother-in-law treated her quite cruelly. Her husband is described as an unfeeling man who neither objected to the abuse nor comforted his wife. After about twelve years of suffering she left home to wander as a religious seeker. To symbolize her renunciation of all attachments and earthly values, including feminine modesty, Lalleshvari wandered nude. During her wanderings she composed and sang songs of devotion to Shiva, which are still popular today.

## Lanka

In the *Ramayana*, the earlier of the two great Indian epics, Lanka is the kingdom of the **demon**-king **Ravana**. Although Lanka is sometimes identified with the modern island of **Sri Lanka**, and though southern Indian sites such as **Rameshvaram** have been identified with events in the *Ramayana*, the epic's descriptions should be read as mythic and narrative accounts, rather than a geographical primer. The divine architect **Vishvakarma** had originally built Lanka for **Kubera** the minor **deity**, but

Kubera had been dispossessed by Ravana and his brothers.

## Lankalakshmi

In the *Ramayana*, the earlier of the two great Indian epics, Lankalakshmi is the name of the guardian **deity** of **Lanka**, the **demon**-king **Ravana's** capital city. Lankalakshmi is also the rebirth of the **goddess** Vijayalakshmi, who has been cursed by the god **Brahma** to serve as Lanka's guardian deity. The **curse** will last until an intruder to the city manages to defeat her, foretelling the fall of Ravana. This defeat comes with the arrival of the monkey-god **Hanuman**, who leaps across the ocean in search of the goddess **Sita**, whom Ravana has kidnapped. Lankalakshmi recognizes Hanuman as an intruder and attacks him, fulfilling her duty as a guardian deity. Hanuman knocks her flat with a powerful blow, breaking the curse and signalling Ravana's fall.

## Lasya

One of two general categories in Indian **dance**, which is soft, lyrical, and conveys a mood of love. Its contrasting form, **tandava**, is athletic, dramatic, and conveys violence and power.

## Lava

In the *Ramayana*, the earlier of the two great Indian epics, Lava is one of the twin **sons** of **Rama**, the epic's protagonist. After their mother, **Sita**, has been cast into exile at the **ashram** of the sage **Valmiki**, Lava is born in the usual manner. His brother, **Kusha**, is magically created by Valmiki out of kusha grass. Later, Lava and Kusha go with Valmiki to Rama's court in **Ayodhya**. It is in Rama's court that they first recite the epic poem composed by Valmiki, the *Ramayana*. After Rama gives up his throne, he divides his kingdom between Lava and Kusha.

## Leap Philosophy

("ajativada") Leap philosophy affirms that one can attain complete freedom from bondage—which in the Indian context is identified as the end of reincarnation (**samsara**) and final liberation of the soul (**moksha**)—but such freedom cannot be gained by a precisely specified sequence of causes and effects. Since gaining freedom is not a matter of cause and effect, there is no way to stimulate or influence this process through one's actions. Leap philosophers tend to denigrate the effectiveness of ritual action as a way to gain final liberation, except as a preparatory phase, stressing that liberation comes only through gaining inner realization. **Sureshvara** and **Shankaracharya**, members of the **Advaita Vedanta** school, dismiss ritual action, except as preparation for wisdom. Both philosophers believe that release from bondage comes through insight gained in a moment of realization, which radically and permanently shifts one's perspective on the world.

## Leather

Considered an impure substance by many traditional Hindus, because it is the product of a dead animal. They believe that leather is an appropriate material for shoes, however, because the feet are deemed the lowest and most impure part of the body. For this reason, many people put on their shoes by slipping their feet into them without using their hands, thus avoiding touching the leather with a higher part of the body. Leather's associations with ritual impurity (**ashaucha**) make it inappropriate for other sorts of clothing—clothing which the hot Indian climate would render problematic—although now it is sometimes used for handbags and briefcases. In earlier times people who wished to avoid leather would wear wooden clogs instead; in modern times, footwear options also include plastic, rubber, and canvas.

## Left Hand Tantra

A variation of the **tantra**; the rituals for this "left hand" variety include consciously violating taboos on nonvegetarian food, intoxicating drinks, and illicit sexuality. See **Vamachara**.

## Levirate

An ancient practice, long condemned, in which a childless **widow** would have intercourse with her deceased husband's brother in an attempt to perpetuate his line. See **Niyoga**.

## Lila

("play") A word whose broad literal meaning denotes any sort of play, game, or sport, but which in a theological context conveys a fundamental assumption about how God interacts with the world. According to this notion, the supreme **deity** engages in **creation** not from any sense of need, but for the sheer enjoyment and entertainment gained from creating and taking part in the world. This is particularly true for the god **Vishnu**, especially in his manifestations as **Rama** and **Krishna**. In this understanding, all divine interactions between God and his devotees (**bhakta**) are undertaken in this spirit of play, although in their ignorance human beings may not recognize the true nature of this encounter. Final liberation of the soul (**moksha**) comes when the devotee recognizes the true nature of this encounter, since after that moment of realization one's entire life is a series of playful interactions with God himself. One of the ways that contemporary devotees strive to enter Rama's and Krishna's divine world is through dramas that are themselves known as lilas. These lilas can be attended for entertainment, but viewing them can also be a deeply serious religious act. When child actors portraying the deities are in costume and in character, they are considered manifestations of the deities themselves. For ardent devotees, viewing these lilas is an avenue for gaining

God's **grace**, and an entry-point into a privileged, divine world. For an excellent consideration of how Krishna's entire life is considered as play, see David R. Kinsley, *The Sword and the Flute*, 1975; for a description of the Krishna lilas, see John Stratton Hawley, *At Play with Krishna*, 1981; and Anaradha Kapur, *Actors, Pilgrims, Kings, and Gods*, 1990. See also **Ram Lila**.

## Limitationism

Theory explaining diversity used by later branches of the **Advaita Vedanta** philosophical school, one of the "**six schools**" of classical Hindu **philosophy**. This school of thought upholds monism—the belief that a single Ultimate Reality known as **Brahman** lies behind all things, and that all things are merely differing forms of that reality. Proponents claim that reality is non-dual (**advaita**), that is, all things are nothing but the formless, unqualified Brahman, despite the appearance of difference and diversity. For the Advaitins, the assumption of diversity is a fundamental misunderstanding of the ultimate nature of things, and therefore is a manifestation of **avidya**. Although often translated as "ignorance," avidya is better understood as the lack of genuine understanding, ultimately causing human beings to be trapped in karmic bondage, reincarnation (**samsara**), and suffering.

Theoretically, if avidya is a defect that resides within an individual, and if many individuals can be afflicted with avidya at once, is there one avidya that afflicts everyone, or are there many separate avidyas? Limitationism asserts that there is a single avidya, afflicting many people at once. The theory proposes that avidya, in a person, is like the quality of color in an object. The color blue may be a single property of two coexisting objects; each instance of the color blue does not use up a finite "blueness" in the world. In the same way, many people may possess the single property of avidya.

The Lingaraja Temple in Bhubaneshvar. Built in the eleventh century, the temple exemplifies the Orissan branch of the Nagara architectural style.

## Linga

("mark," "sign") Aside from the word's literal meaning as any emblematic sign, linga is also the name for the pillar-shaped form of the god **Shiva**. Representing Shiva as the power of generation itself, from which men and women derive their procreative force, the linga is sometimes simplistically called a "phallic" symbol. An equally important part of the linga's image is the base (**pitha**) in which the shaft is placed, a base which represents the female organs of generation. The **Gudimallam** linga, the oldest known image of Shiva in this form, shows him as male and female, transcending the most basic defining factor of human identity.

## Lingaraja Temple

Largest and most important of the temples in the city of **Bhubaneshvar**, dedicated to the god **Shiva** in his aspect as Tribhuvaneshvar, the "Lord of the Three Worlds." The temple was built in the eleventh century C.E., representing the high point of the Orissan branch of the **Nagara** architectural style. The temple building culminates in one single, highest point over the image of the temple's primary **deity**, with shorter subsidiary buildings leading up to it. The Lingaraja temple shows all the elements of the Orissan style: a beehive-shaped tower (**deul**) soaring 120 feet high, fronted by a dance hall (**natamandira**), traditionally used for performances, an entrance hall (**jagamohan**), and an outer entrance hall (**bhogamandapa**).

## Lingayat

**Kannada**-speaking religious community whose members are devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva**, and who mainly live in the southern Indian state of **Karnataka**. Lingayat roots began in the seventh century with the **Nayanar** poet-saints in **Tamil Nadu** state, migrating northward. The community's founder was the poet-saint **Basavanna**; others included

**Allama Prabhu** and **Mahadeviyakka**. The community's founding members were driven by the hunger for God and were impatient with anything that got in its way—**worship** of images, **caste** distinctions, or the demands of family life. These early influences have continued to shape Lingayat culture. Lingayats do not use images in their worship. The only symbol they use is the **linga** of Shiva, which all Lingayats wear as a sign of membership in the community. The Lingayats have also largely retained their founders' egalitarian principles. Although the community eschews caste distinctions, there are higher-status priestly families known as **jangamas**, from whom the celibate monks known as viraktas are often drawn. In practice, this egalitarian emphasis has made the entire Lingayat community a **jati**, one of the **endogamous** social subgroups that make up larger Indian society; the difference is that the Lingayats are not marked by their occupation, but by their membership in a particular religious community. The Lingayats are the dominant community in modern Karnataka, both in terms of traditional landholding patterns and in their control over regional politics. For further information see A. K. Ramanujan, *Speaking of Siva*, 1973; and Sivalingayya Channabasavayya Nandimath, *A Handbook of Virasaivism*, 1979.

## Lion

In Hindu mythology, a lion or a **tiger** is the animal vehicle of the Mother **Goddess**, as in her manifestation as the goddess **Durga**. Modern iconography shows the Goddess riding either of these animals, with no seeming difference between them, perhaps reflecting the fact that the **Hindi** word "sher" can refer to either the lion or the tiger. The fact that the Goddess rides such a dangerous animal is clearly a symbol of her power and capacity. In her mythology these animals are often described as her allies, engaging in battle at her command.

## Liquor

Condemned by the traditional Hindus, although attitudes differ based on the type of liquor consumed. Consuming beer, wine, and distilled spirits ("foreign liquor") carries the stigma of adopting "foreign" Western values; whereas consuming undistilled, fermented beverages such as "country liquor" and **toddy** carry the taint of low-class behavior. Patterns of drinking tend to reflect and reinforce these negative attitudes. Since liquor is taboo in polite society, people who drink will often finish the bottle in one sitting and become intoxicated, thus "proving" that there is no such thing as responsible drinking.

Despite the general cultural disapproval, there are a few Hindu temples where liquor is the everyday **offering** to the **deity**. The worshipers also receive liquor as **prasad**, the sanctified food or drink that carries the deity's blessing. Alcohol has also been incorporated into religious rituals in certain types of tantric religious practice. **Tantra** is a secret ritual-based religious tradition, based on the belief that there is an ultimate unity of everything that exists. From a tantric perspective, to affirm that the entire universe is one principle means that the adept must reject all concepts based on dualistic thinking. One way to do this is to partake of the "Five Forbidden Things" (**panchamakara**), consciously breaking societal norms forbidding consumption of **intoxicants**, nonvegetarian food, and illicit sexuality. This is always done within a carefully defined ritual setting, in a conscious effort to sacralize what is normally forbidden.

## Lohar

Traditional Indian society was modeled as a collection of **endogamous** subgroups (in which marriage is decreed by law to occur only between members of the same group) known as **jatis** ("birth"). The jatis were organized (and their social status determined) by the group's hereditary occupation, over which each

The lota is a vessel designed to allow one to drink from it without touching one's lips to its surface, which would render it impure.

group had a monopoly. The Lohars' hereditary occupation was black-smithing and iron working.

## Lohari

Festival falling on the night before **Makara Sankranti**, the day when the sun moves into the zodiological sign of Capricorn, which almost always falls on January 14. The central focus of this festival is a large bonfire. Celebrants collect fuel for weeks beforehand, lighting the fire on the evening of the festival. People **dance**, sing, and walk around the fire, giving the fire **offerings** of sweets, fried snacks, and peanuts; these same items are also given to those present as **prasad** or sanctified food.

Lohari is a seasonal festival, marking the passing of the coldest period of the winter and anticipating the return of warmer weather, symbolized by the fire. This festival is celebrated in the **Punjab** and in northern India where Punjabis have settled. This festival also serves as a public display recognizing some change within the family. Families that have recorded marriages or births in the past year celebrate with particular fervor, whereas families in which a person has died usually refrain.

## Lokacharya

(ca. early 14th c.) Religious leader also known as Pillai Lokacharya, the founder of the **Tengalai** branch of the **Shrivaishnava** religious community. The Shrivaishnavas are devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Vishnu**. The Tengalais have no faith in human capacities, emphasizing the need for the devotee's absolute surrender to the **grace** of God, which alone will save the devotee.

## Lokayata

One of the traditional names for the **materialist** school of philosophy. See **materialist**.

## Lopamudra

In Hindu mythology, the wife of the sage **Agastya**.

## Lost Wax Casting

A method of metal-casting used to create the southern Indian **bronzes** during the **Chola dynasty** (9th–14th c.). The artisan makes a wax image of the statue, then covers the wax with layers of clay. The clay is fired and the wax vaporizes, leaving a clay mold into which molten metal is poured. Once the metal cools, the clay mold is broken, revealing the statue. Small imperfections are removed by hand, and the statue is polished to a high gloss. This casting method produces exquisite detail and subtlety of expression, but is extremely time-consuming because each wax image and clay mold can only be used once.

## Lota

A vessel for holding water that usually narrows near the top (so that the vessel can be carried in one hand) with a flared opening to facilitate accurate pouring. The lota is used for drinking. Water can be poured directly into one's mouth without touching the vessel to one's lips, which would render the vessel and its contents impure. A lota is also often used in bathing (**snana**), to pour water

over one's body, or for any other uses for which holding and pouring water are necessary.

## Lothal

Ancient city and archeological site located near the Gulf of Cambay in the modern state of **Gujarat**. Lothal was one of the cities of the **Indus Valley civilization**, a highly developed urban culture that flourished in the Indus Valley region between the fourth and third millennia B.C.E. Lothal was a port city, although because of silting, the present site is now well inland. The size of the harbor indicates that it was a prominent port. Archaeological evidence suggests that Lothal continued to flourish for nearly 500 years after the decline of **Harappa** and **Mohenjo-Daro**, the two largest cities of the Indus Valley civilization.

## Lotus

Flower with significant symbolism in Hindu culture. See **Padma**.

## Lotus Position

See **padmasana**.

## Love Marriage

In modern India, the name given to a marriage fixed by the bride and groom themselves, rather than an **arranged marriage** fixed by parents or guardians. Although Western romantic notions consider a love marriage the preferred method, many Hindus consider love marriages suspect. Love marriages carry the stigma of rebellion—children usurping the role traditionally played by their parents. It is sometimes thought to present the danger of inter-**caste** marriage and the likelihood that the marriage will be rooted in lust or infatuation, thus rendering it potentially unstable. The family is considered the foundation of society; anything undermining its stability is viewed quite dimly. Love marriages are becoming more common and accepted among modern Hindus, especially in the larger urban areas. Arranged marriages, however, remain far more common.

## Lunar Line

One of the two great mythic lineages in Hindu mythology, the other being the **Solar Line**. Kings in the Lunar Line traced their descent from **Soma**, the **moon**, who married the daughter of King **Ikshvaku** of the Solar Line. Soma and his wife begat an illustrious group of progeny, including most of the principal characters in the *Mahabharata*, the later of the two great Hindu epics.

## Lunar Month, Structure of

Hindu festivals are determined according to a lunar **calendar**, in which a year is made of twelve lunar months. The lunar month is divided into two halves, each of which has fifteen **days**. In northern India the lunar month begins with the dark (krishna) half—when the **moon** is waning. This phase lasts fifteen days, ending with the **new moon**. This is followed by the light (shukla) half of the month—when the moon is waxing. This phase lasts fifteen days, ending with the **full moon**. The day after the full moon is the first day of the next lunar month, and so on. Any given lunar day is designated by the name of the month, the half (light or dark), and the lunar day (1 to 15). In southern India the pattern is reversed, with the lunar month starting with the light half and ending on the new moon.

The lunar month, as with all Hindu conceptions of time, represents changing times of **auspiciousness** and **inauspiciousness**, peaks and valleys marking times that are more or less propitious. The full moon, with its associations of fullness, abundance, and light, is always auspicious. It is believed that religious rites performed on this day generate as much merit as those performed for an entire month. The new moon, with its associations of darkness and emptiness, is a more ambiguous time. At times the

new moon can be highly auspicious, as on the occasion of a **Somavati Amavasya** (new moon falling on **Monday**). Several major festivals (such as **Diwali**) fall on the new moon. Despite this, the new moon is less auspicious than the full moon. Within each fortnight various days are also associated with particular **deities**, and their devotees (**bhakta**) often do particular rites on those days: The eleventh day (**ekadashi**) is dedicated to the god **Vishnu**, the eighth day (ashtami) to the **Goddess**, the evening of the thirteenth day (trayodashi) and the fourteenth to the god **Shiva**, and the fourth day (chaturthi) to the god **Ganesh**.

As mentioned earlier, the lunar calendar is the basis for almost all Hindu holidays. To correct the discrepancy between the lunar and solar year (about eleven days), and thus keep these festivals at about the same time every year, an **intercalary month** is inserted every 2½ years. Although this extra month keeps the calendar in balance, it is considered highly inauspicious, perhaps because it is an unusual occurrence. During this month people take normal precautions to protect themselves during inauspicious times—basically putting off any new activities until the month is over, and propitiating protective deities until the end of the month.

# M

## Madhava

(from **madhu** "sweet") Epithet of the god **Krishna**, signifying the sweetness that he brings to the lives of his devotees (**bhakta**). See **Krishna**.

## Madhava

(2) (14th c.) Author of the ***Sarvadarshanasangraha***, a philosophical encyclopedia composed in the late fourteenth century. In this text, Madhava compiles the views of all existing philosophical schools, placing them in hierarchical order, based on his judgment of their value. According to the text, the **materialist** school is ranked the lowest and least reliable, since its proponents completely deny the virtue of any religious life. The **Advaita Vedanta** school, Madhava's own, is judged as the highest and most perfect expression of the truth. Although the *Sarvadarshanasangraha* is biased, it is one of the few extant sources which considers the perspectives of all the existing schools.

## Madhima

("greatness") One of the eight **superhuman powers** (**siddhi**) traditionally believed to be conferred by high spiritual attainment. This particular power gives one the ability to become as large as one desires.

## Madhu

In Hindu mythology, one of the two **demons** who attempt to kill the god **Brahma**; the other demon is **Kaitabha**. The story is recounted in several mythic sources with some marked differences between stories. All versions agree that Madhu and Kaitabha are born from the god **Vishnu's** ear wax during the period of cosmic dissolution (**pralaya**). As the creation of the world begins anew, a lotus sprouts from Vishnu's navel. It opens to reveal the creator-god Brahma, who is immediately menaced by Madhu and Kaitabha. In all versions of the myth, Brahma appeals for help, and Vishnu tricks the demons and slays them. The difference in the stories pertains to the **deity** to whom Brahma appeals for help. The story first appears in the mythology of Vishnu; here Brahma invokes Vishnu. Yet this same story also appears in the ***Devimahatmya***, the earliest source in which the Mother **Goddess** appears as the supreme **divine power**. In this version, Brahma's hymn of praise is to the Goddess, who in her form as **Yoganidra** ("sleep of **yoga**") has lulled Vishnu into a cosmic stupor, rendering him unable to come to Brahma's aid. Pleased by Brahma's praise, the Goddess withdraws her influence over Vishnu; he awakens, and slays the demons.

## Madhurya ("Honeyed") Bhava

The second of the five **modes of devotion** to God that were articulated by **Rupa Goswami**, a devotee (**bhakta**) of the god **Krishna** and a follower of the Bengali saint **Chaitanya**. Rupa used human relationships to describe the connection between devotee and **deity**. The five modes showed growing emotional intensity, from the peaceful (**shanta**) sense that comes from realizing one's complete identity with **Brahman** or Ultimate Reality, to conceiving of God as one's master, friend, child, or lover. The Madhurya Bhava is the last and most intense of the five modes of devotion. In this mode, devotees consider the relationship between themselves and the deity as that of lover and beloved. This mode appeared most prominently with regard to the god Krishna (in which the model devotees were the cowherd women of **Braj**), and

**Radha** (who is a symbol for the human soul.) This particular mode is seen as the most intense and demanding because of its emotional closeness. For that same reason, it is also seen as the sweetest.

## Madhusudana Saraswati

(16th c.) A renowned member of the **Sanyasi** community, a group of renunciant ascetics who were devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva**. His last name reveals that he was a member of the **Saraswati** sect, one of the most prestigious of the ten **Dashanami** divisions; he is said to have lived most of his life in **Benares**, the greatest religious center of his time. According to **ascetic** legend, Madhusudana was responsible for the creation of a class of fighting ascetics, the **Naga** Sanyasis. According to tradition, Madhusudana created these fighters because he was distressed at the depredations the Sanyasis suffered at the hands of hostile Muslim **faqirs**. After consulting with Birbal, adviser to Moghul emperor **Akbar**, Madhusudana decided to form a fighting ascetic order dedicated to protecting other ascetics. Recruits came from the ranks of the **shudras**.

## Madhva

(1197–1276) Philosopher and founder of the **Dvaita Vedanta** philosophical school, whose long life was largely spent in **Udupi**, a small town near the **Malabar** coast in the state of **Karnataka**. Madhva's basic philosophy was the utter transcendence of God. This conviction led him to develop the theory of dualism, which posits a qualitative difference between God in his transcendence and the corruptions of material things. According to Madhva, God is completely different from humans and the material world, even though both came from God and depend on Him for their continuing existence. Madhva differed sharply from the major school, **Advaita Vedanta**, which upheld the theory of

monism—the belief that a single Ultimate Reality (called **Brahman**) lies behind all things, which are merely differing forms of this single reality. Whereas Advaita collapses all things into one thing, Madhva firmly insists on maintaining differences.

Madhva's emphasis on dualism led him to articulate these differences, known as the "fivefold difference": the difference between God and Self, between God and the world, between individual Selves, between Selves and matter, and between individual material things. Even though each Self contains an aspect of God, fundamental difference gives the Self only limited capacity for religious life. This limited power means that final liberation of the soul comes solely through the **grace** of God, who alone has the power to effect it. Final liberation was conceived both as freedom from rebirth and as the soul's opportunity to remain in the divine presence forever.

## Madhya Pradesh

("middle state") Modern Indian state located in the geographical center of the subcontinent. Madhya Pradesh was formed after Indian independence in 1947 from the former Central Provinces, Berar State, and several princely states. Large parts of the state are inaccessible and relatively undeveloped, particularly in the **Vindhya Mountain** and Satpura ranges. Madhya Pradesh also has a large percentage of **adivasis** (indigenous tribal people), many of whom are very poor. Madhya Pradesh contains many important archaeological sites, including the **Chandella** temples at **Khajuraho** and the caves at **Udayagiri**. Sacred sites (**tirthas**) include the **Narmada River**, one of the seven sacred rivers of India, and the holy city of **Ujjain**. For general information about Madhya Pradesh and other regions of India, see Christine Nivin et al., *India*. 8th ed., Lonely Planet, 1998.

The Vishvanath Temple at Khajuraho, Madhya Pradesh, dates back to 1002 C.E.

## Madmaheshvar

Temple and sacred site (**tirtha**) in the **Garhwal** region of the **Himalayas**, about twenty miles north of the village of **Ukhimath**. The temple's presiding **deity** is the god **Shiva** in his manifestation as Madmaheshvar. Madmaheshvar is one of the **Panchkedar**, a network of five sacred sites in the Garhwal region; the other four sites are **Kedarnath**, **Rudranath**, **Tungnath**, and **Kalpeshvar**. This network of five sites is seen as a symbolic representation of **Shiva's** body; Madmaheshvar is believed to be Shiva's navel.

## Madri

In the *Mahabharata*, the later of the two great Hindu epics, Madri is the junior wife of King **Pandu** and the mother of **Nakula** and **Sahadeva**. Neither of these children are actually Pandu's **sons**, since he has been cursed to die the moment he holds his wife in amorous embrace. Rather, they have been magically conceived through the effect of a **mantra** given to Pandu's other wife, **Kunti**, by the sage **Durvasas**. The mantra gives the woman who recites it the power to call down any of the gods and to have a son equal in power to that god himself. With Pandu's blessing, Kunti teaches the mantra to Madri, who recites it to the twin gods known as the **Ashvins**. Thus she bears twins. They live happily until springtime comes to the forest. Under the intoxicating influence of spring, Pandu embraces Madri; the **curse** takes effect, and Pandu falls down dead. Because of her role in Pandu's death, Madri consigns her children to Kunti's care, and ends her life on Pandu's funeral pyre.

## Madurai

Temple-town and sacred site (**tirtha**) on the Vygai River, in the state of **Tamil Nadu** in southern India. Madurai is most famous for the large temple dedicated to **Minakshi**, the **goddess**, and her consort Sundareshvara. Minakshi is a local **deity** who has become a major regional goddess, whereas Sundareshvara is considered a form of the god **Shiva**. After the fall of the Vijayanagar empire late in the

sixteenth century, southern India was ruled by the **Nayak dynasty**, with the capital at Madurai. Much of the Minakshi temple was built by **Tirumalai Nayak** (r. 1623-1659); his palace is another of the city's attractions. The streets around the temple form four concentric processional circuits, with the temple directly in the middle. The town was planned as a lotus with layers of petals, with the image of Minakshi at the center, around which all things revolved. Symbolically, the Minakshi temple was not only the center of the city, but the center of the earth. See also **Vijayanagar dynasty**.

## Madya

("wine") In the secret ritually-based religious practice known as **tantra**, wine is the first of the Five Forbidden Things (**panchamakara**). Since "respectable" Hindu society strongly condemns the consumption of alcoholic beverages, its ritual use in tantra must be understood in the larger tantric context. One of the most basic tantric assumptions is the ultimate unity of everything that exists. From a tantric perspective, to affirm that the entire universe is one principle means that the adept must reject all concepts based on dualistic thinking. One way to do this is to partake of the "Five Forbidden Things," consciously breaking the societal norms forbidding the consumption of **intoxicants**, non-vegetarian food, and illicit sexuality—making sacred that which is normally forbidden. Tantric adepts cite such ritual use of forbidden things as proof that their practice involves a more exclusive qualification (**adhikara**), and is thus superior to common practice. In its ritual use—which is usually in very small quantities—the intoxication produced by wine is an approximation of the bliss of realization. For further information see Arthur Avalon (Sir John Woodroffe), *Shakti and Shakta*, 1978; Swami Agehananda Bharati, *The Tantric Tradition*, 1977; and Douglas Renfrew Brooks, *The Secret of the Three Cities*, 1990.

## Magh

According to the lunar **calendar**, by which most Hindu religious festivals are determined, Magh is the eleventh month in the lunar **year**, usually falling within January and February. During Magh there is a month-long bathing (**snana**) festival, the **Magh Mela**, at the confluence of the **Ganges** and **Yamuna** rivers in **Allahabad**. The other major festivals in Magh are **Sakata Chauth**, **Shattila Ekadashi**, **Mauni Amavasya**, **Vasant Panchami**, **Bhishma Ashtami**, **Jaya Ekadashi**, **Ravidas Jayanti**, **Makara Sankranti**. In southern India, **Pongal** and the **Float Festival** are celebrated during Magh.

## Magha

(7th c.) **Sanskrit** writer whose best-known work, the drama ***Shishupala-vadha***, describes the death of **Shishupala** at the hands of the god **Krishna**. In Hindu mythology, Shishupala is a form of **Jaya**, **Vishnu's** gatekeeper, who has been cursed to be born as a **demon** three times and killed each time by Vishnu. Shishupala is the last of these births, after which the **curse** is broken. Aside from its mythic theme, the play is noted for a number of unusual verses, designed to show the poet's skill. These include verses that are perfect palindromes and ones that use only one or two consonants.

## Magh Mela

Religious festival celebrated every **year** during the entire **lunar month** of **Magh** (January–February) in the city of **Allahabad**. According to the Hindu **festival calendar**, Magh is one of the months in which bathing (**snana**) in sacred rivers is highly praised. This is particularly significant because Allahabad lies at the confluence of two sacred rivers, the **Ganges** and the **Yamuna River**. During this month, pilgrims set up an encampment at the confluence, which becomes a bustling religious center. During their stay, pilgrims

live a strict and disciplined religious life. This includes a morning bath, followed by gift-giving (**dana**) and **worship**; **eating** a restricted diet, and evenings spent singing hymns (**kirtan**) and listening to religious discourses. Some pilgrims even take a strict vow, known as **kalpavas**, to remain there for the entire month, a vow which also entails a strict **ascetic** lifestyle. More than a million pilgrims attend this festival. Every twelfth year, when the Magh Mela becomes the Allahabad **Kumbha Mela**, attendance increases. In 1989 an estimated fifteen million pilgrims came for a single day, with millions more coming during the rest of the month.

## Magic

In Hindu tradition there are many different powers in the universe, and many ways of influencing them, both seen and unseen. The emphasis on magic goes back to the **Atharva Veda**, one of the oldest Hindu religious texts, which is mostly a collection of spells. Even today many Hindus accept that certain powerful religious adepts have the power to command unseen forces, as well as the power to counteract the spells levied by others. People who have gained high levels of religious attainments are also believed to have superhuman powers (**siddhi**), allowing them to do things that ordinary people cannot. These superhuman powers are not seen as magical, but rather as the normal exercise of a level of understanding higher than most people have attained. Indian culture also has a long tradition of illusion, sleight of hand, and other sorts of trickery, baffling and entertaining onlookers for centuries. For an extensive account of these powers, see Lee Siegel, *Net of Magic*, 1991.

## Mahabalipuram

Village on the Bay of Bengal in **Tamil Nadu**, about thirty miles south of Madras. Although famous as a beach resort today, during the **Pallava dynasty** (6th–9th c.) Mahabalipuram was a major port, second in importance only to the capital at **Kanchipuram**. Mahabalipuram has several impressive religious monuments, erected during the reigns of **Narasimhavarman I** (630–668 C.E.) and **Narasimhavarman II** (700–728 C.E.). One of the monuments is a rock-cut **sculpture** depicting the myth of the Descent of the **Ganges**, using a natural vertical fissure to lay out the river's path. Other notable constructions are the "Rathas," a series of free-standing temples carved from one giant boulder, dedicated to the **Pandavas**, the protagonists in the epic *Mahabharata*. The most recent attraction is the temple along the shore, built during the reign of **Rajasimhavarman** (early 8th c.). The temple's major **deity** is the god **Shiva**; a smaller shrine also holds an image of the god **Vishnu**. Although all of these have been weathered by time and the elements, they remain some of the most visited sites in southern India.

## Mahabharata

One of the two great **Sanskrit** epics, traditionally ascribed to the mythical sage **Vyasa**. The *Mahabharata* is much longer than the other great epic, the *Ramayana*. At almost 100,000 stanzas, the *Mahabharata* is the world's longest epic poem. If the *Ramayana* can be characterized as the tale of the "good" family, in which brothers cooperate to support and preserve their family, the *Mahabharata* describes the "bad" family, in which hard-heartedness and the lust for power in an extended royal family ultimately cause its destruction. The epic is set in the region west of modern Delhi and describes a fratricidal civil war. A greatly abridged account can be given as follows:

**Shantanu** is the king of the Kurus. He dies an untimely, heirless death. In a desperate attempt to preserve the royal line, Shantanu's wife, **Satyavati**, calls upon her elder son, the sage **Vyasa**, who fathers children by Shantanu's two wives. The elder son, **Dhrtarashtra**, is
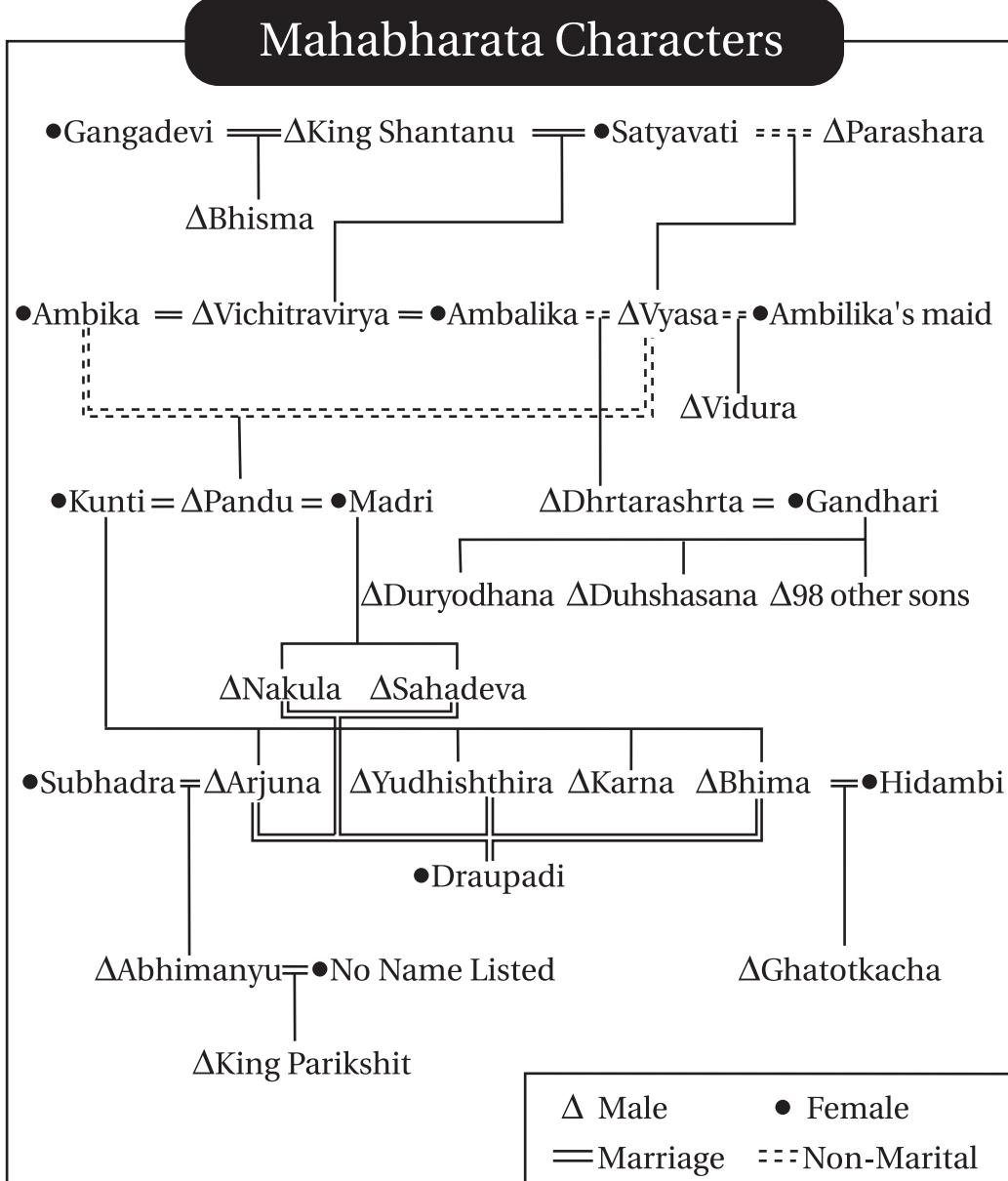
born blind, and thus the rights to the throne fall to his younger brother **Pandu**. Pandu later abdicates his throne because of a **curse**, and goes to live in the forest with his two wives, **Kunti** and **Madri**, leaving his elder brother to rule in his place. In time Dhrtarashtra's wife, **Gandhari**, magically gives birth to one hundred sons, of whom the oldest is **Duryodhana**; the hundred sons are called the **Kauravas**, and are the epic's antagonists. In the forest Kunti has three sons, **Yudhishthira**, **Bhima**, and **Arjuna**, while Madri has the twins **Nakula** and **Sahadeva**. These five sons are the **Pandavas**, the epic's protagonists. None of these children are actually Pandu's sons, since he has been cursed to die the moment he holds his wife in amorous embrace. Rather, they have been magically conceived using a **mantra** given to Kunti by the sage **Durvasas**, giving the woman reciting it the power to call down any of the gods and have a son equal in power to that god himself. When Kunti first receives the mantra, long before her marriage, she impulsively recites it while gazing upon the **sun**, and gives birth to a shining child. Distraught and desperate, Kunti puts him in a box and abandons him in the **Ganges** River. The child is adopted by the charioteer **Adhiratha**, and grows up to be the heroic **Karna**.

As the result of his curse, Pandu dies an early death, and Kunti (his wife) and his sons (the Pandavas) return to the court at **Hastinapur**, where the boys are raised as princes. From the beginning there are bad feelings between Duryodhana (the eldest of the Kauravas) and his cousins, largely because Duryodhana desires the throne, which rightly belongs to Yudhishthira (one of the Pandavas). After foiling several attempts to kill them, the Pandava brothers leave the kingdom to become mercenaries. On one of their journeys, Arjuna wins the hand of the princess **Draupadi**, who becomes their common wife (their mother commands that Arjuna share whatever he wins with his brothers). After some time Dhrtarashtra (father of the Kauravas) renounces the throne and divides his kingdom. The Pandavas build a new capital at **Indraprastha**, identified near modern Delhi.

For a little while things are quiet, but Duryodhana is not content to share his kingdom. He invites Yudhishthira for a game of dice, matching Yudhishthira against **Shakuni**, the most skillful gambler alive. Although Yudhishthira is a model for truthfulness and virtue, his fatal flaw is his love of **gambling**. In the match Yudhishthira loses his kingdom, all his possessions, his brothers, himself, and finally his wife. In one of the epic's most powerful scenes, Duryodhana's brother, **Duhshasana**, drags Draupadi by her hair into the assembly hall, her clothes stained with her menstrual blood. Draupadi's humiliation moves Dhrtarashtra to set them free, but also sparks the enmity that helps drive the rest of the plot. After some bargaining, the parties agree that the Pandavas will spend twelve years in exile and a thirteenth incognito. If they can remain undiscovered during the thirteenth year they will regain their kingdom. If they are discovered, however, the cycle of exile will begin again.

After thirteen years, Yudhishthira and his brothers approach Duryodhana for their rightful share, but are haughtily rebuffed. All efforts at conciliation fail; Duryodhana claims that he will not give them enough land in which to stick the point of a needle. Pushed to the wall, the Pandavas prepare for battle. On one side are Yudhishthira and his brothers, aided by their counselor **Krishna**. On the other are Duryodhana and many respected figures, such as **Drona**, **Bhishma**, and Karna. For eighteen days the battle rages, until most of the important people are dead. Yudhishthira and his brothers survive. Yudhishthira is crowned king and rules righteously for many years. Late in life he installs his grandson, King **Parikshit**, on the throne. With his siblings he takes a final journey into the **Himalayas**. During the journey his brothers fall dead, one by one;

## Mahabharata Characters

•Gangadevi ══ ΔKing Shantanu ══ •Satyavati ┅┅ ΔParashara

ΔBhisma

•Ambika ═ ΔVichitravirya ═ •Ambalika ┅┅ ΔVyasa ┅┅ •Ambilika's maid

ΔVidura

•Kunti ═ ΔPandu ═ •Madri          ΔDhrtarashrta ═ •Gandhari

ΔDuryodhana  ΔDuhshasana  Δ98 other sons

ΔNakula   ΔSahadeva

•Subhadra═ΔArjuna │ ΔYudhishthira  ΔKarna  ΔBhima ═•Hidambi

•Draupadi

ΔAbhimanyu═•No Name Listed          ΔGhatotkacha

ΔKing Parikshit

| | |
|---|---|
| Δ Male | • Female |
| ══Marriage | ┅┅Non-Marital |

Yudhishthira eventually enters the divine realm.

The complete epic is more complex than this summary. One of the features of the epic is that it contains many unrelated tales, for which the main story acts as a frame. Aside from being a tale of a dysfunctional family, the *Mahabharata* also contains a great deal of cultural wisdom, making the names of characters symbolic even today. A televised serial of the text, which ran for more than a year in 1989–90, was wildly popular throughout India. It is also interesting to note that many traditional Indian families will not keep a copy of the text in the house, since it is believed that to do this will foster discord in the family.

## Mahabhashya
("Great commentary") A commentary on the **Ashtadhyayi** of **Panini**, written by **Patanjali**, the grammarian, in the second century B.C.E. Panini's text gives a complete and accurate description of all the forms of the **Sanskrit** language and set the standard for the language after

his time. Although the *Ashtadhyayi* is considered a masterpiece, it appears to invite more detailed commentary because it is written in a series of aphorisms or **sutra**. Each of these aphorisms provides the basis for those which follow. Panini's ultimate purpose is to give a complete account of the language in the briefest possible space. Aside from expanding and expounding Panini's grammar, Patanjali also gives some useful information of his own. The *Mahabhashya* contains the earliest known reference to the Greeks.

## Mahabrahman

("Great **Brahman**") In traditional Indian society, a debased class of brahmins who officiate at rites for the dead, especially at the rites performed immediately after death. In many of these rites the Mahabrahman is identified with the deceased person and is fed and given gifts that are intended to help satisfy the soul of the deceased. These acts are seen as transferring the **inauspiciousness** of death from the family to the Mahabrahman. Such constant association with death and its inauspicious qualities is seen as a highly undesirable way to make a living; Mahabrahmans have extremely low social status, despite being brahmins by birth. As compensation for taking on such inauspiciousness, Mahabrahmans usually demand high payment from a family. For further information see Jonathan Parry, "Ghosts, Greed and Sin: The Occupational Identity of the Benares Funeral Priests," in *Man*, Vol. 15, 1980.

## Mahadeva

("great God") Epithet of the god **Shiva**. See **Shiva**.

## Mahadeviyakka

(12th c.) Poet-saint and religious leader in the **Lingayat** religious community, a **bhakti** (devotional) community centered on both the **worship** of **Shiva** as the single supreme god and on the rejection of all **caste** regulations. The Lingayats were formed in the southern Indian state of **Karnataka**, where they still have a considerable presence. The collections of poetry that form their most important religious texts are composed in the **Kannada** language. Mahadeviyakka was a contemporary of **Basavanna** and **Allama Prabhu**; her status in the community is marked by the suffix akka ("elder sister"). According to tradition, she was devoted to Shiva at a very young age and considered him to be her true husband. This caused great problems during a brief, unhappy marriage, a mismatch between a carnally inclined man and a woman who would have no human lover. She eventually left her husband, wandering naked as a sign that she had cast away all attachments. She later became associated with the Lingayats, known as the "Lord's men." The theme running through most of her poetry is love for Shiva, sometimes as her husband and sometimes as her adulterous lover, both portraying her struggles with the world. For further information see A. K. Ramanujan, *Speaking of Shiva*, 1973.

## Mahakaleshvar

Temple and sacred site (**tirtha**) in the sacred city of **Ujjain** in the state of **Madhya Pradesh**. The temple is named for its presiding **deity**, the god **Shiva** in his manifestation as the "Lord of Death." Shiva is present at Mahakaleshvar in the form of a **linga**, a pillar-shaped image. The Mahakaleshvar linga is one of the twelve **jyotirlingas**, a network of sites at which Shiva is uniquely present. The linga is in an underground room, reached only by traversing a long, dark passageway. This passage may symbolize the darkness and terror of death. **Worship** at Mahakaleshvar is believed to protect one from an early or untimely death, and at death, bring liberation of the soul (**moksha**).

The city of Ujjain has a long history as a sacred, economic, and political center. One of the **Seven Sacred Cities**

(Saptapuri), it also has other important religious sites. Historically, Ujjain is said to have been the capital of King **Vikramaditya**, founder of the **Vikram Era**. Trade routes that passed through it made it economically prosperous.

## Mahakali

In the *Devimahatmya*, the earliest and most important source for the mythology of the **Goddess**, the three parts of this text describe the goddess in three different manifestations: **Mahasaraswati**, **Mahalakshmi**, and Mahakali. All of these manifestations are extremely powerful, but Mahakali is the most ferocious of all. She is said to have sprung from the forehead of the Goddess, as a physical manifestation of the **deity's** rage when insulted by the **demon** generals **Chanda** and **Munda**, who denigrate her fighting ability because she was a woman. According to the story, Mahakali is black in color, thin, and haggard, with long teeth and nails, and utters terrifying cries. She defeats the demon armies by picking them up and stuffing them into her mouth, consuming them whole. She later kills Chanda and Munda by cutting off their heads. Her final adversary is **Raktabija**, who has received the boon that any drop of his blood falling to the earth will instantly turn into a copy of him, rendering him practically unconquerable. **Kali** defeats this demon by drinking his blood as it is shed, until finally it is completely gone. For more information on Mahakali and all the goddesses of Hinduism, see David R. Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, 1986; and John Stratton Hawley and Donna Wulff (eds.), *Devi*, 1996.

## Mahakavya

An epic poem in **Sanskrit** literature. According to tradition, there are six such mahakavyas: the *Kumarasambhava*, *Meghaduta*, and *Raghuvamsha* by the poet **Kalidasa**; the *Shishupala-vadha* by the poet **Magha**; the *Kiratarjuniya* by the poet **Bharavi**, and the *Naishadacharitra* by the poet-king **Harsha**.

## Mahalakshmi

In the *Devimahatmya*, the earliest and most important source for the mythology of the **Goddess**, the three parts of this text describe this goddess in three different manifestations: **Mahasaraswati**, Mahalakshmi, and **Mahakali**. Unlike the goddess **Lakshmi**, who is a sedate and propitious married goddess, Mahalakshmi is seen as a powerful warrior goddess, the premier divine power on the earth. She is formed from the collected radiance (tejas) of all the gods, in order to kill a **demon** named **Mahishasura**, against whom the gods have been unable to prevail. Her climactic act in the *Devimahatmya* is killing Mahishasura, despite his desperate attempts first to defeat and then to elude her. For more information on Mahalakshmi and all the goddesses of Hinduism, see David R. Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, 1986.

## Mahamandaleshvar

("Great Lord of the Region") Term of respect given to a **Mandaleshvar** when one of his disciples is chosen a Mandaleshvar while the preceptor is still living. Mandaleshvars are the learned ascetics who lead the **Naga akharas** of the **Dashanami Sanyasis**, a practice that began in the nineteenth century. The Dashanami Nagas are renunciant ascetics who are devotees (**bhakta**) of **Shiva** and who formerly made their living as traders and mercenary soldiers. Their rough-and-ready qualities made them effective soldiers, but gave them little preparation for formal argument with Christian missionaries. Mandaleshvars were chosen from among the more learned **Paramahamsa** ascetics, so that the latter could provide a more coherent and telling opposition; he also serves as the Nagas' teacher and spiritual adviser. The enshrinement of

Mahant Bhagwan Das, renowned sadhu, attends the Kumbha Mela religious festival in Allahabad.

a Mandaleshvar's disciple is thus seen as boosting his teacher's prestige to an even more rarefied state.

## Mahamandapa

The mahamandapa is an architectural feature found in the **Khajuraho** variation of the **Nagara** architectural style. Usually found in northern India, the Nagara style emphasizes verticality, with the whole temple building culminating in a single highest point; in the Khajuraho variant, the entire structure gradually leads up to the central tower, as foothills lead up to the mountains, with the peak of this central tower directly over the temple's primary image. In this style, the mahamandapa is the name for the temple's main

entrance-hall, which was separated from the main sanctuary (**garbhagrha**) by a short vestibule named the **antarala**.

## Mahamantra

A thirty-two syllable **mantra**, or sacred formula, the recitation of which is the primary religious act for devotees (**bhakta**) belonging to ISKCON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness), a group more popularly known as the Hare Krishnas. The mantra itself is "Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare; Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare."

## Mahamaya

("[she whose] power of illusion is great") Epithet of the **Goddess** in the *Devimahatmya*, the earliest and most important textual source for the notion that God is female. This epithet reflects her position as the sole and supreme power in the universe, wielding the power of illusion that obscures this fact from human awareness. See **Goddess**.

## Mahanirvani Akhara

The name of a group of the **Naga** class of the **Dashanami Sanyasis**, a type of renunciant **ascetic**. The Dashanami Nagas are devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva**, organized into different **akharas** or regiments on the model of an army. Until the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Nagas' primary occupation was as mercenary soldiers or traders; both of these have largely disappeared in contemporary times. This akhara is described as taking part in a battle with the forces of the Moghul emperor **Aurangzeb** in 1664, and are credited with saving the city of **Benares** from being sacked.

The Mahanirvani Akhara is one of the seven main Dashanami Naga akharas and remains one of most influential. The principal center of the Mahanirvani Akhara is in **Allahabad**, site of the largest and most important bathing (**snana**) festivals, known as the **Kumbha Mela**.

Their strength in Allahabad has allowed them to assume the most desirable spot at the head of the bathing procession during the Kumbha Mela. Each of the akharas has a (guardian) **deity** who defines their organizational identity; the tutelary deity of the Mahanirvani Akhara is the great sage **Kapila**.

## Mahant

("great") Honorific title given to an **ascetic** who is the leader of a monastery. Mahants are chosen by their predecessors and designate their successors. While they are living, they have virtually total control over the monastery and its assets, even though they do not own them. In any given ascetic establishment, the mahant has very high status, since he is the absolute ruler of his small domain.

## Mahanubhav

("Great Experience") A regional religious community, whose members are devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Vishnu**, and who are found mainly in the central regions of the state of **Maharashtra**. The Mahanubhavs were founded by Chakradhar in the thirteenth century. Under his influence the community has rejected many aspects of "mainstream" Hindu religious life: social distinctions based on **caste**, the **worship** of images, and the religious authority of **brahmins**. The community is also noted for espousing an **ascetic** way of life. Although the Mahanubhavs are considered **Vaishnavas**, they acknowledge only one God, whom they call Parameshvar ("Great Lord"), and whom they conceive as having had five incarnations. Two of these incarnations are established figures in the Hindu pantheon, the god **Krishna** and the deified ascetic **Dattatreya**. The other three are sectarian figures: their founder Chakradhar, Chakradhar's **guru**, and his guru's guru. Their modern practice stresses pilgrimage, vows, and almsgiving. Nevertheless, through much of Maharashtra there is a

The state of Maharashtra is home to the sculpted caves of Ellora.

legacy of suspicion and mistrust of the Mahanubhavs, perhaps rooted in their anti-authoritarian history. For further information see Anne Feldhaus, *The Religious System of the Mahanubhav Sect*, 1983.

## Mahapataka

("Great Sinner") In the **dharma literature**, a person who has committed one of the **Four Great Crimes**, namely murdering a **brahmin** (**brahmahatya**), stealing a brahmin's gold (**steya**), drinking **liquor** (**surapana**), or committing **adultery** with the wife of one's **guru** (**gurutalpaga**). These crimes were considered so heinous that the performer became an outcast from society. Another indication of the gravity of these acts was that their expiations (**prayashchitta**) were so severe that they normally ended in death; in some cases this outcome was specifically prescribed. Aside from prescribing such punishments for the actual offenders, the dharma literature also prescribed similar outcaste status for anyone who knowingly associated with such people for more than one year.

## Mahapatra

("great vessel") In parts of northern India, the name of a debased **brahmin** group whose members gain their livelihood primarily through receiving gifts, particularly those given following a death. Such brahmins do not actually perform the rites for the dead, although they are seen as symbolically representing the dead person. Their low status stems from this connection with the dead; the gifts they accept transfer the **inauspiciousness** of death from the family to the Mahapatra. This latter assumption is reflected in the group's name—they are "vessels" into which one can deposit such inauspiciousness, and thus be rid of it. Such constant association with death and its inauspicious qualities is seen as a highly undesirable way to make a living, giving this group extremely low social status, despite being brahmins by **birth**. Despite their debased status, they are a necessary part of traditional society, in that they serve as the means through which such inauspiciousness can be removed.

## Mahar

Traditional Indian society was a collection of **endogamous** subgroups (in which marriage is decreed by law to occur only between members of the same group) known as **jatis** ("birth"). These jatis were organized (and their social status determined) by the group's hereditary occupation, over which each group held a monopoly. The Mahars were an **untouchable** jati in Maharashtrian society, performing various services and labor for the landlord communities. The Mahars are famous for two figures: the medieval **bhakti** poet **Chokamela**, and the modern jurist and social reformer **Dr**. **B**. **R**. **Ambedkar**.

## Maharashtra

Modern Indian state along the Arabian Sea, stretching east over the Western Ghats to encompass the northern part of the **Deccan** Plateau. Maharashtra is one of the "linguistic" states formed after Indian independence in 1947; these states were created to unite people with a common language and culture (in this case, Marathi) under one state government. It was formed in 1960 by splitting the former state of Bombay into the present states of **Gujarat** and Maharashtra. Bombay, the capital, is the financial and industrial center of modern India. The western regions are heavily industrialized; the eastern regions are more agricultural, dominated by sugar plantations. Historically, Maharashtra is the homeland of the **Marathas**, a group whose eighteenth-century empire stretched across much of northern India. The **Rashtriya Svayamsevak Sangh** and the **Shiv Sena**, two Hindu nationalist organizations that have both tried to influence Indian politics, were founded in Maharashtra. Along with its economic and political importance, the state contains many important historical, cultural, and religious sites. Historical and cultural sites include the rock-cut caves of **Ellora**, a UNESCO World Heritage Site; the Buddhist caves at Ajanta; and the cave temple at **Elephanta** in the Bombay harbor. Places of religious importance include the **Godavari** and **Bhima** rivers and their attendant sacred sites (**tirthas**); the sites associated with the saints of the **Varkari Panth** religious community, particularly the temple to the god **Vithoba** at **Pandharpur**; and three of the **jyotirlingas**, which are sites particularly holy to the god **Shiva**: **Bhimashankar**, **Ghrneshvar**, and **Tryambakeshvar**. For general information about Maharashtra and other regions of India, see Christine Nivin et al., *India*. 8th ed., Lonely Planet, 1998.

## Maharashtri

Southern Indian brahmins who make up one of the five southern **brahmin** communities (**Pancha Dravida**); the other four are **Gujarati**, **Karnata**, **Andhra**, and **Dravida**. As their name would indicate, the core region for Maharashtri brahmins is the modern state of **Maharashtra**. The Maharashtri brahmins are themselves divided into two subgroups: the **Chitpavan**, or Konkanastha brahmins, who live in the coastal regions, and the **Deshastha** brahmins, who live further inland in the **Deccan**.

## Maharishi Mahesh Yogi

(b. Mahesh Prasad Verma, 1911) Hindu teacher and founder of the religious technique known as **Transcendental Meditation** (TM). The Maharishi ("Great Sage") was trained as an engineer, but eventually renounced the world after meeting one of the **Shankaracharyas**, a name given to the most important modern Hindu religious leaders. He stayed with Shankaracharya for the next twelve years, in pursuit of spiritual knowledge. He established an **ashram** at **Rishikesh** but was relatively unknown until his association with the Beatles, the British musical group who came to India with him on pilgrimage. In the early 1970s, TM instructors traveled throughout American college campuses, touting the

physiological and spiritual benefits of meditation and providing people (for a fee) with a **mantra** or sacred sound that would bring them these benefits. According to TM proponents, meditation is also supposed to have pacific effects on the larger environment, and result in reduced crime, tension, and hatred. During this period Maharishi International University was established at the former Parsons College in Fairfield, Iowa, as a center to teach TM. In the late 1970s, Maharishi University instituted a program training people to develop the six classical **superhuman powers** (**siddhis**). Since then several disappointed patrons have won lawsuits against the organization.

## Mahasaraswati

In the *Devimahatmya*, the earliest and most important source for the mythology of the **Goddess**, the text describes this goddess in three different manifestations: Mahasaraswati, **Mahalakshmi**, and **Mahakali**. The opening story begins at the creation of the cosmos. As the god **Brahma** emerges from the lotus sprouting from the god **Vishnu's** navel, he is beset by two **demons** named **Madhu** and **Kaitabha**, who try to kill him. Brahma tries to elude the demons, but because Vishnu is fast asleep, overcome by the power of the Goddess, he cannot give Brahma any help. It is only when Brahma praises the Goddess that she leaves Vishnu, letting him awake. She then clouds the demons' minds so that they can be tricked (and killed) by Vishnu. In the pantheon, **Saraswati** is the goddess associated with art, learning, and culture—anything involving the life and activity of the intellectual and aesthetic faculties. Mahasaraswati is also connected with intellect, emphasizing her ability to control people's perceptions. For more information on Mahasaraswati and the goddesses of Hinduism, see David R. Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, 1986.

## Mahat

("great one") In the account of **evolution** found in the **Samkhya** philosophical school, mahat is the first evolutionary stage. It consists of the initial disturbance of **prakrti** (primal matter) transforming from its original state of equilibrium. Mahat is called the "great one" because prakrti remains unchanged. Mahat is also known as **buddhi**, the mental faculty for awareness, apperception, and decision making that is believed to be at the root of mental processes. The mental processes facilitated by buddhi spur the development of the next stage in the evolution, **ahamkar** or subjective consciousness, after which the division of the world into subjective and objective spheres proceeds.

## Mahavakya

("great utterance") Short statements from the speculative texts known as the **Upanishads**, called "great" because they reveal the true nature of reality and of the Self. One of the most famous mahavakya is **tat tvam asi** ("that thou art"), expressing the unity of the Self with **Brahman**. Other well known utterances are **ayamatma Brahman** ("This Self is Brahman"), **sarvam idam khalu Brahman** ("Truly, this universe is Brahman"), **aham brahmasmi** ("I am Brahman"), and **prajnanam Brahman** ("Knowledge is Brahman"). These great utterances are most important in the **leap philosophy** propounded by the philosopher **Sureshvara**. Leap philosophers believe that complete freedom is possible, but out of our immediate control, in that it cannot be gained by a precisely specified sequence of causes and effects. According to Sureshvara's understanding, when a person whose understanding has been purified hears one of these mahavakyas, the profound truth in the utterance brings the flash of insight that brings final liberation of the soul (**moksha**).

## Mahavidyas

A collective name for ten fierce and powerful manifestations of the **Goddess**. According to tradition, the goddess **Sati** assumes these forms one after another, in an attempt to persuade her husband, the god **Shiva**, to allow her to attend a **sacrifice** given by her father **Daksha**. These ten forms are all frightful and fearsome, even to Shiva, showing the ultimate superiority of the Goddess over Shiva. These ten forms are **Kali**, Tara, **Chinnamasta**, Bhuvaneshvari, Bagala, Dhumavati, Kamala, Matangi, Shodashi, and **Bhairavi**. Some of these forms, particularly Kali, have become important **deities** in their own right. For further information see David R. Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, 1986.

## Mahayuga

A unit of **cosmic time**. According to traditional Hindu reckoning, time has neither beginning nor end, but alternates between cycles of creation and activity, followed by cessation and quietude. Each of these cycles lasts for 4.32 billion years, with the active phase known as the **Day of Brahma**, and the quiet phase as the Night of Brahma. In one reckoning of cosmic time, the Day of Brahma is divided into one thousand mahayugas ("great cosmic ages"), each of which lasts for 4.32 million years. Each mahayuga is composed of four eras, named the **Krta Yuga**, **Treta Yuga**, **Dvapara Yuga**, and **Kali Yuga**. Each is shorter and more evil than its predecessor; by the end of the Kali Yuga, things have gotten so bad that the only solution is the destruction and recreation of the **earth**, at which time the next Krta Yuga begins.

## Mahendravarman

(r. 600–630) Ruler in southern India during the **Pallava dynasty**, when it was a stronghold of Tamil culture. According to tradition, Mahendravarman was born a Jain, but became a devotee (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva** under the influence of the poet-saint **Appar**. Mahendravarman was a cultured man and a patron of the arts, as well as the author of the play *Mattvavilasa* ("Sport of Drunkards"), which was popular throughout southern India. The rock-cut temples at **Mahabalipuram** were built during his reign. He fought with the surrounding monarchs, especially the **Chalukya** king **Pulakeshin II**; it was in battle with Pulakeshin's forces that Mahendravarman met his death.

## Mahesh

("Great Lord") Epithet of the god **Shiva**. See **Shiva**.

## Maheshvar

("Great Lord") Epithet of the god **Shiva**. See **Shiva**.

## Mahipati

(1715–1790) Writer and hagiographer of the devotional (**bhakti**) poet-saints, particularly those saints connected with the **Varkari Panth**, to which Mahipati himself belonged. The Varkari Panth is a religious community centered around the **worship** of the Hindu god **Vithoba**, whose temple at **Pandharpur** is in the modern state of **Maharashtra**. According to tradition, Mahipati was a civil servant in his home town. One day he was summoned to his job without being able to finish his daily worship. Mahipati did the business at hand, but then resigned his position, vowing never to use his pen except in the service of the saints. Mahipati freely admitted that much of his material on the saints was drawn from earlier works, particularly the *Bhaktamal* written by the poet-saint **Nabhadas**. As with Nabhadas, he presents each of his subjects as a paradigm of devotion; the stories reinforce and validate the power of devotion to overcome all obstacles. His major works are the *Bhaktavijaya* and the *Bhaktililamrta*; the former has been translated by Justin E. Abbott and Narhar R. Godbole as *Stories of Indian*

*Saints*, 1982; parts of the latter by Justin E. Abbott as *The Life of Eknath*, 1981, and *The Life of Tukaram*, 1980.

## Mahishasura

In the ***Devimahatmya***, the earliest and most important source for the mythology of the **Goddess**, Mahishasura is the buffalo-**demon** who is responsible for the birth of the Goddess. Mahishasura receives the boon that he cannot be killed by any male and is able to vanquish the gods. They are driven from their heavenly realm and take shelter in the mountains. While they are there, the assembly of the gods let forth their collected radiance (tejas), coalescing into the figure of the Goddess, who represents all their collected power. The Goddess rides off on a **lion** to challenge Mahishasura. He falls in love with her, but when he proposes marriage, she declares she will only marry the man who can defeat her in battle. A fierce battle ensues; Mahishasura is defeated. He tries to elude the Goddess by changing his form several times, but she keeps striking each one with her sword, finally killing him by cutting off his head.

## Mahishi

In Hindu mythology, the name of a buffalo-demoness killed by the god **Aiyappa**. Mahishi receives the boon that she can only be killed by a person not born from the union of male and female. To circumvent this boon, Aiyappa is born of a union of the gods **Shiva** and **Vishnu**, when the latter takes the form of the enchantress **Mohini**. When Mahishi is killed, the female figure of **Lila** rises from her body. Lila wants to marry Aiyappa; he agrees that he will marry her in the year a celibate pilgrim does not come to visit him at **Shabari Malai**. Since **women** of childbearing age are forbidden to visit Shabari Malai, and those men who come are required to be celibate, Lila is still waiting for this vow to be fulfilled.

## Mahishmati

Ancient city on the **Narmada River** in central India. During the fifth century B.C.E., Mahishmati was the outer boundary for the expansion of the **Aryan**.

## Mahmud of Ghazni

(998–1030) Turkish ruler whose capital was at Ghazni (now in modern Afghanistan). Between 1001 and 1027, Mahmud made seventeen raids into India, lured by the tales of India's fabulous wealth. His plundering was aided by the fragmented political life in northern India, which prevented Hindus from forming any effective opposition. Mahmud struck at many of the centers in northern India, particularly pilgrimage centers, which were renowned for their wealth: Multan, **Mathura**, **Thanesar**, **Kanauj** (which never recovered after being sacked in 1018), and finally **Somnath**, from which he reportedly took tremendous booty. Although these raids often entailed iconoclasm (the destruction of religious imagery), as at the **Shiva** temple in Somnath, Mahmud's fundamental motives were economic—replenishing his coffers with as much plunder as possible, and returning to Ghazni before the advent of the hot **season**. As such he is different from some of the later Muslim kings, such the Moghuls, who actually exercised political sway over much of India. Aside from his pillaging raids, Mahmud is associated with the scholar **Alberuni**. Alberuni accompanied Mahmud on one of these expeditions, later using his observations to write an account of Hindu life and culture. See also **Moghul dynasty**.

## Maithila

Northern Indian **brahmins** who make up **Pancha Gauda**, one of the five northern brahmin communities; the other four communities are **Kanaujia**, **Gauda**, **Utkala**, and **Saraswat**. Maithila brahmins are a small community, found only in the **Mithila** region in the northern

part of modern **Bihar**. Despite the community's size, Maithila brahmins are well known for their commitment to learning and culture, as exemplified by their most famous member, the poet **Vidyapati**.

## Maithuna

("copulation") In the secret ritually-based religious practice known as **tantra**, sexual intercourse is the fifth and last of the Five Forbidden Things (**panchamakara**); the panchamakara are used in their actual forms in "left hand" (**vamachara**) tantric ritual, whereas they are represented by symbolic substitutes in "right hand" (**dakshinachara**) tantric ritual. Many traditions in Hindu tantra describe ritualized sexual intercourse as a symbol of the ultimate union of the god **Shiva** and his wife **Shakti**. Ritual sexuality must be seen in the larger tantric context. One of the most pervasive tantric assumptions is the ultimate unity of everything that exists. From a tantric perspective, to affirm that the entire universe is one principle means that the adept must reject all concepts based on dualistic thinking. The "Five Forbidden Things" provide a ritual means for breaking down duality; in this ritual the adept breaks societal norms forbidding consumption of **intoxicants**, nonvegetarian food, and illicit sexuality in a conscious effort to sacralize what is normally forbidden. Tantric adepts cite such ritual use of forbidden things as proof that their practice involves a more exclusive qualification (**adhikara**), and is thus superior to common practice. In some forms of this ritual the woman is the initiate's wife, who is worshiped before intercourse as a manifestation of the **Goddess**. In other cases this ritual intercourse is portrayed as adulterous, usually with a woman of very low status, to magnify the social boundaries being transgressed. This latter practice is uncommon now, at least in southern India, where Brooks describes it as virtually

unknown. For further information see Arthur Avalon (Sir John Woodroffe), *Shakti and Shakta*, 1978; Swami Agehananda Bharati, *The Tantric Tradition*, 1972; and Douglas Renfrew Brooks, *The Secret of the Three Cities*, 1990.

## Makarasana
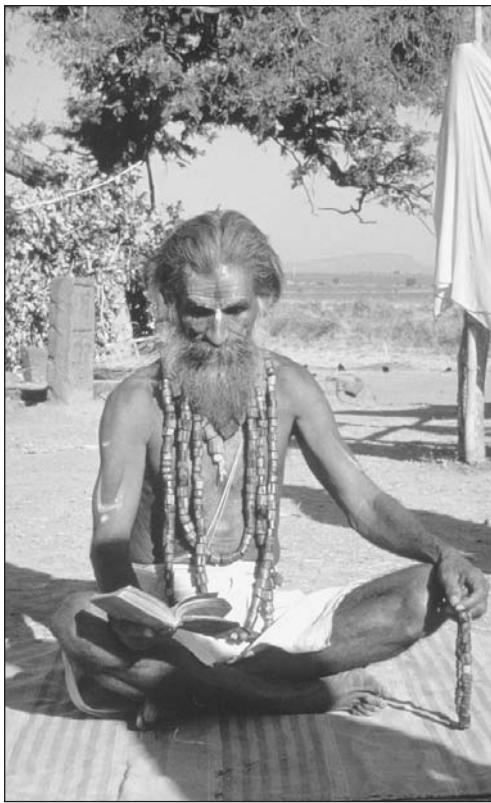
("crocodile seat") In Indian iconography, a base on which an image may be placed. The base is a figure of a crocodile, with a flat part on its back for the image.

## Makara Sankranti

Religious festival that falls on the day the sun makes the transition (**sankranti**) into the zodiacal sign of Capricorn (makara). According to Western astrology, this occurs around December 20, but in Indian astrology (**jyotisha**), this occurs on January 14. This is one of the few celebrations in the festival **year** marked by the solar rather than the lunar **calendar**. On Makara Sankranti, the sun is reckoned as beginning its "northward journey" (**uttarayana**). This will continue until **Karka Sankranti** six months later, when the sun enters Cancer, and begins its "southward journey" (**dakshinayana**). Since the uttarayana is believed to be more auspicious than its counterpart, the day marking this transition is deemed particularly auspicious. Makara Sankranti is primarily a bathing (**snana**) festival; great numbers of people come to bathe in rivers on that day, especially the **Ganges**. The largest bathing festival on the Ganges is at **Sagar** Island in state of **West Bengal** (also known as **Ganga Sagar**), celebrated as the place where the Ganges empties into the sea at the Bay of Bengal.

## Mala

("garland") This word denotes any sort of necklace. Garlands made of flowers are ubiquitous throughout India, both as **offerings** to a **deity**—around whose neck they are placed as adornment—or

Ascetic wearing a mala of sacred wooden beads.

given in the same way to any honored guest as a sign of welcome and respect. Garlands or necklaces made from more permanent materials are important pieces of religious paraphernalia, and in some cases carry clear sectarian associations. Many **Shaivas** wear malas made from **rudraksha** beads, an aniconic form of their patron deity, **Shiva**. In the same way, many **Vaishnavas** will wear a mala made from the wood of the **Tulsi** plant, since this plant is said to be a form of the **goddess Lakshmi**, the spouse of their patron deity **Vishnu**. Although these materials serve as sectarian markers, malas used for ritual purposes can be made from virtually any material. Most favored are substances such as amber, rock crystal, coral, semiprecious stones, and **gemstones**—materials which are durable, valuable, and not formed by human hands.

For ritual purposes, malas are used to keep count during **mantra** recitation (**japa**), by moving one bead through the finger and thumb with each recitation. Such malas are usually strung with 108 pieces. Each mala has one bead set apart from the others; mantra recitation always begins with this bead. This bead symbolizes Mount **Meru**, the mythical mountain that is the cosmic pivot supporting the entire created order. According to established practice, when one has reached the end of the mala and has come back to the Meru bead, one should reverse directions. By virtue of never passing over the Meru bead, one is thus symbolically circling Mount Meru as the center of the universe.

This connection with daily religious practice makes malas powerful religious objects, believed to be charged by their owners' spiritual energy. For this reason, malas are almost never exchanged— except for a mala given by a **guru** to a disciple. Most malas are touched only by the owner. People doing recitation will often keep the hand and mala concealed in a cloth bag (known as a gomukh or "**cow's** mouth"), as a barrier to potentially corrupting outside forces. The conviction that a mala absorbs its owner's spiritual energy also lies behind the taboo on repairing and reusing a broken mala. According to popular belief, a mala breaks because it gradually draws off its owner's negative spiritual forces. Once broken, a mala should therefore be discarded, to prevent the owner from coming back into contact with this potentially damaging energy.

## Malabar
Traditional name for the southern Indian coastal region bordering the Arabian sea, in the modern states of **Kerala** and **Karnataka**.

## Malamasa
("Impure month") An **intercalary month** inserted into the lunar **calendar** about every 2½ years, to correct the discrepancy between the lunar and the solar calendars. Although this month is necessary to maintain the

correspondence between the two calendars—and thus, for example, to keep the spring festivals in the spring—it is considered an unusual event, impure and ritually dangerous.

## Malatimadhava

Play written by the **Sanskrit** dramatist **Bhavabhuti** (early 8th c.), who was particularly noted for his ability to express and transmit the play of emotions through language. The play's general plot is the triumphant love between Malati and her beloved Madhava (an epithet of the god **Krishna**), despite numerous obstacles along the way. The drama is noted as an exquisite poetic work, but also because the primary villain is an evil **ascetic**, generally believed to be a member of the extinct ascetic sect known as **Kapalikas**. The Kapalikas were devotees (**bhakta**) of **Shiva**, emulating him in his wrathful form as **Bhairava**: wearing the hair long and matted, smearing the body with ash (preferably from the **cremation ground**), and bearing a club and a skull-bowl (**kapala**). The Kapilikas are cited as indulging in forbidden behavior—drinking wine, eating meat, using cannabis and other **drugs**, performing **human sacrifice**, and orgiastic sexuality—which made them feared. Bhavabhuti's description is one of the earliest references to **Shaiva asceticism**, and thus historically significant. The play has been translated into English by Michael Coulson and published in an anthology titled *Three Sanskrit Plays*, 1981.

## Mali

Traditional Indian society was a collection of **endogamous** subgroups (in which marriage is decreed by law to occur only between members of the same group) known as **jatis** ("birth"). The jatis were organized (and their social status determined) by the group's hereditary occupation, over which each group held a monopoly. In traditional northern Indian society, the Malis' hereditary occupation was tending gardens, growing flowers, and making flower garlands (**mala**).

## Mallikarjuna

Temple and sacred site (**tirtha**) on the holy mountain **Shrishaila** in **Andhra Pradesh**. The temple is named for its presiding **deity**, the god **Shiva** in his manifestation as the "[Lord] White as Jasmine." Shiva is present at Mallikarjuna in the form of a **linga**, a pillar-shaped image. The Mallikarjuna linga is one of the twelve **jyotirlingas**, a network of sites at which Shiva is uniquely present. Mallikarjuna's charter myth is based on a competition between Shiva's two sons, **Ganesh** and **Skanda**, who agree that the first one to circle the earth will be the first one to be married. Skanda mounts his **peacock** and takes off, sure that he is faster. Ganesh, however, simply walks around Shiva and his wife **Parvati**, as a symbol that they are the entire universe. When Skanda returns, he is very angry to discover that he has been beaten. He leaves **Kailas**, the Himalayan mountain believed to be Shiva's abode, and goes to southern India. Parvati is very upset at the absence of her son, but none of the envoys they send can persuade Skanda to return. Finally, Shiva and Parvati go themselves, landing on Shrishaila mountain. Skanda has already departed for a nearby mountain. Before following after him, his parents consecrate the first site as Mallikarjuna.

As with all the jyotirlingas, Mallikarjuna is deemed a very powerful site. Worshiping this jyotirlinga is said to bring the increase of wealth, freedom from disease, well-being, and any other desired end. The site itself is a difficult place to reach, deep in the jungle on the top of Shrishaila mountain. For this reason, the major festival celebrated here is **Shivaratri**, the most important festival to Shiva during the entire year, when devotees (**bhakta**) come and stay for several days.

## Mallinatha

(14th c.?) **Sanskrit** scholar and commentator noted for his commentaries on the plays written by the poet **Kalidasa** (5th c.?); these commentaries have become sources for interpreting the texts. Although the subject of his commentary was largely "secular" poetry, Mallinatha himself was a Jain, and may have been a monk. His work illustrates the important role that the Jains played in the preservation of Indian literary culture. In addition to their commentaries, they copied and recopied the manuscripts, a never-ending task due to the fragile nature of the **palm leaves** on which they were written.

## Malviya, Madan Mohan

(1861–1946) Hindu activist and founder of **Benares Hindu University**. Malviya belonged to the first generation of Hindus seeking to reclaim India from British rule; these men were well educated, politically active, and passionately committed to traditional Hindu culture. Benares Hindu University was founded in 1916 to uphold Hindu cultural and philosophical traditions, as well as to educate students in the sciences, preparing them for the modern world. Aside from his work in education, Malviya organized and supported Hindu religious causes, in particular a ban on **cow slaughter** and opposition to a proposed dam on the **Ganges** River at the pilgrimage city of **Haridwar**. The dam would have restricted the free flow of the Ganges, so in 1914 and 1916, he spent considerable energy organizing opposition so that a compromise with the government could be found. For a glowing account of his life, see M. A. Parmanand, *Mahamana Madan Mohan Malviya*, 1985.

## Malwa

Traditional name for the plateau in **Madhya Pradesh** centered around the city of **Ujjain**, the region's traditional capital. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Malwa region was one of the centers for the **Rajasthani** school of **miniature painting**. The Rajasthani style is generally characterized by a flat perspective. Visual power is derived from bands of vivid colors that often serve as a backdrop to the painting.

## Mamsa

("meat") In the secret ritually-based religious practice known as **tantra**, meat is the third of the Five Forbidden Things (**panchamakara**); the panchamakara are used in their actual forms in "left hand" (**vamachara**) tantric ritual, whereas they are represented by symbolic substitutes in "right hand" (**dakshinachara**) tantric ritual. "Respectable" Hindu society strongly condemns the consumption of nonvegetarian food; its ritual use therefore must be seen in the larger tantric context. One of the most pervasive tantric assumptions is the ultimate unity of everything that exists. From a tantric perspective, to affirm that the entire universe is one principle means that the adept must reject all concepts based on dualistic thinking. The "Five Forbidden Things" provide a ritual means for breaking down duality; in this ritual the adept breaks societal norms forbidding consumption of **intoxicants**, nonvegetarian food, and illicit sexuality in a conscious effort to sacralize what is normally forbidden. Tantric adepts cite such ritual use of forbidden things as proof that their practice involves a more exclusive qualification (**adhikara**), and is thus superior to common practice. For further information see Arthur Avalon (Sir John Woodroffe) *Shakti and Shakta,* 1978; Swami Agehananda Bharati, *The Tantric Tradition*, 1977; and Douglas R. Brooks, *The Secret of the Three Cities*, 1990.

## Manas

("mind") In the metaphysics of the **Samkhya** school, one of the **six schools**

Pilgrims circling Mt. Kailas traditionally begin the journey with a bath at Manasarovar.

of Hindu **philosophy**, manas is one of the stages in the devolution of **prakrti** (primal matter), resulting in the world that we see around us, in which human souls are subject to reincarnation (**samsara**). Manas evolves from the step known as **ahamkar**—the stage marked by the first sense of Self and subjectivity. The mind (manas) develops as the source of intellectual activity which, colored by this feeling of subjectivity, creates the notion of an individual identity. According to the Samkhyas, concurrent with this mental identity comes the development of the individual's sense organs (**jnanendriyas**) and the organs of action (**karmendriyas**), as well as the subtle elements (**tanmatras**) that are the source for the world's material objects. Although later philosophical schools largely rejected Samkhya **cosmology**, manas became generally accepted as one of the five human sense organs. As the eye perceives sight and the ears perceive sound, the manas perceives mental objects (ideas), allowing the subject to experience them.
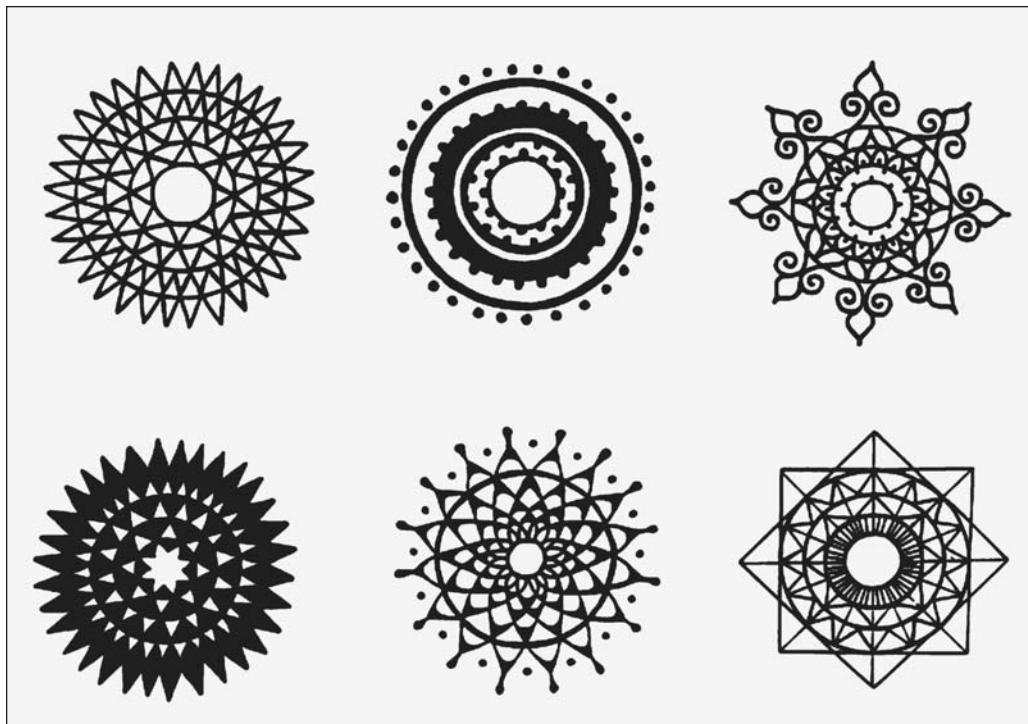
## Manasa

Manasa is a regional goddess considered to be a form of the **Goddess**. She is worshiped mainly in eastern India, and is primarily associated with snakes and snakebites. As with **Shitala**, the goddess, whose divine presence was considered to be revealed by infection with smallpox, Manasa's divine presence comes violently with snakebites, considered a form of divine **possession**. This conception shows the ambivalent nature of many regional goddesses who are both powerful and dangerous. When Manasa appears, it is always traumatic, and sometimes tragic; such is the nature of human interactions with divinity. Manasa is worshiped both to keep people free from snakebites—a very real concern in an agricultural country with highly venomous snakes—or for the recovery of a person who has been bitten. Her **worship** is marked by annual festivals at which people sing songs in her honor, and which are often marked by divine possession and snake-handling.

## Manasarovar

Lake and sacred site (**tirtha**) close to the base of Mount **Kailas** in Tibet. Pilgrims walking around Mt. Kailas traditionally begin their circuit with a bath in the lake before proceeding to the mountain. The lake is traditionally thought to be one of the **Shakti Pithas**, a network of sites

Mandalas can be depicted as complex concentric designs.

sacred to the **Goddess** that spreads throughout the subcontinent. Each Shakti Pitha marks the site where a body part of the dismembered goddess, **Sati**, fell to earth, taking form there as a different goddess; Manasarovar was the palm of Sati's right hand. See also **pitha**.

## Manava Dharma Shastra

Another name for the text on religious duty (**dharma**) and social order ascribed to the mythical sage **Manu**. See *Manu Smrti*.

## Mandakini River

Himalayan tributary of the **Ganges** River, which joins with the **Alakananda River** at the hill town of **Rudraprayag** in the state of **Uttar Pradesh**. As with all the Himalayan tributaries of the Ganges, the **Mandakini** is considered sacred. Important pilgrimage places (**tirtha**) along it include **Kedarnath**, which is at its headwaters, **Guptakashi**, and Rudraprayag.

## Mandala

("circle") As with many **Sanskrit** terms, a word with different meanings in different contexts. In the context of geography it can imply a region, as in the case of the **Braj** region, known as the Braj Mandala. In the context of the **ras lila**, the circle **dance** between the god **Krishna** and his devotees (**bhakta**), mandala refers to the group of devotees as well as to the shape of the dance itself. By extension, mandala can refer to any group of people, although it carries the connotation of people who have gathered for some serious religious purpose. In the context of the secret ritually-based religious practice known as **tantra**, mandala refers to a symbolic diagram used as an aid to meditation, as a ritual accessory, or as a symbolic road map of the spiritual quest. In this context, mandala is more characteristic of Buddhist tantra, with Hindu **tantrikas** more frequently using the terms **yantra** and **chakra**.

## Mandaleshvar

("Lord of the Region") Term of respect for the ascetics chosen to head the **Naga** class of the **Dashanami Sanyasis** in their disputations with Christian missionaries. The Dashanami Nagas are groups of renunciant ascetics who are devotees (**bhakta**) of **Shiva** and who formerly made their living as traders and mercenary soldiers. Their rough-and-ready qualities made them effective soldiers but gave them little preparation for formal argument. The Mandaleshvars were chosen by the Nagas from among the more learned **Paramahamsa** ascetics, providing a more coherent and telling opposition to Christian missionaries. An **ascetic** who becomes a Mandaleshvar becomes the spiritual adviser and the teacher of the Dashanami Naga members of the **akhara**, who deem him a spiritual preceptor as much as their own gurus.

## Mandana Mishra

(early 9th c.) Founder of the **Bhamati** school of **Advaita Vedanta**, who is traditionally held to be a contemporary of **Shankaracharya**, the Advaita school's greatest figure. The Advaita school upholds a philosophical theory known as monism—the belief that a single Ultimate Reality lies behind all things, which are merely differing forms of that reality. Advaita proponents claim that reality is non-dual (advaita)—all things are nothing but the formless, unqualified **Brahman** (the highest reality in the universe), despite the appearance of difference and diversity. For the Advaitins, the assumption of diversity is a fundamental misunderstanding of the ultimate nature of things, a manifestation of **avidya**. Although often translated as "ignorance," avidya is better understood as the lack of genuine understanding that ultimately causes human beings to be trapped in karmic bondage, reincarnation (**samsara**), and suffering.
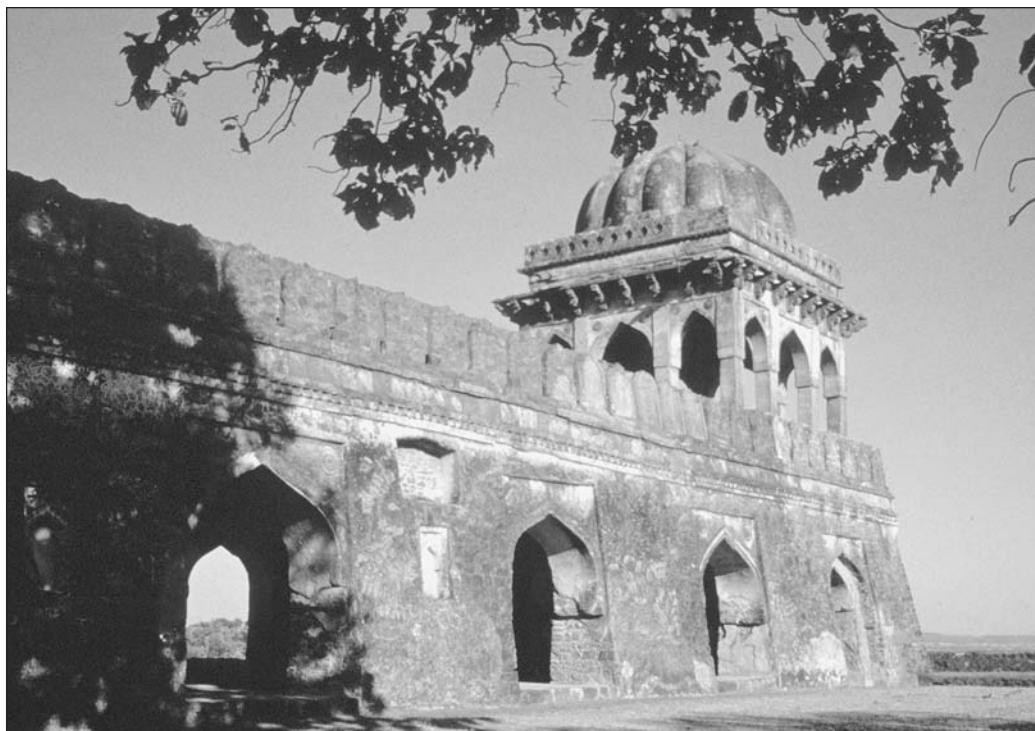
Mandana suggests the vivarta ("illusory manifestation") causal relationship to show how the unchanging Brahman is connected with the world as it is perceived. The concept of superimposition (**adhyasa**) shows how humans project a mistaken understanding onto the correct understanding. For example, a piece of rope is mistaken for a snake. Although this judgment is erroneous, one is actually perceiving something real, in this case the rope, but "superimposing" a different and mistaken identity on it, thus "transforming" it into something it is not. In the same way, it is argued, human consciousness begins with the existent reality (Brahman), which is actually there, but superimposes onto it something which is not (the judgment of a diverse world).

Mandana also differed from Shankaracharya on several points, posing problems for his later followers. One of these judgments was that the locus of ignorance was in the Self, since it was absurd to conceive of Brahman as subject to ignorance; another was that there were multiple Selves, since the liberation of one person did not cause the liberation of all. Mandana's comments presuppose the existence of a common (if illusory) world, upon which he felt called to render a judgment; he ended up describing it as anirvachaniya—"that which cannot be described." In his analysis, Mandana also distinguished between two kinds of ignorance—a primal "covering" that keeps one from perceiving the truth, and a "projective" ignorance through which human beings actively obscure things.

## Mandapa

("pavilion") The mandapa is an architectural feature found in the **Khajuraho** variation of the **Nagara** architectural style. Usually found in northern India, the Nagara style emphasizes verticality, with the whole temple building culminating in a single highest point. In the Khajuraho style, the entire structure gradually leads up to the central tower, as foothills lead up to the mountains, with the peak of this central tower directly over the temple's primary

Rupmati's Pavilion, Mandu.

image. In this style, the mandapa is the name for a hall of the temple that is usually between the entrance hall (**ardhaman-dapa**) and the main hall (**mahamandapa**).

## Mandara

In Hindu mythology, the name of a sacred mountain where the minor god **Kubera** and his court reside. In the myth of the **Tortoise avatar**, Mount Mandara is identified as the churning-stick used to churn the ocean of milk (the mountain's tremendous size makes it an effective churn).

## Mandir

("home") In northern India, the most common name for a temple in which the image of a **deity** has been installed and consecrated for **worship**. Although such temples often have facilities for congregational worship, social life, or cultural events, the building's primary function is to serve as the home for the deities assembled there and considered the temple's real owners.

## Mandodari

In the ***Ramayana***, the earlier of the two great Indian epics, Mandodari is the wife of the **demon**-king **Ravana**, and the mother of **Indrajit**, **Atikaya** and **Akshakumara**. Despite being a loving and loyal wife to Ravana, Mandodari continually advises him that he has done wrong in kidnapping **Rama's** wife **Sita**. She pleads with him to come to terms with Rama before it becomes necessary to fight. Ravana refuses to do so, because of his pride and his deter-mination to avenge the insult to his sister **Shurpanakha**, who has been mutilated by Rama's brother **Lakshmana**. In the end, this stubbornness costs Ravana his life.

## Mandu

Hilltop fort in southwestern **Madhya Pradesh**, about seventy miles south of Indore. Although Mandu is deserted today, it was the capital of a small king-dom until the sixteenth century, and was eventually assimilated into the Moghul empire as a vassal state. During

the early seventeenth century Mandu was one of the important centers for the **Rajasthani** style of **miniature painting**. The Rajasthani style is generally characterized by a flat perspective. Visual power is derived from bands of vivid colors that serve as a backdrop to the painting. See also **Moghul dynasty**.

## Mandukya Upanishad

One of the speculative religious texts known as the **Upanishads**, which form the latest stratum of the **Vedas**, the oldest Hindu sacred texts. The Mandukya Upanishad's underlying concern is to investigate ultimate questions, in particular the nature of the Self (**atman**). The Mandukya Upanishad is generally considered one of the latest upanishads, based on its brevity—a mere twelve verses—and on its concise articulation of philosophical monism. The first verse praises the sound *Om*, calling it the essence of the entire universe. The second verse identifies the world with **Brahman**, the Self (**atman**) with Brahman, and characterizes the Self as having four quarters. The succeeding verses describe the four quarters of the Self, each of which removes another layer of egoism: The first layer is described as waking consciousness, characterized by perceptions of subject and object; the next is **dream** sleep, which is sheer subjectivity; then deep sleep, which has neither subject nor object; and finally a mysterious state simply called "the fourth" (**turiya**), which is the Self itself.

Further verses identify these first three states as corresponding to the three parts of the sound *Om*: the vowels "a" and "u" (which combine to form the vowel "o"), and the letter "m." The fourth state is said to be "beyond all letters" and without duality. The upanishad explicitly states that to know this brings one final liberation, in which one spontaneously merges with the Self.

## Mangalam

("auspicious") Term whose root meaning can be applied to anything believed to bring good fortune: a benedictory formula, a favorable **omen** or portent, an auspicious ceremony such as marriage. It may apply to an object, such as the **mangal sutra**, a necklace worn by married **women** primarily in southern India as a sign that they are married and that their husbands are still living.

## Mangal Sutra

("auspicious thread") Symbol worn by married **women** primarily in southern India indicating their married status. Married women are considered to be inherently **auspicious**, since their potential generative power can be expressed through socially sanctioned procreation. Accounts from several centuries ago describe this symbol as a simple thread, often colored yellow with turmeric; in contemporary times the mangal sutra is often an elaborate necklace. Wearing a mangal sutra indicates that a woman has a living husband, thus she is a vessel of auspicious qualities. For these reasons, a woman must remove her mangal sutra upon being widowed, as she must remove all the other symbols of marriage.

## Manikarnika

("Jeweled earring") Sacred site (**tirtha**) in the city of **Benares** on the **Ganges** River in the state of **Uttar Pradesh**. The site takes its name from the Manikarnika Kund, a bathing (**snana**) tank supposedly dug by the god **Vishnu**, and into which fell an earring of the god **Shiva**, thus sanctifying the tank by its presence. In modern times the site is better known for the **cremation ground** at Manikarnika **Ghat**. In most Indian cities the cremation ground lies at the margin of the settlement, since its association with death makes it an inauspicious place. However, the Manikarnika cremation ground is in the center of Benares. Despite the normal human

desire to ignore and to deny the reality of death, in Benares it is paraded in full view—not to distress or depress people, but to make them confront this reality. Awareness of death has traditionally been considered a great spur to religious life. Since Benares is also one of the **Seven Sacred Cities**, death within the city also carries the hope of ultimate liberation.

## Manikkavachakar

(9th c.) Tamil poet-saint who was a devotee (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva** and the author of the *Tiruvachakam* ("holy utterances"). He is considered the fourth great figure in the Tamil Shaivite tradition, along with the **Nayanar** poet-saints, **Appar**, **Sambandar**, and **Sundaramurtti**. Manikkavachakar's hymns bear witness to the intensity of his individual religious experience and are seen as the culmination of the earlier devotional (**bhakti**) tradition. These hymns are also the basis for the development of the **Shaiva Siddhanta** philosophical school, making him a pivotal figure in southern Indian Shaivism. For further information see Glenn Yocum, *Hymns to the Dancing Siva*, 1982.

## Manimegalai

**Tamil epic** poem which was written as a sequel to "The Jeweled Anklet" (*Shilappadigaram*), connecting its characters with those of the earlier play. The story focuses on a young woman named Manimegalai who, although wooed by the local prince, becomes a Buddhist nun. Manimegalai has numerous debates with people from competing religious traditions, thus giving a picture of sixth century southern Indian religious life.

## Manipura Chakra

In many schools of **yoga**, and in the secret ritually-based religious practice known as **tantra**, the manipura chakra is one of the six psychic centers (**chakras**) believed to exist in the **subtle body**. The subtle body is an alternate physiological system, existing on a different plane of reality than gross matter, but corresponding to the material body. The six psychic centers are visualized as multipetaled lotus flowers running roughly along the spine, connected by three vertical channels. Each of the chakras has symbolic associations with various human capacities, different subtle elements (**tanmatras**), and different seed syllables (**bijaksharas**) formed from the letters of the **Sanskrit** alphabet, encompassing all sacred sound. Above and below these centers are the bodily abodes of **Shiva** (awareness) and **Shakti** (power), the two divine principles through which the entire universe has come into being. The underlying assumption behind the concept of the subtle body is the homology of macrocosm and microcosm, an essential Hindu idea since the time of the mystical texts known as the **Upanishads**.

The six chakras are traditionally enumerated starting from the bottom; the manipura chakra is the third. It is visualized as a ten-petaled lotus, located in the region of the navel. The petals each contain a seed, in this case the consonants from retroflex "dha" to "pha." The manipura chakra is identified as the bodily seat for the subtle element of **fire**, the power of which is believed to bring about digestion. For further information see Arthur Avalon (Sir John Woodroffe), *Shakti and Shakta*, 1978; and Philip S. Rawson, *The Art of Tantra*, 1973.

## Manipuri

One of the classical **dance** forms of India; some of the others are **Bharatanatyam**, **Orissi**, **Kuchipudi**, **Kathak**, and **Kathakali**. Like much of traditional Indian culture, classical dance shows strong regional identification; Manipuri is found only in the state of Manipur, nestled between Burma and **Assam** in eastern India. Developed in the eighteenth century, Manipuri reflects the importance of **Vaishnava** devotionalism. One of the principal

dance genres involves acting out episodes from the life of the god **Krishna**, especially the **Ras lila** and his dalliance with his lover **Radha**. In other genres dancers play a two-headed drum or cymbals, leaping dramatically during the performance. This form has roots in devotional Vaishnavism, particularly the ecstatic singing and dancing associated with the **Gaudiya Vaishnava** community in Bengal. For further information see Mohan Khokar, *Traditions of Indian Classical Dance*, 1984.

## Man Lila

A divine play (**lila**) between **Krishna** and his devotees (**bhakta**). In this lila, one of Krishna's female companions feigns wounded pride (man), usually because he makes some sort of error, such as calling her by another woman's name. For some time she pretends to be angry, but is eventually won over by his charm and undivided attention. This motif of a woman feigning anger—to make her lover flatter and fawn over her, and to sweeten the joy of the eventual reconciliation—has a venerable history in **Sanskrit** poetry. In modern times, this lila is often presented in devotional theatrical presentations, which are themselves known as lilas ("plays"), since their function is to reveal the work of the divine.

## Man-Lion Avatar

Fourth **avatar** or incarnation of the god **Vishnu**; the man-lion's form is usually rendered as the head and shoulders of a **lion**, and the torso and legs of a man. As with all the avatars of Vishnu, the Man-Lion avatar comes to restore the cosmic balance, which has been thrown out of equilibrium by the disproportionate power of some individual. In this case the source of trouble is the **demon**-king **Hiranyakashipu**, who by the power of his **asceticism** (**tapas**) has gained three boons from the gods: that he cannot be killed by man nor beast, by day or by night, and neither inside nor outdoors.



Portrait of the god Vishnu's Man-Lion avatar. Vishnu takes this form to defeat a demon who has conquered heaven and earth.

These boons render him virtually invulnerable; Hiranyakashipu proceeds to conquer the earth and drive the gods from **heaven**. He oppresses his son **Prahlada**, who despite his father's power remains a sincere devotee (**bhakta**) of Vishnu. The more devotion Prahlada shows to Vishnu the more abuse his father gives him, until finally Hiranyakashipu, maddened at the thought that someone refuses to **worship** him, is at the point of killing Prahlada.

Prahlada calls on Vishnu for help, and the Man-Lion, a being which is neither man nor beast, bursts forth from a pillar in the palace. The Man-Lion seizes Hiranyakashipu in the palace doorway, which is neither inside nor out, at twilight, which is neither day nor night, and uses his sharp claws to tear out the demon's entrails, killing him. Once Hiranyakashipu has been killed, Vishnu installs the righteous Prahlada as the king of the realm. This action reveals an important truth about the Hindu view of reality. Although Prahlada is a "demon" (asura), he is not inherently evil, nor is he simply a being to be exterminated. All kinds of beings have their rightful place in the Hindu cosmos—problems

come when they gain disproportionate power and use it to their own ends.

## Manmatha

("churning the mind") Epithet of the **Krishna**, reflecting his ability to bewitch and beguile his devotees (**bhakta**). See **Krishna**.

## Mansa Devi

Presiding **deity** in the village of Manimajara, located in the **Shiwalik Hills**, a short distance from Chandigarh, and one of the nine **Shiwalik goddesses**. According to local tradition, this is one of the **Shakti Pithas**, a network of sites sacred to the **Goddess** that spreads throughout the subcontinent. Each Shakti Pitha marks the site where a body part of the dismembered goddess **Sati** fell to **earth**, taking form there as a different goddess; Mansa Devi was Sati's head. The word *mansa* means "wish," and it is claimed that Mansa Devi will grant whatever wish the devotee (**bhakta**) brings to her. There is another temple of Mansa Devi on the hill above the bathing (**snana**) ghats in the sacred city of **Haridwar**; here, too, the officiants claim that the presiding deity will fulfill all one's wishes.

The charter myth for the Manimajara Mansa Devi, set in the time of the Moghul emperor **Akbar**, illustrates her power and concern for her devotees. Akbar appoints a **Rajput** chieftain to manage the land around Manimajara. One year the chieftain is unable to pay his taxes because bad weather has ruined the crops. The chieftain is put in prison, but his plight moves one of Mansa Devi's devotees, who implores her to intervene in his behalf. The chieftain is released and the taxes waived; when the chieftain discovers how this has happened, he is so grateful that he erects a temple in honor of the goddess. See also **pitha** and **Moghul dynasty**.

## Manthara

In the ***Ramayana***, the earlier of the two great Indian epics, Manthara is the hunchbacked maid of King **Dasharatha's** wife, **Kaikeyi**. Manthara's whisperings against Dasharatha's son **Rama**, the god-king who is the epic's protagonist, slowly poisons Kaikeyi's mind. She succeeds in convincing the queen that after Rama has been crowned Dasharatha's heir, she and her son **Bharata** will be little better than slaves, if they are allowed to live at all. Goaded by Manthara, Kaikeyi decides to demand two boons Dasharatha gave her years before. With the first boon she dictates that Rama be sent in exile to the forest for fourteen years, and with the second she stipulates that her son Bharata be crowned heir in Rama's place.

The epic's oldest version, the *Ramayana* of **Valmiki**, paints Manthara as a genuine villain. There is little explanation for her actions, although given the belief in **karma**, her physical disabilities would have been seen as revealing moral and spiritual deformity as well. In the *Ramayana,* written by the poet-saint **Tulsidas** (1532–1623?), Manthara's behavior is ultimately attributed to the gods who send the **goddess Saraswati** to confound Manthara's mind, setting in motion the chain of events leading to the **demon Ravana's** death. In typical fashion, Tulsidas puts a more charitable spin on the event, relating it to Rama's ultimate purpose for being born on earth.

## Mantra

In its most basic sense, sacred sound. A mantra is a collection of phonemes that may or may not have syntactic meaning as actual words, since their importance comes not from the meaning of the utterances, but from the very sounds themselves. Mantras are believed to confer power and varying spiritual capacities on those who have been given the qualification (**adhikara**) to use them. The qualification comes from

being given the mantra by one's teacher, believed to transmit not only the sounds of the mantra, but the power associated with it. This living transmission is considered an essential feature in "possessing" the mantra; for this reason mantras learned in other contexts are believed to be ineffective. The idea of mantra as sacred sound is traced back to the **Vedas**, the oldest Hindu religious texts. One of the most common mantras, the **Gayatri** mantra, is actually a verse from the **Rg Veda** (3.62.10). The use of mantras is emphasized in the secret ritually-based religious practice known as **tantra**. For further information see Arthur Avalon (Sir John Woodroffe), *Shakti and Shakta*, 1978; Swami Agehananda Bharati, *The Tantric Tradition*, 1977; and Douglas Renfrew Brooks, *The Secret of the Three Cities*, 1990.

## Mantraraja

("king of mantras") Name given to a particular eight-syllable **mantra** associated with the god **Vishnu**, in which he is addressed as **Narayana**. The mantra itself is "**Om** Namo Narayana" ("Om, homage to Narayana"). This mantra is particularly important in the **Shrivaishnava** religious community, which developed in southern India in the twelfth century. The mantra is especially associated with the community's founder, **Ramanuja**. Faithful recitation of this mantra is said to bestow residence in Vishnu's heavenly abode, **Vaikuntha**.

## Mantrashastra

The name for the body of learning that focuses on **mantras** or sacred formulae: their classification, meaning, and use. Some of this learning exists in textual form, but given the secret nature of the subject matter, and the traditional insistence on oral, personal transmission from a religious teacher, much exists only in oral form.

## Manu

In Hindu mythology, the Manus are fourteen semidivine kings, perceived as the progenitors of the human race and rulers over the universe. According to traditional belief, time has neither beginning nor end but alternates between cycles of **creation** and activity, followed by cessation and quietude. Each of these cycles lasts for 4.32 billion years; the active phase is known as the **Day of Brahma**; the quiet phase is known as the Night of Brahma. In one instance of **cosmic time**, each Day of Brahma is divided into fourteen equal periods, each ruled by one of the fourteen Manus.

## Manu Smrti

("Laws of **Manu**") One of the **smrtis** or "remembered" texts, a class of literature deemed important, but less authoritative than the **shrutis** or "heard" texts. This smrti is ascribed to the sage Manu and is an example of one of the **Dharma Shastras**—manuals prescribing rules for correct human behavior and ideal social life. The Dharma Shastras are usually ascribed to mythic sages, reinforcing the authority of these texts. Manu's text is by far the most influential of the Dharma Shastras and is believed to have been composed just before the beginning of the common era.

Manu's text shows the break between the **Dharma Sutras** and the Dharma Shastras, for it is plainly intended as a blueprint for an entire society, rather than a set of rules for a particular **brahmin** group. The introductory chapter details the **creation** of the world and the consequent social order; the chapter ends by summarizing the rest of the volume's contents. The next five chapters focus on the four major social groups (**varnas**) and the four **stages of life** (ashramas), using material from the Dharma Sutras.

Manu's themes in chapters seven through nine sharply diverge from earlier sources. Chapter seven defines the duties of a king. Chapters eight and nine

treat various legal matters that might come before the king for adjudication. Manu attempts to put all of these under eighteen thematic headings. The material in these chapters encompasses all manner of criminal and civil law, from assault and theft to contract law and marital duties laying down a legal framework for the stable governance of society.

The remaining chapters are less original. The tenth chapter discusses occupations that members of the different varnas may follow in times of distress (**apaddharma**), when normal social rules no longer apply. The eleventh talks about gifts to brahmins and rites of expiation (**prayashchitta**), remaining faithful to the Dharma Sutras. Manu's final chapter has a more abstract and speculative nature, focusing on the workings of **karma** and describing the consequences of various good and evil acts. The text has been translated numerous times; see Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty and Brian K. Smith, *The Laws of Manu*, 1991.

## Manvantara

Manvantara is the name of an era in one instance of **cosmic time**. According to traditional belief, time has neither beginning nor end but alternates between cycles of creation and activity, followed by cessation and quietude. Each of these cycles lasts for 4.32 billion years; the active phase is known as the **Day of Brahma** and the quiet phase is known as the Night of Brahma. In one instance of cosmic time, each Day of Brahma is divided into fourteen equal periods, each ruled by one of the fourteen Manus. Manus are celebrated as the sovereigns of the **earth** and are perceived as semidivine beings who are the progenitors of the human race. Currently we are living in the seventh age, with seven yet to come. The **Manu** of this present age, Vaivasvata, was saved from **pralaya** (universal destruction) by **Vishnu** in his form as the **Fish avatar**. Vaivasvata is

regarded as the progenitor of the **Solar Line** of Kings.

## Maranashaucha

The ritual impurity (**ashaucha**) caused by death (marana). All bodily effluvia (**hair**, spittle, pus, **blood**, etc.) are considered to be sources of impurity, but a **corpse** is the most impure thing of all. Any death immediately causes the most violent impurity, affecting the entire family. For the family's safety, this impurity must be carefully contained and managed through the funeral rites (**antyeshthi samskara**). Here one sees the significant ritual difference between **birth** and death. Although birth also brings impurity (**sutakashaucha**) on the family, because of the bodily products attending it, this impurity is considered less violent, because the birth of a child is an auspicious, life-affirming event. Death, on the other hand, is seen as bringing bad fortune, and thus the family must not only take care of this impurity, but must also get rid of the **inauspiciousness** caused by the death.

## Maratha

Traditional Indian society was a collection of **endogamous** subgroups (in which marriage is decreed by law to occur only between members of the same group) known as **jatis**. Jatis were organized (and their social status determined) by the group's hereditary occupation, over which each group held a monopoly. The Maratha jati was one of the dominant landholding communities in the **Maharashtra** region, along with the **Kunbis**. They were most concentrated on the Konkan coast and the inland region around the city of Pune. The Marathas were tough peasant farmers who by the middle of the eighteenth century had forged a large but short-lived empire, the Maratha confederacy, extending over much of northern and central India. By the latter part of the eighteenth century, the confederacy had fragmented into various smaller states.

## Maratha Dynasty

(17th–19th c.) Central Indian dynasty in the region of the western state of **Maharashtra**, particularly along the Konkan coast of the Arabian Sea. The dynasty was founded by the Maratha chieftain **Shivaji**, who spent most of his life locked in a bitter struggle with the Moghul empire. At Shivaji's death in 1680, the Marathas controlled only a small strip of land in western Maharashtra. After the death of the Moghul emperor **Aurangzeb** in 1707, the Moghul empire began to disintegrate; the Marathas filled the political vacuum. At its peak in the mid-1700s, the Maratha Confederacy controlled northern and central India from coast to coast, stretching as far north as Delhi and the **Ganges** River basin. Expansionism was halted in 1761, when the Maratha army was defeated by the Afghans at Panipat in the state of **Haryana**, a short distance north of Delhi. Both groups of combatants sustained major losses in the battle, rendering them unable to contest the arrival of the British. A little more than a decade later, the Maratha Confederacy had fragmented into constituent states, each with its own capital. Of these, the Bhonsle dynasty had its capital in the city of **Nagpur**, the Holkar dynasty had its capital in the city of Indore, the Gaikwad dynasty had its capital in the city of Baroda. The Scindia dynasty had capitals in Gwalior and **Ujjain**, while the **Peshwa** dynasty had its capital in Pune. All except for the last survived as princely states until Indian independence in 1947. See also **Moghul dynasty**.

## Margali

Ninth month in the Tamil solar **year**, corresponding to the northern Indian solar month of Dhanush (the zodiacal sign of Sagittarius), usually falling within December and January. The existence of several different calendars is one clear sign of the continuing importance of regional cultural patterns. One way that the Tamils retain their culture is by preserving their traditional **calendar**. Tamil is one of the few regional languages in India with an ancient, well-established literary tradition. See also **Tamil months**, **Tamil Nadu**, and **Tamil language**.

## Margashirsha

According to the lunar **calendar**, by which most Hindu religious festivals are determined, Margashirsha is the ninth month in the lunar **year**, usually falling within November and December. Margashirsha is generally considered an inauspicious month; the only major festivals in Margashirsha are **Bhairava Jayanti**, **Utpanna Ekadashi**, and **Mokshada Ekadashi**.

## Maricha

In the **_Ramayana_**, the earlier of the two great Indian epics, Maricha is the uncle of **Ravana**, the **demon**-king of **Lanka** who is the epic's antagonist. After Ravana's sister **Shurpanakha** has been insulted and mutilated by **Rama** and **Lakshmana**, the epic's protagonists, Ravana decides to take revenge by abducting Rama's wife, **Sita**. He enlists Maricha's help to kidnap Sita. Maricha takes the form of a golden **deer**. When Sita sees the deer, she asks Rama to kill it for her. Rama pursues the deer into the forest, giving **Lakshmana** strict instructions to stay with Sita no matter what happens. Rama pursues the deer some distance from their home and finally gets close enough to shoot it.

With his dying breath, Maricha cries out Lakshmana's name in a voice that sounds like Rama's, intending to draw Lakshmana away and leave Sita unprotected. Given his orders, Lakshmana is at first unwilling to leave. He finally leaves when Sita, in an uncharacteristic display of suspicion and anger, accuses Lakshmana of withholding help to Rama because he wants to have her to himself. At this unjust allegation, Lakshmana is spurred into action. Before he leaves he draws a magical

protective circle around Sita, instructing her that no harm can befall her as long as she stays in the circle. Ravana, in the form of an old **ascetic**, approaches Sita, **begging** for alms. Out of respect for an ascetic, Sita steps out of the circle to offer the alms. Ravana reveals his true form and carries her away.

## Marichi

In Hindu mythology, one of the six **sons** of **Brahma**, all of whom become great sages. All are "mind-born," meaning that Brahma's thoughts are enough to bring them into being. The others are **Kratu**, **Angiras**, **Pulastya**, **Pulaha**, and **Atri**.

## Mariyammai

Originally a local **goddess** in southern India, whose cult has become a regional phenomenon. Mariyammai embodies many of the contradictions and tensions associated with Hindu conceptions of the Goddess in general. According to her charter myth, Mariyammai is originally a **brahmin** woman, who is beheaded because of her husband's jealousy. She is brought back to life, but not before her body has become switched with that of another woman, this one an **untouchable**. Mariyammai's brahmin head and untouchable body symbolize the imperfect joining of brahminical Hindu and southern Indian culture, as well as the nebulous status of brahmins as the "head" of southern Indian society.

## Markandeya

A sage in Hindu mythology. Markandeya is best-known for two mythic exploits, one of which is associated with the god **Shiva** and the other with the god **Vishnu**. According to tradition, Markandeya is a very intelligent and religious boy who is devoted to Shiva and proficient in all the branches of learning. This seemingly unlimited potential is even more poignant because he learns that he is fated to die at sixteen. Shortly before his sixteenth

birthday, Markandeya begins to **worship** Shiva with even greater fervor. Because of the boy's accumulated religious merits, the servants of **Yama**, the god of death, cannot get near him. So Yama himself has to go for Markandeya. When Yama throws his noose over Markandeya to draw out the boy's soul, it also loops over the statue of Shiva to which Markandeya is clinging. Shiva arises from the image and kills Yama, although he later relents and brings him back to life.

Markandeya's other mythic exploit is a vision of **pralaya**, the universal dissolution of the cosmos. One evening as he is meditating, the sky grows dark, the wind rises, and rain falls until the earth is inundated with water. Markandeya is swept this way and that, until he comes to an enormous banyan tree with an infant sitting in it. Markandeya is drawn to the child and sees that the entire universe is inside this infant boy. He wanders inside the child for some time until he falls out of the child's mouth; then he sees the infant and the banyan tree again. Markandeya realizes that the infant is Vishnu, but before he can reach him again, the child has disappeared.

## Markandeya Purana

One of the eighteen traditional **puranas**, the sectarian compendia of mythic stories and sacred lore that are among the most important sources for modern Hinduism. **Markandeya** is said to have been an ancient sage, but he was not intimately connected with any particular **deity**. In this respect, the *Markandeya Purana* is different from most of the others, which have a clear sectarian bias. This purana is noted for one of its subsections, the *Devimahatmya*. Describing the ultimate power behind all things as female, the *Devimahatmya* is the earliest and most important textual source for the mythology of the **Goddess**. Scholars contend that although this text is the first place that this theological conviction appears, it must

have existed earlier, since it appears in this text fully developed.

## Marriage, Eight Classical Forms

**Dharma literature** (texts prescribing rules for correct human behavior and ideal social life) recognizes eight forms of marriage: **Brahma**, **Daiva**, **Arsha**, **Prajapatya**, **Asura**, **Gandharva**, **Rakshasa**, and **Paishacha**. The first four forms were approved (**prashasta**). In each case, the father of the bride was responsible for arranging the marriage: in the Brahma form, he gave his **daughter** as a gift without conditions; in the Daiva form, she was given as a sacrificial fee; in the Arsha form, in exchange for a pair of cattle for **sacrifice**; and in the Prajapatya form, with the condition that the husband and wife perform their duties together.

The other four forms were considered reprehensible forms of marriage (**aprashasta**). Two of these four were tolerated: the Asura form, in which the bride was exchanged for money, and the Gandharva form, in which bride and groom plighted their troth by mutual consent—that is, through consensual sexual intercourse. The final two forms were strictly forbidden: Rakshasa, in which the bride was forcibly abducted; and Paishacha, in which a man took sexual advantage of a woman who was insentient—the result of drunkenness, a deep sleep, or drugging. It is interesting to note that all of these forms were deemed to create a valid marriage—even the two that were forbidden. The aim in sanctioning such forbidden marriages was not to encourage such actions, but to give the woman the legal status of a wife. In contemporary times most of these forms of marriage are no longer practiced except for the Brahma marriage, which carries the highest status, and the Asura marriage. For further information see Pandurang Vaman Kane (trans.), *A History of Dharmasastra*, 1968; and Raj Bali Pandey, *Hindu Samskaras*, 1969. Despite



In many traditional Hindu marriage ceremonies, the groom's turban is attached to the bride's sari, binding the couple together.

their age, they remain the best sources for traditional Hindu religious rites.

## Marriage Ceremonies

In India, virtually everybody gets married. Marriage is a religious duty for **twice-born** men, satisfying one of their **Three Debts**, in this case the debt to their ancestors. Twice-born men are householders born into one of the three "twice-born" groups in Indian society, **brahmin**, **kshatriya**, or **vaishya**. Such men are eligible to receive the adolescent religious **initiation** known as the "second birth." For most Hindu **women**, being wives and mothers defines their identity. Marriage is also the event by which families are formed and grow. Since the family is considered the bedrock of Hindu society, for most people, marriage is the single most important event in their lives.

The great significance of marriage in Hindu culture means that this life-changing event is attended with potential peril because there is no certainty of success. Other potential dangers come from the inauspicious nature of certain times, people, and the belief that this **inauspiciousness** may bring bad fortune for the future. Finally, given that the bride and groom are the center of attention in the days before the marriage, there is the danger

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that other people's ill will and envy may unleash malevolent and unseen forces. As with many of the other life transitions, Hindu marriages are attended with considerable attention to discerning the unseen forces that could have a negative affect on the couple's future life and protecting the bride and groom from them. The wedding is always performed at an astrologically auspicious time, to start the marriage on the best possible note. In the days before the wedding, the bride is often secluded, keeping her from coming in contact with people or things deemed inauspicious. On their wedding day both the bride and groom are anointed and adorned similar to the **deities** in a temple—according to popular belief, on their wedding day, the couple become **Lakshmi** and **Vishnu**, god and **goddess**. This heightened status puts them in ritual danger when they are outside in the world, both from the legion of sources for ritual impurity (**ashaucha**), and because they are believed to be more susceptible to the evil eye (**nazar**) and other forms of **witchcraft**. These dangers are countered by amulets and various **rites of protection** when the bride or groom must be in the public eye, such as when the groom and his group of friends travel in triumphal procession to the wedding hall, as is common in northern India. Once inside, the danger is less pressing, since they are in a closed and ritually structured environment, surrounded by family and friends.

There is no single Hindu marriage ceremony, as is clear from the eight classical forms of marriage recognized in the **dharma literature**. Of these eight, the two forms generally practiced today are the **Asura** form, in which the groom's family gives money as a **brideprice** to obtain the bride; and the **Brahma** form, in which the bride's family gives their daughter to the groom, without making any conditions on him at all (although in contemporary times the groom's family can usually expect a **dowry** with the bride). The Brahma marriage carries much higher social status and is the most popular form. Although in such a marriage the wedding cere-

monies have regional and sectarian variation, certain common rites reveal important cultural assumptions.

The two major themes in a Hindu marriage are the transfer of the bride from her family to her husband's family, and the indissoluble merging of bride and groom into a new entity, the married couple. The transfer of the bride is done in the **kanyadan** ritual, the "gift of the virgin" performed by the bride's father. The bride and groom's marital union is symbolized by several common rites, including **panigrahana**, in which the groom takes the bride's hand as a sign of their union. Another such rite, considered the defining point of the marriage, is the **saptapadi**, the "seven steps" which the bride and groom take together. The seventh step completes the bride's transfer to the groom's family; it is at this point that the marriage becomes indissoluble. In modern times the saptapadi is often performed in conjunction with another ceremony, the **agnipradakshinam** ("circumambulating the fire"). Instead of taking seven steps, the bride and groom make seven revolutions around a small fire. On one hand, the presence of fire shows that marriage is a **yajna** or Vedic **sacrifice**. On the other, since the fire is considered to be the Vedic god **Agni**, he becomes the divine witness to the marriage. During the circumambulations the bride and groom are often physically joined by tying part of his turban to the edge of her sari. This visible bond between them is yet another sign of the inner union that has just been formed.

As described, in marriage the wife's identity is "assimilated" to her husband's, rather than some sort of mutual transformation. In northern India, the bride lives with her husband's family after the marriage; her new identity stems solely from her relationship with her husband, whereas his identity remains essentially unchanged, although augmented by marriage. For further information see Pandurang Vaman Kane (trans.), *A History of Dharmasastra*, 1968; and Raj Bali Pandey, *Hindu Samskaras*, 1969. For information on modern practice,
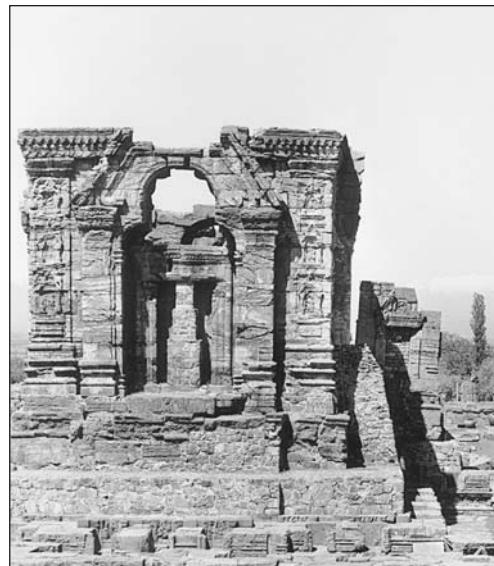
see Lawrence Babb, *The Divine Hierarchy*, 1975. See also **marriage, eight classical forms**.

## Marriage Prohibitions

As in other cultures, Hindus have well-defined rules and prohibitions regarding whom one should and should not marry—marriages should be **endogamous**, that is, between members of the same social subgroup (in this case, the **jati**). Within this larger community, it is generally accepted that the bride and groom should not come from the same **gotra** or the same **pravara**—both mythic lineages detailing relationships with ancient sages. The other strong prohibition was on marrying those with whom one had a **sapinda** relationship—common ancestry. According to one well-known code of law, the ***Mitakshara***, the sapinda relationship ceases after the seventh generation on the father's side, and the fifth generation on the mother's. People with common ancestors beyond those boundaries may contract a valid marriage.

This sapinda formula was routinely ignored, particularly in parts of southern India, where marrying one's maternal uncle's daughter was not only permitted, but considered commendable. While some of the texts in the **dharma literature** condemn the practice as an abomination, others note that this is a practice peculiar to the south, where it is permitted only as part of the family's customary practice (**kulachara**).

There is a long history for cross-cousin marriage in southern India; it is a common practice even today. Among southern Indian brahmins, there is some speculation that their relatively small population—about four percent of the total—made it impossible to find **brahmin** spouses under the strict criteria. Given the competing imperatives to marry other brahmins and to observe the lineage restrictions, this custom was deemed less important.



The village of Martand is known for its ruins of an eighth-century temple built to the sun god.

## Mars

In Hindu astrology (**jyotisha**), a **planet** associated with activity, war, and misfortune. Due to these associations, Mars is considered a strong yet malignant planetary force. **Tuesday,** the **day** of the **week** ruled by Mars, is considered an inauspicious day, a day on which people often perform **rites of protection** to safeguard themselves from Mars's baleful influence.

## Marshall, Sir John

Director General of the Archeological Survey of India (ASI) from 1901 until his retirement in 1931. During his tenure as director, Marshall discovered then excavated the cities of the **Indus Valley civilization**, for which he received his British knighthood. He also carried on the work of his predecessors at the ASI, particularly **Sir Alexander Cunningham**, documenting and cataloging India's archeological artifacts.

## Martand

Village in the state of **Jammu** and **Kashmir** about forty miles southeast of Shrinagar, the capital. Martand is noted as an architectural history site, best

known for its temple to the **sun** god, built during the eighth century. The temple ruins are in a mountain meadow, offering spectacular views of the surrounding mountains.

## Marut

Class of minor **deities** considered to be the companions of **Indra**, god of the storm. The Maruts are described as having a flashing color, armed with golden weapons symbolic of lightning, and roaring like **lions**.

## Marwari

Northern Indian trading community named after its place of origin, the Marwar region surrounding Jodhpur in **Rajasthan**. The Marwaris have spread all over northern India; many of them have become extremely wealthy. The Marwaris are stereotyped as ruthless and cutthroat in their business practices, yet at the same time, they are munificent in donations to religious causes, reflecting traditional religious piety. The most successful Marwari families, such as the **Birlas**, still control large parts of the Indian economy. Marwari support and patronage is an important consideration for all northern Indian political parties.

## Masi

Eleventh month in the **Tamil year**, corresponding to the northern Indian month of Kumbha (the zodiacal sign of Aquarius), usually falling within February and March. The existence of several different calendars is a sign of the continuing importance of regional cultural patterns. One way that the Tamils retain their culture is by preserving their traditional **calendar**. Tamil is one of the few regional languages in India with an ancient, well-established literary tradition. See also **Tamil months**, **Tamil Nadu**, and **Tamil language**.

## Materialist

The name for a philosophical school espousing the belief that the individual and the physical body are identical. The body is composed of certain physical elements, so with the death of the body, the individual ceases to exist. Since the materialists believed there is no life after death, they also believed there is no reason to engage in religious activities in the hope of a better afterlife. The materialist believes that one should live well, enjoy life to the fullest, and then die. This viewpoint was first espoused by **Ajita Keshakambalin**, who was a contemporary of the Buddha. Its later adherents were called both Lokayata ("worldly") and Charvaka (after the supposed founder). The materialists were universally reviled by the other philosophical schools, all of whom considered their rejection of religious life dangerous. One of their philosophical theories, and a sign of their rootedness in concrete experience, was their position on the **pramanas**, the means by which human beings can gain true and accurate knowledge. Most schools admitted at least three such pramanas—perception (**pratyaksha**), inference (**anumana**), and authoritative testimony (**shabda**). In contrast, the materialists accepted only perception, denying the validity of the other two. Emphasis is placed on experience and the belief that what is directly before one's eyes is indisputable.

## Math

(often translated as "monastery") A dwelling place for **ascetics**; usually a large, well-settled dwelling for a number of ascetics belonging to an established order. The four most famous maths are believed to have been established by the philosopher **Shankaracharya**: the **Jyotir Math** in the Himalayan town of **Joshimath**; the **Govardhan Math** in the city of **Puri**, on the Bay of Bengal; the

**Sharada Math** in the city of **Dwaraka** on the Arabian Sea; and the **Shringeri Math** in the town of **Shringeri** in southern India. These maths are the headquarters for the four major groups in the **Dashanami** sect **Sanyasis**, renunciant ascetics who are devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva**. Although most maths do not have the status of these four, they all serve as ascetic and religious centers.

## Mathura

City and sacred site (**tirtha**) in the **Braj** region of the state of **Uttar Pradesh**, about ninety miles south of Delhi. Mathura is known as the town in which the god **Krishna** was born. The **Krishna Janam Bhumi**, purportedly the site of his birth, can still be seen today. Krishna was spirited out of Mathura on that same night because his wicked uncle **Kamsa**, who was king of Mathura, had killed all of Krishna's older siblings at birth. When Krishna came of age he returned to Mathura, killed Kansa, and claimed his patrimony. As with sites in the Braj region, Mathura is full of associations with Krishna's earthly life; these allow his devotees (**bhakta**) access to him, in that they can visualize the places he visited, and thus through imagination take part in his mythic deeds themselves.

## Mathurakavi

(10th c.) The last of the **Alvars**, a group of twelve poet-saints who lived in southern India between the seventh and tenth centuries. All the Alvars were devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Vishnu**, and their emphasis on passionate devotion (**bhakti**) to a personal god, conveyed through hymns sung in the **Tamil language**, transformed and revitalized Hindu religious life. According to tradition, Mathurakavi was the disciple of **Nammalvar**, to whom he was led from northern India by a great light in the southern sky. By asking a question about

the supreme spirit, Mathurakavi was able to rouse Nammalvar from a yogic trance in which the latter had spent much of his life. From that point Mathurakavi served Nammalvar as his **guru**. Whereas the other Alvars were quite prolific, Mathurakavi wrote only ten songs, all in praise of his master. For further information see Kamil Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature*, 1975; John Stirling Morley Hooper, *Hymns of the Alvars*, 1929; and A. K. Ramanujan (trans.), *Hymns for the Drowning*, 1981.

## Matrilinear Succession

(Marumakkatayam) Most of Hindu society is overwhelmingly patrilineal (organized around the father's familial line). However, the **Nayars** of the state of **Kerala** in southern India base society on matrilineal succession (the mother's familial line). Matrilineal succession was practiced from very early times, although it had largely disappeared by the middle of the twentieth century. Under a matrilineal system, both descent and **inheritance** are passed on through the mother's line, which is center of the family. The woman's husband lives in her family home, but has no claim upon their children, and no claim on any of their marital property. A man has a certain amount of control over his own family's ancestral property—which he is often called to manage—but the property ultimately is inherited by his sister's children, rather than his own. In many cases the woman's "official" husband never actually consummates the marriage, and the woman is free to form long-term liaisons with other men, according to her choice.

## Matsya

("fish") In the secret ritually-based religious practice known as **tantra**, fish is the second of the "Five Forbidden Things" (**panchamakara**), which, in "left hand" (**vamachara**) tantric ritual, are used in their actual forms, but are

represented by symbolic substitutes in "right hand" (**dakshinachara**) tantric ritual. "Respectable" Hindu society strongly condemns the consumption of nonvegetarian food, so this ritual use must be seen in the larger tantric context. One of the underlying tantric assumptions is the ultimate unity of everything that exists. From a tantric perspective, to affirm that the entire universe is one principle means that the adept must reject all concepts based on dualistic thinking. The "Five Forbidden Things" provide a ritual means for breaking down duality. In this ritual the adept breaks societal norms forbidding consumption of **intoxicants**, nonvegetarian food, and illicit sexuality in a conscious effort to sacralize what is normally forbidden. Tantric adepts cite such ritual use of forbidden things as proof that their practice involves a more exclusive qualification (**adhikara**), and is thus superior to common practice. For further information see Arthur Avalon (Sir John Woodroffe), *Shakti and Shakta*, 1978; Swami Agehananda Bharati, *The Tantric Tradition*, 1977; and Douglas Renfrew Brooks, *The Secret of the Three Cities*, 1990.

## Matsya Avatar

The first of the ten **avatars** or incarnations of the god **Vishnu**, which all took place at moments of crisis in the cosmos. See **Fish avatar**.

## Matsyagandhi

("[she whose] smell is fish") In Hindu mythology, another name for queen **Satyavati**. Matsyagandhi is a fisher-girl who stinks of fish. She attracts the eye of a powerful sage, who later uses his **magic** powers to give her a pleasant scent. See **Satyavati**.

## Matsyendranath

According to tradition, the **guru** of the sage **Gorakhnath** and the founder of the **Nathpanthis**, a group of renunciant **ascetics** who are devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva**. He is also known as Minanath. According to the Nathpanthi tradition, Matsyendranath received his teaching from Shiva himself, by taking the form of a fish (in **Sanskrit**, the words *matsya* and *mina* both mean "fish"), and eavesdropping while Shiva was teaching his wife **Parvati**. For further information about Gorakhnath and the **Nath** tradition, see George Weston Briggs, *Gorakhnath and the Kanphata Yogis*, 1973. See also **tantra**.

## Matter, Primeval

The general translation given to the **Sanskrit** word **prakrti**, one of the two first principles in the **Samkhya** philosophical school. See **prakrti**.

## Mauni

Derived from the word *muni* ("sage"), mauni designates a person who is observing a vow of silence as a religious act. Just as members of certain Christian monastic orders observe a vow of silence to turn their thoughts inward and enrich their inner lives, in the same way Hindu **ascetics** have taken vows of silence as a tool for spiritual development. At times these vows may be for a finite period of time (a week, a month, and so on), but even now there are ascetics who have not spoken in decades, communicating through expression, gesture, and writing on a piece of paper or a slate.

## Mauni Amavasya

This festival falls on the day of the **new moon** (amavasya) in the **lunar month** of **Magh** (January–February). Those observing this holiday pass the day in silence. The word **mauni** (speechless) is derived from the word **muni** (sage); silence is seen as one of the religious practices helping to promote spiritual awareness. During the entire month of Magh, bathing (**snana**) in the **Ganges** (or another sacred river) is seen as meritorious. Bathing on the day of the new moon offers greater sanctity. A

well-known spot for this rite is at the city of **Allahabad**, at the confluence of the Ganges and the **Yamuna** Rivers.

## Mauritius

Island nation in the Indian Ocean, 1,200 miles east of the African coast. Mauritius has a significant Hindu **diaspora population**. As in many other cases, Indians were first brought to Mauritius as indentured agricultural laborers, in this case as workers on the sugar plantations. Currently, they comprise nearly 75 percent of the island's population, running the nation's political system. The Hindus on Mauritius have transferred India's sacred geography to their new land: A southern lake named **Grand Bassin** is claimed to have an underground connection to the River **Ganges**, and the lake has become a significant pilgrimage site.

## Maurya Dynasty

The earliest of the great Indian empires. At its zenith, the Maurya dynasty ruled over most of the Indian subcontinent, except in the deep south. The dynasty was founded by **Chandragupta Maurya** in the fourth century B.C.E., but reached its peak under his grandson **Ashoka**, who reigned from 269–232 B.C.E. The kingdom was centered in the lower **Ganges** basin, with its capital at **Pataliputra**, near the modern city of Patna in the state of **Bihar**. The Mauryan empire is the first historically documented centralized Indian empire; it was operated and maintained by a large governmental bureaucracy. Despite its size and organization, the empire was short-lived. It began to disintegrate on Ashoka's death; fifty years later it had virtually disappeared.

## Maya

A **Sanskrit** word. Maya's literal meaning is "**magic**" or "illusion"; the connotation it carries is a magic show or illusion in which objects appear to be present, but are not. In the Hindu philosophical tradition, maya describes how human beings become confused about the true nature of the world and themselves. Such illusion keeps them enmeshed in bondage to their desires and continues the cycle of reincarnation (**samsara**) that comes from this; at the same time, however, such people are unaware that they are in bondage.

In Hindu theism—in which the highest power is conceived as a **deity**—maya is generally described as one of God's powers, through which the deity can accomplish his or her purposes; in this understanding, maya is seen as an existing entity. The analysis of maya is a little different in the **Advaita Vedanta** school, which propounds a position known as monism. Monism claims that a single Ultimate Reality, called the unqualified **Brahman**, lies behind all things. Despite the appearance of difference and diversity, the only thing that really exists is this formless, unqualified Brahman. For the Advaitins, the assumption of diversity is a fundamental misunderstanding of the ultimate nature of things. The Advaita school accepts that God wields maya as a power, but since God (as a being with particular qualities) is considered lower than the highest, ultimate Brahman, both God and maya are part this lower reality. Thus, both are ultimately not real. The Advaitins describe maya as confusion from the lack of correct understanding; the confusion disappears when perfect liberation has been reached.

## Maya Devi

Local **goddess** considered to be a form of **Durga**, whose home is in the northern Indian town and sacred city of **Haridwar**. According to local tradition, the site where her temple is built is one of the **Shakti Pithas**, a network of sites sacred to the Goddess which spreads throughout the subcontinent. Each Shakti Pitha marks the site where a body part of the dismembered goddess **Sati** fell to earth, taking form there as a different goddess; Maya Devi was Sati's

navel. Although this claim is not attested in other literature on the Shakti Pithas, the site itself is believed to be very old. One of the oldest names for the Haridwar region is **Mayapur**, the "city of Maya." See also **pitha**.

## Mayapur

City in **West Bengal** on the western side of the Hugli River across from the holy city of **Navadvip**, about sixty-five miles north of Calcutta. Although both cities claim to be the birthplace of the Bengali saint **Chaitanya**, Navadvip's claim is older. However, the claim that Mayapur was the birthplace of Chaitanya is supported by the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), more popularly known as the Hare Krishnas, who have built a magnificent temple complex at Mayapur as the headquarters of the organization. For extensive information about this site, see E. Alan Morinis, *Pilgrimage in the Hindu Tradition*, 1984.

## Mayashiva

("illusionary **Shiva**") In Hindu mythology, a **demon** named Jalandhara assumes the form of the god Shiva in an attempt to trick **Parvati**, the **goddess**, into having sexual relations with him. Jalandhara has been unable to conquer Shiva on the battlefield, so he hopes that he can diminish Shiva's power by compromising the faithfulness of his wife. Jalandhara comes to Parvati in Shiva's form, but she is so suspicious that Jalandhara is unable to fulfill his desires. Jalandhara's power is eventually broken in the same way, when **Vishnu** (in the form of Jalandhara) manages to seduce Jalandhara's wife, Vrnda.

## Meat Eating

An accepted part of the diet for most Hindus. A 1996 poll of urban Hindus found that only a quarter of the respondents were vegetarians. However, this figure may be higher in villages, where people tend to be more traditional and conservative. As the product of a dead **animal**, meat is seen as impure, and those who are concerned about religious **purity** (particularly **brahmins**) will generally avoid it for that reason. Even nonvegetarians recognize a hierarchy of animal foods. Some people will eat only eggs; others will also eat chicken and/or fish, whereas others will also eat mutton. Pork is generally avoided by all but the lowest-status people; pigs are considered scavengers and deemed unclean. Beef is taboo for religious reasons, except for a very small Hindu community in southern India. Even those who eat meat generally do not eat it in large quantities. Because of its relatively high cost, it is generally prepared as one dish among many, rather than the central part of the meal.

## Medhatithi

(mid-9th c.) Author of the most authoritative commentary on the **Manu Smrti**, also known as the "Laws of **Manu**." Medhatithi was schooled in the techniques of textual interpretation developed by the **Purva Mimamsa** school, one of the **six schools** of Hindu **philosophy**. Due to his interpretive abilities, his commentary quickly became the accepted standard.

## Medicine

See **ayurveda**, *Charaka Samhita*, and *Sushruta Samhita*.

## Megasthenes

(3rd c. B.C.E.) Ambassador sent to the court of **Chandragupta Maurya** by Seleucus Nicator, a general in Alexander the Great's army who ruled the eastern part of the empire after Alexander's death. Megasthenes lived for many years in the Mauryan capital, **Pataliputra**. His reports of life there are the first European accounts of India. His original account no longer exists, but the fact of its existence is attested to by the many references to it in the works of later Greek writers; these

writers, however, often voice doubts about his credibility and veracity. See also **Maurya dynasty**.

## Meghaduta

("Cloud-Messenger") One of the great poetic works by **Kalidasa** (5th c.?), generally considered to be the greatest classical **Sanskrit** poet. The Meghaduta is a short poem consisting of one hundred verses, written entirely in an extremely long **meter** called mandakranta—seventeen syllables to each quarter verse. The poem tells the story of a **yaksha** (nature sprite) who has been temporarily banished to the southern part of India. Separated from his beloved wife, who is at their home in the kingdom of **Kubera** in the **Himalayas**, the yaksha sees a **monsoon** rain cloud moving northward in its annual journey. He implores it to carry a message of love to his beloved. The yaksha describes the regions through which the cloud travels. This description gives a vivid picture of everyday life and the cultural centers of Kalidasa's time. In some sources the poem is called *Meghasandesha*, "The Message [carried by] a Cloud."

## Meghanada

("roaring like thunder") In the *Ramayana*, the earlier of the two great Indian epics, Meghanada is one of the epithets of **Indrajit**, son of the **demon**-king **Ravana**. See **Indrajit**.

## Meher Baba

(b. Merwan Sheriar Irani, 1894–1969) Modern religious figure who was born a Parsi, but whose teachings draw on Islamic mystical thought and Hindu devotional (**bhakti**) teachings. Meher Baba ("Divine Father") claimed to be an **avatar** or "incarnation" of the divine, and his followers accept him as such. In 1925 he took a vow of silence, which he kept for the rest of his life, communicating through gestures and an alphabet board. Despite his silence, he compiled his teachings in a five-volume set of



Pilgrims in Allahabad gather in a mela tent to listen to a guru.

discourses titled *God Speaks*. Like many contemporary Hindu missionary figures, Meher Baba emphasized the need for devotion to one's **guru** or religious preceptor, through which the disciple would gain all things. For further information from a devotee's (**bhakta**) perspective, see Jean Adriel, *Avatar*, 1947.

## Mehndipur

Village in the state of **Rajasthan** in the southern region between the cities of Agra and Jaipur. The village is best known for the temple to the god **Balaji**, considered to be a form of the monkey-god **Hanuman**. People possessed by malevolent spirits come to Balaji to be cured through his power. For a thorough discussion of the language of **possession** and exorcism, see Sudhir Kakar, *Shamans, Mystics, and Doctors*, 1991

## Mela

("meeting") In the widest sense, the word *mela* can refer to any type of large gathering, usually for some specific purpose. In a religious context, the word mela is generally translated as "festival" or fair. Melas include commercial interests, religious activity, and entertainment. Melas are usually attended by vast numbers of religious pilgrims, traveling to the site of the festival. By far the largest of these melas is the **Kumbha**

**Mela** at **Allahabad**. In 1989, the Kumbha Mela drew 15 million people on a single day, and millions more during the month of the festival.

## Mena

In Hindu mythology, the wife of the minor **deity Himalaya**, and the mother of **Parvati**, the **goddess**. Mena christens her daughter, **Uma**, through her exclamation "U Ma!" ("Oh, don't!") when Parvati announces her desire to make the god **Shiva** her husband. The *Shiva Purana* details Mena's initial discomfiture with her unconventional **son**-in-law, yet later suggests Shiva as the paradigm for the ideal husband, since he is completely devoted to his wife.

## Menaka

In Hindu mythology, a beautiful celestial maiden (**apsara**), who is a minion of **Indra**, the king of the gods. Menaka's primary function is to seduce sages threatening to replace Indra as the ruler of **heaven**. In traditional Indian culture, **semen** is seen as the concentrated essence of a man's vital energies; **celibacy** is a means to conserve and retain these energies. Menaka's powers of attraction are used to seduce these **ascetics**, diminishing their accumulated spiritual powers. Her most notable partner is the sage **Vishvamitra**, who is twice smitten by her charms. Their first liaison results in the **birth** of the maiden **Shakuntala**, celebrated in the drama *Abhijnanashakuntala*, written by the poet **Kalidasa**. During their second liaison, Vishvamitra lives with Menaka for ten years, before leaving her for renunciant life in the forest.

## Menstruation

In traditional Hindu culture all bodily discharges are considered to be a source of ritual impurity (**ashaucha**). Women are considered ritually unclean during their menstrual periods; menstrual fluid is considered a source of impurity. However, menstruation is also considered a sign of **auspiciousness** or good fortune, since it indicates women's reproductive capacities. The ritual observances and taboos for menstruating women vary widely between differing social groups. In some groups, women are subject to only a few restrictions, such as a ban on entering temples during that time. In other groups, women are expected to confine themselves to certain parts of the house and to refrain from everyday activities such as cooking. Although such strict practice sounds oppressive, for many women this interval was prized as a monthly respite from their everyday duties, which would be performed by the other women in the household.

## Mercury

In Hindu astrology (**jyotisha**), a planet associated with mental quickness, memory, and education, based on its short orbit around the **sun**. Despite these generally positive features, Mercury is considered a weak planet, easily influenced toward benevolence and malevolence by other **planets**, or by its position in the **natal horoscope** (janampatrika). Mercury's association with the mind suggests that the mind's powers can be harnessed for either good or evil ends. During the **week**, Mercury is said to rule over **Wednesday**; this day is not heavily marked as auspicious or inauspicious, reflecting the planet's light powers.

## Mercury

(2) Elemental mercury is a pivotal substance in Indian **alchemy**. Hindu alchemy analyzes the world as a series of bipolar opposites in tension with one another. Unifying these opposing forces brings spiritual progress and end of reincarnation (**samsara**). This model of uniting or transcending opposing forces is shared with Hindu **tantra**, a secret, ritually-based religious practice. This theme is shared with **hatha yoga**, which is based on a series

of physical exercises that are also believed to affect the **subtle body**.

The governing metaphor for this combination of opposites is the union of **sun** and **moon**. Both the sun and the moon are connected to other opposing principles through an elaborate series of associations. In keeping with this bipolar symbolism, mercury is conceived as the **semen** of the god **Shiva** and thus full of healing power. It is also identified with the moon (perhaps through its bright silvery hue), with healing and restorative power, and with the nectar of immortality. Elemental **sulfur** is identified with the **goddess Shakti's** uterine **blood**. When mercury and sulfur are mixed and consumed, the aspirant's body is purified and refined, eventually rendering it immortal. Modern descriptions of this practice warn that it should only be carried out under the direction of one's **guru** (spiritual teacher); otherwise these combinations will be harmful, since by itself mercury is a deadly poison. For further information see Shashibhushan B. Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cults*, 1962; and David Gordon White, *The Alchemical Body*, 1996.

## Meru

Mythical mountain in the center of the continent of **Jambudvipa**, the innermost of the concentric landmasses that make up the visible world in traditional Hindu **cosmology**; Mount Meru is the center of the entire world, the pivot of the entire created order. It is said to extend far up into the **heavens** and have its roots far beneath the earth, and on its crest is a divine city which is the home of the gods. The mythical Meru is often identified with the Himalayan mountain known as **Kailas**. For this reason Kailas has been an important pilgrimage place (**tirtha**), despite its inaccessible location.

## Meter, Poetic

Indian poetry has well-developed metrical forms, basically following two dominant patterns. The first metric pattern is based simply on the number of syllables in a line. In the second pattern, each line contains a certain number of metric beats, based on the distinction between "heavy" and "light" syllables. A heavy syllable is any syllable with a long vowel or a consonant cluster and is given two metric beats; all other syllables are considered light and counted as one beat.

**Sanskrit** poetry tends to stress the former pattern, and has codified meters ranging from four to twenty-six syllables per half-line, yet even within these syllabic constraints each meter usually has a prescribed sequence of light and heavy syllables as well. Two different Sanskrit poetic meters may thus have the same number of syllables, but vary in their syllabic patterns. Although such subtle differences could generate vast numbers of meters, in practice there were only about a hundred. The vast majority of Sanskrit texts are written in a single meter, the **anushtubh**, which has eight syllables per half-line.

Later devotional (**bhakti**) poetry, particularly in northern India, tend to favor poetic forms based on the number of metric beats. The most popular forms are the **doha**, which has twenty-four metric beats in two lines, and the **chaupai**, which has four lines of sixteen beats each. Although there are several poetic forms based on the number of syllables in each line, particularly the **savaiya** and the **kavitt**, these were used less often.

## Mewar

In the time before Indian independence in 1947, Mewar was a princely state in southern **Rajasthan**, the capital of which was in the city of Udaipur. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Mewar was one of the important centers for the **Rajasthani** style of **miniature painting**. The Rajasthani style is characterized by a flat perspective. Visual power is derived from vivid bands of colors that often serve as a backdrop to the painting.

The east gate of the Minakshi Temple in the city of Madurai. The temple is dedicated to the goddess Minakshi, the city's guardian.

## Mimamsa Sutras

The founding text of the **Purva Mimamsa** school, one of the **six schools** of traditional Hindu **philosophy**. The *Mimamsa Sutras* are traditionally attributed to the sage **Jaimini**, who is believed to have lived in the fourth century B.C.E. The Mimamsa school was most concerned with the investigation of **dharma** ("righteous action"), believed to be revealed in the **Vedas**, the earliest Hindu religious texts. Much of Mimamsa thought is concerned with principles and methods for textual interpretation, to discover and interpret the instructions contained in the Vedas. The *Mimamsa Sutras* were elaborated in numerous commentaries, the most famous of which were written by **Kumarila** and **Prabhakara** in the seventh century. For further information and text, see Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore (eds.), *A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy*, 1957.

## Minakshi

("fish-eyed") Presiding **deity** of the Minakshi temple in the city of **Madurai** in the state of **Tamil Nadu**. Her name refers both to the shape of her eyes (long and oval), and to their fluttering movement, both of which are considered marks of feminine beauty in classical India. Minakshi was originally a local deity, the guardian for the city of Madurai. As Madurai became important, by virtue of being the **Pandya dynasty** capital, so did Minakshi. According to her charter myth, Minakshi is born with three breasts—already a sign that she is unusual—and is raised by her parents as a man. As she accedes to the throne in Madurai, she vows that she will only marry a man who can defeat her in battle. She fights and conquers all the kings of the earth, but when she approaches the god **Shiva**, she is suddenly stricken with modesty and transformed from a powerful warrior to a shy and bashful girl. At this moment her third breast disappears, further signifying the loss of her special status. Minakshi and Shiva (in his manifestation as Sundareshvara) are married. Their wedding is celebrated every year in Madurai during the **Chittirai** festival.

Despite her transformation in the charter myth, Minakshi is still an unusual **goddess**. The wedding of a goddess usually marks her domestication and implies subordination to her husband. Minakshi, however, remains the more important deity in Madurai, perhaps reflecting her previous status as the city's guardian deity. For more information see Dean David Shulman, *Tamil Temple Myths*, 1980.

## Minanath

Another epithet for **Matsyendranath**, traditionally cited as the spiritual teacher (**guru**) of **Gorakhnath**, the great **yogi**. See **Matsyendranath**.

## Miniature Painting

The origins of Hindu miniature painting lie in the royal art of the Moghul court, where miniature painting and portraiture were well-established genres. In the seventeenth century other centers for miniature painting began to arise, perhaps spurred by Moghul artists seeking patronage in Hindu vassal kingdoms. Although portraiture and court scenes continued to be important, the miniature genre expanded to include other themes such as the illustration of the musical modes known as **ragas**, which are associated with particular times and/or **seasons**. Another prominent theme was Hindu religious imagery, reflecting the influence of the devotional (**bhakti**) movement, which was in full flower in northern India. Religious themes first concentrated mainly on the mythic exploits of the god **Krishna** and portrayals of the god **Shiva**. At times, these two major themes were combined. Miniature paintings were also used to illustrate manuscripts, thus integrating literature, art, music, and religious images.

The development of Hindu miniature painting can be broadly divided into three schools, each corresponding to a geographical area: **Rajasthani**, Deccani, and **Pahari**. The earliest developed school was the Rajasthani, which flourished in seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the **Malwa** region of the state of **Madhya Pradesh** and the small kingdoms that surrounded the region. The Rajasthani style is characterized by a flat perspective; visual power is derived from vivid bands of colors that often serve as a backdrop to the painting. The Deccani style was established in central India and showed little variation from Moghul court art. The Pahari ("mountain") style flourished in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the small kingdoms in the **Shiwalik Hills** north and west of Delhi. The Pahari style first appeared in **Basohli**, where the influence of the Rajasthani school is evident, and later developed in **Jammu**, **Guler**, **Garhwal**, and **Kangra**. The developed Pahari style differs from the Rajasthani style in its emphasis on more linear drawing—perhaps influenced by European art—and a more restrained use of color, giving the paintings a more lyrical feel. For further information see W. G. Archer, *Indian Painting*, 1957. See also **Moghul dynasty**.

## Minorities

In any society, minority groups are defined according to a particular social context. In India the two most prominent minority groups are Muslims and Christians. Muslims—about twelve percent of the population—are viewed with suspicion, due to India's troubled relations with Pakistan. Christians and Muslims are viewed as having religious loyalties that lie outside of India—Mecca for Muslims, and Rome or Jerusalem for Christians. These two communities have been perceived very differently from other religious communities, such as the Sikhs and the Jains, who are part of the Indian cultural tradition. Cultural and political organizations espousing forms of Hindu nationalism (**Hindutva**), particularly the **Rashtriya Svayamsevak Sangh** and its affiliates, have often stressed the "otherness" of these communities. Such organizations have as their express purpose the unification of Hindus from all regions, castes, and backgrounds, but do so through criteria that exclude these minorities.

## Mirabai

(early 16th c.?) A poet-saint who was a devotee (**bhakta**) of the god **Krishna**. Although little is known about her, Mirabai's songs remain some of the best-known devotional (**bhakti**) poetry. According to tradition, Mirabai was born into a royal family in a small kingdom in **Rajasthan**. From her earliest days, she was passionately devoted to Krishna. Although her parents arranged a marriage with the scion of another

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ruler, she considered Krishna to be her true husband. After extended conflict with her in-laws—in which they reportedly attempted to poison her—her release came with the death of her husband, after which she was allowed to leave her marital home. She spent her later years visiting places associated with Krishna and sharing in the "good company" (**satsang**) of other devotees. She went to **Dwaraka**, the city over which Krishna is said to have ruled, and met her end by being absorbed into the image of Krishna at his temple there.

Mirabai's poetry is marked by her expressions of longing for Krishna. She often speaks of herself either as his wife or his waiting lover, seeking physical and mystical union with him. Her poetry is an intensely personal expression of her religious fervor; the power of this longing has made her a symbol of religious devotion. For scholars, Mirabai's poetry raises perplexing questions of authorship, for the earliest manuscripts are several hundred years older than when she is supposed to have lived, but for common people the songs bearing her name are widely popular even today. She has also been featured in at least ten feature films, showing the staying power of devotion even in the modern age. For further information see A. J. Alston (trans.), *The Devotional Poems of Mirabai*, 1980; and John Stratton Hawley and Mark Juergensmeyer (trans.), *Songs of the Saints of India*, 1988.

## Mitakshara

A voluminous commentary on the **Yajnavalkya Smrti**, written early in the twelfth century by the scholar **Vijnaneshvara**. This particular commentary played a pivotal role in the British colonial administration of India. The British were content to have their Indian subjects governed by their traditional religious laws, but to do so they needed to know what these laws were. For large sections of British India, the *Mitakshara* was given the status of traditional law, functioning as a legal code.

The only major part of India in which the *Mitakshara* did not hold sway was in Bengal, where the legal authority was the **Dayabhaga**. One of the major differences between the two was in matters of **inheritance**. The *Mitakshara* stresses inheritance by survivorship, in which only living males can inherit property, whereas the *Dayabhaga* stresses inheritance by succession, in which a dead man's heirs can inherit in his name.

## Mithila

In the **Ramayana**, the earlier of the two great Indian epics, Mithila is the kingdom ruled by King **Janaka**, foster father of **Sita**, the **goddess**. The region is known for its wealth, as well as for the righteousness of its rulers; it is identified with the Mithila region in the northern part of the state of modern **Bihar**.

## Mithuna

("pair") In **architecture**, the name for what has been described as a "loving couple." A more candid characterization is that of sculptures of men and **women** engaged in sexual activity, either as a pair or a larger group, with the occasional animal thrown in for variety. The most famous examples of such sculptures are at the temples at **Konarak** in the state of **Orissa**, and at **Khajuraho** in the state of **Madhya Pradesh**. The meaning behind such explicit sculptures has been variously interpreted. Some people claim that they sanction carnal pleasure as a religious path, some interpret them as representing human union with the divine, and still others view them as teaching that the desire for pleasure must ultimately be transcended to attain the divine. Any of these may be true, or the sculptures may simply reflect an affirmation of life on all its levels.

## Mitra Mishra

(early 17th c.) Author of the **Viramitrodaya**, a compendium of Hindu lore. The *Viramitrodaya* is an example of a class of

commentarial literature known as **nibandhas** ("collections"). The compilers of the nibandhas culled references on a particular theme from the **Vedas**, **dharma literature**, **puranas**, and other authoritative religious texts, placing these excerpts into a single volume. Each of the *Viramitrodaya*'s twenty-two sections is devoted to a particular aspect of Hindu life, such as daily practice, **worship**, gift-giving (**dana**), vows, pilgrimage, penances (**prayashchitta**), purification, death rites (**antyeshthi samskara**), and law; the final section is devoted to final liberation of the soul (**moksha**). In addition to citing the relevant scriptural passages, Mitra Mishra also provides extensive commentary of his own. His work became an important source for later legal interpretation, particularly in eastern India.

## Mleccha

**Sanskrit** word traditionally used to designate a foreigner or a non-**Aryan**. The word *mleccha* is also used to indicate a person who has become an outcaste and thus has no place in established society. The verb from which the word *mleccha* is derived means "to speak confusedly or indistinctly," indicating someone who has not yet mastered the language.

## Mnemonics
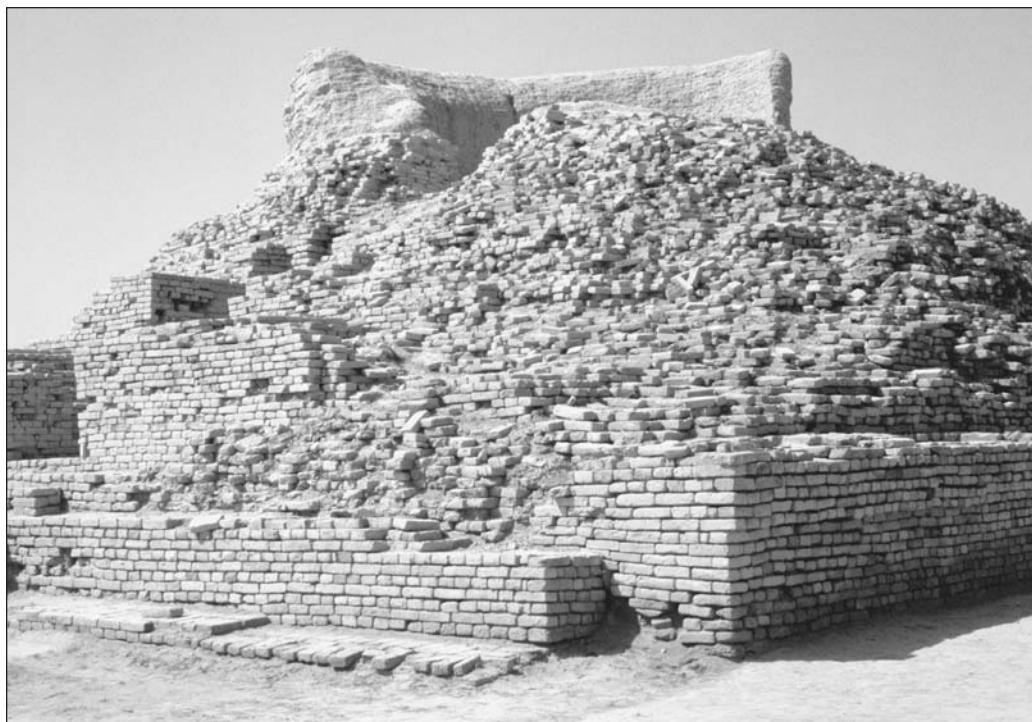
The best-known example of a mnemonic system comes in the study of the **Vedas**, the oldest Hindu religious texts. Traditionally, the power of the Vedas is not derived from the meaning of the words, but in the very sounds themselves. It was imperative for the text to be conveyed without error. This posed a significant challenge. The Vedas have been orally transmitted by an elaborate system of learning strategies, keeping the text unchanged for over three thousand years, identical in all parts of India. This remarkable feat was achieved by memorizing the text in differing patterns: as verses, as the individual words,

as pairs of words in sequential succession (ab, bc, cd, and so forth), and according to some reports, backwards. The ultimate aim of all of these patterns was to render the text into sheer sound, rather than phrases with definite syntactic meaning, since the latter could be subject to substitutions. Although this effort has succeeded in preserving the sacred sounds, in many cases the meanings of these words have become unclear, especially for words which appear only once. This problem was evident as early as the fifth century B.C.E., when **Yaska**, the **grammarian**, wrote the *Nirukta*, explaining the meaning of many of these words.

## Modes of Devotion

Devotion to God (**bhakti**) has been the most important force in Hindu religion for more than the past millennium. However, the form and tone of this devotion have varied considerably in different times and places. The most thorough articulation of different possible modes of devotion was done by **Rupa Goswami**, who lived in the mid-sixteenth century. Rupa was a devotee (**bhakta**) of the god **Krishna** and a member of the **Gaudiya Vaishnava** religious community founded by the Bengali saint **Chaitanya**. Devotion to Krishna is characterized by the emphasis on relationship, particularly the visualization of mythic incidents from Krishna's life, through which one can enter his divine world, and thus take part in his divine "play" (**lila**) with the world.

Rupa distinguished five such modes, which were characterized by growing emotional intensity. The first was the "peaceful mode" (**shanta bhava**), in which the devotee found mental peace through the realization of complete identity with **Brahman**. This was seen as an inferior mode, since the **deity** was seen impersonally, and the devotee had no personal relationship with God. The other four modes were based on human relationships, from the most distant to the most intimate and loving: master

Ruins at Mohenjo-Daro. This archeological site contains some of the earliest
discovered remains of the ancient Indus Valley civilization.

and servant (**dasa bhava**), friend and friend (**sakha bhava**), parent and child (**vatsalya bhava**), and lover and beloved (**madhurya bhava**). Although all of these modes were legitimate forms of relationship with the divine, the last was considered the highest because it generated the most intense emotions.

## Moghul Dynasty

(1525–1857) Muslim dynasty that ruled large parts of India for almost 200 years. The dynasty was established by Babar (r. 1625–1630), a central Asian monarch who had been displaced from his own homeland in Afghanistan and defeated the Lodi dynasty rulers at Panipat in 1625. Babar's son Humayan (1508–1556) acceded to his father's throne but spent much of his life fighting an Afghan threat. He finally recovered his kingdom, but within six months died from injuries sustained in a fall. Humayan was succeeded by his son **Akbar** (1542–1605), considered the greatest of the Moghul emperors, both for his long reign of forty-nine years and for his efforts to include his Hindu subjects as equal citizens, not simply as conquered infidels. Akbar was succeeded by Jahangir (1569–1627), and Jahangir by Shah Jahan (1592–1666). The last of the great Moghuls was **Aurangzeb** (1618–1707), who added parts of the **Deccan** region to the Moghul empire. During Aurangzeb's reign, the **Krishna Janam Bhumi** in the city of **Mathura** and the **Vishvanath** temple in the city of **Benares** were destroyed. Such incidents have caused much speculation as to whether the destruction was the result of anti-Hindu religious sentiments (the Moghuls were Muslims) or an expression of Moghul political dominance. After Aurangzeb's death the Moghul empire broke apart, but the dynasty continued to wield diminishing influence until the 1857 rebellion against the British, when it was definitively removed.

## Mohan

("beguiling," "bewildering") Epithet of the god **Krishna**, which may refer either to his overwhelming attractiveness,

which is believed to beguile the mind, or to his ability to wield **maya** or the power of illusion, and thus cloud people's minds. See **Krishna**.

## Mohenjo-Daro

Archeological site on the **Indus** River in modern Pakistan, about two hundred miles north of Karachi. Mohenjo-Daro is one of the cities of the **Indus Valley civilization**, a highly developed urban culture that flourished in the Indus Valley region between the fourth and third millennia B.C.E. **Harappa** and Mohenjo-Daro have been the most extensively excavated of these cities, although archeological work is proceeding at others. Similarities at these different sites reveal insights into this civilization's material culture. One of the features at Mohenjo-Daro is the "Great Bath," a large water-tank built of brick and sealed with pitch. Scholars speculate that it was connected with ritual **purity**. See also **bath, Mohenjo-Daro**.

## Mohini

("bewitching") In Hindu mythology, a rapturously beautiful, divine enchantress, seen as a manifestation of the god **Vishnu**. Vishnu takes this form to trick the **demons** into giving her their share of the **amrta**, the nectar of immortality, which has been churned from the Ocean of Milk. Through her charms, Mohini succeeds in getting the amrta from the demons; she gives it to the gods, thus depriving the demons of their chance at immortality.

In most versions, the story ends here, but the charter myth for the southern Indian god **Aiyappa** adds an interesting twist. According to the story, when **Shiva** sees the enchanting figure of Mohini, he cannot resist her. The product of this union is Aiyappa, who is considered the son of Shiva and Vishnu. Yet Aiyappa's unusual parentage occurs with good reason, as with most such stories in Hindu mythology. Aiyappa is born to kill a **demon** named **Mahishi**, who has

received the boon that she can only be killed by a person not born from the union of male and female. Mohini's "true" identity (Vishnu) satisfies this condition, and when Aiyappa comes of age he kills the demon. See also **Tortoise avatar**.

## Mohini Attam

The youngest form of classical Indian **dance**, found mainly in the modern state of **Kerala**. Mohini Attam was developed in the early eighteenth century at the royal court in Travancore in Kerala. This style of dance shows traits of both **Bharatanatyam** and **Kathakali**, a Keralan dance form. The dance is named after the mythical enchantress **Mohini** and projects a coquettish sensuality. Some of the dance's physical poses are taken from Bharatanatyam, whereas the stylized hand gestures (**mudras**) come largely from Kathakali. For further information see Mohan Khokar, *Traditions of Indian Classical Dance*, 1984.

## Mohini Ekadashi

Festival falling on the eleventh day (**ekadashi**) of the bright, waxing half of the **lunar month** of **Baisakh** (April–May). The festival is dedicated to the **worship** of **Vishnu** in his **avatar** as **Rama**. Most Hindu festivals have certain prescribed rites usually involving fasting (**upavasa**) and worship, promising specific benefits for faithful performance; observing this festival frees one from the results of one's evil acts.

## Moksha

In Indian **philosophy** moksha is one of the four purusharthas, or **aims of life**; the others are **artha** (wealth, power, and prosperity), **kama** (desire), and **dharma** (righteousness). Moksha literally means "release"—the human soul's (**atman**) final liberation from the cycle of reincarnation (**samsara**). The quest for liberation involves questioning and ultimately detaching oneself from pursuits of

normal social life. Although all four purusharthas are legitimate and sanctioned, liberation is usually seen as the ultimate goal, the last goal to be pursued after fulfilling the pleasures and pains stemming from the other three. Moksha is also unchanging, bringing one complete and absolute freedom, whereas the other three are ultimately transient, for they are pursued within the ever-changing world of desires.

## Mokshada Ekadashi

Festival falling on the eleventh day (**ekadashi**) of the bright half of **Margashirsha** (November–December). As for all the eleventh-day observances, this is dedicated to **Vishnu**. Most Hindu festivals have certain prescribed rites usually involving fasting (**upavasa**) and **worship**, and often promising specific benefits for faithful performance. Faithfully observing this festival is believed to bestow final liberation (**moksha**) of the soul.

## Monday

(Somavar) The second **day** of the Hindu **week**, whose presiding **planet** is the **moon**. The moon is associated with coolness, healing power, and **Soma**, the Vedic **deity**. The Hindu god **Shiva** is manifested as **Somnath**, the Lord of the Moon. Monday is considered one of the most powerful and auspicious days of the week. Worship on certain Mondays is believed to bring even greater religious benefits, such as on a **Somavati Amavasya**, (a **new moon** falling on a Monday), and on the Mondays in **Shravan** (a **lunar month** specially dedicated to Shiva). The Sixteen Mondays Vow (**Solah Somvar Vrat**) is performed on sixteen consecutive Mondays. Like other such vows, the Solah Somvar Vrat entails reading the vow's charter myth in a ritual setting, combined with worship and a regulated diet.

## Moneylending

An important element in the economic activity of the traditional and modern Indian merchant families. Since farmers have profits only after the harvest, they must be able to borrow during the other times of the year. In modern times many farmers borrow from banks, but in earlier times their only resource was these merchant families. Their interest rates usually reflected the borrower's credit worthiness: unsecured loans might have interest rates as high as 30 to 50 percent per year because there was a good chance for default, whereas the interest on loans secured by collateral might be as low as seven percent. To some extent, these moneylending merchants were economically bound to their farmer-creditors, with one providing the capital and the other providing the labor. Moneylenders could not refuse credit to farmers after a bad year, since this would have removed any hope of future repayment. For further information see Christopher Alan Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars*, 1983.

## Monsoon

A season of torrential rains, whose name comes from an Arabic word meaning "season" (mausam). The monsoon is preceded by a period of intense heat; daily temperatures go over one hundred degrees Fahrenheit. As the hot air rises, it draws in a vast current of moisture-laden air from the coastal regions of southern India. The monsoon is one of the year's three major **seasons** and is a vital part of people's daily lives. Because much of India's farmland is not irrigated, the monsoon rains are vital to agriculture. The coming of the monsoon is much awaited in real life; it also has a prominent place in Indian culture. One image of the monsoon comes from love poetry, in which a woman is anxiously scanning the sky, watching the clouds roll up as she awaits her returning beloved. In earlier times the rains made travel almost impossible, making it a bitter time for separated lovers but a

sweet and happy time for united couples. The poet **Kalidasa's** epic *Meghaduta* describes a man exiled in southern India, who addresses one of the monsoon clouds, giving it a message to convey to his beloved. The monsoon rains are also associated with the god **Krishna**. His dark skin color is compared to a rain cloud. Also, his birthday is celebrated at the end of the rainy season, and his divine persona appropriates the image of the lover associated with the rains.

## Moon

In Hindu astrology (**jyotisha**), a **planet** associated with fecundity (fertility), although its aspect can be either benevolent or malevolent—benevolent with the waxing moon, and malevolent with the waning moon. During the **lunar month**, the **full moon** is considered the most auspicious time of all. The **new moon**, however, is considered a ritually ambiguous time, and thus potentially dangerous. During the **week** the moon presides over **Monday**, generally considered an auspicious **day** and one that is sacred to **Shiva** as **Somnath**, the Lord of the Moon.

## Morari Bapu

(b. Muraridas Prabhudas 1946) Modern commentator and expositor (kathavacak) on the *Ramcharitmanas*. Written by the poet-saint **Tulsidas**, the *Ramcharitmanas* is a vernacular version of the *Ramayana*, the earlier of the two great **Sanskrit** epics. As with all vernacular renditions of the *Ramayana*, Tulsidas did not simply translate **Valmiki's** Sanskrit epic, but adapted it to address his own religious concerns, particularly the importance of devotion (**bhakti**) to God, one of the text's central themes. Morari Bapu claims no supernatural powers or ability; his religious fame rests solely on his commitment to the text, and his power in expounding it. At times he speaks to audiences of more than 100,000 people, giving **katha**

(discourse) to the Hindu **diaspora populations** in Europe and North America, as well as in India.

## Mrcchakatika

("The Little Clay Cart") Drama written by the playwright **Shudraka**, probably in the early fifth century. The play describes the flowering of love between a poor but noble **brahmin**, Charudatta, and a wealthy and virtuous courtesan, Vasantasena, set in the context of a complicated political intrigue. The play is noted for its portrayal of everyday urban life, exemplified by the little clay cart—a child's toy. It has been translated into several languages and is periodically performed for modern American audiences.

## Mrtyunjaya

("Conqueror of Death") Epithet of the god **Shiva**. The mythic charter behind this particular name comes from the story of the sage **Markandeya**. Devoted to Shiva, Markandeya is an intelligent and religious boy who is proficient in all branches of learning. His story is poignant because he is fated to die at sixteen. When Markandeya learns of this, shortly before his sixteenth birthday, he begins to **worship** Shiva with even greater fervor. On the appointed day, **Yama**, the god of death, comes to claim Markandeya. When Yama throws his noose over Markandeya to draw out the boy's soul, it catches the statue of Shiva to which Markandeya is clinging. Shiva arises from the image and kills Yama, saving Markandeya's life. Although Shiva relents and restores Yama to life, this particular form of Shiva illustrates his power to protect his devotees (**bhakta**) from all things, including death.

## Mudra

("seal") In Indian **dance**, theater, and iconography, a mudra is a stylized hand **gesture** that conveys a specific meaning, ranging from concrete things such as

animals, everyday objects, and the Hindu **deities**, to abstract things such as emotions. In the context of the performing arts, particularly dance, performers tell detailed stories through gesture alone. In the context of iconography, many of these gestures are traits associated with particular deities. There is some syntactic overlap between the terms *mudra* and **hasta** ("hand"); one of the distinctions between them is that some of the hastas simply describe the position of the hand, and others have symbolic meaning, whereas mudras always have very specific symbolic meanings.

## Mudra

(2) Fermented or parched grain. In the secret ritually-based religious practice known as **tantra**, fermented grain is the fourth of the "Five Forbidden Things" (**panchamakara**), which, in "left hand" (**vamachara**) tantric ritual, are used in their actual forms, whereas in "right hand" (**dakshinachara**) tantric ritual they are represented by symbolic substitutes. Fermented grain may have intoxicating effects, but it is also reputed to be an aphrodisiac. "Respectable" Hindu society strongly condemns the use of intoxicants and/or sexual license. Thus the ritual use of this substance must be seen in the larger tantric context. One of the most pervasive tantric assumptions is the ultimate unity of everything that exists. From a tantric perspective, to affirm that the entire universe is one principle means that the adept must reject all concepts based on dualistic thinking. The "Five Forbidden Things" provide a ritual means for breaking down duality. In this ritual the adept breaks societal norms forbidding consumption of **intoxicants**, nonvegetarian food, and illicit sexuality in a conscious effort to sacralize what is normally forbidden. Tantric adepts cite such ritual use of forbidden things as proof that their practice involves a more exclusive qualification (**adhikara**), and is thus superior to common practice. For

further information see Arthur Avalon (Sir John Woodroffe) *Shakti and Shakta*, 1978; Swami Agehananda Bharati, *The Tantric Tradition*, 1977; and Douglas Renfrew Brooks, *The Secret of the Three Cities*, 1990.

## Mudrarakshasa

("**Rakshasa's** Ring") The only surviving **Sanskrit** drama written by the playwright **Vishakhadatta**, who is believed to have lived in the sixth century. The play chronicles the rise of **Chandragupta Maurya**, founder of the **Maurya dynasty**, and the machinations of his cunning **brahmin** minister, **Chanakya**. The drama's plot is highly complex, as with many Sanskrit plays, but its climax comes when the principal characters are dramatically rescued from execution at the last moment. Although the play is based on actual events, historians feel that the portrayal of Chandragupta Maurya as a weak king is inaccurate. The play has been translated into English by Michael Coulson and published in an anthology titled *Three Sanskrit Plays*, 1981.

## Mueller, F. Max

(1823–1900) Linguist, translator, editor, and ardent student of comparative religion and mythology. Mueller was an important figure in nineteenth-century intellectual history. His primary contribution was introducing Indian ideas to Western audiences by translating primary texts into the *Sacred Books of the East* series. His work allowed Hindu and other Asian religious traditions to show the sophisticated thought often concealed by popular religious practice. Mueller began developing a "science of religion"— a field of knowledge that could be pursued as any other. As a professor at Oxford, he helped to change scholarly views on Hinduism and other Asian religions, moving Western minds from simply dismissing them as polytheistic "idolatry" to taking them seriously

as coherent and compelling pictures of the world.

## Muhurta

In traditional timekeeping, a muhurta is a period of forty-eight minutes, of which there are thirty during each day. The **Brahma Muhurta** is the most auspicious time period, coming directly before dawn. The time before the Brahma Muhurta is considered the least auspicious in the day. This cycle exemplifies a pattern in the Indian view of time. A period of inauspiciousness is typically followed by a sudden regeneration of fortune.

## Mukhalinga

A form of the **linga**, the pillar-shaped object symbolizing the god **Shiva**. A mukhalinga has one or more faces (mukha) sculpted on the shaft of the linga. According to the manuals detailing the form and construction of Hindu images, the number of faces on the linga should not exceed the number of doorways in the temple. Thus, a temple with one doorway should have a mukhalinga with one face, and so on, up to four. The manuals also specify that these faces should be placed facing the entrances. For further information see T. A. Gopinatha Rao, *Elements of Hindu Iconography*, 1981.

## Muktananda

(1908–1982) Modern Hindu teacher, proponent of a religious path named **siddha yoga** ("discipline of the adepts"), and founder of the organization named SYDA (Siddha Yoga Dham America). Muktananda left his family at age fifteen to search for spiritual enlightenment. His spiritual master (**guru**) was an **ascetic** named Nityananda, who was widely believed to be an **avadhuta** (a person who has shaken off all attachments). Siddha Yoga's metaphysics are a modified form of **Kashmir** Shaivism. The organization's signature teaching is that the guru's spiritual power can immediately awaken the disciple's latent **kundalini**, hastening the process of spiritual development. This doctrine emphasizes the importance of the guru, reinforced by Muktananda's charismatic presence. Although his home base was an **ashram** just outside of Bombay, Muktananda traveled throughout the world, establishing ashrams and meditation centers in North America, Europe, and Australia. He was succeeded by **Swami Chidvilasananda**. For further information on Muktananda's teaching, see his autobiography, *Play of Consciousness*, 2000.

## Muktibai

(1279–1297?) Poet and saint in the **Varkari Panth**, a religious community centered around the **worship** of the Hindu god **Vithoba**, at his temple at **Pandharpur** in the modern state of **Maharashtra**. According to tradition, Muktibai was the sister of the great Varkari teacher **Jnaneshvar**.

## Muktinath

Temple and sacred site (**tirtha**) at the headwaters of the Kali Gandaki River in **Nepal**; the temple sits at nearly 13,000 feet at the foot of Annapurna, one of the highest mountains in Nepal. Muktinath is a sacred site to both Hindus and Buddhists; each has a temple there. The Buddhist temple is built over a vent of natural gas, which produces a flame when lit. The Hindu temple, dedicated to the god **Vishnu**, is built over a natural spring that is channelled outside the temple through 108 spouts shaped like heads of **cows**. The Kali Gandaki River is also religiously important because the river bed is one of the major sites of fossilized black **ammonite**. Known as the **shalagram**, this ammonite is considered a self-manifestation (**svayambhu**) form of Vishnu.

## Muktiyoga

In the **Dvaita Vedanta** philosophical school propounded by **Madhva**, a

A man's head is shaved in the traditional Hindu practice of mundan.
Removing one's hair is believed to be purifying.

muktiyoga is a person who is predestined to attain liberation. See also **Dvaita Vedanta**.

## Muladhara Chakra

In many schools of **yoga**, and in the secret ritually-based religious practice known as **tantra**, the muladhara chakra is one of the six psychic centers (**chakras**) believed to exist in the **subtle body**. The subtle body is an alternate physiological system existing on a different plane of reality than matter, but corresponding to the material body. The six psychic centers are visualized as multipetaled lotus flowers running roughly along the spine, connected by three vertical channels. Each of the chakras has symbolic associations with various human capacities, various subtle elements (tanmatras), and different seed syllables (**bijaksharas**) formed from the letters of the **Sanskrit** alphabet, encompassing all sacred sound. Above and below these centers are the bodily abodes of **Shiva** (awareness) and **Shakti** (power), the two divine principles through which the entire universe has come into being. The underlying assumption behind the concept of the subtle body is the homology of macrocosm and microcosm, an essential Hindu idea since the time of the mystical texts known as the **Upanishads**.

The six chakras are traditionally enumerated starting from the bottom; the muladhara chakra is the first. It is visualized as a four-petaled lotus, located in the region at the base of the spine. The petals each contain a seed syllable, in this case the consonants from "va" to "sa." The muladhara chakra is associated as the bodily seat for the subtle element of **earth**, to which excretions are compared. The muladhara chakra is also considered the locus for the **kundalini**, the latent spiritual energy present in all human beings, visualized as a serpent wound three times around the muladhara chakra. Despite its associations with the most mundane element and the most impure bodily function, the muladhara is also the source of potential for religious attainment. For further information

see Arthur Avalon (Sir John Woodroffe), *Shakti and Shakta*, 1978; and Philip S. Rawson, *The Art of Tantra*, 1973.

## Mulamantra

("root mantra") A mulamantra is a sacred sound or sounds (**mantra**) that are considered to be the most subtle form of a **deity**. Every Hindu deity has a mulamantra. Different manifestations of the deity usually have different mantras, which are associated with them alone. The mulamantra is usually considered to be the highest and truest form of the deity, since it is nothing but sacred sound.

## Munda

A **demon** general killed by the **Goddess** in the ***Devimahatmya***, a **Sanskrit** text which is the earliest and most important mythic source for the cult of the Goddess. This text describes the Goddess in several different manifestations. The seventh book tells how the goddess **Ambika's** anger takes form as the terrifying goddess **Kali**. Kali attacks the demon armies commanded by Munda and his companion **Chanda**. After destroying the armies, Kali beheads the two generals. As a memorial of this mythic deed, the Goddess is worshiped by the name **Chamunda**, the slayer of Chanda and Munda.

## Mundan

("**shaving**") In general terms, mundan refers to any type of haircutting or shaving done for religious purposes, such as the head-shaving traditionally done at certain pilgrimage places (**tirtha**). In **Tirupati** in southern India, the hair is given as an **offering** to the presiding **deity**; shaving is also a means of ritual purification, as in the rites for the dead. In a more specific sense, mundan is often used as a synonym for the **chudakarana samskara**, a life-cycle rite in which a young child's head is shaved, removing the last residual impurities from **birth**. See also **hair**.

## Muni

A term of ancient provenance, dating back to the **Vedas**, the earliest Hindu religious text. In the Vedas this term is used to denote an **ascetic**, sage, or seer, particularly one keeping a vow of silence.

## Murali

In Hindu mythology, murali is the god **Krishna's** flute. As recounted in sectarian texts such as the *Bhagavata Purana*, and countless vernacular devotional (**bhakti**) poems, the sound of this flute has an enticing quality that is irresistible to Krishna's devotees (**bhakta**). When they hear its melody, they rush to Krishna's presence. The flute and its siren song are seen as an extension of Krishna's own enticing presence.

## Murals

**Sanskrit** literature contains numerous references to mural painting. In early medieval times, these were common forms of decorating both temples and the homes of the wealthy. The heat and moisture of the Indian climate have not been kind to such artwork; few examples remain today. The most famous murals are at Buddhist sites—Ajanta in central India and Sigiriya in **Sri Lanka**. These murals convey themes about everyday life. There are also traces of painting in the caves at **Ellora**. Paintings from the Chola era were recently discovered at the **Rajrajeshvar temple** in **Tanjore**; they are being restored. See also **Chola dynasty**.

## Murari

("Mura's enemy") Epithet of the god **Krishna**. Mura is an extremely powerful **demon** who conquers all of the gods. He is eventually killed in battle by Krishna. See **Krishna**.

## Murari Gupta

(16th c.) Author of the earliest version of the ***Chaitanya-Charitramrta*** ("Nectar

of Chaitanya's Deeds"), an account describing the life of the Bengali saint **Chaitanya** (1486–1533). Murari Gupta's text focuses on Chaitanya's early life up to his southern Indian pilgrimage ending in 1513. The last part of the text briefly mentions his pilgrimage to **Brindavan** in 1514 and his final return to **Puri**, where he lived for the rest of his life. Like the other traditional accounts of Chaitanya's life, this does not purport to be an "objective" biography; it is rather a hagiography (idealized portrait) written by a passionate devotee (**bhakta**). Nevertheless, Murari Gupta was a contemporary and companion of Chaitanya; his text reflects first-hand experience and is the most reliable of these traditional sources.

## Murti

("shape," "form") The most common name for a sculptural image of a Hindu **deity** fashioned by human beings, rather than those that are self-manifested (**svayambhu images**) forms of the deity.

## Murugan

("fragrant, beautiful") Hindu **deity** primarily worshiped in southern India. Murugan originally appears in the Tamil **Sangam literature**, where he is a hill deity associated with the hunt and wild, unsettled places. One of Murugan's characteristic objects is the lance, symbolizing the hunt. As brahminical Hindu culture gradually came to southern India, Murugan was drawn into the established pantheon as a form of the god **Skanda**, who is the son of the god **Shiva**. By the tenth century Murugan's identity had evolved as that of a philosopher and exponent of the **Shaiva Siddhanta** philosophical school and as the patron deity of **Tamil language** and literature. For southern Indians, especially in the state of **Tamil Nadu**, worshiping Murugan becomes a vehicle to affirm their traditional culture. This has been particularly true since Indian independence in 1947, when the attempt to impose **Hindi** as the national language was seen as northern Indian cultural imperialism and was met with incredible resistance. The cult of Murugan has five major pilgrimage centers—**Palani**, **Tiruchendur**, **Tiruttani**, **Tirrupparankunram**, and **Swami Malai**. All of these sites are located in different parts of Tamil Nadu. This network of sacred sites (**tirthas**) is a way in which the cult of Murugan has come to symbolize Tamil identity. For further information see Fred Clothey, "Pilgrimage Centers in the Tamil Cultus of Murukan," in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion,* Vol. 40, No.1, 1972.

## Musala

("pestle") A musala is a grinding pestle, used with a mortar to husk and grind grain. Miniature versions were used to grind spices. Aside from its utilitarian use, the musala's long, club-like shape could easily serve as a weapon. It is one of the characteristic objects in Hindu iconography, appearing with images of various **deities**—the **Goddess**, **Shiva**, and **Vishnu**.

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James G. Lochtefeld, Ph.D.

*First Edition*

*Manufactured in the United States of America*

# N

## Nabhadas

(c. 1600) Author of the ***Bhaktamal***
("Garland of Devotees"). In this hagio-
graphic text, he gives short (six line)
accounts of the lives of more than two
hundred contemporary **bhakti** (devo-
tional) figures, some from personal
experience. Although Nabhadas identi-
fies himself as a **Ramanandi**—a devotee
(**bhakta**) of the god **Rama**—his work
includes devotees of all sectarian per-
suasions. The text is notably free of mar-
velous and miraculous events, and
Nabhadas emphasizes the devotee's
personal qualities, to serve as a model of
devotion for others. In many cases the
*Bhaktamal* gives the earliest reliable
account for these figures, making it an
important source for northern Indian
literary and religious history. Despite its
importance the text cannot be defini-
tively dated, although internal evidence
suggests that it was completed early in
the seventeenth century.

## Nacciyar Tirumoli

One of two collections of poetry com-
posed by the poet-saint **Andal** (9th c.),
the other being the ***Tirruppavai***. Andal
was the only woman among the **Alvars**,
a group of twelve poet-saints who lived
in southern India between the seventh
and tenth centuries. All the Alvars were
devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Vishnu**.
Their emphasis on passionate devotion
(**bhakti**) to a personal god, conveyed
through hymns sung in the **Tamil lan-
guage**, transformed and revitalized
Hindu religious life. Andal's chosen
**deity** was **Ranganatha**, the form of
Vishnu presiding at the temple of
**Shrirangam**. Yet both collections of her

poetry are dedicated to **Krishna**, a dif-
ferent form of Vishnu. This seeming
divergence may reflect her conviction
that all manifestations of Vishnu are
ultimately the same or indicate the dif-
ference between personal devotion and
literary expression.

The thirty poems in the *Nacciyar
Tirumoli* are told by a group of unmar-
ried girls, who have taken a vow to bathe
in the river at dawn during the coldest
month of the year. This vow has a long
history in southern India, where young
girls would take the oath to gain a good
husband and a happy married life. In the
poem, the girls have taken the vow to
gain Krishna as their husband. The
poems in the cycle describe various fea-
tures of the natural world at dawn, the
girls' hopes in performing the vow, and
their return to Krishna's house to awaken
him and beg for his **grace**. The final
poem in the series describes the benefits
gained by one who chants the text.

## Nachiketas

A primary character in the **Kathka
Upanishad**, a speculative philosophical
text considered one of the later **upan-
ishads**. In the text, the boy Nachiketas is
the seeker of ultimate wisdom. In a fit of
anger his father curses him to be given
to Death; Nachiketas obediently goes to
the house of Death to give himself up.
He waits for three days at Death's door,
but receives none of the hospitality due
to a **brahmin** guest. When Death returns
he is disturbed to discover that his guest
has been neglected. To atone for the
lapse, Death offers Nachiketas three
boons. With his first two, Nachiketas
wishes to return to his father and to
understand the meaning of a particular
sacrificial ritual. With the final boon he
asks what happens to a person after the
death of the body. Death first tries to
evade the question, then tries to bribe
Nachiketas with other gifts. When the
boy holds firm in his resolve, Death
begins to reveal his secrets. This dis-
course makes up the bulk of the text.
Death's secrets focus mainly on the

reality of the Self (**atman**), its eternal and indestructible nature, and the difficulties in truly knowing it. The Self is portrayed as the ultimate truth, and to know it is to know the only thing that really matters.

## Nadi

("tube") In general, the word *nadi* may be applied to any pipe or tube, whether in plumbing or the human circulatory system. A nadi has a more specialized meaning with regard to the Hindu conception of the **subtle body**. The subtle body is an alternate physiological system, existing on a different plane than gross matter, but corresponding to the material body. It consists of six psychic centers (**chakras**), visualized as multipetaled lotus flowers running roughly along the spine, connected by three vertical channels known as nadis. Of these, the **ida nadi** is on the left side, the **pingala nadi** on the right, and the **sushumna** in the center.

## Naga

("naked") The general term for any fighting or militant **ascetic**. Ascetic orders traditionally chartered companies of fighting ascetics to protect the members and their resources. The Naga orders of the **Dashanami Sanyasis** were devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva**, whereas the **Bairagi** orders were devotees of the god **Vishnu**. In northern India during the eighteenth century these Naga ascetics developed into dynamic military and mercantile powerhouses. In several instances, Naga ascetics managed to carve out petty kingdoms of their own. In many other instances, they had significant influence in the northern Indian economy and politics, whether in their own right or as mercenary soldiers in the service of a reigning monarch. Their name was a literal description of their practices, since many of these ascetics would go into battle bearing only their weapons. Their ash-smeared

bodies and flying matted hair presented a fearsome sight. As Indian social and political circumstances have changed, their military importance has faded. However, these organizations (**akhara**) of Naga ascetics still exist, although they are most important now in determining the order for bathing (**snana**) at the **Kumbha Mela**. The accounts of the ascetics themselves are full of tales of strife along sectarian lines (**Shaivas** versus **Vaishnavas**); a good indication that the Shaivas gained superiority is that they have priority in the bathing at the Kumbha Melas. For further information see Jadunath Sarkar, *A History of the Dasanami Naga Sanyasis*, 1958; David Lorenzen, "Warrior Ascetics in Indian History," in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 98, No. 1, 1978; and James G. Lochtefeld, "The Vishva Hindu Parishad and the Roots of Hindu Militancy," in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. LXII, No. 2, 1994.

## Naga

(2) In Hindu mythology, the Nagas are a class of minor divinities who have the form of serpents. Their king is **Vasuki**. In popular Hinduism, Nagas are often considered to be the gods of a specific place. Often associated with fertility and fecundity, Nagas are usually believed to live in springs, ponds, and other small bodies of **water**. In Buddhist and Jain iconography the Nagas often play the role of minor protective **deities**. It is common to see a seated figure shadowed by an "umbrella" of Nagas. Although this is unusual in Hindu iconography, there may be remnants of this in the iconography of the god **Shiva**, who is often depicted wearing snakes for both his ornaments and his **sacred thread**.

## Nagara

One of the three developed styles in medieval Hindu temple **architecture**, along with the **Dravida** and the **Veshara**.

Built in the Nagara style, the Triloknath Temple in Mandi consists of a series of towers, the largest of which contains an image of the presiding deity.

The Nagara style is found throughout northern and eastern India. One of its prominent features is a **shikhara** or tower. The shikhara is often surrounded by smaller towers that lead the eye up to the highest point, which is directly over the image of the temple's primary **deity**. Within this general pattern there are two variants, exemplified by the temples at **Khajuraho** and **Orissa**.

In Khajuraho the series of shikharas are connected, forming a continuous rising swell that draws the eye upward, similar to a series of hills leading to a distant peak. This verticality is accentuated through the use of turrets (**urushringas**) on the sides of the towers, which replicate the shape of the final peak. The entire temple is set on a raised base (**adhishthana**). Within the temple there are usually several different zones: an entrance porch (**ardhamandapa**), a hall (**mandapa**), an intermediate area (**antarala**), and a central shrine (**garbhagrha**) surrounded by a processional path

(**pradakshina**). Despite their different parts, temples built in the Khajuraho style convey the artistic impression of an integrated, unified whole.

The Orissan style emphasizes the contrast between the temple's constituent parts. The two central components are the entrance hall (**jagamohan**) and the beehive-shaped temple tower (**deul**). The tower is often three or four times taller than the entrance hall, a difference that tends to heighten the contrast between the two. Other sections include a dance-hall (**natamandira**), traditionally used for performances, and a "food pavilion" (**bhogamandapa**), where the **prasad** was cooked. These architectural elements are connected like beads on a string, as seemingly separable parts lined up with one another. The most important temples in the Orissan style are the **Lingaraja Temple** in **Bhubaneshvar**, the **Jagannath** temple in **Puri**, and the **Sun Temple** at **Konarak**.

## Nageshvar

Temple and sacred site (**tirtha**) about fifteen miles northeast of the holy city of **Dwaraka**, in the eastern state of **Gujarat**. The temple is named after its presiding **deity**, the god **Shiva** in his manifestation as the "Lord of Serpents." Shiva is present at Nageshvar in the form of a **linga**, a pillar-shaped image. The Nageshvar linga is one of the twelve **jyotirlingas**, a network of sites at which Shiva is uniquely present. Nageshvar's charter myth is based on the story of the demon Daruk and his wife Daruka. Daruka is a fervent devotee (**bhakta**) of Shiva's wife **Parvati**; through Parvati's **grace** Daruka gains protection for all the other **demons**. The demons use this power to oppress the righteous. As the demons are about to kill one of Shiva's devotees, Shiva appears and slays them. Parvati has come along with Shiva to protect Daruka, her devotee. Daruka persuades Shiva and Parvati to remain in Nageshvar as a sign of their **grace**. Since the city of Dwaraka is also connected with the god **Krishna**, some scholars believe the Nageshvar linga may have been promoted to maintain a Shaivite presence in an important **Vaishnava** area.

## Nag Panchami

Festival falling on the fifth day (panchami) of the bright, waxing half of the **lunar month** of **Shravan** (July–August). This day is devoted to the **worship** of serpents, whether as **Nagas**—the minor **deities** who take the form of snakes—or actual cobras and other snakes. On this day the images of the Naga deities are bathed and given **offerings**. Offerings are also made to real serpents. On this day people refrain from digging in the earth, since snakes live there.

This rite occurs on the fifth day because in astrology (**jyotisha**), the guardian deity for this day is **Shesha**, the god **Vishnu's** serpent couch. This festival falls at the beginning of the rainy **season**, when the rising waters caused by the **monsoon** rains often drive snakes out of their dens, and at times into peoples' homes and gardens. The rainy season is also the time for growing crops; snakes pose a real danger for people working in the fields. According to one estimate, 10,000 Indians die from snakebites every year. According to popular belief, observing this rite will protect one from snakebites for the entire year. This observance is a protective ritual, marking the advent of a dangerous time for many villagers.

## Nagpur

City in the eastern state of **Maharashtra**. Nagpur is the birthplace of the Hindu nationalist organization known as the **Rashtriya Svayamsevak Sangh**. The organization was formed in 1925 by **Dr**. **K**. **B**. **Hedgewar** and still maintains its headquarters in Nagpur.

## Nahusha

In Hindu mythology, a king of the lunar dynasty, and a paradigm for a person

afflicted with self-pride. Through amassing religious merits, Nahusha succeeds to the throne of **Indra**, the king of the gods, who has gone into hiding because of an evil deed. Nahusha is filled with lust for Indra's wife, **Indrani**. He tries to act on it despite the obvious improprieties of approaching another man's wife and a mortal making a claim on a **goddess**. Nahusha sets off for Indrani's palace in a **palanquin**. In his impatience, he whips the palanquin bearers, saying "Sarpa, sarpa" ("Move! Move!"). Unfortunately for Nahusha, one of the bearers is **Agastya**, the sage. For Nahusha's lust and disrespect, Agastya curses him to become a snake (sarpa). Nahusha remains a serpent for many years but is released from the **curse** by the sight of the **Pandava** brothers.

## Nai

Traditional Indian society was modeled as a collection of **endogamous**, or intermarried, subgroups known as **jatis** ("birth"). Jatis were organized (and their social status determined) by the group's hereditary occupation, over which the group held a monopoly. The Nai jati's occupation was barbering, a low status job because it required continual contact with cut human hair, considered a source of impurity (ashaucha). In many instances the Nais also served as messengers.

## Naimisha

City and sacred site (**tirtha**) in the state of **Uttar Pradesh**, about fifty miles northwest of the city of Lucknow. In the later sectarian literature known as the **puranas**, Naimisha is described as a forest. Today the city's major attraction is a spring-fed bathing (**snana**) pool named Chakra Tirtha. According to tradition, this bathing pool contains **water** from all the holy places of India, and thus is the best place for pious Hindus to take a holy bath.

## Naimittika Karma

("occasional [ritual] action") One of three general types of ritual action, the others being **nitya karma** and **kamya karma**. Naimittika karma rites follow a particular cause (naimittika); when particular circumstances arise, one is required to perform the ritual. For example, when a child is born, certain rites must be performed. However, the ritual is not required unless a birth has taken place.

## Naina Devi

Presiding **deity** of the Naina Devi temple in the **Shiwalik Hills** in the state of **Himachal Pradesh**, and one of the nine **Shiwalik goddesses**. Naina Devi's temple is located on a mountaintop close to the border of **Punjab**. It is nine miles from Anandpur Sahib, a famous Sikh place of pilgrimage, and about one mile from Nangal village. The greatest pilgrimage traffic occurs during festivals held on the eighth day in each half of the **lunar month** of **Shravan**, and also during the first nine days of the month of **Ashvin**, when the **Navaratri** festival takes place.

According to the temple's charter myth, Naina Devi is one of the **Shakti Pithas**, a network of sites sacred to the **Goddess** which spreads throughout the subcontinent. Each Shakti Pitha marks the site where a body part of the dismembered goddess **Sati** fell to earth, taking form there as a different goddess; **Naina Devi** was Sati's eyes (naina). As with many of the other Shiwalik goddesses, the images in Naina Devi's temple are self-manifested (**svayambhu** images) outcrops of stone. In a different version of the myth, the images were discovered by a herdsman named Naina, who heeded the command of the Goddess to build a temple for her. For further information see Kathleen Erndl, *Victory to the Mother*, 1993. See also **pitha**.

## Naisthika

("fixed") A person who takes a vow to remain a perpetual religious student (**brahmacharin**), keeping lifelong vows of **celibacy**, austerity, study, and service to his or her religious preceptor (**guru**).

## Naivedya

("to be presented") The thirteenth of the sixteen traditional **upacharas** ("**offerings**") given to a **deity** as part of **worship**. To treat the deity as an honored guest, a person may offer food. The food is often returned to the worshipers as **prasad**, the sanctified food bearing the deity's **grace**. The offering may be done in various ways, but the underlying motive for all the upacharas is to show one's love for the deity and attend to the deity's needs.

## Naiyayika

Term for a follower of the **Nyaya** and **Vaisheshika** philosophical schools, two of the **six schools** in Hindu **philosophy**. After the early centuries of the common era, the Nyaya and Vaisheshika schools merged, as did the **Samkhya** and **Yoga schools** and the **Mimamsa** and **Vedanta schools**. The term Naiyayika is used to denote a follower of the combined Nyaya-Vaisheshika school of philosophy.

## Nakshatra

In Indian astrology (**jyotisha**), a nakshatra is one of the twenty-seven signs in the lunar **zodiac**. In a single **lunar month** the **moon** moves through each of the twenty-seven lunar houses. The territory for these lunar houses is divided equally throughout the solar zodiac—with 2.25 lunar houses for each of the twelve solar signs. The nakshatras are important in Indian astrology, partly because they change quite rapidly, but also because the character and qualities associated with each nakshatra are believed to color the time period in which they fall. One group of five nakshatras, the **Panchak Nakshatra**, is considered extremely **inauspicious**; many activities will be curtailed until this period has passed. Certain nakshatras are judged to be incompatible with certain everyday activities, which should be avoided during that time. Hindus who pay attention to astrology are keenly aware of the passage of time and the quality of each moment.

## Nakula

In the *Mahabharata*, the later of the two great Hindu epics, Nakula is the fourth of the five **Pandava** brothers, the epic's antagonists. Nakula's mother, **Madri**, is the younger wife of King **Pandu**. None of the Pandava brothers are actually Pandu's sons, since he has been cursed to die the moment he holds his wife in amorous embrace. Instead, they are magically created through the effect of a **mantra** given to Madri's co-wife, **Kunti**, by the sage **Durvasas**. The mantra gives the woman who recites it the power to call down any of the gods to conceive a son who will be as powerful as the god himself. With Pandu's blessing Kunti teaches the mantra to Madri. She meditates on the **Ashvins**, the divine twins who are the physicians of the gods. Thus, she bears twins. As the sons of the physicians of the gods, both Nakula and **Sahadeva** are skilled healers of **animals** and human beings. Although Nakula and Sahadeva are among the five Pandava brothers, they are less important to the *Mahabharata* than their three elder siblings.

## Nala

In Hindu mythology, the King of Nishadas and the husband of **Damayanti.** The story of Nala and **Damayanti** appears as a story within the *Mahabharata*, the later of the two great Hindu epics. It is recounted to the five **Pandava** brothers, the epic's protagonists, during their twelve year exile in the forest, as a way to keep up their spirits by telling how others have transcended misfortune.

When Damayanti is old enough to marry, her father sends invitations to the kings of the earth, announcing her **svayamvara**, a rite in which Damayanti will choose her husband. The kings of the earth come to the svayamvara to seek her hand, as do the gods (**devas**)

themselves. Yet Damayanti has already decided to choose Nala after being advised by a swan who praises him. The gods try to foil this by taking on the physical appearance of Nala, so that Damayanti will not be able to tell the difference between them. As a last resort, Damayanti makes an **act of truth**, a ritual action whose efficacy is based on the power of truth. In her act of truth, Damayanti declares that she has never loved anyone but Nala. To prove that this statement is true, she directs the gods to resume their true forms. Compelled by the power of truth, the gods immediately do as she commands. Nala and Damayanti are married, and as a reward for her fidelity, the gods give Nala various divine gifts. Hearing of the marriage, two of the rejected suitors curse Nala to lose his kingdom. Because of the **curse**, Nala and Damayanti are separated and suffer long tribulations, which include Nala having his body magically changed so that no one is able to recognize him. In the end Damayanti recognizes him by his divine powers, which cannot be hidden, and the lovers are happily reunited. See also **truth, power of**.

## Naladiyar

One of the most important pieces of early Tamil literature, along with its predecessor, the *Tirukkural*. The Naladiyar is a collection of four hundred verses that date from the fifth or sixth century. Mainly concerned with moral and ethical life, the verses were written by a group of Jain monks who found shelter with a pious king in time of famine. In gratitude each monk wrote one verse. Despite the *Naladiyar*'s sectarian origin, it has become the cultural property of Tamils from all religious communities; many of the verses have come into the language as proverbial sayings.

## Nalayira Divyaprabandham

("The Four Thousand Divine Compositions") Title for the collected



Namakarana samskara being performed on an infant, who in this photo is wrapped in cloth for protection from the evil eye.

hymns of the **Alvars**, compiled in the tenth century by **Nathamuni**. The Alvars were a group of twelve poet-saints who lived in southern India between the seventh and tenth centuries. All the Alvars were devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Vishnu** and emphasized passionate devotion (**bhakti**) to a personal god, conveyed through hymns sung in the **Tamil language**. Their collected hymns were popularly known as the "Tamil Veda." They carry Vedic authority for many southern Indian Vaishnavas, particularly the **Shrivaishnava** school, which applied more developed philosophical articulation to these devotional ideas. See also **Veda**.

## Namakarana ("name-giving") Samskara

The fifth of the traditional life-cycle ceremonies (**samskaras**), during which the newborn child is given a name. Although some commentators believe

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that this rite should be done on the day of **birth**, many others insist that it should be on the tenth day, indicating a difference between birth and the social ritual of name-giving. Some believe that the child's name should begin with the first letter of the **nakshatra** (sign in the lunar **zodiac**) in which the child is born; this practice is still widespread in northern India. Although the classical form of this rite has largely fallen into disuse, naming ceremonies are still an important part of the birth of a child.

## Namarupa

Literally, this word means "name [and physical] form," two of the most identifiable and enduring aspects of a person. In philosophical discourse, the term *namarupa* is often used pejoratively to designate all aspects of personality that are ultimately ephemeral but help reinforce the illusion of a diverse world and a Self with an independent identity. These notions of independence are thought to be ultimately false since one's name and form will be different in one's next **birth**. In this context, namarupa designates all that is provisionally real.

## Namaskara

("reverential salutation") Both a phrase and a **gesture** used to greet another person respectfully. The gesture is done by joining both palms, pointing the fingers up, with the base of the thumbs touching the chest. Namaskara is the fourteenth of sixteen traditional **upacharas** ("**offerings**") given to a **deity** as part of **worship**, treating the deity as an honored guest. In this action, the deity is given a gesture of respect, which can take a variety of forms: joining the palms with the fingers pointing upward (**anjali hasta**), kneeling and touching one's head to the floor, or a full prostration (**dandavat pranam**). The underlying motive for all the upacharas is to show one's respect and love for the deity by ministering to the deity's needs.

## Nambudiri

Southern Indian **brahmin** community, which is a sub-division of the **Dravida** brahmins, one of five southern Indian brahmin communities (**Pancha Dravida**). The Nambudiris' traditional homeland is in the region that is now the modern state of **Kerala**. The Nambudiris are noted throughout India for their learning and piety. According to tradition, the great philosopher **Shankaracharya** was a Nambudiri brahmin. In his desire to revitalize Hindu religion, Shankaracharya reportedly chose one Hindu sacred center in each corner of the subcontinent, and at each established a **Dashanami Sanyasi** monastic center (**math**) to train learned monks. One of these sacred centers was at **Badrinath** in the **Himalayas**. According to the Badrinath temple records, for several hundred years the temple **worship** was performed by the **Dandi Sanyasis**, who were also Nambudiri brahmins. When the last of these died without a successor in 1776, the local king, who served as the protector of the shrine, invited a non-**ascetic** Nambudiri brahmin to serve as the temple's priest. This priest was given the title **rawal** ("deputy"), and his extended family has maintained the shrine since then. The rawal was the only person allowed to touch the image of the presiding **deity**. As a consequence he was required to remain a bachelor, lest the ritual impurity arising from the **birth** of a child (**sutakashaucha**) render him unable to attend to his duties. For a long time the rawals had sole rights to the **offerings** given at the shrine, but since 1939 the temple has been managed by a committee, and the rawal has been restricted to ritual duties.

## Namdev

(1270–1350?) Poet-saint who is one of the great figures in the **Varkari Panth**, a religious community centered around the **worship** of the Hindu god **Vithoba**, at his temple in **Pandharpur** in the modern state of **Maharashtra**. According to tradition, Namdev was a cotton-printer, considered a low-status occupation, but the strength of his devotion rendered his worldly status irrelevant. He is said to have been an associate of **Jnaneshvar** and **Chokamela**, two other Varkari poet-saints. His songs have been preserved in several different collections, including the **Adigranth** (compiled by the Sikh community) and the **Panchvani** (a collection of songs by five poets compiled by the **Dadupanth**). For traditional information about his life, see G. A. Deleury, *The Cult of Vithoba*, 1960; and Justin E. Abbott and Narhar R. Godbole (trans.), *Stories of Indian Saints*, 1982. For a more critical look at his Hindu songs and the difficulties using them as biographical sources, see Winand Callewaert and Mukund Lath, *The Hindi Padavali of Namdev*, 1989.

## Nammalvar

(10th c.) The most prolific composer of all the **Alvars**, a group of twelve poet-saints who lived in southern India between the seventh and tenth centuries. All the Alvars were devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Vishnu**. They emphasized passionate devotion (**bhakti**) to a personal god, conveyed through hymns sung in the **Tamil language**, which transformed and revitalized Hindu religious life. According to tradition, Nammalvar was born into a princely family, but was completely disinterested with life in the world. His distraught parents eventually abandoned him. Nammalvar crawled into the hollow of a giant tamarind tree, where he sat in silent meditation. He remained there until the arrival of his disciple **Mathurakavi**, who managed to rouse him by posing a question on the nature of the Self. Nammalvar immediately poured forth more than one thousand hymns to Vishnu, each beginning with the last word of the previous hymn. These hymns are known as the ***Tiruvaymoli*** ("holy words"). This collection of 1,102 stanzas is the concluding section of the ***Nalayira Divyaprabandham***, the collected hymns of the Alvars. For further information see Kamil Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature*, 1975; John Stirling Morley Hooper, *Hymns of the Alvars*, 1929; A. Shrinivasa Raghavan, *Nammalvar*, 1975; and A. K. Ramanujan, *Hymns for the Drowning*, 1981.

## Nanak Jayanti

Celebration falling on the **full moon** in the **lunar month** of **Kartik** (October–November). This day is celebrated as the birthday of the first Sikh **guru**, Guru Nanak, and is celebrated largely by members of the Sikh community.

## Nanda

In Hindu mythology, the god **Krishna's** foster father, who cares for Krishna as his own child after Krishna is placed in his care. Nanda is described as the headman of the village. Under his care Krishna lives a comfortable, if simple, life. In Krishna's mythology, Nanda is a less important figure than Krishna's foster mother, **Yashoda**.

## Nanda Devi

Nanda Devi is the name for one of the tallest mountains in India, rising over 25,000 feet, in the Kumaon region of the **Himalayas**. Nanda Devi is also a form of the **Goddess** who is identified with that mountain. With Nanda Devi, as for many of the other **goddesses** of India, divinity and the natural landscape are inextricably connected. Nanda Devi is a local Himalayan goddess who presides over the **Garhwal** and Kumaon regions. People in the region consider her to be a "daughter" of the region, who had to change her residence when she married the god **Shiva**. Nanda Devi's songs and rites show strong connections with the

Statue of Nandi, the bull who is the god Shiva's vehicle.

life-cycle journeys of Himalayan **women**. Songs associated with Nanda Devi describe the difficulty of going from her natal home to her marital home, a reality for many Himalayan women. In the same way, Nanda Devi's pilgrimages, which emphasize journeys through the hills surrounding the mountain, imitate the women's periodic journeys back to their own natal villages. A major part of Nanda Devi's mythology is the adoption of an abandoned buffalo calf, which is later discovered to be a **demon** in buffalo form. The buffalo demon grows large and troublesome, and is eventually slain by Nanda Devi. This myth parallels the narrative in the *Devimahatmya*, the earliest and most important source for the mythology of the Goddess; this is the most influential text used in Nanda Devi's **worship**. For further information on Nanda Devi, her rites, and her connection with Himalayan society, see William Sax, *Mountain Goddess*, 1991.

## Nanddas

(late 16th c.) One of the **ashtachap**, a group of eight northern Indian **bhakti** (devotional) poets. The compositions of these eight poets were used for liturgical purposes by the **Pushti Marg**, a religious community whose members are devotees (**bhakta**) of **Krishna**. In the Pushti Marg's sectarian literature, all eight are also named as members of the community, and as associates of either the community's founder, **Vallabhacharya**, or his successor, **Vitthalnath**. Very little is known about his life, but he is mentioned in the *Bhaktamal*, a collection of lives of the saints written by **Nabhadas** in the seventeenth century. Like all the poetry associated with the Pushti Marg, Nanddas's poetry focused on devotion to Krishna. His two most important works, written in elegant poetry, are extended poems on the **ras lila** and **Uddhava's** message. Both of these themes date back to the *Bhagavata Purana* (10th c.?), the most important text for Krishna devotionalism. These have been translated by R. S. McGregor, *The Round Dance of Krishna and Uddhav's Message*, 1973.

## Nandi

("joy," "delight") Epithet of the animal vehicle of the god **Shiva**, which takes the form of a **bull**. Like all of the animal vehicles, it symbolizes the **deity**. Nandi is not only Shiva's vehicle, but his devotee (**bhakta**). Statues of Nandi are often sculpted outside Shiva temples (usually facing the image) as a way of marking the site as sacred to Shiva. He appears in many places in Shiva's mythology, but usually as a devoted underling advancing Shiva's purposes, rather than an independent agent with a purpose and ends of his own.

## Nandigrama

In the *Ramayana*, the earlier of the two great Hindu epics, Nandigrama is a village outside the city of **Ayodhya**, where Prince **Bharata** sets up the royal court

during his brother **Rama's** absence. Bharata's mother **Kaikeyi** uses her influence to banish Rama for fourteen years, putting Bharata on the throne in his place. At Rama's command, Bharata agrees to act as the temporary king, but with two symbolic adjustments. The first is that Bharata moves the royal court from the capital city of Ayodhya to the village of Nandigrama, as a symbol of Rama's exile; the second is that throughout his regency, Bharata sits at the foot of the royal throne, upon which is placed a pair of Rama's sandals, symbolizing that Rama is the rightful ruler. Thus, Nandigrama is a symbol of Bharata's righteousness.

## Narada

A famous sage in Hindu mythology, equally renowned for his qualities as a musician and as a gossip. Narada plays a stringed instrument known as the **vina**, serving as the bard to the gods. His ambition as a musician apparently exceeds his actual skill, since several of his mythic stories describe him being humbled. In his capacity as wandering musician, he also conveys news and gossip. In many cases Narada's news-bearing is the vehicle advancing the plot in a story. According to one famous story, he requests that **Vishnu** give a demonstration of his **magic** (**maya**). Vishnu sends him to a nearby farmhouse for some water, where Narada meets an enchantingly beautiful woman. Forgetting all about his errand, the two fall in love, are married, and have several children. After several years of wedded bliss, severe floods wash away his home and drown his family. As he mourns his loss, he finds himself back on the side of road with Vishnu, who is still asking him to go to the farmhouse to get some water.

## Narada Smrti

One of the **smrtis** or "remembered" texts, a class of literature deemed important, but less authoritative than the

other textual category, the **shrutis** or "heard" texts. This smrti is ascribed to the sage **Narada**, and is an example of one of the **Dharma Shastras**, which were manuals prescribing rules for correct human behavior and ideal social life. Unlike the **Dharma Sutras**, which are ascribed to recognizable individuals, the Dharma Shastras are usually ascribed to mythic sages, a strategy used to reinforce the authority of these texts. The *Narada Smrti* exists in several versions, one of which is much longer than the others. All of the versions were written later than the **Manu Smrti** (1st c. B.C.E.?), since this text is mentioned in the preface. Narada's text deals exclusively with the administration of justice (vyavahara), and treats this in exhaustive detail, with a strong emphasis on clarity and precision.

## Narak Chaturdashi

Religious observance falling on the fourteenth day (chaturdashi) of the dark, waning half of the **lunar month** of **Kartik** (October–November). People who observe this day **worship** and make **offerings** to the god **Yama**. In the evening they light a lamp in his name. Yama is the lord of the underworld and the judge of the dead; he reviews the deeds of the dead and inflicts punishment upon people for their misdeeds. Those who faithfully observe Narak Chaturdashi are believed to be spared from the torments of **hell**.

## Nara-Narayana

In Hindu mythology, two of the **sons** of the god **Dharma**; through their **ascetic** practices (**tapas**) these two boys became sages. The place where they performed their **asceticism** is believed to have been in the region of **Badrinath**. The duo are still associated with the charter myths for that place.

## Narasimha ("Man-Lion") Avatar

Fourth **avatar** or incarnation of the god **Vishnu**, in which he appears as a figure

with the head and shoulders of a **lion**, but the torso and lower body of a man. As with all of Vishnu's avatars, this appearance comes at a moment when the cosmos is in crisis, and decisive divine action is needed to restore cosmic equilibrium. See **Man-Lion avatar**.

## Narasimha Jayanti

Religious observance falling on the fourteenth day of the bright, waxing half of the **lunar month** of **Baisakh** (April–May). This day is celebrated as the birthday of **Vishnu's** fourth **avatar**, Narasimha, although his birthday is different from those of Vishnu's human avatars. Narasimha is not human, but a creature with the head and shoulders of a **lion**, and the torso and lower body of a man. He is not born in the usual sense, but bursts forth fully formed from a pillar, to destroy the **demon Hiranyakashipu** and to protect his devotee (**bhakta**) **Prahlada**. See also **Man-Lion avatar**.

## Narasimhavarman I

(r. 630–668) **Pallava dynasty** ruler during its most vibrant era, when it was a stronghold of Tamil culture. Narasimhavarman succeeded his father **Mahendravarman**, who had been killed in a battle with the forces of the **Chalukya** king **Pulakeshin II**. Narasimhavarman avenged his father's death by conquering the Chalukya kingdom and killing Pulakeshin II in battle, but the two kingdoms were so evenly matched that neither could retain control over the other. Like his father, Narasimhavarman was a great patron of the arts. It was during his reign that construction commenced on the great sculptures at **Mahabalipuram** in the state of **Tamil Nadu**. The most famous of these is a rock-cut **sculpture** depicting the myth of the Descent of the **Ganges**, in which a natural vertical fissure is used to lay out the river's path.

## Narasimhavarman II

(r. 700–728) **Pallava dynasty** ruler during the dynasty's most vibrant era, when it was a stronghold of Tamil culture. Like all the great Pallava monarchs, Narasimhavarman II was a great patron of the arts. During his reign there was continued construction of the monuments at **Mahabalipuram** in the state of **Tamil Nadu**.

## Narayana

Epithet of the god **Vishnu**. The name is traditionally interpreted as meaning "resting on the waters," based on the claim that the word *nara*, which usually means "man," in this case means "waters." Narayana is the image of Vishnu in the time of cosmic dissolution (**pralaya**). He is reclining on his serpent couch, **Shesha**, in the midst of the cosmic sea, with his wife, **Lakshmi**, seated at his feet, and his vehicle, **Garuda**, standing by. Vishnu is the sole remaining agent in the cosmos, as its beginning and end. When the time for a new creation arrives, a lotus sprouts forth from Narayana's navel, which opens to reveal the creator-god **Brahma**. The cycle of creation begins anew.

## Narayana Bhatta

(1513–1570?) The most celebrated scholar and commentator on the **dharma literature** of his time, and the patriarch of a scholarly family. **Narayana's** father had migrated from the city of **Paithan**, in central India, to **Benares**, a center of **Sanskrit** learning. Narayana's work fell mainly in the class of commentarial literature known as **nibandhas** ("collections"), which were compilations of Hindu lore. Nibandha compilers collected references on a particular theme from the **Vedas**, dharma literature, **puranas**, and other authoritative religious texts, and then compiled these excerpts into a single volume. Aside from his unparalleled command of these traditional texts, Narayana was also noted for his learned interpretation

and commentary; to these texts, he applied the rules that the **Purva Mimamsa** philosophical school had originally developed to interpret the Vedas, the oldest Hindu religious texts. According to tradition, he was a man whose personal holiness was equal to his great learning. He is reported to have performed a miracle by causing rain to fall out of **season**, convincing the Muslim officials ruling Benares to allow the **Vishvanath** temple to be rebuilt.

## Narmada River
Central Indian river that has its source at the sacred site (**tirtha**) of **Amarkantak** in the state of **Madhya Pradesh**, and flows almost directly west through the state of **Gujarat**, then to the Arabian Sea. The Narmada is one of the few central Indian rivers flowing from east to west; rivers further south are channeled east by the upthrust of the highlands known as the Western Ghats. It is traditionally considered one of the seven sacred rivers of India, along with the **Ganges**, **Yamuna**, **Godavari**, **Saraswati**, **Indus**, and **Cauvery**. An important site on the Narmada is **Omkareshvar**, one of the twelve **jyotirlingas**, a network of sites sacred to the god **Shiva**. During the 1990s the Narmada has become a rallying point for environmentalists who have opposed construction of several massive dams, on the grounds that these dams have displaced too many people and destroyed too much prime farmland. Although work on these dams has continued, the pace has slowed. In 1997 a minor earthquake in the Narmada basin prompted the call for further consideration of this project's environmental dangers.

## Narsi Mehta
(16th c.) **Gujarati** poet-saint who was a well-known figure in northern Indian devotional life. Narsi was a devotee (**bhakta**) of the god **Krishna**. His poetry describes the love affair between Krishna and his consort **Radha**.

According to tradition, Narsi's poetry was rooted in a vision of Krishna's **ras lila**, or great circle **dance**, in which Narsi was privileged to stand as attendant holding a torch to light the **lila**. Narsi is one of the devotees profiled in the ***Bhaktamal***, a text that gives short biographical profiles of more than 200 devotional (**bhakti**) saints; in the text Narsi is portrayed as a paradigm of generosity, an earthly imitation of Krishna himself. For further information see John Stratton Hawley, "Morality Beyond Morality in the Lives of Three Hindu Saints," in John Stratton Hawley (ed.), *Saints and Virtues*, 1987.

## Nasik
City and sacred site (**tirtha**) near the headwaters of the **Godavari** River in the state of **Maharashtra**, about 100 miles northeast of Bombay. Nasik is one of the four sites for the **Kumbha Mela**, a religious bathing (**snana**) festival. Nasik hosts this festival every twelve years. Nasik is an important bathing place and is a center of pilgrimage, piety, and learning. According to tradition the god-king **Rama**, his wife, **Sita**, and his brother, **Lakshmana** lived during much of their twelve years in exile in the nearby village of **Panchavati**. Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana are central characters in the ***Ramayana***, the earlier of the two great Hindu epics. Although claims of them living near Nasik are impossible to prove or disprove, the legend adds one more layer of sanctity to the site.

## Nasik Mela
The Nasik Mela is the celebration of the **Kumbha Mela** at Nasik. The Kumbha Mela is a religious festival celebrated in four different locations: **Haridwar**, **Allahabad**, **Ujjain**, and **Nasik**. The festival's focus is bathing (**snana**) in the sacred rivers during particularly holy moments. The Kumbha Mela's primary participants are **ascetics**, who come from all over southern Asia to bathe in the sacred waters. According to

tradition, the Kumbha Mela was organized by the great philosopher **Shankaracharya** to promote regular gatherings of learned and holy men, as a means to strengthen, sustain, and spread the Hindu religion. The timing for each of these festivals is determined by the position of the **sun** and the **planet Jupiter**; the twelve years between these festivals correspond to Jupiter's orbit. The Nasik Mela is celebrated during the **lunar month** of **Shravan** (July–August), when the planet Jupiter is in the sign of Leo. This is the least important of all four Kumbha Melas, attended mostly by ascetics.

## Nastika

("nihilists") In Hindu philosophical discourse, this was a pejorative term to denigrate certain other religious and philosophical schools. The name *Nastika* was applied to groups who denied the three most basic principles of religion: the authority of the **Vedas** as religious texts, the eternal existence of the soul (**atman**), and the value of religious life in general. In context this term could be applied to the Jains (who denied the first of these three) to the Buddhists (who denied the first and the second) or to the **materialist** philosophical school (which denied all three).

## Natal Horoscope

In Indian culture, a person's natal horoscope or janampatrika ("birth-paper") is believed to reveal a great deal about a person. One's previous **karma** is thought to determine the moment when one is born. Thus, a natal horoscope provides a karmic "itinerary," indicating where one has been and what he or she might expect in the future. Natal horoscopes still play a role in decision-making, particularly in arranging marriages. Natal horoscopes are exchanged before fixing an engagement in order to determine the couple's compatibility. Sometimes this process takes place merely because the claim that the horoscopes are incompatible can provide an acceptable excuse to refuse an inappropriate or unacceptable match. Natal horoscopes are believed to reveal important things about a person's future. A person whose horoscope indicates an early death—or the early death of a spouse—may find it difficult to marry unless he or she performs certain rituals to remove these problems.

## Natamandira

In the temple **architecture** of **Orissa**, one of the major forms of the northern Indian **Nagara** style. The natamandira is the section of the temple found between the **bhogamandapa** ("food-pavilion") and the **jagamohan**, or entrance hall leading to the main image. Natamandira literally means "**dance**-house." In many Orissan temples the natamandira was used for performance, in particular for the **Orissi** dance style that was developed and sustained in these temples. The performances were partly for the aesthetic appreciation of the spectators, but mainly as an **offering** of entertainment to the **deity** himself. Although dances are still performed at the natamandiras as a part of **worship**, they are primarily staged for entertainment.

## Nataraja

Form of the god **Shiva** as the "Lord of the **Dance**." The most famous Nataraja image is in the temple-town of **Chidambaram** in the state of **Tamil Nadu**. The temple was erected during the reign of Vira Raja (927–997 C.E.), with Nataraja as its primary **deity**. However, the image of Nataraja is well known, particularly from the southern Indian **bronzes** of the **Chola dynasty** (9th–13th c).

As a divinity, one of Shiva's most important characteristics is that he transcends all duality; the Nataraja image symbolizes this concept. Shiva dances within a circle of fire, symbolizing birth and death, but remains untouched by these forces. As Shiva dances, his matted locks swing wildly, showing the force of

The god Shiva, in the form of Nataraja (the "Lord of the Dance"),
dances within a circle of fire that symbolizes the cycle of birth and death.

his activity, yet his face stays impassive and unmoved. One of his four hands holds the drum that beats the rhythm of creation, while a second hand holds the fire of destruction. His third hand is held palm upward in a **gesture** meaning "fear not." The fourth points to his upraised foot, the symbol of refuge and divine mercy for the devotee (**bhakta**). His other foot crushes a **demon**, displaying his power to destroy the wicked. The image is a well-developed theological statement, able to be "read" by those who can interpret it.

In Nataraja's charter myth, Shiva and **Kali**, the **goddess**, decide to settle their

competition with a dance contest. Shiva finally bests Kali by manifesting as Nataraja and doing an athletic (**tandava**) dance style that Kali's feminine modesty prevents her from copying. Mythic roots aside, the Nataraja temple at Chidambaram has been an important center for classical Indian dance for well over a thousand years. The temple's eastern wall bears relief carvings of the 108 basic dance positions (**karanas**). These positions are central to classical Indian dance, particularly in the **Bharatanatyam** school, which is the major dance tradition in **Tamil Nadu**.

## Nath

("lord") Epithet of the god **Shiva**, based on his power as the ultimate lord. Among the **Nathpanthis**, a renunciant **ascetic** community whose members are devotees (**bhakta**) of Shiva, "Nath" is added to the end of one's name after final ascetic **initiation** as a symbol of membership. This practice apparently dates from the Nathpanthis' earliest days, since according to tradition they were founded by the sage **Gorakhnath**.

## Nathamuni

(10th c.) Compiler of the *Nalayira Divyaprabandham*, the collected hymns of the **Alvars** that are popularly known as the "Tamil Veda." Nathamuni is also a pivotal figure in the later development of the **Shrivaishnava** religious community, in which the passionate devotion in the Alvar hymns found more systematic philosophical articulation. According to tradition, Nathamuni's grandson was **Yamunacharya**, the teacher of **Ramanuja**, the greatest Shrivaishnava figure. See also **Veda**.

## Nathdwara

City and sacred site (**tirtha**) about twenty-five miles north of the city of Udaipur in the south-central region of the state of **Rajasthan**. Nathdwara has a temple housing an image of the god **Krishna** in his form as **Shrinathji**. According to tradition, the image was originally hidden on the top of Mount Govardhan, a mountain in the **Braj** region where Krishna is said to have lived. The location of the image was revealed in a **dream** to **Vallabhacharya**, the founder of the religious community known as the **Pushti Marg**. Vallabhacharya built a temple to house it on Mount Govardhan, and his descendants have remained the image's hereditary servants since that time. The image was moved to the state of Rajasthan in 1669, prompted by fears that it would be destroyed by the Moghul emperor **Aurangzeb**. According to tradition Shrinathji revealed his wish to stay in Nathdwara by sinking his wagon's wheels deep into the **earth**, so that it could not go further. Nathdwara is a fairly remote location, making it a safe place to keep the image. See also **Moghul dynasty**.

## Nathpanthi

Renunciant **ascetic** community founded by the sage **Gorakhnath**. The Nathpanthis are also known by many names: as **jogis** (from their emphasis on the practice of **yoga**), Gorakhnathis (from the name of their founder), **Kanphatas** (meaning "split-ear" by virtue of the signature earrings placed in the split cartilage of both ears), **Gosains** ("master of the senses"), and simply as **Naths** ("lord") from the characteristic suffix taken as part of their names upon ascetic **initiation**. The Nathpanthis are a very old organization and have a long tradition in northern India, but their historical record is relatively faint. The organization has no single organizing body; their emphasis on yoga has meant that their practice has been internalized, rather than focused on temples or other material objects. Although the Nathpanthis are usually described as devotees (**bhakta**) of **Shiva**, they are distinct from the **Shaiva Sanyasis**.

The spiritual practice of the Naths has traditionally focused on the mastery

of the **subtle body** as the means to final liberation of the soul. The Naths believe that liberation is physical immortality, rather than escape from the cycle of transmigration, which is more commonly accepted. The subtle body is an alternate physiological system, believed to exist on a different plane than gross matter, but corresponding to the material body. It is visualized as a set of six psychic centers (**chakras**) running roughly along the spine; above and below these centers reside two divine principles, Shiva (awareness) and **Shakti** (power). The aspirant aims to join these two principles at the crown of the head, thus transforming the perishable elements in the gross body into immortality.

Among the Nathpanthis, the dominant metaphor for talking about this process is the union of **sun** and **moon**. The sun, identified with Shakti, stands for the processes of change and destruction, whereas the moon, identified with Shiva, symbolizes stability and immortality. In some cases this union of sun and moon is described in very abstract terms; for example, in the definition of **hatha yoga** "ha" refers to the sun and "tha" refers to the moon. Other abstract descriptions of this process speak of gaining equilibrium of the **vital winds** (**prana**), or yogic union in the subtle body. In other cases this union is symbolized in concrete ways, as in the practice of **vajroli mudra**. This sexual practice uses urethral suction or the "fountain-pen technique," by which a man, having ejaculated into his female partner, draws his **semen** back into his body. The semen has been refined through contact with the woman's uterine blood.

The Nathpanthis have been important both as an ascetic community in their own right, and as an influence on many of the northern Indian **bhakti** poet-saints, particularly **Kabir**. Their religious practice has consistently stressed internal religion, in which individual realization has been deemed far more important than performing social duties or established **worship**. The most complete source on Gorakhnath and his followers is George Weston Briggs, *Gorakhnath and the Kanphata Yogis*, 1973.

## Natya

The word *natya* refers to the genre in classical Indian **dance** in which the dancer's movements convey a story to the audience. Natya is one of the two most basic dance genres. The other genre, **nrtya**, is "pure" dance, in which the dance conveys nothing more than the dancer's skill.

## Natyashastra

Prescriptive manual (**shastra**) for the performing arts written during the second century, whose authorship is ascribed to the mythical sage **Bharata**. The text is divided into thirty-seven sections, detailing every aspect of the three major performance forms: music, drama, and **dance** (which combines both music and drama). Some sections of the text are devoted to aesthetics and poetics, helping to create and convey the correct atmosphere for the appreciation of the arts. Other parts of the text discuss concrete, practical issues, such as the construction of the stage. The text is still an authority for these three performing arts, but it is particularly important for dance. Many of the positions and gestures found in Indian dance were first codified in this text; the *Natyashastra* remains the ultimate authority for any dance form that claims to be "classical" dance, rather than "folk" dance.

## Navadurga

("Nine Durgas") Collective name for nine differing forms of **Durga**, a powerful and dangerous form of the **Goddess**. One of the "nine Durgas" is worshiped each of the nine nights during the **festival** of **Navaratri**, which usually falls in October or November. Each goddess has her own identity, yet at the same time is a form of Durga. This fluidity is

Worshipers celebrating the Navaratri festival carry an image of the Goddess in the form of Durga.

characteristic of the Goddess; all female divinities are ultimately seen as manifestations of some single great Goddess. The nine Durgas, in the order in which they are worshiped, are **Mahalakshmi**, **Mahasaraswati**, **Yogmaya**, **Raktadantika**, **Shakumbhari Devi**, Durga, **Bhramari**, and **Chandika**.

## Navadvip

City and sacred site (**tirtha**) on the Hugli River, about sixty-five miles north of the city of Calcutta. Navadvip is traditionally regarded as the birthplace of the Bengali saint **Chaitanya** (1486–1533), although in the twentieth century, the same claim has been made for the city of **Mayapur**, on the other side of the river. For extensive information about Navadvip, see E. Alan Morinis, *Pilgrimage in the Hindu Tradition*, 1984.

## Navaratri

("nine nights") Festival dedicated to the **Goddess** celebrated twice during the **year**. The spring Navaratri occurs during the bright, waxing half of the **lunar month** of **Chaitra** (March–April), and the fall Navaratri falls during the bright half of the lunar month of **Ashvin** (September–October). Each Navaratri celebration lasts for the first nine nights

of these lunar months and concludes with a festival dedicated to the god **Rama**: **Ram Navami** in Chaitra and **Dussehra** in Ashvin. Of the two, the fall Navaratri is far more important. The fall Navaratri is celebrated with fervor in the Bengal region, where the Goddess is the dominant regional **deity**. The Bengali Navaratri is characterized by large processions featuring elaborately decorated clay images of the Goddess. These images are commissioned by individuals, businesses, trade unions, and neighborhood associations. Having the best image is a sign of great status. During the weeks around Navaratri, Bengali children get a holiday from school, state workers get paid vacation from their jobs, and the electricity supply in Calcutta runs without interruptions—a phenomenon dubbed the Navaratri "miracle," since during the rest of the year shortages and blackouts are common.

These Navaratri festivals are performed to gain the favor of the Mother Goddess, particularly in her powerful forms such as **Durga**. During these nine nights devotees (**bhakta**) perform a variety of different rites. Some fast (**upavasa**) and **worship** in their homes, often consecrating temporary images of the Goddess for use during this festival. Devotees may also worship young girls as manifestations of the Goddess, or sponsor readings of the ***Devimahatmya***, the earliest and most important text for the mythology of the Goddess. They may also worship the Goddess in her form as **Navadurga**, paying homage to a different form on each of the nine nights.

Another common practice is to harvest shoots of barley, which are sometimes worn on the final day of the festival. This practice hints at the festival's purpose since, among other things, the Goddess represents the female power of fertility and procreation. In northern India, the spring festival comes before the crops are planted. Wearing sprouting grain is an attempt to please the Goddess so the crop may flourish. The fall Navaratri comes after the harvest, when this promise of fruition has been fulfilled, and is seen as a time of thanksgiving for blessings received. The Goddess also represents the triumph of good over evil; the readings of the *Devimahatmya* on these occasions remind the listeners of the Goddess' wondrous deeds and assure them of her continued protection.

## Navyanyaya

("new **Nyaya**") A later branch of the Nyaya philosophical school. The Nyaya school was one of the **six schools** in traditional Hindu **philosophy**, which flourished in the early centuries of the first millennium, but then lost its influence. The Navyanyaya school developed in late medieval times (15th–17th c.), in an attempt to reinvigorate the school and to resolve some of the problems with the earlier Nyaya notion of **inherence** (**samavaya**). The earlier Nyayas perceived inherence as a weak relational force that connected objects and their qualities—for example, connecting the color red with a particular ball and thus making the ball red. It also connected material objects—the force that held a clay pot together once the two halves had been pressed against each other. Finally, inherence connected selves and their qualities—one became happy when inherence connected happiness to one's self, and unhappy when unhappiness was connected.

This notion of inherence explained many things in the perceivable world. However, objections were raised against the Nyayas' insistence that inherence was a single, universal property at work in different places. According to this criticism, a universal and eternal inherence could link an object with *any* property, including ones that contradict—the color brown with the moon or the appearance of a cow with a dog. Other attacks questioned whether inherence continued to exist after one of the things it had been connecting was destroyed. If it did not, opponents claimed, then inherence was clearly

nothing to begin with, whereas if it did, then the remaining connecting power would exist unconnected to anything, which was clearly absurd. Finally, some attacked the need for inherence at all—which was cited as an example of "needless complexity" (**gaurava**).

The Navyanyaya school attempted to sidestep these problems by positing a new class of relationship, that of "self-linking connectors." These connectors were seen as an integral part of all things, by their very nature, and since they were self-linking, this eliminated the need for a separate inherence to connect things together. In this understanding, the relationship and the related objects are one and the same. This notion allowed the Navyanyayas to retain their fundamental assumptions that there are real objects in the world and they are connected to one another. For further information see Karl H. Potter and Sibajiban Bhattacharyya (eds.), *Indian Philosophical Analysis*, 1992.

## Nayachandra Suri

(14th c.) The author of the *Hammira-mahakavya*, a **Sanskrit** drama that chronicles the defeat and death of the **Rajput** king Hammira by the Delhi sultan Alauddin Khilji in 1301. Aside from its historical value, this play is notable because Nayachandra Suri was a Jain monk. Although Jain monks are subject to a strict religious lifestyle that would seem to cut them off from the world, they have a long history of deep involvement with intellectual and literary culture. See also **mahakavya**.

## Nayak Dynasty

Southern Indian dynasty whose capital was in the city of **Madurai** in the state of **Tamil Nadu**. The Nayaks came to power in the political vacuum created by the destruction of the **Vijayanagar dynasty** late in the sixteenth century. The Nayaks ruled the southernmost part of the subcontinent for about the next hundred years. The dynasty's greatest ruler was **Tirumalai Nayak** (r. 1623–1659), who constructed large sections of the **Minakshi** temple, dedicated to Madurai's patron **goddess**, Minakshi.

## Nayanar

Group of sixty-three **Shaiva** poet-saints, who lived in southern India between the seventh and ninth centuries. In concert with their **Vaishnava** counterparts the **Alvars**, the Nayanars spearheaded the revitalization of Hindu religion vis-à-vis the Buddhists and the Jains. Both the Nayanars and the Alvars stressed passionate devotion (**bhakti**) to a personal god—**Shiva** for the Nayanars, **Vishnu** for the Alvars—and conveyed this devotion through hymns sung in the **Tamil language**. The Nayanars tended to be more overtly hostile to the Jains. According to legend the Nayanar **Sambandar** was instrumental in the **impalement** of eight thousand Jain monks in the city of **Madurai**. The hymns of the three most important Nayanars—**Appar**, Sambandar, and **Sundaramurtti**—comprise the *Devaram*, the most sacred of the Tamil Shaivite texts. An important later source is the *Periya Puranam* by **Cekkilar**, which gives hagiographic accounts for all the Nayanars.

## Nayar

The Nayars are a Hindu **jati** who traditionally were the primary landholding community in traditional **Kerala**. Jatis are **endogamous** subgroups of traditional Indian society whose social status is determined by the group's hereditary occupation. The Nayars were one of the few groups in India to practice **matrilinear succession**, in which both descent and **inheritance** were passed on through the mother's line.

## Nazar

("glance") The literal meaning of the word *nazar* is an unobstructed line of sight to a person or a thing. The word *nazar* is also the term most commonly

used to denote the "evil eye," a malefic influence that is put on people through sight, particularly eye-to-eye contact. The existence of the evil eye is widely accepted among traditional Hindus. It is warded off either by avoiding this sort of gaze, or by performing **rites of protection**. For further consideration see David F. Pocock, "The Evil Eye," in T. N. Madan (ed.), *Religion in India*, 1991.

## Nepal

A small Himalayan nation on the northern border of India that is deemed the world's only Hindu kingdom. One basis for this claim is that almost 90 percent of Nepal's inhabitants identify themselves as Hindu; the other is that since 1769 Nepal's ruling house has been a Hindu dynasty, the Shah dynasty. The present monarch, Birendra Bir Bikram Shah (b. 1945), was an uncontested absolute monarch until April 1990, when popular discontent led to a movement seeking the restoration of democracy in Nepal. The king was forced to accede to democratic reforms, and since May 1991 has governed as a constitutional monarch, with the Nepali Parliament wielding the real power.

Although Nepal is a small country, it has great geographical diversity. Its three major geographical regions are the submontane lowlands, the Himalayan foothills, and the high mountains. The country's uneven topography further subdivides each of these regions. This rugged geography has a marked effect on the country's economy, rendering agriculture impossible at anything more than a subsistence level. However, it provides the attraction for tourism, which is Nepal's greatest source of foreign exchange.

Such great geographical diversity promotes similar human diversity. The people of Nepal are an amalgam of many different groups, including people whose historical roots lie in India and indigenous hill tribes associated with particular parts of the country. Most Nepalese live in the fertile valleys of the foothills. These are the most habitable regions, as the climate in the mountains is far too harsh for permanent habitation, while the lowland regions are rife with disease, particularly malaria. In general, Nepali culture shows many similarities with the adjoining areas of India, and thus from a cultural perspective is firmly fixed in the Indian cultural orbit. Nepal is also the home to several important Hindu pilgrimage places (**tirtha**), notably **Pashupatinath** in the Kathmandu Valley, and **Muktinath**, at the headwaters of the Kali Gandaki River.
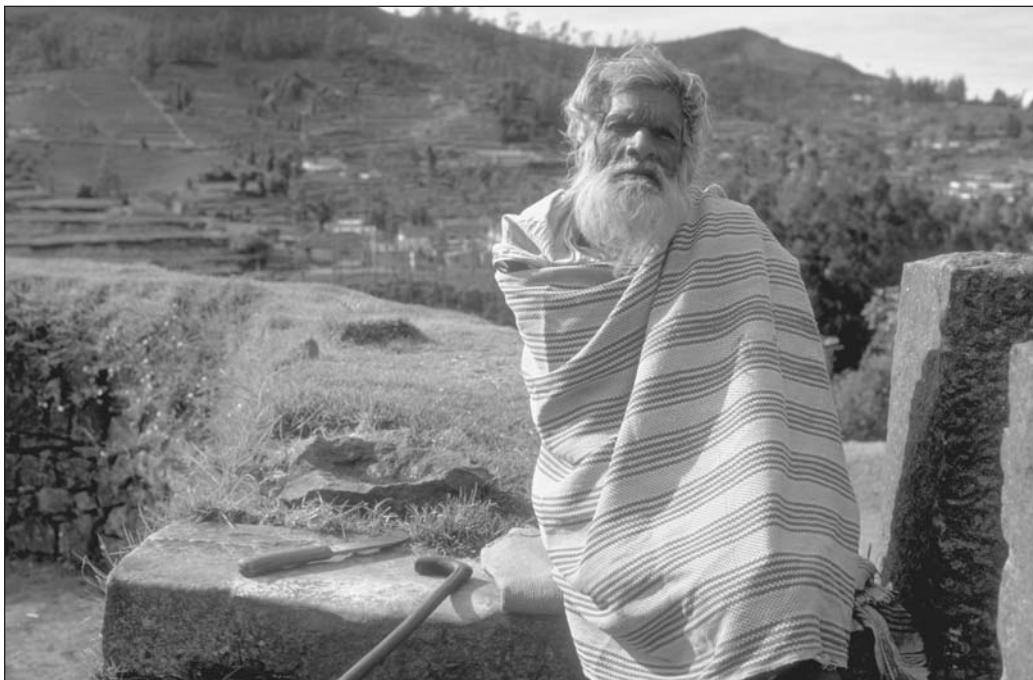
## New Moon

(amavasya) In northern India, the new **moon** usually marks the midpoint of the **lunar month**, whereas in southern India it often identifies the end. Unlike the **full moon**, whose associations with fullness and completion make it always **auspicious**, the new moon's associations with darkness and emptiness make it a more ambiguous time. One of the most important festivals in the Hindu religious **year**, **Diwali**, falls on the new moon in **Kartik** (October–November). The new moon can also be highly auspicious on certain other occasions, such as a **Somavati Amavasya**, a new moon falling on a **Monday**. In general, however, the new moon is less clearly auspicious than the full moon. Not only are there fewer celebrations during the new moon, but there is also a proportionately greater number of holidays falling in the light, waxing half of the lunar month. The new moon and the dark, waning half are not in themselves **inauspicious**, they are simply deemed less auspicious than the light half and the full moon.

## Nibandha

("collection") Genre of thematic commentarial literature that became prominent in medieval northern India. The nibandhas were compendia of Hindu lore, in which the compilers culled

Leader of a Toda tribe in the Nilgiri Hills.

excerpts on a particular theme from the **Vedas**, **dharma literature**, **puranas**, and other authoritative religious texts, and then compiled them into a single organized text. Excerpts from these same authoritative texts on a different theme would be compiled into a different volume, and so on. The compilers would often have to reconcile conflicting texts, or judge which passage was preferable to another. Such judgments were generally done using rules for textual interpretation developed by the **Purva Mimamsa** philosophical school, one of the **six schools** of traditional Hindu **philosophy**. The Purva Mimamsa school had originally developed these rules for interpreting the Vedas, the oldest and most authoritative Hindu religious texts. In many cases the nibandhas had between fifteen and twenty volumes, attempting to provide an exhaustive investigation of Hindu religious life. Among the most influential nibandhas are the ***Kalpataru***, compiled by **Lakshmidhara** in twelfth century, and the ***Viramitrodaya***, compiled by **Mitra Mishra** early in the seventeenth century.

## Nigantha Nataputta

In early Indian **philosophy**, a figure whose views are mentioned in the Buddhist scriptures. Nigantha advocated a four-fold self-restraint, although these sources give no further indication of his doctrines. It is generally accepted that Nigantha was the same person as Mahavira. Mahavira is believed to have been the last of the Jain tirthankaras, the founding figures in the Jain religious tradition.

## Night, Goddess of

In the **Vedas**, the earliest and most authoritative Hindu religious texts, the gods and goddesses are associated with phenomena in the natural world. In the Vedas the **goddess** Ratri (Night) is mentioned both as a goddess and as the night itself. At times she is seen as life-giving, allowing people the opportunity to refresh and renew themselves. At other times she is associated with the dangers of the night, such as wild animals and thieves. Ratri is considered a sister to **Ushas**, the dawn. As night and day alternate, the two goddesses mark

out the regular passage of time that characterizes the cosmic order (**rta**). For further information on Night and all the goddesses of Hinduism, see David R. Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, 1986.

## Nilachal Hill

Sacred site (**tirtha**) overlooking the Brahmaputra River, about six miles outside the city of Guwahati in the modern state of **Assam**. Nilachal Hill is known for its temple to the **goddess Kamakhya**, one of the most powerful goddess temples in India. This site is one of the **Shakti Pithas**, a network of sites sacred to the Goddess which spreads throughout the subcontinent. Each Shakti Pitha marks the site where a body part of the dismembered goddess **Sati** fell to **earth**, taking form there as a different goddess. The Kamakhya temple is where Sati's vulva is said to have fallen to earth; the image of the goddess is a natural cleft in the rock around which the temple has been built. Since Kamakhya sprang from the most sexually charged part of the female body, the site is extremely powerful. See also **pitha**.

## Nilakanth

("blue-throated") Epithet of the god **Shiva**; also the name of a manifestation of Shiva who is enshrined at the Nilakanth Mahadev temple outside the city of **Rishikesh** in the state of **Uttar Pradesh**. Shiva is present at Nilakanth in the form of a **linga**, the pillar-shaped object that is his symbolic form. The mythic charter for this epithet (and for the establishment of the temple as well) is drawn from the tale of Churning the Ocean of Milk. The gods and **demons** churn the ocean to produce **amrta**, the nectar of immortality thought to be the finest essence of the ocean. Yet their action produces not only the amrta, but also its antithesis, the **halahala** poison. This is an event of great peril; the poison is so powerful that if left unchecked, it can destroy the earth. When this poison appears, the gods and demons are

unable to figure out a way to contain it. Shiva takes care of the poison by holding it in his throat, but the force of the poison is so great that it turns his throat blue. See also **Tortoise avatar** and **ocean, churning of the**.

## Nilgiri Hills

Range of hills formed by the conjunction of the Western and Eastern Ghats, located at the junction of three southern Indian states—**Tamil Nadu**, **Kerala**, and **Karnataka**. In earlier times the hills were occupied by a tribal people known as the Todas, although only a few thousand Todas are left today. This region is important for its hill stations, such as Ootacamund and Kodaikanal, which are popular spots for vacations, honeymoons, and movie filming.

## Nimbarka

(12th c.?) **Ascetic**, philosopher, devotee (**bhakta**) of the god **Vishnu**, and attributed as the founder of the **Sanaka Sampraday**, one of the four **Vaishnava** ascetic orders. According to tradition, Nimbarka was a Telegu (southern Indian) **brahmin** who was born in the city of **Paithan** in central India, but lived much of his life in the northern Indian **Braj** region, where the god **Krishna** is supposed to have lived. Nimbarka's philosophical position is described as dualism-nondualism (dvaitadvaita), a concept in which God and human beings are both identical and different. While earlier Vaishnavas worshiped **Vishnu** and **Lakshmi** as the divine couple, Nimbarka used the same concept, but changed the focus to Krishna and **Radha**.

## Nimbarki

Name for the religious group founded by the **Vaishnava** figure **Nimbarka**. It is also used as a variant name for the **Sanaka Sampraday**, an **ascetic** community that traces its spiritual lineage to Nimbarka, as a way to reinforce their religious authority.

## Nirakara

("without form") Epithet of the divine reality in its ultimate aspect. According to many Hindu traditions, God is ultimately without form, transcending all particularity and superior to any particular image. This belief is first phrased in the **Upanishads**, the speculative religious texts that are the most recent part of the **Vedas**, and is advocated by the philosophical traditions based on the Upanishads, such as **Advaita Vedanta**. This concept is opposed by certain Hindu theistic traditions, such as the **Gaudiya Vaishnava** religious community, in which a particular **deity**—in this case, **Krishna**—is conceived as the Ultimate Reality.

## Niranjani Akhara

The name of a subgroup of the **Naga** class of **Dashanami Sanyasis**; a particular type of renunciant **ascetic**. The Dashanami Sanyasis are devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva**, organized into different **akharas** or regiments on the model of an army. Until the beginning of the nineteenth century the Dashanami Sanyasis' primary occupation was as mercenary soldiers, although they also had substantial trading interests; both of these have largely disappeared in contemporary times. The Niranjani Akhara is one of the seven main Dashanami Sanyasi akharas and along with the **Mahanirvani Akhara** is one of the most powerful. This power is clearly shown by their respective positions in the bathing (**snana**) processions at the **Kumbha Mela** festivals: in **Haridwar** the Niranjani Akhara goes first, followed by the Mahanirvani; at **Allahabad** the order is reversed. In 1962 the **Juna Akhara** acquired the status of a separate procession, rather than as a subsidiary of the Niranjani Akhara. According to the terms of the 1962 agreement, at Haridwar the Juna Akhara would lead the Sanyasi processions for the bathing on the festival of **Shivaratri**, followed by the Niranjani and Mahanirvani Akharas. The Niranjanis

would be first for the other two major bathing days, followed by the Juna and Mahanirvani Akharas. The Niranjani Akhara's ability to command the premier position is based primarily on their local strength: the Niranjani Akhara was quite powerful in Haridwar, where it still owns significant property. The Mahanirvani Akhara, however, was based in Allahabad. Another sign of the Niranjani Akhara's status is that it has as a subsidiary group, the **Ananda Akhara**.

All of the akharas have particular features that define their organizational identity, especially specific tutelary **deities**. The Niranjani Akhara's tutelary deity is **Skanda**, the son of the deities Shiva and **Parvati**, and the celestial general commanding Shiva's supernatural army. Aside from serving as an identifying marker, the choice of a celestial warrior reflects the akhara's influence and former military strength.

## Nirguna

("without qualities") Epithet of the divine reality in its ultimate aspect. According to many Hindu traditions, God is ultimately without qualities or attributes, transcending all particularity and superior to any qualified form. This conception is first phrased in the **Upanishads**, the speculative religious texts that are the most recent part of the **Vedas**, and in the philosophical traditions based on the Upanishads such as **Advaita Vedanta**. This belief is opposed by certain Hindu theistic traditions, such as the **Gaudiya Vaishnava** religious community, in which a particular **deity**—in this case, **Krishna**—is conceived as the Ultimate Reality.

## Nirikari

Minor **Vaishnava** sect founded in the late 1700s, by a **Ramanandi ascetic** named **Baba** Sarjudasa. The name comes from their greeting, *Sat Nirikara* ("Truth Is Formless"). Their major areas of influence and operation are in **Punjab**, **Haryana**, and northwestern **Uttar Pradesh**.

At the Kumbha Mela festival in Haridwar the Niranjani Akhara proceeds first, followed by the Mahanirvani.

## Nirjala Ekadashi

Religious observance on the eleventh day (**ekadashi**) in the bright, waxing half of the **lunar month** of **Jyeshth** (May–June). As for all the eleventh-day observances, this is dedicated to the **worship** of the god **Vishnu**. Most Hindu festivals have certain prescribed rites, which usually involve fasting (**upavasa**) and worship, and often promise specific benefits for faithful performance. The regulations for this ekadashi are more strict than all the others. Not only is all food forbidden, but the person performing this rite must not drink **water**, hence the name *nirjala* meaning "waterless." The fast must last from dawn till dusk. This is no easy task, since this ekadashi occurs during the hottest part of the **year**. The rewards are great: Those who fulfill the vow for this single ekadashi receive the religious merit for all twenty-four ekadashis during the year, whether or not they have done the rites for the others. Carrying out the vow for this ekadashi is also believed to bring one a long life and liberation of the soul after death.

## Nirmala

("free from defilement") With the **Udasis**, one of the two Hindu **ascetic** communities tracing its origins to the Sikh community. According to one tradition, the Nirmala sect was established by the tenth Sikh **guru**, Gobind Singh. On the whole, the Sikh tradition has not endorsed **asceticism**, but rather an active life in the world. The Nirmalas have a large ascetic center in the northern Indian sacred city of **Haridwar**, where they run a primary school. As a community, the Nirmalas are known far more for learning and study than asceticism or **yoga**. At the **Kumbha Melas**, the Nirmalas bathe last of all, after the **Sanyasis**, **Bairagis**, and Udasis.

## Nirmala Devi

(b. 1923) Modern Hindu teacher who claims to be an **avatar** of the primordial **Goddess**, and the founder of **Vishva Nirmala Dharam**, an organization dedicated to spreading her message. Nirmala Devi's teaching is based on traditional ideas of **hatha yoga** and the **subtle body**. The subtle body is an

alternate physiological system, existing on a different plane than gross matter, but corresponding to the material body. It is visualized as a set of six psychic centers (**chakras**) running roughly along the spine; two divine principles, **Shiva** (awareness) and **Shakti** (power), reside above and below these centers. In practicing this yoga, the aspirant aims to awaken the latent spiritual energy of Shakti known as **kundalini**, move it into union with the Shiva principle at the crown of the head, and transform the perishable elements in the gross body to become immortal.

Nirmala Devi claims to be able to arouse a devotee's (**bhakta**) kundalini through an infusion of her own spiritual power, thus dramatically speeding up the path to liberation. Her Indian devotees are mainly middle-class, but she also claims to have a substantial following in Europe, North America, and Australia. For a skeptical account of an encounter with Nirmala Devi, see Sudhir Kakar, "Cooling Breezes," in *Shamans, Mystics, and Doctors*, 1991.

## Nirmohi ("free from illusion") Ani

Among the **Bairagi Nagas**, renunciant **ascetics** who are devotees of **Vishnu**, the Nirmohis are one of the three Naga **anis** ("armies"). The others are the **Digambaras** and **Nirvanis**. In earlier times these anis were actual fighting units who made their living as traders and mercenary soldiers, but in modern times they are mainly important for determining the order in the bathing processions at the **Kumbha Mela**. Of the three Naga anis, the Digambaras are by far the most important and take precedence at the Kumbha Mela.

## Nirriti

("decay, destruction") In the **Vedas**, the oldest and most authoritative Hindu religious texts, Nirriti is a **goddess** personifying all the negative aspects associated with life. Nirriti's personality is not well-defined, for she is rarely mentioned; the hymns mentioning her usually express the hope that she will stay away and allow the speakers to be free from misfortune. For further information on Nirriti and all the goddesses of Hinduism, see David R. Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, 1986.

## Nirukta

("explanation") One of the six **Vedangas**. These were the auxiliary branches of knowledge associated with the use of the **Vedas**, the oldest Hindu religious texts. Nirukta is concerned with the etymological explanations of archaic words. This was apparently a serious problem, since almost one-quarter of the words in the Veda occur only once, and with the passage of time their precise meanings became either unclear or unknown. The most famous nirukta text—known simply as the *Nirukta*—was written by **Yaska** the grammarian, in about the fifth century B.C.E. His work was immeasurably helpful to later readers, but it is clear that even in Yaska's time the meanings for many of these words had become uncertain and unclear. Aside from nirukta, the other Vedangas are **vyakarana** (**Sanskrit** grammar), **chandas** (Sanskrit prosody), **kalpa** (ritual instructions), **shiksha** (correct pronunciation), and **jyotisha** (**auspicious** times for sacrifices).

## Nirvani ("liberated") Ani

Among the **Bairagi Nagas**, renunciant **ascetics** who are devotees (**bhakta**) of **Vishnu**, the Nirvanis are one of the three Naga **anis** ("armies"). The others are the **Nirmohis** and **Digambaras**. In earlier times these anis were actual fighting units who made their living as traders and mercenary soldiers, but in modern times they are mainly important for determining the order at the bathing (**snana**) processions at the **Kumbha Mela**. Of the three Naga anis, the Digambaras are the most important and take precedence at the Kumbha Mela.

## Nirvikalpaka

In certain schools of Indian **philosophy**—among them certain Buddhists, the **Nyayas**, and the **Prabhakara** school of **Mimamsa**—nirvikalpaka is the name for a sort of simple non-conceptual awareness, produced solely by the operation of the senses. According to these schools, if the senses producing this awareness have no defect, such an awareness is believed to be true. However, it can be confused or misinterpreted through the action of the mind. This belief had important ramifications for **theories of error**, which seek to explain how erroneous judgments are possible. The schools that believed in this theory attributed error to the action of the mind.

## Nishkramana ("going-out") Samskara

The sixth traditional life-cycle ceremony (**samskara**), in which the infant is taken for his or her first trip outside the house. Although the traditional texts consider this a minor rite and the traditional textual procedures are seldom performed, a young child's first outing is often still carefully planned. On a symbolic level, it represents the child's first encounter with the larger world, and thus the child's expanding sphere of possibilities. It also shows the continuing importance of **rites of protection**. Even in modern India many people believe in the power of the evil eye (**nazar**), and young children are considered particularly susceptible. Thus, a child's first encounter with the chaotic outside world must be carefully structured and carefully supervised.

## Nishumbha

In Hindu mythology the name of a **demon** killed by the **goddess Kali** in the **Devimahatmya**, the earliest and most important text for the mythology of the Goddess. Together with his brother **Shumbha**, Nishumbha is one of the generals in the army of a demon named **Mahishasura**. Due to a divine boon given to Mahishasura, Shumbha and Nishumbha are able to vanquish the gods and assume control of **heaven**. However, they are devoured by Kali, who emerges as a manifestation of the Goddess's anger.

## Niti Shastra

("instructions on diplomacy") General name for a genre of instruction that taught politically astute behaviors, such as making friends and allegiances, intimidating one's enemies, and knowing who can be trusted. This was a recognized branch of learning in the traditional Hindu sciences, and was taught to influential and royal families, for whom knowing the real workings of the world was considered essential to fulfilling their social functions. The fables of the **Panchatantra** convey these hard-edged lessons on self-interest and caution through the use of animal characters.

## Nitya Karma

("perpetual [ritual] action") One of the three broad types of ritual action, the others being **naimittika karma** and **kamya karma**. Nitya karma is ritual action that is prescribed at regular fixed intervals, often on a daily basis; one gains no religious merit from performing them, but omitting them is considered a religious demerit. One example of a nitya karma is the **Gayatri Mantra**, which must be recited at morning and evening **worship** (**sandhya**) by every "**twice-born**" man who has received the adolescent religious **initiation** known as the "second birth." Another nitya karma is the Five Great Sacrifices (**panchamahayajna**), which are daily religious duties for a "twice-born" householder; they are rarely performed today.

## Nityasamsarin

One of the three classes of beings in the **Dvaita Vedanta** philosophical school, founded by the philosopher **Madhva**

(1197–1276). Madhva's fundamental belief was that God was utterly transcendent, above and beyond the world and human beings. The strength of this conviction led him to stress the importance of **grace** as the sole means of salvation, since human beings were unable to save themselves. Given this dire view of human capacities, Madhva divided the beings of the world into three classes: The **muktiyogas** were destined for final liberation, the nityasamsarins were destined for eternal rebirth, and the **tamoyogas** were predestined for eternal damnation.

## Nivedita, Sister

(b. Margaret Noble, 1867–1911) Irish disciple of the modern Hindu teacher **Swami Vivekananda**. Nivedita devoted much of her life to the service of the **Ramakrishna Mission**, particularly the education of Indian **women**. Nivedita was born in Ireland and taught in London, where she met Vivekananda. She accepted him as her spiritual master (**guru**) and came to India with him, where she founded the Nivedita Girls School in Calcutta. Nivedita was part of the first generation of Europeans who came to India searching for answers to life's ultimate questions.

## Nivrttinath

(1268–1294?) Elder brother of **Jnaneshvar**, the first great poet-saint of the **Varkari Panth**, a religious community centered around the **worship** of the Hindu god **Vithoba** at his temple at **Pandharpur** in the modern state of **Maharashtra**. Nivrttinath is traditionally named as Jnaneshvar's religious teacher (**guru**), although his younger brother became more influential. According to tradition, Nivrttinath's guru, Gainanath, was a direct disciple of **Gorakhnath**, the celebrated **ascetic**. This relationship is indicated in the *Jnaneshvari*, in which Jnaneshvar describes himself as a pupil in Gorakhnath's line. For further information see George Weston

Briggs, *Gorakhnath and the Kanphata Yogis*, 1973.

## Niyama

("observance") In the **ashtanga yoga** taught by **Patanjali**, the second of the eight constituent elements of yoga practice. While the first element lists five injurious actions and dispositions to avoid, Niyama gives five positive instructions, shifting the focus from abstinence to active cultivation. The five observances are: **purity**, contentment, **asceticism**, study, and making the lord the motive of all action.

## Niyati

("destiny") Niyati was the central philosophical assumption for the **Ajivikas**, an ancient and extinct philosophical school. The Ajivikas were fatalists, who believed that niyati inexorably predetermined all things. Human beings can do nothing to influence destiny, since they can only do what has been preordained. The Ajivikas compared the process of reincarnation (**samsara**) to a ball of string, which would unroll until it was done, and then go no further. The word niyati still carries this sense of "fate" or "destiny," but with one important difference: While the Ajivikas conceived niyati as an impersonal and uncontrollable force, in modern times one's fate is believed to result from past **karma**.

## Niyoga

("appointment") Practice by which a childless **widow** could have intercourse with her dead husband's brother, or some other "appointed" male, in order to bear a **son**. The child is considered the son of the dead man and preserves his lineage. There is significant disagreement about the propriety of this practice in the **dharma literature**. Some of these texts permit it, although hedged with numerous conditions, but others unconditionally condemn it. Niyoga is one of the practices judged to be

The two most basic genres of Indian classical dance are natya and nrtya. This dancer, performing in the natya genre, uses dance to tell a story. In the nrtya genre the dance conveys only the dancer's skill.

**Kalivarjya**, or "forbidden in the **Kali** [Age]." Kalivarjya, which first appeared in the twelfth century, was a legal strategy used to forbid certain religious practices that were prescribed in the sacred literature, but were no longer acceptable in contemporary times.

## Nrtya

In classical Indian **dance**, the word *nrtya* refers to the genre of "pure" dance, in which the dance conveys nothing more than the dancer's skill. Nrtya is one of the two most basic dance genres. The other genre, **natya**, is an acting dance, in which the dancer's expressions, movements, and gestures convey a story to the audience.

## Nryajana

("**sacrifice** to human beings") One of the Five Great Sacrifices (**panchamahayajna**) that is prescribed in the **dharma literature**, which describes religious duty. These Five Great Sacrifices are daily religious observances prescribed for a **twice-born** householder. This is a person who has been born into one of the three twice-born groups in Indian society—**brahmin**, **kshatriya**, or **vaishya**—

and who has received the adolescent religious **initiation** known as the "second birth." Each of the five sacrifices (**yajna**) is directed toward a different class of beings—from the Ultimate Reality of **Brahman** down to **animals**—and is satisfied by different actions. The nryajana is directed toward fellow human beings, and is satisfied by showing hospitality to one's guests. Although Hindu religious life has undergone significant changes and some of the other rites have fallen into oblivion, this rite is still widely practiced; the ethos of hospitality is still very strong in Hindu society.

## Nudity

Nudity is often seen as both **inauspicious** and forbidden, and is subject to numerous taboos: according to some authorities, one should not bathe (**snana**) naked (a more understandable taboo in times when people would bathe outdoors) and one should not be naked during sexual intercourse. In some cases there are also taboos on a husband seeing his wife naked, since it is widely believed that this will cause **Lakshmi**, the **goddess**, to forsake her, taking away her **auspiciousness** as a

married woman. The exception to this taboo on nudity is that some **ascetics** believe nakedness symbolizes the renunciation of all **possessions** and the rejection of all worldly standards, including shame. Few ascetics renounce all clothing; some wear a loincloth in public, rationalizing that one should not mislead or scandalize ordinary people who have limited understanding.

## Nyasa

("laying down") A characteristic ritual in **tantra**, a secret religious practice. In the practice of nyasa, the person performing the ritual identifies certain sounds, often in the form of seed syllables (**bijaksharas**), with parts of the human body, **deities**, and material objects. This is done to create a series of identifications between the macrocosm of the universe and the microcosm of the body, such that actions in the microcosmic ritual sphere will cause results in its macrocosmic counterpart.

## Nyaya

("method") One of the **six schools** of traditional Hindu **philosophy**, concerned with the examination and validation of the objects of knowledge. It was the Nyayas who first developed and codified the notion of the **pramanas**, the means by which human beings may gain true and accurate knowledge. The Nyayas recognized four such pramanas: perception (**pratyaksha**), inference (**anumana**), analogy (**upamana**), and authoritative testimony (**shabda**). These ideas are accepted by virtually all Indian philosophical schools, and are the Nyayas' major contribution to Indian philosophy.

As did all schools of Indian philosophy, the Nyayas undertook the examination of knowledge not for mere speculation, but to find a way to release the soul from the bondage of reincarnation (**samsara**). The **Nyaya Sutras**, attributed to **Gautama**, are the traditional basis for the school. The **sutras** begin by asserting that the means of knowledge and its elements can bring a person supreme happiness. The text's second sutra describes a five-part **causal chain**: pain, **birth**, activity, defect, and wrong notion. Each of these elements is caused by the one succeeding it, and is eliminated with the destruction of its cause. The primary cause for all of this is "wrong notion," hence the Nyaya were concerned with the investigation of the pramanas.

The Nyayas draw their metaphysics from the **Vaisheshika** school, with whom they become assimilated in the early centuries of the common era. Their philosophical perspective is sometimes described as the "ordinary person's conception." The Nyayas and Vaisheshika are philosophical realists—that is, they believe the world is made up of many different things that exist as perceived, except in cases of perceptual error. All things are composed of nine fundamental substances—the five **elements**, **space**, time, mind, and selves—and that whatever exists is both knowable and nameable. The Nyayas subscribe to the **causal model** known as **asatkaryavada**, which posits that when a thing is created, it is a new entity, completely different from its constituent parts. This causal model tends to multiply the number of things in the universe, since each act of creation brings a new thing into being. It also admits that human efforts and actions are one of the causes influencing these affects, making it theoretically possible to act in a way that brings final liberation of the soul (**moksha**).

One of the unique features of the Nyaya school is their belief in **inherence** (**samavaya**), a weak relational force that functions like a glue connecting various things: wholes and their parts, substances and their attributes, motions and the things that move, and general properties and their particular instances. For the Nyayas, the Self (**atman**) is the locus for all experience. Inherence connects all experiences—

pleasure, pain, happiness, sorrow, and so forth—to the Self. The philosophical difficulties with inherence—particularly the notion that it is one single principle and not a collection of things—caused the Nyaya school great difficulty. These assumptions were ultimately responsible for the rise of **Navyanyaya** school, which attempted to explain these relationships in a more sophisticated way. For further information see Karl H. Potter and Sibajiban Bhattacharyya (eds.), *Indian Philosophical Analysis*, 1992; and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore (eds.), *A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy,* 1957.

## Nyaya Sutras

Foundational text for the **Nyaya** school, one of the **six schools** of traditional Hindu **philosophy**. The Nyaya Sutras are traditionally attributed to the philosopher **Gautama**; the most significant commentary was written by **Vatsyayana** in the fourth century. The Nyaya Sutras begin with an exposition of the cause of the human bondage, explained as stemming from a five-part **causal chain**: pain, **birth**, activity, defect, and wrong notion. Each of these elements is caused by the one succeeding it, and is eliminated with the destruction of its cause. The root cause for bondage and reincarnation (**samsara**) is thus wrong notions, which must be corrected to attain final liberation of the soul (**moksha**). In their quest for correct understanding, the Nyaya Sutras devote great attention to the **pramanas**, the means by which human beings can gain true and accurate knowledge, and to the rules and procedures for applying them. The Nyaya Sutras describe four such pramanas: perception (**pratyaksha**), inference (**anumana**), analogy (**upamana**), and authoritative testimony (**shabda**). These ideas are accepted by virtually all Indian philosophical schools and are the Nyayas' major contribution to Indian philosophy.

# O

## Obscenity

Traditional Hindu culture can be characterized as straightlaced, even prudish, with regard to sexuality; any public mention of sexuality is taboo in polite society. The exception of ritually sanctioned obscenity comes before and during the festival of **Holi**, which usually occurs in March. Holi is a "festival of reversal," in which most social taboos are temporarily suspended. Holi comes very close to the end of the lunar **year**, and symbolizes the end of time, when all norms and standards have been lost. In recent times the license and lawlessness associated with Holi have led many people to stop celebrating it in public, particularly in the cities.

## Ocean, Churning of the

Famous mythic event in which the gods and **demons** churned the Ocean of Milk to produce the nectar or immortality. See also **Tortoise avatar**.

## Offerings

One of the pervasive realities in Hindu religious life is the importance of transactions or exchanges—both between human beings, and between humans and superhuman beings. The importance of these exchanges makes various offerings a fundamental part of Hindu **worship**. One set of sixteen offerings, known as the **upacharas**, are given to a **deity** as part of worship, on the model of treating the deity as an honored guest—inviting the deity inside, offering the deity a seat, a drink of **water**, and so forth. In the **naivedya**, one offers the deity food, perhaps the most fundamental courtesy of all.

## Om

A sacred sound. According to tradition, it should be uttered before and after reading the **Vedas** (the oldest Hindu religious texts), saying any prayer, or performing any sacred rite. When uttered at the beginning of a rite, it is believed to remove obstacles, and when uttered at the end it is seen as a concluding affirmation. Because of its pervasive ritual use, the sound *Om* is regarded as the essence of all holy speech. As early as the **Mandukya Upanishad**, the sound's phonetic elements (A, U, and M) were interpreted as corresponding to different states of consciousness, and ultimately designating the Self (**atman**). See also **four states of consciousness**.

## Omens

The notions of **auspiciousness** and **inauspiciousness** are deeply rooted in Hindu life, and are based on the assumption that by their very nature certain things bring good fortune, and certain other things bring ill fortune. The notion of omens is an extension of this idea; omens are important not because they cause good or bad fortune in themselves, but because they indicate conditions that are present. According to this belief, auspicious conditions will automatically give rise to favorable omens, and inauspicious conditions to unfavorable omens. Omens serve as indicators to help judge the current state of affairs and make any necessary adjustments. For example, if on leaving the house to do some business one sees a person deemed inauspicious, one should return to the home and begin again, lest the work be fruitless.

## Omkareshvar

Temple and sacred site (**tirtha**) on an island in the **Narmada River** in the state of **Madhya Pradesh**, about fifty miles southeast of the city of Indore. The temple is named after its presiding **deity**, the god **Shiva** in his manifestation as the "Lord of [the sound] **Om**," an utterance

claimed to symbolize the entire universe, according to the early speculative texts known as the **Upanishads**. Omkareshvar is one of the twelve **jyotirlingas**, a network of sites at which Shiva is uniquely present. According to the site's mythic charter, Shiva appears there to reward the sage Mandhata, who has performed harsh **asceticism** (**tapas**) to gain a vision of Shiva. The image at the site is a "self-manifested" (**svayambhu**) form of Shiva—an unshaped, roundish black stone emerging from the **earth**, while nearby is a white stone considered to be a manifestation of Shiva's wife, **Parvati**. Viewing this image is believed to grant all of one's desires, just as it did for Mandhata. **Worship** at the site continues all year, but during **Kartik Purnima**, the **full moon** in the **lunar month** of **Kartik** (October–November), there is a major bathing (**snana**) festival at the site.

## Onam

The festival of Onam, in the southern Indian state of **Kerala**, is celebrated in the Malayalam month of Chingal, which corresponds to the northern Indian month of **Bhadrapada** (August–September). Onam is a four-day harvest festival highlighted by races in elaborately carved boats known as "snake boats," some of which are large enough to carry 100 paddlers. The most famous of these boat races are held in the Keralan town of Aleppey.

## Oraon

Northern Indian tribal (**adivasi**) community. The Oraons are concentrated in the southwestern corner of modern **Bihar**, in the geologic region known as the Ranchi Plateau. The land is quite poor, and for many life is very difficult. For a discussion of the difficulties of Oraon life, see Sudhir Kakar, *Shamans, Mystics, and Doctors*, 1991.

## Ordeal, Trial By

Trial by ordeal was one of the traditional means for establishing a person's guilt or innocence. Ordeals were considered a "divine" proof, but could only be used in cases when human proofs such as evidence or eyewitness testimony were inadequate or unobtainable. Crimes committed in secret or in lonely places, questions of sexual consent, or money left for deposit were proven by these trials, following a carefully established ritual procedure. The trial could be done in four different ways: **fire**, **water**, balance, or poison.

The fire ordeal entailed carrying a red-hot iron ball, licking a red-hot plowshare, or removing a ring or coin from a vessel of boiling oil, with guilt or innocence established by whether or not one was burned. The water ordeal entailed remaining underwater for a specified length of time, with guilt determined by the inability to do so. The balance ordeal was done by successive weighings, with the conviction that a guilty person would become progressively heavier. The poison ordeal was performed either by consuming poison, or by safely removing a coin from an earthen pot containing a cobra; innocence was established by surviving.

There were fairly strict prescriptions governing which of these ordeals certain people were allowed to perform. **Women**, the elderly, and the infirm were subjected to the test of balance; **brahmins** were generally forbidden from undertaking ordeal by poison. In every case the actual ordeal was preceded by the person proclaiming his or her innocence, followed by declarations praising the saving **power of truth** and the damning force of untruth. Historians speculate that these required declarations helped make the ordeal more reliable. For instance, in the ordeal of licking a red-hot plowshare, a guilty person might be significantly more nervous and thus have less moisture on the tongue. Similarly, the nervousness during the water ordeal may have impeded

Temple to the sun at Konarak, in Orissa.

a person's ability to hold his breath. Whether or not these speculations have any merit, the most important feature in the original Hindu context was the belief in the power of truth itself.

## Organs of Action
See **karmendriya**.

## Orissa
A state in modern India on the eastern coast between the states of **Andhra Pradesh** and **West Bengal**. Orissa traces its roots to the kingdom of Kalinga and the bloody conquest by the Mauryan emperor **Ashoka** (r. 269–232 B.C.E.). During the early medieval period the Kesari and **Ganga** dynasties built stunning temples, many of which exist today. Modern Orissa is largely undeveloped, and a large percentage of its people are indigenous tribal peoples (**adivasis**). Historically, Hindu culture has been manifest in the coastal regions, whereas the interior has been tribal land. Orissa's sacred sites include the Ganga-era temples in the state capital of

**Bhubaneshvar**, the sacred city of **Puri**, and the temple to the **Sun** at **Konarak**. For general information about Orissa and all the regions of India, see Christine Nivin et al., *India*. 8th ed., Lonely Planet, 1998. See also **Maurya dynasty**.

## Orissi
One of the classical **dance** forms of India; some of the others are **Kathak**, **Bharatanatyam**, **Kuchipudi**, **Kathakali**, and **Manipuri**. Dance in **Orissa** dates to the second century B.C.E.; the present Orissi style has its roots in the dance performed at the temple of the god **Jagannath** in **Puri**. The temple itself was built in the eleventh century; the subsidiary part, known as the **natamandira** ("dance-hall"), was built about a century later. The latter period was the era of the poet **Jayadeva**, whose lyric poem, the *Gitagovinda*, is the only non-scriptural poem that can be recited in the temple. According to tradition, Jayadeva's wife, Padmavati, was one of the dancers in the temple, and it was she who first danced parts of the *Gitagovinda* as an **offering** to Jagannath. As dance at the

temple evolved, two categories of temple dancers emerged: those allowed to dance in the inner sanctum, and those allowed to dance in the natamandira. In the seventeenth century, a third type of dance emerged—boys dressed as dancing girls performed for general entertainment both outside and inside the temple. The latter dance tended to be more athletic and acrobatic, whereas the women's dance was more gentle and lyrical.

The modern Orissi style combines both elements. The most characteristic stance is the chauka ("square"), in which the feet are spread wide and pointed in opposite directions, with the knees bent so that the upper leg is parallel to the ground. The arms are held in a mirroring position, bent at the elbow with the upper arms horizontal, and the lower arms and hands pointing straight down. The dance's stylistic impression is one of roundness and fluidity, created by rippling movements in the upper body during the dance. As in all the Indian dances, Orissi has a well-developed vocabulary of **gesture** and expression, making complex story-telling possible. The modern Orissi dance form has been shaped by the shift from temple to stage in the twentieth century; this change of venue has been primarily responsible for its "classical" form becoming more rigidly defined than in the past. For further information see Mohan Khokar, *Traditions of Indian Classical Dance*, 1984.

## Osho

The name adopted late in life by **Bhagwan Shri Rajneesh**. See **Bhagwan Shri Rajneesh**.

## Owl

In Hindu mythology, the owl is the animal vehicle of **Lakshmi**, the **goddess**. Just as the owl is popularly believed to have trouble seeing in the daytime, a person pursuing "Lakshmi" (money and prosperity) will be single-minded toward it and unable to "see" anything else, such as deeper wisdom. In modern **Hindi**, calling someone an "owl" is a mild insult, referring to the other as a "fool."

# P

## Pacification of Planets

Indian astrology (**jyotisha**) recognizes nine "**planets**": the **sun**, **moon**, **Mercury**, **Venus**, **Mars**, **Jupiter**, and **Saturn**; the remaining two are **Rahu** and **Ketu**, which do not correspond to any Western astrological features. Each of these planets is considered helpful or harmful by nature. The relative strength of any planet is believed to depend on its position in the horoscope and vis-à-vis the other planets. All are seen as minor divinities rather than as simple material objects, and thus a potentially harmful planet can be "pacified" through rites intended to minimize its disruptive potential. One common means of pacification is to wear the **gemstone** corresponding to the particular planet, so that the stone can neutralize the planet's force. More inauspicious cases demand stronger measures, often involving rites in which the planetary **inauspiciousness** is given away through the medium of gifts (**dana**). For further consideration see Gloria Goodwin Raheja, *The Poison in the Gift*, 1988. See also **Suryia**.

## Padma

("lotus") One of the richest symbols in Indian **philosophy** and iconography, both Hindu and Buddhist, and an invariably auspicious object. Its size and colors make it one of the most beautiful Indian flowers, but the lotus is also a potent symbol for spiritual realization. It is rooted in the mud—symbolizing the corrupting world with which all beings must contend—but it blooms above the surface of the water, signifying transcendence. The lotus plant's underwater stems grow as long as necessary to get the flower bud above the water's surface—whether three, five, or ten feet—symbolizing the human ability to overcome obstacles to spiritual progress. Finally, lotus leaves are covered with a waxy coating, upon which water beads up and flows off; one religious text, the **Bhagavad Gita** (5.10), uses this as a simile for the man who renounces all attachment and is untouched by the things of the world.

Aside from its symbolic content, the lotus is also an important element in Hindu iconography. It is one of the four identifying objects carried by the god **Vishnu**, along with the conch shell (**shankha**), club (**gada**), and discus (**chakra**). It is also commonly carried by the **Goddess**, both in her forms as **Durga** and related powerful goddesses, and in her beneficent and benevolent form as **Lakshmi**, who is usually portrayed as standing on a lotus. The lotus even figures in one of the common Hindu creation myths, in which a lotus sprouts from Vishnu's navel and opens to reveal **Brahma**, who proceeds to create the earth. When the universe has run its course and is about to be destroyed, same process happens in reverse.

## Padmapada

One of the two attested disciples of **Shankaracharya**—the other being **Sureshvara**—and the founder of the **Vivarana** school of **Advaita Vedanta**. The Advaita school upholds a philosophical position known as monism, which is the belief that a single Ultimate Reality, **Brahman**, lies behind all things, and that all things are merely differing forms of that reality. Advaita proponents claim that reality is nondual (**advaita**)—that is, that, despite the appearance of difference and diversity, all things are nothing but the formless, unqualified Brahman. For the Advaitins, the assumption of diversity is a fundamental misunderstanding of the ultimate nature of things, and a manifestation of **avidya** (lack of genuine understanding).

Man sitting in the padmasana, or lotus posture. This sitting position is often used in yoga and meditation.

The defining characteristic of Padmapada's Vivarana school is that he places the locus of ignorance in Brahman, in contrast to the **Bhamati** school, which placed it in the individual. To explain how Brahman can be the locus of ignorance the Vivarana Advaitins invoke the theory of **Reflectionism**: Just as an image appearing in a mirror is based on the original, but different from it, so human selves are identical with Brahman, but appear to be separate. The basis of Padmapada's position is an uncompromising affirmation of Brahman as the sole "reality," to which anything that exists must belong. For further information see Karl H. Potter (ed.), *Advaita Vedanta up to Samkara and His Pupils*, 1981; and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore (eds.), *A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy*, 1957.

## Padmasana

("lotus posture") Well-known sitting position (**asana**) used in **yoga** and in meditation; the lotus posture is also one of the sitting positions in which **deities** are portrayed in Hindu iconography. In this position the person sits cross-legged, with each foot placed on the thigh of the opposite leg. One of its benefits is that it is extremely stable and well suited for meditation, since the angle of the lower legs keeps the upper part of the legs flat on the ground, making a wide base to support the body. Done properly, it also keeps the spine quite straight, which is thought essential to keep from constricting the channels in the **subtle body**. In Indian iconography, the lotus position is sometimes represented at the base of a statue by the **sculpture** of a lotus, which forms the base on which the image is placed.

## Paduka

A wooden sandal used mainly by ascetics. It consists of a wooden sole and a mushroom-shaped front post, which is gripped with first two toes for stability. Padukas are used by **ascetics** not only because of their cheapness and durability, but because they are completely free of animal products such as **leather**, which are considered impure. Aside

from their functional use as footwear, after death an ascetic's padukas will often be kept by his (or, more rarely, her) disciples, as a sign of their **guru's** symbolic presence.

## Padya

("for the feet") The third of the sixteen traditional **upacharas** ("**offerings**") given to a **deity** as part of **worship**, on the model of treating the deity as an honored guest. In this offering, the deity is offered water for washing the feet, which would be a traditional act of hospitality for a guest coming in from outside. The actual act of offering can be performed in various ways and often depends on the worshiper's inclinations. In some cases the water will simply be presented before the deity's image with the understanding that the deity has taken it, whereas in other cases the devotee (**bhakta**) will physically wash the feet of the image. In either case, the underlying motive is to show love for the deity and to minister to the deity's needs.

## Pahari

One of the two influential "schools" of Indian **miniature painting**, the other being the **Rajasthani**. The distinctions between schools are geographical and thus somewhat arbitrary, since, for example, the **Basohli** paintings belong to the Pahari school, but are stylistically closer to those of **Rajasthan** than to the later Pahari style.

The Pahari style flourished in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the small kingdoms in the **Shiwalik Hills** north and west of Delhi. It first appears in the kingdom of **Basohli,** where the influence of the Rajasthani school is the clearest, and later developed in the kingdoms of **Jammu**, **Guler**, **Garhwal**, and **Kangra**. The developed Pahari style differs from the Rajasthani in its emphasis on more linear drawing—perhaps influenced by European art—and a more restrained use of color, both features

tending to give the paintings a more lyrical feel. For further information see W. G. Archer, *Indian Painting*, 1957; and "Pahari Miniatures: A Concise History," in *Marg*, Vol. 28, No. 2, 1975.

## Paishacha Marriage

One of the eight ways to perform a marriage recognized in the **dharma literature**, the treatises on religious duty. Paishachas are a class of **demons**, so a marriage named after them is already suspect. The Paishacha marriage takes place when a man has intercourse with a woman who is drunk, unconscious, or asleep. Not surprisingly, this is one of the four reprehensible (**aprashasta**) forms of marriage, and because of the woman's lack of conscious awareness, this form was forbidden, even though it was deemed a valid marriage. Here the writers' concern seems to have been to give the "bride" legal status as a wife, rather to legitimate the actions of the "groom." Although theoretically valid, this form of marriage has always been forbidden, and thus it has never been one of the common forms of marriage. See also **marriage, eight classical forms**.

## Paithan

City and sacred site (**tirtha**) on the **Godavari** River in the state of **Maharashtra**, about 175 miles east of Bombay. Although of reduced importance in modern times, it has a long history as a trading city and was an important stopping-point on the central Indian trade route from southern India to **Ujjain**. Since the sixteenth century, Paithan has been famous as the home of **Eknath**, one of the important figures in the **Varkari Panth**, a religious community centered around the **worship** of the Hindu god **Vithoba** at his temple at **Pandharpur** in the modern state of **Maharashtra**. Varkari religious practice primarily consists of two pilgrimages, in which all the participants arrive in Pandharpur on the same **day**. Eknath still symbolically travels to Pandharpur

twice each year; a **palanquin** (palkhi) bearing his sandals is at the head of the procession bearing his name.

## Paksha

One of the parts in the accepted form of an inference (**anumana**) in Indian **philosophy**. The accepted form for an inference has three terms: an assertion (**pratijna**), a reason (**hetu**), and examples (**drshtanta**); each of these three has its own constituent parts. The paksha is part of the first term, the assertion, and comprises the class of things about which the assertion is to be proved. For instance, in the stock example, "There is fire on that mountain, because there is smoke on that mountain," the paksha in this case is "that mountain," or the class of things about which the assertion must be proved. The class that forms the paksha must also appear in the second term of the inference, the reason, as the common link between the two parts (as in "this mountain is on fire, because this mountain is smoking"). The paksha thus forms the common link between the assertion and the reason, thereby ensuring that the latter is relevant to the former.

In the context of a **lunar month**, the word *paksha* refers to the month's two "parts." The **Shukla Paksha** is the waxing half, while the **Krishna Paksha** is the waning half.

## Pakudha Kacchayana

An atomistic early Indian philosopher whose views are mentioned in the Buddhist scriptures. As these scriptures portray him, Pakudha believed that seven things were eternal, unmoving, and unchanging—the four elements, ease, pain, and the soul. According to Pakudha, when a sword cuts a person's head in two, no one is deprived of life, rather the sword merely penetrates the interval between two elementary substances (presumably the soul and the material part of the person's body). This example seems to suggest an antisocial

ethos, but beyond this, very little is known about him.

## Pala Dynasty

(8th–12th c.) Eastern Indian dynasty whose ancestral homeland was in **Bihar** but whose core territory also spanned most of modern Bengal. The Pala dynasty's zenith came at the turn of the ninth century, when they controlled the entire northern Indian plain all the way into the **Punjab** region. Their rise to power came as a result of political instability in the Gangetic plain, and the Palas were quickly supplanted by the **Gurjara-Pratihara dynasty** while retaining sway over Bengal and Bihar for several centuries more. Their territory in Bengal was eventually taken by the **Sena dynasty**, and the Palas were finally conquered by the **Gahadavalas** in the middle of the twelfth century. The Palas and Senas are both noted for a particular type of **sculpture**, in which the images were made from black chlorite schist polished to a mirror finish.

## Palani

Town and sacred site (**tirtha**) in the eastern part of the state of **Tamil Nadu**, about sixty miles northwest of **Madurai**. Palani is part of a network of six temples in Tamil Nadu dedicated to **Murugan**, a hill **deity** who has been assimilated into the larger pantheon as a form of the god **Skanda**, the **son** of **Shiva**. Five of these temples have been definitively identified, and each is associated with a particular region, a particular ecosystem, and a particular incident in Murugan's mythic career—in the case of Palani, Murugan lived there as a young **ascetic**. Every other shrine to Murugan in Tamil Nadu can be considered the sixth of these temples. The cult of Murugan is thus a symbolic vehicle for Tamil pride and identity, and since the number six has connotations of completeness—as in the six directions, or the six **chakras** in the **subtle body**—it also connotes that nothing external is needed. For

A palanquin is used to carry images of a temple's deity in ritual processions.

further information see Fred Clothey, "Pilgrimage Centers in the Tamil Cultus of Murukan," in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion,* Vol. 40, No. 1 (1972).

## Palanquin

Platform or litter supported by poles on the shoulders of two or more men, and used as a respectful way to carry something or someone in procession. A palanquin can be used to carry the image of a **deity** in a ritual procession, or an **ascetic** leader or spiritual teacher (**guru**) by his (or more rarely, her) disciples, or the sandals (**padukas**) or other **possessions** connected with one's spiritual leader, as in the **Varkari Panth's** pilgrimage to **Pandharpur**.

## Pallava Dynasty

(6th–9th c.) Southern Indian dynasty whose capital was at the city of **Kanchipuram**, and which ruled over much of the southern Indian peninsula between the sixth and ninth centuries. The greatest Pallava rulers were king **Mahendravarman** and his successors **Narasimhavarman I** and **II**. The reign of the Pallava dynasty was marked by the explosion of southern Indian culture: the development of Tamil literature, the devotional (**bhakti**) religious fervor of the groups known as the **Alvars** and the **Nayanars**, and the magnificent religious monuments at **Mahabalipuram**. Throughout much of its existence the Pallava empire carried on a running battle with the **Chalukya** and **Pandya** Dynasties, neither of which could prevail against it, but it was eventually absorbed by the next great southern Indian empire, the **Chola dynasty**. See also **Tamil language** and **Tamil epics**.

## Palm Leaves

Until commercially produced paper became readily available, palm leaves were the most common writing medium in traditional India. The palm leaves were cut into narrow strips held together by a cord (**sutra**) running through a hole punched in the middle of the leaf. Palm leaf books usually had a top and bottom made from strips of wood, to protect the leaves, and these covers were often ornately decorated. The fragile nature of these palm leaves made regular copying necessary to preserve manuscripts, even though such frequent copying generally introduced errors. If left untended, the life span of a manuscript was at most fifty years, due to the deteriorations caused by the climate and the damage from a species of termite known as "white ants," which fed on palm leaves. See also **pustaka**.

## Pan

See **betel**.

## Pancha Dravida

Collective name for the five main southern Indian **brahmin** communities, whose names largely correspond to the regions in which they live: the **Gujaratis**

in the state of **Gujarat**, **Maharashtris** in the state of **Maharashtra**, **Karnatas** in the state of **Karnataka**, **Andhras** in the state of **Andhra Pradesh**, and **Dravidas** in deep southern India, in the states of **Tamil Nadu** and **Kerala**.

## Pancha Gauda

Collective name for the five main northern Indian **brahmin** communities: the **Gaudas** and **Kanaujias**, who stretch over most of northern India; the **Maithilas** in the northern state of **Bihar**; the **Utkalas** in the coastal state of **Orissa**; and the **Saraswats**, traditionally found in several widely separated locations. One group lived in the coastal region of Sindh in modern Pakistan, although after Partition in 1947 most migrated to Bombay. Another group was located in prepartition **Punjab**, although here too they have tended to migrate away from the part of Punjab in modern Pakistan. A third branch, known as the **Gauda Saraswats**, is found on a narrow strip of coastline in the southern Indian state of **Karnataka**.

## Panchagavya

("five [products of the] **cow**") A mixture of cow's milk, curds, clarified butter (ghee), urine, and dung. Since each of these products comes from the sacred cow, it is considered a ritually purifying substance. Panchagavya is drunk for purification during rituals of expiation (**prayashchitta**), and it can also be used in other rituals used to purify people, objects, and places.

## Panchagni-Tapa

("five-fires **asceticism**") Form of voluntary physical mortification, usually performed in the hot **season**, in which the person sits surrounded by four fires, the fifth fire being the sun overhead. Although this practice is now uncommon, it is very old and routinely named in the **puranas** and other religious texts as one of the standard **ascetic** practices. As with all forms of physical ascetic endurance (**tapas**), this rite is performed under the assumption that voluntarily enduring pain and/or hardship is a way to gain spiritual, religious, and magical power.

## Panchak Nakshatra

A group of five (pancha) consecutive **nakshatras** (the twenty-seven signs in the lunar zodiac) in Indian astrology (**jyotisha**). The lunar houses are divided equally throughout the solar zodiac, with 2.25 lunar houses for each solar sign. In a single **lunar month** the **moon** moves through each of these lunar houses in turn, spending about a **day** in each. The Panchak Nakshatra is believed to be a highly inauspicious time, and people who pay attention to astrology will often severely curtail any nonessential activities until this time has passed.

## Panchakroshi Yatra

A circular journey (**yatra**) in which pilgrims circumambulate the outer boundary of **Kashi** (the largest of the three concentric ritual areas contained in the city of **Benares**) and visit 108 shrines along the way. The journey's length is reckoned at five kroshas (roughly ten miles), hence the name. The journey measures out the boundaries of the sacred city, and thus pilgrims symbolically circle the entire world. Although the best known Panchakroshi Yatra is in Benares, and the name is most commonly associated with this place, many other sacred sites (**tirthas**) have similar pilgrimage routes, and this process of a circular journey around a sacred spot is a common ritual motif.

## Panchala

Name of the region corresponding to the middle part of the state of **Uttar Pradesh**, centered on the **Ganges** River valley around the city of **Kanauj**. Panchala is mentioned as a kingdom as early as the sixth century B.C.E., and although it became a tributary to the great empires such as the Mauryas

(4th–3rd c. B.C.E.), it retained an independent identity until the third century. See also **Maurya dynasty**.

## Panchamahayajna

("[the] five great sacrifices") Set of five ritual actions—**brahmayajna**, **pitryajna**, **devayajna**, **bhutayajna**, and **nryajana**—that are prescribed in the **dharma literature**, (texts on religious duty). These five actions are prescribed daily religious observances for a "**twice-born**" householder, that is, a householder who has been born into one of the three "twice-born" groups in Indian society—**brahmin**, **kshatriya**, or **vaishya**—and who has received the adolescent religious **initiation** known as the "second birth." Each **sacrifice** (**yajna**) is directed toward a different class of beings—from the Absolute Reality down to animals—and is satisfied by different actions: to **Brahman** by teaching and studying the **Veda**, to the **ancestral spirits** (pitr) by **offerings** of water (**tarpana**), to the gods (**deva**) by offering clarified butter into the sacred **fire**, to the animals and social outcasts (**bhut**) by putting out food for them, and to human beings (nr) by showing hospitality to guests. In the time since the dharma literature was composed, Hindu life has seen significant changes in emphasis, and although some of these are still important in modern Hindu life—particularly the stress on hospitality to guests—in most cases the others have been either elided or replaced by other religious forms.

## Panchamakara

"The Five Forbidden Things," literally, "the five m's": A group of five things used for **worship** in the secret, ritually based religious practice known as **tantra**. This name arises because the names for all five of these begin with the letter "m"—**madya** (wine), **matsya** (fish), **mamsa** (meat), **mudra** (fermented or parched grain), and **maithuna** (copulation). They are used in their actual form in "left hand" (**vamachara**) tantra, and by

substitution in "right hand" (**dakshinachara**) tantra.

All five are condemned by "respectable" Hindu society (the last because it is characterized as adulterous), and their use in tantric ritual must be seen in a larger context. One of the most pervasive tantric assumptions is the ultimate unity of everything that exists. From a tantric perspective, to affirm that the entire universe is one principle—often conceived as the activity of a particular **deity**—means that the adept must reject all concepts based on dualistic thinking. The "Five Forbidden Things" provide a ritual means for breaking down duality, since in this ritual the adept violates societal norms forbidding consumption of **intoxicants**, nonvegetarian food, and illicit sexuality, in a conscious effort to sanctify what is normally forbidden. Tantric adepts cite such ritual use of forbidden things as proof that their practice involves a more exclusive qualification (**adhikara**) and is thus superior to common practice. For further information see Arthur Avalon (Sir John Woodroffe), *Shakti and Shakta*, 1978; Swami Agehananda Bharati, *The Tantric Tradition*, 1977; and Douglas Renfrew Brooks, *The Secret of the Three Cities*, 1990.

## Panchang

In Indian astrology (**jyotisha**), an almanac documenting the position of the various celestial bodies during the course of a **calendar year**, including the days of the **moon's** monthly cycle, its progression through the **nakshatras**, and the position of the **planets**. Most Hindu religious festivals fall according to a lunar calendar, and thus a panchang is needed to determine when they will arrive. A panchang is also important for helping people to determine auspicious and inauspicious times for the performance of certain activities. The greatest care is taken in fixing marriage times, to avoid any possible **inauspiciousness** that could affect the marriage, but in many cases a panchang will be

consulted before initiating any important activity.

## Pancharatra

("five nights," of uncertain meaning) The name denotes a particular group of **Vaishnavas** (devotees of the god **Vishnu**). Although there is plenty of evidence that the Pancharatra community is very old, very little is known about its origins. In the earliest Vaishnava sectarian texts, the Pancharatra community is unfavorably compared to another group, the **Bhagavatas**, with the former described as marginal and the latter as "Vedic" and respectable. Despite this seeming disapprobation, in their earliest appearances Pancharatras do not seem theologically different from the Bhagavatas, although their differences may have been rooted in differing practices. In their later history, the Pancharatras become associated with an elaborate theory of **creation**, finalized somewhere around the sixth century and based on the successive appearance of four divine emanations: Vishnu-Narayana, **Sankarshana**, **Pradyumna**, and **Aniruddha**. The successive activity of these divine emanations brings the world into being, but each is also associated with a particular facet of spiritual life through which human beings can reverse the process of creation and gain liberation. The Pancharatra school is also important for its theory of primary and secondary **avatars**, in which the latter can include any properly consecrated image of the **deity**. The doctrine of secondary avatars has become a pivotal idea in the later **Shrivaishnava** community, through which Pancharatra ideas have continued to influence modern Hindu life.

## Panchatantra

("Five Treatises") A collection of moralistic fables intended to impart practical and worldly wisdom. The fables themselves are framed by the story of a king who is distressed by his sons' lack of learning and good moral character, which gives him grave misgivings about their ability to rule well after his death. He resolves this problem by hiring a person to teach the boys through fables, each of which usually has several shorter fables embedded in it to give moral lessons along the way. These fables are intended to provide pragmatic advice about how to be successful in the real world, particularly in the art of statecraft. This pragmatic focus can lead one to characterize the text's advice as opportunistic, particularly since it encourages caution and self-interest as the keys to success. The *Panchatantra* exists in several versions, of which the most famous is the **Hitopadesha**. The text has been translated numerous times; a version found its way to Europe, where it became the basis for the fables of La Fontaine.

## Panchavati

In the **Ramayana**, the earlier of the two great Indian epics, the place where three of the epic's central characters—the god-king **Rama**, his wife **Sita**, and his brother **Lakshmana**—live during much of their fourteen years of forest exile. It is from here that Sita is kidnapped by **Ravana**, the **demon**-king of **Lanka**. Although the events in the *Ramayana* cannot be definitively set in any specific place, there is a village named Panchavati, outside the city of **Nasik** in the state of **Maharashtra**, which is identified with the mythic site.

## Panchayat

In traditional India, a group of five (pancha) elders from a particular community, who were the final authority for the members of that community. Each **jati** (**endogamous** subcommunity, often defined by hereditary occupation) was a self-governing body, for which the panchayat would make all the important decisions. In modern India this institution is being hailed as a paradigm for decentralized government, in which the

people themselves take responsibility for their communities, but since there are multiple jatis in any traditional Hindu village, this also means that there were multiple centers of authority.

## Panchayatana ("five-abode") Puja

Type of **worship** (**puja**) performed by **Smarta** brahmins, a group of **brahmins** distinguished, not by region or family, but by the religious texts they hold most authoritative—in this case, those known as the **smrtis** rather than sectarian religious texts. The panchayatana puja is marked by the simultaneous worship of five different **deities**—usually **Vishnu**, **Shiva**, **Surya**, **Ganesh**, and the **Goddess**. Individual Smartas may choose one or another from among these as their primary deity, but all these deities are ritually honored since they are all considered manifestations of the divine.

## Panchkedar

("The Five Kedars") The collective name for a network of five sites, sacred to the god **Shiva**, spread throughout the **Garhwal** region of the **Himalayas**: **Kedarnath**, **Rudranath**, **Tungnath**, **Madmaheshvar**, and **Kalpeshvar**. Each site is identified with a part of Shiva's body, thus providing a series of connections between the **deity's** body and the land itself—understandably so, since Shiva is believed to dwell in the Himalayas. Kedarnath is identified as Shiva's back, Madmaheshvar his navel, Tungnath his arm, Rudranath his face, and Kalpeshvar his matted locks (**jata**).

## Panchvani

("Five Voices") Manuscript collection compiled by the **Dadupanth**, a religious community founded by the northern Indian poet-saint **Dadu** (1554–1603). The collection contains the works of five different devotional (**bhakti**) poet–saints: Dadu, **Kabir**, **Namdev**, **Ravidas**, and Hardas. **Rajasthan's** desert climate has helped to preserve these manuscripts, some of which date from the early seventeenth century. The Panchvani manuscripts are among the earliest written sources for these poets, which makes them an important resource for the historical study of northern Indian devotional poetry. For further information on the literary resources of the Dadupanth, see Winand Callewaert (trans.), *The Sarvangi of the Dadupanthi Rajab*, 1978; and *The Sarvangi of Gopaldas*, 1993.

## Panda

A hereditary priest who assists pilgrims with any rituals they may need or desire to perform, and also with any other needs that the pilgrims may have. Each panda family in any given pilgrimage place (**tirtha**) has the exclusive rights to serve pilgrims coming from a particular geographical area or areas; pilgrims are supposed to seek out the panda serving their native region, whether or not the pilgrims still live in that place. On every visit, pilgrims will make an entry in the panda's pilgrim register (**bahi**), detailing the names of those who visited and the reason that they came. Some of these registers date back hundreds of years, and the documents are the ultimate proof of the hereditary connection between panda and pilgrim families. In earlier times this hereditary relationship was essential for the pilgrims, since their connection with their pandas provided resources while traveling—lodging, food, and other sorts of support. The pandas would minister to their clients, arrange for any needed rites, and even lend them money, if necessary. Pilgrims would usually give the panda a token gift when they departed, along with a pledge for some larger amount, which the pandas would travel to their homes to pick up.

Although pandas are often characterized as greedy and rapacious—based on their tendency to demand what they think a client is able to pay—in its ideal form both parties benefit from the relationship. In recent years, the pandas have become less central figures in

Varkari Panth pilgrims en route to Pandharpur.

many pilgrimage places, and conse-
quently, their status and their income
have declined. Many pilgrimage places
have been developed as sites for reli-
gious tourism, and hotels and facilities
that have been built at these places have
rendered pilgrims less dependent on
their pandas for accommodation. At the
same time, recent years have seen a gen-
eral decline in the performance of ritual
acts, except for the most important, par-
ticularly those connected with death.

## Pandava

("**sons** of **Pandu**") A collective name
for the five brothers who are the
protagonists of the *Mahabharata*:
**Yudhishthira**, **Arjuna**, **Bhima**, **Nakula**,
and **Sahadeva**. Although they are
named after king Pandu, none are actu-
ally his son, since Pandu has been
cursed to die the moment he holds his
wife in amorous embrace. Rather, they
are magically conceived through a
**mantra** given by the sage **Durvasas** to
**Kunti**, Pandu's senior wife. The mantra
gives the woman who recites it the
power to call down any god and to have,

by that god, a son equal in power to him-
self. Kunti uses this mantra to bear
Yudhishthira by the god **Dharma**,
Arjuna by the storm-god **Indra**, and
Bhima by the **wind**-god **Vayu**. With
Pandu's blessing Kunti also teaches the
mantra to her co-wife **Madri**, who med-
itates on the **Ashvins** (divine twins who
are the physicians to the gods), and
delivers the twins Nakula and Sahadeva.
The basic theme of the *Mahabharata*
is the story of the struggle for royal
power between the Pandavas and
their cousins, the **Kauravas**, which
culminates in a war that destroys the
entire family.

## Pandharpur

City and sacred site (**tirtha**) on the
**Bhima River** in the state of
**Maharashtra**, about 185 miles east and
south of Bombay. Pandharpur is best
known for the temple to the god
**Vithoba**, and has been a center of **wor-
ship** for the **Varkari Panth** religious
community for at least seven hundred
years. Varkari rituals center around a
twice-yearly pilgrimage to Pandharpur,

in which the pilgrims all arrive on the same day. Each pilgrim procession starts from a different place and is identified with one of the poet-saints who helped form the community. At the front of each procession is a **palanquin** (palkhi) bearing the sandals of that group's particular saint, who is thus symbolically leading them into Pandharpur. For more information see G. A. Deleury, *The Cult of Vithoba*, 1960; I. B. Karve, "On the Road," *Journal of Asian Studies,* Vol. 22, No. 1, 1962; and Digambar Balkrishna Mokashi, *Palkhi*, 1987.

## Pandrenthan

Historical site south of the city of Shrinagar in **Kashmir**. Pandrenthan is famous for one of the few old Hindu temples still standing in Kashmir, a temple dedicated to the god **Shiva** built in the twelfth century C.E. The shrine itself is fairly small and simple. The floor plan is basically square, with each side 17.5 feet long and an entrance on each side giving the temple an open feel. Each doorway has a gable over it projecting out from a pyramidal roof known to builders as a hip roof. The temple is built entirely of stone but has overlapping courses, in an attempt to mimic wooden construction.

## Pandu

In the *Mahabharata*, the later of the two great Hindu epics, the son of the sage **Vyasa** and queen **Ambalika**. Pandu and his brother **Dhrtarashtra** are born as the result of a desperate attempt to preserve the royal line of King **Shantanu** after Shantanu's son **Vichitravirya** dies without heirs. Upon Vichitravirya's death, his mother **Satyavati** calls upon her eldest son, **Vyasa**, to sleep with Vichitravirya's wives, **Ambika** and her sister Ambalika, in the hope that the women will conceive. According to tradition Vyasa is very ugly, and each woman reacts involuntarily when Vyasa appears in her bed: Ambika covers her eyes, causing her son **Dhrtarashtra** to be born blind, and Ambalika turns pale, causing her son

Pandu to be born with an unnaturally pale complexion. Given Dhrtarashtra's blindness, Pandu is the best suited to rule; he marries **Kunti** and **Madri** and lives quite happily as the king.

This idyllic time abruptly ends one day while he is hunting in the forest and shoots a **deer** while it is mating. To his horror, he discovers that the deer is the sage **Kindama**, who has taken this form for sport with his wife; with his dying breath, the sage curses Pandu that he will die the moment he touches his wife in an amorous embrace. Since he has no children, and the **curse** condemns him to die without an heir, Pandu abdicates the throne in favor of his brother Dhrtarashtra and goes with his wives to live as an **ascetic** in the **Himalayas**. At this time Kunti tells him about the **mantra** she has received years before from the sage **Durvasas**, which gives the woman who recites it the power to call down any of the gods and to have by him a son equal in power to himself. With Pandu's blessing Kunti and Madri bear five heroic sons, the five **Pandava** brothers. They all live happily together until one day when Pandu, swayed by the intoxicating influence of spring, ignores Madri's warnings and embraces her. The sage's curse takes effect and Pandu falls dead, although, through the power of the mantra, his family line continues.

## Pandurang

("pale") Epithet of the god **Vithoba**, whose primary place of **worship** is in the holy city of **Pandharpur** in the state of **Maharashtra**. See **Vithoba**.

## Pandya Dynasty

(6th–14th c.) Southern Indian dynasty whose capital was in the city of **Madurai** in the state of **Tamil Nadu**. The Pandyas existed as a regional power as early as the late sixth century, when they fought the **Pallava dynasty** of **Kanchipuram** for control of the peninsula. The Pandyas at one time became vassals to the **Chola dynasty** when the latter reigned over all

of southern India, but with the decline of the Cholas the Pandyas became the dominant regional power, eventually absorbing the Chola kingdom in 1279. At their zenith in the thirteenth century the Pandyas controlled most of the southern part of India, but were in turn conquered and annexed early in the fourteenth century by the Sangama dynasty, also known as the **Vijayanagar dynasty** after their capital city.

## Panguni

Twelfth month in the Tamil solar **year**, corresponding to the northern Indian solar month of Mina (the zodiacal sign of Pisces), which usually falls within March and April. This name is a modification of **Phalgun**, the twelfth month of the lunar **calendar**. The existence of several different calendars is one clear sign of the continuing importance of regional cultural patterns. One way that the Tamils retain their culture is by preserving their traditional calendar. Tamil is one of the few regional languages in India with an ancient, well-established literary tradition. See also **Tamil months**, **Tamil Nadu**, and **Tamil language**.

## Pani

A group of northern Indian people mentioned in a hymn in the **Rg Veda** (10.108), the oldest Hindu religious text. This reference speaks poorly of this group, since it portrays them as cattle thieves. The hymn is spoken as a dialogue between the Panis and **Sarama**, the divine **dog** who is the servant of the god **Indra** and who has been sent by Indra to recover the cattle the Panis have stolen. This hymn may refer to an actual incident and an actual group of people, but it is impossible to say. Certainly the Vedas were not written as a strict historical record, and it is perilous to read them as such. At the same time, as the earliest textual records they preserve references to the culture and to contemporary times that can be found nowhere else.

## Panigrahana

A minor rite, performed in many Hindu marriages, in which the groom grasps the bride's right hand as a symbol of their impending marital union. See also **marriage customs**.

## Panini

(4th c. B.C.E.) The greatest **Sanskrit** grammarian, whose descriptive account of that language in his *Ashtadhyayi* ("Eight Sections") became the prescriptive norm for the language in later generations. Panini was not the earliest grammarian, since he names several in his text; his genius lay rather in his skills as an organizer and systematizer. Each of the *Ashtadhyayi*'s eight sections is written as a series of brief aphorisms (**sutras**), each of which provides the foundation and necessary background for those that follow. Panini's use of this form allowed him to provide a complete account of the language in the briefest possible space, and the text's condensed form made it easier to memorize. As with most sutra texts, the *Ashtadhyayi's* terseness of expression presupposes a commentary, of which the most famous is the *Mahabhashya*, written by the grammarian **Patanjali** in the second century B.C.E.

## Panth

General term used for a particular religious community, such as the **Dadupanth**, **Varkari** Panth, or the Nanak Panth—an older name for the Sikh community, which has simply been abridged to "Panth" by contemporary Sikhs. The word is derived from the **Sanskrit** word for "path" and is here used metaphorically to indicate a fixed pattern of belief and behavior, often rooted in a particular individual's teachings. There is a certain amount of semantic overlap between the words *panth* and ***sampraday***, both of which denote religious communities, and there is no hard-and-fast rule dividing the two. In general, however, the term

*panth* is more closely associated with movements in the **sant** religious tradition, which tended toward rebellion against the prevailing religious establishment, whereas *sampraday* is more commonly applied to groups that evolved within these established religious communities.

## Pap

("evil") A word sometimes used as an adjective to describe people and actions, but most often used as a noun, either to denote a particular deed as evil or to refer to the collective evil one has accumulated through the bad deeds in one's karmic career. Since, according to **karma** theory, all one's deeds will eventually come to fruition, the evil that one has done is seen as already existing, even if only in a potential state. The opposite of pap is **punya**, the most general term denoting religious merit.

## Papamochani Ekadashi

Religious observance falling on the eleventh day (**ekadashi**) of the dark (waning) half of the **lunar month** of **Chaitra** (March–April). The name Papamochani means "freeing from evil," and the faithful observance of this festival is believed to do exactly that. As with all the eleventh-day observances, it is dedicated to the **worship** of **Vishnu**. Most Hindu festivals have certain prescribed rites, which usually involve fasting (**upavasa**) and worship (**puja**), and often promise specific benefits for faithful performance. On this day one should worship Vishnu with the full complement of the sixteen **upacharas** ("**offerings**").

## Papankusha Ekadashi

Religious observance falling on the eleventh **day** (**ekadashi**) of the bright (waxing) half of the **lunar month** of **Ashvin** (September–October). As with all the eleventh-day observances, it is dedicated to the **worship** of **Vishnu**. Most Hindu festivals have certain prescribed rites, which usually involve fasting (**upavasa**) and worship (**puja**), and often promise specific benefits for faithful performance. This ekadashi's name indicates that it is the goad (**ankusha**) to drive away all evil (**pap**), here fancifully conceived as an **elephant**. Thus, faithfully observing this festival is believed to cleanse one of all one's sins.

## Parakiya

("belonging to another") Particular type of relationship between lover and beloved, in which the woman is seen as married to another person. Parakiya is said to generate the most intense passion, since the people pursuing it have nothing to gain but love itself—if caught, they risk ridicule and shame, and in any case their liaison has no real future. This is not the conventional, safe love with one's own spouse (**svakiya**) that is sanctioned by marriage, carries social approval, and usually entails procreation, but rather a dangerous love pursued solely for pleasure. This type of relationship is a standard image in **Sanskrit** poetry, and is also the dominant theme for describing the relationship between the god **Krishna** and his human consort **Radha**, which is seen as symbolizing the relationship between god and the human soul.

## Paramahamsa

("supreme **Hamsa**") One of four types of Hindu **ascetic**. The four types were based on their supposed means of livelihood, which in practice has been much less important for ascetic identity than sectarian or organizational affiliation. The Paramahamsa is the most prestigious of the four, the others being (in order of increasing status) **Kutichaka**, **Bahudaka**, and Hamsa. Paramahamsas have no fixed abode and always live in an uninhabited place. They are said to have transcended all questions of religious duty (**dharma**), **purity**, and impurity (**ashaucha**), to have broken all attachments to the world, and to be

continually immersed in contemplation of the Supreme **Brahman**.

The word Paramahamsa has a more specialized meaning among the **Dashanami Sanyasis**, ascetic devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva** whose organization is divided into ten sections, each designated by a particular name. Here the name Paramahamsa refers to an ascetic who comes from one of the three **twice-born** (dvija) **varnas**—that is, who is a **brahmin**, **kshatriya**, or **vaishya**, the three social groups with higher symbolic status—and who has been initiated as a **Sanyasi** in one of the six divisions that will accept non-brahmins. Paramahamsas have higher status in these divisions than the **Naga** or fighting ascetics, who will initiate **shudras**, but lower status than the **Dandis**, who are invariably brahmins.

## Paramatman

("the highest self") Term generally used as a synonym for **Brahman**, the unqualified and undifferentiated reality that is seen as the source of all things, and the sole true power in the universe. This name, through its inclusion of the Self (**atman**) as part of the term, also emphasizes the identity in kind between Brahman and atman, between Supreme Reality and the individual Self.

## Parampara

("succession") The general term for the spiritual lineage maintained by the transmission of knowledge and power from **guru** to disciple. Such lineages form the basis for tracing spiritual descent within religious communities, particularly in secret traditions such as **tantra**. In a religious context, one's spiritual lineage is an important factor in establishing an identity and connections with others in the school, in the same way a biological lineage places one within a family.

## Parashara

In Hindu mythology, a legendary sage who is the grandson of the sage **Vasishtha**. He is credited with authoring the **Parashara Smrti**, an important and early work in the **dharma literature**. Parashara is best known as the father of the sage **Vyasa**, whom he begets through a maiden named **Satyavati**. Satyavati makes her living ferrying people across the **Ganges** River, and although she is a beautiful young woman, she always smells of fish because her mother is a celestial nymph who has been cursed to live as a fish in the Ganges. Struck by Satyavati's beauty while she is ferrying him across the river, Parashara creates an artificial fog to give them the privacy to have sexual intercourse. As a reward, he gives her the boon that, from that day onward, she will smell of musk instead of fish.

## Parashara Smrti

One of the **smrtis** or "remembered" texts, a class of literature deemed important but less authoritative than the other textual category, the **shrutis**, or "heard" texts. This smrti is ascribed to the sage **Parashara**, and is an example of one of the **Dharma Shastras**, which were manuals prescribing rules for correct human behavior and ideal social life. Unlike the **Dharma Sutras**, which are ascribed to recognizable individuals, the Dharma Shastras are usually ascribed to mythic sages as a strategy to reinforce the authority of these texts. At 592 verses, the *Parashara Smrti* is relatively short, and it treats only two themes, religious custom (**achara**) and expiation (**prayashchitta**). The text is estimated to have been written between the first and fifth centuries, but in the fourteenth century it received an extensive commentary by **Madhava**, and the resulting work, known as the *Parasharamadhava*, has continued to be influential since then.

The god Vishnu's Parashuram avatar, carrying his battle-axe. He appears in this form to punish the warrior class' abuse of power.

## Parashu

("battle-axe") A characteristic object in Hindu iconography, and one that appears in various forms—sometimes with a very light, thin handle and a larger head, at other times with a handle the size of a club (**gada**) and a very small, thin head. This weapon has the strongest mythic associations with **Vishnu's** sixth **avatar** or incarnation, **Parashuram**, who uses it in his war of extermination against the the ruling **kshatriya** class when their pride has grown too strong. The battle-axe is also commonly carried by the god **Ganesh** and signifies his power to cut through obstacles and impediments. It also commonly appears in various images of the deities **Shiva**, **Vishnu**, and the **Goddess**, as one among their galaxy of weapons.

## Parashuram Avatar

Sixth **avatar** or incarnation of the god **Vishnu**. As with all the avatars of Vishnu,

the Parashuram avatar comes to restore a cosmic equilibrium that has been thrown out of balance, in this case from the overweening abuse of power by the warrior (**kshatriya**) class. Parashuram is the son of **Jamadagni**, a **brahmin** sage whose most precious **possession** is Surabhi, a **cow** that will grant its owner any desired wish. One day when Parashuram is away, the king comes to Jamadagni's **ashram**. When he sees the cow, he desires it, and when Jamadagni refuses to give it to him, the king takes it by force.

When Parashuram learns of this, he becomes fiercely angry. Taking up his **parashu** (or battle-axe, a weapon particularly associated with him), he enters into battle with the king and eventually kills him. When the king's sons remain rebellious in opposition to him, Parashuram makes twenty-one journeys around India, destroying all of the kshatriyas that he can find, in an effort to wipe them from the face of the earth. The major theme of this story is the conflict between the brahmin and kshatriya classes, and the realities of living in a society in which brahmins had religious authority but kshatriyas had the power of enforcement. This story reveals a strong concern for the sanctity of a brahmin's possessions and highlights the perils of taking them by force. The writers behind the story were almost certainly brahmins, and their remarks on the perils of taking a brahmin's possessions doubtless reflect an insecurity about their ability to supersede governmental power.

In addition to the story of exterminating the kshatriyas, Parashuram appears in the epic *Mahabharata* as the person who teaches the heroic **Karna** the art of weapons and warfare. The epic portrays Parashuram as powerful and irascible, and as possessing such continuing hatred of kshatriyas that he refuses to take them as students. When Parashuram discovers that Karna is a kshatriya and not a brahmin, as he has claimed to be, he lays a curse on Karna that, in his hour of greatest

need, he will forget everything he has learned as his student.

## Parashurameshvar Temple

Temple constructed about 750 C.E. in the city of **Bhubaneshvar** in the state of **Orissa**, dedicated to the god **Shiva** in his aspect as the "Lord of **Parashuram**." This title refers to Parashuram's long period of **asceticism**, in which he worshiped Shiva as his chosen **deity** and was rewarded with Shiva's **grace**. The temple is an early example of the Orissan variant of the northern Indian **Nagara** temple style. The Nagara style emphasizes verticality, with the whole temple building culminating in a single high point, and the Orissan variant of this style has a single enormous tower (**deul**) over the image of the temple's primary deity, with shorter subsidiary buildings leading up to it. The Parashurameshvar temple is the first example of this basic pattern—a low, flat assembly hall (**jagamohan**), followed by a much taller and narrower tower (deul), in this case about forty feet high. Although later Orissan temples are much larger—some of the deuls tower over 200 feet—and often include additional buildings and structures, they all retain this basic pattern.

## Parashuram Jayanti

Festival marking the birthday of **Parashuram avatar**, **Vishnu's** sixth **avatar**. This takes place on the third day of the bright (waxing) half of the **lunar month** of **Baisakh** (April–May), the same day as the festival of **Akshaya Trtiya**.

## Parikshit

Mythic king in the **Lunar Line**, who serves as an example that one's fate cannot be escaped. Parikshit is the grandson of **Arjuna**, one of the five **Pandava** brothers who are the protagonists in the *Mahabharata*, the later of the two great Hindu epics.

Parikshit inherits the throne from **Yudhishthira**, Arjuna's elder brother, and according to tradition rules righteously for sixty years, but it is his death that is best remembered. Fond of hunting, Parikshit one day comes across a meditating sage while he is chasing a wounded deer. When the sage refuses to answer to his inquiries about the deer, Parikshit grows angry and, with his bow, drapes a dead cobra around the sage's neck. The sage remains unaware of this, but his **son** finds out about it when his playmates jeer at him. Furious, the son lays a curse that the person responsible will be fatally bitten within seven days by the great serpent **Takshaka**. When he discovers that the king is responsible, the son repents his **curse** to the King.

Parikshit takes all possible precautions to avoid his fate. He builds a house on a huge pillar, has anything brought into the house carefully searched, and surrounds himself with physicians who can cure snakebite. After six days without incident, the king begins to relax his vigilance. As the seventh day is ending, Takshaka conceals himself as a worm in a piece of fruit, changes into his real shape when the fruit is cut open, and bites the king, killing him.

## Parinamavada

("transformation-relationship") Philosophical perspective that explains the relationship between the Ultimate Reality or realities and the perceivable world, and describes the world as a genuine transformation of this reality.

This position is espoused by proponents of the **Samkhya**, **Vishishthadvaita Vedanta**, and **Bhedabhada** philosophical schools. All three of these are proponents of a **causal model** called **satkaryavada**. The satkaryavada model assumes that effects preexist in their causes, and that, when these effects appear, they are transformations (parinama) of those causes. The classic example for this model is the transformation of milk to curds, butter, and clarified butter: each of these effects was

already present in the cause, emerges from it through a natural transformation of that cause, and is causally related to it.

All three schools believe that the world as perceived is real and has some single ultimate source behind it: for the Samkhyas, the first principles are **purusha** and **prakrti**, for the Vishishthadvaita school, the god **Vishnu**, and for the Bhedabhada school, **Brahman**. All believe that real things come into being because these first principles undergo real transformations. Parinamavada allows for an explanation of the phenomenal world that compromises the transcendence of these first principles by making them part of the world. Philosophically, their difficulties arise in describing how the transcendent can become mundane, and then become transcendent again.

The transformation relationship is vehemently opposed by the **Advaita Vedanta** philosophical school, which upholds a philosophical position known as monism (the belief that a single Ultimate Reality lies behind all things, and that all things are merely differing forms of that reality). Advaita proponents claim that reality is nondual (**advaita**)—that is, that all things are "actually" the formless, unqualified **Brahman**, despite the appearance of difference and diversity in the world. Since Brahman is the only real thing, and Brahman never changes, the parinama model is a fundamental misunderstanding of the ultimate nature of things, since it assumes real change. The Advaita proponents' explanation for the nature of the relationship and the world is known as **vivartavada** ("illusory manifestation"), in which the ultimate appears to become transformed but in reality never changes. For further information see Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore (eds.), *A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy*, 1957; and Karl H. Potter (ed.), *Presuppositions of India's Philosophies*, 1972.

## Parivartini Ekadashi

Religious observance falling on the eleventh day (**ekadashi**) of the bright (waxing) half of the **lunar month** of **Bhadrapada** (August–September). As are all the eleventh-day observances, this is dedicated to the **worship** of **Vishnu**. This day is particularly devoted to the worship of Vishnu's wife **Lakshmi**, the **goddess** presiding over wealth and prosperity. In her form as **Mahalakshmi** (as told in the *Devimahatmya*) she is able to kill **demons** that the gods cannot, and restore to gods the kingdom they have lost. This festival occurs during the time Vishnu is believed to be sleeping on the serpent **Shesha**, on an ocean of milk, with Lakshmi massaging his feet. The name Parivartini means "turning," and on this day Vishnu is believed to be stirring in his sleep. See also **ocean, churning of the**; and **cosmology**.

## Parivrajaka

(from **Sanskrit** *parivraj*, "to wander about") A term that can be used to denote any wandering religious mendicant. Continual wandering is a very old Indian **ascetic** practice. It shows the conscious renunciation of the fixed and stable world of the householder, particularly in earlier societies, and it prevents the wanderer from forming any sort of attachments, even to places. This exemplifies the fourth and final stage of life found in the **dharma literature**, the **sanyasi**, in which a person has renounced all attachments of everyday life to search for spiritual attainment.

## Parmananddas

(early 16th c.) One of the **ashtachap**, a group of eight northern Indian **bhakti** (devotional) poets. The compositions of these eight poets were used for liturgical purposes by the **Pushti Marg**, a religious community whose members are devotees (**bhakta**) of **Krishna**. In the Pushti Marg's sectarian literature, all eight are also named as members of the community and as associates of either the

community's founder, **Vallabhacharya**, or his successor **Vitthalnath**. Little is known about Parmananddas himself, although tradition asserts that he was a **Kanaujia brahmin**, and the corpus of poetry attributed to him is much larger in later sources, suggesting that his name was used by later writers. The evidence from the earliest sources suggests that he was a devoted follower of Vallabhacharya. Much of his poetry is specifically written for the Pushti Marg, such as hymns in praise of Vallabhacharya, or hymns to be sung for the **worship** of Krishna throughout the day, a form of piety that came to characterize the Pushti Marg. To date, his works have not been translated, perhaps because of their sectarian character.

## Parvana

A particular type of the memorial rites for the dead known as **shraddhas**. A parvana shraddha can be performed at specific times throughout the **year**, such as the **new moon**, but is most commonly performed during the Fortnight of the Fathers (**Pitrpaksha**), which falls during the waning moon in the **lunar month** of **Bhadrapada**. Whereas an **ekoddishta shraddha** is performed for any particular deceased individual, the parvana shraddha invokes first the paternal father, grandfather, and great-grandfather, then the same ancestors on the mother's side. The rite is performed to give benefits to all of these ancestors, although the father's ancestors are considered the primary recipients.

## Parvata Dashanami

One of the ten divisions of the **Dashanami Sanyasis**, renunciant ascetics who are devotees (**bhakta**) of **Shiva**. The Dashanamis were supposedly established by the ninth century philosopher **Shankaracharya**, in an effort create a corps of learned men who could help to revitalize Hindu life. Each of the divisions is designated by a different name—in this case,

*parvata* ("mountain"). Upon **initiation**, new members are given this name as a surname to their new **ascetic** names, thus allowing for immediate group identification.

Aside from their individual identity, these ten "named" divisions are divided into four larger organizational groups. Each group has its headquarters in one of the four monastic centers (**maths**) supposedly established by Shankaracharya. The Parvata Dashanamis belong to the **Anandawara** group, which is affiliated with the **Jyotir** math in the Himalayan town of **Joshimath**.

## Parvati

("**daughter** of the mountain") Wife of the god **Shiva**, and an important Hindu **goddess**, Parvati is the daughter of the minor deity **Himalaya** (the Himalaya Mountains personified), and his wife **Mena**. Parvati appears in human form to draw Shiva out of the **ascetic** isolation in which he has been lost since the death of his first wife, **Sati**, and to induce him to father the son necessary to kill the **demon Taraka**. According to her myths, even in her childhood Parvati vows that she will have only Shiva for her husband. Her parents try to discourage her, since Shiva has taken a vow of **asceticism** and is absorbed in deep meditation on Mount **Kailas**.

Parvati's first effort to arouse Shiva's desire ends in a dismal failure. **Kama**, the god of love, tries to shoot Shiva with an arrow of desire, but Shiva lets loose a stream of fire from the third eye in his forehead, burning Kama to ash. Undeterred, Parvati goes into the mountains and begins a program of harsh physical asceticism (**tapas**) of her own: standing on one foot for immense periods of time, enduring the heat of summer and cold of winter, and practicing severe fasting (**upavasa**) and self-denial. The spiritual power generated by her asceticism eventually awakens Shiva, and he comes to her, disguised as an aged **brahmin**. He tries to discourage

Parvati with her husband Shiva and their sons Ganesh and Skanda.

Parvati by making disparaging remarks about Shiva's lifestyle and personality, but Parvati, unshaken in her resolve, refuses to listen. Eventually Shiva reveals his true form to her, and they are married.

Although in his devotion to his wife Shiva is the Hindu symbol for the ideal husband, their family life is unusual. Since Shiva is the symbol for the perfect ascetic, the couple has no fixed home or means of support, and occasionally Parvati is portrayed as complaining of being an ascetic's wife. Symbolically, their marriage represents the domestication of

the ascetic and his entrance into social and family life. Their union highlights the cultural tension between the two most important Hindu religious ideals: the householder and the renunciant ascetic. Perhaps to illustrate the contradiction of being a married ascetic, Shiva and Parvati have children but not in the normal way: **Skanda** develops from Shiva's **semen**, which falls on the ground during their interrupted love-making, while **Ganesh** is formed of the enlivened dirt from Parvati's body.

Parvati, as with all married Hindu goddesses, is generally seen as benign and benevolent. In some mythic stories she can be spiteful, but on the whole she projects a nurturing and motherly presence. Her mythology is almost completely connected with that of Shiva, showing her subordination as the model wife, and her **worship** is generally connected with him as well. She occupies an important position in **tantra**, a secret, ritually based religious practice, since in tantric texts Parvati is usually portrayed as the person questioning Shiva and then as the student receiving his instruction. For more information on Parvati and all the goddesses of Hinduism, see David R. Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, 1986.

## Paryanka

("bedstead") One of the postures (**asanas**) described in commentaries to the **Yoga Sutras**, in which the person is lying down with the arms stretched around the knees.

## Pasha

("noose") In Indian iconography, one of the weapons carried by some of the divinities, especially **Ganesh** and **Yama**. For Ganesh, as the "Lord of Obstacles," the noose signifies his ability to bind (and release) obstacles, whereas Yama, the god of death, uses the noose to draw the soul from the body at the time of death. In the **Shaiva Siddhanta** religious community, pasha is also the name given to **Shiva's** power of illusion (**maya**), through which he entraps and enthralls unenlightened people (**pashu**). The triad of pasha, pashu, and Shiva as lord (**pati**) are the defining features of the Shaiva Siddhanta school.

## Pashu

("beast") In the philosophical school known as **Shaiva Siddhanta**, and in the secret, ritually based religious practice known as **tantra**, the term for an unenlightened person, who is said to have a human form but to be little better than an **animal**. This lack of awareness comes not just through inherent dullness, but through the activity of **maya**, the power of illusion wielded by **Shiva** as lord (**pati**). The triad of pashu, pati and the bonds of illusion (**pasha**) are defining features of the Shaiva Siddhanta school.

## Pashupata

An extinct **ascetic** community, of devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva** in his form as Pashupati, "the Lord of Beasts." Although the Pashupatas have now disappeared, according to the Chinese pilgrim **Hsuan Tsang** they were once the most important ascetic sect in northern India. According to historical reports, its members would engage in strange and antisocial behavior intended to bring disgrace upon themselves, although without lust or malice in their hearts. This practice was in imitation of one of Shiva's mythic tales, in which he exposed himself to the wives of the Sages in the Pine Forest but was without desire for them. For further information see Daniel H. H. Ingalls, "Cynics and Pasupatas: The Seeking of Dishonor," in *Harvard Theological Review,* 55, 1962.

## Pashupati

("Lord of Beasts") Epithet of the god **Shiva** in his form as the "Lord of Beasts." See **Shiva**.

The Pashupatinath Temple in Katmandu, Nepal, is dedicated to the god Shiva as "Master of the Lord of the Beasts."

## Pashupatinath

Temple and sacred site (**tirtha**) in Katmandu, **Nepal**. The temple is named for its presiding **deity**, who is the god **Shiva** in his form as Pashupatinath, "the Master of the Lord of Beasts." This is a considered an extremely powerful site, and one of its charter myths connects it to **Kedarnath**, a sacred site high in the **Himalayas**. According to the story, the five **Pandava** brothers, who are the protagonists in the epic *Mahabharata*, are making their final journey into the Himalayas in search of a vision of Shiva. They finally see him at a distance, but when they try to get closer, Shiva takes the form of a **bull** and begins running through the snow. The bull burrows into a snow bank, and when the Pandavas follow, they find the body of the bull in the snow. The ridge of rock that forms the Kedarnath **linga** is considered to be the hump of this bull. The bull's head continues traveling over the hills, eventually stopping in Nepal, where it takes form as the deity Pashupatinath.

## Patala

A generic name for the realms of the underworld, traditionally numbered at seven to parallel the seven **heavens** that are believed to exist above the visible world. These underworld realms are not considered to be **hells** but rather planes of existence other than the visible world, populated by the **Nagas** and other non-human beings.

## Pataliputra

Capital city of the Mauryan empire, identified with modern Patna, the capital of **Bihar** state. See also **Maurya dynasty**.

## Patanjali

(2nd c. B.C.E.) **Sanskrit** grammarian and author of the *Mahabhashya* ("Great Commentary") on **Panini's** *Ashtadhyayi*. Panini's text was written as a series of short phrases or aphorisms intended to be a complete description of the language in the briefest possible space. Panini's text was a marvel of economy and was easy to memorize but

was so cryptic that it virtually presupposed a commentary, which Patanjali provided. Patanjali's *Mahabhashya* is not only important for his explication of Panini's grammar, but also because his examples often provide useful historical information.

Patanjali is also the person named as the author of the **Yoga Sutras**, but since these are believed to have been composed several centuries after the *Mahabhashya*, the authors are believed to be two different people with the same name.

## Pati

("master") In the philosophical school known as **Shaiva Siddhanta**, the name given to the god **Shiva** as the highest being, who wields the noose (**pasha**) of illusion to enthrall and bewilder unenlightened people (**pashu**). The triad of pashu, pati and pasha are the defining features of the Shaiva Siddhanta school.

## Patita

("fallen one") In the **dharma literature**, the term for someone who had committed one of the **Four Great Crimes**; murdering a **brahmin** (**brahmahatya**), stealing a brahmin's gold (**steya**), drinking **liquor** (**surapana**), and **adultery** with one's **guru's** wife (**gurutalpaga**). These crimes were considered so heinous that the performer became an outcast from society. Another indication of the gravity of these acts was that their expiations (**prayashchitta**) were so severe they normally ended in death, and in some cases this outcome was specifically prescribed. Aside from prescribing such punishments for the actual offenders, the dharma literature also prescribed similar outcast status for anyone who knowingly associated with such people for more than one year.

## Pattadakal

Historical site in the state of **Karnataka**, about twenty miles east of the city of Badami. During the **Chalukya dynasty**,

Pattadakal was an important urban center and a sister city to the Chalukya capital at Badami. Although nearly deserted today, the site is important for a collection of temples built in a variety of architectural styles during that era. The Virupaksha temple, dedicated in 740 C.E. during the reign of King **Vikramaditya**, clearly shows the influence of the southern Indian **Dravida** architectural style: a mostly low and extended profile, with a series of terraced roofs over the main sanctuary. It is believed to have been modeled after the temples in the city of **Kanchipuram**, which had been conquered by Vikramaditya, who brought its architects and builders back to Pattadakal with him. At the same time, there are temples showing the early development of the **Nagara** style, in which the major architectural feature is a series of upswept towers (**shikharas**), with the tallest tower directly over the image of the temple's primary **deity**. The best example of this is the Galaganatha temple, dedicated to the god **Shiva**, which has a tall vertical tower perched on a larger, cube-shaped base.

## Pattuppattu

("Ten Songs") Collective name for a group of ten Tamil poems written in the style of the eight anthologies of the **Sangam literature** and believed to have been composed later. The dates for the literature are the subject of controversy, but the prevalent scholarly consensus is that it was written in the early centuries of the common era. Like this literature, the Pattuppattu songs fall into two general genres, puram ("the outer part") and akam ("the inner part"). Puram poetry was "public" verse, describing the deeds of kings, war, death, and other heroic actions, whereas akam poetry was about an individual's inner experience, especially love and sexuality. See also **Tamil language** and **Tamil epics**.

## Paush

According to the lunar **calendar**, by which most Hindu religious festivals are determined, Paush is the tenth month in the lunar **year**, usually falling within December and January. In northern India, Paush is the coldest month of the year. It is considered inauspicious, and its only holidays are **Saphala Ekadashi** and **Putrada Ekadashi**.

## Peacock

Indian bird with several divine associations. It is the **animal** vehicle of the god **Skanda**, the **son** of **Shiva**, who is the leader of the divine armies. The peacock's quickness and resplendent appearance are felt to mirror these qualities in the young god. The peacock also has strong associations with the god **Krishna**, who is usually depicted as wearing a decorative crown containing peacock feathers. This association may come from the peacock's connection with the **monsoon**, which is the peacock mating season, during which they utter piercing calls in the forests and are believed to **dance** with delight on the hillsides. Krishna's dark color often leads to comparisons with rain clouds, and like the peacock he spends his nights dancing in the company of his devotees (**bhakta**), in the celebration known as the **ras lila**.

## Penance

The **dharma literature** gave considerable attention to penance and expiation, based on the almost universal Hindu belief in the inexorable workings of **karma**. According to this notion, all good and bad deeds would eventually have their effect, either in this life or the next. Penances were a way to lessen the future consequences of one's past misdeeds, by undergoing voluntary suffering and expiation in one's present life. See **prayashchitta**.

## Perception

In Hindu **philosophy**, perception (**pratyaksha**) is universally accepted as one of the **pramanas**, the means by which human beings can gain true and accurate knowledge. Perception is the only pramana accepted by all the schools, but most of the others also accept inference (**anumana**) and authoritative testimony (**shabda**). See **pratyaksha**.

## Periyalvar

(9th c.) One of the **Alvars**, a group of twelve poet-saints who lived in southern India between the seventh and tenth centuries. The Alvars were devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Vishnu**, and their stress on passionate devotion (**bhakti**) to a personal god, conveyed through hymns sung in the **Tamil language**, transformed and revitalized Hindu religious life.

According to tradition, Periyalvar was born into a **brahmin** family. From his youth he showed deep piety, and his primary means of devotion was to grow and pick flowers for the image of his chosen **deity**, **Krishna**. The most famous story about Periyalvar tells of a **dream** in which God commanded him to take part in a scholarly debate to be held by one of the Pandya kings. Periyalvar, despite his reservations about his lack of learning, obeyed this command after he woke. When he spoke, the words flowed out under divine inspiration, and the bag containing the prize money flew off the hook and into his hands as a sign of his victory. For further information see Kamil Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature*, 1975; and John Stirling Morley Hooper, *Hymns of the Alvars*, 1929. See also **Pandya dynasty**.

## Periya Puranam

Hagiographical account of the lives of the sixty-three **Nayanars**, written by the twelfth-century figure **Cekkilar**. The Nayanars were a group of **Shaiva** poet-saints, who lived in southern India

between the seventh and ninth centuries. Together with their **Vaishnava** counterparts, the **Alvars**, the Nayanars spearheaded the revitalization of Hindu religion within **Tamil Nadu**, which was mostly Buddhist and Jain. Both the Nayanars and the Alvars stressed passionate devotion (**bhakti**) to a personal god—**Shiva** for the Nayanars, **Vishnu** for the Alvars—and conveyed this devotion through hymns sung in the **Tamil language**. According to tradition, Cekkilar was a minister at the court of the **Chola dynasty** king Kullottunga II (r. 1130–50). Cekkilar, distressed by the king's admiration for a Jain epic poem, composed his text in an effort to wean the king away from it. His text portrays these saints as models of devotion to Shiva and as salutary examples to others although at times extreme in their devotion. One example of this intense devotion is Kotpuli Nayanar, who killed his entire family when he discovered that, in order to save their lives in a time of famine, they had eaten rice that belonged to Shiva's temple. Although this is an extreme case, the message is clearly that devotion to God must eclipse all other loyalties.

## Peshwa

Originally, title given to the **brahmin** ministers who served as advisers to the kings in the **Maratha** empire. Traditionally, these ministers were **Chitpavan** brahmins, which gave this small group influence far disproportionate to its numbers. During the resurgence of the Maratha confederacy in the early eighteenth century, the Peshwas became *de facto* rulers, although they continued to govern in the name of the Maratha kings. At this time, the position of Peshwa became hereditary. After the Maratha confederation split into different royal states around 1770, the Peshwas retained control over the ancestral Maratha homeland in the western part of the state of **Maharashtra**, where they reigned until it was conquered by the British in 1818.

## Pey

(7th c.) With **Bhutam** and **Poygai**, one of the first three **Alvars**, a group of twelve poet-saints who lived in southern India between the seventh and tenth centuries. All Alvars were devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Vishnu**, and their stress on passionate devotion (**bhakti**) to a personal god, conveyed through hymns sung in the **Tamil language**, transformed and revitalized Hindu religious life.

According to tradition, the three men were caught in a torrential storm and one by one took shelter in a small dry spot, with each making room for the next. As they stood next to one another they felt a fourth presence, that of Vishnu. The Alvars were such great devotees that their combined energy was sufficient to provoke Vishnu's manifestation. Overwhelmed with ecstasy, each burst into song, which formed the first of each of their compositions. For further information see Kamil Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature*, 1975.

## Phalgun

According to the lunar **calendar**, by which most Hindu religious festivals are determined, Phalgun is the twelfth month in the lunar **year**, usually falling within February and March. Phalgun concludes with the festival of **Holi**, which is the unofficial end of the cool season. The other holidays in Phalgun are **Janaki Navami**, **Vijaya Ekadashi**, **Shivaratri**, and **Amalaki Ekadashi**.

## Phallic Emblem

Designation for the **linga**, the pillar-shaped object that is the symbolic form of the god **Shiva**. The precise sculptural form of the **Gudimallam linga**, which dates from at least the second century B.C.E., leaves little doubt that this phallic element is one aspect of the symbol. What is often overlooked is that an equally important part of the linga's image is the base (**pitha**) in which the shaft is placed, said to represent the female organs of generation. In his

symbolic form Shiva is thus both male and female—an appropriate form for a **deity** who is famous for transcending any and all duality.

## Philosophy

The Euro-American conception that there is a fundamental distinction between philosophy and religion reflects unique historical and cultural circumstances that have no parallel in many other cultures. The Western philosophical tradition is rooted in Greek thought and culture, whereas Western religious traditions primarily have been shaped by ideas coming out of the Jewish tradition. The ideas from these two different sources developed side by side in Western culture, sometimes in an uneasy alliance and sometimes at odds but they were always seen as separate. In many other cultures, this distinction does not exist, and such imported concepts become less helpful in encountering these cultures. Indian and Hindu culture have a long history of critical and speculative thought, which could be called philosophical. Yet such thought is never exercised simply for its own sake, but always with an underlying religious purpose—to enable one to gain the ultimate religious goal, final liberation of the soul (**moksha**). The different perspectives on how to do this, known as **darshans**, are usually designated as "philosophical schools." See also **six schools**.

## Pilgrimage

See **tirthayatra**.

## Pilgrimage Places

See **tirtha**.

## Pillar Edicts

Set of **inscriptions** commissioned by the Mauryan emperor **Ashoka** (r. 269–32 B.C.E.), containing official pronouncements on royal policy, and advice and instructions to his subjects on a variety of topics, including religious toleration.

Although these edicts were found in widely separated places, the text in each edict was fairly consistent throughout the Mauryan empire. The pillar edicts were inscribed on pillars of polished **Chunar** sandstone and placed on the major roads running through the empire, where they would have been visible to passersby. In this respect they were different from the **rock edicts**, which were carved into large boulders in places near the borders of the Mauryan empire, thus symbolically defining its boundaries. See also **Maurya dynasty**.

## Pinaka

In Hindu mythology, the name of the archery bow belonging to the god **Shiva**.

## Pinda

("lump") A ball of cooked rice or other grain, one of the important objects used in rites for the dead. A pinda is offered to the departed spirit each day for the first ten days after death, in the belief that the ten pindas progressively help form a new body for the dead person (a secondary meaning of the word *pinda* is "body"). Pindas are also used in the memorial rite known as **shraddha**, which can be performed years after the actual death; in this rite, the performer offers pindas to his or her ancestors as symbolic nourishment.

## Pindadan

("giving pindas") In general usage, a synonym for the memorial rite known as **shraddha**. It is given this name because an important element in shraddha is **offering** the balls of cooked grain, known as **pindas**, considered symbolic nourishment for the ancestors.

## Pindara River

A Himalayan tributary of the **Ganges**. The Pindara River flows west from the Pindari glacier and joins the **Alakananda River** at the town of **Karnaprayag**. As with all the Himalayan

tributaries of the Ganges, the Pindara is considered sacred along its length, but this region is so mountainous and so thinly settled that Karnaprayag is the river's only noteworthy spot.

## Pingala Nadi

One of the vertical channels (**nadi**) in the traditional conception of the **subtle body**. The subtle body is an alternate physiological system believed to exist on a different plane than gross matter, but with certain correspondences to the material body. It is visualized as a set of six psychic centers (**chakras**) running roughly along the course of the spine, connected by three parallel vertical channels. Above and below these centers are the bodily abodes of the two divine principles, **Shiva** (awareness) and **Shakti** (power), the latter as the latent spiritual energy known as **kundalini**. In this model of the subtle body, the pingala nadi is the vertical channel on the right side of the body. As with the rest of the subtle body, the pingala nadi has certain symbolic correspondences; in particular, it is identified with the **sun** and is thus visualized as being a tawny red in color.

## Pipa

(15th c.?) Poet-saint in the **Sant** religious community. The name *Sant* is an umbrella term for a group of central and northern Indian poet-saints who share several general tendencies: focus on individualized, interior religion leading to a personal experience of the divine; disdain for external ritual, particularly image **worship**; faith in the power of repeating one's patron deity's name; and the tendency to ignore conventional **caste** distinctions.

According to tradition, Pipa was born into a **Rajput** royal family in the **Malwa** region but eventually renounced his throne and went to **Benares** to become a disciple of the poet-saint **Ramananda**. The hagiographer **Nabhadas** reports that Pipa was a disciple of the powerful

**goddess** Bhavani (an epithet of **Parvati**), showing the breadth of the Sant tradition. A few of Pipa's verses have been preserved in the **Adigranth**, the sacred text of the Sikh community, and in their language and religious thrust the verses are consistent with these traditions.

## Pipal

Common name for *Ficus religiosa*, the fig-tree also known as the **ashvattha**, which has a long history of being considered a sacred tree. See **ashvattha**.

## Pippalada

In Hindu traditional lore, one of the ancient sages in the **Atharva Veda**, one of the oldest Hindu religious texts. Pippalada is also mentioned in the **Prashna Upanishad**, one of the speculative religious texts that forms the latest part of the Vedas, as a religious teacher who instructs sages such as Sukesha, **Kashyapa**, and Bhargava. Pippalada supposedly gets his name from his fondness for Pippali fruits, the fruit of the *Ficus religiosa*, the sacred pipal (**ashvattha**).

## Pitambara

("clothed in yellow") Epithet of the god **Krishna**, because of his penchant for wearing yellow garments. See **Krishna**.

## Pitavasana

("yellow-clad") Epithet of the god **Krishna**, because of his penchant for wearing yellow garments. See **Krishna**.

## Pitha

("bench") In its widest meaning, the base or foundation of any object. It can denote the material base or foundation upon which the image of a **deity** is placed. In some cases the foundation becomes an integral part of the image itself, as in the **linga**, the pillar-shaped object that is the symbol of the god **Shiva**. The form of the linga, an upright

During Pitrpaksha, Hindus offer rice balls and water to their ancestors.

shaft set in a horizontal base, represents, not only the union of male and female, but also their transcendence, since Shiva is both male and female at once. At a more symbolic level, a pitha can be the "seat" or residence of a particular deity, that is, the place at which the deity metaphorically sits. The best example of this is the **Shakti Pithas**, a network of sites sacred to the **Goddess**, spread throughout the subcontinent. Each Shakti Pitha marks the site where a body part of the dismembered goddess **Sati** fell to earth, taking up residence in each place as a different goddess.

## Pitr

("father") Any and all **ancestral spirits**, to whom funerary **offerings** are due as one of a man's expected duties. See **ancestral spirits**.

## Pitrpaksha

The fortnight (**paksha**) dedicated to the **worship** of the **ancestral spirits** (pitr), observed in the dark (waning) half of the **lunar month** of **Ashvin**. This is the period during the **year** in which Hindus remember and give **offerings** for their dead: offerings of **water** and rice-balls (**pinda**) on each day of the fortnight, and as well as special observances on the day of the fortnight corresponding to the day of the ancestor's death. These offerings are believed to sustain the dead by symbolically feeding them, and also to placate the dead by demonstrating that the living still remember and care for them.

Because of its strong connection with the dead, this fortnight is generally considered an inauspicious time, and people often restrict their everyday activities in symbolic recognition of it. Many people will not cut their **hair**, beards, or nails during this time, nor will they wear new clothes. These precautions stem from the conviction that making alterations in one's appearance during an inauspicious time will have adverse future affects, since it will carry the taint forward. Many people also curtail other normal activities during this

time, such as buying any article or initiating any new project, unless it is absolutely necessary. The period is also deemed a good time for religious observances, particularly giving gifts (**dana**) to **brahmins**. On the one hand this is a way to propitiate the ancestors, whom the brahmins represent, and thus whatever is given to brahmins is given symbolically to the ancestors. On the other hand, giving such gifts is also a rite of protection against misfortune in an inauspicious time, since the receiver is believed to take away the bad luck along with the gift.

## Pitryajna

("**sacrifice** to the ancestors") One of the Five Great Sacrifices (**panchamahayajna**) prescribed in the **dharma literature**, the texts on religious duty. These Five Great Sacrifices are daily observances for a "**twice-born**" householder, that is, one who has been born into one of the three "twice-born" groups in Indian society—**brahmin**, **kshatriya**, or **vaishya**—and who has received the adolescent religious **initiation** known as the "second birth." Each of the five sacrifices (**yajna**) is directed toward a different class of beings—from the Absolute Reality down to **animals**—and is satisfied by different actions. The pitryajna is directed toward one's ancestors, and is satisfied by **offering** them libations of water (**tarpana**). In the time since the dharma literature was composed Hindu life has undergone significant changes, and some of these five rites have been completely elided. Although in certain contexts pitryajna is still an important rite—particularly at pilgrimage sites and in formal rites for the dead—it is no longer performed on a daily basis.

## Pitta

("bile") Along with **vata** ("air") and **kapha** ("phlegm"), one of the three humours (**tridosha**) in **ayurveda**, or traditional Indian medicine. Every person has all three of these humours, but usually one is predominant, and this marks a person in certain ways, particularly with regard to health, digestion, and metabolism. Pitta is associated with the elements of **fire** and **water**, since bile is a liquid involved in digestion, which is believed to take place through interior burning. Pitta is hot, intense, and mobile, and those for whom this is the predominant humor are said to have a strong will, be good leaders, and be blessed with good digestion. At the same time, this inner fire gives them bodily difficulties in hot weather, and to do their best they must also learn how to harness their fiery temperaments.

## Plakshadvipa

In traditional mythic geography, the second of the seven concentric landmasses (**dvipas**) making up the visible world. See also **cosmology**.

## Planets

Indian astrology (**jyotisha**) recognizes nine planets that affect human beings: the five visible ones (**Jupiter**, **Venus**, **Mercury**, **Saturn**, and **Mars**), the **Sun** and **Moon**, and two planets not known to Western astrology, **Rahu** and **Ketu**. Of these, Jupiter, Venus, and Mercury are, by themselves, always benevolent. The moon is changeable, depending on its position in the lunar cycle, and the others are considered to have malefic tendencies, although only Rahu and Ketu are invariably malevolent. Rahu and Ketu move throughout the **zodiac**, but the others are all fixed in place. Each of the planets is part of an elaborate series of associations, including parts of the body, **family relationships**, and personal qualities. The influence of all these planets can be heightened or weakened according to their position in a person's **natal horoscope**, or their position vis-à-vis the other planets. The astrological tradition also recognizes a practice known as **pacification of planets**, through which their good qualities can be heightened, or their malevolent

qualities weakened and contained. This can be done either through wearing particular **gemstones** that are believed to correspond to these planets, or by performing certain protective rituals.

## Pole Star

In Hindu mythology, the personified form of the boy **Dhruva**, who is a symbol for unrelenting pursuit of a goal. Dhruva is a king's son, but for some unknown reason his father favors Dhruva's half-brother over him. Distressed by this insult, Dhruva takes a vow to attain a place above all others and goes off to the forest to perform austerities (**tapas**). After Dhruva endures many bodily mortifications, the god **Vishnu** appears and grants him a boon. In response to Dhruva's request for a place above all others, Vishnu promises Dhruva that after his death he will be installed as the Pole Star, the pivot around which all the other stars in the sky will turn.

## Pollution

In Hindu religious life, a term designating religious contamination and ritual impurity (**ashaucha**). This notion of impurity is strictly concerned with the presence or absence of contamination and carries no necessary sense of moral or ethical lapse. See **ashaucha**.

## Polyandry

Having more than one husband. This practice is extremely uncommon in Indian society, either now or in the past. The best-known mythical example comes from the epic *Mahabharata*, in which **Draupadi** is married to all five of the **Pandava** brothers, the epic's protagonists. Textual scholars have argued that this type of marriage was so unusual that it must have been rooted in some ancient practice, but there is no proof for this claim. In contemporary times polyandry can be found only at the outer fringes of Hindu society, such as in the state of **Assam** and in some of the **Himalayan** regions, where traditional practices have allowed for one woman to marry several brothers, following Draupadi's example.

## Polygamy

Given the overwhelmingly patriarchal character of Hindu society, polygamy has probably existed since very early times. The practice is attested in both the great epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, as well as in the historical record. The **dharma literature** permits men to marry wives of lower social status, under the condition that their first wife was of equal status. Despite the existence of polygamy, it was probably unusual and restricted to men of high status and financial resources, who would be able to support several families. For "regular" men, one of the few reasons for taking a second wife was when the first wife was unable to bear children, in an attempt to sire the sons needed to preserve the lineage and ensure performance of the ancestral rites.

## Pongal

Southern Indian harvest festival marking the change of **seasons** and the transition of the **sun** into the zodiacal sign of Capricorn, and thus beginning its northward course (**uttarayana**). According to Indian astrology this usually takes place on January 14th; in northern India this day is celebrated as **Makara Sankranti**. Both mark the sun's change in motion from the southerly direction to the northerly, or from the direction considered less auspicious to the one considered more auspicious.

The festivities for Pongal last for three days. The first day is the Pongal of Joy (Bhogi Pongal), on which people visit and exchange sweets and gifts. The second day is dedicated to the Sun (**Surya** Pongal). On this day married women cook rice in milk, and when the pot comes to a boil they shout "Pongal" ("It has boiled"). The milk-rice is made into sweets, which is first offered to the

Sun and to the god **Ganesh**, and then given to friends. On the final day, Pongal of Cows (Mattu Pongal), worshipers walk in a circle around cows while the cows are decorated, garlanded, and worshiped.

## Possession

Possession by gods, **ghosts**, and spirits is an accepted element in the traditional Hindu worldview, although whether this is good or bad depends on the nature of the being responsible. Possession is the most common means for **village deities** and certain forms of the **Goddess** to communicate with human beings, although the highest gods in the pantheon virtually never use this medium. Possession by a deity can bring a person high religious status but is generally said to be physically exhausting; through the medium the deities can interact with human beings, both to make their wishes known and to give their help and advice to those who need it. One of the more unusual cases of this occurs at the annual pilgrimage at **Kataragama** in **Sri Lanka**. Devotees (**bhakta**) suspend themselves from trees by hooks stuck into the flesh of their backs and, while suspended, are believed to be speaking for the god **Murugan**.

Possession by departed spirits (**bhut** or **pret**) or by witches and other malefic beings is always seen as an inopportune event and a dangerous imposition on the sufferer that must be remedied as soon as possible through healing or exorcism. As Sudhir Kakar masterfully shows, the language of possession and exorcism can be interpreted as an "idiom," using traditional Indian cultural categories, for what modern psychiatrists might call the diagnosis and treatment of mental illness. For further information see Sudhir Kakar, *Shamans, Mystics, and Doctors*, 1991.

## Poygai

(7th c.) With **Pey** and **Bhutam**, one of the first three **Alvars**, a group of twelve poet-saints who lived in southern India between the seventh and tenth centuries. All the Alvars were devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Vishnu**, and their passionate devotion (**bhakti**) to a personal god, conveyed through hymns sung in the **Tamil language**, transformed and revitalized Hindu religious life. According to tradition, the three men were caught in a torrential storm and, one by one, took shelter in a small dry spot, with each making room for the next. As they stood next to one another, they felt a fourth presence, who was Vishnu. The alvars were such great devotees that their combined energy was sufficient to provoke Vishnu's manifestation. Overwhelmed with ecstasy, each burst into song, which formed the first of each of their compositions. For further information see Kamil Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature*, 1975.

## Prabhakara

In Indian **philosophy**, one of the two great seventh-century commentators in the **Purva Mimamsa** school, one of the **six schools** of traditional Hindu philosophy; the other great commentator was **Kumarila**. The Mimamsa school was most concerned with the examination and pursuit of **dharma** ("righteous action"), the Mimamsa school believed all necessary instructions were contained in the **Vedas**, the oldest Hindu religious texts. Much of Mimamsa thought is concerned with principles and methods for textual interpretation seeking to uncover and interpret these instructions. Although both Kumarila and Prabhakara were committed to discovering the boundaries of dharma by interpreting the Vedas, there are significant differences in their philosophical positions, seen most clearly in their **theories of error**.

Prabhakara believes in a concept similar to the **Nyaya** concept of **inherence** (**samavaya**), a weak relational force that is assumed to connect objects and their attributes—for example, connecting the color red with a particular

ball, thus making the ball red. This assumption leads him to characterize error as **akhyati** ("nondiscrimination"), the inability to make sharp distinctions. For example, a person mistakes the silvery flash of sea shell for a piece of silver. To Prabhakara, the person errs by uncritically connecting two simple judgments: "that object is silvery" and "silver is silvery." By themselves, both of these statements are true, what is false is their combination into the complex judgment "that object is silver." Kumarila is closer to the **bhedabhada** ("identity-and-difference") philosophical position, which holds that all things both identify with and differ from all other things. Kumarila explains error as **viparitakhyati**, the mistaken pairing of the similarities between two things, rather than the failure to note their differences.

## Prabhupada, A.C. Bhaktivedanta

(b. Abhay Charan De, 1896–1977) Devotee (**bhakta**) of the god **Krishna** and founder of ISKCON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness), more popularly known as the Hare Krishnas. ISKCON has its roots in the **Gaudiya Vaishnava** religious community founded by the Bengali saint **Chaitanya**, in which the primary religious action was the repeated recitation of Krishna's name, often in public settings. Prabhupada was initiated into Krishna devotion in his university years, at which time his **guru** commanded him to bring the **worship** of Krishna to the West. At the age of 58, after a successful career as a pharmacist, he boarded a steamer for the United States, arriving with a few books, a typewriter, and eight dollars in his pocket. His timing was exquisite—or, as he put it, reflected Krishna's **grace**—for he came during the countercultural movement in the second half of the 1960s; by the time of his death he had thousands of followers. In his later years he focused on translating and commenting on important **Vaishnava** texts, particularly the **Bhagavad Gita** and the *Bhagavata*
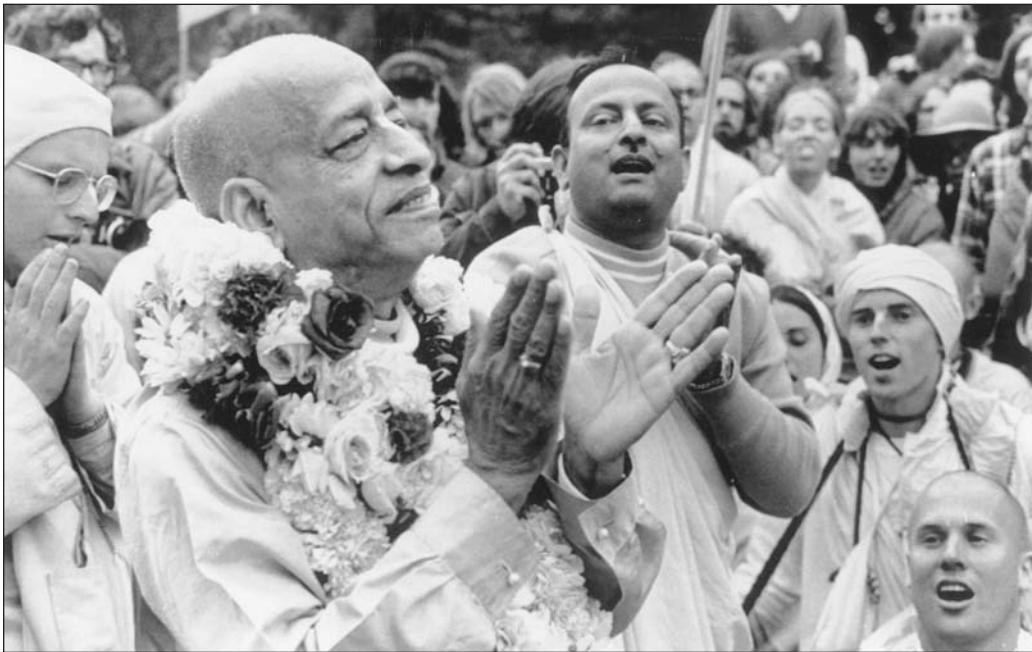
*Purana*, and this emphasis on publishing has continued after his death. For an insider's perspective on his life, see Satsvarupdas Dasa Goswami, *Prabhupada*, 1983; and Robert D. Baird, "Swami Bhaktivedanta and Ultimacy," in Robert D. Baird (ed.), *Religion in Modern India*, 1998.

## Prabodhachandrodaya

("Rising of the **moon** of wisdom") **Sanskrit** drama written by **Krishnamishra**, probably in the latter half of the eleventh century. Clearly allegorical, the play celebrates the triumph of **Vaishnava** piety, that is, of the devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Vishnu**. The play is particularly notable for its third act, in which representatives for four non-Vaishnava sects appear: a **materialist**, a Jain monk, a Buddhist monk, and a **Kapalika** (a member of an **ascetic** community that worshiped the god **Shiva**). The last is portrayed as thoroughly depraved, indulging in meat, wine, and sexual gratification, and having a penchant for violence. In the play, all four heretical characters plot to capture another character, named Faith, for their king, named Passion. However, they discover that Faith is a devotee of Vishnu and is outside their powers. In the end Faith is reunited with her son Tranquillity and a character named Compassion. Although the reader may safely assume that this play is written from a biased perspective, it is instructive in the attitudes it reveals toward ascetics and all other non-Vaishnava religious groups.

## Pracharak

("director") In the **Rashtriya Svayamsevak Sangh** (RSS), a conservative Hindu organization whose express purpose is to provide the leadership cadre for a revitalized Hindu India, the pracharaks are the full-time RSS workers who provide the link between the local units, known as **shakhas** ("branches"), and the RSS higher authorities. The RSS is a highly

A.C. Bhaktivedanta Prabhupada was the founder of ISKCON,
a religious community devoted to the god Krishna that is popularly known as the Hare Krishnas.

authoritarian organization, with all power ultimately vested in a single, unelected leader, the sarsanghchalak, and the pracharaks are the crucial link between this highly centralized leadership and the highly decentralized local units. The pracharaks are responsible for coordinating and managing RSS activities in their area, as well as for reporting on these at RSS meetings at various levels; they may also be sent out on loan to provide leadership to RSS-affiliated organizations. As a rule, pracharaks are completely devoted to the RSS cause, and most have been associated with the RSS since childhood. Their ethos is one of service and sacrifice to the RSS, and by implication to the country as a whole: They are generally unmarried, have no other employment, receive no salary from the RSS (although the local unit generally provides their living expenses), and are famous for living a simple and spartan lifestyle. Most of them are also well educated and are selected for their ability to get along well with others. For further information see Walter K. Andersen and Shridhar D. Damle, *The Brotherhood in*

*Saffron*, 1987; and Daniel Gold, "Organized Hinduisms: From Vedic Truth to Hindu Nation," in Martin Marty and R. Scott Appleby (eds.), *Fundamentalisms Observed*, 1991.

## Pradakshina

("toward the right") Circumambulation of an object or person as a sign of **worship**, reverence, or respect. This is always done in a clockwise direction, so that the walker's right side (considered the purer and more auspicious side) is always turned toward the object or person being circled. Just about anything can be so circled—one's parents or teacher, the image of a **deity**, a temple, a city, or the entire Indian subcontinent. In many larger temples, particularly in the **Nagara** architectural style, the pradakshina is the name for one of the architectural features. In this case, it is a semicircular processional passageway surrounding the temple's main image, so that people can circumambulate the main image either before or after worship. Pradakshina is also the fifteenth of the sixteen traditional **upacharas** ("**offerings**") given to

a deity as part of worship, on the model of treating the deity as an honored guest. The underlying motive here, as for all the upacharas, is to show one's love for the deity and to minister to the deity's needs as one would to a living person's needs.

## Pradhana

("principal") In the **Samkhya** philosophical school, pradhana is another name for **prakrti**, the "primal matter" that the Samkhyas consider the first principle from which all material things have evolved. In the secret, ritually based religious practice known as **tantra**, the word *pradhana* is used to denote the goddess **Shakti**, as the active principle behind the formation of the universe. Grammatically, the word is feminine, indicating a connotation of fertility and fecundity.

## Pradosh Vrat

("twilight vow") Religious observance celebrated on the thirteenth day of each lunar fortnight, mainly by **women**, often for the birth of children or to sustain the general family welfare. The vow (**vrat**) is dedicated to the god **Shiva**, and its most important part takes place on the evening of the thirteenth day (the word *pradosh* is interpreted as meaning "twilight") when worshipers present Shiva with the sixteen traditional **offerings** (**upacharas**), following which they may take their only meal of the day. In some cases worshipers stay awake through the night so that the observance may finish on the fourteenth day of the month, a lunar day connected with Shiva. When the thirteenth day falls on a **Monday** (associated with Shiva), **Saturday** (associated with **Saturn**), or **Sunday** (associated with the **Sun**), this rite is believed to be especially efficacious.

## Pradyumna

In Hindu mythology, the son of the god **Krishna** and his divine queen **Rukmini**.

Pradyumna is the rebirth of the god **Kama**, who has been completely annihilated by the fire from the god **Shiva's** third eye. After Kama's death, Shiva reassures Kama's wife **Rati** that her husband will be reborn as Pradyumna to kill the **demon** Sambhara. Through his **magic** powers Sambhara is well aware of the threat; when he finds the child, he throws it into the ocean and thinks that he has killed it. Pradyumna is swallowed by a great fish, which is caught and presented to king Sambhara; when the fish is split open, the child enchants his wife Mayavati, in whose form Rati has taken birth to aid her husband. Pradyumna kills Sambhara in a ferocious battle and is reunited with Rati.

## Prahlada

In Hindu mythology, the **son** of the **demon**-king **Hiranyakashipu**, and a great devotee (**bhakta**) of the god **Vishnu**. Through harsh physical **asceticism** (**tapas**) Hiranyakashipu has gained a series of divine boons that render him virtually invulnerable, yet despite his power, his son Prahlada refuses to abandon his devotion to Vishnu. Prahlada's devotion in the face of his father's ever-growing pride generates an escalating pattern of abuse that culminates in the demand that Prahlada **worship** him rather than Vishnu. At that point Vishnu comes to Prahlada's aid as the **Man-lion avatar**, slays Hiranyakashipu, and establishes Prahlada as king in his place.

## Prajapati

("Lord of Creatures") **Deity** appearing late in the **Vedas**, the earliest Hindu sacred texts, who is described as the creator of the universe and is considered superior to the Vedic deities. The means by which Prajapati carries out creation are different in different places. In **Rg Veda** 10.121 he is described as the **Golden Embryo** from which all things developed, whereas in Rg 10.90, also known as the **Purusha Sukta**, he is described as the primal person

(purusha) who is sacrificed by the gods and from whose parts the world develops. In later Hindu practice the name *Prajapati* can also be used to refer to the god **Brahma**, as fashioner of the universe, or to the gods **Vishnu** or **Shiva**, as the universe's supreme deities.

## Prajapatya Marriage

One of the eight ways to perform a marriage recognized in the **dharma literature**, the treatises on religious duty. In Hindu mythology **Prajapati** was the name of the creator, and this name suggests that the purpose of this marriage was for people to fulfill their duties to the ancestors by procreating. A Prajapatya marriage takes place when a father gives away his **daughter** to a man with the condition that they will perform their civic and religious duties together. This was one of the four approved (**prashasta**) forms of marriage, because it was arranged by the girl's father. However, it was considered less commendable than the other approved forms, because the girl was given in marriage with conditions. In Indian culture, the best way to give a daughter is to impose no conditions. See also **marriage, eight classical forms**.

## Prajnanam Brahman

("Wisdom is **Brahman**") In the Hindu philosophical tradition, one of the "great utterances" (**mahavakyas**) expressing the ultimate truth. The truth here is the identity of **prajnanam** (ultimate wisdom) and Brahman (Supreme Reality); this identity is the heart of the speculative texts called the **Upanishads**. Aside from their importance in a philosophical context, as encapsulating fundamental truths, the four mahavakyas were also appropriated as identifying symbols by the four divisions of the **Dashanami Sanyasi** ascetics. Each division had a different **mahavakya**, just as each had a different **Veda**, a different primary monastic center, and a different paradigmatic **ascetic** quality. Prajnanam

Brahman is the mahavakya associated with the **Bhogawara** division of the Dashanami Sanyasis.

## Prakamyam

("irresistible will") One of the eight **superhuman powers** (**siddhi**) traditionally believed to be conferred by high spiritual attainment. This particular power removes all obstructions to the movement of one's body, such that one can go wherever one desires, even passing through solid objects as if moving through water.

## Prakasha

("illumination") In Hindu **tantra**, a secret, ritually based religious practice, prakasha is one of the bipolar opposites that are used to characterize the nature of all reality, with its counterpart being reflection (**vimarsha**). These two terms are particularly important for the creation of the world, which is said to happen when the pure and radiant consciousness (prakasha) of the ultimate **Brahman** becomes self-conscious through the reflection (vimarsha) of this original consciousness. From one single consciousness, the absolute then evolves into a binary divinity—the god **Shiva** and his consort **Shakti**—whose continued interaction combines to create the world. For further information see Jaideva Singh, *Pratyabhijnanahrdayam*, 1982. See also **cosmology**.

## Prakashatman

(13th c.) Proponent of the **Advaita Vedanta** school, one of the **six schools** of traditional Hindu **philosophy**. Prakashatman's **Vivarana**, a commentary on the work of the Advaita philosopher **Padmapada**, provides the name for the Vivarana school of Advaita Vedanta. Prakashatman is traditionally described as Padmapada's disciple, but since the latter is an attested pupil of **Shankaracharya** (9th c. C.E.), the time difference makes this unlikely.

Since **Brahman** is believed to be the locus of all things, Vivarana Advaitins conclude that ignorance must also be a part of Brahman. However, they try to maintain Brahman's integrity by invoking a theory of **reflectionism** to explain the apparent difference between Self and Brahman, even though they are ultimately identical. Just as an image appearing in a mirror is based on the original but different from it, so human Selves are identical with Brahman but appear to be separate. The basic position of the Vivarana school is an uncompromising affirmation of Brahman as the sole "reality," in which anything that exists must belong to it.

## Prakrit

("formed") Collective term for the grammatically simpler vernacular languages that developed from **Sanskrit** through the natural process of linguistic change. The existence of Prakrits is evident as early as the fifth century B.C.E., at which time several different dialects are spoken. The Prakrits were contrasted with Sanskrit ("perfected"), the language of temple, court, and other elite contexts, which was subject to strict grammatical canons and did not change. Even those fluent in Sanskrit would have learned it as a second language—as a static, learned language, it is inherently artificial—and would have spoken in Prakrit with lower status people (such as servants, commoners, and most **women**). Despite its "lower" status, Prakrits are vitally important historically: They were the languages for royal **inscriptions** up to the Gupta era (ca. 350–550), and one of the Prakrits, Pali, is famous as the language for the Theravada Buddhist canon. See also **Gupta dynasty**.

## Prakrti

("nature") One of the two fundamental principles in the **Samkhya** school, the other being **purusha** ("person"). Samkhya espouses an atheistic philosophical dualism, in which purusha and prakrti—roughly, spirit and nature—are the source of all things. Prakrti is better conceived of as force or power rather than a specific material object. It contains within it three different forces with three different qualities (**guna**): **sattva** tends toward the good, **rajas** towards activity or passion, and **tamas** towards darkness and decay. In the primal prakrti these forces are in perfect equilibrium, each perfectly balancing the others, but when prakrti's equilibrium is disturbed, it sets in motion a pattern of **evolution** that creates both the exterior physical world and the interior psychological world. All of these evolutes—material or psychic—have a differing balance of the three gunas, which ultimately determines their character as wholesome, active, or unwholesome. For further information see Gerald Larson and Ram Shankar Bhattacharya (eds.), *Samkhya*, 1987; and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore (eds.), *A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy*, 1957.
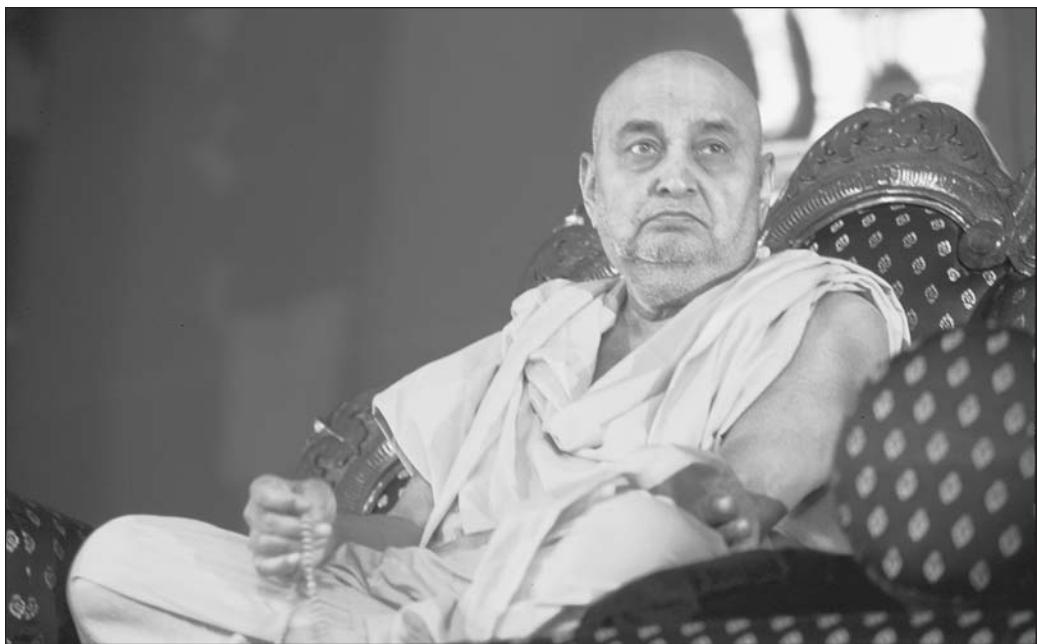
## Pralaya

In Hindu mythology, the dissolution of the universe that comes at the end of the **kalpa** or **Day of Brahma**. Pralaya is considered the "night" of Brahma, and lasts for the same amount of time as the day (by one estimate, 4.32 billion years). The approach of this "night" is preceded by the destruction of the earth, first by fire, and then by torrential rains that transform the entire planet into one vast ocean. During this time the only living thing is the god **Vishnu**, who reclines on the back of his serpent vehicle **Shesha**, deep in a yogic trance. When the time again comes for creation, a lotus sprouts from his navel, which opens to reveal **Brahma**, and the world begins anew.

## Pramana

In Indian **philosophy**, a means by which human beings can gain true and accurate knowledge, generally classified as one of three types: Perception

Pramukh Swami, the present spiritual leader of the Swaminarayan religious community.

(**pratyaksha**), which includes magical or yogic insight as well as direct sensory perception; inference (**anumana**), which ultimately depends upon direct experience; and testimony (**shabda**), which can be either scriptural or the instruction of one's teacher. Some philosophical schools also include a fourth source, analogy (**upamana**), but those who do not recognize this categorize it as another form of inference. The first three are accepted by all philosophical schools except for the **materialists**, who recognize only perception. The **Purva Mimamsa** school affirms two additional pramanas—presumption (**arthapatti**), and knowledge from absence (**abhava**)—which they argue give one knowledge. The root meaning of this term comes from the verb "to measure"; thus these are tools for measuring and interpreting the world we experience.

## Pramukh Swami

("President Swami," b. 1921) Title of Shastri Narayanswarupdas Swami, the present spiritual leader of the **Swaminarayan** religious community. Swaminarayan Hinduism is based on the life and teachings of Sahajananda Swami (1781–1830), who because of his piety and charisma was deemed by his followers an **avatar** of the god **Vishnu**. Pramukh Swami is the uncontested head of the **Akshar Purushottam Samstha**, a branch of the Swaminarayan movement that separated from the parent group in 1906. He is a strict **ascetic** who serves as religious teacher (**guru**) to an estimated million followers all over the world. His devotees (**bhakta**) are predominately members of the **Gujarati** community and mostly affluent merchants, making the movement financially robust.

## Prana

("breath") As a collective noun, the name for the five "winds" considered to be responsible for basic bodily functions. The first of these, located in the chest, is labeled by the general term *prana*. Because it performs those functions necessary for sustaining life—respiration, the movement of food into the stomach, and the circulation of **blood** through the body—its name is often used to designate all five winds. Of the other four winds, **apana** (in the anal region) is concerned with elimination,

**samana** (in the navel) aids digestion, **udana** (in the throat) conveys things out of the mouth—like speech, song, burps, etc.—and **vyana** circulates throughout the body, mixing things together. These winds are the focus of the **yoga** exercise known as **pranayama**, the aim of which is to achieve control over the central forces of life.

## Pranapratishtha

("establishing the **prana**") Pranapratishtha is the final rite in the **consecration** of a deity's image, usually performed by brahmins, since they have the necessary ritual **purity** and training. The image is infused with the breath of life (prana) through the performance of ritual and the intoning of sacred sounds known as **mantras**. After this rite is performed, the **deity** is believed to be resident in the image, which thereafter must be treated with the care such a spiritual entity requires.

## Pranava

Name denoting the sacred sound *Om*. See **Om**.

## Pranayama

("restraint of breath") In the **ashtanga** ("eight-part") **yoga** first codified by **Patanjali** (1st c. C.E.?), pranayama is the fourth of the eight constituent elements of yoga practice. Pranayama requires a conscious control of respiration, specifically halting one's breathing before inhaling and exhaling. When both of these actions have become automatic, this is described as "total" restraint. This practice is supposed to weaken and destroy the practitioner's unwholesome **karma**, and render the mind fit for concentration. Removing karma is necessary for liberation of the soul, since all karma (both good and bad) ties one to the cycle of birth and rebirth.

## Prapatti

("throwing oneself down") Prapatti refers to a devotee's (**bhakta**) complete surrender to God's power as the only means of salvation. This attitude is particularly stressed among the **Shrivaishnavas**, a southern Indian religious community who are followers of the god **Vishnu** and whose founder was the great philosopher **Ramanuja** (11th c.). Although ultimate power is believed to be vested in God's **grace** by the practitioners of prapatti, believers nevertheless possess a concern for continuing religious practice. Thus, prapatti is not meant to replace conventional religious activities such as **worship**. These activities are still performed, but with the consciousness that God's grace will be sufficient. They are therefore not seen as a means toward salvation, but as reflections of the grace one has already obtained.

## Prapti

("acquisition") One of the eight superhuman powers (**siddhi**) traditionally believed to be conferred by high spiritual attainment. This particular power gives one the ability to gain any object simply by desiring it.

## Prarthana Samaj

Hindu reformist organization centered in Bombay, whose most important figure was M. G. **Ranade** (1842–1901). The Prarthana Samaj's reformist mission focused more on social issues than on theological or **worship**-related ones. Their primary aim was to rid Hindu society of "evils" such as child marriage and the ban on **widow** remarriage. Although its members were educated and progressive, they were also religiously conservative and devout Hindus with deep roots in the tradition. They saw their work as a slow and gradual process of reforming Hinduism by removing its most objectionable practices rather than by radically remaking it from start. In this they differed from the

**Brahmo Samaj**, who attempted to remake the tradition wholesale by giving it a strong, quasi-monotheistic emphasis, a quality heavily influenced by European missionaries. The Prarthana Samaj lost its steam by the early 1920s, when social reform associations became absorbed into the Indian National Congress.

## Prasad

("favor") Prasad is food or drink that has been offered to a **deity** as part of normal **worship** and, having been sanctified by the deity's power, is later distributed to worshipers as a symbol of the deity's **grace**. In this process, the deity is believed to have "consumed" part of the food **offering**, and thus—in keeping with everyday ideas about the contaminating power of saliva—to have "imprinted" the food with its substance. Since this substance has been "charged" with divine presence, it is given to devotees (**bhakta**) as an emblem of the deity's grace, and worshipers consume it in the belief that this sanctifies them. Its sacred qualities mean that prasad is treated differently than regular food: It cannot be refused and can never be thrown away. If one cannot eat it, the favored method of disposal is to feed it to a **cow**. See also **jutha**.

## Prashasta ("Approved") Marriages

In the **dharma literature**, or the texts on religious duty, these are the four approved forms of marriage: the **Brahma** marriage, the **Daiva** marriage, the **Arsha** marriage, and the **Prajapatya** marriage. These forms are deemed commendable because in each case the father of the bride is responsible for arranging the marriage: In the Brahma form the bride is given as a gift without conditions, in the Daiva she is given as a sacrificial fee, in the Arsha she is given in exchange for a pair of cattle for **sacrifice**, and in the Prajapatya she is given with the condition that the husband and wife perform their duties together. The

Brahma is the only one of these four practiced in modern India and is the idealized form of marriage. See also **marriage, eight classical forms**.

## Prashastapada

(5th c.) Author of the *Padarthadharma-sangraha*. This text is the most influential commentary on **Kanada's Vaisheshika Sutras**, the founding text of the Vaisheshika school, one of the **six schools** of traditional Hindu **philosophy**. The Vaisheshika school was atomistic, believing that all things were made up of a few basic constituent substances: the five **elements** (**earth**, **fire**, **water**, **wind**, and **akasha**) along with space, time, mind, and individual selves (**atman**). The five elements combined to form the things in the world, though selves were considered ultimately different from matter.

## Prashna ("Question") Upanishad

One of the later and more developed **upanishads**, the speculative religious texts that form the latest stratum of the oldest Hindu sacred texts, the **Vedas**. As with most of the upanishads, the Prashna Upanishad's underlying concern is to investigate ultimate questions, in particular the nature of the Self (**atman**). Considered one of the later upanishads, the Prashna Upanishad is similar to the earliest upanishads, the Brhadaranyaka and the Chandogya, but is far shorter, and the text is much more focused. Like the older upanishads, the Prashna is written as a dialogue. It takes the form of a conversation between the sage **Pippalada** and six questioners. In each section (called a prashna in the text) one of the hearers asks a question, to which Pippalada replies. The six sections all have different themes: the nature of time, **prana** as the most important human power, the nature of life after death, sleep, meditation, the sound *Om*, and the nature of the Self. In this way, it uses the older dialogue form to advance a far more developed and cohesive philosophical perspective.

## Pratihara Dynasty
See **Gurjara-Pratihara dynasty**.

## Pratijna
("assertion") In Indian logic, a part in the generally accepted form of an inference (**anumana**), or logical statement. The accepted form for an inference has three terms: an assertion (pratijna), a reason (**hetu**), and examples (**drshtanta**). Each of these three also has its own constituent parts. The pratijna's two constituent parts are the **paksha** and the **sadhya**. The paksha is the subject of the assertion and names a class of things, while the sadhya is the claim to be proven about that class. For example, in the assertion "this mountain is on **fire**," the paksha is "this mountain" (the class of things about which a claim is being made), and the sadhya, or thing to be proven, is "is on fire."

## Pratiloma
("against the **hair**") Forbidden marriage union, in which the husband has lower social status than the wife. See **hypogamous marriage**.
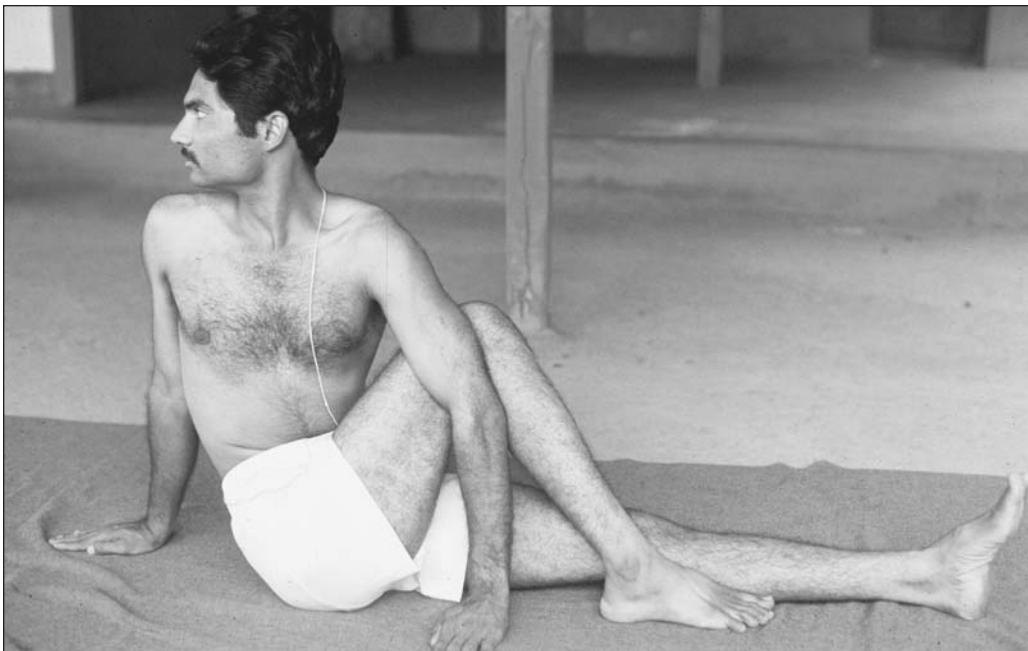
## Pratinidhi
("substitute") In the context of **tantra**, a secret, ritually based religious practice, anything that can correctly be used as a substitute. Certain tantric rites make ritual use of substances or actions that are normally forbidden; the most famous of these rites, the Five Forbidden Things (**panchamakara**), incorporates violating the social taboos on drinking wine, consuming nonvegetarian food, and engaging in illicit sex. The ritual use of such normally forbidden things must be seen in the larger context of tantric practice. One of the most pervasive tantric assumptions is the ultimate unity of everything that exists. From this perspective, adepts affirm that the entire universe is one principle—often, conceived as the activity of a particular **deity**—and therefore reject all concepts based on dualistic thinking. The "Five Forbidden Things," therefore, provides a ritual means for breaking the duality of sacred and forbidden, by sacralizing several things that are ordinarily forbidden.

These five things are used in their actual form in "left hand" (**vamachara**) tantra, and by substitution in "right hand" (**dakshinachara**) tantra. Substitution allows the adept to perform the ritual and at the same time to avoid the disapproval that would result from breaking certain social rules. Although tantric texts allow for substitution in this rite, they are usually quite specific about what sorts of things are acceptable substitutes, a signature quality of strictly defined ritual systems. For further information see Swami Agehananda Bharati, *The Tantric Tradition*, 1975; and Douglas Renfrew Brooks, *The Secret of the Three Cities*, 1990.

## Pratyabhijna
("recognition") Doctrine advanced by many different schools of **tantra**, a secret, ritually defined religious practice, and particularly by the Kashmiri philosopher **Abhinavagupta**, the most influential figure in **Trika** Shaivism. It holds that the final realization of the Absolute is simply a "re-cognition" of one's essential unity with the Divine. This unity has always existed and has never been altered, the only factor preventing it from being clearly seen being the obscuring power of false understanding. Final unity with the Divine, therefore, comes not through doing anything, but simply through realizing what has always been the case. This doctrine clearly shows the influence of the **Advaita Vedanta** philosophical school, but with an important shift. The Advaita school upholds a philosophical position known as monism, which is the belief that a single abstract ultimate principle—which they call **Brahman**—lies behind all things, and that all things are only particular manifestations of that one principle. The "Recognition" school

Yoga asanas contribute to the development of pratyahara, or withdrawal from the senses.

adopts this general principle but conceives of Ultimate Reality theistically, as the god **Shiva**. For Trika Shaivism, Shiva is the sole true reality, who is both supreme god, and the source of the material universe. For further information see Jaideva Singh, *Pratyabhijnanahrdayam*, 1982.

## Pratyahara

("withdrawal [of the senses]") In the **ashtanga** ("eight-part") **yoga** first codified by **Patanjali** (1st c. C.E.?), pratyahara is the fifth of the eight constituent elements of yoga practice. Pratyahara occurs when one withdraws the senses from the sense objects they ordinarily perceive. It is done after one has mastered the sitting positions (**asanas**)—and thus can sit comfortably for long periods—and after one has gained control of "breath" (**pranayama**), which allows heightened command of one's physiological capacities. Having gained relative mastery over the body, one is then ready to focus attention inward.

## Pratyaksha

("concerning the eye") In Indian **philosophy**, pratyaksha is the general term for sense perception. All philosophical schools accept perception as one of the **pramanas**, the means by which human beings can gain true and accurate knowledge, and it is the only pramana accepted by the **materialist** school. Although the word's literal meaning implies only information from the eyes, this pramana includes sense data from the other four human senses, as well as "perceptions" obtained through magical cognition, yogic insight, or any other supernormal abilities or phenomena.

## Pravahana Jaivali

A character in the **Chandogya Upanishad**, one of the speculative religious texts that form the latest stratum of the **Vedas**, the oldest Hindu religious texts. In the text, Pravahana Jaivali is a member of the warrior (**kshatriya**) class who serves as teacher to members of the scholarly-priestly (**brahmin**) class. His first students are Silaka Shalavatya and Caikitayana Dalbhya, then **Shvetaketu** Aruneya and his father **Gautama**. This is

one of several episodes in the **Upanishads** in which kshatriyas instruct brahmins, thus inverting the accepted pattern that holds brahmins as religious authorities. These episodes reveal the nature of wisdom as conceived in the Upanishads—it is conferred, not by birth or social position, but by individual striving and realization.

## Pravara

A lineage system, primarily among **brahmins**, which builds on the assumptions of the **gotra** system (the tracing of brahmin lineage to one of seven mythical sages). In his daily **worship** a brahmin would not only mention the name of his gotra, who is the sage believed to be the family's immediate progenitor, but also the names of other sages believed to be remote ancestors. Both these "lineages" were passed down only through men, since it was customary for a married woman to adopt her husband's gotra as part of her new identity. The only context in which gotra and pravara were really important was in fixing marriages, because of the kinship conferred by these mythic lineages. Marriage within the gotra was strictly forbidden, since the assumption that such people were directly related made this marriage incestuous. Marriage within the pravara was also forbidden, although in medieval times different groups interpreted this prohibition differently. For some groups, any shared pravara ancestry would forbid the marriage, but for other groups one shared "ancestor" was deemed permissible. The more lenient interpretation may well have been spurred by practical difficulties in making matches.

## Prayaga

("Place of **Sacrifice**") The traditional Hindu name for **Allahabad**, the city at the junction of the **Ganges** and **Yamuna** rivers. See **Allahabad**.

## Prayashchitta

A general term meaning atonement for one's misdeeds. The Hindu religious tradition gives considerable attention to penance and expiation, based on the almost universal Hindu belief in the inexorable workings of **karma**. According to this notion, all good and bad deeds will eventually have their effect, either in this life or the next, and thus one must either atone for the evil one has done or face its consequences in the future. Prescriptions for such expiation can be found as far back as the **Vedas**, and the acts prescribed for atonement fall into several categories: confession, repentance (which was usually seen as preparation for expiation, rather than absolution of the evil itself), restraint of breath (**pranayama**), physical **asceticism** (**tapas**), **fire sacrifice** (**homa**), recitation of prayers (**japa**), gift-giving (**dana**), fasting (**upavasa**), and travel to sacred sites (**tirthayatra**). The prayashchitta literature is quite well developed, both in detailing differing kinds of offenses and their potentially mitigating circumstances, and in laying out the types of atonement to be performed for each offense. For further information see Pandurang Vaman Kane (trans.), *A History of Dharmasastra*, 1968.

## Prayoga

("use," "application") In the context of Hindu ritual, any prescribed procedure to be followed during **worship**, meditation, or when performing other ritual actions.

## Pregnancy

As in all societies, Hindus regard the impending **birth** of a child as a time of eager expectation tinged with anxiety. Part of this anxiety stems from purely physical worries that the pregnancy and birth proceed normally, and that the mother and child remain in good physical health. Expectant mothers are usually encouraged to rest and are often given

food considered especially nourishing (such as milk products and nuts) to build their strength. From the mother's perspective, pregnancy is an extremely significant event, since the birth of children (especially **sons**) will solidify her status in her marital family; but this significance also contributes its own quotient of expectation and anxiety. Since the mother's emotional state during pregnancy is believed to affect the child, all efforts are made to shelter the expectant mother from unpleasant thoughts and situations and to generate happy thoughts.

Aside from protecting the expectant mother's physical and psychological health, Hindus take numerous precautions to guard her from other sorts of misfortune. As at other life transitions, during pregnancy and the child's first days the mother and her child are considered particularly vulnerable to black **magic**, particularly the **witchcraft** of those who might be jealous of the expectant or new mother. Another avenue for harm comes from inauspicious events, such as an **eclipse**, during which a pregnant woman should stay inside (away from its malevolent rays) and remain perfectly still, lest her child be born with missing limbs. These hostile forces can also be countered by various **rites of protection**, such as wearing amulets, charms, or iron (considered to render one impervious to spells), by cutting back on social interaction to avoid possible contact with inauspicious people and things, and by attention to religious rites.

## Prenatal Rites

Life-cycle rituals (**samskaras**) performed by a husband before his child's **birth**, as prescribed in the **dharma literature**, the texts on religious duty. According to this literature, there were three such rites: **Garbhadhana**, which ensured conception; **Pumsavana**, which guaranteed that the newly conceived child would be a boy; and **Simantonnayana**, which was performed late in the **pregnancy** to ensure the child's good health and the mother's easy delivery. Although the dharma literature prescribes these rites as obligatory, none of them are widely performed now except by the most orthodox brahmins.

## Pret

("departed," "deceased") The spirit of a person who has recently died but is still inappropriately connected to the world of the living, often as a troubling or malevolent presence to the departed's family or the general population. Prets are believed to be the spirits of people who died in childhood and whose untimely death left them with certain unfulfilled desires, particularly longings relating to marriage and family life. Prets make themselves known to the living in two ways, either through **dreams** or **possession**. In some cases they have specific requests and can be placated through **worship** and **offerings**. In such instances, dreams offer a method of communicating with the living, so that necessary actions can be performed for the pret. In other cases, the spirit may resort to bodily possession in an attempt to realize unfulfilled desires directly. These spirits are typically malevolent and require an exorcism to be removed. For further information on the care of unquiet family spirits, see Ann Grodzins Gold, *Fruitful Journeys*, 1988; for a psychological interpretation of spirits, possession, and healing, see Sudhir Kakar, *Shamans, Mystics, and Doctors*, 1991.

## Prinsep, James

(1799–1840) British official and amateur Indologist. In 1837, Prinsep became the first modern person to decipher the **Brahmi** script, and was thus able to translate the edicts of the Mauryan emperor **Ashoka** (r. 269–32 B.C.E.). Unfortunately, his career was cut short by an early death, a pattern distressingly familiar for colonial administrators in British India. See also **Maurya dynasty**.

## Priyadas

(early 18th c.) Author of the ***Bhaktirasa-bodhini*** ("Awakening the Delight in Devotion"), a commentary on the ***Bhaktamal*** of **Nabhadas**, completed in 1712. In his text, Nabhadas had given very brief (six line) biographies of over two hundred contemporary **bhakti** (devotional) figures. These original biographies are notably free of marvelous and miraculous events, with their major emphasis being the devotee's (**bhakta**) personal qualities, to serve as a model for others. In his commentary, Priyadas gives greatly expanded accounts for each one of the devotees mentioned by Nabhadas, and usually describes events to which Nabhadas makes no reference. At least in the case of the poet-saint **Ravidas**, Nabhadas clearly drew his material from the texts written by the biographer **Anantadas**, but in many other cases his sources are not clear. The accounts by Priyadas are larded with miracles and wonders, and the prevalence of such events, combined with his chronological distance from his subjects, makes him a less reliable source for the lives of these devotees.

## Progress Philosophy

("jativada") Progress philosophy affirms that one can attain complete freedom from bondage—which in the Indian context is identified as the end of reincarnation (**samsara**) and final liberation of the soul (**moksha**)—and that one can also specify the necessary and sufficient conditions that allow human beings to bring about this freedom. As a rule, progress philosophy tends to stress gradual spiritual attainment, in which very small beginnings can gradually lead one to the ultimate goal. Progress philosophers thus tend to stress particular religious paths that will lead one to the final goal, and also tend to place a great significance on actions (especially ritual actions) as essential parts of this path. In the Hindu tradition, most philosophical schools are progress philosophies: the combined **Nyaya-Vaisheshika** school, the combined **Samkhya-Yoga** school, the **Purva Mimamsa** school, and even the **Bhamati** and **Vivarana** schools of **Advaita Vedanta.**

## Prohibition

Most traditional Hindus have clearly and strongly disapproved of consuming **liquor**, a substance which, because it may lead to a loss of control, is seen as impure. Among wealthier Indians, drinking alcoholic beverages is seen as a habit that signals the acceptance of Western values and alienation from one's roots, whereas among poorer citizens, particularly laborers, drinking is often seen as a misuse of money needed to support a family. For all these reasons, the imposition of total or partial prohibition has become an effective part of electoral platforms designed to appeal to traditional and conservative Hindus. In 1997, prohibition had been established in three Indian states: **Gujarat**, **Andhra Pradesh**, and **Haryana**. Of these three, Gujarat is the only one with a long-standing history of prohibition, while prohibition in Andhra Pradesh in 1995, and in Haryana in 1996, was imposed to fulfill campaign promises made during the state elections in those years. In both cases, the imposition of prohibition also stimulated widespread bootlegging and illegal distilling.

## Prostitution

Prostitutes or courtesans were a regular feature of ancient Indian life. But far from simply offering sexual pleasure, these prostitutes were in many cases women of culture and learning. One of the sections in the ***Kama Sutra*** pertains to such individuals, and the author **Vatsyayana** portrays prostitutes as women who, while clearly outside normal society, have far greater independence than most women. One finds a similar picture in *The Little Clay Cart* (***Mrcchakatika***), a drama in which the

courtesan Vasantasena is sought by all the men of the city because of her beauty, wealth, and mastery of the sixty-four aesthetic arts. This picture is doubtless idealized and was probably realistic for only a tiny fraction of the women plying the sex trade, however.

The existence of prostitution also appears in relation to a group of women connected to certain temples. Called servants of the **deity** (**devadasis**), these women were not allowed to marry. Instead, they were considered to be married to the god, for whom they would sing, **dance**, and perform various rites, just as any Hindu wife would for her husband. These women could hold property and resources of their own, but their status was clearly unusual, and it was not uncommon for them to develop long-term liaisons with local men for mutual enjoyment. In some cases this degenerated into prostitution—through which such women became a source of income for the temple—but in other instances they were successful in retaining some autonomy. Since Indian independence in 1947 there has been a prohibition on initiating devadasis, but some older women remain who were initiated before that time. In 1995, a furor developed when the **Jagannath** temple management committee began to explore the possibility of new initiations. For further information see Vatsyayana (tr. Alain Daniélou), *Kama Sutra of Vatsyayana*; and Frederique Apffel Marglin, *Wives of the God-King*, 1985. See also **Yellamma**.

## Prthivi

The most common name for the **Earth**, which, in addition to its material form, is conceived of as a **goddess**. This particular name for the Earth goddess comes from a mythic story connecting her to the righteous king **Prthu**.

## Prthu
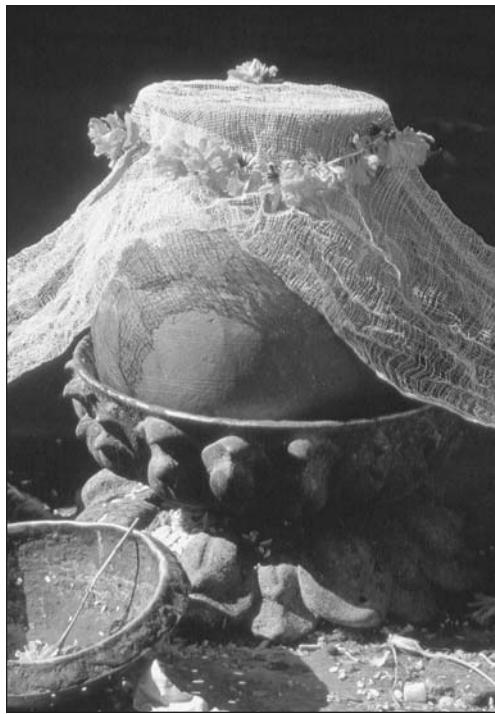
In Hindu mythology, an ancient king who rules over all the **Earth**, and whose reign is considered a golden age. Prthu is magically born from the right hand of king **Vena**, a man so wicked that he has prohibited all sacrifices to the gods. After Prthu's birth the people in his kingdom suffer famine, since the Earth has refused to produce food in protest against Vena's wickedness. Prthu chases the Earth, who has taken the form of a **cow**. She finally agrees that, if Prthu will spare her life, she will produce food again. It is in memory of this deed that the Earth is given the name **Prthivi** ("related to Prthu").

## Puja

("homage") The most common word for **worship** in modern Hinduism. The root of the word carries the sense of reverence or respect, but puja is primarily focused on actions, particularly **offerings** to the **deity**, who is treated as an honored guest. Although, according to one list, there are sixteen such offerings (**upacharas**), in practice the worship performed in any particular setting is subject to wide variation—based on regional or local custom, individual inclination, and the person's social status and learning. At the heart of puja, however, is a series of transactions between the deity and devotee (**bhakta**). One such transaction comes in **darshan**, the exchange of glances between an image of the deity and a devotee, which initiates the relationship between the two. The other transactions come from offerings given by the devotee, to which the deity responds by giving **prasad** sanctified by divine contact, most often food or drink for the devotee to consume.

Aside from the transactions, the other most common feature of most puja is the emphasis on **purity**, both of worshiper and of context. The only exception to this arises in certain forms of **tantra**, a secret, ritually based religious practice in which the performer deliberately inverts normal ideas of purity and impurity (**ashaucha**) as a way of symbolically destroying all duality.

Puja offerings, including flowers and red tika powder, are left for a deity as a sign of honor and respect.

Devotees commonly purify themselves before worship, and the purity of the site, and the objects used in worship, must be either established (in the case of a place or things not generally used for worship) or maintained (as in the case of a temple or other regularly established place).

In its most basic conception, the temple is a home for the deity, a ritually pure environment. Most temples have at least two different "purity zones," an outer zone into which the devotees may enter, and an inner zone closest to deity, restricted to the temple priests. In their purity requirements, deities show as much variation as one finds in the human community, and stricter concern for purity indicates higher status, just as for human beings. Whereas **village deities** are often served by non-**brahmin** priests and typically take offerings of meat, **blood**, and **liquor**, the higher deities are always served by brahmin priests, and the food offered to them is invariably vegetarian. As the ritually purest of all human beings, the

brahmin priest acts as an intermediary between the high deities and other worshipers, shielding the deity from potentially contaminating contact. His high ritual purity also makes the brahmin a universal donor, from whose hand all people can receive prasad without fear of pollution. For further information see C. J. Fuller, "Hindu Temple Priests," in T. N. Madan (ed.), *Religion in India*, 1991.

## Pujari

In its most basic meaning, the word *pujari* denotes "one who does **puja** (**worship**)." In theory this word could refer to any worshiper, but in general usage the meaning is more restricted. It usually designates a man performing worship as his means of livelihood, either as a priest in a temple, or as a religious "technician" hired to perform ceremonies for others. For further information see C. J. Fuller, "Hindu Temple Priests," in T. N. Madan (ed.), *Religion in India*, 1991.

## Pulaha

In Hindu mythology, one of the six **sons** of **Brahma**, all of whom become great sages. All are "mind-born," meaning that Brahma's thoughts bring them into being. The others are **Kratu**, **Angiras**, **Pulastya**, **Marichi**, and **Atri**.

## Pulakeshin II

(r. 609–42) Greatest king in the **Chalukya dynasty**, which ruled much of the **Deccan** peninsula from the Chalukya capital at modern Badami. Pulakeshin was a contemporary of the Pushyabhuti emperor **Harsha**, whom Pulakeshin defeated in battle to contain Harsha's southward expansion. Pulakeshin also defeated the **Pallava dynasty** king **Mahendravarman**, who was killed in battle with Pulakeshin's army. He, in turn, was finally defeated and killed by Mahendravarman's **son Narasimhavarman**. For several centuries afterward, the Chalukya and Pallava Dynasties warred with one

Farmers harvesting wheat in a field in Punjab.

another, and although each was strong enough to defeat its opponent at various points in this conflict, neither was capable of keeping the other under subjugation. See also **Pushyabhuti dynasty**.

## Pulastya

In Hindu mythology, one of the six **sons** of **Brahma**, all of whom become great sages. All are "mind-born," meaning that Brahma's thoughts are enough to bring them into being. The others are **Kratu**, **Angiras**, **Pulaha**, **Marichi**, and **Atri**.

## Pumsavana ("engendering a male") Samskara

In traditional calculation, the second of the life-cycle ceremonies (**samskaras**). The Pumsavana samskara was one of the **prenatal samskaras** performed before **birth**, done to ensure that a newly conceived child would be a boy. Various writers give differing prescriptions as to the correct time during the **pregnancy** to perform this rite, but they generally specify that it be performed when the **moon** is in a male

constellation, at which time the woman should have several drops of the juice from the banyan tree inserted into her right nostril (a common practice in traditional medicine). This samskara is seldom performed in modern times.

## Pundit

Term still used in modern times to denote a scholar or learned man. In traditional usage, the word *pundit* denoted a person proficient in **Sanskrit** and Sanskrit learning.

## Punjab

Modern Indian state that lies south of the state of **Jammu** and **Kashmir** on the border of Pakistan. Modern Punjab is one of the so-called linguistic states, created to unite people with a common language and culture (in this case, Punjabi) under one state government. The present state of Punjab was created in 1966, when the former state (also called Punjab) was divided into three areas: Punjab (the Punjabi-speaking region), the state of **Haryana** (from the

**Hindi**-speaking regions), and **Himachal Pradesh** (from the hill regions). The Punjab region is replete with history, for it has been the traditional route by which invaders have gained access to the northern Indian plains. The first of these were the **Aryans**, who coined its name from the five rivers (pancab) flowing through it. The abundant **water** from these rivers, carried by an extensive irrigation network, has made the Punjab exceptionally fertile, and today it remains the largest wheat-growing area of India.

The Punjab is famous as the birthplace of the Sikh religious community, and is today the only Sikh-majority state. The partition of India into Hindu and Muslim states in 1947 hit the Sikhs the hardest, since the division essentially carved their homeland in half. In the aftermath of the partition millions of people became refugees, and many of them fell victim to the atrocities of the time. For most of the 1980s, Sikh proindependence groups waged an undeclared war against the Indian government. In one of the most dramatic events of this period, the Akal Takht, the traditional symbol for Sikh temporal power, was stormed by the Indian army in June 1984, and the Indian prime minister, Indira Gandhi, was assassinated four months later. By the mid-1990s this movement seemed to have been quelled, although no one can predict whether this is permanent. Punjab is most famous for the Sikh Harmandir (Golden Temple) in Amritsar, a short distance from the **Jallianwala Bagh**, site of a massacre that was one of the pivotal events in the struggle for Indian independence. For general information about Punjab and all the regions of India, an accessible reference is Christine Nivin et al., *India*. 8th ed., Lonely Planet, 1998.

## Punya

("holy") Word most often used as a noun to mean "religious merit"—sometimes to denote the religious distinction arising from a particular deed, but more often to refer to the collective body of religious merit one has accumulated through the good deeds in one's karmic career. (According to the theory of **karma**, all of one's deeds will eventually be realized, so the merit one has earned in the past is stored up to bring benefits in the future.) Its opposite is **pap**, the most general word for religious demerit.

## Purana

("old") An important genre of **smrti** texts, and the repository of traditional Indian mythology. The smrtis, or "remembered," texts were a class of literature that, although deemed important, was considered less authoritative than the **shrutis**, or "heard" texts. In brief, the shrutis denoted the **Vedas**, the oldest and most authoritative Hindu religious texts, whereas the smrtis included the two great epics, namely the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, the **dharma literature**, the **Bhagavad Gita**, and the compendia known as the puranas.

According to one traditional definition, a purana should contain accounts of at least five essential things: the creation of the **earth**, its dissolution and recreation, origins of the gods and patriarchs, the reigns of the **Manvantaras**, and the reigns of the **Solar** and **Lunar Lines**. In practice, the puranas are compendia of all types of sacred lore, from mythic tales to ritual instruction to exaltation of various sacred sites (**tirthas**) and actions. Individual puranas are usually highly sectarian and intended to promote the **worship** of one of the Hindu gods, whether **Vishnu**, **Shiva**, or the **Goddess**. By tradition the major puranas number eighteen, but there are hundreds of minor works. Along with the epics, the puranas are the storehouses of the mythic tales that are the common religious currency for traditional Hindus. In this respect the puranas are much more influential than any of the **Vedas**, because the tales in the puranas are common knowledge. The contents of the Vedas, though more authoritative, are less well known. Judgments on the importance of individual puranas vary according to sectarian persuasion, but some of the

Rath Yatra festival in Puri.

most important puranas are the *Agni Purana*, **Shiva Purana**, *Brahma Purana*, **Bhagavata Purana**, **Vishnu Purana**, **Harivamsha**, and **Markandeya Purana**. For a general translation of stories from puranic texts, see Cornelia Dimmitt and J. A. B. van Buitenen, *Classical Hindu Mythology*, 1978.

## Purana Kassapa

In early Indian **philosophy**, philosopher opposed to moral rules, whose views are mentioned in Buddhist scriptures. According to these texts, Kassapa believed that there was no religious merit in good acts, and no demerit in evil acts—that neither of these had any affect on the Self at all. Beyond this, very little is known about him.

## Purandaradas

(1480–1564) A devotee (**bhakta**) of the god **Vishnu** who was the founder of the **Haridasas**, a sect of saint-composers in the southern Indian state of **Karnataka**. Aside from the literary merits of the poetry Purandaradas wrote, the musical structure of his songs is believed to have laid the foundations for the Karnatic school of Indian music, the predominant musical form in southern India.

## Purattasi

The sixth month in the Tamil solar **year**, corresponding to the northern Indian solar month of Kanya (the zodiacal sign of Virgo), which usually falls within September and October. The existence of several different calendars is one clear sign of the continuing importance of regional cultural patterns. One way that the Tamils retain their culture is by preserving their traditional **calendar**. Tamil is one of the few regional languages in India with an ancient, well-established literary tradition. See also **Tamil months**, **Tamil Nadu**, and **Tamil language**.

## Puri

City and sacred site (**tirtha**) on the Bay of Bengal in the state of **Orissa**. Puri is best known for its temple to the god **Jagannath**, a local **deity** assimilated

into the pantheon as a form of the god **Krishna** and therefore, by extension, a form of **Vishnu**. The temple was completed in 1198 C.E. and is currently receiving much needed restoration, after several pieces fell off the tower in the early 1990s. The most important annual festival held in Puri is the **Rath Yatra**. During this festival, Jagannath, his brother **Balabhadra**, and his sister **Subhadra** are carried in procession through the city's main street in enormous wooden carts. They travel to another temple about a mile away, where they stay for a week, and then return to Puri. Aside from the spectacle, the ceremony is an important ritual theater used to demonstrate the relationship between Jagannath and the kings of Puri, who were considered to be deputies ruling in his name. Although the kings no longer wield actual power in modern times, by virtue of their status they still play an important ritual role.

Aside from containing the temple of Jagannath, Puri is one of the **four dhams**, which symbolically mark the geographic boundaries of India. It is also the home of the **Govardhan Math**, one of the four **Dashanami Sanyasi** sacred centers supposedly established by the philosopher **Shankaracharya**. Puri's character as a holy city has made it an attractive place for religiously inclined people to make their homes, most notably the Bengali saint **Chaitanya** (1486–1533), who lived there for much of his adult life. The cultural life generated by the **worship** of Jagannath also made Puri a center for the arts, and it is the traditional home of the classical **dance** form known as **Orissi**. For further information see Anncharlott Eschmann, Hermann Kulke, and Gaya Charan Tripathi, *The Cult of Jagannath and the Regional Tradition of Orissa*, 1978; and Frederique Apffel Marglin, "Time Renewed: Ratha Jatra in Puri," in T. N. Madan (ed.), *Religion in India*, 1991.

## Puri Dashanami

One of the ten divisions of the **Dashanami Sanyasis**, ascetics who are devotees (**bhakta**) of **Shiva**. The Dashanamis were supposedly established by the ninth century philosopher **Shankaracharya** in an effort to create a corps of learned men who could help to revitalize Hindu life. Each of the divisions is designated by a different name—in this case, **puri** ("city"). Upon **initiation**, new members are given this name as their new surname, thus allowing for immediate group identification.

Aside from their individual identity, these ten "named" divisions are also divided into four larger organizational groups. Each group has its headquarters in one of the four monastic centers (**maths**) supposedly established by Shankaracharya, as well as other particular religious associations. The Puri Dashanamis belong to the **Kitawara** group, which is affiliated with the **Shringeri Math** in the southern Indian town of Shringeri.
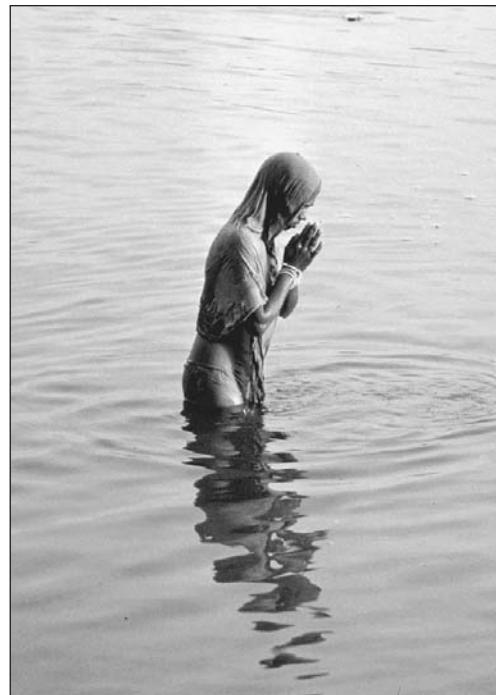
## Purity

(shaucha) Along with its opposite, impurity (**ashaucha**), purity is one of the fundamental concepts in Hindu culture. Although to outsiders purity can be easily confused with cleanliness, it is fundamentally different—purity is a religious category marked by the presence or absence of pollution or defilement, whereas cleanliness is a hygienic category. In some cases these categories can overlap, but in most their disjunction becomes clear. For example, from a religious perspective, bathing (**snana**) in the **Ganges** River makes one pure, whereas from a hygienic perspective the lower reaches of the Ganges are quite heavily polluted.

On a personal level, purity can be best described as the absence of defilement, gained through removing impurities in some manner, most often by bathing. After becoming purified, one remains pure until coming into contact with a source of impurity. These sources

of impurity include essential bodily functions, such as urination and evacuation; sexual activity; contact with impure things both inside and outside one's home; and even contact with certain groups of people deemed impure. Thus, although purity is always easy to regain, it is impossible to retain, since it is breached by many of the actions of everyday life. It is also important to realize that impurity brings no moral stigma to an individual—becoming impure means simply that one has come into contact with some contaminant, and that this must be removed. The only times when purity is particularly important are in **worship** and in **eating**—the former to keep from contaminating the **deities** and their environs, the latter to protect oneself, since the circumstances surrounding what one eats are considered to have long-term effects on an individual.

Aside from its personal dimension, purity has a social dimension as well. Higher status groups, such as **brahmins**, are considered to have inherently higher ritual purity. This social dimension of purity comes with **birth** and is the religious basis determining the hierarchical divisions in the traditional social system. To some extent, a group's purity level corresponds to its hereditary occupation. People who had continual contact with substances considered impure (such as latrine cleaners, **corpse** burners, and scavengers) were seen as tainted by work, and rendered impure. Brahmins, as scholars and priests (the latter a task that brought them in contact with the gods), were the purest. Between these extremes fell the other groups, whose relative status in a specific locale was determined by local factors. For theoretical consideration of the importance that purity plays in modern Hindu life, see Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus*, 1980; for another analysis of social ordering, see McKim Marriot, "Hindu Transactions: Diversity Without Dualism," in Bruce Kapferer (ed.), *Transaction and*



Pilgrim bathing in the sacred Narmada River. Bathing is believed to be purifying, especially when it is done in sacred waters.

*Meaning*, 1976; see also Pauline Kolenda, "Purity and Pollution," in T. N. Madan (ed.), *Religion in India*, 1991. See also **caste** and **jati**.

## Purochana

In the *Mahabharata*, the later of the two great Hindu epics, Purochana is a minister of **Duryodhana**, the epic's antagonist. He advises Duryodhana to build the **House of Lac** as a means to kill the **Pandavas**, the five brothers who are Duryodhana's cousins, and the epic's protagonists. After the Pandavas move into the House of Lac, Purochana sets **fire** to it. The Pandavas, whose uncle **Vidura** has alerted them to the danger, are able to escape through a secret underground passage, but Purochana himself is killed in the fire.

## Purohit

("[one] placed in front") The most important of the priestly functionaries in the cult of **sacrifice** found in the **Brahmanas**. The purohit was

responsible for supervising the other sacrificing priests, such as the **rtvij** and the **hotr**, and for making sure that the **animal sacrifices** were completed without error. The purohit would often be attached to a particular ruler and was also called to perform rites for communal well-being. In modern times this latter meaning has persisted, the word is often used to denote one's family priest, who will perform various rituals for the family.

## Pururavas

In Hindu mythology, a prominent king of a royal lineage who trace their ancestry to the **moon**. Pururavas is a righteous king who performs one hundred horse **sacrifices** (**ashvamedha**), and the merit from these gives him great power. He is best known for his dalliance with the celestial nymph (**apsara**) **Urvashi**, by whom he has several children. Although the two are forced to spend sixty years apart because of a **curse**, in the end they are happily reunited.

## Purusha

("person") One of the two fundamental first principles in the **Samkhya** philosophical school, the other one being **prakrti** ("nature"). Samkhya upholds an atheistic philosophical dualism in which the twin principles of purusha and prakrti—roughly, spirit and nature—are the source of all things. Purusha is conceived as conscious but completely inactive and unchanging. It is the passive witness to the myriad transformations of prakrti going on around it, and as the source of consciousness purusha is ultimately identified with a person's true Self (**atman**). Thus purusha is inferred as plural, given the plurality of conscious beings and the fact that one person can gain final enlightenment while all the rest remain in bondage. According to the Samkhyas, the ultimate source of bondage lies in people's failure to distinguish between purusha and prakrti and in identifying

the Self with the latter rather than the former. For further information see Gerald Larson and Ram Shankar Bhattacharya (eds.), *Samkhya*, 1987; and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore (eds.), *A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy*, 1957.

## Purushartha

The **Aims of Life**, traditionally numbered at four: material wealth and power (**artha**), pleasure (**kama**), religious duty (**dharma**), and final liberation (**moksha**). All of these were seen as legitimate goals in traditional Hindu society. See **Aims of Life**.

## Purusha Sukta

("Hymn to the Primeval Man") The most common name for the hymn in the **Rg Veda** (10.90) that describes the creation of the material and social world as the result of a primordial **sacrifice**. According to the text, in the beginning there was one primeval man, who was dismembered in sacrifice. Different parts of his body became different parts of the physical universe, as well as the four traditional major social groups (**varnas**): the **brahmins** came from the primeval man's mouth, the **kshatriyas** from his shoulders, the **vaishyas** from his thighs (a common euphemism for the genitals), and the **shudras** from his feet. This hymn clearly reflects the sacrificial paradigm that was so central to the later **Brahmana** literature, and is thus believed to be one of the latest hymns in the Rg Veda. It is also notable for giving the first known articulation of the four varnas, as well as the symbolic functions associated with each: for brahmins, speech and the authority of the sacred word; for kshatriyas, protection and military valor; for vaishyas, generation and production, and for shudras, service to others.

## Purushottama Mas

Religious observance that occurs when the **intercalary month** falls during the

**lunar month** of **Ashadh**. The intercalary month is an extra lunar month inserted into the **calendar** about every thirty months, to maintain general agreement between the solar and lunar calendar. It begins after any "regular" lunar month in which the **sun** has not moved into the next sign of the **zodiac**, and takes the name of the preceding month. Since the intercalary month is an unusual phenomenon, it is generally considered to be inauspicious, and the most common colloquial name for this month is the **malamasa**, the "impure month." When this extra month falls in the lunar month of Ashadh, however, devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Vishnu** take the opposite perspective and treat it as an exceedingly holy time, dedicated to Vishnu in his form as Purushottama ("best of men"). **Vaishnavas** celebrate this month by reading the sacred texts, chanting Vishnu's divine names, and other sorts of **worship**. The month of Ashadh, and its intercalary month, are especially important for the **Jagannath** temple in the city of **Puri**, whose presiding **deity**, Jagannath, is considered a form of **Krishna** and therefore, by extension, a form of Vishnu. During every year Ashadh is the month in which the **Rath Yatra** festival is performed in Puri, and in years when the intercalary month falls in Ashadh, new images of Jagannath and his siblings are created.

## Purva ("Earlier") Mimamsa

One of the **six schools** of traditional Hindu **philosophy**, most commonly referred to simply as Mimamsa ("investigation"); it was given the name Purva Mimamsa to distinguish it from the Uttara ("Later") Mimamsa school, better known as **Vedanta**. The Mimamsa school's name is quite apt, for it emphasizes the investigation of **dharma** ("righteous action"), particularly as revealed in the **Vedas**, the earliest and most authoritative Hindu religious texts. Mimamsas affirmed that the Vedas were the source of perfect knowledge, and believed that the Vedas had not been composed either by God or by human beings but were rather simply heard by the ancient sages through their advanced powers of perception, and then transmitted orally from generation to generation.

Since they accepted the Vedas as the primary source of authority and assumed that the Vedas contained codes and prescriptions pertaining to dharma, the Mimamsas then developed complex rules for textual interpretation to discern these, and it is for these rules that they are best known. Mimamsas believed in the existence of the soul and in the necessary connection of actions with their results inherent in the notion of **karma**—two ideas attested to in the Vedas. In cases where the result of an action comes some time after the act, the Mimamsas believed that the result existed as an unseen force called **apurva**. This force would invariably bring on the result, thus maintaining the Vedic truth. The Mimamsas were less unified on the existence of God. **Jaimini** (4th c. B.C.E.?), the author of the ***Mimamsa Sutras*** and the founder of the school, seems to ignore the issue completely, and 1,000 years later another Mimamsa luminary, **Kumarila**, argued against the existence of God.

Aside from developing methods for interpreting the Vedas, Mimamsas also contributed to logic and epistemology. One of their notable contributions was postulating two new **pramanas**, which are the means by which human beings can gain true and accurate knowledge. All the philosophical schools accepted perception (**pratyaksha**) as a pramana, and most also accepted inference (**anumana**) and authoritative testimony (**shabda**). The two new modes developed by the Mimamsas were "presumption" (**arthapatti**) and "knowledge from absence" (**abhava**). The Mimamsas justified these additions by claiming that they accounted for knowledge that could not be subsumed under the existing pramanas. Arthapatti is an inference from circumstance, in which a judgment is made about one case based solely on similarities to related cases. An

The city of Pushkar is built around a sacred lake used for ritual bathing.

example would be the presumption that a traveler had reached his or her destination after the train's arrival time had passed. According to Indian philosophy, this is not a true inference, since the latter must always be confirmed by direct perception. In the same way, abhava or the perception of any absence (e.g., the absence of some object before one) could not be accounted for by any of the existing pramanas, and thus required this new one to explain it. Aside from Jaimini, the two most significant figures among the Mimamsas are Kumarila and **Prabhakara**, who both lived in the seventh century. For further information see Karl H. Potter, *Presuppositions of India's Philosophies*, 1972; and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore (eds.), *A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy*, 1957.

## Pushan

In the **Vedas**, the oldest and most authoritative Hindu religious texts, Pushan is one of the **deities** identified with the **Sun**. Due to this connection, Pushan is described as the witness to all things; he is also considered to be the keeper and protector of flocks, and bringer of prosperity. By the turn of the common era, and perhaps significantly earlier, his presence had almost completely disappeared, and today he remains only historically important.

## Pushan

(2) In Hindu mythology, the name of an **aditya** (minor **deity**) who attends the **sacrifice** sponsored by the demigod **Daksha**. The sacrifice is a disaster, since Daksha insults the god **Shiva** by not inviting him to the ceremony. When Daksha's daughter **Sati**, who is also Shiva's wife, inquires why Shiva has been excluded, Daksha begins to insult her in full view of the company. Mortified and humiliated, Sati commits **suicide**. When Shiva learns of this, he comes with his ghoulish minions and utterly destroys the sacrifice. In the process many of the guests suffer injuries or indignities, and Pushan's teeth are broken and lost.

## Pushkar

("blue lotus") City and celebrated sacred site (**tirtha**) a few miles north and west of the city of Ajmer in the state of **Rajasthan**. Pushkar's center is a natural lake, and its major importance is as a bathing (**snana**) place—according to tradition, its lake is so holy that Pushkar is said to be the religious preceptor (**guru**) of all other sacred sites. Pushkar's lake is surrounded by temples. Of these, the best-known is dedicated to the god **Brahma** and is his only temple in all of India. Two nearby temples dedicated to the **Goddess** are said to be **Shakti Pithas**, a network of sites spread throughout the subcontinent and sacred to the Goddess. Each Shakti Pitha marks the site where a body part of the dismembered goddess **Sati** fell to earth. The two temples in Pushkar mark the places where both of Sati's wrists fell. Pushkar's largest festival is known as **Kartik Purnima** (October–November), and falls on a **full moon** (generally associated with enhancing the sanctity of bathing places). Aside from being a time for bathing, this event is also marked by the holding of an enormous livestock market, particularly for camels and horses. The state government is currently promoting this as a tourist attraction, and it has drawn over 200,000 people in recent years. See also **pitha**.

## Pushkara ("Blue Lotus") Dvipa

In traditional mythic geography, the name of the seventh and outermost of the concentric land masses (**dvipas**) making up the visible world. See also **cosmology**.

## Pushpa

("flower") The tenth of the sixteen traditional **upacharas** ("offerings") given to a **deity** as part of **worship**. In this offering (based on the model of treating the deity as an honored guest) the deity is given flowers, valued both for their color and their fragrance. The actual act of offering can be performed in various ways and often depends on the worshiper's inclinations. In some cases the flowers will simply be presented before the deity's image, with the understanding that the deity has taken them, whereas in other cases flowers will be placed on the deity's image, or a garland hung around its neck. In either instance, the underlying motive is to show love and respect for the deity and to minister to its needs as one would to a living person. This particular act of respect and love can also be accorded to other human beings; garlanding a person with flowers is a sign of high esteem or congratulations.

## Pushpak Viman

("Flower chariot") In Hindu mythology, the most famous of the **aerial cars**. Pushpak Viman is built by the divine architect **Vishvakarma**. Vishvakarma's daughter **Sanjna** has married the **Sun** but is so overwhelmed by his brilliance that she begs her father to reduce his luster so she can stand to be with him. Vishvakarma does this by trimming some bits off the sun, which are later fashioned into the Pushpak Viman as well as several divine weapons. For some time the Pushpak Viman is held by the minor **deity Kubera**, who obtains it as a reward for performing intense physical **asceticism** (**tapas**). It is later taken from Kubera by the **demon**-king **Ravana**, who uses its powers to wreak all sorts of tyranny, culminating in the abduction of **Rama's** wife **Sita**. After slaying Ravana, Rama uses the Pushpak Viman to return to the city of **Ayodhya** and then returns the car to Kubera.

## Pushti Marg

Religious community founded by the philosopher **Vallabhacharya** (1479–1531), whose teachings remain the sect's primary influence. Vallabhacharya characterized his philosophical position as "pure monism" (**Shuddadvaita**); his fundamental position is that the god **Krishna** is the Supreme Being and the

ultimate source of everything that exists. The world, and human beings, thus share in his divine nature, although only in a limited fashion, and the human soul is imbued with divinity as its inner light and controller.

Since Krishna is the ultimate source of everything and thus everything depends ultimately on God, the school's primary religious emphasis is on the importance of God's **grace**. This grace is seen as nourishing (pushti) the devotee (**bhakta**) and is best attained by devotion (**bhakti**), which is conceived of as the only effective religious path. This emphasis on grace and devotion has meant that the Pushti Marg have put little stress on **asceticism** or renunciation, and the bulk of Vallabhacharya's followers came from affluent merchant communities. The stress on devotion was soon articulated in elaborately arranged forms of image **worship** in the Pushti Marg's temples. Devotees would visualize themselves as Krishna's companions during his daily activities—waking, eating, taking his cows to graze, coming home, etc.—and thus gain the opportunity to take part in the divine play (**lila**). This emphasis on visualization and participation was fostered through the development of vast liturgical resources, which were composed by eight poets (the **ashtachap**) who were associated with Vallabhacharya and **Vitthalnath**, his **son** and successor. The third leader, Vitthalnath's son **Gokulnath**, further consolidated the developing community, whose major sacred site is now in **Nathdwara** in the state of **Rajasthan**. For further information see R.K. Barz, *The Bhakti Sect of Vallabhacharya*, 1976.

## Pushyabhuti Dynasty

(6th–7th c.) Northern Indian dynasty whose capital was at **Kanyakubja**, the modern city of **Kanuaj** in the **Ganges** river basin, and whose territory ran through the northern Indian plain from the **Punjab** to **Bihar**. The Pushyabhutis filled the northern Indian political vacuum after the demise of the Gupta empire and in some measure regained its greatness. The dynasty's greatest ruler was the emperor **Harsha** (r. 606–47), whose reign was chronicled in panegyric fashion by the playwright **Bana**, and perhaps more factually by the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim **Hsuan Tsang**. The latter's journals give a detailed picture both of Harsha himself, in whose court Hsuan Tsang stayed for some time, and of everyday life in Harsha's kingdom. See also **Gupta dynasty**.

## Pustaka

A book, traditionally made of **palm leaves** connected by a string running through a hole punched in the middle, with a wooden cover on top and bottom to keep the leaves from being bent or broken. In Indian iconography, the book is most strongly associated with the **goddess Saraswati**, in keeping with her identity as the patron **deity** of the arts, culture, and learning. It also commonly appears as one of the objects held by the god **Brahma**.

## Putana

In Hindu mythology, Putana is one of the **demon** assassins sent by **Kamsa**, the king of **Mathura**, in an attempt to kill his nephew, the child-god **Krishna**. Through her **magic** powers, Putana assumes the form of a beautiful young woman and, after cooing over Krishna for awhile, puts him to suckle at her poisoned breast. When Krishna latches on, however, it is Putana who is in dire trouble—Krishna sucks at her breast so hard that he sucks the life right out of her. As she dies, she reverts to her original form, gigantic and hideous, and the crash of her falling body shakes the earth and fells trees.

## Putrada Ekadashi

Religious observance that occurs twice per **year**: on the eleventh **day** (**ekadashi**) of the bright (waxing) half of the **lunar month** of **Shravan** (July–August), and

on the eleventh day of the bright (waxing) half of the lunar month of **Paush** (December–January). As with all the eleventh-day observances, these are dedicated to the god **Vishnu**. Most Hindu festivals have certain prescribed rites, which usually involve fasting (**upavasa**) and **worship**, and often promise specific benefits for faithful performance. Faithfully observing the ekadashi rites on these days is believed to give one a **son** (putra), which is a major concern in traditional Indian culture. Sons are necessary for this world and the next, not only to care for their parents in their old age, but also to perform certain ancestral rites after one's death. The strength of this desire for sons is demonstrated by the fact that this particular ekadashi occurs twice during the year—the only ekadashi to do so.

## Puttaparthi

Town in **Andhra Pradesh** near the border with **Karnataka**, about ninety–five miles north of Bangalore. Puttaparthi is best known in connection with the modern Hindu teacher **Sathya Sai Baba**, not only as the place where he was born and raised, but also the site of his most important religious dwelling (**ashram**) and primary residence.

# R

## Radha

In later devotional (**bhakti**) literature, Radha is the woman portrayed as the god **Krishna's** lover and companion. Radha's love for Krishna is a symbol of the soul's hunger for union with the divine, expressed through the poetic conventions of **erotic** love.

Although a few references to Radha in poetry date back to the seventh century, her first developed portrayal is in **Jayadeva's** lyric poem the **Gitagovinda,** written around the twelfth century. The *Gitagovinda* tells the story of Radha and Krishna's passion, their conflict and separation, and their eventual reconciliation. Jayadeva's portrayal of Radha is unique. In the poem Radha wishes to have Krishna all to herself, as his sole lover and companion. She sulks jealously when he flirts with other women and angrily dismisses him when he comes to her marked with the signs of another tryst. In the end, however, they reconcile and make passionate love as a symbol of their union.

This picture of love, separation, and reunion between Radha and Krishna gains a sharper focus through the context set by Jayadeva's hymn *Dashavatara Stotra*. In it Jayadeva lists the achievements of Krishna's ten incarnations (**avatars**) immediately after the text's introductory verses. The concluding verses of the hymn explicitly refer to Krishna as the ultimate source of the ten avatars, reminding hearers that the person taking part in this drama of jealousy, repentance, and reconciliation is none other than the Lord of the Universe Himself, who in ages past has acted to preserve the world from destruction. Unlike earlier depictions of Krishna in which his connections with his devotees (**bhakta**) are portrayed as a form of "play" (**lila**), the Krishna found in the *Gitagovinda* seems less lofty and detached, more intimately and intensely involved with Radha as the object of his affection. The poem renders Krishna as one who feels emotions deeply and truly and meaningfully reciprocates the feelings of his devotee.

Jayadeva's poetic focus is on the inner dynamic between the two lovers, and he reveals little about Radha outside this relationship. In the time after the *Gitagovinda*, Radha's character developed in various ways. Some poets describe her as married to another man, thus giving Radha's trysts with Krishna the color of adulterous, forbidden love. This love is considered more intense in Indian poetics, since the lovers have nothing to gain from the liaison but the love itself and stand to lose everything should they be discovered. Here Radha stands as the symbol of one willing to risk and lose all for the sake of love itself.

The other way in which Radha's character is developed runs contrary to this adulterous portrayal. In some traditions Radha is not drawn as a simple woman consumed with love for Krishna, but as his wife, consort, and divine power (**shakti**), through whose agency Krishna is able to act in the world. This deified image of Radha was particularly important for the **Nimbarka** religious community, which conceived of Radha and Krishna as forms of **Lakshmi** and **Narayana**. Another group espousing this equality was the **Radhavallabh** community, whose members particularly stressed the love Krishna felt for Radha. For further information about Radha, see Barbara Stoller Miller (ed. and trans.), *The Love Song of the Dark Lord*, 1977; and David R. Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, 1986.

## Radhakrishnan, Sarvepalli

(1888–1975) Modern Indian philosopher and statesman. Like many elite Indians

Radha, the god Krishna's lover and companion.

of his generation, Radhakrishnan was educated at Christian missionary schools, and the contrast between the Hindu piety of his home and the Christian doctrine he encountered at school sparked his interest in comparative **philosophy**. He spent the rest of his life as an interpreter and apologist for classical Hindu thought, particularly the **Vedanta** school, and as a proponent of philosophical idealism, the notion that absolute truth can be found through intuition alone. Aside from his work as a college teacher and administrator, he also served as the vice president of India from 1952 to 1962, and as president from 1962 to 1967. For further information on his thought, see his *An Idealist View of Life*, 1981; Paul A. Schilpp, *The Philosophy of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan*, 1952; and Robert N. Minor, "Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and 'Hinduism' Defined and Defended," in Robert D. Baird (ed.), *Religion in Modern India*, 1998.

## Radhashtami

("**Radha's** eighth") Festival falling on the eight **day** of the bright (waxing) half of the **lunar month** of **Bhadrapada** (August–September); this day is celebrated as the birthday of **Krishna's** consort Radha. Radha is seen differently by various **Vaishnava** religious communities: For some she is a human woman, the symbol of the perfect devotee (**bhakta**) who forsakes all else to be with her lover, for others she is considered the queen of heaven and an equal to Krishna himself. In either case, her closeness to him is shown by her birth on the same month and lunar day as Krishna, but in the opposite half of the month. Radhashtami festival is celebrated with particular fervor in **Barsana**, the village in the **Braj** region in which Radha is said to have been born.

## Radha Soami

Modern Hindu religious community founded in 1861 in the city of Agra by Shiv Dayal Singh, more commonly referred to as Soamiji Maharaj. Soamiji's family had been influenced by **Tulsi** Saheb, a devotional (**bhakti**) saint who lived in that region, and Soamiji's teachings reflect the importance of that contact. The two pillars of Radha Soami doctrine are the importance of the spiritual teacher (**guru**) and the practice of a spiritual discipline called **surat-shabd-yoga.**

According to Radha Soami teachings, contact with a guru is the single most important factor in a person's spiritual development, and this spiritual progress hinges on complete surrender to the guru's **grace**. It is essential for the devotee (**bhakta**) to be associated with a "true guru" (**satguru**), since not only does such an individual have access to the divine, he is considered a manifestation of the divine itself. Surat-shabd-yoga stresses joining (yoga) the devotee's spirit (surat) with the Divine Sound (shabd). The Divine Sound emanates from the Supreme Being and is always present. Most people cannot hear it, due to their preoccupation with worldly things, but with proper training and devotion to a true guru, anyone can eventually become attuned to the Divine Sound and resonate in harmony with it.

In the era since Soamiji Maharaj, the Radha Soami **Satsang** has split numerous times, usually based on disagreements over spiritual authority. Given the Radha Soami emphasis on the satguru as the Supreme Being, disagreements over spiritual succession—in effect, disagreements over the identity of the Supreme Being—made schisms virtually inevitable. It also seems clear that the underlying forces in many of these schisms were disagreements over far more mundane things, such as power, status, and property. Various branches of the Radha Soamis have made successful missionary efforts and established centers in Europe and the United States. For further information see Sudhir Kakar, *Shamans, Mystics, and Doctors*, 1991;

Lawrence Babb, *Redemptive Encounters*, 1987; and Mark Juergensmeyer, *Radhasoami Reality*, 1991.

## Radhavallabh Sampraday

Religious community whose members are devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Vishnu** (that is, **Vaishnavas**), and whose founder was the sixteenth-century poet-saint **Harivamsh**. Harivamsh held distinctive views on the status of **Radha**, which his community has preserved. Whereas earlier poetry had often portrayed Radha as the god **Krishna's** adulterous mistress, the Radhavallabhans conceive of her as his lawful wife and as a **deity** whose status was equal with Krishna's. Their devotion was focused on Krishna and on his status as the "beloved of Radha" (Radhavallabh).

## Raga

In Indian music, a concrete melodic mode of at least five notes. Any musician playing a raga is limited by the constraints of its established form. The order of these established notes in the raga does not follow their musical order but differs according to whether the note sequence is ascending or descending. There are over 200 recognized ragas, but only about thirty are in general use. Each raga has very particular symbolic associations—particularly with the time of **day** or with the **seasons**—and is also believed to convey a particular aesthetic mood (**rasa**) to listeners. As in all the Indian arts, the musician who plays a raga endeavors to convey a certain mood to an audience and to awaken corresponding feelings within them.

## Raghu

In Hindu mythology, Raghu is a famous king of the **Ikshvaku** dynasty and the grandfather of King **Dasharatha**. One of Dasharatha's **sons** is **Rama**, the protagonist of the *Ramayana*, the earlier of the two great Hindu epics.

## Raghuvamsha

("**Raghu's** Lineage") One of the great poetic works by **Kalidasa**, who is generally considered to be the finest classical **Sanskrit** poet. The *Raghuvamsha* is a quasi-historical epic in nineteen cantos, devoted to the kings of the **Solar Line**, and particularly to its most eminent member, the god-king **Rama**. The story of Rama in Kalidasa's poem is fairly close to that of the epic *Ramayana*, although Kalidasa describes Rama as an **avatar** or divine incarnation in a way that **Valmiki** does not. Kalidasa's poem also uses the kings of the Solar Line as examples of devotion to the four **aims of life** (purushartha): wealth (**artha**), pleasure (**kama**), religious duty (**dharma**), and release (**moksha**). In Kalidasa's portrayal, the kings at the end of the line are completely immoral and devoted solely to pleasure. Such abject neglect of their duty to rule righteously brings on the destruction of the line and provides a exemplary lesson for hearers of the poem.

## Rahu

A malevolent "**planet**" in Hindu astrology (**jyotisha**) that has no counterpart in Western astrology and was originally the head of a **demon**. According to the story, as the gods drink the nectar of immortality they have churned from the ocean of milk, the demon **Sainhikeya** slips into their midst in disguise. As the demon begins to drink, the **sun** and **moon** alert **Vishnu**, who uses his discus to cut off the demon's head. Sainhikeya's two halves become immortal, however, after coming into contact with the nectar. The severed head becomes Rahu, and the decapitated body another evil planet, **Ketu**. Rahu is regarded not as a physical planet, but as the ascending node of the moon. This is the point where the moon's northward path intersects the path of the sun in the sky, causing an **eclipse**. Rahu has particular enmity for the sun and moon, as the **deities** responsible for his demise, and tries to swallow them whenever he meets them

in the **heavens**. He always succeeds, but since he no longer has a body to digest them, they escape unharmed through Rahu's severed neck. This, of course, is the traditional explanation for solar and lunar eclipses; their association with the malevolent Rahu has led eclipses to be seen as highly inauspicious times. See also **Tortoise avatar**.

## Raidas

A variant name for the Hindu poet-saint **Ravidas**.

## Rajabhiseka

("royal anointing") Royal **consecration** ceremony that replaced the earlier **rajasuya** rite. The Rajabhiseka includes rituals of anointing that were believed to have transformative power, but were less complex than the Rajasuya, and did not involve the ritual slaughter and **sacrifice** of **animals**.

## Rajadharma

General name for the "king's **dharma**," or religious duty, which fell to him (or far more rarely, her) by virtue of his role as ruler. This notion proceeded from the assumption in the **dharma literature** that every person had a unique role to play in society, a role that provided for social stability but also brought individual fulfillment. The king's most basic duty was to maintain order in the realm, since such peace enabled all others to fulfill their own individual religious duties (**svadharma**). The dharma literature conceives of maintaining order primarily through inflicting punishment (**danda**), designed to remove some evildoers and frighten the rest into good behavior. If the king succeeded in maintaining social order, then he could otherwise do as he pleased, with the proviso that taxation should not be so high that it was burdensome to the people. Beyond this, the Indian theory of kingship was largely pragmatic.

## Rajagrha

Ancient name for the city corresponding to modern Rajgir, in the Nalanda district of the state of **Bihar**. Although contemporary Rajgir is a small and insignificant city, at the time of the Buddha it was the capital of the Magadhan empire and the center of the region's political and intellectual life. According to Buddhist tradition, Rajgir was the site of the first Buddhist council, held shortly after the Buddha's death and organized to document his teachings. This story is almost certainly apocryphal, since the Buddhist scriptures went through a much longer period of development, but its setting illustrates Rajagrha's centrality in the middle of the first millennium before the turn of the common era.

## Raja Raja

(r. 985–1014) Monarch under whose rule (and that of his son **Rajendra**) the **Chola dynasty** reached the apex of its power, stretching its influence from the **Tanjore** district of **Tamil Nadu** throughout southern India and into southeast Asia all the way to Malaysia. Raja Raja directed the wealth that such power brought toward the construction of massive temples. Of these, he is most noted for the **Brhadeshvar** temple in the city of Tanjore, dedicated to the "Great Lord" **Shiva**.

## Rajas

("passion") One of the three fundamental qualities (**gunas**) believed to be present in all things, the other two gunas being **sattva** ("goodness") and **tamas** ("darkness"). According to this model, differing proportions of these qualities account for differences in the properties of concrete things, and in the range of individual human capacities and tendencies. Unlike sattva and tamas, which, respectively, carry exclusively good and bad associations, rajas and its effects can be either positive or negative, depending on context. Rajas is negative, for example, when it leads to an enslavement to the

passions that may blind one to careful and conscious thought. Alternately, the energies derived from passion can also engender useful activity and industriousness. The notion of the gunas originated in the metaphysics of the **Samkhya** school, one of the **six schools** of traditional Hindu philosophy, and although much of Samkhya metaphysics connected with the gunas has long been discredited, the idea of the gunas and their qualities has become a pervasive assumption in Indian culture.

## Rajashekhara

(10th c.) Dramatist notable for writing plays both in **Sanskrit** and **Prakrit**. Rajashekhara's Sanskrit plays were highly literary, and it seems that they were probably intended for reading rather than performance.

## Rajasimhavarman

(8th c.) Ruler in the **Pallava dynasty** who, like his predecessors, was a great patron of the arts. His reign saw the construction of the last of the magnificent shore temples built on the Bay of Bengal, at **Mahabalipuram** in **Tamil Nadu**. The temple's major **deity** was the god **Shiva**, but a smaller shrine also held an image of the god **Vishnu**. Although these temples have been weathered by time and the elements, they remain some of the most visited sites in southern India.

## Rajasthan

("land of kings") Modern Indian state on the border of Pakistan between the states of **Punjab** and **Gujarat**, created by combining a network of princely states with Ajmer, formerly under British control. These principalities were the remnants of small kingdoms, usually maintained by force of arms, giving Rajasthan its well-entrenched martial tradition. Many cities in Rajasthan have large forts originally built as defensive strongholds, which in modern times have been popular tourist attractions.



A miniature painting in the Rajasthani style, circa 1730.

Geographically, the state is split diagonally by the **Aravalli Hills**, creating two distinct climatic zones. The south gets more rainfall and has traditionally been more thickly settled, whereas the north blends gradually into the Thar Desert—rendered cultivable in recent years by a system of irrigation canals. While the state's most important pilgrimage site is the city of **Pushkar**, other locales of interest abound. Among them, the temple of **Hanuman** at **Mehndipur** has gained regional importance as a site for curing mental illness, and the **Karni Mata** temple in the village of **Deshnok** is noted for its sacred rats. For general information about Rajasthan and all the regions of India, an accessible reference is Christine Nivin et al., *India*. 8th ed., Lonely Planet, 1998.

## Rajasthani

One of the two influential "schools" of Indian **miniature painting**, the other being the **Pahari**. Distinctions between the two schools are largely geographical and thus somewhat arbitrary, since the

**Basohli** paintings of the Pahari school are stylistically closer to those of **Rajasthan** than to works in the later Pahari style.

The Rajasthani was the earliest developed school; it flourished in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the small kingdoms of the **Malwa** region such as **Mandu**, and in the kingdoms that now comprise regions in modern Rajasthan—particularly **Bundi**, **Kota**, and **Mewar**, but also Jaipur and Bikaner. The Rajasthani style is generally characterized by a flat perspective and by visual power derived from vivid colors, bands of which often serve as a backdrop to the painting. For further information see W. G. Archer, *Indian Painting*, 1957.

## Rajasuya

Royal **consecration** ceremony that is one of the most famous of the sacrificial rites that appear in the **Vedas**, the earliest and most authoritative Hindu religious texts. The ceremony is believed to have developed in the latter part of the Vedic era. Preparations for this rite could last for a **year**, and the rite itself served to raise the king to semidivine status. As with many Vedic sacrifices, an important part of the rajasuya **sacrifice** was the ritual slaughter and **offering** of **animals**. This rite has long fallen into disuse, partly because of the trouble required to prepare for it and partly because of general disapproval over **animal sacrifices**. The coronation rite that has replaced it is the **rajabhiseka**.

## Rajatarangini

("River of Kings") Historical chronicle of the kings of **Kashmir**, written in verse by the Kashmiri poet **Kalhana**. The *Rajatarangini* is an unusually descriptive and accurate history of Kashmir and the region's political, social, and religious institutions; the text's only shortcoming is that it pays little attention to the outside world. Kalhana's historical emphasis is unusual for Indian writers, and the *Rajatarangini* is one of the few indigenous Indian histories.

## Rajendra I

(r. 1014–42) Monarch under whose rule (and that of his father, **Raja Raja**) the **Chola dynasty** reached the apex of its power, stretching its influence from the **Tanjore** region in **Tamil Nadu**, throughout southern India, and into southeast Asia all the way to Malaysia. In 1023 Rajendra defeated one of the kings of Bengal to extend his empire all the way to the **Ganges** but was unable to maintain authority over this expansive domain for long. He also fought a campaign against the Shrivijaya Empire in modern Malaysia, to retain control of trade from China. Like his father, Rajendra was a great patron of temple-building and other public monuments, including the great temple at **Gangaikondacholapuran**, built to commemorate the victory that opened the way to the Ganges.

## Rajneesh, Bhagwan Shri

(b. Mohan Chandra Rajneesh, 1931–1990) Controversial Hindu teacher who mixed traditional Hindu teachings with ideas gleaned from modern psychology. He is most popularly associated with a permissive attitude toward sexuality that attracted many of his followers, both Western and Indian, although the former tended to predominate. This was part of a more generally indulgent attitude in which people were encouraged to act upon their desires, as a way to remove impediments to ultimate realization. For some time his **ashram** was located in Pune in the state of **Maharashtra**, but in 1981 he relocated to southern Oregon, propelled by local opposition and an investigation by Indian tax officials. For several years the new site was highly successful, but local opposition to his teachings and unease about his lifestyle—he reportedly owned ninety-three Rolls-Royces and was protected by Uzi-toting bodyguards—

caused the spectacular collapse of this community in 1985. Rajneesh returned to India, where he eventually took up residence in Pune again. In his last years he changed his name several times— once claiming that the spirit of **Gautama** Buddha had entered him— and at the time of his death had taken the name Osho.

## Rajput

("king's son") Traditional Indian society was modeled as a collection of **endogamous**, or intermarried, subgroups known as **jatis** ("birth"). These jatis were organized (and their social status determined) by the group's hereditary occupation, over which each jati had a monopoly. The Rajputs were a martial Hindu jati that at times ruled large parts of western India, and have always claimed to be **kshatriyas**—buttressing this claim by creating genealogies linking their families to the mythical Solar or **Lunar Lines** of kings. Their origin is uncertain, for they first appear around the end of the first millennium, and many scholars speculate that they were descended from the Hunas and later assimilated into the small kingdoms. The four main Rajput clans were known as the **Agnikula** ("fire lineage"), because they claimed descent from a single mythical king who had arisen from a sacrificial fire pit in Mount Abu, **Rajasthan**. These four ruling clans were the Pariharas in southern Rajasthan, the Chauhans in the region around Delhi, the Solankis in **Gujarat**, and the Pawars in western **Madhya Pradesh**.

Whatever their origin, the Rajputs were warrior princes whose martial code stressed death before dishonor and swift reprisals against any insult. During the Moghul Empire era (1525–1707) Rajput kings were often feudal vassals, given kingdoms in exchange for their loyalty and service. After the breakup of the Moghul Empire many of them continued to reign as the rulers of small princely states. They remain an important ruling class even in modern times, through the medium of parliamentary politics.

## Rajrajeshvar Temple

Massive temple in the city of **Tanjore** in state of **Tamil Nadu**, dedicated to the god **Shiva** in his form as "Lord of Kings." Tanjore was the capital of the **Chola dynasty**, and this temple, built approximately 1000 C.E. by the Chola king **Raja Raja**, conveys the confidence of a kingdom on the rise. Architecturally speaking, the temple is an enlargement of the simplest sort of Hindu temple, with a **garbhagrha** covered by a spire, but it is breathtaking in its scale. The tower over the central shrine is 190 feet high and looks even higher, since the construction minimizes any distracting elements that would arrest the eye's upward journey. It is capped by a single piece of stone weighing an estimated eighty tons, which required a four-mile-long ramp to put in place. See also **Moghul dynasty**.

## Raksha Bandhan

Festival **day** celebrated on the **full moon** in the **lunar month** of **Shravan** (July–August); this festival's theme is the bond of protection (raksha) between brother and sister. On this day sisters tie (bandhan) a string around the brother's right wrist, which is sometimes just a simple thread and sometimes an elaborately constructed ornamental bracelet. Sisters then mark a tilak (**tika**) on the brother's forehead as a sign of respect and feed their brothers sweets. For their part, brothers give their sisters money, clothing, jewelry, or other gifts.

As with the festival of **Bhaiya Duj**, Raksha Bandhan symbolizes the protective bond between brothers and sisters. In the long term, brothers are seen as the family members who will protect their sisters' interests—since in many cases daughters long outlive their fathers and their brothers are the natal relatives on whom they must depend. Sisters perform these rites to protect

their brothers from misfortune—the string tied around the wrist is believed to ward off evil. The festival of Raksha Bandhan is also performed by men and **women** who are not related by blood but who are close to one another. Tying on the string "makes" them brother and sister, and thus rules out the potential for any romantic involvement, which would be seen as a form of incest.

## Rakshasa

In Hindu mythology, a particular type of asura (**demon**). Rakshasas are generally considered to be extremely powerful—not only in terms of their prodigious physical strength but also in their considerable skill in the magical arts. They are also generally characterized as malevolent toward human beings, whom they not only kill but also eat. According to one myth, rakshasas are born from **Brahma's** anger when he becomes hungry while reciting the **Vedas**. The capital of the rakshasas is in **Lanka**, and their most celebrated leader is **Ravana**, whose death at the hands of **Rama** is the climax of the *Ramayana*, the earlier of the two great Hindu epics.

## Rakshasa Marriage

One of the eight ways to perform a marriage recognized in the **dharma literature**, the treatises on religious duty. The **rakshasas** are a class of **demon**, and the rakshasa form of marriage took place when a man had intercourse with a woman after carrying her away by force. Not surprisingly, this was one of the four reprehensible (**aprashasta**) forms of marriage and was forbidden because of the woman's lack of consent, even though it was deemed a valid marriage. (Here the writers' concern seems to have been to give the "bride" legal status as a wife rather than to legitimate the actions of the "groom.") Theoretically valid, this form of marriage has been forbidden since the dharma literature was first codified in the centuries before the common era. Although the rakshasa

marriage has never been one of the accepted forms of marriage, there are groups in which a ritualized battle and capture of the bride is part of the wedding ceremony. One could even interpret the **barat**, the procession of the groom and his family to the wedding location, as a ritualized triumphal entry following conquest. See also **marriage, eight classical forms**, **marriage ceremonies**, and **marriage prohibitions**.

## Rakshasi

A female form of the type of **demon** known as a **Rakshasa**.

## Raktabija

In the *Devimahatmya*, the earliest and most important textual source for the **worship** of the **Goddess**, Raktabija is the name of one of the **demons** vanquished by the goddess **Kali**. Raktabija has received the boon that any drop of his blood falling to the earth will instantly turn into another version of himself, rendering him practically unconquerable. Kali defeats this demon by drinking his blood as it is shed, until finally it is completely gone, and so is he.

## Raktadantika

("bloody teeth") Powerful and protective form of the **Goddess**, particularly noted for killing **demons** and drinking their **blood**. During the fall festival of **Navaratri**, in which the Goddess is worshiped in a different form on nine successive nights, Raktadantika is her manifestation revered on the fifth night.

## Rama (Rama Avatar)

The seventh **avatar** or incarnation of the god **Vishnu**, the crown prince of the **Solar Line** and the protagonist of the *Ramayana*, one of the two great Indian epics. As with all of Vishnu's avatars, Rama is born to destroy a being powerful enough to throw the cosmos out of balance, in this case **Ravana**, the **demon**-king of **Lanka**. The focal conflict

in the *Ramayana* is **Rama's** quest to regain his wife **Sita**, who has been kidnapped by Ravana. The climactic sequence of the epic features Rama's struggle with Ravana, Ravana's death, and the reestablishment of cosmic equilibrium, signified by Rama's ascension to divine kingship.

Unlike the god **Krishna**, whose divine play (**lila**) often subverts or ignores accepted social values, Rama is a pillar of society. As a whole the *Ramayana* tends to espouse and uphold the traditional social values of religious duty (**dharma**), social hierarchy (**varna**), and the **stages of life** (ashrama). As the epic's protagonist, Rama is the epitome of all these values. He is solid, dependable, stable, righteous, and predictable. In Hindu culture Rama is the model of the perfect **son**, and he shows this by being utterly devoted to his parents, giving far greater weight to his duties as a son than as a husband. Unlike Krishna, who has multiple liaisons with his female devotees (**bhakta**), all in the name of divine play, Rama is married and monogamous. When the time comes for battle, he is the fiercest of combatants, incarnating the warrior (**kshatriya**) ideal of using strength to uphold justice, protect the righteous, and punish the wicked. In all these things he personifies some of the most deeply embedded values of Hindu culture.

Yet there are also some unsettling incidents, particularly in the **Valmiki Ramayana**, the epic's earliest version. These incidents either feature Rama inexplicably stepping out of character or else point to problematic tensions in traditional Hindu values. In an attempt to help the monkey-king **Sugriva** against his rival **Bali**, Rama shoots Bali in the back from a concealed place—an action incompatible with the notion of fair and honorable warfare. His actions in enforcing the existing social order also show its oppressive and restrictive nature. In one incident, Rama kills a low-status **shudra** whom he finds



The god Vishnu's Rama avatar. In the Hindu epic the *Ramayana*, Vishnu appears as Rama to defeat Ravana, the demon king.

performing physical **asceticism** (**tapas**), a privilege reserved for his betters, and has molten lead poured in the ears of another shudra who was discovered listening to the sacred **Vedas**—a forbidden act for such a person. Both incidents show the hierarchical nature of idealized Hindu society, and the king's role in preserving and sustaining this hierarchy. When Rama and his brother **Lakshmana** are propositioned by Ravana's sister **Shurpanakha**, they first mislead and ridicule her, then mutilate her by cutting off her ears and nose. These actions seem incompatible with the kshatriya ethic of respect for **women** and the righteous use of force, and prompt Ravana to kidnap Sita in revenge.

Perhaps the most troubling questions arise from Rama's behavior toward his wife Sita. Immediately after being liberated from enslavement, she undergoes an **ordeal** by **fire**, from which her emergence unscathed upholds her

claim that she remained chaste while being held captive. Despite this definitive proof, Rama later insists on a second test, in which Sita, in protest, is swallowed up by the **earth**. Thus, the picture of Rama conveyed by the epic is of a figure righteous by the standards of his time but on occasion rigid and inflexible.

In later versions of the *Ramayana*, particularly the **Ramcharitmanas** by the poet-saint **Tulsidas** (1532–1623?), this picture subtly shifts, possibly in an attempt to soften or remove these troubling incidents. Certain changes in Tulsidas's text also highlight the centrality of devotion (**bhakti**) over all other religious attitudes. Tulsidas's Rama is more explicitly portrayed as God incarnate, a figure who is aware of his divine status and whose actions are undertaken for the benefit of his devotees. This Rama is still concerned with social values, particularly the kshatriya obligation to uphold and protect religious duty (dharma). Yet this ethic is in tension with—and sometimes in opposition to—the importance of bhakti, which is portrayed as the ultimate religious goal. These subtle shifts in the later text point to an occasional conflict between two differing ideals—dharma and bhakti— both of which are affirmed as essential. For further information on Rama, see the texts of the *Ramayana* (the *Valmiki Ramayana*, *Kamba Ramayana*, and *Ramcharitmanas*) or translations from the Sanskrit puranas, such as Cornelia Dimmitt and J. A. B. van Buitenen (eds. and trans.), *Classical Hindu Mythology*, 1978; secondary sources include V. Raghavan (ed.), *The Ramayana Tradition in Asia*, 1980; Edmour J. Babineau, *Love of God and Social Duty in the Ramcharitmanas*, 1979; and Frank Whaling, *The Rise in the Religious Significance of Rama*, 1980.

## Ramakrishna

(1836–86) Bengali mystic and saint who was one of the most remarkable figures in the nineteenth-century revival of Hinduism. Ramakrishna was the son of a village priest and received little formal education during his life. He retained much of his rustic simplicity and spent his adult life as a temple priest at the **Kali** temple at **Dakshineshwar**, outside the city of Calcutta. From his childhood Ramakrishna had been devoted to the **Goddess** Kali, and characterized himself as being "intoxicated with God." He sought and found the divine, first through Kali but later through a variety of other religious paths, including the abstract monism of the speculative **Upanishads**, devotion to the god **Vishnu**, Christianity, and Islam. Out of these experiences came his conviction that the inner experience in all religious traditions was the same and led to the same divine presence. Although Ramakrishna did not publicize himself, he became known in Calcutta's religious circles through his association with **Keshub Chander Sen**, the leader of the reformist **Brahmo Samaj**. This association brought him disciples who would spread his teachings, particularly Narendranath Datta, better known as **Swami Vivekananda**. For a devotee's perspective on Ramakrishna, see Christopher Isherwood, *Ramakrishna and His Disciples*, 1965; for a modern psychological reading, see Jeffrey Kripal, *Kali's Child*, 1995.

## Ramakrishna Mission

Hindu religious organization founded in 1897 by **Swami Vivekananda** to propagate the religious message of Vivekananda's teacher, **Ramakrishna**. Since its inception, the Ramakrishna Mission has been equally dedicated to spiritual uplifting and to social service, based on Vivekananda's realization that India needed material development as much as it needed religious instruction. The mission has sought to fulfill part of this charge by publishing inexpensive editions of religious texts, including but not restricted to the teachings of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, and by sponsoring social service in the fields of

education, medical care, and other charitable works. For further information see George M. Williams, "The Ramakrishna Movement: A Study in Religious Change," in Robert D. Baird (ed.), *Religion in Modern India*, 1998.

## Ramana Maharishi

(1879–1950) Modern Hindu sage, whose life and message reiterated the fundamental insight of the ancient speculative **Upanishads**, namely, that the inner Self (**atman**) is identical with Supreme Reality (**Brahman**). Ramana was born into a middle-class Indian family and during his youth demonstrated no unusual abilities. In 1895 he obtained a copy of the ***Periya Puranam***, a text chronicling the lives of the poet-saints known as the **Nayanars**, and in reading about their lives Ramana began to desire to renounce the world. This inclination was realized the next year, when he imagined the death of his body and reached the conclusion that his real identity was the Self. He left his family and went to the temple of **Tiruvannamalai**, also known as Arunachala, where he remained until his death fifty-four years later. For some time at the start he was deep in meditation and barely attended to his physical needs. Soon he attracted disciples, through whom his family eventually discovered his whereabouts, although Ramana refused to return home with them when they came to see him. His mother moved to Tiruvannamalai in 1916, and after her death five years later Ramana relocated his dwelling to be near her grave. Although he spoke very seldom, he managed to compose two short works—*Self-Enquiry* and *Who am I?*—in which he stated his basic insights. For further information see T. M. P. Mahadevan, *Ramana Maharshi*, 1977.

## Ramananda

(14th c.?) **Sant** poet-saint who is traditionally cited as the spiritual teacher (**guru**) of the poet-saints **Kabir**, **Ravidas**, **Pipa**, and others. The Sants were a group of poet-saints from central and northern India who shared several general tendencies: stress on individualized, interior religion leading to a personal experience of the divine; disdain for external ritual, particularly image **worship**; faith in the power of the divine name; and a tendency to ignore conventional **caste** distinctions. Ramananda is said to have been a charismatic spiritual leader, and is claimed to have been a direct disciple of the southern Indian philosopher **Ramanuja**, who sent Ramananda north to help spread the devotional movement. The latter claim is almost certainly false, given that the only verse incontestably attributable to Ramananda is found in the **Adigranth**, the scripture of the Sikh community. This verse does not reflect Ramanuja's **Shrivaishnava** tradition, in which the primary **deity** is **Vishnu**, but instead shows the influence of the **Nathpanthi** ascetics, who stressed **yoga**. There are other verses ascribed to Ramananda in later sources, but their authenticity is doubtful, and little can be definitely known about his life.

## Ramanandi

Renunciant ascetics, devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Vishnu**, who are by far the most numerous and most influential of the **Vaishnava** ascetics. The Ramanandis claim that their order was founded by the religious teacher **Ramananda**, about whom little is definitely known. For some time the Ramanandis maintained that Ramananda had been a disciple of the southern Indian philosopher **Ramanuja**, and thus that their sect had sprung out of Ramanuja's **Shrivaishnava** religious community, but this claim was formally renounced after a dispute at the **Kumbha Mela** festival in the city of **Ujjain** in 1921. Ramananda is also traditionally thought to have been the **guru** of many northern Indian **bhakti** figures, most notably **Kabir**, **Ravidas**, **Pipa**, and **Sen**, although on this matter too there is little hard historical evidence.

All of the stories about Ramananda, however, point to someone who was firm in his commitment to devotion and was willing to initiate people from all walks of society.

The tutelary **deity** for the Ramanandi ascetics is **Rama**, particularly as described in the ***Ramcharitmanas***, a vernacular version of the epic ***Ramayana*** written by the poet-saint **Tulsidas** (1532–1623?). Tulsidas portrays Rama as God incarnate, come to **earth** for the benefit of his devotees, and the text's primary theme is on the power of devotion. Yet within the larger confines of the Ramanandi fold there are several distinct variations on practice, which have little or nothing in common with one another. One strand is that of the **tyagis**, who stress renunciation and **asceticism**. A second strand is that of the **Nagas**, who in earlier times were fighting ascetics but whose military organization is now important only during the bathing (**snana**) processions for the Kumbha Mela. The final strand is that of the **rasiks** ("aesthetes"), whose religious practice is based on highly complex patterns of visualization in which they imagine themselves as present in the court of Rama itself; this sort of visualization was undoubtedly imitated from the patterns of **Krishna** devotion as practiced in the **Braj** region. The rasik tradition is by far the most literate and sophisticated; the tyagis and the Nagas perform similar sorts of rites as other ascetics, although their interpretation and their chosen deity is unique to their order. For further information see Peter van der Veer, *Gods on Earth*, 1988.

## Ramanand Sagar

Director of the televised production of the ***Ramayana***, which was completed in the late 1980s. The episodes were aired each Sunday morning for about a year, and were wildly successful despite problems with production quality. (Some of these problems undoubtedly derived from the difficulties of preserving the immediacy of the oral experience of traditional storytelling in the modern medium of television.) In the mid-1990s Sagar devoted his attention to other mythological television serials, with an extended series on the life of the god **Krishna**.

## Ramanuja

(11th c.) Southern Indian philosopher who was the greatest exponent of the philosophical position known as **Vishishthadvaita** ("qualified nondualism") **Vedanta**, and the most important figure in the **Shrivaishnava** religious community. Ramanuja lived most of his life at the temple-town of **Shrirangam** in the state of **Tamil Nadu**, in service of the temple's resident **deity**, **Ranganatha**, a form of **Vishnu**. Ramanuja was convinced that **Brahman**, or Supreme Reality, was a personal deity rather than an impersonal abstract principle, and he was also convinced that devotion (**bhakti**) was the most important form of religious practice. **Vishishthadvaita Vedanta**, his philosophical position, stressed both of these convictions. According to Ramanuja, in his essential nature God is completely transcendent and free from imperfections. The world develops from God through a process of **evolution**, an idea adapted from the **Samkhya** philosophical school. The world is thus similar to God, since it proceeds from him, but also different, since matter is unconscious and insentient. In the same way, human beings are similar in nature to God, because they have him as their source, though unlike God they are subject to ignorance and suffering. For Ramanuja and his followers, God is not identical to human selves or to the world, all of which are perceived as having real and independent existence. The differences in capacity between God and human beings makes devotion the most effective means to gain final liberation (**moksha**) of the soul, a liberation that is conceived of as eternal communion with God. For further

information see Sarvepalli Radha-krishnan and Charles A. Moore (eds.), *A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy*, 1957; and John B. Carman, *The Theology of Ramanuja*, 1974.

## Ramavali

("Series [of poems] to **Rama**") A series of 330 short poems dedicated to the god Rama, written in the **Braj Bhasha** form of **Hindi** by the poet-saint **Tulsidas** (1532–1623?). The *Ramavali* is one of Tulsidas' longest extant works—shorter only than the ***Ramcharitmanas***. The seven sections in the *Ramavali* parallel the structure of the ***Ramayana***, but differing sections receive unequal emphasis. Tulsidas gives his greatest attention to Rama's childhood and paints lyrical images of the child Rama's divine play (**lila**). Here Tulsidas clearly borrows from devotional poetry to the god **Krishna**, in which such childhood images are well established. Yet the *Ramavali*'s portrayal of Rama de-emphasizes the mischievous qualities associated with Krishna, to stress instead the generally milder nature of Rama, and to highlight the devotee's (**bhakta**) quiet delight in sharing his divine presence.

## Ramayana

One of the two great **Sanskrit** epics, traditionally ascribed to the mythical sage **Valmiki**. The *Ramayana* is much shorter than the other great epic, the ***Mahabharata***, and in many ways is a less complex work. The *Ramayana*'s text was composed later than the core story of the *Mahabharata*, but the *Mahabharata*'s final recension was compiled after the *Ramayana* had been fixed. The *Mahabharata* is the story of an "evil" royal family for whom greed and power-mongering ultimately lead to destruction. In contrast, the *Ramayana* is the tale of a "good" royal family, and many of the epic's characters are symbols of established Indian family values: **Rama** is the perfect son and the virtuous king, **Lakshmana** and **Bharata** his ideal younger brothers, and **Sita** the model wife. Despite this, the story is not without some troubling moral issues, particularly connected with Rama's treatment of Sita.
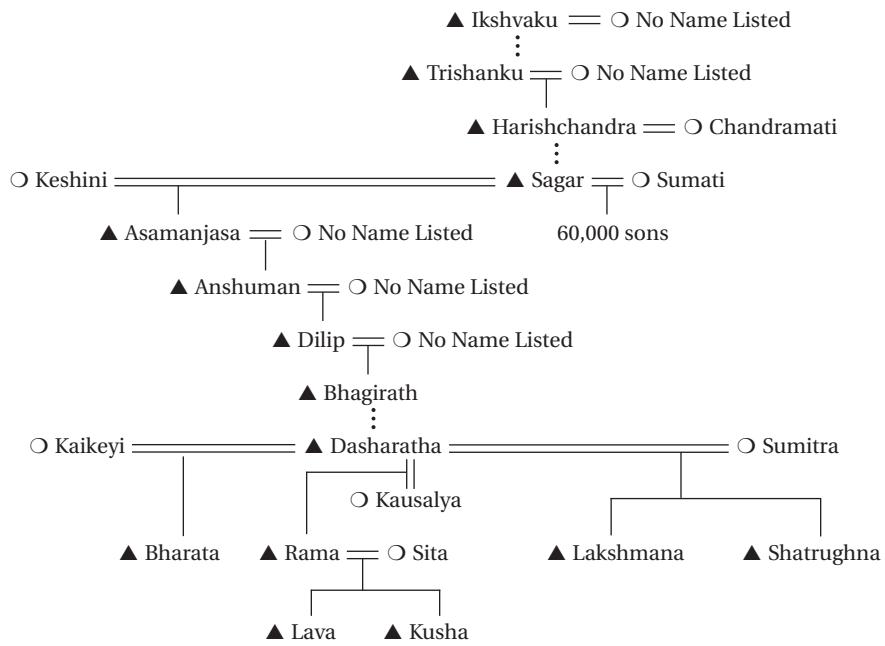
The story has been altered somewhat over the years, with the most important change being the elevation of Rama to divine status as an **avatar** or incarnation of the god **Vishnu**. The earliest *Ramayana*, attributed to the sage **Valmiki**, mentions Rama's divinity only in the first and last books, whereas in other portions of the poem he is described merely as a great hero. Given the position of these references to divinity, scholars speculate that they could easily have been added to the original core story of exile, abduction, and revenge.

The text of the *Ramayana* is divided into seven sections (khandas), each of which has a different focus. In the opening section, the Balakhanda ("childhood section"), the text describes the birth of Rama and his brothers (Lakshmana, Bharata, and **Shatrughna**) to King **Dasharatha**, and their lives as young princes. Rama and his brothers take part in an archery contest, sponsored by King **Janaka**, at which Rama's prowess as an archer wins the hand of Janaka's daughter Sita. They are married and live happily at Dasharatha's court.
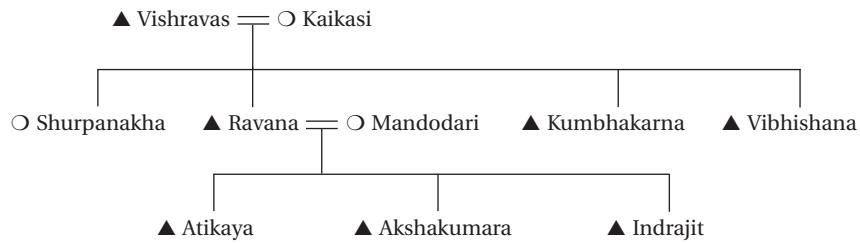
The Ayodhyakhanda ("**Ayodhya** section") tells how Dasharatha makes preparations to anoint Rama as his successor but how, on the night before the ceremony, these plans are spoiled by Rama's stepmother **Kaikeyi**. Many years before, Kaikeyi receives the offer of two favors from Dasharatha, which she has never used. At the suggestion of her hunchback maid **Manthara**, Kaikeyi demands of Dasharatha that Rama be banished to the forest for fourteen years, and that her son Bharata be crowned in his place. This disaster seems grounded in malice but is presented as the culmination of a **curse** placed on Dasharatha, which predicts he will die bereft of his sons. When informed of his stepmother's

## Ramayana Characters

### A. The Solar Line of Kings

▲ Ikshvaku ══ ○ No Name Listed

▲ Trishanku ══ ○ No Name Listed

▲ Harishchandra ══ ○ Chandramati

○ Keshini ═══════════ ▲ Sagar ══ ○ Sumati

▲ Asamanjasa ══ ○ No Name Listed          60,000 sons

▲ Anshuman ══ ○ No Name Listed

▲ Dilip ══ ○ No Name Listed

▲ Bhagirath

○ Kaikeyi ═══════════ ▲ Dasharatha ═══════════ ○ Sumitra

○ Kausalya

▲ Bharata     ▲ Rama ══ ○ Sita          ▲ Lakshmana     ▲ Shatrughna

▲ Lava     ▲ Kusha
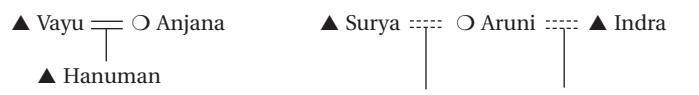
### B. Rakshasas (Epic's Antagonists)

▲ Vishravas ══ ○ Kaikasi

○ Shurpanakha     ▲ Ravana ══ ○ Mandodari     ▲ Kumbhakarna     ▲ Vibhishana

▲ Atikaya     ▲ Akshakumara     ▲ Indrajit

### C. Monkey Lineages

▲ Vayu ══ ○ Anjana          ▲ Surya ┅┅ ○ Aruni ┅┅ ▲ Indra

▲ Hanuman          ▲ Sugriva     ▲ Bali ══ ○ Tara

▲ Angada

▲     Male
○     Female
══   Marriage
┅┅   Non-Marital
••••   Several Generations Lapse

wish, Rama immediately prepares to leave, refusing to seize the throne by force, and Sita and Lakshmana announce their intention to accompany him. Bharata is put on the throne but only as a regent in Rama's place, and the heart-broken Dasharatha dies of grief.

In the Aranyakhanda ("Forest section"), Rama, Lakshmana, and Sita settle into life in forest exile. Rama and Lakshmana kill many of the **demons** (**rakshasas**) who plague the forest-dwellers, thus bringing peace to the area. One day the female demon **Shurpanakha** comes to their dwelling, is smitten by the two young men, and asks them to marry her. The brothers first mock her, then mutilate her by cutting off her ears and nose. Shurpanakha goes to her brother **Ravana**, the demon-king of **Lanka**, and demands revenge for the attack. When frontal assaults fail, Ravana commands his uncle **Maricha** to assume the form of a golden deer in order to lure Rama away from his hut. At Sita's behest, Rama pursues the deer after giving Lakshmana strict orders not to leave Sita's side. Rama slays the deer, which with its dying breath calls out Lakshmana's name in a voice that mimics Rama's. Sita hears the call and flies into a rage when Lakshmana refuses to leave her. She finally drives him off, in an uncharacteristic show of temper, by accusing him of neglecting his brother in a time of peril so that he can have Sita to himself. When Lakshmana departs, Ravana comes to Sita disguised as a mendicant **ascetic**. He lures her out of a protective **magic** circle that Lakshmana has drawn around her, then kidnaps her. Ravana's escape is briefly delayed by a virtuous vulture named **Jatayu**, who attempts to rescue Sita. In the ensuing combat Jatayu is mortally wounded, but he lives long enough for Rama and Lakshmana to find him and learn the identity of Sita's abductor.

The Kishkindhakhanda ("**Kishkindha** section") narrates Rama's and Lakshmana's trip south to the Kishkindha forest. There they become allies with the monkey-king **Sugriva**, whose lost kingdom Rama helps to regain by slaying Sugriva's brother **Bali**. After enjoying the spoils of kingship, Sugriva and his monkey subjects, particularly his lieutenant **Hanuman**, begin searching throughout the country for any trace of Sita. Hanuman decides to leap over the sea, to Lanka, to see if he can find her there.

The Sundarakhanda ("Beautiful section") begins with Hanuman leaping the sea to Lanka and describes how, after much searching, he finally manages to locate Sita. Meanwhile, Ravana unsuccessfully tries to convince Sita to accept him as her husband. The demon's actions are motivated by his desire to avoid a curse, which states that he will drop dead if he ever rapes a woman who resists him. Hanuman reassures Sita that all will be well, and after many adventures makes his way back to Rama, to inform him that Sita has been found.

The Lankakhanda ("Lanka section") describes the beginning of a war between the forces of Rama and Ravana. Aided by armies of monkeys and bears, Rama builds a causeway across the sea to Lanka and begins to besiege the city. In his struggle he is helped by Ravana's youngest brother **Vibhishana**, who opposes Ravana's evil deeds and casts in his lot with Rama. Ravana is assisted by his brother **Kumbhakarna** and his son **Indrajit**, but in the end Ravana and his demon allies are killed in battle. After being rescued, Sita undergoes a trial by **fire** to prove her chastity, and when the fire refuses to burn her, she is shown to have been completely faithful to Rama. They return in triumph to Ayodhya, where Bharata renounces the throne, and the couple rule happily.

In the "Final section" (Uttarakhanda), which was almost certainly added later, Rama has further doubts about Sita's virtue. While roaming the capital one night, he hears a washerman abusing his wife for staying out all night. The washerman says that he is not as big a fool as their king. Rama is troubled by this and, although he is supposedly

convinced of Sita's innocence, sends her into exile to please his subjects—here showing a distrust uncharacteristic of a figure who supposedly represents the epitome of virtue. While in exile, Sita gives birth to twin sons, **Lava** and **Kusha**, whose prowess makes them known to Rama, and they are eventually acknowledged as his heirs. Yet after all her suffering, Sita is not amenable to reconciliation. As a final proof she calls on her mother, the **Earth**, to bear witness to her virtue, and as a sign that this is true Sita sinks beneath the earth, never to be seen again. Soon after, Rama himself leaves his body and takes again his true form as Vishnu.

The *Ramayana* has been an extremely influential text, primarily because of the social virtues modeled by its characters. The epic is known throughout the subcontinent, and its popularity can be seen by its numerous retellings in vernacular languages, of which the most famous are the Tamil *Ramayana* of the poet **Kamban** (9th c.), and the ***Ramcharitmanas*** of the poet-saint **Tulsidas** (17th c.). The epic continues to be a prominent text in the modern day, as witnessed by its astounding popularity as a weekly television serial produced in the mid-1980s under the direction of **Ramanand Sagar**. The Valmiki *Ramayana* has been translated numerous times, the most recent partial translation of the work is by Robert Goldman and Sheldon Pollack. See also **Tamil epics**.

## Rambha Ekadashi

Religious observance falling on the eleventh day (**ekadashi**) of the dark (waning) half of the **lunar month** of **Kartik** (October–November). As with all the eleventh-day observances, this is dedicated to the **worship** of the god **Vishnu**, on this particular day in his form as **Krishna**. As with most Hindu festivals, Rambha Ekadashi requires that certain rites be performed. These rites involve fasting (**upavasa**) and worship, and promise specific benefits for faithful

performance. This ceremony is named after Rambha, a famous **apsara** or celestial damsel. Its charter myth tells how, by faithfully observing this rite, a certain king was born in **heaven** and served by Rambha and other apsaras.

## Ramcharitmanas

("Holy Lake of **Rama's** Deeds") Vernacular retelling of the ***Ramayana***, the earlier of the two great **Sanskrit** epics. The *Ramcharitmanas* was written by the poet-saint **Tulsidas** (1532–1623), in the language known as **Avadhi**, an eastern variant of medieval **Hindi**. Evidence indicates that Tulsidas began the text in **Ayodhya** in 1574. At nearly 10,000 lines, this text is by far his longest work and is generally considered to be his greatest. For the most part the poem is structured in groups of six to eight verses written in the **chaupai** form, followed by a verse in the shorter **doha** form. (The doha verse either sums up the essence of the preceding chaupai verses or serves to foreshadow later developments.) There are also verses written in longer meters such as **savaiya**, as well as invocations in fluid Sanskrit poetry at the beginning of each of the seven sections. Tulsidas was a masterful epic poet, as evidenced both by the sheer size of his text and the high poetic quality of the verses contained in it.

As with all the *Ramayana*'s vernacular retellings, Tulsidas did not merely translate the story of Rama but interpreted it according to his own religious convictions. His two most important changes to the poem are the overwhelming emphasis on the importance of devotion (**bhakti**), and the saving power of the name of Rama, to which Tulsidas gives greater importance than Rama himself. Tulsidas also includes mythic material from a variety of other sources, most notably the ***Shiva Purana*** and the *Adhyatmaramayana*. This material is largely added to the first and last chapters, in which Tulsidas makes his greatest changes from the original

epic. One theory to explain why Tulsidas brought in this other material argues that he endeavored to transcend narrow sectarian boundaries, for example, by having the god **Shiva** narrate much of the text in the form of a dialogue to his wife **Parvati**. Later, in part of the final book, Shiva is supplanted as narrator by the crow **Bhushundi**, who symbolizes the power of devotion to rescue even a common carrion-eating crow.

The *Ramcharitmanas* has popularly been called the "Bible of northern India," reflecting its enormous influence on ordinary people's piety. Although according to legend Tulsidas faced some opposition from **brahmins** who thought it sacrilegious to translate the *Ramayana* into a vernacular tongue, the text has been immensely popular with ordinary people. Even now there are many people who can recite large sections from memory ("discourses" (**katha**) on the text can draw hundreds or thousands of people) and many of the verses have become proverbial expressions in modern Hindi. Aside from reading or hearing the text, millions of people see it each autumn, in the dramatic presentation known as the **Ram Lila**. The oldest and most traditional Ram Lila, held at **Ramnagar** in **Benares**, uses the text from the *Ramcharitmanas*, and takes great pride in this traditionalism. For further information see Philip Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text*, 1991.

## Ramdev

(1404–58) According to legend, a **Rajput** prince whose piety and ability to perform miracles won him renown during his lifetime, and who was considered an incarnation of the god **Krishna** after his death. His tomb in the village of **Ramdevra**, east of the city of Jaisalmer in the western part of the state of **Rajasthan**, has become a pilgrimage site for devotees (**bhakta**) who come seeking various favors. Little is known about Ramdev's life, and unlike many of the other medieval saints, he has no poetry or body of literature attributed to him,

nor did he serve as the leader of any organized religious community. His original followers came to him because he was able to meet their needs, and for this reason pilgrims come to him still.

## Ramdevra

Village and sacred site (**tirtha**) in the northwest corner of the state of **Rajasthan**, about sixty miles east of the city of Jaisalmer. Ramdevra is famous for the grave of the fifteenth-century saint **Ramdev**, as well as the grave of his low-**caste** disciple Dadi Bhai. During his lifetime Ramdev was famous for his piety and generosity, and was credited with performing various miracles to aid those in need. Since his death he has come to be regarded as an incarnation of the god **Krishna**. Although pilgrims can come throughout the **year**, most come during the annual religious fair (**mela**), at which time the near-deserted town takes on the semblance of a bustling city. Many of the visitors come to ask Ramdev for something, often related to concerns over health or prosperity. Others come to show gratitude, especially those whose past wishes have been granted, and to maintain their relationship with him.

## Rameshvar

Manifestation of the god **Shiva**, in his form as "**Rama's** Lord" at **Rameshvaram** in the state of **Tamil Nadu**. The image of Rameshvar at this site is a **linga**, a pillar-shaped object said to represent Shiva's symbolic form. The Rameshvar linga is one of the twelve **jyotirlingas**, a network of twelve lingas deemed especially holy and powerful, and at which Shiva is thought to be uniquely present. The site's mythic charter is drawn from the *Ramayana*, the earlier of the two **Sanskrit** epics. According to tradition, Shiva is worshiped here by the god Rama, the epic's protagonist, although there are differing accounts of when this happened. In some stories, it is to gain Shiva's blessing immediately before

Rama's attack on the **demon** kingdom of **Lanka**. In other accounts the **worship** comes after the conquest of Lanka, as a rite of thanksgiving. In either case, both sets of stories portray Rama as a devotee (**bhakta**) of Shiva and thus buttress Shiva's status as the greatest god of all.

## Rameshvaram

("**Rama's** Lord") Sacred site (**tirtha**) on an island off the coast of the state of **Tamil Nadu** in the Palk Strait, which separates **Sri Lanka** from the mainland. Rameshvaram is one of the most important sacred sites in India, for several different reasons. It is one of the **four dhams** associated with the philosopher **Shankaracharya**, which mark the geographical boundaries of the subcontinent. It also has specific mythic associations that make it holy both to devotees (**bhakta**) of **Shiva** and **Vishnu**, two of the most important Hindu **deities**. For Shiva's devotees, the pillar-shaped image (**linga**) of Shiva there represents the god in his manifestation as **Rameshvar** ("Rama's Lord"). This image is also one of the **jyotirlingas**, a network of twelve lingas deemed especially holy and powerful, and at which Shiva is said to be uniquely present. For Vishnu's worshipers, Rameshvaram is held to be the place from which the god Rama staged his attack on the **demon** kingdom of **Lanka**. According to tradition, upon Rama's return with his rescued wife **Sita**, the image of Rameshvaram was consecrated in gratitude for his success. Rameshvaram also has very old connections with the sacred city of **Benares**, and even today pilgrims come from there bearing **Ganges** water to offer to Shiva.

## Ramgarh

Architectural site in the **Vindhya** Hills, 160 miles south of **Benares**. An **inscription** in one of the caves at Ramgarh, estimated to be from the third century B.C.E., contains the earliest datable reference to **devadasis**, a special class of women who served the **deities** of certain temples.

## Ram Janam Bhumi

Site in the city of **Ayodhya**, where some claim the god **Rama** was born; since the early 1980s this spot has witnessed some of India's most intense postindependence religious conflict. The site has long been a source of controversy between the Hindu and Muslim communities, and British sources record hostilities there in 1855 and 1934. Until 1992 Ram Janam Bhumi was occupied by the **Babri Masjid**, a mosque constructed in 1528 by command of Mir Baqi, a general of the Moghul emperor Babar (1483–1530). Local tradition holds that the mosque was built after the razing of an existing Hindu temple there, although there is little evidence for this claim. A few months after India gained independence in 1947, several local Hindus secretly installed images of the child Rama, his wife **Sita**, and his brother **Lakshmana** in the mosque, claiming that the images had miraculously appeared in a ball of light. The government, having only recently quieted the Hindu-Muslim massacres that accompanied the partition of British India into India and Pakistan, was loath to ignite religious passions, and its solution, therefore, was to padlock the compound's gates and send the case to the courts for resolution, where it languished for almost forty years.

The early 1980s saw renewed controversy over the site, when the **Vishva Hindu Parishad** (VHP), a Hindu nationalist organization, first began calling for the site's "liberation," proclaiming that the existing mosque was an insult to all Hindus. The VHP's campaign portrayed the mosque as a symbol of Muslim iconoclasm and depicted government efforts to protect it as an attempt to appease the Muslim community and retain their votes. In 1986, the VHP's drive to liberate the site was aided by Rajiv Gandhi's national government. Together, the VHP and the Gandhi administration

An effigy of Ravana from the Ram Lila, a dramatic presentation of the *Ramcharitmanas*.

succeeded in unlocking the compound's gates so that Hindus could **worship** there, though observers called the action a clear bid to attract the Hindu vote.

Pressure throughout the 1980s, culminated in a series of campaigns to begin construction of a new temple at Ram Janam Bhumi. Many of these campaigns coincided with national elections, and the emotion that they generated boosted the electoral fortunes of the **Bharatiya Janata Party** (BJP), a political group with close links to the VHP. The final campaign came on December 6, 1992, a day that was scheduled to have "symbolic" meaning, and ended a little over five hours later with the mosque's demolition. The whole operation was carefully planned—demolition crews ordered the destruction of all television cameras prior to leveling the building in order to prevent any media coverage by outsiders. The razing was also carried out with the blessing of the BJP-led state government, which made no attempt to protect the temple. Riots ensued, particularly in the city of Bombay, where over three thousand people were killed, most of them Muslims.

Even after the destruction of the Babri Masjid, the site remained an area of contention between Muslims and Hindus. Immediately after the demolition, Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao promised to rebuild the mosque but did nothing to accomplish this during the next five years he was in office. Meanwhile, various Hindu groups have been calling for the construction of a Ram Janam Bhumi temple, including traditional religious leaders such as the **Shankaracharyas**. Seeing nothing but trouble ahead, the government again sent the matter to the courts for resolution, where it remains to this day and may remain for decades to come. For further information see Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*, 1996.

## Ram Lila

Any public dramatic presentation of the **Ramayana**, the earlier of the two great Hindu epics. The epic's basic plot

revolves around the unjust exile of the god-king **Rama**; the abduction of Rama's wife **Sita** by **Ravana**, the **demon**-king of **Lanka**; and Rama's search to regain Sita, a struggle that ultimately ends in Ravana's death. Ram Lilas are prominent during the autumn in northern India, and usually correspond with the festival of **Dussehra** (October–November), which celebrates Rama's victory over Ravana and thus the symbolic triumph of good over evil. Late in the nineteenth century the Ram Lilas were important symbolic vehicles for demonstrating pride in Indian culture. Additionally, they were considered a coded symbol of resistance to British rule. Today, Ram Lilas can be found throughout northern India in many of the larger cities, while neighborhood associations often sponsor their own local productions.

The longest, most elaborate, and arguably the oldest Ram Lila is held at **Ramnagar**, the fortified town where the kings of **Benares** reside. The Ramnagar Ram Lila was begun in the early nineteenth century, during the reign of **Udit Narayan Singh**, and the Maharaja of Benares still plays an important symbolic role in the production even though he no longer wields temporal power over the city. It lasts for thirty-one days, during which the action moves to different places in and around Ramnagar. Thousands of faithful viewers follow the drama for the entire month, but on peak days the audience can reach 100,000. For further information on the Ram Lila, see Norvin Hein, *The Miracle Plays of Mathura*, 1972; and Anaradha Kapur, *Actors, Pilgrims, Kings, and Gods*, 1990.

## Ramnagar

Fortified city just south and across the **Ganges** from the sacred city of **Benares** in the state of **Uttar Pradesh**. The Maharajas of Benares built their fort on this site because it was relatively easy to defend, and continue to live there, although they no longer possess ruling power. Ramnagar is famous as the site of the oldest and most traditional **Ram Lila**, a production of the epic *Ramayana* dramatized in a month of nightly shows. Aside from sponsoring this Ram Lila and underwriting its costs, the royal family also continues to play an important symbolic role in the production itself. For further information see Anuradha Kapur, *Actors, Pilgrims, Kings, and Gods*, 1990.

## Ram Navami

Festival celebrated on the ninth day of the bright (waxing) half of the **lunar month** of **Chaitra** (March–April). Ram Navami is celebrated as the birthday of the god **Rama**, the seventh **avatar** of the god **Vishnu**, and this festival also ends the spring **Navaratri** festival of the **Goddess**. The Goddess festival of Navaratri, observed twice yearly in the spring and in the fall, ends each time with a celebration for Rama. The reason for this festival sequence is not entirely clear but probably reflects cultural imperatives to contain the explosive but uncontrolled fertile feminine energy personified by the Goddess with the stable and predictable masculine energy of Rama. Ram Navami is widely celebrated across India, but especially in **Ayodhya**, the city traditionally deemed his birthplace. In their celebrations, devotees (**bhakta**) may **worship** in their homes, fast (**upavasa**), attend religious discourses (**katha**), or go to temples for **darshan** and worship. With the recent growth of **Hindutva** (militant, politicized Hinduism) this holiday has become a day for large demonstrations and political action. This has been particularly true in Ayodhya, where the continuing struggle to build the **Ram Janam Bhumi** temple at the site of Rama's birthplace has made this day particularly significant.

## Ramprasad

(early 19th c.) Bengali poet-saint and devotee (**bhakta**) of the **goddess Kali**, who is justly renowned for the power

and expressive quality of his poems. As with many of the devotional (**bhakti**) figures, little is definitely known about his life. According to tradition, he worked for a short time as a clerk before his indulgent employer, finding him spending his days composing poetry to Kali, became his literary patron to allow him to write full time. Ramprasad's poetry invokes the Goddess in many of her different personae—as the goddesses **Uma**, **Durga**, and **Bhairavi**—but the majority of his poems are addressed to Kali. Despite Kali's fearsome qualities, Ramprasad persistently addresses her as "mother," and, like a child, clings to her despite all her attempts to discourage him. The end result is that his unflinching and unquestioning devotion to Kali removes all fear and brings him liberation. For further reading, see David R. Kinsley, *The Sword and the Flute*, 1975; and Clinton Seely and Leonard Nathan (trans.), *Grace and Mercy in Her Wild Hair*, 1999.

## Ram Rajya Parishad

("Organization for Ram's Reign") Northern Indian political party formed immediately after Indian independence in 1947. It was founded by Swami **Karpatri**, an influential modern Hindu **ascetic**. The term Ram Rajya carries mythical significance, referring to the period of righteous rule by the god-king **Rama**, the protagonist of the epic *Ramayana*, after his return from fourteen years of exile in the forest. According to popular belief, Rama's reign was marked by perfect peace, justice, and social harmony.

The Ram Rajya Parishad sought to reshape India according to the vision of this mythical time, and the party's political platform was solidly rooted in conservative Hindu religious ideas. The party strongly supported the **caste** system, with its traditional division of social status and labor, and believed that it was essential for a smoothly functioning society. This position would have condemned most low-caste people to a life of servitude, although the party did leave them a few meager windows for advancement. One of these was managing shoe factories, since **leather** is considered religiously impure by the higher castes, and thus working with leather is the traditional occupation of certain low status groups. Aside from their views on the validity of the caste system, the Ram Rajya Parishad also supported other conservative Hindu causes, particularly a total ban on **cow slaughter** and a complete ban on the production and consumption of **liquor**. The Ram Rajya Parishad's constituency came mainly from conservative, upper-class Hindus, particularly those in the **Ganges** River basin. Its conservatism gave those outside this group no incentive to support it. Although it had limited electoral success in years immediately after independence, within a dozen years the party had been reduced to a completely marginal presence.

## Ram Rasik Sampraday

Religious lineage among the **Ramanandis**, a community of renunciant ascetics. All Ramanandis are devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Rama**, but members of the Ram Rasik Sampraday stress the **worship** of Rama and his wife **Sita** as the divine couple. They focus their worship on the time of domestic bliss when the newly married couple lived in **Ayodhya**, before Rama's unjust banishment from that city. Rasik ("aesthete") devotion involves complex forms of visualization, in which devotees imagine themselves to be servants and companions of Rama and Sita, and spend their days in service to the divine couple. Rasik devotees also draw up exacting "schedules" of the **deities'** daily routines—in some cases, down to the quarter-hour—so that through this imaginative exaltation they can savor the bliss of being God's companions. (This form of dedication is clearly influenced by devotional patterns to the god **Krishna**, particularly the divine reverence found in the **Gaudiya Vaishnava**

religious community.) Because Rasik worship is complex and highly developed, it has remained an elite phenomenon largely confined to a small group of ascetics. For further information see Peter van der Veer, *Gods on Earth*, 1988; and Philip Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text*, 1991.

## Ramsnehi

Renunciant **ascetic** community made up of devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Vishnu**—in his form as the god **Rama**—whose practice stresses the love (sneha) of Rama. The Ramsnehis have three main centers, all located in the state of **Rajasthan**. These centers are unique in that each pays homage only to its own founder, and no founder or preceptor is honored by all three. Ramsnehi religious practice focuses on the repetition of the name of Rama, but has also been influenced by the Jains. Because of this latter influence the Ramsnehis voluntarily take on many restrictions to avoid destroying life.

## Ranade, Mahadev Govind

(1842–1901) Lawyer, judge, and one of the great Hindu social reformers of nineteenth-century India. Along with his younger contemporary, **Gopal Krishna Gokhale**, Ranade was marked by his commitment to reform Hindu life by seeking the cooperation of the British government and by working within established institutions. Ranade was among the first generation of Indians to be educated in British schools and, after earning his degree at Bombay University, chose a career in law. In thirty years as a judge Ranade worked diligently to reform certain religious practices that were deemed social abuses, particularly issues concerning child marriage and **widow** remarriage. He was also a founding member of the **Prarthana Samaj**, a Hindu reformist organization that sought to attain similar goals. In addition to his interests in law, Ranade applied himself to the study

of economics, to provide practical guidance for economic development.

## Ranganatha

("the rocking lord") A particular form of the god **Vishnu**, in which the god is depicted as sleeping on the back of his serpent couch, **Shesha**, floating in the sea of cosmic dissolution (**pralaya**). The most famous example of this image is housed in the Ranganathaswamy temple in **Shrirangam**, in the state of **Tamil Nadu**.

## Rasa

("tastes") In Indian aesthetics, the nine moods that can be generated in an audience by various types of artistic expression: **erotic**, comic, compassionate, cruel, heroic, terrifying, loathsome, marvelous, and peaceful. These nine rasas correspond to the nine **bhavas** ("states"): sexual excitement, laughter, grief, anger, energy, fear, loathing, wonder, and peace. The nine bhavas are considered to be the most basic unadulterated emotions, and although each of the rasas corresponds to one of the bhavas, there is an important difference. Human emotive states come and go in response to circumstances largely beyond our control. Such emotive states often cannot be sustained, and they are generally not objects of aesthetic satisfaction. The case is very different for an aesthetic mood (rasa), which can be sustained, since it is artificially generated through artistic expression. This emphasis on creating and sustaining such a mood for an audience is the dominant goal of the performing arts in the Hindu tradition.

## Rasayana

("method of essences") Alchemical school specializing in the use of certain chemicals, particularly compounds made from elemental **mercury**, in a quest to transmute the body and render it immortal. Some scholars have characterized rasayana as the Buddhist school

of **alchemy**, with the Hindu school known as **dhatuvada**. The reported difference is that the latter relied solely on the consumption of mercurials, whereas the former used mercurials only to prolong life until the body could be transmuted through meditation, ritual, and extramaterial means. Despite these differing conceptions of the end of the process, the two schools overlap considerably on many other points. Both also probably draw from a common alchemical tradition. For further information see David Gordon White, *The Alchemical Body*, 1996.

## Rashtrakuta Dynasty

(8th–10th c.) Central Indian dynasty whose core area was in the middle of **Maharashtra**, and whose capital was the Maharashtrian city of Achalpur. The **Rashtrakutas** were originally vassals of the **Chalukya dynasty**, but overthrew them in the middle of the eighth century and remained the premier power south of the **Vindhya Mountains** until the middle of the tenth century. The dynasty directly ruled most of the modern states of Maharashtra and **Karnataka**, along with parts of the states of **Andhra Pradesh** and **Tamil Nadu**, but had vassal states through the entire **Deccan** plateau, southern India, and Ceylon. Their hegemony ended in 973, when they were overthrown by the later Chalukya dynasty. The Rashtrakutas' greatest monument is the **Kailasanatha** temple at **Ellora** in the state of Maharashtra, which was completed late in the eighth century.

## Rashtriya Svayamsevak Sangh

("National Volunteer Corps," hereafter RSS) Hindu nationalist organization founded in 1925 by **Dr. K. B. Hedgewar**. Since its inception the RSS has ascribed to the ideals of **Hindutva**, the notion that the Hindus are a nation despite their regional, linguistic, and cultural differences. The RSS has historically characterized itself as



In their daily meetings, members of the Rashtriya Svayamsevak Sangh practice martial drills that include sparring with sticks.

a cultural and character-building organization and, for much of its existence, has shunned direct political involvement, although it has exercised considerable influence through its many affiliated organizations.

RSS training stresses loyalty, obedience, discipline, and dedication to the advancement of the Hindu nation, but does not encourage the development of independent thought. The heart of its program are the daily meetings of its neighborhood units known as **shakhas** ("branches"). At these meetings members, known as **svayamsevaks** ("volunteers"), spend part of their time playing games, part of their time practicing martial drill—including sparring with sticks—and part of their time discussing and absorbing RSS ideals. The shakhas in any given area are overseen by a full-time RSS worker known as a **pracharak** ("director"), who serves as a liaison between the local units and the RSS leadership and who oversees RSS activity in his area.

As an organization, the RSS is profoundly elitist, and its self-proclaimed

mission is to provide leadership for a renascent Hindu India. Most of its members will never advance beyond the local level, but those who do are generally remarkably efficient, effective leaders. Although the RSS has shunned direct activism that would tarnish its self-proclaimed cultural emphasis, it has exercised considerable influence through the formation of affiliated organizations, for which it has provided the leadership cadre. These organizations are spread throughout every level of Indian society, from labor and student unions to service organizations, religious organizations such as the **Vishva Hindu Parishad** (VHP), and political parties such as the **Bharatiya Janata Party**.

Although the RSS has produced some remarkably effective leaders, it has also generated considerable controversy. One reason is that it is a highly authoritarian organization, run on the model of the Hindu joint family. All authority is vested in a single supreme leader, the sarsanghchalak, and proceeds downward from there. In this way the RSS is profoundly undemocratic, and many of its opponents—particularly in the political arena—have felt uneasy about having it as the controlling hand behind its affiliated organizations. Other opponents have also worried about its anti-Muslim and anti-Christian tone—non-Hindus were not allowed to join the organization until 1979—a tone rooted in the organization's Hindutva ideals. A final reservation about the RSS comes on social grounds. The RSS has long condemned untouchability, and has also long asserted that **caste** distinctions did not exist within its ranks—in keeping with its Hindutva roots, it proclaims that all its members are Hindus and Hindus only. Nevertheless, critics have noted that most RSS members come from **brahmin** and other privileged castes, and that all of its leaders have been brahmins. These critics contend that such public disavowal of caste distinctions is a mask to perpetuate brahmin control and to conceal whose interests the RSS truly serves. For further informa-

tion see Walter K. Andersen and Shridhar D. Damle, *The Brotherhood in Saffron*, 1987; K. Jayaprasad, *The RSS and Hindu Nationalism*, 1991; Daniel Gold, "Organized Hinduisms: From Vedic Truth to Hindu Nation," in Martin Marty and R. Scott Appleby (eds.), *Fundamentalisms Observed*, 1991; Tapan Basu et al., *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags*, 1993; Lise McKean, *Divine Enterprise*, 1996; and Christopher Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*, 1996.

## Rasik

Person able to appreciate a developed artistic mood (**rasa**); someone who is cultured and sophisticated. In the context of religious practice, the word refers to a person who has transposed this appreciation of aesthetic mood into a devotional setting. Rasik devotees (**bhakta**) would engage in elaborate visualizations of their chosen divinity and mentally accompany that divinity during the day. These meditative visualizations were said to give the devotee a sense of participation in the divine play (**lila**) of God's presence on earth and thus sharpen his or her enjoyment of it. The two religious communities that laid the greatest stress on this ability were the **Pushti Marg** and the **Ram Rasik Sampraday**, whose objects of devotion were the gods **Krishna** and **Rama**, respectively. This type of **worship** is almost exclusively focused on these **deities**, or on other forms of the god **Vishnu**.

## Raskhan

(late 16th c.) Poet-saint and devotee (**bhakta**) of the god **Krishna** who was born a Muslim, specifically a Pathan (Afghan) and whose name may have been Saiyid Ibrahim. According to legend, Raskhan spent the early part of his life in Delhi, where he became enamored of a handsome boy. When the object of his affections proved unattainable, he migrated to **Brindavan**, the

town where Krishna is said to have lived as a child, and spent the rest of his life sublimating that attraction through his devotion to Krishna. The main themes in his poetry are the attraction of the cowherd women (**gopis**) to Krishna, sparked by Krishna's physical beauty and, especially, the enthralling music of his flute. With Raskhan one finds a person who was a Muslim by birth but who used images and attitudes belonging to Hindu culture in an absolutely genuine manner.

## Ras Lila

In the mythology of the god **Krishna**, the ras lila is the "circle dance" that **Krishna** and his devotees (**bhakta**), the **gopis**, perform on autumn nights on the shore of the **Yamuna River**. In this dance—a symbol of communion with the divine—Krishna offers a form of himself to every woman present, in order to convince each one that God is paying attention to her and to her alone.

## Rat

An animal with a prominent place in at least two religious contexts. On one hand, the rat is famous as the animal vehicle of the **elephant**-headed god **Ganesh**, and reinforces Ganesh's identity as the Lord of Obstacles. If Ganesh's elephant head represents his power to remove obstacles by simply knocking them aside, his rat vehicle shows a stealthier approach. Rats are famous for their ability to work their way around obstacles, slipping through the smallest cracks in granaries to get to the grain inside. In their ability to slip around and between obstructing objects, they stand as a worthy complement to Ganesh's power.
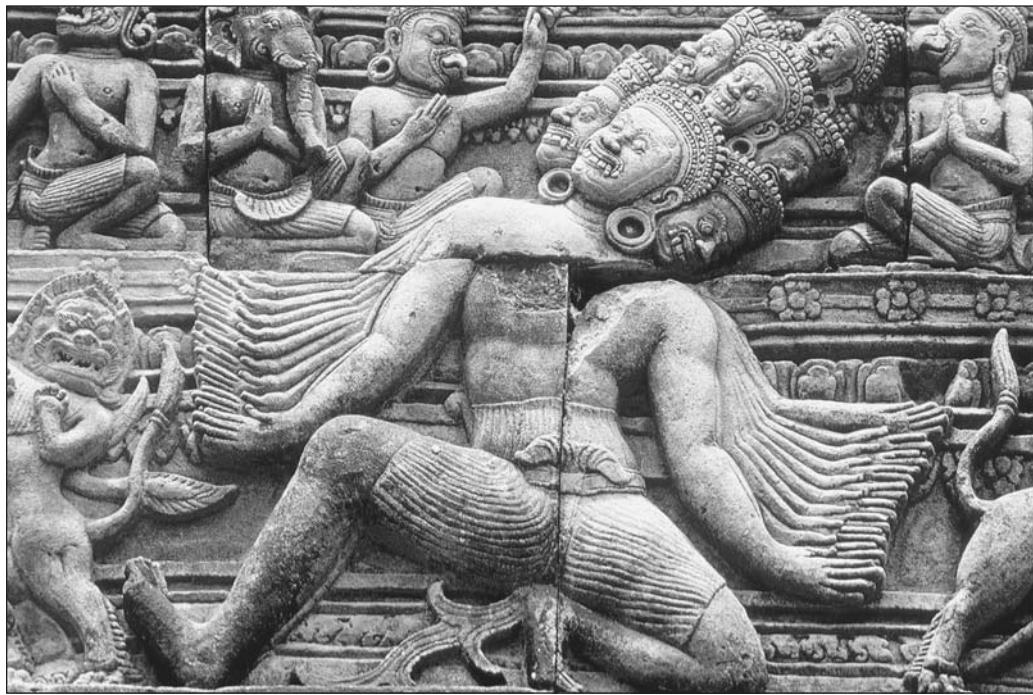
Rats are also important to the temple of the **goddess Karni Mata** in the village of **Deshnok**, in the state of **Rajasthan**. The Karni Mata temple is inhabited by thousands of rats, considered to be Karni Mata's **sons** and thus sacred **animals**. According to tradition, when the rats die they are reborn as members of the families that comprise the temple's hereditary servants, and thus the rats and the temple priests are all members of one extended family.

## Rath Yatra

Festival falling on the second day of the bright (waxing) half of the **lunar month** of **Ashadh** (June–July). The primary **deity** worshiped in this festival is **Jagannath**, who is considered a form of the god **Krishna**. This festival is celebrated all over India but especially in the sacred city of **Puri**, where the principal temple of Jagannath is located. During the festival in Puri, Jagannath, his brother **Balabhadra**, and his sister **Subhadra** are carried in procession through the city's main street to another temple about a mile away. They stay in this nearby temple for a week, and then return to the Jagannath temple.

The deities are processed by their devotees (**bhakta**) in three enormous wooden chariots (rath), which the devotees pull using long ropes. The largest of the three, belonging to Jagannath, is forty-five feet high, thirty-five feet broad and wide, and travels on sixteen wheels each seven feet high. The English word "**juggernaut**" is a corruption of Jagannath, and the connotation of a juggernaut as an unstoppable force undoubtedly derives from the momentum that these carts attained once they began to move. One of the staple fictions of British colonial lore described Jagannath's frenzied devotees committing **suicide** by throwing themselves under the car's wheels, so that they would die in the sight of God. Despite such tales being widely repeated, suicides of this sort were extremely uncommon. Still, there was some risk in pulling the carts, since people losing their footing in the massed crowd would be unable to get up, and could potentially be crushed by the wheels. For further information see T. N. Madan (ed.), *Religion in India*, 1991.

Relief sculpture of the demon king Ravana from Angkor, Cambodia. As the antagonist of the Hindu epic, the *Ramayana*, Ravana acquires great magical powers, which he abuses until Rama kills him in battle.

## Rati

("pleasure," particularly sexual pleasure) The wife of **Kama**, god of love. Rati is both Kama's wife and his ally, reflecting the way that sexual pleasure can both accompany and amplify desire.

## Ratri

Name of the **goddess of Night**. See **Night, goddess of**.

## Ravana

In the ***Ramayana***, the earlier of the two great Indian epics, Ravana is the ten-headed **demon** king of **Lanka**. To destroy Ravana, the god **Vishnu** is born in his incarnation as **Rama**. Ravana is a reincarnation of Vishnu's gatekeeper **Jaya**, who has been cursed by a sage to be reborn three times as a demon and to be killed by Vishnu each time. As a **rakshasa**, a type of demon, Ravana possesses enormous physical strength and various **magic** powers. He augments these natural abilities by performing intense physical **asceticism** (**tapas**), which in Indian culture is widely believed to generate spiritual power and bring boons from the gods. When the god **Brahma** finally appears and directs Ravana to choose his boon, Ravana requests that he be able to be killed by no one but a human being. This seems to make him practically immortal, since his powers are such that no ordinary human will be able to harm him, much less kill him. Ravana then proceeds to terrorize the gods, secure in the knowledge that they will not be able to harm him. He begins with his half-brother, the minor **deity Kubera**, who loses his home and all his possessions to Ravana.

Ravana's virtual invulnerability goes to his head, and the powerful demon begins to disregard all rules of decency and morality. He is particularly guilty of molesting and abducting women, acts which result in various **curses** being laid upon him by his helpless victims, many of them predicting his death. As a result of one of these curses his sister **Shurpanakha** is mutilated by Rama's brother **Lakshmana**. Ravana is determined to avenge this insult, and decides that the best way will be to abduct

Rama's wife **Sita**. Although his wife **Mandodari** and his brothers rebuke him for this act and advise him to return Sita and make peace with Rama, Ravana stubbornly refuses to listen. His inflated pride and desire to avenge the insult to his sister deafen his ears to their good counsel, and he eventually pays for his stubbornness with his life when Rama kills him in battle.

As with all **demons**, Ravana is not completely villainous by nature but rather greatly powerful and greatly flawed at the same time. According to some stories he is a devotee (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva**, and the hymn to the dancing Shiva known as the Shivatandava **Stotra** is often attributed to Ravana.

## Ravidas

(ca. 1500) **Sant** poet-saint who lived his life in the city of **Benares** and is traditionally believed to have been a younger contemporary of the poet-saint **Kabir**. The Sants were a loose group of central and northern Indian poet-saints who shared several general tendencies: stress on individualized, interior religion leading to a personal experience of the divine; disdain for external ritual, particularly image **worship**; faith in the power of the divine Name; and a tendency to ignore conventional **caste** distinctions. Both tradition and references in his poetry describe Ravidas as a **leather** worker (**chamar**), a social group whose contact with dead **animals** and their skins rendered them **untouchable**. He is believed to have supported himself by his hereditary trade, and much of his poetry speaks on issues of worldly **birth** and status. He never denied the importance of heredity but ultimately felt that his devotion to God had helped him to transcend his birth and given him status based on different criteria. His poetry reflects this staunch personal faith, as do his frequent warnings to his listeners that life is short and difficult, and that they should pay great attention to religious practice.

Given his low social status, Ravidas was almost certainly illiterate. His poetic songs were likely first transmitted orally, though their personal appeal made him one of the most popular sant poets. The two oldest attested sources of his work are the **Adigranth**, the scripture for the Sikh community, and the **Panchvani** collections, compiled by the **Dadupanth**. In modern India, Ravidas has also served as a model for the depressed classes; his followers call themselves **Ravidasis**. For further information see John Stratton Hawley and Mark Juergensmeyer, *Songs of the Saints of India*, 1988; and Winand M. Callewaert and Peter Freidlander (trans.), *The Life and Works of Raidas*, 1992.

## Ravidasi

Name taken by followers of the **untouchable** poet-saint **Ravidas**. The Ravidasis emphasize many ideas found in the poetry of Ravidas, such as the irrelevancy of ideas of **purity** and impurity (**ashaucha**), the futility of trying to contain the divine in texts and rites, and his vision of a society in which all people can have equal status, whatever their background. It is unlikely that the Ravidasis were established by Ravidas himself, nor is Ravidas an object of **worship** for them, although he is held as a model for religious equality, based on the messages in his poetry. In modern times the Ravidasis have focused on opposing all sorts of **caste**-based discrimination and have also taken up the empowerment of various low-caste groups. This movement is very recent, and to date little has been published about it; for some information see the introduction to Ravidas in John Stratton Hawley and Mark Juergensmeyer (trans.), *Songs of the Saints of India*, 1988.

## Ravidas Jayanti

Festival falling on the **full moon** in the **lunar month** of **Magh** (January–

February), celebrated as the birthday of the medieval **bhakti** poet-saint **Ravidas**, born near **Benares**. Ravidas's birth into the **untouchable caste** of **leather** workers (**chamar**) afforded him a very low social status. His poetry is set in a personal voice and contrasts this lowly status with the honor and renown he gained through his devotion to God. In modern times many members of the depressed classes see Ravidas as a model, and his birthday is celebrated with great fervor.

## Rawal

Title given to the head priest (**pujari**) at the temple of **Badrinath** in the **Himalayas**. The Rawal is invariably a **Nambudiri brahmin**, who must remain unmarried to retain his position. In Hindu belief, Badrinath is one of the **four dhams** ("divine abodes") connected with the philosopher **Shankaracharya**. Seeking to combat the spread of Buddhism and revitalize Hindu religion, Shankaracharya reportedly chose one Hindu sacred center in each corner of the subcontinent, and at each established a **Dashanami Sanyasi** monastic center (**math**) to train learned monks. Badrinath is associated with the **Jyotir Math** in the Himalayan town of **Joshimath**, forty miles south, which is also the place where the **deity** Badrinath is symbolically transported for the winter.

According to Badrinath temple records, for several hundred years the position of head priest was filled by **Dandi Sanyasis**, who were also Nambudiri brahmins, the same **caste** into which Shankaracharya is supposed to have been born. When the last of these died without a successor in 1776, the local king who served as the protector of the shrine invited a non-**ascetic** Nambudiri brahmin to serve as the temple's priest. This priest was given the title *rawal* (from the word *raja*, "deputy"), and his extended family has run the shrine since then. The rawal was the only person allowed to touch the image

of Badrinath, and was responsible for performing **worship** during the six months that the temple is open. Because of these duties, the rawal was required to remain a bachelor, lest the ritual impurity arising from the **birth** of a child (**sutakashaucha**) render him unable to attend to his duties. Until the Badrinath Temple Act of 1939 established a temple board as the ultimate authority, the rawals had sole rights to the **offerings** given at the shrine.

## Rawat

A particular subgroup of the warrior princes known as the **Rajputs**; the Rawats' major area of influence was in southwestern **Uttar Pradesh** state.

## Reciprocal Dependence

In Indian logic, one of the **fallacies** to be avoided in constructing an argument. Reciprocal dependence occurs when two things each stand as cause and effect to the other—when A depends on B, and B in turn depends on A. This is seen as an extended case of **self-residence**, and equally objectionable.

## Reconversion

General name for the rites by which people who have converted to other religious traditions are accepted back as Hindus. See **shuddhi**.

## Reflectionism

Theory used in later schools of **Advaita Vedanta** to explain how one single primal ignorance could afflict multiple ignorant selves. Reflectionism is rooted in the idea of an image appearing in a mirror; different from the original, it is nonetheless based on it. In the same way, according to this explanation, the ignorance affecting each individual is simply a reflection of a primal ignorance. For further information see Karl H. Potter, *Presuppositions of India's Philosophies*, 1972.

## Reincarnation
One of the fundamental assumptions of Indian religious life. See **samsara**

## Religious Duty
See **dharma**.

## Religious Law
See **dharma**, **dharmashastra**, and **dharma literature**.

## Religious Persecution
In popular belief India is visualized as a land of perfect religious tolerance in which all schools of thought have been allowed to grow unchecked. Although true in its basic form, this picture is greatly simplified. There is a long history of competition between differing religious communities and schools of thought, sometimes fueled by scathing polemics designed to persuade listeners that one was correct and the others false. What has been quite rare, however, are acts of violence accompanying these arguments, or the notion that people should have to fear for their lives because of their ideas. In the literature of the **Nayanar** and **Lingayat** communities—both devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva**—language toward the Jains has a genuinely hostile edge, and the Nayanar leader **Sambandar** has been persistently implicated in the **impalement** of 8,000 Jains in the southern Indian city of **Madurai**. In the same way, the northern Indian king **Sashanka**, who was also a devotee of Shiva, harbored a pathological hatred of Buddhists. Sashanka reportedly not only persecuted Buddhists themselves, but also tried to destroy the tree in Bodh **Gaya** under which the Buddha purportedly gained enlightenment.

Sectarian competition aside, people whose religious faith has led them to ignore generally accepted social conventions have been quite likely to encounter stiff opposition. Stories of the devotional (**bhakti**) poet-saints are replete with tales of the troubles they faced from guardians of conventional morality, usually said to be **brahmins**. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there was a running and often bloody conflict between two groups of militant ascetics—the **Naga** class of the **Dashanami Sanyasis**, and the **Bairagi Nagas**—although in that case the motives might just as well have been economic, namely, the control of trade in the **Ganges** valley. A final example of religious persecution appears in the rise of **Hindutva** in the 1980s. Propelled by verbal attacks on Muslims and Christians, this persecution has all too often prompted physical violence.

## Renuka
In Hindu mythology, the wife of the sage **Jamadagni** and mother of the **Parashuram avatar**, the fifth **avatar** or incarnation of the god **Vishnu**.

## Republic Day
Indian national holiday, falling on January 26, that marks the day the Indian constitution was adopted in 1950. As a holiday connected with Indian independence, it is one of the few celebrated according to the common **calendar**. Republic Day is comparable to the Fourth of July in the United States and is celebrated with massive parades in India's major cities. The largest occurs in New Delhi—from which it is televised to the rest of the nation—and includes singers and performers from all over the country, as well as large displays of military hardware, including fly-overs by the newest jet planes.

## Reservations
Modern government policy designed to rectify the long-standing economic and social disadvantages faced by certain poor or low-status groups by offering them preferential treatment in employment and education. This is usually done by setting aside, or "reserving," for such groups certain percentages of

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government jobs or places in institutions of higher learning, which admit people from disadvantaged communities under much lower standards than those for the general public. Those groups who qualify for such reservations are generally referred to as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, after the "schedule" or official government list on which the names of these groups appear. The Scheduled Castes are low-status **caste** Hindus, who in earlier times would have been called **untouchables**, while the Scheduled Tribes are aboriginal peoples (**adivasis**), who mainly live in central India.

Although the reservations policy has been implemented for some time, it remains a continual source of controversy. Proponents claim that it is moving socially disadvantaged people into the mainstream of Indian life and helping to correct centuries of injustice. Opponents decry the fact that less-qualified people are being deliberately chosen, making a mockery of the notion of merit. Critics also argue that the people who benefit the most from such policies are the best-off members of such communities—the so-called creamy layer, designating their position at the top—whereas the truly disadvantaged remain in the same positions as they have always been. Aside from the philosophical debates about this policy, it has had a recognizable impact on people's livelihoods. Such reservations have made competition even more ferocious for the remaining spots, and made reservations a politically volatile issue. Given the benefits derived from reservations, there has also been considerable lobbying to include other, less-disadvantaged groups under its rubric, as a way to spread benefits to other sectors of Indian society.

## Rg Veda

The oldest and most important of the four **Vedas**, which are themselves the most ancient and authoritative Hindu religious texts. The Rg Veda is a group of 1,028 hymns collected in ten books. Judging by their content, the hymns were clearly composed over a long period of time, but the actual dates are the subject of sharp disagreement. Traditional Hindus assert that the Vedas were not composed either by God or by human beings but, rather, simply heard by ancient sages through their advanced powers of perception, and then transmitted orally from generation to generation. Because of their origin, the Vedas thus belong to the class of religious texts known as **shruti** ("heard"). Scholarly consensus maintains that the Vedas were begun in the earlier part of the second millennium B.C.E., perhaps 1800–1500 B.C.E., and were finished somewhere around the end of the second millennium B.C.E., perhaps 1200–900. All these dates are highly speculative, since the hymns themselves have no internal evidence to allow precise dating, which has instead been based primarily on a comparative study of changes in the language of certain Vedas. Some of the hymns, for example, are thought to have been created relatively later than others, both because their language is less archaic and closer to classical **Sanskrit** and because the locations mentioned in them reflect a broader geographical area.

Most of the hymns in the Rg Veda are addressed to a particular **deity**. The primary deities are **Indra**, **Agni**, and **Soma**, although **Varuna** is prominent in the earliest hymns. It is generally accepted that the hymns were chanted at sacrifices as a way to invoke these deities. Evidence from the hymns themselves describes these sacrifices as large public rites, usually involving the slaughter of **animals**, which were burned on a sacrificial **fire**, and the preparation and consumption of the mysterious beverage soma. In this context, the Vedic hymns reflect a body of sacred learning known to only a small group of religious specialists. Accordingly, these hymns were never meant for universal public dissemination, since all except **twice-born** men were forbidden to hear them.

The Rg Veda's tenth and final book differs sharply from the preceding ones. Its language is closer to classical Sanskrit, and its content is far more speculative than that of the earlier books, hinting at a major conceptual shift. This book features the famous **Creation Hymn** (10.129), in which the poet speculates on how the world came to be, only to conclude that the answer may be unknown even to the creator. Another notable hymn in this book is the **Purusha Sukta** (10.90), which describes both the earth and human society as the product of a primeval **sacrifice**. The former hymn foreshadows the religious and cosmological speculation found in the texts known as the **Upanishads**. The latter, which contains the first known articulation of the four major social groups (**varnas**), along with their symbolic functions, is distinguished as foreshadowing the later **dharma literature**.

## Rhythm, in Music
See **tala**.

## Right Hand Tantra
Name for a type of **tantra**, a secret, ritually based religious practice. Certain tantric rituals make use of substances that are normally forbidden, such as **liquor** and nonvegetarian food, in an effort to unify the world by destroying all conceptual dualities, including that between sacred and forbidden. These substances are used in their actual forms in "left hand" (**vamachara**) tantric ritual, and by substitution in "right hand" (**dakshinachara**) tantric ritual. See **dakshinachara**.

## Rishabha
According to Jain tradition, Rishabha was the founder of the Jains. He is considered the first of the Jain tirthankaras, the founding figures in the Jain religious tradition. He is one of three Jain tirthankaras who are mentioned in the **Yajur Veda**, one of the earliest

The city of Rishikesh lies on the Ganges River. It contains many ashrams and is a popular place for ritual bathing.

Hindu religious texts. The figure most often credited with developing the teachings used by the Jains today is Mahavira, who is considered the twenty-fourth tirthankara.

## Rishi
Common word to designate a sage, seer, or inspired religious leader. It is most often used to indicate religious figures of the distant past, and is not usually applied to contemporary figures.

## Rishikesh
City and sacred site (**tirtha**) in the Himalayan foothills of the state of **Uttar Pradesh**. Rishikesh lies about fifteen miles up the **Ganges** River from the sacred city of **Haridwar**. As with many sites on the Ganges, Rishikesh is famous primarily as a bathing (**snana**) place, although it is also noted as a dwelling-place for **ascetics**, particularly at the **ashrams** in the area around **Lakshman Jhula**. As a sacred site, Rishikesh is also notable for having no single charter myth. According to one story, this is the place where the god **Rama** kills several **demons**, enabling the sages to carry out

their sacrifices undisturbed. Another story names this as the place where Rama does penance (**prayashchitta**) for killing the demon-king **Ravana**. A third story names Rishikesh as the site where a sage named Raibhya receives a vision of the god **Vishnu**. The most famous temple in Rishikesh is named after Rama's brother **Bharata**.

## Rishi Panchami

Festival falling on the fifth **day** (panchami) of the light (waxing) half of the **lunar month** of **Bhadrapada** (August–September). This festival is dedicated to the Seven Sages (**rishi**) born of **Brahma**: **Bhrgu**, **Pulastya**, **Kratu**, **Pulaha**, **Marichi**, **Atri**, and **Vasishtha**. Worshiping these seven sages on this day is said to bring prosperity and happiness.

## Rishyashringa

A sage in the ***Ramayana***, the earlier of the two great Indian epics. King **Dasharatha** commissions Rishyashringa to perform a great **sacrifice**, to enable the king's wives to conceive. At the conclusion of Rishyashringa's sacrifice, a shining figure emerges from the sacrificial fire, places a pot of milk-rice before Dasharatha, and directs him to feed it to his wives. Dasharatha divides the contents among his wives **Kausalya**, **Kaikeyi**, and **Sumitra**, and in due time they all bear **sons**. Kausalya is the mother of **Rama**, the *Ramayana*'s protagonist. Kaikeyi is the mother of **Bharata**, and Sumitra is the mother of **Lakshmana** and **Shatrughna**.

## Rites of Passage

General term for rites that recognize and mark transitions in an individual life-cycle, and that often signify a change of state or status. See **samskara**.

## Rites of Protection

For many Hindus, the world is a ritually dangerous place. Certain hours, days, and periods of the **year** are considered inauspicious. At these times the very tone of the cosmos is disagreeable and all sorts of bad fortune can befall the ignorant or the unwary. Rites of protection are used to counter these dangers, as well as the problems of one's past **karma**, which can be diagnosed through an inauspicious conjunction in one's birth horoscope (**natal horoscope**).

Some inauspicious times are unlucky only for certain types of activities. Potential misfortune can be avoided simply by refraining from these activities. However, certain events that cannot be avoided, such as **eclipses**, are also believed inauspicious. In such cases, one can prevent the negative effects of **inauspiciousness** by transferring it to another person, usually through the medium of gifts (**dana**); giving gifts is also the preferred means for getting rid of inauspiciousness stemming from a bad conjunction in one's birth horoscope. People also safeguard themselves by performing prayer and **worship** as positive protective forces.

Inauspicious forces are also generated by human jealousy, greed, and hatred, which can find their agency in black **magic**, the evil eye (**nazar**), or other sorts of **witchcraft**. Finally, some Hindus believe there are a host of non-human beings, such as spirits, **ghosts**, and witches, who sometimes seek to harm human beings through the exercise of supernormal powers. Despite the power and prevalence of all of these malevolent forces, if one is aware and careful of them there are ways to counter them.

For problems stemming from human malice, there are well-established solutions. One is to avoid those people who are considered inauspicious, such as **widows**. Another strategy is to avoid inciting people's jealousy by never proclaiming one's good fortune too openly, praising a child too lavishly, or flaunting one's wealth too freely. In many cases, people will counter potentially vulnerable moments in the life cycle by various protective rites. It is still common for

people to wear talismans or amulets, which are believed to protect the wearer. Another common protective measure is to carry iron, which is believed to render the person carrying it impervious to witchcraft. Young children will often have a black smudge of lamp-black put on their faces, to symbolically disfigure them and take away the motive for jealousy. Another protective strategy is to hang up an object (such as a clay pot with a painted face) intended to absorb all the bad feelings, which is then discarded. For further information see Lawrence Babb, *The Divine Hierarchy*, 1975; Gloria Goodwin Raheja, *The Poison in the Gift*, 1988; and David F. Pocock, "The Evil Eye," in T. N. Madan (ed.), *Religion in India*, 1991.

## Rock Edicts

Name for a set of **inscriptions** commissioned by the Mauryan emperor **Ashoka** (r. 269–32 B.C.E.). The inscriptions were official pronouncements on royal policy, and advice and instructions to his subjects on a variety of topics, including religious tolerance. In general, the rock edicts were carved into large boulders or rock faces in places that would have been at the borders of the Mauryan Empire, thus symbolically defining its boundaries. The text was fairly consistent throughout the empire, even though different examples of these edicts were found in widely separated places. The other major class of Ashokan inscriptions, the **pillar edicts**, were inscribed on pillars of polished **Chunar** sandstone and set up on the major roads running through the empire, where they would have been visible to passersby. See also **Maurya dynasty**.

## Rohini

In Hindu mythology, a daughter of the demigod **Daksha** who, along with her twenty-six sisters, is married to the **Moon**. The Moon favors Rohini over all her sisters, despite Daksha's entreaties to give them all equal time. In the end

Daksha lays a curse on the Moon to lose his luster. The **curse** is later modified so that the moon will alternately wane and wax, but that its disappearance will never be final.

## Rohini

(2) In Hindu mythology, birth mother of **Balarama**, the god **Krishna's** brother. Balarama's birth is unusual. After his conception the fetus is magically transported from the womb of **Devaki** to that of Rohini. This is done to protect him from harm, as Devaki's wicked uncle **Kamsa** has already killed her first seven children and will certainly do the same to Balarama if she carries him to term.

## Roy, Ram Mohan

(1774–1833) First major Indian proponent of Hindu social and religious reform, who founded the organization **Brahmo Samaj** for this purpose. He came from a wealthy Bengali family and was a successful businessman and civil servant. He moved to Calcutta in 1815, at the time when the British were first beginning to take serious notice of traditional Indian society, especially the aspects they considered "evil." Roy's reformist interests largely meshed with that of the British. From an early age Roy had rejected the practice of using images in **worship**, perhaps through exposure to Sufi ideas, and his first public crusade was against such worship of gods and goddesses. Like most Indian reformers, Roy used **Sanskrit** texts selectively, and for him the most important ones were the speculative **Upanishads**, which (under the influence of the English Unitarians) he translated to reflect a monotheism (belief in the existence of only one God). In his later years he promoted many different educational and social works, but is especially known for his opposition to **sati**, the custom of burning a **widow** on her husband's funeral pyre. Although later seen as too heavily influenced by the British, his reinterpretation of the past provided a

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model for others to use. For further consideration see Robert D. Baird (ed.), *Religion in Modern India*, 1998.

## Rta

In the **Vedas** (the oldest and most authoritative Hindu texts) rta is the cosmic order and regularity that allows the rhythms of time and the **seasons** to occur in orderly succession. According to the texts, rta also had a moral dimension, which human beings had an obligation to support. One such moral dimension was truth, which was seen as upholding the cosmos, whereas its opposite, **anrta**, came to signify falsehood. The connection between natural and moral world came through the Vedic god **Varuna**, who was both the guardian of rta and the **deity** who punished untruth, usually by affliction with **dropsy**.

## Rtvij

In the Hindu sacred texts (**Vedas**), one of the priests who officiated at **sacrifices**. The four chief priests at sacrifices were the **hotr**, **udgatr**, **adhvaryum**, and **brahman**.

## Rudra

("howler") Fearsome **deity** who first appears late in the **Vedas**, the oldest Hindu religious texts, later identified with the god **Shiva**. Several hymns in the **Rg Veda** are dedicated to Rudra, where he is identified with the storm-god **Indra**, and the fire-god **Agni**. A more developed picture of Rudra appears in the **Shvetashvatara Upanishad**, one of the later speculative texts known as the **Upanishads**. In the third chapter (adhyaya) of this text, Rudra is identified as the ruling power in the universe and the source and origin of the gods themselves. Rudra's depiction in this upanishad shows considerable ambivalence, both mentioning the destructive arrows that he bears and imploring him to appear in a form that is auspicious (shivam) and peaceful. This ambivalence

perhaps reflects the religious tension associated with the figure of Shiva, who was a deity outside the Vedic sacrificial cult but was gradually absorbed into established religion and is now one of the primary Hindu deities.

## Rudraksha

("eye of **Rudra**") The dried seed of the tree *Elaeocarpus ganitrus*, which is considered sacred to the god **Shiva**. Rudrakshas are often strung into garlands and worn by Shiva's devotees (**bhakta**). The seed itself is round with a knobby, pitted surface, with a natural channel in the middle through which a thread can easily be drawn. Each seed also has natural longitudinal lines running from top to bottom, which divide the seed into units known as "faces" (mukhi). The most common rudrakshas have five faces, but they can have up to fourteen. Each differing number of faces has been given a symbolic association with a particular **deity**. The rarest form is the **ekmukhi** rudraksha, which has no faces at all and is considered to be a manifestation of Shiva himself. This rudraksha is so valuable that street sellers routinely make counterfeit versions by carving them out of wood. Another rare form is the **Gauri-Shankar**, in which two rudraksha seeds are longitudinally joined; this is considered a manifestation of Shiva and **Shakti**. Aside from the number of "faces," the quality of rudrakshas is judged by their color and size. The color runs from reddish brown to a light brown, with the former considered more desirable, while the smaller sizes are preferable to the larger ones.

## Rudranath

Temple and sacred site (**tirtha**) in the **Garhwal** region of the **Himalayas** in the valley between the **Mandakini** and the **Alakananda** rivers, about thirty miles from the district headquarters at Chamoli. The temple's presiding **deity** is the god **Shiva** in his manifestation as "Lord **Rudra**."

Rudranath is one of the **Panchkedar**, a network of five sacred sites spread throughout the Garhwal region; the other four sites are **Kedarnath**, **Kalpeshvar**, **Tungnath**, and **Madmaheshvar**. This network of five sites is seen as a symbolic representation of Shiva's body, since Shiva is believed to dwell in the Himalayas. Rudranath is believed to be Shiva's face.

## Rudraprayag

Himalayan town and sacred site (**tirtha**) at the junction of the **Mandakini** and **Alakananda** rivers, two Himalayan tributaries of the **Ganges** River. As with all the other river junctions in the **Garhwal** region, Rudraprayag is considered an especially holy place for bathing (**snana**), although the raging currents make it dangerous. Above the junction of the rivers is a temple to **Shiva** in his form as **Rudra**. According to local tradition, this marked the place where the sage **Narada** performed physical **asceticism** (**tapas**) to gain his skill as a bard. Shiva, pleased with Narada's efforts, instructed Narada in music and remained at the spot.

## Rudra Sampraday

One of the four branches (**sampraday**) of the **Bairagi Naga** ascetics. The name *Bairagi* denotes ascetics who are devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Vishnu**. The name *Naga* describes a class of fighting ascetics recruited to protect the other Bairagi ascetics who, because they were saintly, scholarly men, could not protect themselves. Bairagi Nagas were organized in military fashion into different **anis** or "armies." Until the beginning of the nineteenth century the Nagas' primary occupation was as mercenary soldiers, although they also had substantial trading interests. The Nagas lent money at interest, engaged in trade, and often owned large amounts of property. They were particularly powerful in parts of the country where the centralized government had broken down. Their roles as mercenaries and in trade have both largely disappeared in contemporary times.



Rudraksha seed. Devotees of the god Shiva often identify themselves by wearing necklaces made of these seeds.

The Rudra Sampraday traces its spiritual lineage through the philosopher **Vallabhacharya** and the earlier religious teacher, **Vishnuswami**. The followers of Vallabhacharya tend to be householders rather than ascetics; Vallabhacharya himself was married and had many children. It is the smallest and least important of the Bairagi Naga sampradays, and the only event at which it figures is the bathing (**snana**) processions at the **Kumbha Mela**.

## Rukmini

In Hindu mythology, the chief queen of the god **Krishna** in his later life as the king of the city of **Dwaraka**. Rukmini is the daughter of the king of Vidarbha, and although both she and her parents favor her marriage to Krishna, her brother, who is Krishna's bitter enemy, makes arrangements to marry her to his friend **Shishupala**. On her wedding day, with all the guests assembled, Krishna carries Rukmini off in his chariot. They are married, and, according to tradition, have ten **sons**.

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## Sabarmati

Northern Indian river that rises in the **Aravalli Hills** in the state of **Rajasthan**, and flows south to the Gulf of Cambay in the state of **Gujarat**. It is best known as the site of the Sabarmati **Ashram**, across the river from the city of Ahmedabad in Gujarat. The Sabarmati Ashram was home to **Mohandas K. Gandhi** for sixteen years after he returned from **South Africa** in 1915. He organized much of the struggle for Indian independence from this ashram.

## Sacchidananda

**Sanskrit** compound word denoting the three generally accepted attributes of the supreme **Brahman** (the Ultimate Reality of the universe according to some Hindu traditions): being (**sat**), consciousness (chit), and bliss (**ananda**). The differences between the form of the individual words and their form in the compound are the result of **sandhi** or euphonic combination.

In certain Hindu philosophical traditions, but particularly in the **Advaita Vedanta** school, the supreme Brahman is considered the Ultimate Reality behind all things. Although Brahman is considered to be without particular qualities, these three attributes are believed to be inseparable from its very nature. It has the attribute of being, because it is the reality from which all other "being" comes. In the same way, it is consciousness, as the source of all conscious thought. Finally, bliss proceeds from its perfection, which is ultimate and complete.

## Sacred Ash

Substance used in rituals and by devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva** to mark their bodies, in imitation of their patron **deity**. The name given to this ash is **vibhuti**. See **vibhuti**.

## Sacred Sites

Hindu religious life is intimately connected to the land of India itself, which is studded with sacred sites, known as **tirthas**. These can be lakes, rivers, mountains, or any other natural feature; they can also be cities, temples, or any other created environment; they can even be the presence of holy men and **women**. Pilgrimage (**tirthayatra**) to any sacred site is a means of spiritual and religious advancement. See **tirtha**.

## Sacred Thread

A circular cord made of three strands (in which each strand itself has three strands), which is worn over the left shoulder, crossing the body to fall on the right hip. The sacred thread is given to a boy as part of the **upanayana samskara**, which is the adolescent religious **initiation** also known as the "second birth." Second birth entitles a boy to study the **Vedas**, the oldest Hindu religious texts. In the **dharma literature** this initiatory rite is prescribed for all young men belonging to the three "**twice-born**" social groups (**varnas**)—that is, the **brahmins**, **kshatriyas**, and **vaishyas**. The sacred thread would have been the most visible sign of a twice-born man, for whom wearing the thread was mandatory, since any religious acts performed without wearing it were said to be ineffective.

In modern times its presence generally means that the wearer is a brahmin, since it is mainly the brahmins who carry out this rite today. The sacred thread is worn for extended periods of time, although it must be changed at certain times: after the wearer has suffered violent impurity (**ashaucha**), such as that of death; after performing any

rite of expiation (**prayashchitta**); and after **eclipses** or other highly inauspicious times. For further information see Pandurang Vaman Kane, *A History of Dharmasastra*, 1968; and Raj Bali Pandey, *Hindu Samskaras*, 1969. The former is encyclopedic and the latter more accessible; despite their age, they remain the best sources on traditional Hindu rites.

## Sacrifice

Generally a rite involving a sacred **fire** and, often, an **offering** in that fire. This sort of ritual is rooted in the oldest part of the Hindu tradition, although it has undergone some profound changes, particularly in the decline of **animal** sacrifice. This sort of sacrificial rite is known as a **yajna**.

## Sadachara

("practice of good [people]") One of the traditional sources for determining religious duty (**dharma**) for matters not treated in the **dharma literature**, or for cases in which the literature itself gave conflicting opinions. This was the least authoritative source of dharma, after the **Vedas** (the oldest Hindu scriptures) and the dharma literature. Sadachara recognizes that life has many ambiguities and uncertainties, and at the same time provides a resource for determining the appropriate action, by taking as a model the practice of established and upright people. Another term to designate this sort of authority was **shishtachara**, the "practice of learned [people]."

## Sadasatkhyati
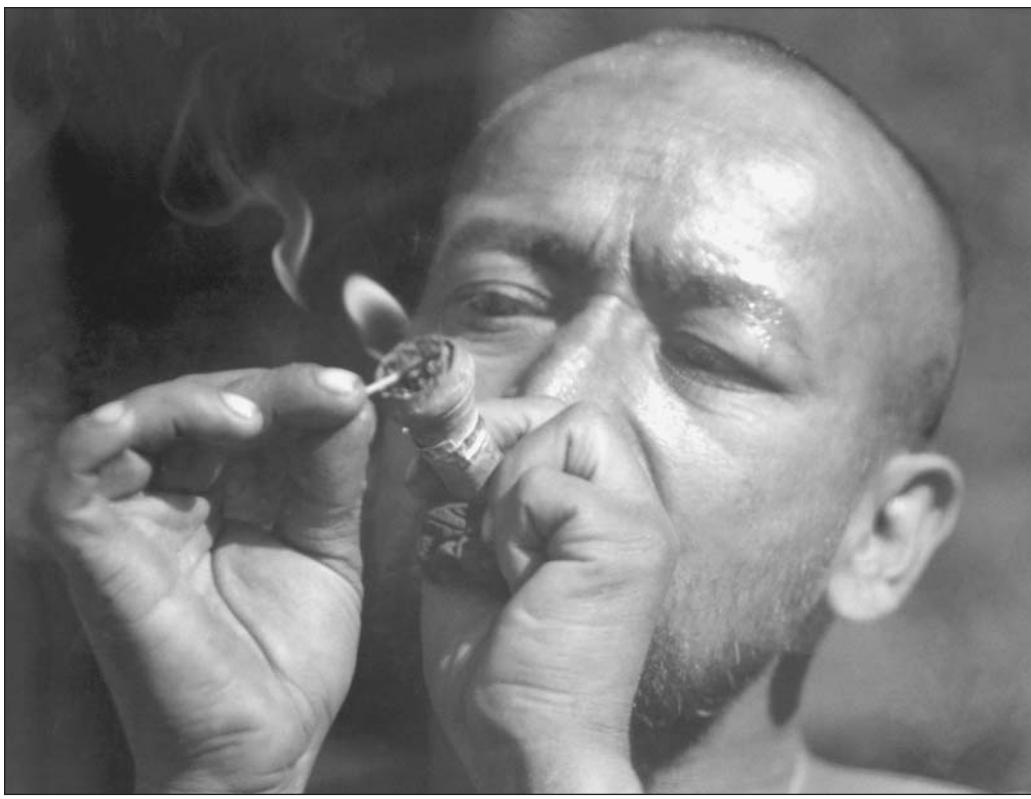
("discrimination of the unreal as the real") **Theory of error** propounded by the **Samkhya** philosophical school. All theories of error attempt to explain why people make errors in judgment, the stock example being of mistaking the silvery flash of a sea shell for a piece of silver. The Samkhya theory of error is based on dualistic metaphysics, in which the fundamental error comes in confusing **purusha** and **prakrti**—roughly, spirit and nature—which are the sources of all things. These are the two Samkhya first principles—purusha as conscious witness, and prakrti as insentient matter—which are always separate from each other, and whose attributes can never coincide. For the Samkhyas, the fundamental error is to confuse these two completely different principles—that is, to attribute powers of motion and development to purusha, and consciousness to prakrti. Purusha is conceived as conscious, but completely inactive and unchanging. It is the passive witness to the myriad transformations of prakrti going on around it.

This initial misidentification causes the **evolution** of the entire world, both the interior, subjective world and the exterior world the subject perceives. Against this background, confusing the shell for silver is just an extension of this original mistake and is rooted in it. According to the Samkhyas, perfect knowledge would protect one from all sorts of errors, both cosmic and mundane. For further information see Karl H. Potter (ed.), *Presuppositions of India's Philosophies*, 1972.

## Sadashiva

In certain schools of **tantra** practice, particularly in the **Trika** school of Kashmiri Shaivism, the name for the first step in the **evolution** of the cosmos. According to the Trika school, the Ultimate Reality, conceived as **Shiva**, is utterly nondual, and thus neither masculine nor feminine. The first step in cosmological evolution comes when the divine consciousness becomes conscious of itself through the reflection (**vimarsha**) of its original illumination (**prakasha**). Moved by this self-consciousness, the unqualified divine being transforms itself into a divine being containing a masculine and feminine nature, the first of many such bipolar dyads from which the universe is born. The masculine part of this first dyad is Sadashiva, which is considered the

A man smokes from a chillum wrapped with a safai, a cloth used to cool the smoke before it is inhaled.

material cause of the universe. The energy for creation comes from the creative and dynamic power of the dyad's female principle, **Shakti**. For further information see Jaideva Singh, *Pratyabhijnanahrdayam*, 1982.

## Sadhana

("accomplishing") The most common colloquial Hindu term designating established and regular religious practice. It is given this name because it is through such practice that one gains spiritual attainments. In modern **Hindi**, the word can also be used to refer to anything to which one has devoted a great deal of time, attention, and hard work.

## Sadharana ("common") Dharma

In the **dharma literature**, the religious duties required of all human beings, including truth, generosity, and compassion. One's essential obligation, however,

is to fulfill one's own **dharma** (**svadharma**), which may supersede or even contradict the requirements of the common dharma. For instance, it is generally accepted that a king must occasionally disregard truth to be an effective ruler. Since a king's primary duty is to maintain peace and order in the country, so that other people have the opportunity to do their duties, he is required to do whatever it takes to accomplish this.

## Sadhu

("virtuous man") A general term that can be used for any **ascetic**, although it more often refers to an ascetic who has not undergone formal **initiation** into an established ascetic order.

## Sadhubela

In the time before the partition of India in 1947, Sadhubela was the name of the most important **ascetic** center for the **Udasi** ascetics; it was in Sukkur

in the province of Sindh province, now in Pakistan.

## Sadhya

("to be proved") Element in the accepted form of an inference (**anumana**) in Indian **philosophy**. An acceptable inference has three terms: an assertion (**pratijna**), a reason (**hetu**), and examples (**drshtanta**); each of these three has its own constituent parts. The sadhya is, along with the **paksha**, one of the two parts of the assertion. The paksha is the subject of the hypothesis and names a class of things, while the sadhya contains the claim to be proven about that class. In the standard example, in which the hypothesis is "this mountain is on fire," the paksha is "this mountain" (the class of things about which a claim is being made); and the sadhya, or thing to be proven, is "is on fire."

## Safai

Small cloth wrapped around the base of a **chillum**, a clay cylinder used for smoking a mixture of tobacco and hashish (**charas**). The safai serves two purposes, one ritual and one physical. On one hand, it forms a barrier intended to prevent passing the ritual impurity (**ashaucha**) carried by saliva when the chillum is being passed from person to person. Ascetics who are very conscious of **purity** or status will often wrap their own safai around the base of the chillum before smoking. Aside from helping to protect personal purity, the safai also serves a practical purpose–it is usually dipped in **water** before being wrapped around the chillum, which serves to cool and mellow the smoke being drawn through it.

## Sagar

In Hindu mythology, a celebrated king of the **Solar Line**. Sagar, the son of King Subahu and his wife Yadavi, gets his name because one of Yadavi's co-wives has given her poison (gara) while she is pregnant with him. Sagar has a very hard early life. His father is driven from his kingdom even before he is born, and Sagar is raised at the **ashram** of the sage Aurva, where his mother has taken asylum. When he comes to maturity Sagar embarks on a series of military campaigns in which he wins back all the lands his father lost, and becomes a righteous and religious king whose only concern is his lack of progeny.

To beget **sons**, Sagar calls on the sage **Bhrgu**, who gives Sagar's two wives a choice: one wife will bear 60,000 sons who will all die childless, and one wife will bear one son who will carry on the line. Each of his wives chooses, and in due course both have their children—**Keshini** delivers her one son in the normal way, whereas **Sumati** delivers a lump of flesh that is divided and put into 60,000 pots, each of which develops into a handsome son.

In his prosperity King Sagar continues to sponsor religious rites, and is on the verge of completing his hundredth horse **sacrifice** (**asvamedha**), which will entitle him to the throne of **Indra**, the god who is the king of **heaven**. To forestall this, Indra steals the sacred horse and hides it in the ashram of the sage **Kapila**. Sagar sends his 60,000 sons to search for the horse, but they make the mistake of insulting the sage, who burns them all to ash through his yogic powers. To rescue their souls it is necessary to bring down the **Ganges** from heaven, a job that Sagar's descendants diligently attempt to complete. After several generations of frustration, his great-great-grandson **Bhagirath** is finally successful.

## Sagara Dashanami

One of the ten divisions of the **Dashanami Sanyasis**, renunciant ascetics who are devotees (**bhakta**) of **Shiva**. The Dashanamis were supposedly established by the ninth-century philosopher **Shankaracharya** in an effort create a corps of learned men who could help to revitalize Hindu life. Each of the divisions is designated by a

different name—in this case, sagara ("ocean"). Upon **initiation**, new members are given this name as a surname to their new **ascetic** names, thus allowing for immediate group identification.

Aside from their individual identity, these ten "named" divisions are divided into four larger organizational groups. Each group has its headquarters in one of the four monastic centers (**maths**) supposedly established by Shankaracharya, as well as other particular religious associations. The Sagara Dashanamis belong to the **Anandawara** group, which is affiliated with the **Jyotir math** in the Himalayan town of **Joshimath**.

## Saguna

("with qualities") Anything having distinguishing qualities. In the context of ideas about divinity it refers to particular **deities** with particular attributes. In the religious traditions based on the ideas of the **Upanishads**, the speculative texts that are the final texts in the **Vedas**, any manifestation of a deity with qualities is seen as ultimately inferior to the unqualified (**nirguna**) **Brahman**. This assumption is adamantly opposed by certain theistic traditions, such as the **Gaudiya Vaishnava** religious community, which insists that the highest deity, in this case **Krishna**, has a particular form (and thus certain qualities).

## Sahadeva

Fifth of the five **Pandava** brothers who are the protagonists in the great Hindu epic, the *Mahabharata*. Sahadeva's mother is **Madri**, who is the junior wife of King **Pandu**. None of the Pandava brothers are actually Pandu's sons, since he has been cursed to die the moment he holds his wife in an amorous embrace. Madri conceives her sons magically, using a **mantra** given to her co-wife, **Kunti**, by the sage **Durvasas**. The mantra gives the woman who recites it the power to call down any of the gods and to have by him a son

equal in power to the god. With Pandu's blessing Kunti teaches the mantra to Madri, who meditates on the **Ashvins**, the divine twins who are the physicians of the gods, and thus bears the twins **Nakula** and Sahadeva. As the sons of the physicians of the gods, both are skilled healers of animals and human beings. Although they are among the five Pandava brothers, they are less important to the *Mahabharata* than their three elder siblings.

## Sahajiya

Religious community originating in medieval Bengal. The Sahajiyas synthesize devotional practices to the god **Vishnu** and the ritual practices of the secret tradition known as **tantra**, particularly the extreme practices associated with the "left-hand" (**vamachara**) tradition of tantra. The name *sahajiya* comes from the word *sahaja* ("natural" or "spontaneous"), indicating the group's belief that one's natural passions, qualities, and tendencies should not be suppressed but should be channeled to help one gain final liberation of the soul (**moksha**). Over this foundation of tantric ritual practice was added the devotion to the god **Krishna** and his consort **Radha**, a devotional thrust strongly influenced by the **Gaudiya Vaishnava** religious community, founded by the Bengali saint **Chaitanya**. For further information see Shashibhushan B. Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cults*, 1962; and Edward C. Dimock Jr., *The Place of the Hidden Moon*, 1989.

## Sahasradalapadma

In many schools of **yoga**, and in the religious tradition known as **tantra**, one of the sites in the **subtle body** (an alternate physiological system believed to exist on a different plane than gross matter but with certain correspondences to the material body). The subtle body consists of a set of six psychic centers (**chakras**), which are visualized as six multipetaled lotus flowers running roughly along the

course of the spine and connected by three vertical channels. Each of these chakras has important symbolic associations—with different human capacities, with different subtle elements (**tanmatras**), and with different seed syllables (**bijaksharas**) formed from the letters of the **Sanskrit** alphabet, thus encompassing all sacred sound. Above and below these centers are the bodily abodes of **Shiva** (awareness) and **Shakti** (power), the two divine principles through which the entire universe has come into being. The underlying assumption behind this concept of the subtle body is thus the homology of macrocosm and microcosm, an essential Hindu idea since the time of the mystical texts known as the **Upanishads**.

The sahasradalapadma is the site at the apex of the **subtle body**, visualized as a "thousand-petaled lotus" located in the crown of the head. This is identified as the bodily abode of Shiva, where he is ever-present. In tantra, final liberation (**moksha**) comes through the divine union of Shiva and Shakti in one's own body. This is done through awakening the **kundalini**, the bodily correlate of Shakti that lies dormant at the base of the spine, and drawing the kundalini up to the sahasradalapadma to effect the divine union. The sahasradalapadma is identified with the seed syllable *Om*, the symbol of completeness and perfection. For further information see Arthur Avalon (Sir John Woodroffe), *Shakti and Shakta*, 1978; Philip S. Rawson, *The Art of Tantra*, 1973; and Douglas Renfrew Brooks, *The Secret of the Three Cities*, 1990.

## Sai Baba

Name used by two different charismatic Hindu teachers, now distinguished by the addition of other names. The earlier of the two is **Shirdi Sai Baba** (d. 1918), so named for the town in the state of **Maharashtra** where he lived much of his life. The latter figure, **Sathya** ("true") **Sai Baba** (b. 1926), is a modern Hindu religious figure of the type known as a **godman**, who claims to be the reincarnation of Shirdi Sai Baba.

## Sainhikeya

In Hindu mythology, **demon** who appears in the story of churning the Ocean of Milk. After the gods and demons join forces to churn the Ocean of Milk and obtain the nectar of immortality (**amrta**), the gods succeed in tricking the demons out of their share. As the gods divide this nectar among themselves, the demon Sainhikeya slips into the distribution line and is mistakenly served some as well. As the demon drinks it, the **Sun** and **Moon** alert the god **Vishnu** to his presence and Vishnu cuts off the demon's head with his discus. Although the head and body are separated, both parts become immortal through their contact with the nectar. The head becomes **Rahu**, while the body becomes **Ketu**, both of which are considered malevolent **planets** in Indian astrology (**jyotisha**). According to tradition, Rahu is also the cause of **eclipses**: He roams the sky, chasing the Sun and Moon, and tries to get revenge by swallowing them, but the two planets always pass unharmed out of his severed neck. See also **Tortoise avatar**.

## Sakata Chauth

Festival falling on the fourth **day** (chauth) of the dark (waning) half of the **lunar month** of **Magh** (January–February), which is celebrated as the birthday of the god **Ganesh**. Those who observe this festival are believed to gain Ganesh's blessings—wisdom, freedom from troubles, and prosperity. The fourth day of every lunar fortnight is sacred to Ganesh, and vows marking this day may be performed by his devotees (**bhakta**). The biggest Ganesh festival of the **year** is not his birthday, but **Ganesh Chaturthi**, which falls on the fourth day of the bright (waxing) half of the lunar month of **Bhadrapada** (August–September).

## Sakha ("companion") Bhava

The third of the five **modes of devotion** to the Supreme Being that were most prominently expressed by **Rupa Goswami**. Rupa used different types of human relationships as models for the possible relationships between **deity** and devotee (**bhakta**). These five models increased in emotional intensity from the peaceful (**shanta**) sense that comes from realizing one's complete identity with **Brahman**, or Supreme Reality, to conceiving of God as one's master, friend, child, or lover. In the sakha bhava, devotees consider themselves as God's friends and companions and thus as taking part in his regular, everyday activities.

## Sakhi

("friend," "companion") The motif of friendship as a religious ideal was well developed by the devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Krishna**, and to a lesser extent by devotees of the god **Rama**. Both of these **deities** are **avatars** (incarnations) of the god **Vishnu**, and **Vaishnava** devotion tends to stress not only **worship** of the chosen deity, but also the notions of relationship and communion—both between the deity and devotee, and among devotees themselves. Vaishnava religious practice often involved elaborate visualization exercises, in which devotees would envision the deity's daily activities—for Krishna, the simple life of a village cowherd, and for Rama, the life of a prince. Some devotional manuals give detailed daily schedules of the deity's activities to facilitate this process of visualization. Such elaborate visualization allowed the devotees to symbolically enter the deity's world and take part in the deity's divine play (**lila**) on **earth**, building a relationship with God through sharing the mundane elements of everyday life. In this sort of visualization, devotees commonly considered themselves to be the deity's sakhis or companions—in some cases male companions, and in other cases female companions of the deity's consorts, **Radha** and **Sita**. Taking on the persona of a sakhi provided a devotee with a concrete place in the divine world, in which he or she could both observe and participate in the god's earthly activity.

## Sakshin

("witness") The perceiving consciousness believed to be the inner Self (**atman**), which observes changes going on around it but is utterly unaffected by them. It is described in a primitive way as early as the **Upanishads**, the speculative texts that form the final layer of the **Vedas**, the most authoritative Hindu religious texts. The **Katha** Upanishad describes the Self as a thumb-sized person inside the head. The **Samkhya** philosophical school develops this notion in a more subtle and sophisticated way: of its two fundamental first principles, one is the **purusha**, which is the conscious but inert witness to the transformations of **prakrti**, or nature. Later philosophical schools such as **Vedanta** reject the Samkhya school's dualism by collapsing all reality into a single ultimate principle known as **Brahman**. Vedanta's conception of Brahman as "being-consciousness-bliss" (**sacchidananda**) also conceives of the Self as the conscious and unchanging witness to the material flux surrounding it.

## Sala

In **Hindi**, "wife's brother." The term can be used as a serious insult if applied to someone who is not related in this way. Calling someone "sala" implies that the other is in a position of relative subservience, since he is a member of the family that "gives" the bride. It also implies that one is having sexual relations with that person's sister, an allegation that is an insult to a family's honor, whether or not it is true.

## Salmala ("Silk-Cotton Tree") Dvipa

In traditional mythic geography, the third of the seven concentric landmasses (**dvipas**) making up the visible world. See also **cosmology**.

## Samadhi

("trance") In the **ashtanga yoga** first codified by the philosopher **Patanjali**, the last of the eight elements of yoga practice. Along with **dharana** ("concentration") and **dhyana** ("meditation"), samadhi is one of the three practices that make up the "inner discipline" (**samyama**), the culmination of yogic training. Samadhi is described as a state in which the mind is conscious of only the object of concentration, and is devoid of any notion of the self as perceiver. Once one has attained samhadi on the conscious plane, one supposedly pursues it on more subtle inner planes.

The loss of subjectivity in samadhi is believed to make people unaware of the outside world, such that they will not respond to stimuli and may sometimes appear almost dead. For this reason, the **burial** places of deceased ascetics are usually referred to as **samadhi shrines**, since it is popularly believed that they are not dead, but only rapt in deep meditation.

## Samadhi Shrine

**Burial** place of a deceased ascetic. Part of the process of **ascetic initiation** is the initiate's ritualized death, in which he (or far more rarely, she) performs his (or her) own funeral rites, followed by rebirth with a new name and a new identity. Consequently, upon the physical death of an ascetic the funeral rites (**antyeshthi**) are not performed, since the ascetic is (ritually speaking) already dead. The body is often disposed of by being weighted down with rocks and thrown into a river, but well-known and powerful ascetics are often buried, usually in a sitting position as if in meditation. Such people are often buried in

places associated with their presence during their lives—whether a room, building, or particular outdoor site. In popular wisdom such ascetics are believed not to be dead but only rapt in deep meditation (**samadhi**). The samadhi shrines of very renowned ascetics often have shrines built over them, which can become places of pilgrimage for those seeking the ascetic's continuing blessings (**ashirvad**).

## Samana

In traditional Indian physiology, one of the five bodily **winds** considered responsible for basic bodily functions, the others being **prana**, **apana**, **vyana**, and **udana**. The samana wind is considered to reside in the navel, and to aid in the process of digestion.

## Samasthana

In **yoga** practice, sitting position in which the legs are bent, with the soles of the feet pressed flat against one another and the outer edges of the feet on the ground. See **utkutikasana**.

## Samavartana ("return") Samskara

The fourteenth of the life-cycle ceremonies (**samskaras**), which marks the end of a young man's life as a celibate student (**brahmacharin**) and the return to his parental home. The most important element in this rite is a bath, after which the young man changes into new clothes, marking his change in status. The young man is supposed to ask his **guru's** permission before performing the ceremony, and gives him his teacher's fee (**dakshina**), both as payment for services rendered and as a sign of respect. Shortly after his return to his natal home, the young man usually gets married. In modern times this rite is not often observed, due to the decline of the traditional paradigm of the brahmacharin **stage of life**, although sometimes it is performed in preparation for a marriage.

The four Vedas in Sanskrit. The Sama Veda is the second of the four Vedas.

## Samavaya

("**inherence**") Fundamental category in the worldview of the **Nyaya-Vaisheshika** philosophical school. This school conceives of the world as made up of atomistic parts, which are connected to form larger things. The fundamental function of samavaya is as a subtle glue to connect various things: wholes and their parts, substances and their attributes, motions and the things that move, and general properties and their particular instances. It also connects both pleasure and pain to the Self. Thus samavaya is the fundamental thing holding the universe together. The philosophical problems raised by the idea of inherence—particularly the claim that inherence was one single principle, and not a collection of things—were ultimately responsible for the rise of **Navyanyaya** school, which attempted to explain these relationships in a more sophisticated way.

## Sama Veda

Traditionally considered the second of the four **Vedas**, the oldest and most authoritative Hindu religious texts. The Sama Veda is a collection of hymns, arranged for singing as one of the components of the Vedic sacrifices (**yajna**). While drawn mostly from the **Rg Veda**, the singing patterns are far more elaborate than the simple chanting generally associated with the Rg Veda. Thus it is believed that the Sama Veda developed later than the Rg Veda.

## Sambandar

(7th c.) One of the earliest of the **Nayanars**, a group of sixty-three southern Indian poet-saints who were devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva**. Along with their contemporaries the **Alvars**, who were devotees of **Vishnu**, the Nayanars spearheaded the revitalization of Hindu religion through their passionate devotion (**bhakti**) to a personal god, conveyed in hymns sung in the **Tamil language**. Along with his contemporary

**Appar**, Sambandar actively opposed the unorthodox sects of the times, particularly the Jains, whom he reviles in his poems. The depth of his hatred can be seen in a well-established tradition that, after converting the king of **Madurai**, of the **Pandya dynasty**, from Jainism to Shaivism, Sambandar was instrumental in having eight thousand Jain ascetics executed by **impalement**. The collected hymns of the three most important Nayanars—Appar, Sambandar, and **Sundaramurtti**—comprise the *Devaram*, the most sacred of the Tamil Shaivite texts. See also **Shaiva**.

## Samharakrama

("destruction method") Ritual in the **Shrividya** school of the secretive religious practice known as **tantra**. This ritual uses the **shrichakra**, a symbolic diagram used in **worship**. The adept's ritual journey starts at the outer edges of the shrichakra, which represents the apparently "real" everyday world, and gradually moves toward the center, where a single point (**bindu**) represents absolute unity. This process is called "destruction" because the ritual process systematically deconstructs the notion of the dualistic world and destroys the notion of a Self that is separate from the Absolute Reality. For further information see Douglas Renfrew Brooks, *The Secret of the Three Cities*, 1990.

## Samhita

("collection") The most archaic textual layer in the **Vedas**, comprising hymns to the Vedic **deities**, benedictions, prayers, spells, and litanies. The term indicates that this group of texts is a collection of various things important, not only for their cognitive meaning, but for their power as **mantra** (sacred sound). The samhitas were chanted during rites of **sacrifice** and remain the oldest living part of the Hindu tradition. Following the samhitas are the three later textual levels: the **Brahmanas**, which are essentially manuals detailing correct performance of the sacrifice, and the **Aranyakas** and the **Upanishads**, which ask speculative questions about the power behind the sacrifice.

## Samkalpa

("intention") Important ritual sequence at the beginning of many religious rites in which the person performing the rite states his or her identity, the time and place at which the action is being performed, the performer's intention to carry out this particular ritual act, and the benefits desired from the action. The samkalpa is important as the formal commitment to perform the stated action. For ritual actions that promise several different possible benefits—for example, **birth** in **heaven** or final liberation—performing the samkalpa is believed to give one the result one desires.

## Samkhya

("enumeration") One of the **six schools** of traditional Hindu **philosophy**, whose founding text is the *Samkhyakarikas*, written by **Ishvarakrishna** in the third century B.C.E. Samkhya espouses an atheistic philosophical dualism positing two fundamental principles as the source of all things. The first of these is called **purusha** ("person"), which is conscious, but completely inactive and unchanging. It is seen as a passive witness to the transformations going on around it. As the source of consciousness, purusha is ultimately identified with an individual's true and eternal Self. Purusha is inferred as plural, given the plurality of conscious beings, combined with the fact that one person can gain enlightenment while all the rest remain in bondage.

The other fundamental principle is **prakrti**, ("nature"), which provides the object to the purusha's subject. Prakrti is better conceived of as force or power rather than a specific material object. Prakrti contains within it forces with three different primordial qualities (**gunas**):

**sattva** tends toward the good, **rajas** towards activity or passion, and **tamas** towards darkness and decay. In the primal prakrti these three forces are in perfect equilibrium, each perfectly balancing the others. The two principles of purusha and prakrti are distinct, separate, and alone.

When prakrti's initial equilibrium is disturbed, it sets in motion a pattern of **evolution** that creates both the exterior physical world and the interior psychological world. From prakrti emerges **mahat** ("the great one"), which has as its psychological counterpart the subtlest form of mental activity (**buddhi**). From buddhi evolves **ahamkar**, which contains the first real ideas of individual identity. From ahamkar evolves the mind (**manas**), the sense organs (**jnanendriyas**), the organs of action (**karmendriyas**), and the subtle elements (**tanmatras**); from the last evolve the gross elements that actually make up the material world. All of these evolutes—material or psychic—have a differing balance of the three gunas, which ultimately determines their character as wholesome, active, or unwholesome. Throughout this process of evolution, purusha remains unchanged, a mere witness to prakrti's unceasing transformations. Their mutual functioning is described using the metaphor of the lame man (purusha) being carried by the blind man (prakrti).

The ultimate source of bondage, according to the Samkhya school, comes because people do not recognize the difference between these two principles. Through this lack of discrimination between the two, the Self (purusha) appears as if it is an agent, and the evolutes (from prakrti) as if they are conscious. The Samkhyas illustrate this misunderstanding using the example of the rose behind the crystal, in which the latter appears to be colored but is in fact unchanged. Although for the Samkhyas prakrti undergoes real transformations, the primary problem is epistemological—that is, how one comes to know things—rather than ontological, or rooted in the nature of things themselves. Since the purusha never changes, there is no question of making it into anything else or regaining the way that it used to be; the real problem is making the distinction between the differing realities of these two principles. Once this has been done, the evolution of prakrti is said to reverse, leaving the purusha again in its state of magnificent isolation (**kaivalya**). Of course, once one has a developed (if erroneous) idea of (conventional) personality, this discrimination becomes all the more difficult. This mistaken idea becomes the basis for one's volitional actions (**karma**) and one's emotional dispositions. One's actions and dispositions reinforce each other, and both of these are undergirded by the notion of a Self.

The Samkhya metaphysics were adopted wholesale by the **yoga** philosophical school, and the two schools are usually mentioned together—Samkhya as the theoretical foundation, and Yoga as the practical component. One of Samkhya's lasting contributions to Indian thought is the idea of the gunas, a basic concept running through Hindu culture. Another influential but less pervasive idea is their model of evolution, which has been adapted by other schools but often subsumed under theistic assumptions in which God is the source of both consciousness and the material world. The one philosophical problem that the Samkhya could never surmount was to explain the source of bondage, given their starting assumptions. If purusha and prakrti are completely separate, how could the two of them interact—much less mistake one for the other—and how did the process of evolution begin? Although their contributions remain significant, they were largely eclipsed by **Vedanta**, which claimed that the problem is ignorance of the Self and not-Self, and that the world around us is not an actual evolution, but only an illusory transformation (vivarta). This philosophical model is called **Vivartavada**. For further information see Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and

Charles A. Moore (eds.), *A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy*, 1957; and Gerald Larson and Ram Shankar Bhattacharya (eds.), *Samkhya*, 1987.

## Sampraday

("tradition") Literally, "that which is handed down," or the transmitted body of teachings that distinguishes one religious group from another. Belonging to a particular sampraday is based on having received teachings from one's spiritual preceptor (**guru**), thus becoming part of a spiritual lineage, and continuing the life of that sampraday by transmitting the teachings to disciples. Although the sampraday is often translated as "sect," this loses its sense of uniqueness within particular theistic traditions. For example, one can speak of different sampradays among Tamil **Shaiva** brahmins, by virtue of their differing spiritual lineages, even though they **worship** the same **deity** and share a common cultural heritage.

## Samsara

("wandering") The cycle of reincarnation, one of the most fundamental assumptions throughout all Indian religion. In the Indian worldview, reincarnation involves a series of births and rebirths in different realms and forms, all based on the quality and quantity of **karma**, formed through previous actions and patterns of thought. Beings with good karma may be born into the **heavens**, which are essentially realms of pleasure and carefree enjoyment; those with bad karma may be reborn as **animals** or as **ghosts**, or into realms of punishment, such as **hells**. Neither pleasure nor punishment is eternal, although they may last an extremely long time. Beings in heaven enjoy the results of their past actions, but when their good karma is exhausted they must take another, lower birth; beings in realms of punishment are paying for their evil deeds, but when this has been done they will take another birth, presumably in some higher status.

Between these two lies the human realm, which comprises infinite possibilities, based on various factors—such as high status or low, wealth or poverty, health or disability, and the religious piety of one's natal family. Varying mixtures of good and bad karma combine for many different human circumstances, and according to popular belief one's present life and body are a record of one's past. The notion that people are, in life, where they deserve to be because of karma can be seen as the basis for the **caste** system. Fulfilling one's particular social role (**svadharma**), no matter how humble, not only upholds the social order but is a means for individual spiritual advancement.

The human realm is widely believed to be the best of all for spiritual life, partly because human beings can make rational choices, including the decision to take part in religious life. In this humans are different from animals, which are driven mainly by their instincts, and from ghosts or hell-dwellers, who are simply expiating their past acts. At the same time human life, unlike life in the heavens, is full of reverses and sorrow continually reminding human beings about the transience of life and possessions and the need to engage in spiritual development. Embodied existence is a constant cycling from one realm to the next, leaving one body and assuming another, and the inherent uncertainty of this condition has led to the search, dating from the time of the speculative texts known as the **Upanishads**, for an unchanging state, completely out of this cycle of rebirth. This unchanging state is widely accepted as life's supreme goal, although in any generation very few actively seek it, with most people content to relegate it to some indefinite future lifetime. For further information see Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty (ed.), *Karma and Rebirth in Classical Indian Traditions*, 1980.

The chudakarana samskara, in which a child's head is shaved as a rite of purification.

## Samskara

("making perfect") Collective name for the various life-cycle ceremonies in Hindu society. Although status in Indian society depends most on one's **birth**, this alone is not sufficient to become a complete and finished person. In an individual's development, the raw material given by nature must be refined through the process of culture, or the

action of samskaras. This process of transformation begins before birth, with the three **prenatal** samskaras, and continues to death with the **antyeshthi** samskaras. In general, samskaras transform people in two ways: by removing latent or residual impurities, such as the childhood **chudakarana samskara**, or by generating new capacities and entitlements, such as the **upanayana** (**initiation**) and **vivaha** (marriage) **samskaras**.

Although different writers in the **dharma literature** disagree on the number of samskaras, traditionally, sixteen are accepted. Three were prenatal samskaras: one to ensure conception (**Garbhadhana**), one to ensure the birth of a boy (**Pumsavana**), and one to ensure an easy delivery and a healthy child (**Simantonnayana**). Six samskaras were associated with childhood: ritual actions immediately after birth (**Jatakarma**), name-giving (**Namakarana**), the first outing (**Nishkramana**), the first solid food (**Annaprashana**), head-**shaving** (**Chudakarana**), and piercing of the ears (**Karnavedha**). Five samskaras were connected with life as a celibate student (**brahmacharin**): beginning of learning (**Vidyarambha**), adolescent religious initiation (**Upanayana**), the beginning of **Veda** study (**Vedarambha**), the first shave (**Keshanta**), and the return home at the conclusion of studies (**Samavartana**). The final two samskaras were marriage, and the last rites for the dead (**antyeshthi samskara**).

These sixteen samskaras were the rites for a **twice-born** man, whom this literature considered the default person. A twice-born man was one born into one of the three "twice-born" **varnas**—**brahmin**, **kshatriya**, or **vaishya**—who were ritually eligible for the adolescent religious initiation known as the "second birth." **Women** in the twice-born groups would undergo all the rites through the **childhood rites**, but would have no further rites until marriage, which was considered equal to all samskaras for them. People born outside the twice-born groups—namely, **shudras** and **untouchables**—would perform few if any of these rites.

These life cycle rites drive and govern the formation of the individual. In modern times many of these samskaras are still performed, but mainly by brahmins who, because of their traditional role as priests and scholars, conserve this practice to help maintain their traditional prestige. For further information see Pandurang Vaman Kane, *A History of Dharmasastra*, 1968; and Raj Bali Pandey, *Hindu Samskaras*, 1969. The former is encyclopedic and the latter more accessible; despite their age, they remain the best sources about traditional Hindu rites.

## Samudra Gupta

(r. 335–376) The second monarch in the **Gupta dynasty**, **son** of **Chandra Gupta I**. During his reign Samudra Gupta made significant territorial gains from the Gupta dynasty's home base in eastern **Uttar Pradesh** and **Bihar** westward to the **Ganges** basin and eastward into Bengal and **Assam**. **Orissa** and much of the **Coromandel** Coast gave tribute as independent but vassal states. Samudra Gupta left a personal account of his prowess inscribed on a stone column at **Allahabad**. This column had originally been carved to display one of the **Pillar Edicts** of the Maurya emperor **Ashoka** (r. 269–232 B.C.E.), and in claiming it as his own Samudra Gupta was attempting to appropriate some of the **Maurya dynasty's** luster.

## Samvad

("dialogue") Technical term for the speaking parts in the **Ramnagar Ram Lila**, a dramatic presentation of the *Ramayana* staged annually at the fortified town of Ramnagar, near **Benares**. The dialogues are interspersed with recitations from the *Ramcharitmanas*, a vernacular retelling of the *Ramayana* written by the poet-saint **Tulsidas** (1532–1623?), and render the archaic language of the *Ramcharitmanas* into modern vernacular **Hindi**. The action in

the Ram Lila alternates between contemporary and archaic text.

## Samyama

("inner discipline") In the **ashtanga yoga** first codified by the philosopher **Patanjali**, a collective name for the last three stages in yoga practice, namely **dharana**, **dhyana**, and **samadhi**. These stages are concerned with focusing and disciplining the mind, and are the most subtle and internalized elements in yogic practice.

## Sanaka

In Hindu mythology, one of four sages born of the god **Brahma**, who are paradigms of **asceticism**; the other three are **Sanandana**, **Sanatana**, and **Sanatkumara**. When Brahma emanates these four sages, he commands them to begin the work of creation, but they are so detached from worldly concerns that they refuse to do so. They are celibate their entire lives, study the **Vedas** from childhood, and always travel together.

## Sanakadi

("**Sanaka** and the others") In Hindu mythology, a collective name for four sages born of **Brahma** who are paradigms of **asceticism**; the four sages are Sanaka, **Sanandana**, **Sanatana**, and **Sanatkumara**. When Brahma emanates them, he commands them to begin the work of creation, but they are so detached from worldly concerns that they refuse to do so. They are celibate their entire lives, study the **Vedas** from childhood, and always travel together.

## Sanaka Sampraday

One of the four branches (**sampraday**) of the **Naga** class of the **Bairagi** ascetics. Bairagi ascetics are devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Vishnu**. The Nagas are fighting ascetics hired by the other Bairagis to protect them. The Naga class is organized in military fashion into different **anis** or "armies." Until the beginning of the nineteenth century their primary occupation was as mercenary soldiers, although they also had substantial trading interests; both of these have largely disappeared in contemporary times. The Sanaka Sampraday traces its spiritual lineage from the **Nimbarki** sect, founded by **Nimbarka**. Members of this sect **worship Radha** and **Krishna** as a divine couple, with both **deities** holding equal status.

## Sanandana

In Hindu mythology, one of four sages born of the god **Brahma** who are paradigms of **asceticism**; the other three are **Sanaka**, **Sanatana**, and **Sanatkumara**. When Brahma emanates these four sages, he commands them to begin the work of creation, but they are so detached from worldly concerns that they refuse to do so. They are celibate their entire lives, study the **Vedas** from childhood, and always travel together.

## Sanatana

In Hindu mythology, one of four sages born of the god **Brahma** who are paradigms of **asceticism**; the other three ascetics are **Sanaka**, **Sanandana**, and **Sanatkumara**. When Brahma emanates these four sages, he commands them to begin the work of creation, but they are so detached from worldly concerns that they refuse to do so. They are celibate their entire lives, study the **Vedas** from childhood, and always travel together.

## Sanatana ("eternal") Dharma

In the **dharma literature**, the ultimate and eternal moral order of the universe. It is the eternal ideal pattern revealed in the **Vedas** (the oldest and most authoritative Hindu religious texts). This pattern must be upheld to maintain the stability of society. All aspects of religious duty (**dharma**) aim ultimately toward

the maintenance and fulfillment of this order, including common religious duties (**sadharana dharma**), religious duties stemming from social status (**varna dharma**) and **stage of life** (ashrama dharma), and individualized religious duty (**svadharma**). In more recent times, the term has been used by Hindus to identify the religious tradition known to the outside world as "Hinduism."

## Sanatana Sampraday

Another name for the **Nimbarki** religious community. The philosopher **Nimbarka** was the community's historical founder, but, according to the Nimbarkis, the actual founder was the god **Vishnu** himself. One of Vishnu's disciples was named **Sanatana** ("eternal"), hence the name of the **sampraday**.

## Sanatkumara

In Hindu mythology, one of four sages born of the god **Brahma** who are paradigms of **asceticism**; the other three are **Sanaka**, **Sanandana**, and **Sanatana**. When Brahma emanates these four sages, he commands them to begin the work of creation, but they are so detached from worldly concerns that they refuse to do so. They are celibate their entire lives, study the **Vedas** from childhood, and always travel together

## Sandarshana ("expositing") Mudra

In Indian **dance**, **sculpture**, and ritual, a particular symbolic hand **gesture** (**mudra**), in which the tips of the thumb and index finger are touching, with the rest of the fingers extended and the palm facing the viewer. This is the hand gesture used to signify explanation or exposition, and for this reason it is also known as the **vyakhyana** ("teaching") **mudra**. Since the teaching gesture indicates a person of higher spiritual attainment, it is also known as the chit ("consciousness") mudra.

## Sandhabhasha

Symbolic language used in **tantra**, a secret, ritually based religious practice. The literal translation of the term is disputed; it is often translated as "twilight language" because of its shadowy and mysterious character, but Agehananda Bharati is emphatic that the term means "**intentional language**." The elements of tantric **worship** and practice are described in a coded language drawn from the parts and functions of the human body considered private by most standards. Such coded discourse is used to hide the tradition's essentials from noninitiates and also to project the speakers into an altered understanding. For noninitiates, such language reinforces the general conception of tantric practitioners as completely debased. Douglas R. Brooks reports in *The Secret of the Three Cities*, 1990, that although widely used in Buddhist tantra, Sandhabhasha is less common among Hindus, who for their coded language favor using common words with contextually technical meanings. For further information see Swami Agehananda. Bharati, *The Tantric Tradition*, 1977; Appendix A in Linda Hess and Shukdev Singh (trans.), *The Bijak of Kabir*, 1983; and Douglas Renfrew Brooks, *The Secret of the Three Cities*, 1990.

## Sandhi

("junction") In classical **Sanskrit** grammar, a term for the euphonic (harmonic) combination of words. In general this is done by modifying the final phoneme of one word, based on the initial phoneme of the following word, to facilitate a smooth verbal transition between the two. An example is the compound word **sacchidananda**, which designates the three essential aspects of the ultimate unqualified **Brahman**, and is formed from the words *sat* ("being"), *chit* ("consciousness") and *ananda* ("bliss").

## Sandhya

("union") Morning and evening twilight, the two transitional times between day and night and thus, metaphorically, the times when day and night are united. The word also often denotes certain rites performed daily at morning, noon, and evening, the three times when different parts of the day are in union. These rites are prescribed in the **dharma literature** as mandatory for all **twice-born** men, that is, all men from the **brahmin**, **kshatriya**, or **vaishya** groups who have undergone the adolescent religious **initiation** known as the "second birth." At present time these rites are performed only by the most orthodox brahmins.

## Sangam

("coming together") Meeting-place for two rivers and the point at which their capacity for purification is believed to be heightened. The most famous such site is the confluence of the **Ganges** and the **Yamuna** rivers at the city of **Allahabad**, but numerous other such sites exist throughout the Indian subcontinent.

## Sangama Dynasty

See **Vijayanagar dynasty**.

## Sangam Literature

Collection of classical literature from the Tamil culture, composed during the early centuries of the common era; Sangam (also spelled Cankam) means "academy." The most famous texts in Sangam literature are eight collections of short poems. Three of these collections fall into the genre called puram ("the outer part"); the other five are in the genre called akam ("the inner part"). Puram poetry was "public" verse, describing the deeds of kings, war, death, and other heroic actions. Akam poetry was about an individual's inner experience, especially cultured love, of which the Sangam poets distinguished five developed moods: union, patient waiting, unfaithfulness, separation, and hardship. Each of these moods had well-developed symbolic associations, including associations with a specific type of landscape, time of **day** and **year**, flora, fauna, and types of people; such richly developed symbolism gives these poems incredible symbolic depth. The akam poems are arguably the literary antecedents to devotional (**bhakti**) poetry, which first developed in **Tamil Nadu**. For further information see A.K. Ramanujan (trans.), *The Interior Landscape*, 1994; and Glenn Yocum, "Shrines, Shamanism, and Love Poetry: Elements in the Emergence of Popular Tamil Bhakti," in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion,* Vol. 41, No. 1, 1973. See also **Tamil epics** and **Tamil language**.

## Sanjaya

Minister of the blind king **Dhrtarashtra**, an important older figure in the Hindu epic the ***Mahabharata***. Sanjaya tries valiantly to avert the war that is the epic's climax by counseling the king to better control his son **Duryodhana**, and to deal more equitably with his nephews the **Pandavas**, the five brothers who are the epic's protagonists. In the end, the king ignores Sanjaya's advice. Sanjaya is most famous for his ability to see anything he thinks about ("tele-vision"). This power is given to him as a gift from the sage **Vyasa** so he can describe the progress of the war to Dhrtarashtra without actually having to be there. After the war, Sanjaya goes to live in the forest with Dhrtarashtra, and it is he who informs the Pandavas about the blind king's death in a forest fire.

## Sanjaya Belatthiputa

Agnostic thinker in early Indian **philosophy** whose views are alluded to in the Buddhist scriptures. The scriptures portray Sanjaya as an advocate of profound agnosticism with regard to another world, the effects of good and evil deeds, and just about every facet of religious life.

## Sanjna

In Hindu mythology, the daughter of **Vishvakarma**, workman and architect for the gods. Sanjna has been married to **Surya**, the **Sun**, but finds his dazzling radiance too much to bear. To help his daughter adjust to her husband, Vishvakarma trims off some bits of the sun with his divine tools, removing enough of his radiance that Samjna can bear to be with him. The trimmed-off parts of the sun are used to build the **Pushpak Viman**, an **aerial car**, as well as the god **Vishnu's** discus (**chakra**), the god **Shiva's** trident, and various other divine weapons.

## Sankalpa

Spoken ritual performed before a religious act. The person about to perform the act identifies himself by name, tells the location of the act, and gives the lunar **calendar** date and time. He goes on to describe the religious act and what benefits he wants to receive as a result. Sankalpa is done before rituals such as **suicide** and doing morning **puja** to the **Ganges**. See **samkalpa**.

## Sankarshana

("dragging away") Epithet of the god **Krishna's** brother **Balarama**, referring to Balarama's unusual prenatal development—he is conceived by Krishna's mother **Devaki** but is magically transferred into the womb of her co-wife **Rohini**. This is done to protect him from harm, since Devaki's wicked uncle **Kamsa** has already killed her first seven children, and will certainly do the same if she carries Balarama to term. See **Balarama**.

## Sankat Mochan

("freeing from distress") Epithet of a particular form of the monkey-god **Hanuman**, whose main temple is on the southern part of **Benares**. Sankat Mochan has been an increasingly popular form of Hanuman since the 1970s. As with all manifestations of Hanuman, Sankat Mochan is considered a strong protective **deity**, with the power to rescue his devotees (**bhakta**) from all kinds of trouble and misfortune.

## Sankat Mochan

(2) A temple in the southern part of **Benares** dedicated to the monkey-god **Hanuman** in his form as Sankat Mochan. The temple does not have a long history but first became famous in the nineteenth century through some **Ramanandi** ascetics living there, whose piety drew visitors to the spot. In modern times, the temple has become popular because the image of Hanuman is believed to be very powerful, but also accessible—qualities that lead petitioners to come with requests and leave with the assurance that help is forthcoming.

## Sankranti

("transition") The transition of a celestial body (**sun**, **moon**, or **planet**) from one sign of the **zodiac** to another. Such transitions can give the celestial bodies or the time in question positive or negative qualities. The most important of these celestial bodies is the sun, whose two directional transitions—northward at **Makara** Sankranti, and southward at **Karka** Sankranti—define more and less auspicious times for the entire **year**.

## Sanskrit

("perfected") For much of Indian history, Sanskrit was the language of the cultural and religious elite. Even in the twentieth century, it is still the language with the highest religious status. Its name reflects the religious conviction that it was the perfect language—the language of the gods. Sanskrit was essentially fixed in the fourth century B.C.E. by the **grammarian Panini** in his *Ashtadhyayi*. Since it has not changed from Panini's time, Sanskrit is no longer considered a "natural" language. Even in Panini's time, Sanskrit would have been a person's second language, learned by conscious study after acquiring a grammatically simpler mother tongue (one of the **Prakrits**)

An illustrated page of Sanskrit from the first chapter of the *Devimahatmya*.
The illustration depicts the opening episode, in which a king and a merchant visit a hermit.

through the normal process of language learning. In a religious context Sanskrit has primarily been the province of **brahmins**, serving both as a sacred language and a common language through which the brahmins from various areas could communicate with each other. Its place of pride as the religious language *par excellence* has been somewhat undercut by the influence of the devotional (**bhakti**) religious movement. One of this movement's pervasive features was poetry composed in vernacular languages, which reflected the conscious choice to speak in a language that everyone could understand.

## Sant

Literally, someone who has found the truth, or who is searching for it. The word is derived from the **Sanskrit** word **sat** ("truth"). More generally it refers to two major groups of devotional (**bhakti**) poet-saints. One group was centered around the temple of **Vithoba** at **Pandharpur** in the state of **Maharashtra**, and includes saints from the **Varkari Panth** community such as **Namdev**, **Tukaram**, **Chokamela**, and **Eknath**. The other group included later poet-saints from various places in northern India, among them **Kabir**, **Ravidas**, **Dadu**, and Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh community.

As a group the sants shared certain general tendencies rather than an explicit body of doctrine. Sant religion was inclined to stress an individualized, interior religion leading to a personal experience of the divine, rather than participation in established cults. One of the most common sant themes was their disdain for external ritual, and the general rejection of any **worship** using images. The northern Indian sants are the most uncompromising advocates of **nirguna** devotion, in which the divine is seen as beyond conception; but even among the Pandharpur devotees (**bhakta**) the stress was on devotion to the god Vithoba, rather than actual worship. The sants stressed the power of the divine Name and its ability to remove all obstacles. They disregarded **caste** distinctions, viewing them as an arbitrary barrier dividing the human community. They stressed instead the value of **satsang**, and the transforming effects that such "good company" could bring. Satsang thus formed an egalitarian community through the common bonds of faith and devotion, as an alternative to the hierarchical society established by birth.

It is sometimes suggested that all of these themes can be traced to the sants' social background, since many of them

came from very low caste communities. It is certainly true that devotees of low social status would have been forbidden even to enter temples, much less worship the images in those temples, and thus a religious path emphasizing the Name and interior religious experience, which are accessible to everyone, might have seemed a more viable option. In the same way, the socially oppressed might find the notion of an alternative, egalitarian community immensely attractive. Yet to reduce the sant tradition to a simple reaction by marginal social groups cannot explain why one of its major figures is Eknath, a **brahmin**. Such reductionist analyses ignore the sant movement's real thrust, namely the passionate search for the divine that permitted no compromises and no excuses. For further information see Karine Schomer and W. H. McLeod, *The Sants*, 1985.

## Santal

Tribal (**adivasi**) community in northern India, particularly in the border districts of **Bihar** and **West Bengal**. As with most tribals in India, many are very poor and make a precarious living as cultivators.

## Santoshi Ma

("the mother who satisfies") **Goddess** who is one of the most fascinating Hindu **deities**, and whose recent explosive popularity illustrates both the flexibility of the Hindu pantheon, and the way that Hindu religion reflects and responds to changes in Indian society. Santoshi Ma's popularity was largely inspired by a film released in 1975, *Jai Santoshi Ma* ("Victory to Santoshi Ma"). The film first details the birth of Santoshi Ma as the daughter of the god **Ganesh**, but then cuts to the earthly problems suffered by one of her devotees (**bhakta**), **Satyavati**. Satyavati is a new bride having problems adjusting to her marital home, particularly because of tensions with her wicked sisters-in-law. By the end of the film, through Satyavati's steadfast devotion to Santoshi Ma, all of her problems are resolved.

This film did not invent Santoshi Ma, although it was largely responsible for spreading her **worship**. The prescriptions for Santoshi Ma's religious vow (**vrat**) had existed before the film was made, and both the rite's charter myth and the film focus on the problems of a new bride and their eventual resolution through her steadfast devotion to Santoshi Ma. Santoshi Ma's ultimate source is a mystery, but her iconography suggests that she is an amalgam of other female deities. She is seated on the lotus, a feature associated with the goddess **Lakshmi**; she wields the sword associated with the goddesses **Kali** and **Durga**, as well as the trident associated with the god **Shiva**. She shows the attributes associated with both married and unmarried goddesses: Like the married goddesses, she is nurturing and caring to her devotees, playing the role of the benevolent Indian mother, and like the independent unmarried goddesses, she is powerful and and potentially dangerous—one of the film's climactic scenes shows her utterly destroying a temple after Satyavati's sister-in-law intentionally ruined the sanctified food (**prasad**) meant for her devotees. Yet she is also believed to have the power to grant her devotees' requests, no matter how large. Through her nurturing, benevolent character coupled with power, she crosses the usual boundaries associated with Hindu goddesses.

Part of the popularity of Santoshi Ma's vrat comes from its simplicity, cheapness, and promise of benefits. The observance is usually kept by **women** with the aim of attaining concrete goals for themselves and their families: getting a job, passing an exam, conceiving a child, or arranging a marriage. The rite involves weekly fasting (**upavasa**) and worship. One of the social factors cited in Santoshi Ma's explosive popularity is the steadily growing uncertainty in Indian (and South Asian) life, which makes very ordinary things difficult to attain and necessitates the use of all possible resources. In this context, an inexpensive rite that promises

concrete benefits for assiduous devotion is an attractive option. See also **Santoshi Ma Vrat**.

## Santoshi Ma Vrat

Religious observance celebrated on **Fridays** in homage to the **goddess Santoshi Ma** ("the mother who satisfies"). This religious vow (**vrat**) is usually kept by **women** with the aim of attaining concrete goals for themselves or (more commonly) their families: getting a job, passing an exam, conceiving a child, or arranging a marriage. When one's wish has been granted, a final ceremony calls for the observant to feed eight **brahmin** boys a meal of rice, yogurt, and bananas. After this concluding rite, one is no longer required to observe the vow, although many women choose to continue performing it as a means to maintain the household's general good fortune.

The Santoshi Ma Vrat has become extremely popular throughout northern India since the late 1970s, one reason being that it is simple and inexpensive. On the day of the fast (**upavasa**) the worshiper should not eat until the evening meal, although tea and other beverages are generally allowed. In the late afternoon the worshiper should light a lamp in front of a picture of Santoshi Ma, offer her small amounts of chickpeas and raw sugar—things that can be found in even the poorest households—and read aloud the rite's charter myth, which tells how a poor, unfortunate woman solved all her family's troubles through her devotion to Santoshi Ma. After this, the worshiper may eat the evening meal, although it is also subject to restrictions: Since Santoshi Ma is a goddess associated with sweetness, the food must not contain any sour, spicy, or bitter seasonings. This observance thus carries the two common features of most religious vows: some form of **worship** and modification of one's diet, with the promise of benefits in return.

## Sanyasi

("renunciant") According to the **dharma literature**, the last of the idealized **stages of life** (ashrama) for a **twice-born** man, that is a man born into the **brahmin**, **kshatriya**, or **vaishya** communities. Boys born into these communities are eligible for the adolescent religious **initiation** known as the "second birth." After engaging in religious learning as a celibate student (**brahmacharin**), marrying and raising a family as a householder (**grhastha**), and gradually detaching himself from the world as a forest-dwelling recluse (**vanaprastha**), a twice-born man should finally renounce all possessions and all attachments to devote himself exclusively to the search for ultimate truth. Although in a general sense the word *Sanyasi* can (and sometimes does) refer to any such renunciant, it is most used as the name of a particular **ascetic** community, the **Dashanami Sanyasis**, who are believed to have been founded by the great philosopher **Shankaracharya**, and who are devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva**.

## Sanyasi Rebellion

Name given by the British to a long-term struggle in the Bengal region in the latter half of the eighteenth century. This was the period in which the British East India Company was consolidating its economic, political, and military control over the region, causing wide-ranging dislocations in traditional Bengali society. Among the entrenched powers with which the British clashed were organized bands of soldier-ascetics, both Hindus and Muslims. These soldier-ascetics were significant local forces, with both military and economic power gained through mercenary services, trading, and money-lending, and they competed with the British East India Company for political authority and land revenue.

Conflict between the British and the ascetics peaked shortly after the Bengal famine of 1770–1771. The rebellion was caused partly by competition for greatly

reduced agricultural revenue and by British-sponsored changes in land ownership patterns, in which officials in the East India Company replaced many of the "unprofitable" traditional landowners with their own Company employees. Many of the traditional landowners owed money to **ascetic** moneylenders (Sanyasis), and had pledged their land revenue as security. The Sanyasis were upset when the landowners were replaced and the debts not honored. For their part, the Company's officials were reluctant to allow the ascetics, who traveled in heavily armed bands, to pass through the company's territories while on religious pilgrimage, as the ascetics had traditionally done. Ultimately the ascetic attacks were disorganized and local, and the disparate **Sanyasi** bands were unable to withstand British resources and organization. A fictionalized account of the Sanyasi Rebellion appeared in the novel *Anandamath*, by **Bankim Chandra Chatterjee** (1838–1894), who used the Sanyasi Rebellion as a coded call for resistance to contemporary British rule.

## Sapaksha

One of the parts of an acceptable form of inference (**anumana**) in Indian **philosophy**. An acceptable inference has three terms: an assertion (**pratijna**), a reason (**hetu**), and examples (**drshtanta**); each of these three has its own constituent parts. The sapaksha is part of the third term, the examples. It is a positive example given to support the claim made in the initial assertion, by showing that similar things happen in comparable cases. For example, in the inference, "there is **fire** on the mountain, because there is smoke on the mountain," the sapaksha could be "as in a kitchen," since this place has both fire and smoke, and thus supports the initial assertion. Conventionally, an inference also has to have a negative example, to show that the claim made in the assertion does not happen in some other cases.

## Saphala Ekadashi

Religious observance falling on the eleventh day (**ekadashi**) of the dark (waxing) half of the **lunar month** of **Paush** (December–January). All the eleventh-day observances are dedicated to the **worship** of **Vishnu**. Most Hindu religious festivals have certain prescribed rites, which usually involve fasting (**upavasa**) and worship and often promise specific benefits for faithful performance. Those performing this rite must stay up all night singing and telling of Vishnu's exploits. The name *Saphala* means "successful," and those who faithfully observe this will be successful in all their endeavors.

## Sapinda

("having a common body") Term for people having common ancestry, who could thus be said to share the same body through the ancestor. This relationship was held to cease after seven generations on the father's side, and after five on the mother's. Men and women who were sapinda were theoretically forbidden to marry, although this prohibition has been routinely ignored in southern India since very early times. See also **marriage prohibitions**.

## Sapindikarana

Funerary rite (**antyeshthi samskara**) performed on the twelfth day after death, which symbolically represents the one-year anniversary of the death. In this rite, the departed person is transformed from a potentially dangerous wandering spirit (**pret**) to a benevolent **ancestral spirit** (pitr). Each day for ten days following a person's death, mourners leave a ball of cooked grain (**pinda**) for the departed spirit. Gradually the ten pindas "construct" a new body for the departed person. Then sapindikarana is performed on the twelfth day. A large pinda, representing the departed, and three smaller ones are collected, representing the departed's father, grandfather, and great-grandfather. The rite's

A groom and bride circle the sacred fire during the marriage ceremony,
a rite often combined with the saptapadi, or the seven steps.

central moment comes when the departed's pinda is divided into three parts, one part is mixed with each of the other three pindas, and finally all three pindas are combined into one. At the moment the three pindas are combined, the departed is believed to have become one (sapindi) with his ancestors, and to have been transformed from a wandering spirit into an ancestor as well. This twelfth day rite is the last of the funerary rites performed on a strict timetable. Mourners may wait for years before performing the final rite of **asthi-visarjana**, in which bone and ashes from the dead person's **cremation** pyre are immersed

in a sacred river, although with the advent of better transportation this is sometimes now performed before the twelfth day rites. In addition, people still perform annual memorial rites for the deceased. For an excellent account of this rite, see David M. Knipe, "Sapindikarana: The Hindu Rite of Entry into Heaven," in Frank E. Reynolds and Earle H. Waugh (eds.), *Religious Encounters With Death*, 1977.

## Saptapadi

("seven steps") The most important rite in the Hindu **marriage ceremony**, in which the bride and groom take seven steps together to symbolize their marital union. The seventh step completes the transfer of the bride from her natal family to the groom's family and is also the point when the marriage becomes permanent. As described in the **dharma literature**, the bride and groom would perform this rite by taking seven steps in a straight line. In contemporary times this rite is often combined with the **agnipradakshinam** ("circumambulating the **fire**"), in which the bride and groom make seven revolutions around a small fire—considered to be a form of the god **Agni** and thus the divine witness to the marriage. While circling the fire, the bride and groom are often physically joined by tying part of his turban to the edge of her sari as a visible sign of their marital union.

## Saptasindhu

("seven seas") In traditional mythic geography, the seven oceans surrounding the seven concentric landmasses (**dvipas**) that make up the visible world. Each of these seven seas is composed of a different substance. The ocean accessible to human beings is composed of salt water, but the oceans beyond that are composed of sugarcane juice, wine, ghee (clarified butter), yogurt, milk, and sweet water. Few specific details exist about most of these oceans, but the Ocean of Milk has a prominent place in Hindu mythology, since it was by churning this that the gods obtained the nectar of immortality (**amrta**). See also **Tortoise avatar**.

## Sarama

In the **Rg Veda**, the earliest Hindu sacred text, a servant of the storm-god **Indra**. In Rg Veda 10.108, Sarama is sent as an emissary to Indra's enemies, the **Panis**, to inquire where they have hidden the **cows** they have stolen, and to threaten them with Indra's wrath if they do not reveal their location.

## Saraswat

Traditional Indian society was modeled as a collection of **endogamous**, or intermarried, subgroups known as **jatis** ("birth"). Jatis were organized (and their social status determined) by the group's hereditary occupation, over which each group has a monopoly. This sort of differentiation applied even to **brahmins**, whose role has been to serve as priests, scholars, and teachers. The Saraswats are a brahmin jati counted as one of the five northern Indian brahmin communities (**Pancha Gauda**); the other four are the **Gaudas**, the **Kanaujias**, the **Maithilas**, and the **Utkalas**. Unlike most other brahmin communities, which had a well-defined core region, the Saraswats are found in several widely separated locations. One group lived in the coastal region of Sindh in modern Pakistan, although after Partition in 1947 most of the group migrated to Bombay. Another group was located in prepartition **Punjab**, although here too they have tended to migrate away from the part of Punjab in modern Pakistan. A third branch, known as the Gauda Saraswats, is found on a narrow strip of coastline in the southern Indian state of **Karnataka**. The Saraswat community takes its name from **Saraswati**, patron **goddess** of speech and learning, and, as a group, is famous for its erudition and piety.

A depiction of Saraswati, the goddess associated with art, aesthetics, learning, sacred speech, and wisdom.

## Saraswati

**Goddess** associated with art, aesthetics, learning, sacred speech, and wisdom. Saraswati is the patron **deity** of culture in all its manifestations. The spoken word is considered very powerful in Hindu culture and Saraswati can either promote or frustrate one's efforts by conferring or withdrawing the ability to speak clearly. Her association with sacred speech goes back to the time of the sacrificial manuals known as the **Brahmanas**, in which the cult of **sacrifice** was based on the precise performance of sacred speech and ritual.

Her iconography emphasizes her connection with the life of the mind: She holds a book, a crystal (symbolic

of a purified mind), a **vina** (musical instrument), and a rosary (associated with religious rites, and particularly with the repetition of the sacred sounds known as **mantras**). Her animal vehicle is the swan, whose white color is a symbol of **purity** and whose high flight is a symbol of transcendence. Through Saraswati's blessings (**ashirvad**) human beings can transcend their biological condition to create works of art and culture.

Saraswati is usually believed to be married, although different mythic sources give her different husbands. In some cases she is described as the wife of the god **Brahma**, the creator; here their joint activity encompasses the formation of the material world and its transformation through human cultural activity. In other stories she is described as the wife of the god **Vishnu**, and thus a co-wife of **Lakshmi**. Here the realms of Lakshmi and Saraswati can be seen as giving differing messages about the "good things" in life—while Lakshmi grants wealth and material prosperity, Saraswati brings wisdom and culture. A popular Indian saying reports that Saraswati's devotee (**bhakta**) will never make money, while a follower of Lakshmi (whose vehicle is the **owl**) will be "blind" to spiritual wisdom. For more information on Saraswati and all the goddesses of Hinduism, see David R. Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, 1986.

## Saraswati Dashanami

One of the ten divisions of the **Dashanami Sanyasis**, renunciant ascetics who are devotees (**bhakta**) of **Shiva**. The Dashanamis were supposedly established by the ninth-century philosopher **Shankaracharya** in an effort to create a corps of learned men who could help to revitalize Hindu life. Each of the divisions is designated by a different name—in this case, **Saraswati** (the patron **goddess** of learning and culture). Upon **initiation**, new members are given this name as a surname to their new **ascetic** names, thus allowing for immediate group identification.

These ten "named" divisions of Dashanami Sanyasis are divided into four larger organizational groups. Each group has its headquarters in one of the four monastic centers (**maths**) supposedly established by Shankaracharya, as well as other particular religious associations. The Saraswati Dashanamis belong to the **Bhuriwara** group, which is affiliated with the **Shringeri math** in the southern Indian town of **Shringeri**. The Saraswati division is elite in that it is one of the few that will initiate only **brahmins** (the other such divisions are **Ashrama**, **Tirtha**, and part of the **Bharati** order).

## Saraswati River

One of the seven sacred rivers of India, along with the **Ganges**, **Yamuna**, **Godavari**, **Narmada**, **Indus**, and **Cauvery**. The Saraswati is particularly interesting because no one is sure exactly where this river is located. A river by this name is mentioned in the hymns of the **Vedas**, the earliest and most authoritative Hindu religious texts, and thus the Saraswati River would seem to have been in the northeastern part of India, in which these hymns are set. In modern times a Saraswati River flows through the northern Indian state of **Haryana** and dries up in the desert of the state of **Rajasthan**. Archaeologists have found extensive settlements from the **Indus Valley civilization** on its banks, indicating that in earlier times the river was an active tributary of the Indus. Popular belief holds that the Saraswati continues to flow underground, and joins the Ganges and Yamuna Rivers at their confluence in **Allahabad**. This reputed confluence of three sacred rivers is the source for one of the site's names, **Triveni** ("triple stream").

## Sarmanochegas

According to the Greek writer Strabo, the name of an **ascetic** who was part of a delegation sent to Athens by a king of the **Pandya dynasty**, met by Augustus in

Athens in 20 B.C.E. In Athens, Sarmanochegas, tired of a life of bondage on earth, committed religious **suicide** by burning himself on a pyre.

## Sarvadarshanasangraha

("Collection of all [philosophical] views") A philosophical encyclopedia composed by **Madhava** in the late fourteenth century. In this text, Madhava compiled the views of all the existing philosophical schools, which he placed in hierarchical order, based on his judgment of their truth value. The **materialist** schools were ranked the lowest and least reliable since their proponents completely denied the virtue of any religious life. After this came various Buddhist schools, whose low standing can be attributed to the widespread perception that they were nihilists (**nastikas**). Madhava then moves through the various Hindu philosophical schools, finishing with the **Advaita Vedanta** school—his own—which was judged the highest and most perfect expression of the truth. Although the Sarvadarshanasangraha is a polemical text with a clear bias, it is one of the few extant sources that considers the perspectives of all the existing schools.

## Sarvam Idam Khalu Brahman

("Truly, this universe is **Brahman**") In the Hindu philosophical tradition, one of the "great utterances" (**mahavakyas**) expressing the ultimate truth, here the sameness of the individual Self (**atman**) with the Supreme Reality (Brahman).

## Sarvasvara

Sacrificial rite found in the **Vedas**, the oldest and most authoritative Hindu religious texts. The most notable feature of the sarvasvara is that it involved the **suicide** of the sacrificer, who concluded the rite by entering the sacrificial fire. The sarvasvara is an extreme example of the class of ritual actions known as **kamya karma**, which consists of action performed solely because of the performer's desire (**kama**) to obtain certain benefits. This element of desire makes kamya karma different from the other two classes of ritual action, **nitya karma** and **naimittika karma**, which were each in some way obligatory. The sarvasvara could be undertaken to obtain any outcome, such as **birth** in **heaven** as a god, or rebirth in a royal family. The sacrificer declares the benefit in the part of the rite called the **samkalpa**. Although the sarvasvara had extreme elements, it was completely voluntary.

## Sashanka

(7th c.) King of Bengal who was an ardent devotee (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva** and a fierce opponent of Buddhism, which was deeply entrenched in his domain. According to reliable historical reports, Sashanka not only persecuted the Buddhists themselves but also tried to destroy the tree in Bodh **Gaya** under which the Buddha gained enlightenment. This is one of the few well-documented cases of **religious persecution**.

## Sat

In Indian philosophical thought, the most basic denotation for "that which (really and truly) exists." The term is a present participle of the verb "to be," so a fairly common translation is "Being," but the word also carries connotations relating to the idea of Truth—that things that exist are both "real" and "true." Sat is the first of the three attributes traditionally ascribed to the unqualified, ultimate **Brahman** as **sacchidananda**, along with consciousness (chit) and bliss (**ananda**).

## Satavahana Dynasty

Central Indian dynasty whose core area was in the **Deccan** plateau in the western state of **Maharashtra**, and whose capital was in the city of **Paithan**. The Satavahana dynasty was at its peak from the first to the third centuries, when it ruled an area spanning the modern

states of **Gujarat**, **Madhya Pradesh**, Maharashtra, **Karnataka**, and **Andhra Pradesh**. It was in the Satavahana domains that the first cave temples were constructed in the **chaitya** and **vihara** architectural styles, which paved the way for later architectural forms.

## Satguru

("true **guru**") In the **sant** religious tradition, an epithet (label) that can refer either to the Supreme Being or to a genuinely realized religious teacher, through whose instruction a disciple attains the Supreme Being. The sants were a loose group of central and northern Indian poet-saints who lived between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries and who shared several general tendencies: stress on individualized and interior religion, leading to a personal experience of the divine; disdain for external ritual, particularly image **worship**; faith in the power of the divine Name; and a tendency to ignore conventional **caste** distinctions. Many of the sants, particularly in northern India, thought of the divine as without qualities (**nirguna**) and beyond human powers of conception. Given these aniconic and occasionally iconoclastic tendencies, it is not surprising that the sant tradition highlights the importance of the spiritual teacher (guru), since the guru's human form is the only image that a disciple has to work with. In human form, the satguru guides the disciple's spiritual practice and thus becomes the vehicle for spiritual attainment. Yet a true guru, according to the tradition, always remains a servant rather than a master, maintaining and transmitting the teaching of his or her particular lineage. The sant notion of the satguru has been adopted into many modern Hindu movements, most notably the **Radha Soami Satsang**.

## Sathya Sai Baba

(b. Satya **Narayana** Peddi Venkappa Raju, 1926) Modern Hindu teacher and religious figure who presides as religious teacher (**guru**) over millions of devotees (**bhakta**), both Indian and foreign. He was born in the small village of **Puttaparthi** in the state of **Andhra Pradesh**, where his main **ashram** is still located. He first claimed to be an incarnation of **Shirdi Sai Baba**, a Maharashtrian saint, at thirteen—a move that gave him religious authority and obviated the need to accept a human guru and a spiritual lineage. Sathya Sai Baba has since stated that he will be reincarnated a third time, thus eliminating awkward questions about a successor. His fame rests upon his supposed **magic** powers, particularly the ability to heal and to materialize objects from thin air. Sai Baba has many middle- and upper-class Indian devotees, whom he obliges to perform service (**seva**) to others. Some observers are highly skeptical about his reputed powers and about Sai Baba in general. For further information see Lawrence Babb, "Sathya Sai Baba's Saintly Play," in John Stratton Hawley (ed.), *Saints and Virtues*, 1987; "Sathya Sai Baba and the Lesson of Trust," in *Redemptive Encounters*, 1987; and "Sathya Sai Baba's Miracles," in T. N. Madan (ed.), *Religion in India*, 1991.

## Sati

Hindu **goddess**, **daughter** of the demigod **Daksha** and wife of the god **Shiva**, whose death and dismemberment are pivotal incidents in the mythology of both Shiva and the **Goddess**. According to legend, after Sati marries Shiva, her father Daksha feels that Shiva has not shown him proper respect and develops bad feelings toward him. Inflated with pride, Daksha plans a great **sacrifice** to which he invites all the gods but deliberately excludes Shiva. When Sati learns about the sacrifice, she insists that she wants to go, since it is in her natal home. Shiva, after trying to discourage her by pointing out that one should not go without an invitation, finally gives her his permission. When Sati arrives at the sacrificial grounds and asks

Daksha why he has excluded her husband, Daksha responds with a stream of abuse, excoriating Shiva as worthless and despicable. Humiliated by these public insults, Sati commits **suicide**—in some versions, by leaping into the sacrificial **fire**, in others by withdrawing into yogic trance and giving up her life.

Shiva, furious at what has happened, creates the fierce **deity Virabhadra** (or in some versions, Virabhadra and the fierce goddess **Bhadrakali**), and dispatches them to destroy Daksha's sacrifice. They gleefully carry out his command, scattering the guests and killing Daksha. The resulting carnage ends only when the assembled gods praise Shiva as the supreme deity. Daksha is eventually restored to life with the head of a goat, and he too repents his arrogance and worships Shiva. At Daksha's request, Shiva agrees to remain at the sacrificial site forever and sanctify it. Shiva takes the form of a **linga**, the pillar-shaped object that is his symbolic form, and can still be seen at the **Daksha Mahadev** temple in the town of **Kankhal**.

Although Shiva's anger has been pacified by this **worship**, he is disconsolate at Sati's death and wanders the **earth** carrying her body on his shoulders. In his grief, Shiva neglects his divine functions, and the world begins to fall into ruin. The gods, concerned over the world's imminent destruction, go to the god **Vishnu** for help. Vishnu then follows behind Shiva and uses his razor-sharp discus to gradually cut away pieces of Sati's body, until finally there is nothing left. When the body is completely gone, Shiva leaves for the mountains, where he remains absorbed in meditation until it is broken by **Kama**. Sati is reborn as the goddess **Parvati** and later remarries Shiva.

The myth connected with the figure of Sati is important for several reasons. First, it provides the charter myth for the **Shakti Pithas** ("bench of the Goddess"), a network of sites sacred to the Goddess that spreads throughout the subcontinent. Each of these Shakti Pithas—in some lists there are fifty-one, and in others 108—marks the site where a part of Sati's body fell to earth, taking form there as a different goddess. These differing goddesses, spread all over the subcontinent, are thus seen as manifestations of this one primordial goddess, united by the symbolism of the human body. Aside from establishing this network, the myth has several other important messages: It graphically illustrates the supremacy of devotion (in this case, to Shiva) over the older sacrificial cult; it illustrates some of the tensions in the joint family, in which **women** feel the conflict of loyalty between their natal and their marital homes; and it is the charter myth for the **Daksha Mahadev** temple in the town of Kankhal, just south of the sacred city of **Haridwar**, where Daksha's sacrifice is claimed to have taken place. See also **pitha**.

## Satkaryavada

One of the three **causal models** in Indian **philosophy**, along with **asatkaryavada** and **anekantavada**. All three models seek to explain the relationship between causes and their effects in the everyday world, which has profound implications for religious life. All the philosophical schools assume that if one understands the causal process correctly, and can manipulate it through one's conscious actions, it is possible to gain final liberation of the soul (**moksha**). Thus, disagreements over different causal models are not merely academic disputes but are grounded in basically different assumptions about the nature of things. The satkaryavada model assumes that effects preexist in their causes, which can thus be seen as transformations (real or apparent) of those causes. The classic example is the transformation of milk to curds, butter, and clarified butter. According to satkaryavada proponents, each of these effects was already present in the cause, and emerges from it through a natural transformation of that cause.

This causal model tends to reduce the number of causes in the universe, since anything can be seen as a transformation of other things. Given these strong

Women singing hymns at a neighborhood temple during a satsang in Ahmedabad, Gujarat.

relationships, if one can understand how these relationships work, they can be manipulated to one's advantage. The disadvantage of this model is that it can lead to **fatalism**. In a world in which everything occurs through natural transformation, it can seem as if the universe is running under its own power, and that human actions may not be able to influence such strong relationships. The philosophical schools espousing this model are the **Samkhyas**, proponents of **Bhedabhada**, **Ramanuja's Vishishthadvaita Vedanta**, and the various branches of **Advaita Vedanta**. The first three believe that the difference between cause and effect is a genuine transformation of the cause, whereas the Advaita school stresses that this transformation is only apparent, and that the real source of bondage (and liberation) lies in **avidya**, the fundamental lack of understanding that causes one to misperceive the nature of things. For further information see Karl H. Potter (ed.), *Presuppositions of India's Philosophies*, 1972.

## Satkhyati

("discrimination of the real") **Theory of error** propounded by **Ramanuja**, the eleventh century philosopher who was the founder of **Vishishthadvaita Vedanta**. This theory is also known as yathakhyati ("discrimination [of things]

as they are"). All the theories of error aim to explain why people make errors in judgment, the stock example being mistaking the silvery flash of sea shell for a piece of silver. Ramanuja's analysis is based on the understanding that all things are composed of the five **elements**, and that the different proportions of the elements account for their differences. The viewer is correct in perceiving the silvery flash, since this is a property shared by both shell and silver. The error comes in supposing that the object is silver—that is, taking the part of the judgment that is true, and making an incorrect assumption based on that. As for some of the other theories, the ultimate reason one "sees" silver and not other silvery things comes from karmic dispositions stemming from **avidya**, specifically the greed for silver that prompts us to look for such items of value. For further information see Bijayananda Kar, *Theories of Error in Indian Philosophy*, 1978; Karl H. Potter (ed.), *Presuppositions of India's Philosophies*, 1972.

## Satsang

("company of the good") Quasi-congregational meeting and **worship** that was particularly emphasized in devotional (**bhakti**) religious life as a way to

associate with fellow devotees (**bhakta**). The word covers an enormous range of activities and contexts, from an informal gathering for singing and conversation in someone's home, to highly orchestrated meetings in which a **guru** may preach to thousands of devotees, and anything in between. In all these cases the importance of satsang lies in the wholesome religious atmosphere generated by the presence of good people, which is believed to create beneficial effects in terms of reinforcing one's own good qualities and reforming one's faults.

## Sattan

(7th c.) Tamil poet who was the author of the *Manimegalai*, a text that was clearly written as a sequel to the earlier poem "The Jeweled Anklet" (*Shilappadigaram*). Sattan's story focuses on a young woman named Manimegalai, who was wooed by the local prince but eventually became a Buddhist nun. Although the story's bias clearly favors the Buddhists, the Manimegalai has numerous debates with people from competing religious traditions, thus giving a rounded if somewhat subjective picture of contemporary religious life. See also **Tamil epics** and **Tamil language**.

## Sattva

("goodness") One of the three fundamental qualities (**gunas**) believed to be present in all things. The other two gunas are **rajas** ("passion") and **tamas** ("darkness"). According to this model, the differing proportions of these qualities account for the differences between the properties of concrete things, and in individual human capacities and tendencies. Of the three, sattva is invariably positive and carries associations with goodness, truth, wholesomeness, health, cognitive thought, and deep-rooted religious life. The notion of these three gunas originated in the metaphysics of the **Samkhya** school, one of the **six schools** of traditional Hindu **philosophy**. Although much of Samkhya metaphysics connected with the gunas have been long discredited, the idea of the gunas and their qualities has become a pervasive assumption in Indian culture.

## Saturday

(Shanivar) The sixth **day** of the Hindu **week**, whose presiding planet is **Saturn** (Shani). Saturn is by far the most feared of all the **planets**, and Saturday is considered by far the most inauspicious day of the week. In Hindu iconography, Saturn is depicted as a terrifying black figure holding a sword and riding a buffalo; he is also considered easily affronted and extremely thorough in avenging any offenses. Any misfortune Saturn brings will last for fourteen years—a figure doubtless drawn from the fourteen years of Saturn's orbit.

Hindus counter this danger by avoidance and **rites of protection**, just as they do on **Tuesday**, the other day considered to be generally inauspicious. Movements and activities are often widely restricted on Saturday, and certain activities, in particular buying things made from iron (whose black color is associated with Saturn), are avoided except when absolutely necessary. As on Tuesday, people **worship** protective **deities** and give as charity (**dana**) items associated with Saturn: iron, mustard oil, black sesame seed, black cloth, and black lentils. Giving away such items associated with Saturn is believed to transfer any potential **inauspiciousness** from Saturn to the recipient, providing a way to get rid of one's bad luck.

## Saturn

In Hindu astrology (**jyotisha**), a strongly malevolent **planet** associated with obstruction and death. Saturn's power and malevolent nature make him extremely dangerous, particularly

since any misfortune he brings will last for fourteen years—a figure doubtless drawn from the fourteen years of Saturn's orbit. During the **week** Saturn presides over **Saturday**, considered by far the most inauspicious **day** of the week. On this day people refrain from numerous activities and also commonly perform **rites of protection**, such as giving alms (**dana**) as a way to give away any potential misfortune.

## Satyabhama

In Hindu mythology, one of the wives of the god **Krishna**, when he has assumed his kingly station as the ruler of **Dwaraka**.

## Satyagraha

("Holding Fast to the Truth") Organized campaign of nonviolent resistance or non-cooperation as a political tool, a technique best refined by **Mohandas K. Gandhi**. For Gandhi himself, the basis of this technique was rooted in his commitment to the truth and his conviction that his opponents could be swayed by the **power of truth**, if it was put before them. Gandhi's satyagraha campaigns would begin by publicly pointing out the injustice in question, in the hope that this alone could lead to the matter being rectified. If nothing was done, a campaign would then begin, but the adversary would always be informed of what was to happen next. The real goal was not to humble the adversary but to persuade the other party to see the rightness of one's position and to accept it. The most important thing of all was to retain one's own commitment to the truth and never to compromise it, even if doing so could gain one some immediate advantage. For Gandhi, in the end the truth was the only thing that mattered, and winning or losing could only be measured insofar as one kept this in perspective.

## Satyakama

("He whose desire is truth") Legendary figure in the early speculative text **Chandogya Upanishad**, renowned for his adherence to the truth. Desiring to take **initiation** as a celibate student (**brahmacharin**), Satyakama asks his mother about his extended family, so that he can have this information to give his teacher. His mother Jabala replies that she does not know who his father is and tells him to take her name, and call himself Satyakama Jabala. Satyakama, when asked by his teacher **Gautama** to tell about his family roots, tells the whole story. Impressed by his honesty, Gautama initiates him at once. This story is often cited in modern times, to emphasize the importance of one's actions over one's **birth**.

## Satyanarayan Vrat

Religious observance that may be observed any day of the month but is most commonly performed on the day of the **full moon**. The presiding **deity** is **Vishnu**, worshiped in his form as Satyanarayan ("Lord of Truth"). The rite is believed to destroy evil and to promote the prosperity of its sponsors (those who hire a **brahmin** to perform the rite), its performers, and even its hearers. The rite's major features involve modification of diet and **worship**, the two general characteristics of most Hindu religious observances. On the day this rite is performed, the observant must keep a strict fast (**upavasa**) until the ceremony is over. A pavilion is prepared in which an image of Satyanarayan is installed and worshiped (part of the worship includes reading the rite's charter myth), and after which **prasad** is given to all those present.

## Satyavan

In Hindu mythology, the husband of **Savitri**, a woman famous both for her devotion to her husband and for her cleverness in outwitting Death to regain her husband after he dies.

## Satyavati

In Hindu mythology, the mother of the sage **Vyasa**. Satyavati is born in an unusual way. Her mother, a celestial nymph who lives as a fish in the **Ganges** as the result of a **curse**, one day swallows some **semen** that has fallen into the Ganges, becomes pregnant, and delivers a **son** and a **daughter**. Satyavati grows into a beautiful young woman, but because of her origins she always smells of fish, and because of this is also called Matsyagandhi ("fish-scent"). She works ferrying passengers across the Ganges and one day ferries the sage **Parashara**, who is struck by her charms. Parashara creates an artificial fog to give the two of them privacy, has sexual relations with her, and grants that from that day onward Satyavati will smell of musk instead of fish. The son born of this union is Vyasa.

Satyavati continues to ply her trade, and one day ferries King **Shantanu**, who is also struck by her beauty. Before she will marry him she demands that her sons will rule Shantanu's kingdom. Shantanu agrees; and to give her absolute certainty, his son **Bhishma** takes a vow that he will never marry, so that his line will never compete with hers. Satyavati has two sons: Chitrangada dies in childhood, and **Vichitravirya** dies after he marries the princesses **Ambika** and **Ambalika** but before having any children. In desperation, Satyavati thinks of her first son Vyasa, who conceives a son with each of the wives: **Pandu** from Ambalika, and **Dhrtarashtra** from Ambika. The descendants of these two sons are the warring families in the **Sanskrit** epic *Mahabharata*, of which Vyasa is famed as the narrator.

## Saumya

("mild") Term used to refer to the **deities** in their benevolent, beneficent, and gentle manifestations, as opposed to their terrifying (**ghora**) manifestations. This distinction is particularly applicable to **Shiva** and the **Goddess**, both of whom can appear in either form and whose **worship** can focus on either aspect.

## Saundaryalahari

("waves of beauty") Poetic text dedicated to the praise of the **Goddess** as the supreme power in the universe. The text is traditionally ascribed to the philosopher **Shankaracharya**, who is also believed to have written other hymns in praise of Hindu gods and goddesses, despite being the greatest exponent of the philosophical school known as **Advaita Vedanta**, in which the Supreme Reality, called **Brahman**, is believed to be completely devoid of specific attributes. If Shankaracharya did in fact author these poetic texts, one possible explanation is that Shankaracharya was an intensely religious man and expressed this devotion in various ways. The text has been an enormously influential, particularly in those schools of **tantra** (a secret, ritually based religious practice) in which the Goddess is considered the single Ultimate Reality.

## Savaiya

Syllabic **meter** in **Hindi** poetry, composed of four lines of between twenty-two and twenty-six syllables each. Its loose form gives the poet some flexibility, but the challenges of working with such an extended meter place considerable demands on the poet's skill, making this one of the more "literary" meters.

## Savarkar, Vinayak Damodar

(1883–1966) Hindu nationalist leader and thinker whose ideas have had lasting influence. Savarkar spent his entire life opposing British rule, often by violent means. He was also virulently opposed to Muslims, whom he saw as invaders and intruders in the Indian homeland. After being expelled from college for organizing a political rally, he spent four years in London, where he and his compatriots learned bomb-making and planned political assassinations. In 1911 he was

Image of the sun god Savitr, more commonly known as Surya, sculpted in Bengal during the Pala dynasty.

sentenced to life imprisonment in the Andaman Islands but was released because of political pressure in 1924, although he was barred from politics until 1937. In the time after that he served for seven years as president of the **Hindu Mahasabha**, until failing health finally forced him to resign. Throughout his life he had sharp differences with **Mohandas Gandhi**, first over the latter's commitment to nonviolence and later over the partition of India, which Savarkar characterized as the "vivisection" of the Indian motherland. Savarkar was brought to trial when Gandhi was assassinated by one of his former associates, **Nathuram Godse**. Savarkar was acquitted, but the accusation had a negative affect on the rest of his life.

Savarkar's keynote work, *Hindutva*, was composed and committed to memory while he was imprisoned in the Andamans. His central thesis was that the Hindus were a nation, despite all of their differences—social, regional, cultural, linguistic, and religious—because for them India was their motherland, fatherland, and holy land. He called on Hindus to transcend the particular identities that divided them and to gain strength through unity to resist the oppression of outsiders. Sarvarkar's formulation equates Hinduism and Indian nationalism and thus marginalizes both Muslims and Christians as "outsiders." His ideas profoundly influenced **Dr. K. B. Hedgewar**, founder of the **Rashtriya Svayamsevak Sangh** (RSS). The RSS and its affiliates have continued to stress some of Savarkar's ideas, which, during the 1990s, have gained a national audience with the rise of the RSS-affiliated **Bharatiya Janata Party** (BJP). For further information see Lise McKean, *Divine Enterprise*, 1996; and Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*, 1996.

## Savikalpika

("with conceptions") In certain schools of Indian **philosophy**—among some Buddhists, the **Nyayas**, and the **Prabhakara** school of **Mimamsa**—a term referring to complex conceptual knowledge in which the mind puts together and interprets data from the senses or from memory. Since such knowledge involves the activity of the mind, it is susceptible to error. The opposite sort of knowledge, called **nirvikalpaka**, nonconceptual awareness, is produced directly by the operation of the senses without any interpretation. According to these schools, if the senses producing this awareness have no defect, such an awareness is true.

## Savitr

("generator") Epithet of **Surya**, the **sun**, in his aspect as the progenitor and nourisher of all things. This particular name appears in the **Gayatri Mantra**, a sacred formula whose daily recitation is required of all **twice-born** men.

According to the **dharma literature**, a twice-born man was one born into the **brahmin**, **kshatriya**, or **vaishya** communities, who was thus eligible for the adolescent religious **initiation** known as the "second birth." See **Surya**.

## Savitri

In Indian culture, a mythic figure and the model for a virtuous and faithful wife, who by her cleverness is able to rescue her husband **Satyavan** from the clutches of Death himself. Before Savitri is betrothed to Satyavan, she has been told that he will die within a **year**. Savitri replies that she has chosen him for her husband and will not be deterred. On the day that he is fated to die, Satyavan goes to the forest to cut wood, accompanied by Savitri. After Satyavan falls unconscious while working, Savitri sees **Yama**, the god of Death, draw out Satyavan's soul and start his journey back to the underworld. Savitri follows them. When Yama tells her that she cannot follow where they are going, she meekly replies that it is her wifely duty to follow her husband. Yama grants her some wishes, although she is forbidden to ask for her husband's life. Savitri first requests that her blind father-in-law shall regain his sight, then that he shall regain the kingdom from which he has been exiled, and finally that she shall have many **sons**. All of these requests are granted, and when she points out that the return of her husband will be necessary for her to have many sons, Yama acknowledges that he has been outwitted, and leaves the two of them to many happy years together.

## Savitri Puja

Religious observance on the **new moon** in the **lunar month** of **Jyeshth** (May–June), celebrating the virtue of **Savitri**, who rescued her husband **Satyavan** from the clutches of **Yama**, the god of Death. This observance is usually kept only by **women**, to promote the health and longevity of their husbands, and thus ensure them a long married life. As a woman whose entire energies were directed toward the well-being of her family, Savitri is a cultural model for Indian women; her ability to save her husband from death demonstrates her virtue and cleverness as well. Women observing this rite **worship** Savitri, Satyavan, and Yama; keep a strict fast (**upavasa**) before the worship; and after worship eat only fruit for the rest of the day.

## Sayana

(14th c.) A southern Indian **brahmin** scholar most famous for his commentaries on the **Vedas**, the oldest and most authoritative Hindu religious texts. Sayana's commentary is notable, in part because it is an outstanding scholarly work, but also because this is generally believed to be the first time that the Veda was ever written down, an estimated three thousand years after some of the hymns were composed. Part of Sayana's commentary was simply explanatory because, in the time since the Vedas had been composed, the meanings of many of the words had been forgotten. Sayana's text is noted as a careful and credible clarification of the text.

## Sculpture

Branch of the visual arts most important in Hindu religion for its use as decoration in **architecture** and in the construction of images of Hindu **deities** for **worship**. Both these sculptural forms were regulated by precisely defined canons. See also **shilpa shastra**.

## Seasons

According to the most traditional enumeration, there are six seasons, each spanning two **lunar months**: Vasanta (spring) in the lunar months of **Chaitra** and **Baisakh**; Grishma (hot season) in **Jyeshth** and **Ashadh**; Varsha (rains) in **Shravan** and **Bhadrapada**; Sharad (fall) in **Ashvin** and **Kartik**; Hemanta (winter) in **Margashirsha** and **Paush**; and

Shishira (late winter) in **Magh** and **Phalgun**. In actual practice, there are three major seasons, at least in northern India: the hot season (April–June), the **monsoon** (July–September), and the cool season (October–March). All these seasons are approximate, because they are ultimately determined by larger climatic phenomena. In the hot season the sun bakes the northern Indian plains, eventually setting in motion air currents that suck moist air north from the Indian ocean; the resulting monsoons break the heat and provide rain for the crops. The weather then gets gradually cooler until January, when it becomes gradually hotter until the hot season returns. The monsoon arrives at different times in different parts of the country—earlier to regions further south, later to regions further north—and at times the monsoons are sporadic or do not come at all. Each of these three seasons has general correlations with certain festivals.

The hot season is a time of gradually increasing heat, and many of the festivals during this time have associations with heat: **Holi**, **Navaratri**, **Ram Navami**, **Shitalashtami**, and **Ganga Dashahara**. Although the rising heat can make life difficult, it is considered a generally auspicious time.

The rainy season is a time of both physical and ritual danger. The sudden influx of rain drives venomous animals such as snakes and scorpions from their holes, and their search for other habitations often brings them into contact with human beings. On a bacteriological level, the runoff from the rains often leads to the contamination of water supplies by sewage and to a sharp rise in sickness and death from gastrointestinal ailments, as well as other infections. On the ritual level, the gods are considered to be sleeping during part of the rainy season and thus less available to protect their devotees (**bhakta**). At the same time, the coming of the rains is greatly anticipated, and the moisture is essential for crops to grow. Consequently, although this is a time of great fertility and abundance, it is also associated with danger, and some of the festivals are **rites of protection**: **Nag Panchami**, **Raksha Bandhan**, **Ganesh Chaturthi**, **Anant Chaturdashi**, and the **Pitrpaksha**. Other ceremonies are associated with water or with the rains, such as the **Shravan** festival and **Janmashtami**.

In the cool season the gods awaken from their sleep, and crops that have been fed by the rains are ready for harvest. This is the most ritually active time of the **year**, and is generally auspicious. Major festivals include the fall Navaratri, ending with the festival of **Dussehra** (Vijaya Dashami), **Diwali**, **Karva Chauth**, **Kartik Purnima**, **Makara Sankranti**, and **Shivaratri**. The last major festival of the year is Holi, which marks the unofficial beginning of the hot season. In ending with Holi, a festival celebrating license, excess, and the dissolution of all social boundaries, followed by an abrupt reestablishment of propriety and social order, the lunar year thus mirrors the cycle of the cosmos, which is subject to degeneration and periodic renewal.

## Seed Syllable

A syllable, or set of syllables, that are believed to have an intimate connection with a **deity**—either as a way of gaining access to the deity's power or as the subtlest form of the deity itself. They are seed syllables in that they contain the deity in its briefest form, just as a seed contains the potential for a plant. These seed syllables are called **bijaksharas**. See **bijakshara**.

## Self-Residence

In Indian logic, one of the **fallacies** in constructing an argument. Self-residence occurs when the cause and effect are believed to be the same thing. Although the simplest forms of this fallacy are almost never found, since it is so patently unconvincing, one does find extended forms of it, such as **reciprocal dependence**, **vicious circle**, and **infinite regress**.

## Self-Revealing Knowledge

In Indian **philosophy**, the notion that certain things, such as knowledge, are self-revealing and do not need proof or substantiation to be known. Whether such knowledge (or things) exists, and what they would be if they did, was a source of lively disagreement among Indian thinkers. See **svaprakasha**.

## Self-Validating Knowledge

In Indian **philosophy**, a name denoting a sort of knowledge believed to carry its own stamp of truth, which does not need to be verified by anything outside itself. See **svatahpramanya**.

## Semen

As with all bodily fluids, semen is considered to make a person ritually impure through emission or contact, although it is obviously necessary for procreation, which is an auspicious event. Semen is also considered the concentrated essence of a man's vital energy, distilled drop by drop from his **blood**; in Hindu mythology the semen from the gods is portrayed as having wondrous generative powers, as in the story of the god **Skanda**, who spontaneously developed when the god **Shiva's** semen fell on the ground. Although a married man is obliged to have intercourse with his wife at certain times during her menstrual cycle, this is also seen as a potentially dangerous depletion of his vital energy. Since in Indian culture women are seen as having stronger sex drives than men, men are faced with the constant demand on their resources, which must be carefully husbanded to maintain their vitality. This problem of depletion is particularly pronounced in the unusual case when a man is younger than his wife, for in that case her needs are believed to be far greater than his capacity. Because all seminal emission depletes one's vital forces, there are strict taboos on masturbation, which is seen not only as an abject surrender to one's baser instincts, but as posing actual physical danger.

## Sen

(15th c.) Poet and saint of the **Varkari Panth**, a religious community centered around the **worship** of the Hindu god **Vithoba**. According to tradition, Sen was a barber—a very low-**caste** occupation—at the court of the king of Bidar. Sen renounced this occupation to wander and sing Vithoba's praises. Little is known about him, but he is mentioned as a model of devotion in one of the hymns by the northern Indian poet-saint **Ravidas**, which indicates that he was well known outside **Maharashtra**. For traditional hagiography, see Justin Abbott and Narhar R. Godbole, *Stories of Indian Saints*, 1988.

## Sen, Keshub Chander

(d. 1884) Reformist Hindu and leader of the **Brahmo Samaj**, to which he gave most of his life. His emphases on the ideal of ethical monotheism and rejection of many rituals were heavily influenced by English Unitarianism. In 1865, the Samaj split over Keshub's insistence that members should no longer wear the **sacred thread**. Then in 1878 Keshub had an inexplicable lapse in principles when he arranged for the marriage of his thirteen year-old **daughter**. Most of his followers left him in protest, and he spent his remaining years creating what he called the New Dispensation, a new religion using elements drawn from various religious traditions. At his death he had few followers but had been influential through his earlier efforts to reform Hindu society, and to look critically at Christian culture and religion. In his curiosity for religious ideas, he happened to meet the Bengali mystic **Ramakrishna**, and it was through association with Keshub that Ramakrishna began to attract disciples from Calcutta's middle class, most notably Narendranath Datta, who became famous as **Swami Vivekananda**.

## Sena Dynasty

(11th–13th c.) Eastern Indian dynasty whose ancestral homeland was in the Bengal region but whose territory also

The ashram established by Mohandas K. Gandhi in Sevagram, Maharashtra.

included the western part of the state of **Bihar**. The Senas were originally vassals of the **Pala dynasty** but became independent in 1097 and later seized much of the Pala domain in Bihar. The Sena dynasty survived until 1245, when it was finally conquered by the Mamluks, who had been seizing Sena territory since the beginning of that century. The Senas (and their predecessors, the Palas) are particularly noted for a certain type of **sculpture** in which the images were carved from black chlorite schist that was polished to a mirror finish.

## Setubandha

("Building the Bridge") Early medieval poem whose theme is taken from the epic *Ramayana* and describes **Rama's** invasion of **Lanka** by building a bridge across the ocean straits. The poem is written in **Prakrit**, an umbrella term for the grammatically simpler vernacular languages that developed from **Sanskrit** through natural linguistic change. The poem has been falsely ascribed to **Kalidasa**, the greatest Sanskrit poet. The true author is unknown.

## Seva

("service") Actions springing from an attitude of loving devotion, manifested as attendance on and service to a **deity**, religious teacher (**guru**), or any superior person. The notion of seva is particularly important in the relationship between religious teacher and disciple. The teacher's task is to further the disciple's spiritual development, which may sometimes entail harsh criticism to reform some of the disciple's faults. The ideal disciple will accept such direction in a spirit of self-effacement and carry out the teacher's instructions faithfully and without protest, as a sign of submission and service. Such arrangements are often necessary for spiritual growth, and a teacher can often give a much more objective assessment of the disciple's true spiritual state and what must be done for advancement. Still, when one of the parties is not sincere, this model has great potential for abuse. In such circumstances the teacher's call for obedience and service—in which any "resistance" to the teacher's demands can be cited as a sign of spiritual immaturity—can be a way to take advantage of a devotee (**bhakta**).

## Sevagram

("service village") City in the eastern part of the state of **Maharashtra** about fifty miles south and west of **Nagpur**. It is most famous for the **ashram** established there by **Mohandas K. Gandhi** in 1933, which was founded to promote his

ideal of a decentralized village economy. This economic model had political and cultural symbolism, since it was independent of the industrialized economy run by the British and intended to counterbalance it by providing a model of an economy based on indigenous "Hindu" values.

## Seven Sacred Cities

Seven sacred cities (**tirthas**) spread throughout the Indian subcontinent in which death is traditionally believed to bring final liberation of the soul (**moksha**). The seven cities are **Ayodhya**, **Mathura**, **Haridwar**, **Benares**, **Kanchipuram**, **Ujjain**, and **Dwaraka**.

## Shabara

In the **Purva Mimamsa** school of Hindu **philosophy** Shabara was the author of the earliest and most famous commentary on **Jaimini's *Mimamsa Sutras***, the school's founding text. The commentary is called Shabara-**bhashya**. The date of the text is highly uncertain, and estimates range from the first century B.C.E. to the fourth or sixth century C.E. As often happens, later commentators have accepted Shabara's commentary as part of the text itself and commented on it as well as on the original sutras.

## Shabarabhashya

("**Shabara's** commentary") Extensive commentary on the ***Mimamsa Sutras*** of **Jaimini**, the founding text of the **Purva Mimamsa** school of **philosophy**. The date of the text is uncertain. It is believed to have been written by Shabara in either the first century B.C.E., or the fourth or sixth century C.E. As often happens, later commentators have accepted Shabara's commentary as part of the text itself and commented on it as well as on the original sutras.

## Shabari

In the ***Ramayana***, the earlier of the two great Indian epics, a tribal woman who is a sincere devotee (**bhakta**) of the god **Rama**. Shabari belongs to a group known as the Shabaras, and so her name conveys a sense of anonymity, since it is simply the feminine form of the group's name. Rama and **Lakshmana** stop for some time at Shabari's dwelling during their search for Rama's kidnapped wife **Sita**. Although as a tribal she has very low social status, Rama graciously receives her hospitality as a reward for the devotion with which it is given. In the ***Ramcharitmanas***, the vernacular retelling of the *Ramayana* written by the poet-saint **Tulsidas** (1532–1623?), Shabari tastes each fruit before she gives it to Rama, to be sure that he will get only the very sweetest—an act that violates one of the most pervasive ritual taboos barring the exchange of any food that has come into contact with saliva, and particularly from lower to higher status people. Yet in the story Rama eats the fruits very happily because of the love with which they are given. The message in this episode is consistent with a primary theme in the *Ramcharitmanas*, namely, the power of devotion to override or overturn conventional social norms. Soon after Rama and Lakshmana's visit, Shabari dies a happy death.

## Shabari Malai

Temple and sacred site (**tirtha**) in the hills of the southern state of **Kerala**, about seventy miles north of Trivandrum. Shabari Malai is renowned for the temple to **Aiyappa**, a regional divinity who has been assimilated into the larger pantheon as the son of the gods **Vishnu** and **Shiva**; he is born when Vishnu takes the form of the enchantress **Mohini**. Shabari Malai's annual month-long pilgrimage occurs from the middle of December to the middle of January, with the exact dates determined by astrological calculations.

This pilgrimage is most often taken by men, since, according to the charter myth, the site is forbidden to **women** of childbearing age. The pilgrimage itself is a highly structured ritual process. Pilgrims carry out their spiritual training for the journey in well-defined village groups, each headed by a local leader, who supervises their strict religious discipline. Their preparatory vows commence forty-five to sixty days before the actual journey begins, and entail strict **celibacy** and avoiding the company of women, distinctive dress, a ban on **shaving** and wearing shoes, a strict vegetarian diet, daily **worship**, and the erasing of all social and status distinctions among members. In essence, the men training for this pilgrimage live as renunciant ascetics for this period and later revert to their normal identities. The pilgrimage itself is an arduous and exhausting journey over the twisted ridges of the Periyar Hills, during which pilgrims symbolically divest themselves of their egos, to be filled with the **grace** of God. For a first person account of the Shabari Malai pilgrimage, see E. Valentine Daniel, *Fluid Signs*, 1984.

## Shabda

("word") In Indian **philosophy**, the general term for authoritative testimony. This is generally accepted as one of the **pramanas**, the means by which human beings can gain true and accurate knowledge, except by the **materialists**, who reject all pramanas except perception (**pratyaksha**). Such authoritative testimony is of two sorts. It most often refers to authoritative scriptural texts, such as the **Vedas**, but it can also refer to verbal instruction given by one's **guru**, which is considered to have equal authority, at least by members of that spiritual lineage. Shabda is an important **pramana** because it tells people about those things that the other pramanas cannot uncover, such as the nature of the

**heavens**, the course of the soul after death, proper religious life, and so forth. With regard to the liberation of the soul, it is often the most important pramana, since this cannot be discovered in any other way.

## Shabdabrahman

("**Brahman**-as-sound") This term refers to the notion that the Supreme Reality (Brahman) exists in its most subtle form, not as matter, but as sound. This idea is particularly prevalent in **tantra**, a secret, ritually based system of religious practice, and helps to explain the tantric stress on **mantra**, or sacred sound, as the essential means through which one gains access to this reality. In this understanding, the primary mantra (**mulamantra**) of one's particular **deity** would be the clearest articulation of shabdabrahman, with other mantras conceived as derivative forms of that primary mantra; these latter mantras were the source for everyday speech and the mundane sounds of ordinary experience.

## Shachi

In Hindu mythology, the wife of the god **Indra**, also known as **Indrani**. See **Indrani**.

## Shaddarshana

("six perspectives") Collective name for the **six schools** of classical Hindu **philosophy**. These six were usually grouped in three pairs: **Nyaya** and **Vaisheshika**, **Samkhya** and **Yoga**, and **Purva Mimamsa** and **Vedanta**. See **six schools**.

## Shaiva

Devotee (**bhakta**) of the Hindu god **Shiva**, who along with **Vishnu** is one of the major figures in the Hindu pantheon. From the evidence at hand, it seems that the earliest sectarian Shaivites were the **Kapalikas**, **Kalamukhas**, and

**Pashupatas**. All three of these were communities of renunciant **ascetics**, perhaps to accord with the example set by their patron deity. The information for all three must be reconstructed, since the sects have all disappeared. Shaivas can still be found in ascetic life in the **Dashanami Sanyasis** and the **Nathpanthis**, two living ascetic communities. The major current through which Shaiva devotionalism (**bhakti**) came into mainstream society was through the devotional hymns of the **Nayanars**, a group of sixty-three poet-saints who lived in southern India in the seventh and eighth centuries. Their passionate devotion, conveyed in hymns in the **Tamil language**, was later systematized into the southern Indian philosophical school known as **Shaiva Siddhanta**. As the bhakti movement moved northward, it found Shaiva expression in the **Lingayat** community in modern **Karnataka**, as well as the Krama and **Trika** schools of Kashmiri Shaivism. Shaivism has had a long association with **tantra**, a secret, ritually based religious practice, and the influence of tantra is evident in the Kashmiri schools as well as in the doctrines of the Nathpanthi ascetics.

Shaivism does not show the bewildering sectarian variety characterizing **Vaishnavas**, devotees of the god **Vishnu**, and Shaivites tend to be less strict about membership in a particular sect. Nevertheless, Shiva has millions of devotees in modern India, and a well-established network of pilgrimage places (**tirtha**), particularly in the **Himalayas**.

## Shaiva Nagas

**Naga** ("naked," i.e., fighting) ascetics who are devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva**, organized into different **akharas** or regiments on the model of an army. The other major Naga division was the **Bairagi** Nagas, who were devotees of the god **Vishnu**. Until the beginning of the nineteenth century the Nagas' primary occupation was as mercenary soldiers, although they also had substantial trading interests. Such resources allowed many Naga leaders to become rich and powerful men despite often coming from lower social strata, and in earlier times such opportunities would have made a career as a Naga an attractive proposition for an ambitious young man. Both these sources of income have largely disappeared in contemporary times, although some Naga communities are still landowners with extensive properties and thus both rich and influential. See also **shaiva**.

## Shaiva Siddhanta

Southern Indian religious community that was particularly developed in the Tamil country, and whose members are devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva**. Shaiva Siddhanta is based on a series of fourteen texts, all completed by the fourteenth century C.E., in which the ideas about Shiva found in **Sanskrit** texts were reinterpreted in light of the devotional faith of the **Nayanars**. The Nayanars were a group of sixty-three poet-saints who lived in southern India in the seventh and eighth centuries. The most famous and influential of these interpreters was the ninth-century poet **Manikkavachakar**. Central to Shaiva Siddhanta is the triad of Shiva as the "Lord" (**pati**), human souls held in bondage (**pashu**), and the "bonds" (**pasha**) holding these souls. Shiva is conceived as the supreme divinity, who wields the bonds of **maya**, or illusion, to keep souls in bondage. Yet he is also pictured as gracious and loving to his devotees, a far cry from the capricious and somewhat dangerous figure in his earliest mythology. As the supreme lord, Shiva is the source of all spiritual illumination and energy, and also the power through which the world is created, sustained, and reabsorbed again. Souls are conceived as different from Shiva, since they are

subject to imperfections, although here too his power is their ultimate source. The only path to liberation is devotion to Shiva, through whose **grace** the bonds of maya can be broken or transcended. Even after liberation souls remain distinct from Shiva, although they remain in his presence. For further information see M. Dhavamony, *Love of God According to Saiva Siddhanta*, 1971. See also **shaiva** and **Tamil Nadu**.

## Shaka ("Teak") Dvipa

In traditional mythic geography, the sixth of the seven concentric landmasses (**dvipas**) making up the visible world. See also **cosmology**.

## Shaka Era

One of the dating systems in India, which is claimed to mark the defeat of the Shakas by King Salivahana. For any given **year** in the common era, the Shaka era date is either seventy-eight or seventy-nine years earlier, a discrepancy that stems from the differing days on which the years begin in these two systems. In the common era the year begins on January 1, but in the Shaka era it begins with the **sun's** transition into Aries, determined in India as falling on April 14. Hence, to convert a Shaka era date to a common era date, one adds seventy-nine years for dates from January 1 to April 14, and seventy-eight years for dates from April 15 to December 31.

## Shakata

("cart") One of the **demon** assassins sent by **Kamsa**, the demon-king of **Mathura**, to kill his nephew, the child-god **Krishna**. Shakata takes the form of a cart, intending to take the infant Krishna unaware. Yet Krishna is not fooled by this deception: With a kick of his infant toes Krishna launches the cart into flight, killing the demon with the force of the blow.

## Shakha

("branch") The name given to a local "branch" of the **Rashtriya Svayamsevak Sangh** (RSS), whose membership is often drawn from a particular neighborhood or section of a city. The RSS is a conservative Hindu organization whose express purpose is to provide the leadership cadre for a revitalized Hindu India. The RSS has historically characterized itself as a cultural and character-building organization, and for much of its existence has shunned direct political involvement, although it has exercised considerable influence through its many affiliated organizations. Each shakha, or local RSS unit, holds a daily meeting for its members, who are known as **svayamsevaks** ("volunteers"). The meeting's typical activities include an opening ceremony in which the organization's saffron banner is raised; traditional games or exercises, including martial drill, and a discussion period in which RSS ideals can be disseminated and propagated. The shakhas in any given area are overseen by a full-time RSS worker known as a **pracharak** ("director"), who serves as a liaison between the local units and the RSS leadership, and who oversees RSS activity in his area. Most of the shakha's members will never advance beyond this local level, and those who do are usually gifted leaders. Thus, the primary stress at the shakha level is on forming personal relationships with other members, as a way to develop loyalty to the organization. Although the shakhas often have very high attrition, the bonds developed there are often very strong as well and are particularly beneficial in helping displaced and newly urbanized people develop a sense of community. For further information see Walter K. Andersen and Shridhar D. Damle, *The Brotherhood in Saffron*, 1987.

## Shakra

An epithet of the god **Indra**. See **Indra**.

## Shakta

Worshiper of the **Goddess** in any of her myriad forms. The name itself is derived from **shakti**, the divine feminine "power" that gives the Goddess her vitality. Among the most famous forms of the Goddess are **Durga** and **Kali**, who are both powerful and dangerous goddesses. Aside from these, there are a host of other goddesses, who are often the presiding **deities** of a particular place. See also **Lakshmi**, **Nirriti**, **Parvati**, **Prithvi**, **Sati**, **Shiwalik goddesses**, and **Ushas**.

## Shakti

("power") In Hindu iconography, the name of the spear carried by the god **Skanda**. The spear's head is shaped either like a leaf or a diamond, and it is fitted with a wooden shaft.

## Shakti

(2) Epithet of the **Goddess**. Shakti is believed to be a divine feminine power that is present in each person as the **kundalini**. See also **Goddess** and **kundalini**.

## Shakti Pithas

("benches" or "seats" of Shakti) General term for a network of sites connected with the **worship** of the Mother **Goddess**. Although their number differs from source to source—some list fifty-one, and others 108—in both cases the sites are spread throughout the subcontinent, from Baluchistan (in modern Pakistan) to **Assam** to the deep south. According to the charter myth, each of these places marks the site where a body part of the dismembered goddess **Sati** fell to **earth**, taking form as a different goddess in each place. This myth provides a way to connect the myriad local Hindu goddesses by conceiving them as differing manifestations of a single primordial Goddess. It also connects the subcontinent into a single conceptual unit, knit together by this network of sites as the body is connected by its members. One should also note that different places may claim the same body part in the drive to enhance the religious prestige of any particular site. As but one example, according to most "official" lists Sati's vulva, the most powerfully charged part of the female body, fell at the temple of **Kamakhya** in **Assam**, but the same claim is made at **Kalimath** in the **Himalayas**. Suffice it to say that there is no single authoritative list of sites, and competing claims are not unusual. See also **pitha**.

## Shakumbhari Devi

Presiding **deity** of the Shakumbhari Devi temple in the district of Saharanpur in **Uttar Pradesh**, and one of the nine **Shiwalik goddesses**. This site is one of the **Shakti Pithas**, a network of sites sacred to the **Goddess** that spreads throughout the subcontinent. Each Shakti Pitha marks the site where a body part of the dismembered goddess **Sati** fell to **earth**, taking form there as a different goddess; in the case of Shakumbhari Devi, the body part is said to have been Sati's head. The temple is in a thinly settled region, and the major time of **year** that pilgrims come to visit is during the **Navaratri** festivals.

Although **Hindi** literature identifies Shakumbhari Devi as a form of **Durga**, the site's charter myth shows the nurturing capacities of the Goddess as well as the warrior aspect more commonly associated with Durga. According to the story, a **demon** named Durgam gains the boon that he cannot be conquered by any of the gods. After subduing all the gods, Durgam prevents the storm-god **Indra** from sending rain to the earth for one hundred years. Seeing the earth's distress, the gods approach the Goddess and beg for her help. The Goddess,

filled with pity, takes a form with one hundred eyes, because of which one of her epithets is Shatakshi ("hundred eyes"). From each eye comes a stream of tears, and when these fall to the earth, plants begin to grow again. Further, when her tears do not reach some places, she puts forth vegetables (Shak) from her own body to nourish the creatures of the earth. Her final action is to kill the demon Durgam, reasserting the Goddess as a strong and protective figure. Although there is little information on Shakumbhari Devi in English, there are further references to her in David R. Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, 1986. See also **pitha**.

## Shakuni

In the ***Mahabharata***, the later of the two great Hindu epics, the maternal uncle of **Duryodhana**, the epic's antagonist. Shakuni's most famous episode in the *Mahabharata* is as a player in the game of dice against **Yudhishthira**, the eldest of the five **Pandava** brothers who are the epic's protagonists. The epic describes Shakuni as the world's best dice player, whereas Yudhishthira is enthusiastic but completely unskilled. As Yudhishthira begins to lose, he keeps betting bigger and bigger stakes in an effort to win back what he has lost. After losing his family's kingdom and all their possessions, Yudhishthira wagers himself and his brothers, and after losing this bet, he wagers and loses their common wife, **Draupadi**. As a result, Draupadi is paraded through the assembly hall by Shakuni's nephews, Duryodhana and **Duhshasana**, her clothes stained with her menstrual blood, sharpening the already strong enmities between these two groups. Shocked at such treatment, Duryodhana's father, King **Dhrtarashtra**, gives the Pandavas back their freedom. Then, because of a loss in a subsequent game of dice, the Pandavas agree to go into exile for twelve years and live incognito for the thirteenth, with the condition that, if they are discovered in the thirteenth year, the cycle will begin anew. In the ensuing Mahabharata war Shakuni fights on the side of his nephew and is eventually killed by the fourth Pandava brother, **Sahadeva**.

## Shakuntala

A figure in Hindu mythology and the protagonist in the drama ***Abhijnana-shakuntala*** written by the poet **Kalidasa**. Shakuntala is the daughter of the **apsara Menaka** and the sage **Vishvamitra**, conceived when Menaka is sent to seduce Vishvamitra in an attempt to reduce his spiritual powers. Shakuntala is raised at the **ashram** of the sage Kanva, where she grows into a beautiful young woman. One day she attracts the eye of King **Dushyanta**, who has been hunting in the forest, and they are married by the **gandharva** form of marriage (consensual sexual intercourse), conceiving their son **Bharata**. Shakuntala's happiness, however, is short-lived. As she is thinking one day about Dushyanta, who has traveled back to his capital without her, she fails to notice the arrival of the sage **Durvasas**. In his anger at being ignored, Durvasas lays a curse that her beloved will completely forget her. Shakuntala, horrified, manages to convince Durvasas to modify the **curse**: Dushyanta will remember everything, as soon as Shakuntala shows him proof of their union. Shakuntala has Dushyanta's signet ring as proof, but she loses it on her way to see Dushyanta. Dushyanta (as expected) denies that he has ever met Shakuntala, and she eventually ends up working as one of the palace cooks. Her salvation comes unexpectedly, when she finds the missing ring in the belly of a fish she is preparing for the king's dinner. When she shows him the ring, Dushyanta immediately recognizes Shakuntala and acknowledges her as his wife, and the couple live happily ever after.

Believed to be a manifestation of the god Vishnu, a shalagram is a black stone that contains the fossilized spiral shell of a prehistoric sea creature.

## Shalagram

Black stone containing an **ammonite**, the spiral-shaped fossil shell of a prehistoric sea creature. The shalagram is primarily found in the upper reaches of the **Gandaki** River in **Nepal**. The circular ammonite fossil is understood to be **Vishnu's chakra**, and the shalagram is thus understood as a "self-manifest" (**svayambhu**) form of Vishnu. As with all such "self-manifest" forms, the shalagram is believed to be especially holy, since in it Vishnu has chosen to reveal himself to his devotees (**bhakta**) rather than coming to an image fashioned by human hands. Because of its holiness, the shalagram is often an object of **worship**. Its portability (and durability) made it the preferred form of Vishnu for wandering **Vaishnava** ascetics. One also finds cases in which small images are claimed to have been revealed when a shalagram was broken open; these images carry the glamour of a finished image as well as the **divine power** that accompanies spontaneous manifestation.

## Shambhu

("causing happiness," "granting prosperity") Epithet of the god **Shiva**. See **Shiva**.

## Shamvuka

**Shudra ascetic** who appears both in the ***Ramayana***, the earlier of the two great Indian epics, and in the poet **Kalidasa's** ***Raghuvamsha***, whose story line is based on the *Ramayana*. According to the story a **brahmin** comes to **Rama**, the epic's protagonist, and complains that his son has died because of the unrighteousness running through the land. Since the king is considered responsible for the general moral climate in his kingdom, Rama immediately asks the brahmin for more information. He is told that a man named Shamvuka has been doing physical **asceticism** (**tapas**) in a bid to generate spiritual powers through his suffering, even though Shamvuka is a member of the servant (**shudra**) class, and these sorts of religious exercises are forbidden to people of such low social status. Rama finds Shamvuka hanging his head downward over a smoking **fire**, and when he refuses to desist from his ascetic practices, Rama kills him. This episode conveys several important messages. One of these is the Indian cultural belief that physical suffering generates spiritual and/or **magic** powers. When this belief is combined with a profoundly hierarchical model of society, it becomes important for the higher-class people to control the people who are allowed to do this, lest the lower classes gain power over their "betters." Finally, this story shows the *Ramayana*'s general tendency to uphold established social values and boundaries.

## Shankara

("auspicious") Epithet of the god **Shiva**. With the honorific suffix ***acharya*** ("teacher"), this is also the name of the most significant figure in the **Advaita Vedanta** philosophical school, **Shankaracharya**, who is popularly considered to be Shiva incarnate. As noted above, the generally accepted meaning of the name

Shankara has intensely positive connotations, yet the verb *shank*, from which this name is almost certainly derived, has associations with doubt, uncertainty, and anxiety. This sort of ambivalence has a long association with Shiva; the earliest accepted reference, in the **Shvetashvatara Upanishad**, mentions both his death-dealing arrows, and his kindness to his devotees (**bhakta**). The traditional meaning of this name may thus be a form of propitiation—knowing that Shiva wields awesome and unpredictable power but describing him as "auspicious" in the hope that he will show his kinder side.

## Shankaracharya

(788–820?) Writer and religious thinker who is unquestionably the most significant figure in the **Advaita Vedanta** philosophical school, and arguably the single greatest Hindu religious figure. Very little is known about his life—even his dates are a matter of speculation—but popular tales abound. According to one story, he was the god **Shiva** incarnate, who descended to earth to reveal the knowledge of the absolute. This connection is shown by his name—**Shankara** is one of the epithets of Shiva, and **acharya** ("teacher") is an honorific suffix. He is traditionally believed to have been born in a **Nambudiri brahmin** family at Kaladi in the state of **Kerala**, to have become an **ascetic** at a very young age, and to have traveled widely engaging in religious disputes, particularly with the Buddhists, whose religious influence he put in permanent decline. He is believed to have established the ten **Dashanami Sanyasi** orders and the four **maths** that are their centers, to have written commentaries on the three texts central to the Vedanta school—namely the **Upanishads**, the *Vedanta Sutras*, and the **Bhagavad Gita**—and to have gone finally to the high **Himalayas**, where he died at the age of 32.

Many of these claims cannot be substantiated, but the significance of his work cannot be denied. His commentary on the *Vedanta Sutra*s, the ***Brahmasutra Bhashya***, gives the classic formulation of Advaita Vedanta, with its emphasis that the Ultimate Reality is the unqualified (**nirguna**) **Brahman**, which is eternal and unchanging, and to which the human soul is identical. The changing phenomenal world (the world we see and sense) is an illusion, created through the superimposition (**adhyasa**) of mistaken ideas upon the unqualified Brahman. Since Shankaracharya believes that one is released from bondage by replacing this mistaken understanding with the correct one, insight and not action is the means to liberation. This moment of understanding can be described as a flash of realization, but it seems mistaken to characterize Shankaracharya as a mystic. This is because he strongly emphasizes the authority of the sacred texts as a source of accurate knowledge about the ultimate truth. Although this stress on insight devalues the ultimate worth of ritual action, except in a preparatory role by removing defilements, Shankaracharya also believed that required ritual actions should be performed from a sense of duty.

Shankaracharya is as philosophically significant for his silence as for his speech. He gives no definitive answer on many philosophical issues: about whether selves are one or many, about whether the locus of ignorance (**avidya**) was Brahman or the individual, about the nature of ignorance itself, and about the real nature of the material world. His refusal to take a position on these issues left many different routes open to those who came after him. Shankaracharya himself tended to emphasize epistemological issues—how human beings come to know things, and particularly how to correct the mistaken ideas through which human beings are held in bondage. The image that comes through his writing is of a deeply religious man whose primary concern was

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A shankha, or conch shell. Used as a musical instrument, it is an identifying object carried by the god Vishnu.

to help his hearers destroy their illusions and gain final liberation of the soul (**moksha**). Given this underlying goal and his acute philosophical mind, one can argue that he was aware of such metaphysical questions but chose to ignore them, since they were unrelated to his primary goal. For further information on Shankaracharya's thought, see Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore (eds.), *A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy*, 1957; and Karl H. Potter (ed.), *Advaita Vedanta up to Samkara and His Pupils*, 1981.

## Shankaracharyas

The philosopher **Shankaracharya** (788–820) is traditionally said to have established centers for the **Dashanami Sanyasi** ascetics, devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva**, at four places in India: **Badrinath**, **Puri**, **Shringeri**, and **Dwaraka**. The head monk at each of these centers has been given the title *Shankaracharya*, as a sign of the status of his office. The head of the **Kamakotipith**, an **ascetic** center in the southern Indian city of **Kanchipuram**, has also come to be described as a Shankaracharya, even though this site is not one of the original four; this reflects the Kamakotipith's importance as an

ascetic center and Kanchipuram's general status as a religious center. Although by this reckoning there are five places, at present there are only four Shankaracharyas, since Swami Swaroopanand Saraswati holds the seat for both Badrinath and Dwaraka. The other Shankaracharyas are Swami Nishchalanand (Puri), Swami Bharati Tirtha (Shringeri), and Swami Jayendra Saraswati (Kanchipuram). Their traditional office gives the Shankaracharyas a great deal of religious status and prestige, and because of this they have become highly influential figures, even in an intensely decentralized religious tradition.

## Shankaradigvijaya

("**Shankara's** victory tour") A written account of the life of the philosopher **Shankaracharya** traditionally attributed to the fourteenth-century writer Madhavacharya, although evidence within the work points to composition several centuries later. The story is clearly hagiographical, for it is filled with fantastic legends intended to highlight Shankaracharya's achievements and his ultimate identity with the god **Shiva** himself. According to this story, after gaining full wisdom, Shankaracharya embarks on a "victory tour" (digvijaya) of India. During this tour he travels throughout the country, debates all opponents, and defeats them all convincingly, thus establishing the supremacy of his **Advaita Vedanta** philosophical school. The motif of the digvijaya (literally, "conquest of [all] directions") was a common theme in works about political and military leaders, and here it has been adapted to tell a religious story.

## Shankha

("conch shell") In Hindu religious imagery, one of the identifying objects always carried by the god **Vishnu**, along with the club (**gada**), lotus (**padma**), and discus (**chakra**). Vishnu's conch is

considered both a musical instrument and an instrument of war, since through its powerful sound he is said to have struck terror in the hearts of his enemies. The conch is also commonly carried by certain powerful forms of the **Goddess**. The reason for this can be found in her charter myth, in which she is formed from the collected radiance of all the gods and receives duplicates of all their weapons.

## Shanta ("peaceful") Bhava

The first of the five **modes of devotion** to God that were most prominently articulated by **Rupa Goswami**, a devotee (**bhakta**) of the god **Krishna** and a follower of the Bengali saint **Chaitanya**. Rupa used five different models of human relationships to explain the variety of links followers might have with the **deities**. These five models showed growing emotional intensity, from the peaceful (shanta) sense that comes from realizing one's complete identity with **Brahman**, or Supreme Reality, to conceiving of god as one's master, friend, child, or lover. The shanta bhava, in which one finds mental peace through the realization of complete identity with Brahman, is the only one of these modes in which the devotee does not have a personalized relationship with God. Given Rupa's assumption that Krishna was the highest manifestation of godhead, and that true religious life involved having a relationship with him, the shanta bhava was thus judged inferior to the other four modes.

## Shantanu

In the *Mahabharata*, the later of the two great **Sanskrit** epics, Shantanu is the father of **Bhishma** by his first wife, and the husband of **Satyavati** in his second marriage. Satyavati has agreed to marry Shantanu on the condition that her sons reign, despite the fact that Bhishma is the eldest and thus is rightly entitled to the throne. Shantanu agrees to this condition, and to please his father Bhishma

vows never to marry, so that he will have no heirs to compete with Satyavati's. Bhishma upholds his promise until his death, but Shantanu's willingness to put aside the rightful heir has terrible consequences. When Satyavati's son **Vichitravirya** dies childless, she calls on her elder son **Vyasa** to sire children by his wives. From this union comes **Pandu** and **Dhrtarashtra**. The struggle for royal power by their respective sons culminates in the Mahabharata war, in which the family is destroyed.

## Shantiniketan

("abode of peace") Town in the Birbhum district of **West Bengal**, about ninety miles northeast of Calcutta. It is most famous for Vishva-Bharati University, founded in 1921 by the Indian poet and Nobel laureate **Rabindranath Tagore** (1861–1941). As an educational institution, the university was dedicated to providing an education that would satisfy people's material and spiritual needs and thus develop an integrated human being. It did this in part by promoting the arts and by stressing the interconnection between nature and human beings, both themes that were close to Tagore's heart.

## Sharada Math

One of the four **maths** or sacred centers for Hindu **ascetics** (often translated as "monasteries") traditionally believed to have been established by the great philosopher **Shankaracharya**; the others are the **Jyotir Math**, **Shringeri Math**, and **Govardhan Math**. These four sacred centers are each associated with one of the four geographical corners of the Indian subcontinent; the Sharada Math is in the western quarter, in the city of **Dwaraka** in the state of **Gujarat**, on the shore of the Arabian Sea. Shankaracharya is traditionally cited as the founder of the **Dashanami Sanyasis**, the most prestigious Hindu ascetic order. The Dashanami ("ten names") ascetics are devotees (**bhakta**) of the god

**Shiva** who are divided into ten divisions, each with a different name. These ten divisions are organized into four larger organizational groups—**Anandawara**, **Bhogawara**, **Bhuriwara**, and **Kitawara**—each of which has two or three of the ten divisions and is associated with one of the four maths. Of these, the Sharada Math is associated with the Kitawara group.

## Sharva

(from *shara*, "arrow") Epithet of the god **Shiva**. In his earliest description in the **Shvetashvatara Upanishad**, the god **Rudra** (later identified with Shiva) is identified as a god whose primary weapons are infallible arrows. This characterization of Shiva as an archer has continued ever since; his bow **Pinaka** is one of few divine weapons famous enough to have a name. See **Shiva**.

## Shastra

("order") A shastra is the name given to a technical treatise explaining the standards of a particular cultural or artistic discipline in Hinduism, as in **Bharata's** *Natyashastra*, a technical manual that discusses **dance** and the theater. When it is placed at the end of a compound (as in "**Shilpa Shastra**"), the word *shastra* can also serve to denote the whole body of teaching on that particular subject. All of the classical arts were placed under well-defined canons, each with its own specific rules and standards to guide artists: **Sculpture** and **architecture** were under Shilpa Shastra, music under Sangita shastra, and dance and theater under **Natya** shastra. Given the prevailing emphasis on upholding such strict rules, artistic genius meant doing something unusual within the larger confines of the tradition rather than creating something entirely new or original.

## Shastri Narayanswarupdas Swami

The **ascetic** name of the spiritual leader of the **Akshar Purushottam Samstha**, a branch of the **Swaminarayan** religious community. He is more commonly known by his title **Pramukh Swami** ("President Swami"). See **Pramukh Swami**.

## Shatakatrayam

("The Three Hundred") Collection of **Sanskrit** poems ascribed to the poet-philosopher **Bhartrhari**, who is believed to have lived in the fifth century. The text is a three-part collection of poems about political life, love, and renunciation, which explore all of the conventional ends of life: The first two sections are about power (**artha**), sensual or physical desire (**kama**), and righteous action (**dharma**), whereas the final section is concerned with liberation of the soul (**moksha**). Much of the poetry carries a cynical, slightly bitter tone, suggesting the world-weariness of a man who has seen too much of the harsh realities of life. For further information see Barbara Stoller Miller (trans.), *The Hermit and the Love-Thief*, 1978.

## Shatakshi

("[having] one hundred eyes") Epithet of the **goddess Shakumbhari Devi**, based on a story that tells of a time when the **earth** is parched with drought, and she takes a form with a hundred eyes, watering the earth with her tears. See **Shakumbhari Devi**.

## Shatapatha ("Hundred-Path") Brahmana

One of the two most important texts in the **Brahmana** branch of sacred Vedic literature, along with the **Aiteraya Brahmana**. The Brahmanas were primarily manuals describing the correct performance of Vedic ritual sacrifices. Each Brahmana was in theory connected with one of the **Vedas**, which gave them Vedic authority, but in fact they were quite different from the Vedas in scope and content. According to tradition, the Shatapatha Brahmana was connected with the "white" recension of the **Yajur Veda**, a variant form of the text in which the explanatory notes connected with the Vedic mantras have been collected into a separate appendix. This is in

A man shaves an infant boy's head. Hair is believed to trap impurities.

contrast with the "Black" Yajur Veda, in which these notes have been incorporated into the body of the text itself. Aside from giving instruction on the practice of rituals, the Shatapatha Brahmana includes a wide variety of texts, one of which is the **Isha Upanishad**. The upanishad's presence in a Brahmana text clearly shows that there was considerable overlap in the times of composition of various Vedic literary styles, rather than clear-cut "periods."

## Shatrughna

("Foe-slayer") In the ***Ramayana***, the earlier of the two great Indian epics, Shatrughna is the second son of King **Dasharatha** and his wife **Sumitra**, and the youngest brother of **Rama**, the epic's protagonist. Whereas Rama's brothers **Lakshmana** and **Bharata** play important roles in the epic—the former as Rama's minion and shadow, the latter serving as Rama's regent during his exile—Shatrughna is virtually invisible and does not play an important part in the larger epic narrative.

## Shattila Ekadashi

Religious observance falling on the eleventh day (**ekadashi**) of the dark (waning) half of the **lunar month** of **Magh** (January–February). As with all the eleventh-day observances, this is dedicated to the **worship** of the god **Vishnu**. Most Hindu festivals have certain prescribed rites, which usually involve fasting (**upavasa**) and worship and often promise specific benefits for faithful performance. On this day one should bathe an image of Vishnu with the five auspicious things (milk, curds, honey, ghee, and sugar water), placing some sesame seed (tila) into each. One should also eat food containing sesame seed. During the night one should sleep before the image of the **deity**. This ekadashi's name comes from the six (sat) ways in which the sesame seed has been used. Faithfully observing this festival is said to cause one to be reborn in Vishnu's realm, **Vaikuntha**.

## Shaving

An act of ritual purification as well as an act of hygiene. The **hair** of the head and face is believed to trap impurity (**ashaucha**), and shaving one or both is a significant part of many rites of

purification. Body hair, however, is rarely shaved, since the **Sanskrit** language has different words for these two types of hair, and they are considered to be different things entirely. During the period of impurity associated with death (**maranashaucha**) the mourners will not shave for the entire ten days, signifying their continuing impurity, but at the end of that period they will shave completely to signify their final purification. Hindu men will sometimes also refrain from shaving as a sign of austerity while they are keeping religious vows, and shave when the vow has been completed. One example occurs during the **lunar month** of **Shravan**, in which men who are devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva** will often refrain from shaving. Another example can be found in the ritual preparation for the annual pilgrimage to **Shabari Malai**; men must keep a strict **ascetic** discipline for forty-one days before the pilgrimage, in which one element is a ban on shaving.

## Shesha

("remnant") Mythical thousand-headed serpent upon which the god **Vishnu** reclines, as on a couch; Shesha is also considered to support the various regions of the **earth**, particularly the underworlds. His name comes from the fact that he is considered a partial incarnation of Vishnu and is thus related to Vishnu, both as incarnation and through his status as Vishnu's couch. As with most of the gods' animal associates, Shesha does not play a prominent role in his own right. The one mythic episode in which he does play an important part is that of churning the Ocean of Milk in which Shesha serves as the churning-rope to turn Mount **Mandara**, with all the gods pulling from one side, and the **demons** pulling from the other. Yet here too he is only instrumental, necessary for the episode to unfold but with the main focus lying

elsewhere. Shesha is seen as having a protective role. In Hindu astrology (**jyotisha**) he is identified as the protective **deity** for the fifth **day** of each half of the **lunar month**. See also **Tortoise avatar**.

## Shibi

In Hindu mythology, sage-king who is famous for his virtue and commitment to his word. Shibi's reputation reaches the ears of the gods, who decide to test it. The god **Dharma**, who is righteousness personified (or in some other versions, the god **Agni**) takes the form of a dove, and is pursued by the god **Indra**, in the form of a hawk. The dove flies into Shibi's lap and entreats him for asylum, which Shibi grants. The hawk observes that it is inappropriate for Shibi to deprive him of the food he needs to eat, and demands in exchange an equal weight of flesh cut from Shibi's body. Shibi agrees, but no matter how much of his flesh he throws into the balance, the dove is still heavier. Finally Shibi sits his whole body into the balance, as a sign that he will sacrifice his life for the dove. At this point the gods resume their divine forms and bless Shibi for his steadfastness.

## Shikhandi

In the *Mahabharata*, the later of the two great Hindu epics, the rebirth of the maiden **Amba**, daughter of the king of **Kashi**. Amba and her sisters have been kidnapped by **Bhishma** to be married to his nephew **Vichitravirya**, but when she informs Bhishma that her heart already belongs to King Salva, Bhishma gallantly releases her. Yet Salva refuses to marry her, for since she has been kidnapped he is not certain of her virginity. Amba then returns to Bhishma, who refuses to marry her because of his vow to remain a lifelong bachelor. In her anger Amba swears to get revenge on Bhishma and performs

harsh physical **asceticism** (**tapas**) to generate the spiritual powers necessary to do this. Her austerities eventually please the god **Shiva**, who promises her that she will be rewarded in her next **birth**. Amba then raises a pyre and burns herself to death.

Amba is reborn as Shikhandi to King **Drupada**, whose wife has received a boon that she will give birth to a girl, but that the girl will later be transformed into a boy. When Shikhandi is born, it is announced that the child is a boy and the child is given the training appropriate for a prince. It is only upon fixing a marriage for Shikhandi that the issue of the child's gender comes up and it is finally resolved when Shikhandi exchanges sexes with a nature spirit (**yaksha**) named **Sthunakarna**, who becomes a woman, and Shikhandi a man. The switch is originally intended to be for only a short period, but is later extended until Shikhandi's death, at which time Sthunakarna again becomes male.

During the Mahabharata war Shikhandi challenges **Bhishma** in battle but the latter refuses to fight him, since Shikhandi has been born a woman. Shikhandi takes advantage of this gallantry to shoot a barrage of arrows at Bhishma, as does the warrior **Arjuna**, who hides behind Shikhandi for protection. With this assault, Bhishma finally decides that the time has come for him to give up the fight and die. In the battle that follows after Bhishma falls, Shikhandi is killed by **Ashvatthama**, the **son** of **Drona**, who fights on the side of the **Kauravas** in the war. Based on Shikhandi's role in shielding Arjuna from harm, in modern **Hindi** the name Shikhandi is used to designate a scapegoat, someone behind whom another person hides and escapes blame.

## Shikhara

Temple tower that was the central feature of the **Nagara** architectural style, prevalent in northern and eastern India. The temple's tallest tower was always directly over the image of the temple's primary **deity**, although there were often also smaller, subsidiary towers to lead the eye up to that primary one. Within this general pattern there are two important variations, exemplified by the temples at **Khajuraho** and **Orissa**. In the Khajuraho style a group of shikharas is unified into one continuous upward swell, which draws the eye upward like a series of hills leading to a distant peak. In contrast, the Orissan style tends to emphasize the differences between the temple's parts, with a low entrance hall (**jagamohan**) next to a beehive-shaped temple tower (**deul**), which is often three or four times taller than the entrance hall.

## Shiksha

("learning") One of the six **Vedangas**. These were the supplemental branches of knowledge connected with the **Vedas**, the oldest Hindu religious texts, and all the Vedangas were associated with the use of the Vedas. Shiksha was concerned with articulation, proper pronunciation, and the laws of euphonic combination (**sandhi**), that is, sounds combined in a certain way to have a pleasant effect. Although this may sound trivial, it was a central concern in the cult of **sacrifice** laid out in the **Brahmana** literature. This was because the power of these sacrifices was believed to depend on the proper delivery of the Vedic **mantras**, with any mistake being potentially ruinous. Aside from shiksha, the other Vedangas are **vyakarana** (**Sanskrit** grammar), **chandas** (Sanskrit prosody), **kalpa** (ritual instructions), **nirukta** (etymology), and **jyotisha** (favorable times for sacrifices).

their possessions. When he finally returns to his wife, their only remaining valuables are one pair of her jeweled anklets. The couple decides to travel to the town of **Madurai** to sell the anklets, and use the proceeds to reestablish their family as traders.

When they reach Madurai, however, tragedy strikes. The night before the couple's arrival, a dishonest jeweler has stolen an identical pair of anklets from the queen of Madurai, and when Kovalan goes to sell the anklets, the same jeweler accuses him of being the thief. Kovalan is executed, and when Kannaki hears of this she comes into the city, bearing the other anklet as a sign of his innocence. She gains an audience with the king, who falls dead with remorse when he realizes the disaster he has caused. Still furious, Kannaki rips off her left breast, pronounces a **curse** on the city, and hurls the breast onto the street; the breast bursts into flames that consume the city. In the end, Madurai's patron **goddess** persuades Kannaki to withdraw her curse, and Kannaki dies a few days later.

One of the forces assumed to be operating here is the power of a woman's devotion to her husband. Even though Kovalan squanders all their money through unfaithfulness, Kannaki readily takes him back when he returns, and is willing to give up her last resource to help him. The power of her devotion gives her the ability to cause widespread destruction through a single curse, and the strength of this power is still an article of faith among many Hindus even today. For further discussion of the themes in this play, and more general consideration of images of Hindu **women**, see Sarah Mitter, *Dharma's Daughters*, 1991. See also **Tamil language** and **Tamil epics**.



Image of the god Vishnu. Crafted according to the rules of shilpa shastra, the image's proportions are strictly defined and he holds identifying objects.

## Shilappadigaram

("the Jeweled Anklet") The greatest epic poem in classical Tamil literature. It is traditionally ascribed to the poet **Ilangovadigal** (2nd c.) but almost certainly was written several centuries later. The poem is a symbolic theater for several important themes that have pervaded Hindu culture, particularly the need for a king to rule righteously and the power gained by a wife through her devotion to her husband. The story tells the tale of a married couple, Kannaki and her husband Kovalan. In his infatuation with a dancer, Kovalan squanders the family's wealth, selling nearly all

## Shilpa Shastra

General name for rules and standards governing the mechanical arts and handicrafts—traditionally numbered at sixty-four—through which anything was

formed, made, or fashioned. In the context of art and **architecture**, the term *shilpa shastra* is most often associated with two specific areas, which by the medieval era had had their conventions strictly fixed. One of these governed the creation of sculptural images, according to which the images of the **deities** had to be carved to exactly defined proportions, along with their identifying attributes. The other area was in regard to buildings, whether individual structures such as temples, or collections of buildings in city planning. The layout of temples was modeled after the human body (and thus mirrored the sculptor's precision regarding the images of the divine); entire towns were similarly modeled to create a harmonious urban environment.

## Shipra River

A distant tributary of the **Yamuna River**, which has its headwaters in the **Vindhya Mountains** in **Madhya Pradesh**. The Shipra is considered a holy river because it flows through **Ujjain**, a central Indian city with great religious and historical significance.

## Shirdi

Small town in the state of **Maharashtra**, about 120 miles northeast of Bombay. It is famous as the home of the modern saint **Shirdi Sai Baba**, who appeared there as an adolescent boy in 1872 and lived there until his death in 1918. He was greatly esteemed by people from all religious communities, and the shrine built in the place in which he lived receives considerable traffic even today.

## Shirdi Sai Baba

(d. 1918) Hindu **ascetic** and religious teacher whose disciples came from many different religious communities—Hindu, Muslim, Parsi, and Christian. His origins are mysterious, for in 1872 he simply appeared in the town of **Shirdi** in **Maharashtra**, as a boy of about sixteen.

He was dressed in the manner of a Muslim **faqir** (religious mendicant, or beggar), but claimed to have forgotten his birthplace and his family. Because of his dress a local priest forbade him from staying at a Hindu temple, so he moved into a small, unused mosque, where he lived for the rest of his life. He kept a perpetual fire burning in a fire pit, and for religious rituals performed both Muslim prayers and Hindu **worship**. He was most famous for his supernatural powers: healing (for which he often gave people ash from his fire pit to eat), foretelling the future, multilocation (the ability to be in two places at the same time), and appearing in **dreams** to guide his followers. His response to people's immediate needs made him famous through much of India, but he always maintained that his purpose in performing miracles was to attract people to spiritual life. He gradually attracted disciples, and in the time since his death the town of Shirdi has become an important regional pilgrimage place (**tirtha**). Although he referred to himself as **Sai Baba**, he is now usually called Shirdi Sai Baba, to distinguish him from **Sathya Sai Baba**, another religious leader who claims to be Shirdi Sai Baba's reincarnated form.

## Shishtachara

The "practice of learned [people]," which was one of the traditional sources for determining religious duty (**dharma**) for matters not discussed in the **dharma literature**, or for cases in which the literature itself gave conflicting opinions. Although Shishtachara was the least authoritative source of dharma, after the Vedic scriptures and the dharma literature, making it an authority recognizes that life has many ambiguities and uncertainties and at the same time provides a resource for determining the appropriate action by taking as a model the practice of established and knowledgeable people. Another term to designate this sort of authority was *sadachara*, the "practice of good [people]."

## Shishupala

In the **Mahabharata**, the later of the two great Hindu epics, Shishupala is the son of the king of Cedi. He is also described as a reincarnation of **Jaya**—one of the gatekeepers of the god **Vishnu's** heavenly dwelling, **Vaikuntha**—who has been cursed by the sages to be born three times as a **demon** and killed by the god Vishnu each time. Shishupala is born with three eyes and four hands, but as his horrified parents are about to abandon him, a celestial voice informs them that the child will grow up into a powerful king. The heavenly voice also says that Shishupala can be killed by only one person on **earth**, that Shishupala's third eye will disappear when he sees that person, and that two of his hands will disappear when the person takes him in his lap. After some time the god **Krishna** pays a visit to Cedi, and when the signs take place as foretold, Shishupala's parents know that Krishna is the only person who can kill their son. Shishupala's mother is Krishna's aunt, and when she begs him not to kill her son, Krishna promises to forgive Shishupala's misdeeds one hundred times. Krishna sticks to his word, but such forbearance only makes Shishupala more reckless, and after the one hundred and first insult, Krishna throws his discus and cuts off Shishupala's head.

## Shishupala-Vadha

("Slaughter of **Shishupala**") **Sanskrit** drama written by the seventh-century poet **Magha**, which is traditionally reckoned as one of the six **mahakavyas**. The play's theme is the death of the mythic figure Shishupala, whose mother has been promised by **Krishna** that he will forgive her son one hundred times. This promise only makes Shishupala more reckless, and after the one hundred and first insult, Krishna throws his discus and cuts off Shishupala's head. Aside from its mythic theme, the play is notable for a number of unusual verses, such as verses that are perfect palindromes (verses that are the same when read backward or forward), or that use only one or two consonants, as a sign of the poet's skill.

## Shishya

("to be taught") A word that in its literal meaning can refer to any student but in its most common sense refers to the disciple of a religious instructor (**guru**).

## Shitala

Hindu **goddess** who is both worshiped and feared. Shitala was traditionally believed to be the physical representation of smallpox, a deadly virus, and a person infected with the disease was thought to be possessed by the goddess, a notion reinforced by the fever and delirium that often accompany this disease. Shitala is also associated with heat—both because of the fever caused by smallpox and because her major religious observance, **Shitalashtami**, comes near the advent of the hot **season**. Shitala is considered a jealous, spiteful goddess whose wrath is visited upon those who ignore and displease her. The literal meaning of her name, "Cool One," can be seen as an attempt to appease her wrath through flattery. Shitala has retained prominence even though the World Health Organization has declared that smallpox has been completely eradicated. In a fascinating example of religious change, one writer details how Shitala has shifted the disease through which she shows herself, and now appears in the guise of tuberculosis. See Margaret Thrice Egnor, "The Changed Mother, or What the Smallpox Goddess Did when There Was No More Smallpox," *Contributions to Asian Studies XVIII*, 1984.

## Shitalashtami

Religious observance celebrated on the eighth day of the bright (waxing) half of the lunar month of **Baisakh** (April–May), in honor of the **goddess Shitala**. In northern India this festival

falls at the advent of the hottest time of **year**; the climate thus mirrors the heat and fevers brought on by contact with Shitala herself, in her form as smallpox. Although Shitala is conceived as spiteful and jealous, she cannot be ignored, since this will be sure to provoke her wrath.
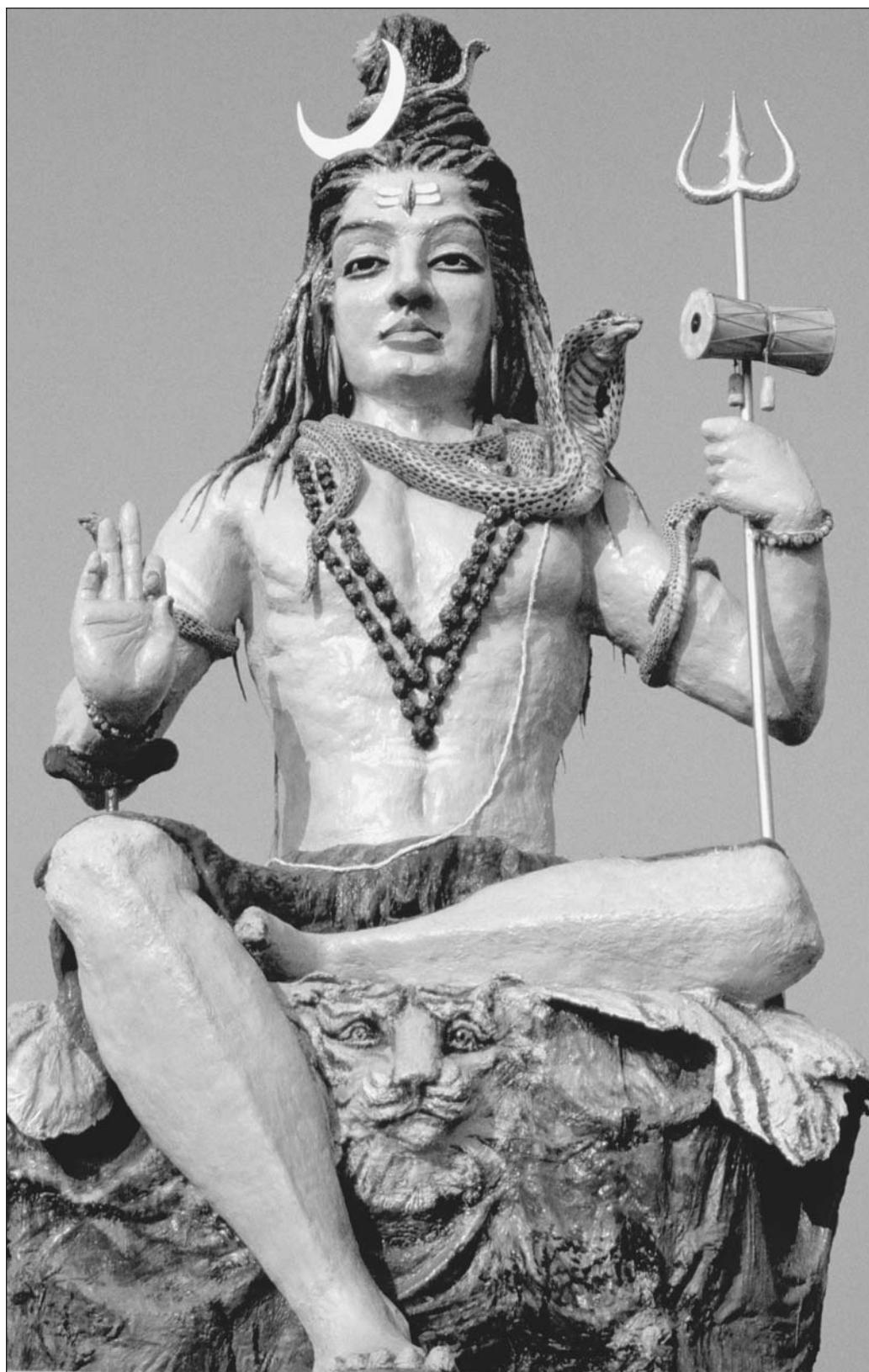
## Shiv Sena

("Army of **Shivaji**") Militant Hindu organization formed in Bombay in the late 1960s by Bal Thackeray. It was originally a movement made up of people native to **Maharashtra**, a modern Indian "linguistic state" formed to unite people with a common language, to resist the perceived dominance of outsiders, in this case migrants from **Tamil Nadu** who were taking away jobs from the Maharashtrian "sons of the soil." This nativist bent is reflected in its name, taking as its symbol the Maharashtrian hero Shivaji, who successfully resisted the power of the Moghul Empire. In more recent times the movement has associated itself with **Hindutva** or Hindu nationalism, projecting itself as defending the interests of the larger Hindu community against the "outsiders," in particular Muslims. The Shiv Sena's potential for violent action is well known, and they have always been ready to defend their interests with physical force, as well as working through official channels. The Sena's ability to provide "muscle power" has given them political strength in Maharashtra, both in the municipal government of Bombay, and most recently as a partner (with the **Bharatiya Janata Party**) in running the state government. This political strength is being translated into a strong presence in other areas, particularly in labor unions, in which the Sena-affiliated union is gaining greater influence and membership. See also **Moghul dynasty**.

## Shiva

(auspicious) Along with the god **Vishnu** and the **Goddess**, one of the three most important **deities** in the Hindu pantheon. All three are notable for being virtually absent from the Vedas, and their collective rise to dominance (and the gradual eclipse of the original Vedic gods) points clearly to a definitive change in the Hindu tradition. Of the three, Shiva is not mentioned at all in the **Veda**. He is identified with the god **Rudra**, who first appears in a few of the late Vedic hymns and who is later identified in the **Shvetashvatara Upanishad** as the single supreme deity behind all things. The word *Shiva* ("auspicious") first appears in this upanishad, but as an adjective modifying the feminine noun *body*.

Despite Rudra/Shiva's appearance in the upanishad as a supreme divinity, his position is not clear-cut. He is described as a master of archery who dwells in the mountains (and thus away from human beings) and is implored not to use his arrows to harm either man or beast. It is certain that Rudra/Shiva is not a Vedic deity, and some have claimed that his roots lie in the ancient urban-cultural center known as the **Indus Valley civilization**, citing as evidence one of the seals found in **Harappa**, an ancient city of Pakistan, which shows a horned figure sitting cross-legged as if in meditation. This identification is possible but hardly compelling. A more likely possibility is that he entered the pantheon as a god worshiped by **ascetics**, who have always been associated with mountain dwellings. His connection with ascetics is reinforced by several ascetic characteristics attributed to Shiva, such as the matted locks and ash-smeared body. Ascetic origins would also account for his marginal status among the gods, since this would have rendered him an "outsider" to Vedic sacrificial cult, which was the "established" religion of the time. Shiva's dramatic entry into the pantheon comes in the story of the death of his wife **Sati**. In this story, his

Statue of the god Shiva from the Kumbha Mela festival in Allahabad. Living outside of society with his hair in matted locks and his body smeared with ash, Shiva is often regarded as the model for the Hindu ascetic.

father-in-law **Daksha's** insulting remarks—that Shiva was an ascetic with no money, job, or family, and was unfit to join respectable society—finally resulted in the destruction of Daksha's **sacrifice** as a sign of Shiva's supremacy.

Shiva has retained this ambivalent, sometimes marginal quality in his iconography, his mythology, and his character. Perhaps his most basic and important characteristic is that he is a divinity whose nature allows him to move beyond the opposing forces (or dualities) within himself and the world by being at all times the possibility of both forces at once. Shiva can represent both the wild and dangerous side of life and the respectable and refined side. On the one hand, he is the typical ascetic, with matted hair, ash-smeared body, and a home on Mount **Kailas** in the remote **Himalayas**. On the other hand, he is Hindu society's ideal for the good husband, who dotes upon his wife **Parvati**. His body is adorned with snakes and clothed with a bloody **elephant** skin, but he also wears the **Ganges** River and the crescent **moon**, which are associated with beauty, **purity**, and **auspiciousness**. His mythic deeds stress his overwhelming power, against which no enemy can stand, and his sudden and sometimes impetuous temper, seen best in the destruction of **Kama**, the god of love; yet this sudden violence contrasts with his **grace** and favor toward his devotees (**bhakta**), by whom he is given the name "quickly satisfied" (Ashutosh) and to whom he will give almost everything. Although he is portrayed as simple and without deceit (as **Bholanath**, the "simple lord"), he is also traditionally described as the expositor of the **tantras**, the most secret and hidden religious practice of all. This transcendence of all opposites can be seen in the images that commonly represent him: in his form as **Nataraja**, in which many of these contrary attributes are shown, or as **Ardhanarishvara**, in which the image is half male and half female. This transcendence of duality is also visible in the **linga**, the pillar-shaped object that is his symbolic form, whose base and shaft are interpreted as symbolizing male and female reproductive organs. Finally, one can see this transcendence in the tantric conception of the **subtle body** (the system of psychic centers, or **chakras**, that run throughout the human body), in which religious practice aims for the union of Shiva and **Shakti**. As Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty points out, through his actions Shiva embodies all the contradictory possibilities for human experience, and in mythic form provides a resolution that one ordinary human life can never provide.

In medieval times Shiva's devotees developed a doctrine of **avatars** (incarnations of Shiva who take the form of a variety of saints, sages, and minor deities who appear on earth to restore balance and perform other necessary acts), probably in response to the older and better developed notion of avatars of Vishnu. Unlike Vishnu's avatars, Shiva's do not seem to have been a way to create a place for smaller existing deities in the larger pantheon. Of Shiva's twenty-one avatars, the most important one is **Hanuman**, who is the only one with a well-established independent cult. The others were sages (such as **Durvasas**) and important beings, but the worship of Shiva's avatars has never upstaged the worship of Shiva himself, as has often happened with Vishnu. For further information on the mythology of Shiva, see Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty *Shiva*, 1981; and Stella Kramrisch, *The Presence of Shiva*, 1981. See also **Shaiva**.

## Shivaga-Sindamani

By far the latest of the three **Tamil epics**, written perhaps in the late sixth century. The story describes the adventures of Shivaga, a man who excels at every possible manly art, who with each new challenge wins a new wife for his harem but in the end renounces everything to become a Jain monk. Although the story clearly has a Jain bias, the *Shivaga-Sindamani* paints a

Ascetics observing Shivaratri.

useful picture of contemporary southern Indian life.

## Shivaji

(1627–1680) **Maratha** chieftain who carved out an independent kingdom in western **Maharashtra** and **Goa**, and was able to hold onto it despite the efforts of the Moghul emperor **Aurangzeb** to take it back. Shivaji's father Shahji was a Moghul governor in the city of Bijapur, and Shivaji began his operations as a robber chief there. He gained the support of the local Maratha people, and his first important conquest was a hill fort near the city of Pune. From there he expanded his territory and consolidated his power, building forts to hold the territory. Shivaji was a devout Hindu, which undoubtedly helped gain him support from the common people. In modern times his Hindu roots, and his opposition to Moghul rule, have transformed him into a Hindu nationalist hero, particularly in Maharashtra. See also **Moghul dynasty**.

## Shivananda, Swami

(1887–1963) Hindu **ascetic**, teacher, and founder of the **Divine Life Society**. Shivananda's first calling was to be a doctor; after getting his degree, he spent some time practicing medicine in Malaysia, spurred by a passion to serve others. Later in life he felt the call of renunciation and, in 1924, settled in **Rishikesh**, where he was based for the rest of his life. Shivananda's message stressed the teachings of the **Advaita Vedanta** school, which is devoted to a belief in monism (the belief in a single Ultimate Reality where all things are united), and the practice of **yoga** for a disciplined life. He saw his own mission as teaching others, a mission fostered by the Divine Life Society's publications,

which continue to be important today. Shivananda's learning and religious charisma made him greatly respected, and in keeping with his original vocation, one of the charitable works sponsored by the Divine Life Society is a free medical clinic. For further information see David Miller, "The Divine Life Society Movement," in Robert D. Baird (ed.), *Religion in Modern India*, 1998.

## Shiva Purana

One of the eighteen traditional **puranas**, which were an important genre of **smrti** texts and the repository of much of traditional Indian mythology. The smrtis, or "remembered" texts, were a class of literature, which, although deemed important, were considered less authoritative than the **shrutis** or "heard" texts. In brief, the shrutis included the **Vedas**, the oldest and most authoritative Hindu religious texts, whereas the smrtis included the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, the **dharma literature**, the **Bhagavad Gita**, and the puranas. The puranas are the collection of all types of sacred lore, from mythic tales to ritual instruction to exaltation of various sacred sites (**tirthas**) and actions. Most of the puranas stress the **worship** of one deity as supreme over all others and as this one's name clearly shows it is focused on the worship of **Shiva**. The *Shiva Purana* is one of the longer and larger puranas. It gives an exhaustive account of Shiva's mythic deeds—many of which have become the common mythology for many traditional Hindus—as well as instructions for how, where, and when Shiva is to be worshiped.

## Shivaratri

("Night of **Shiva**") The most important annual festival for devotees (**bhakta**) of the god Shiva, celebrated on the fourteenth day of the dark (waning) half of the **lunar month** of **Phalgun** (February–March). Worshipers of Shiva on this night are said to receive unlimited religious benefits. The observances for this festival fall into three general categories: fasting (**upavasa**), wakefulness, and **worship**. Those fasting on Shivaratri must abstain from all grains—which define the difference between a "snack" and a "meal"—but are free to eat all other things. During the night observers stay awake, preferably at a temple, relating and listening to Shiva's mythic exploits, and worship Shiva early the next morning. Shivaratri is a major Indian festival, and in many places the readings and discourses are broadcast through loudspeakers, so that those nearby may also share the religious merit.

The charter myth for this festival describes the power of any religious observances performed on this day, even if unknowingly. According to the story, a hunter lost in the woods on the evening of Shivaratri climbs a tree for safety, and spends the night. Unknown to him, at the base of the tree is a **linga**, the pillar-shaped object which is Shiva's symbolic form. The hunter passes a cold and miserable night, and through his shivering shakes the tree, sending dew and leaves from the tree as **offerings** onto the linga; upon descending the tree he kneels to pick up an arrow he has dropped during the night and thus kneels before the linga. Despite a lifetime of bad **karma** generated by his livelihood as a hunter, the religious merit from this unknowing observance brought this hunter to the abode of Shiva on his death, and to a later rebirth as a king.

## Shiwalik Goddesses

Local goddesses from the **Shiwalik hills** separating the **Himalayas** from the northern Indian plain. Some have little importance beyond the borders of their particular villages, whereas others have become important regional **deities**. As with all the goddesses of India, the Shiwalik goddesses are considered to be manifestations of the same feminine divine energy—the **Goddess**. As one

sign of this identity, many of these sites are claimed to be **Shakti Pithas**—places where a part of the dismembered goddess **Sati** fell to **earth** and took form as a different goddess. Shiwalik goddesses are also thought of as relatives. Kathleen Erndl mentions seven goddesses, known as the Seven Sisters: **Vaishno Devi**, **Jwalamukhi**, **Vajreshvari Devi**, **Chintapurni**, **Naina Devi**, **Chamunda**, and **Mansa Devi**. Modern **Hindi** language sources list nine—the seven just mentioned plus **Shakumbhari Devi** and **Kalika Devi**. This group of nine is scattered in three different Indian states along the Shiwalik Range: Seven are in **Himachal Pradesh**, Vaishno Devi is in **Jammu** and **Kashmir**, and Shakumbhari Devi is in **Uttar Pradesh**. The pantheon here is fairly flexible, and the goddesses mentioned in these lists will probably vary over time, partly reflecting the success or failure to establish the holiness of these sites. For further information on the Shiwalik goddesses and **worship** of the Mother Goddess in northwestern India, see Kathleen Erndl, *Victory To The Mother*, 1993. See also **pitha**.

## Shiwalik Hills

Himalayan foothills running through the Indian states of **Uttar Pradesh**, **Himachal Pradesh**, and **Jammu** and **Kashmir**. The hills are an ecological transition zone between the plains and the mountains but have their own religious ecology as well. Whereas the sites high in the **Himalayas** are often associated with **Shiva**, the primary sacred sites (**tirthas**) in the Shiwaliks are associated with the **Goddess**. See also **Shiwalik goddesses**.

## Shraddha

("faithful") Ancestral memorial rite, performed either for one specific person (**ekoddishta**), or for a group in which the primary beneficiaries were one's three paternal ancestors (**parvana**).

An ekoddishta shraddha is usually first performed on the eleventh day after a person's death, although it may be repeated on the anniversary of the death. It is also usually performed every year during the **Pitrpaksha**, a two-week period specifically devoted to such rites, on the lunar day during this period that corresponds to the lunar day of death.

A parvana shraddha can be performed on a number of different occasions, for a number of different reasons. In the **dharma literature** and its commentaries, shraddhas are classified as falling in all three categories of ritual action: **nitya**, **naimittika**, and **kamya**. Certain shraddhas are obligatory (nitya) because they are prescribed for certain particular times, such as during the Pitrpaksha. Other shraddhas are occasional (naimittika) because they are necessary only under certain conditions, such as the obligation to give a **tirtha** shraddha when one visits a pilgrimage place (tirtha). Finally, certain shraddhas are freely performed because of the desire (**kama**) for certain benefits from them—usually conceived as the well-being of one's ancestors—and these are desiderative (kamya) shraddhas.

Whatever the motive for giving the shraddha, the general procedure always has two particular features: symbolically feeding one's ancestor(s) by **offering** balls of cooked grain (**pindas**), and feeding real food to a group of brahmins (the group with the highest social status in Hinduism) representing one's ancestors. Each of these parts is given a great deal of ritual elaboration, and there is considerable disagreement about which should come first, but in modern times offering the pindas generally precedes the meal. Many texts exalt the spiritual merits generated from feeding brahmins, but this is hardly surprising, since most of these texts were written by brahmins, and for many brahmins living at pilgrimage places these shraddhas were (and remain) an important part of their livelihood. However, many people deem this livelihood parasitic, and it is also potentially inauspicious, since it is gained through rites performed for the

dead. For further information see Pandurang Vaman Kane, *A History of Dharmasastra*, 1968; and Raj Bali Pandey, *Hindu Samskaras*, 1969.

## Shraddhanand, Swami

(b. Lala Munshi Ram, d. 1926) Key figure in the development of the **Arya Samaj**, a modern Hindu reformist movement. Shraddanand was born in **Punjab** and got a law degree from the Government College in Lahore, but was most influential through his support for the Arya Samaj's educational institutions. His greatest work was establishing the Gurukul Kangri near the sacred city of **Haridwar** in 1901. The Gurukul ("teacher's household") was a boarding school where Arya Samaj children could be raised with "progressive" Arya values, far from the corrupting influences of traditional mainstream Hindu society. This model was based on the **Vedas**, the earliest Hindu religious texts, which the Arya Samaj took as the sole religious authority, and in which a student would live as a member of his teacher's family. Educationally, the curriculum stressed the arts and sciences necessary for a "modern" education, but also traditional **Sanskrit** learning, particularly of the Vedas. Shraddhanand became a **Sanyasi** in 1917 but continued to support political causes, particularly Indian social and political leader **Mohandas Gandhi's** 1919 call for non-cooperation with the British government. His fervor and strength of character made him an unpopular figure, and he was assassinated by a Muslim in 1926.

## Shramana

(from the **Sanskrit** verb *shram*, "to strive") General term denoting religious adepts from the middle of the first millennium before the common era whose beliefs stressed renunciation, **ascetic** practices, and the search for intuitive insights. Shramana religious practice was individualist, experiential, free-form, and independent of society. All of these qualities put them in religious competition with the **brahmin** priests, whose practice stressed mastery of sacred texts and performing enormously complex rituals; the need for sponsors for these rituals made brahmin religion "establishment" religion, serving its patron classes. Indian grammarians use the pair shramana and brahmin to illustrate typically bitter opponents, along with examples such as mongoose and cobra, and their difference seems to be between a religious model stressing individual charisma (shramana), and one stressing highly trained technical expertise (brahmin). Part of the shramana tradition remained outside the Hindu fold by virtue of resolutely rejecting the authority of the **Vedas**; the Jains, Buddhists, Ajivikas, and other religious groups developed as a result of this rejection of the Vedas. Part of the shramana tradition was absorbed into traditional Hinduism in the **dharma literature**, which found a place for renunciant **asceticism** in the form of the **Sanyasi**, the last of the four traditional **stages of life** (ashramas). For further information on the shramanas and the development of this tradition, see Padmanabh S. Jaini, "Sramanas: Their Conflict with Brahmanical Society," in Joseph Elder (ed.), *Chapters in Indian Civilization*, 1970.

## Shrauta Sutras

("aphorisms on Vedic rituals") A set of brief sayings (4th c. B.C.E.) explaining the ritual instructions for performing the public sacrifices prescribed in the **Vedas**, the earliest and most authoritative Hindu religious texts. Such sacrificial instructions had been prescribed in the **Brahmana** literature—itself considered part of the Veda—but with the passage of time the Brahmanas had become too complex and difficult to understand. The Shrauta Sutras were essentially manuals for the priests presiding over the Vedic sacrifices, composed to ensure that the sacrifices would be performed correctly. Aside from instructions for

performing the **sacrifice**, the Shrauta Sutras also contained an appendix with the exact measurements for the sacred altar, known as the **Sulva Sutras**. In theory, the Shrauta Sutras were the first part of a **Kalpa Sutra**, which would also contain prescriptions for domestic rites (**Grhya Sutras**) and appropriate human behavior (**Dharma Sutras**), with each Kalpa Sutra being connected to one of the four Vedas. But in practice the story of the Shrauta Sutras is far more complex, since aside from the three complete Kalpa Sutras that have survived, by **Apastamba**, **Baudhayana**, and **Hiranyakeshin**, there are other Shrauta Sutras, indicating a more independent composition.

## Shravan

According to the lunar **calendar**, by which most Hindu religious festivals are determined, Shravan is the fifth month in the lunar **year**, usually falling within July and August. In northern India Shravan is associated with the rains, the breaking of the heat and revival of the land, and a general feeling of release. The major holidays in Shravan are **Nag Panchami**, **Kamika Ekadashi**, **Tulsidas Jayanti**, **Putrada Ekadashi**, and **Raksha Bandhan**. In addition, the entire month is deemed sacred to the god **Shiva**, with all **Mondays** and the **Shravan Vrat** marked out as times for particular observances.

## Shravan Vrat

Religious vow (**vrat**) performed during the entire **lunar month** of **Shravan** (July–August), which is dedicated to the god **Shiva**. During this month devotees (**bhakta**) will perform various acts of homage, abstinence, and **worship**, although the strictness of this observance depends largely on individual inclination. Some worshipers observe a vow on each **Monday** of Shravan to worship Shiva (Monday is the day of the **week** over which he presides). The observant will fast (**upavasa**) during the

day, worship Shiva and members of his "family" (**Ganesh**, **Parvati**, and **Nandi**), and sometimes stay up late into the night reciting Shiva's mythic deeds. Some devotees will also refrain from cutting their **hair** and **shaving** their beards during this month, in imitation of Shiva's primary identity as the great **ascetic**.

Another observance falling in Shravan is the festival of **kanvars**, in which devotees draw pots of **water** from the **Ganges**, suspend them from a bamboo pole (kanvar), and carry this water to a Shiva temple, where it is offered to Shiva. This practice occurs in many places throughout northern India, but the most famous place is at **Deoghar** in the state of **Bihar**. There Shiva is present in his form as **Vaidyanath** ("Lord of Physicians"), and the image of Vaidyanath at Deoghar is one of the twelve **jyotirlingas** (images considered especially sacred). Pilgrims going to Deoghar draw their water from the Ganges at Sultanganj, and then walk to Deoghar to offer the water, a distance of over sixty miles. This particular observance combines devotion to God with the willingness to suffer hardship; it is often performed to fulfill a vow made when asking for some divine favor. See also **Solah Somvar Vrat**.

## Shri

("auspicious," "bringing good fortune") Epithet of the **goddess Lakshmi**, reflecting her identification with luck, fortune, and prosperity. See **Lakshmi**.

## Shri Aurobindo

Name taken by the Indian philosopher and social activist **Aurobindo Ghose** after retiring from political life to become an **ascetic**. See **Aurobindo Ghose**.

## Shrichakra

Symbolic diagram (**yantra**) used in **worship** by the **Shrividya** school, a branch of the secret, ritually based religious practice known as **tantra**. The

Shrichakra is a set of nine interlocking triangles with four pointing up and five pointing down. The figure is surrounded by a double series of lotus petals, then an enclosing circle, and finally angular exterior walls. In the center of the diagram is a single point known as the **bindu**, representing the ultimate divinity that is the source of all things. The shrichakra is considered a subtle form of the **goddess** Lalita Tripurasundari, a goddess who is identified with different local goddesses throughout southern India. Lalita Tripurasundari is considered a "textual" goddess since she appears as an object of worship in the Shrichakra diagram but has no temple or image. The Shrichakra is used as a ritual aid during the rite known as **samharakrama**, in which the adept symbolically destroys the external world and ideas of a separate Self to become completely identified with this goddess, who is considered the source of all reality. For extensive information on the Shrichakra, see Douglas Renfrew Brooks, *The Secret of the Three Cities*, 1990.

## Shrichandra

(b. 1494–1612?) Historical founder of the **Udasi** ("indifferent") **ascetic** community. Shrichandra was the elder son of Guru Nanak, the first of the Sikh community's ten gurus. By all accounts, Shrichandra was a devout and pious man, but Nanak passed over Shrichandra to designate one of his followers, Angad, as the second Sikh guru. According to tradition this was because Guru Nanak, believing that his followers should live married lives in regular society, disapproved of Shrichandra's status as ascetic. Due to his pedigree and his piety, Shrichandra gained a considerable following of his own, but the Udasis have always been considered as belonging in the Hindu fold. During the **Kumbha Mela**, an important bathing (**snana**) festival held in different places in northern India, the Udasis march third in the bathing procession, behind the **Sanyasis** and the **Bairagis**.

## Shrikrishnavali

("Series [of poems] to **Krishna**") Series of sixty-one short poems dedicated to the god Krishna, written in the **Braj Bhasha** form of **Hindi** by the poet-saint **Tulsidas** (1532–1623?). This collection is unusual, since Tulsidas is renowned as a devotee (**bhakta**) of the god **Rama**, and most of his literary work describes Rama's exploits. The *Shrikrishnavali* is a poetic cycle about Krishna's life, so it begins with poems devoted to Krishna's childhood and youth in the **Braj** region. Most of the text, however, describes the sorrow of the cow herd girls (**gopis**) after Krishna's departure for his kingdom in **Mathura**, and their scornful rejection of Krishna's messenger **Uddhava**, who tries to convince them that since Krishna is the supreme **deity**, he is everywhere. This work is an example of the ecumenical, or universal, tendencies found throughout Tulsidas's work. Not only did he compose poems in praise of another deity, thus transcending sectarian barriers, but he also transcended linguistic barriers by writing these poems in Braj Bhasha, the most widely read language of his time, rather than his own native **Avadhi**.

## Shrinathji

The name of a particular image of the god **Krishna**, the presiding **deity** of the Shrinathji temple in **Nathdwara**, **Rajasthan**. According to tradition, the image was originally hidden on top of Mount **Govardhan**, a famous mountain in the **Braj** region that is mythically associated with Krishna's humiliation of the storm-god **Indra**. The image's location was revealed in a **dream** to **Vallabhacharya**, the founder of the religious community known as the **Pushti Marg**. Vallabhacharya built a temple to house the image on Mount Govardhan, and his descendants have remained Shrinathji's hereditary servants since that time. The image was taken to Rajasthan in 1669, a move prompted by fears that it would be destroyed by the Moghul emperor **Aurangzeb**. According

Shrirangam, an island in the Cauvery River, contains the Ranganathaswamy Temple, dedicated to the god Vishnu.

to tradition Shrinathji revealed his wish to stay in Nathdwara by sinking his wagon's wheels deep into the earth, so that it could not go further. A new temple was erected and dedicated in 1672, and the image has remained there ever since.

Whether or not one accepts the claim of the divine mandate, much of the story seems reasonable. Given the proximity of Braj to Agra, the Moghul capital, keepers of well-known images might have been concerned about their safety, and since the neighboring state of Rajasthan was controlled by the Moghuls' Hindu vassals, this would have been an obvious place to go. Even today Nathdwara is in a remote and thinly settled region of Rajasthan, which indicates that in earlier times it would have been a place of refuge. The Nathdwara temple is particularly important to the Pushti Marg, a religious community devoted to the god Krishna, who play the major role in administering it. For more information see Rajendra Jindel, *Culture Of a Sacred Town*, 1976. See also **Moghul dynasty**.

## Shringeri

Town and sacred site (**tirtha**) in eastern **Karnataka**, about 160 miles west of Bangalore. Although Shringeri is a very small town, it is religiously significant as the home of the Shringeri **Math**, one of the four **Dashanami** maths, the monastic centers believed to have been established by the philosopher **Shankaracharya**. The **ascetics** of the Shringeri math have a reputation for very strict adherence to traditional practice, and the town has a long standing as a center for religious learning.

## Shringeri Math

One of the four **maths** or monastic centers traditionally believed to have been established by the great philosopher **Shankaracharya**; the others are the **Jyotir Math**, **Sharada Math**, and **Govardhan Math**. These four sacred centers are each associated with one of the four geographical corners of the Indian subcontinent; the Shringeri Math is in the southern quarter, in the city of **Shringeri** in the southern Indian state of **Karnataka**. Shankaracharya is traditionally cited as the founder of the **Dashanami Sanyasis**, the most prestigious Hindu **ascetic** order. The Dashanami ("ten names") ascetics are devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva**, who are divided into ten divisions, each with a different name. These ten divisions are organized into four larger organizational groups—**Anandawara**, **Bhogawara**, **Bhuriwara**, and **Kitawara**—each of which has two or three of the ten divisions, and each of which is associated with one of the four sacred centers. Of these, the Shringeri Math is associated with the Bhuriwara group.

## Shrirangam

Island in the **Cauvery** River, just north of the town of **Tiruchirappalli** in the state of **Tamil Nadu**. The site is most famous for the Ranganathaswamy Temple, dedicated to the god **Vishnu** in his form as **Ranganatha**, who is sleeping on the back of his serpent couch **Shesha** in the sea of cosmic dissolution (**pralaya**). The temple is built in the **Dravida** style of **architecture**, in which the temple buildings are of modest height but cover an immensely large area and are surrounded by a boundary wall with massive towers (**gopurams**) over each wall's central gateway. In the temple's outer zones one often finds shops and houses, making such temples veritable cities in their own right. The Ranganathaswamy temple has a series of seven concentric processional streets, making it one of the largest temples in India. It was built in stages by the various dynasties that controlled this part of southern India—**Chera**, **Pandya**, **Chola**, **Hoysala**, and **Vijayanagar**—although the bulk of the construction was done by the last two. Since Vishnu's image is that of the divine king, it is hardly surprising that each of these regional dynasties patronized this site, as a way of using this divine imagery to support and validate their own right to rule.

## Shrirangapatnam

Demolished fortress city just outside the city of Mysore in the state of **Karnataka**. Shrirangapatnam formerly served as the capital of Tipu Sultan (r. 1782–1799), the last ruler of Mysore. Throughout his reign he fought against the encroachment of outside powers. However, in 1799 he unsuccessfully took up arms against the British and was killed in battle, leaving the city largely destroyed. The city got its name from a temple there to the god **Ranganatha**, a form of **Vishnu** in which he is sleeping on his serpent couch **Shesha** in the sea of cosmic dissolution (**pralaya**). The temple survived the demolition and is still functioning today. Ranganatha is considered a divine king, and his most famous image, on the island of **Shrirangam** in **Tamil Nadu**, has strong associations with southern Indian kings and kingship. Even though Tipu was a Muslim, invoking Ranganatha's powerful symbolism would have been an astute political move, to legitimate his rule in the eyes of his Hindu subjects.

## Shri Sampraday

One of the four branches (**sampraday**) of the **Bairagi Naga** ascetics. The Bairagi Nagas are devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Vishnu**, organized in military fashion into different **anis** or "armies." Until the beginning of the nineteenth century their primary occupation was as mercenary soldiers, although they also had substantial trading interests; both of these have largely disappeared in contemporary times. The Shri Sampraday

traces its spiritual lineage through the poet-saint **Ramananda** to the southern Indian philosopher **Ramanuja**, who is claimed to have been Ramananda's **guru**. This claim can also be seen in the name of the sampraday, since Ramanuja's followers, the **Shrivaishnavas**, focus their **worship** on Vishnu and Shri (**Lakshmi**). Yet the **Ramanandi** ascetics worship an entirely different pair of **deities—Rama** and **Sita**—and the claim of any connections between the Ramanandis and the Shrivaishnavas was formally renounced at the **Ujjain Kumbha Mela** in 1921, at the insistence of the Shrivaishnavas. As with another Bairagi order, the **Brahma Sampraday**, the claim to be connected to a famous religious figure seems to be a way to gain the authority and prestige of an ancient and established tradition. Even without this claim, the Shri Sampraday is the largest and the most important of the Bairagi Naga orders. For further information see Peter van der Veer, *Gods on Earth*, 1988.

## Shrishaila

("holy mountain") Sacred mountain in the center of the state of **Andhra Pradesh**, about 185 miles south and slightly east of Hyderabad. The site is remote and difficult to reach but is famous for a temple sacred to the god **Shiva**, in his manifestation as **Mallikarjuna**, "[Lord] White as Jasmine." Shiva's image as Mallikarjuna is in the form of a **linga**, the pillar-shaped image that is his symbolic form, and the Mallikarjuna linga is one of the twelve **jyotirlingas**, a network of sites deemed especially sacred to Shiva, and at which **Shiva** is uniquely present.

## Shrivaishnava

Southern Indian religious community who are devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Vishnu** and Shri (**Lakshmi**), and whose religious life is rooted in the devotional hymns of the **Alvars**, a group of twelve poet-saints who lived in southern India between the seventh and tenth centuries. All the Alvars were devotees of Vishnu, and their stress on passionate devotion (**bhakti**) to a personal god, conveyed through hymns sung in the **Tamil language**, transformed and revitalized Hindu religious life. Two centuries later, the Alvars' devotional outpouring was organized and systematized by the philosopher **Ramanuja**, considered the Shrivaishnava founder. Ramanuja was convinced that **Brahman**, or Supreme Reality, was a personal **deity**, rather than an impersonal abstract principle, and was also convinced that devotion was the most important form of religious practice. **Vishishthadvaita Vedanta**, his philosophical position, stressed both of these convictions, and thus opposed the **Advaita Vedanta** school founded by the philosopher **Shankaracharya**, which stressed that the Supreme Being was impersonal and that realization (**jnana**) was the best spiritual path. In the time after Ramanuja the Shrivaishnava community split into two smaller groups, the **Tengalai** and the **Vadagalai**. The schism stemmed from a disagreement over whether human action was necessary to attain final liberation, or whether the hope came in complete surrender (**prapatti**) to God's **grace**; the Vadagalais held the former position, and the Tengalais the latter.

In practice, the Shrivaishnava community has been strongly influenced by the doctrine of divine "emanations" originated by the **Pancharatra** religious community, particularly the notion that a properly consecrated image becomes a form of the deity itself. Shrivaishnava piety has tended to center around temples, and particularly the service of the temple's image, which is considered a genuine form of the deity. Given this stress on learning and temple-based **worship**, it is not surprising that the community has been dominated by **brahmins**, and the few non-brahmins in the community have distinctly inferior status. For further information see K. Rangachari, *The Sri Vaisnava Brahmans*, 1931; and

John Braisted Carman, *The Theology of Ramanuja*, 1974.

## Shrivatsa

An auspicious mark on the god **Vishnu's** chest, also found on Vishnu's form as **Krishna**, which is sometimes described as a mole and sometimes as a curl of **hair**. In statues and pictures, the Shrivatsa is usually portrayed as a four-petaled flower, and it is believed to be the **kaustubha** jewel, which was one of the precious things churned from the Ocean of Milk along with the **goddess Lakshmi**, the wishing-**cow** Surabhi, and **amrta**, the nectar of immortality. See also **Tortoise avatar**.

## Shrividya

Southern Indian school of **tantra**, a secret, ritually based religious practice, in which the principal **deity** is the **goddess** Lalita Tripurasundari. The Shrividya tradition is noted for its ritual use of the **shrichakra**, a particular symbolic diagram (**yantra**) composed of a series of interlocking triangles. The Shrichakra ritual is known as **samhara-krama**, and is a systematic ritual deconstruction of the perceivable world and all illusions of duality, to attain union with the single true reality. The interior counterpart to this exterior ritual is the practice of **kundalini yoga**, which is based on the tantric idea of the **subtle body**—the six psychic centers (**chakras**) running along the spine—and seeks to gain ultimate union within the aspirant's own body by bringing together the microcosmic forms of the deities **Shiva** and **Shakti** that exist within the body. For a careful and considered picture of the Shrividya tradition, see Douglas Renfrew Brooks, *The Secret of the Three Cities*, 1990.

## Shriyantra

Another name for the **Shrichakra**, a symbolic diagram (**yantra**) used in **worship** by the **Shrividya** school, a particular branch of the secret, ritually based religious practice known as **tantra**. See **Shrichakra**.

## Shrutashravas

In the *Mahabharata*, the later of the two great Hindu epics, **Krishna's** paternal aunt and the mother of **Shishupala**.

## Shruti

("[that which is] heard") The most authoritative type of Hindu sacred literature, made up of all the **Vedas**, the oldest Hindu religious texts. The Vedas are generally considered to have four types of texts: the hymns to the gods known as **samhitas**, the ritual manuals called the **Brahmanas**, and the speculative texts known as the **Aranyakas** and the **Upanishads**. The term comes from the traditional Hindu belief that these texts were not composed by human beings but are based in the primordial vibrations of the cosmos itself. The ancient sages, whose faculties of perception had been sharpened through persistent religious practice, were able to "hear" and understand these vibrations, and transmitted them to others in a lineage of learning. Thus, the belief that their origin is nonhuman makes the shruti the highest religious authority.

## Shuddadvaita

("pure monism") Philosophical school first propounded by **Vallabhacharya** (1479–1531). Vallabha called his school shuddadvaita, or "pure monism," to distinguish it from the **Advaita Vedanta** school founded by the philosopher **Shankaracharya**. The latter school propounds "nondual" (advaita) monism, in its claim that a single Ultimate Reality lies behind all things, and that all things are merely differing forms of that reality. The Advaitins call this single reality **Brahman**, which they conceive as formless, impersonal, and having no defining attributes except for being, consciousness, and bliss (**sacchidananda**). In the Advaita understanding, since all conceptions of particular **deities** have

specific attributes, they are thus conditioned forms of the ultimate Brahman. In fact, any assumption that the world as it appears is real is a fundamental misunderstanding that ultimately causes human beings to be trapped in karmic bondage, reincarnation (**samsara**), and suffering.

Shankaracharya's philosophical position was based primarily on the **Vedas**, the oldest and most authoritative Hindu texts, and particularly on the **Upanishads**, the speculative texts that are the latest part of the Vedas. Vallabhacharya used both of these sources in framing his Shuddadvaita school, but also used the *Bhagavata Purana*, which he considered to be of equal authority. The *Bhagavata Purana* is one of the later sectarian collections known as **puranas**. It is the most important source for the **worship** of the god **Krishna**, whom Vallabha considered to be the ultimate manifestation of the Supreme Being, rather than the unqualified Brahman promoted by Shankaracharya. Aside from promoting a personal conception of the deity over an impersonal conception, another difference in the two schools concerned the status of the world. For Vallabhacharya, the world as perceived is not an illusion but is real, because it and human beings have both evolved from God through the exercise of his supreme power. Krishna is conceived in the traditional threefold divine aspect as being–consciousness–bliss. Living beings possess being and consciousness, but not the divine bliss, whereas the material, nonliving, world has only being. Since this conception gives real value to the everyday world, Vallabhacharya described it as "pure monism."

In Vallabhacharya's system God is the inner controller of all souls, which makes human beings dependent on God for thinking and perception (**pratyaksha**). This dependence on God highlights the importance of **grace**, which he refers to as pushti, meaning "that which nourishes the soul."

Because of this emphasis on grace, Vallabhacharya's religious community is also known as the **Pushti Marg**. The Pushti Marg believes that God's favor is gained through devotion (**bhakti**), which is open to all and for which there are no prerequisites. The emphasis on devotion has marginalized all other forms of religious practice, and the Pushti Marg is particularly known for rejecting all **ascetic** endeavors, such as **celibacy**, fasting (**upavasa**), or renunciation. Its members tend to be householders coming from merchant families, particularly from the state of **Gujarat**. The community's primary temple is at **Nathdwara** in the state of **Rajasthan**. For further information see Richard Barz, *The Bhakti Sect of Vallabhacarya*, 1976.

## Shuddhi

("purification") Any ritual purification that removes impurities and thus returns one to a state of ritual **purity**. In a more specialized context the term denotes the "reconversion" back to Hinduism of people who had either converted to another religion or who had adopted practices characteristic of other religious traditions. This practice was first instituted in the 1890s by the reformist **Arya Samaj**, led by **Swami Dayanand Saraswati**. There was a tremendous stir in the Sikh community when several Sikhs were a part of a group thus "purified," and in Sikh accounts this threat of reabsorption into the Hindu community was one of the major forces behind the Singh Sabha movement, which defined the Sikhs as a separate religious community. In modern times this practice has been employed by the Hindu nationalist organization **Vishva Hindu Parishad**, which has used it to "purify" certain groups who had adopted some Islamic practices.

## Shudra

Among the four major social groups (**varnas**) in the traditional Hindu society, the shudras are the lowest and least influential. In this model, the shudras' social function was to serve all the others. This low social status is reflected in the creation story known as the **Purusha Sukta**, in which the shudras are described as being created from the Primeval Man's feet. The feet are the lowest and basest part of the body, and the shudra was correspondingly seen as the lowest level of **caste** Hindu society. Unlike members of the "**twice-born**" varnas—**brahmin**, **kshatriya**, and **vaishya**—whose adolescent males were entitled to have a ritual second birth that entitled them to study the **Veda**, shudras were always once-born, and thus forbidden to study or even to hear the Veda. In practice the status of shudras differed widely from region to region—in southern India, many of the land-owning **jatis** (**endogamous** social subgroups) were shudras, and they were very influential communities. At the very least, they were accorded a definitive place in caste Hinduism, unlike the **untouchables**, who were considered completely impure, usually because of their hereditary occupations.

## Shudraka

(early 5th c.) Playwright and author of the *Mrcchakatika* ("The Little Clay Cart"). This drama describes the love between a poor but noble **brahmin**, Charudatta, and a wealthy but virtuous courtesan, Vasantasena, set in the context of a complicated political intrigue. It is notable for its detailed portrayal of everyday urban life, exemplified by the little clay cart, which is a child's toy. It has been translated into several languages, and is periodically performed for modern American audiences.

## Shuka

("parrot") In Hindu mythology, a sage whose life story upholds the traditional doctrine of the four **stages of life** (ashramas). Shuka was the **son** of the sage **Vyasa**, born when Vyasa had a seminal emission upon seeing a celestial nymph (**apsara**) in the form of a parrot. From boyhood Shuka was interested only in spiritual life and had the firm desire never to marry, but despite intensive spiritual study he could not find contentment. He eventually decided to visit the sage-king **Janaka**, who advised Shuka that he could rightly consider renunciation only after having married and raised a family. Shuka returned home to his father and lived the householder's life; later in life he took up renunciation again and became perfectly realized.

## Shuka Sampraday

Another name for the **Charanadasi** religious community, since their founder **Charanadas** was believed to have received **initiation** from the sage **Shuka**. See **Charanadasi**.

## Shukla Paksha

("light half") Name denoting the waxing half of a **lunar month**, so called because the **moon's** light increases every night.

## Shukra

In Hindu mythology, the religious teacher (**guru**) of the type of **demons** known as **asuras**. Shukra is a well-known figure who appears most prominently in the tale of the **Vamana avatar**. In this tale, the Asura king **Bali** is performing a great **sacrifice**. He is approached by the god **Vishnu**, who has taken the form of a dwarf (**vamana**), and asks Bali for three paces of land to build a sacrificial altar. Shukra suspects a trick, and warns Bali not to grant it, but Bali ignores Shukra's cautionary advice. As soon as Bali grants the gift, the dwarf grows immensely large. With his first two steps Vishnu measures out the cosmos, and with his third pushes Bali down into the underworld, where he is allowed to reign as king.

The god Shiva carrying a shula, or lance, beside his wife Parvati.
The type of shula with which Shiva is associated is the trishul, or trident.

## Shula

A lance or pike; one of the characteristic weapons in Hindu iconography. The most famous example of this is the trident (**trishul**), which has three points, although the center one may be larger than the side ones. This weapon is most intimately associated with **Shiva**, but it is also commonly carried by certain powerful forms of the **Goddess**. This may reflect her charter myth, in which she was formed from the collected radiance of all the gods and received duplicates of their weapons from all of them. The lance with a single blade is associated with the god **Skanda**, particularly in his southern Indian manifestation as **Murugan**. When carried by Skanda-Murugan, the lance is usually called **shakti** ("power"), rather than shula.

## Shumbha

In Hindu mythology, demon killed by the **goddess Kali** in the *Devimahatmya*, the earliest and most important text for the mythology of the **Goddess**. Together with his brother **Nishumbha**, Shumbha is a general in the army of a **demon** named **Mahishasura**, the figure whom the Goddess takes form to destroy. Due to a divine boon given to Mahishasura,

Shumbha and Nishumbha are able to conquer the gods and assume control of **heaven**, but they are unable to resist the power of the Goddess.

## Shurpanakha

([having] "nails [like] winnowing-fans") In the *Ramayana*, the earlier of the two great Indian epics, Shurpanakha is the sister of **Ravana**, the demon-king of **Lanka**. Although she is a minor character in the epic, she plays a pivotal role in advancing the action of the story. As Ravana's sister, Shurpanakha is a **demon** woman of high status, and is free to choose her own husband according to her inclinations. As she roams through the forest one day, she happens to see **Rama**, the epic's protagonist, and is immediately smitten by his handsome form. Assuming the shape of a beautiful woman, she approaches him and expresses her desire for him. Rama tells her that since he is already married, his brother **Lakshmana** will be a more appropriate match for her. When Lakshmana gives her reasons why he too cannot marry her, Shurpanakha becomes angry. Realizing that Rama's wife **Sita** is the real impediment to her desires, Shurpanakha tries to harm her, and in the struggle that follows, Lakshmana mutilates her by cutting off her ears and her nose. Shrieking with pain and humiliation, Shurpanakha returns to her brother Ravana's court, who swears that her insult will be avenged. After their brothers **Khara** and **Dushana** are killed in a direct attack on Rama, Ravana decides to get revenge by kidnapping Sita, an action that eventually causes his own death.

## Shvetaketu

A character in the **Chandogya Upanishad**, one of the speculative texts that form the latest stratum of the **Vedas**. In the upanishad, Shvetaketu is the **son** of **Uddalaka Aruni**, and a paradigm for a seeker of knowledge. Shvetaketu's education also symbolizes the conception of true knowledge found in the Upanishads and the way that this differs from earlier conceptions. According to a story in the upanishad's sixth chapter, Shvetaketu is sent away by his father to study the Vedas, and when he returns twelve years later having mastered all the Vedas, he incorrectly considers himself learned. Shvetaketu's father punctures his arrogance, showing him the difference between memorization and true knowledge, by asking Shvetaketu questions about the nature of the cosmos. When Shvetaketu cannot answer these, he admits his ignorance and accepts instruction from his father on the nature of the Self (**atman**). This instruction contains the teaching "That thou art" (**tat tvam asi**). This is one of the "great statements" (**mahavakya**) in Indian **philosophy**, and asserts the ultimate nondifference between **Brahman** and **atman**, the cosmos and the individual Self.

## Shvetashvatara Upanishad

A text generally regarded as one of the latest **upanishads**, the speculative religious texts that themselves form the most recent stratum of the **Vedas**. This judgment is based on both the Shvetashvatara Upanishad's form and on its content. Stylistically, the earliest upanishads tend to be written in prose, or prose mixed with verse, whereas the later upanishads, including the Shvetashvatara, are completely in verse. In terms of content, the earlier upanishads tend to be long and rambling, whereas in the later ones the ideas are far more concise and clearly developed. The Shvetashvatara Upanishad's most original idea is its description of the Supreme Being in completely theistic terms, in contrast to the abstract, impersonal representations in the earlier upanishads. It identifies Ultimate Reality as the god **Rudra**, who was later identified with the god **Shiva**, one of the most important modern Hindu **deities**. The text is also notable for an explicit description of the process and results of

**yoga**, which is the first known written explanation of this tradition.

Although it is best noted for these new ideas, the upanishad also reveals continuity with the older tradition. The second chapter begins with an extended invocation to the god Savitr (**Surya**), the **sun**, using verses drawn directly from Vedic texts composed a thousand years earlier. Such anachronisms indicate that there was no clear dividing line between the four differing types of Vedic text—**samhita**, **Brahmana**, **Aranyaka**, and **upanishad**—but rather that these textual styles were composed in overlapping periods.

## Shyam

("black") Epithet of the god **Krishna**, based on the dark color of his skin. See **Krishna**.

## Siddha

("perfected one") Name for a religious adept who is believed to have attained the perfect knowledge, enlightenment, and ultimate spiritual realization.

## Siddhapith

("seat of the perfected") Name denoting a site believed to have particular power in conferring spiritual attainments upon those who carry out religious practices there. This power is usually tied to a mythic charter in which a **deity** became resident at the site—and is thus still present to assist people—but such sites have often been further sanctified by the presence of charismatic ascetics whose lives and spiritual discipline serve as examples to others.

## Siddhasana

("perfected posture") One of the common sitting postures (**asana**) used for meditation. In this position one foot (often the left) is placed with the heel in the area between the anus and genitals, with the other foot resting on the opposite calf, turned so that the heel is straight up. This is called the "perfected" posture partly because of its difficulty—only those perfected in **yoga** can do it—but also because it is believed to bring substantial spiritual benefits.

## Siddhi

("attainment") The most common word used to denote a superhuman power or faculty. The siddhis are first referred to in **yoga's** founding text, the **Yoga Sutras** of **Patanjali** (3.45), and are traditionally said to number eight: minuteness (**anima**), lightness (**laghima**), greatness (**madhima**), acquisition (**prapti**), irresistible will (**prakamyam**), control (**vashitvam**), superiority (**ishitvam**), and suppression of desire (**kamavasayitvam**).

The **possession** of such siddhis is generally seen as the evidence of high spiritual attainment, but the attitude toward the powers is mixed. They give one great abilities, but they are also seen as being highly seductive, since they can be used for both good and evil. The ability to keep from being beguiled by them is the true sign of spiritual maturity, and a spiritually immature person could easily fall into using them for selfish purposes. For this reason, religious aspirants are discouraged from aiming to gain such powers, since the very act of seeking is considered a selfish desire. In contrast, when one has gained such powers as a by-product of spiritual attainment, one is believed to be able to keep them in proper perspective.

## Simantonnayana Samskara

Traditionally, the third of the life-cycle ceremonies (**samskaras**), and the last of the **prenatal samskaras**. This was performed when the **pregnancy** was further advanced, although various writers gave differing times for this. The major element in this rite is the husband parting the **hair** of his wife, supposedly to protect her from the misfortune and black **magic** that are supposed to plague pregnant **women**. One can also interpret

parting the hair as symbolizing an easy delivery, and since this was a rite of protection, it would also give the expectant mother psychological assurance that everything would be all right. One bit of evidence supporting this interpretation is that many of the **dharma literature** writers classify this samskara as being for the woman rather than the unborn child, and as only needing to be performed during the first pregnancy. This samskara is seldom performed in modern times.

## Simhakarna

("**lion's** ear") Another name for the hand **gesture** (**hasta**) known as **kataka hasta**, in which the fingers are loosely pressed onto the thumb, creating a ring. This particular name comes from the fanciful notion that the shape of the hand resembles a lion's ear. See **kataka hasta**.

## Simuka

(1st c. B.C.E.) Founder of the **Satavahana dynasty**, which for over three centuries ruled over much of central India and the **Malwa** region from their capital in the city of **Paithan**.

## Singh, Ishvari Prasad Narayan

(r. 1835–1889) A Maharaja of **Benares** who, with the help of local scholars, wrote the dialogues (**samvads**) for the characters in the **Ramnagar Ram Lila**. The Ram Lilas are dramatized versions of the epic *Ramayana*, which transcend simple theater to become a form of **worship**. The Ram Lila at Ramnagar, the fort that is home to the kings of Benares, is the most famous and traditional of all these Ram Lilas. The Ramnagar Ram Lila began because of the royal family's patronage, and the annual performance is still sponsored by them. Although they are no longer the actual political rulers, the royal family continues to play an important ceremonial role. For further information see Anaradha Kapur, *Actors, Pilgrims, Kings, and Gods*, 1990.

## Singh, Udit Narayan

(r. 1796–1835) Maharaja of **Benares** whose reign saw the first performances of the **Ram Lila** at his palace in **Ramnagar**. The Ram Lilas are dramatized versions of the epic *Ramayana*, which transcend simple theater to become a form of **worship**. The Ram Lila at Ramnagar, the fort that is home to the kings of Benares, is the most famous and traditional of all these Ram Lilas. According to tradition, the Maharaja was a great devotee (**bhakta**) of the god **Rama** and a patron of the Ram Lilas in Benares itself, but on several occasions found it difficult to get across the **Ganges** because of the seasonal flooding. As a solution to the problem, he sponsored his own Ram Lila—no doubt also symbolically intended to reinforce his kingship—which has become the oldest, most traditional, and most important Ram Lila in Benares. Udit Narayan Singh finalized the locations of the Ram Lila, which is performed throughout the city, whereas his son **Ishvari Prasad Narayan Singh** was responsible for writing the dialogues (**samvads**) spoken by the characters. For further information see Anaradha Kapur, *Actors, Pilgrims, Kings, and Gods*, 1990.

## Sinhastha Mela

Name for the **Kumbha Mela** festival held in the holy city of **Ujjain**. The festival is called Sinhastha because it is celebrated when **Jupiter** is in Leo (Sinha). The Sinhastha Mela's climactic bathing (**snana**) day comes on the **full moon** in the **lunar month** of **Baisakh** (April–May). The Kumbha Mela is a massive religious festival celebrated at three-year intervals in four different cities: **Haridwar**, **Allahabad**, **Ujjain**, and **Nasik**; the festival thus comes to each city every twelve years. The Kumbha Mela is chiefly a festival at which participants bathe in sacred rivers. The festival's primary participants are ascetics, who come from all over South Asia to bathe in the sacred waters. According to

Depiction of Sita and her husband Rama. In the epic the *Ramayana*,
Sita is abducted by the demon king Ravana and Rama must search the earth for her.

tradition, the Kumbha Mela was orga-
nized by the great philosopher **Shan-
karacharya** to promote regular gather-
ings of learned and holy men, as a
means to strengthen, sustain, and spread
Hindu religion.

The charter myth for the Kumbha
Mela is taken from the story of Churning
the Ocean of Milk. After the ocean has
been churned and the nectar of immor-
tality (**amrta**) has been extracted, the
gods and their **demon** opponents begin
to quarrel over the pot of nectar. The
gods snatch the pot and run off with it,
but the one carrying the pot grows tired,
and in twelve days of carrying it sets it
on the ground in twelve different places.
Eight of the places are in heaven, but the
other four are on earth and these are the
four sites where the Mela is held. In each
place a bit of the nectar splashes on the
ground, sanctifying the site, and since a

divine day is considered to be a human year, the twelve-year cycle is established. According to popular belief, at each Kumbha Mela's most providential moment, the waters in which people are bathing become the nectar of immortality, and all those who bathe in these waters gain immeasurable religious merit.

Historically speaking, the two most important sites have been Haridwar and Allahabad; one measure of their dominance is that they have held "half" (**ardha**) Kumbha Melas after six years, and that these have consistently drawn bigger crowds than the "full" Kumbha Melas at Ujjain and Nasik, which fall during those times. In recent times, however, political considerations have increased the attendance at the Sinhastha Mela. Ujjain is located in central India, in the heartland of the Hindu nationalist groups such as the **Rashtriya Svayamsevak Sangh**, **Vishva Hindu Parishad**, and **Bharatiya Janata Party**. The city of Ujjain is also close to the ancestral kingdom of Vijaya Raje Scindia, the matriarch of a former royal family and a prominent figure in the Bharatiya Janata Party. In such a political climate and local environment, the Sinhastha Mela has been seen as a good opportunity for religious-political theater, in order to generate publicity, deliver patronage, and give the people in these organizations greater status and visibility. See also **Tortoise avatar**.

## Sita

("furrow") Daughter of King **Janaka**, wife of the god-prince **Rama** (himself the seventh **avatar** or incarnation of the god **Vishnu**), and the major female character in the *Ramayana*, the earlier of the two great **Sanskrit** epics. Unlike many other Hindu goddesses, Sita's identity stems almost completely from her husband, and she has little independent **worship** or personality of her own. Her abduction by the **demon**-king **Ravana** is the single major event driving the plot of the *Ramayana*, prompting

her husband and his allies first to search the **earth** for her and then to fight a climactic battle to regain her, concluding with Ravana's death. Throughout all the tumult Sita simply waits to be rescued, sure that this will provide her husband with greater glory.

According to her charter myth, Sita is not born in the normal way but is found in a furrow by King Janaka as he plows his field. Sita thus carries a strong association with the earth, fertility, and prosperity; as David Kinsley points out, her marriage to Rama symbolizes the union between the fecund earth and a righteous king that will make it prosper. Her connection with the earth is also seen in her disappearance, when in response to Rama's accusations of unfaithfulness, she calls on the earth to swallow her up as a witness to her chastity, and disappears forever.

Sita's primary virtue is her devotion to her husband, and in her unflagging love for him she is a model Hindu wife, just as many of the *Ramayana*'s other characters incarnate cultural ideals. An early sign of her devotion is shown when Rama has been wrongly exiled in the forest for fourteen years. Even though Sita has never known anything but luxury and ease, she is determined to accompany him into exile, based on the conviction that a faithful wife should always accompany her husband. Rama objects, reasons, and even forbids her, but Sita does not give in—perhaps the only time that she does not observe her husband's wishes. She goes to the forest with Rama and her brother-in-law **Lakshmana**, cheerfully taking on the difficult life of an **ascetic**, since this means she can remain with her husband.

The more difficult test of her devotion to her husband comes when she is abducted and held captive by Ravana. She holds steadfast despite Ravana's unceasing persuasion, threats, and attempts to convince her that Rama has been killed. According to one story, the only part of Ravana that she ever sees is his feet, since as a devoted wife she kept

her eyes modestly downcast rather than look directly at another man. When Rama's ally **Hanuman** discovers where Sita is hidden, she refuses to let him carry her away, since this will have meant touching another man, as well as depriving her husband of the opportunity to rescue her.

Her devotion is severely tested after her rescue, when Rama insists that she must have been unfaithful to him during her long captivity. This accusation reflects the Indian cultural assumption that **women** have much higher sex drives than men, and much less ability to control these drives. Stung by this accusation, she asks Rama to have a funeral pyre built for her and enters it with the wish that, if she is innocent, the **fire** will not harm her. When the blaze dies down she emerges unscathed, with the god **Agni** (fire personified) as a witness to her chastity. Despite this proof, Rama banishes her from **Ayodhya** after their return. When Rama later demands a second **ordeal**, Sita calls on the earth to swallow her up as a witness to her **purity**, and disappears forever.

Sita's ability to withstand both ordeals reflects the widespread Indian belief that women gain power through their devotion to their husbands, power that can be so great that they can even **curse** the gods themselves. Encoded in this notion are cultural messages about the role of women and the importance of their relationships with others. Sita represents the model Indian woman, whose primary loyalty is to her husband and his family. This reflects the northern Indian marriage pattern in which brides are brought into the groom's home and become part of their marital families, severing their connection with their **birth** family. Wives are expected to place other people's welfare before their own, so that they may live a happily married life. In return for such self-**sacrifice**, a wife becomes a model for all to respect and honor.

For more information on Sita and all the goddesses of Hinduism, see John Stratton Hawley and Donna Wulff (eds.),

*The Divine Consort*, 1986; David R. Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses,* 1986; and Sara Mitter, *Dharma's Daughters*, 1991.

## Sitamarhi
City in the northern part of the state of **Bihar**, about ten miles from the border with **Nepal**. It is in the **Panchala** region traditionally reckoned as the kingdom of King **Janaka**, and Sitamarhi is believed to be the place where the **goddess Sita** was found in a furrow of the **earth** while King Janaka was plowing.

## Six Schools
Collective name for the six developed schools of traditional Hindu **philosophy**. All six schools consider the religious texts known as the **Vedas** to be the most authoritative **pramana**, the means by which human beings can gain true and accurate knowledge. All six schools also assume that philosophical reflection must ultimately serve religious goals, to release the embodied soul (**atman**) from an otherwise unending cycle of transmigration. Aside from these basic similarities, each of these schools developed distinctive and characteristic perspectives. Despite their differences, by the early centuries of the common era the schools had become associated in pairs: **Nyaya**-**Vaisheshika**, **Samkhya**-**Yoga**, and **Purva Mimamsa**-Uttara Mimamsa, with the final school more commonly known as **Vedanta**.

Of these, the Nyaya school focused on examining and cataloguing the pramanas, the means by which human beings can gain true and accurate knowledge, and their conclusions became accepted by all six schools. The Vaisheshika school was a descriptive ontology that categorized the world in atomistic fashion, in which all things were considered to be constructed from smaller parts. This school had inherent philosophical problems that contributed to its eclipse. **Samkhya** is an atheistic dualism based on the distinction between a conscious but inert

Skanda, the god Shiva's son. Skanda is a warrior prince, born to defeat the demon Taraka.

**purusha** ("person," or spirit), and an unconscious but active **prakrti** ("nature"). According to the Samkhya proponents, failure to discriminate between the two leads to the **evolution** of the world and the individual person, whereas correct understanding reverses this process. Samkhya provides the theoretical basis for the Yoga school, which essentially details techniques to help one gain the correct understanding between these two entities. Purva Mimamsa stresses the study of the Vedas as the source of instruction for human beings, an emphasis that led it to develop sophisticated theories of language and methods for textual interpretation. These tools were used by the Vedanta school in its efforts to reveal the ultimate meaning of the Vedas. Most of the first millennium during the common era was a time of lively debate among these schools, each of which held varying positions on basic things such as the reality of the world. By the end of the millennium Vedanta had become the most significant philosophical perspective, largely eclipsing the others, although it had absorbed certain influences from them. For further information see Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore (eds.), *A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy*, 1957.

## Skanda

Hindu **deity** who is the son of the god **Shiva**. Skanda is born to destroy the **demon Taraka**, who has received the divine boon that he can only be killed by a son of Shiva. When Taraka makes this request, Shiva is deep in meditation in his grief after the death of his wife **Sati**, and it seems unlikely that such a son can ever be born. After Taraka grows too strong, the other gods begin the process of trying to encourage Shiva to marry, which results in his wedding with the **goddess Parvati**.

Despite the marriage of Shiva and Parvati, Skanda is born in an unusual way. According to the legend, Shiva and Parvati are disturbed while making love, and Shiva inadvertently spills his **semen** on the ground (the verb *skand* means "to leap" or "to ooze"). In Indian culture semen is seen as a man's concentrated essence, and for a deity like Shiva this means that the semen is inordinately powerful, capable of destroying the **earth**. The semen is first held by the god **Agni**, who is fire personified, but it proves too powerful for him. Agni then puts it in the River **Ganges**, and after 10,000 years the river deposits a shining child in the reeds by its bank. The child is discovered by the **Krittikas** (the Pleiades personified), each of whom want to nurse him. To oblige them Skanda grows five extra heads. As a mark of the Krittikas' care, one of his epithets is Kartikkeya. Skanda grows rapidly, assumes command of Shiva's heavenly host (**gana**), and kills the troublesome Taraka. His persona remains that of a warrior prince, unlike that of his brother **Ganesh**, who is a scholar and sage.

In northern India Skanda is considered a member of Shiva's household, and although his power is acknowledged, he is generally not a primary object of **worship**. In southern India Skanda has been identified with **Murugan**, a regional deity associated primarily with the hunt, but also with war. In this atmosphere he has taken on a much greater role, particularly in **Tamil Nadu**, and has assumed the mantle of a philosopher and exponent of the **Shaiva Siddhanta** school.

## Smallpox

In traditional Hindu belief, smallpox was personified as the **goddess Shitala** ("Cool One," a euphemism), and the fever and skin eruptions accompanying the disease were interpreted as signs of **possession** by this goddess. In the time since the World Health Organization has declared smallpox officially eradicated, in some regions Shitala has been identified with tuberculosis. See **Shitala**.

## Smara

("memory") Epithet of the god **Kama**, the deification of desire, reflecting the importance of memory in generating and maintaining desire. See **Kama**.

## Smarana

("remembering") One of the standard religious practices mentioned in lists of religiously meritorious actions. Smarana is most often associated with **deities** but is also mentioned in conjunction with sacred sites (**tirthas**), one's spiritual teacher (**guru**), or even particular acts of **worship**. This practice involves thinking constantly upon the deity, person, place, or object, and in the case of a deity this often involves mental recitation of the deity's name. The primary emphasis in this practice is to create habitual behavioral patterns that, over the long term, will have beneficial effects on one's character.

## Smarta

Name for a particular group of brahmins distinguished not by region or family, but by the religious texts that they hold most authoritative. For the Smartas, the most authoritative texts are the texts known as the **smrtis**—either the texts themselves or commentaries and compilations based on them. The smrtis or "remembered" texts were a class of literature that, although deemed important, were considered less authoritative than the **shrutis** or "heard" texts. In brief, the shrutis denoted the **Vedas**, the oldest and most authoritative Hindu religious texts, whereas the smrtis included the **dharma literature**, the **Bhagavad Gita**, the *Mahabharata*, and *Ramayana*, and the collection known as the **puranas**. The Smartas thus stand in contrast with sectarian brahmins, whether **Shaiva** (devotees of **Shiva**) or **Vaishnava** (devotees of **Vishnu**), for whom their particular sectarian scriptures have the highest religious authority. Smarta brahmins can therefore claim to be following the oldest and best established religious texts and thus in some way to be the most orthodox. Since Smartas are distinguished by their authoritative texts and practice rather than by the **deity** they **worship**, individual Smartas may worship different Hindu deities, and many do. Yet particularly in southern India, many Smartas perform the **panchayatana puja** to the five divine forms—Vishnu, Shiva, **Surya**, **Ganesh**, and the **Goddess**—which is intended to show the ultimate unity behind the differing manifestations of divinity.

## Smrti

("[that which is] remembered") An important class of Hindu religious literature that, despite its sacrality, is deemed less authoritative than the other major category, **shruti**. According to tradition, the shruti ("heard") texts were not composed by human beings but are based in the primordial vibrations of the cosmos itself. The ancient sages, whose faculties of perception had

Snana, or bathing, at a festival in Rajasthan. Before performing any ritual, one must obtain purity by bathing.

been sharpened through rigorous religious practice, were able to "hear" and understand these vibrations, and transmitted them to others in a lineage of learning. The smrti texts, in contrast, are attributed to human authors, who are putting forth matters that are "remembered" and thus carry with them the possibility of error. The smrti literature is wider and much more varied than the shruti, which is restricted to the texts in the **Vedas**; smrti literature includes the **dharma literature**, the sectarian compilations known as **puranas**, the two great epics (*Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*), the **Bhagavad Gita**, and the **tantras**, which are manuals detailing the secret, ritually based religious practice of tantra followers. Although theoretically the smrtis have less religious authority than the shrutis, in practical terms they are often far more important, in part because their contents are much better known. This is particularly true for sectarian Hinduism, in which a group's sectarian literature will often be given the highest religious authority.

## Snana

("bath") Bathing is arguably the single most commonly performed Hindu religious act, and it is a necessary one before performing any rite or **worship**. An early morning bath is the norm for just about all Hindus, and this has been true for centuries. The earliest European visitors invariably remarked on this practice, since some of these visitors bathed only a few times in their lives. For Hindus, bathing not only keeps one clean but is a way to regain ritual **purity** by using water (most commonly) to remove any source of defilement.

Bathing is normally the last part of one's morning rites, preceded by cleaning one's teeth and tongue, rinsing the mouth (**achamana**), and (immediately before bathing) voiding one's bladder and bowels. These latter acts are a necessary part of life, but they also render one ritually impure, a state that the bath removes. People generally perform any daily worship immediately after bathing, while this ritual purity is still unbroken.

Most people bathe only in the morning, although those scrupulously concerned with purity (generally brahmins or ascetics) will bathe more often. The bath itself is usually quite brief and some in cases consists of simply immersing oneself in a natural body of water, or pouring a bucket of water over one's head. In modern times people often use soap, but the traditionally prescribed cleansing medium is **earth**. It is preferable to bathe in running water, since the bath purifies by removing the impurity (**ashaucha**) and carrying it away and although bathing in a large pond is seen as acceptable, bathing in a bathtub is seen as simply spreading the impurity around rather than getting rid of it. Although the most common medium for bathing is water, when this is impossible one can ritually cleanse oneself with oil, or one can perform ritual cleansing with **mantras** by using sacred sounds to remove defilement and bring one to a state of ritual purity.

In the context of worship, snana is the sixth of the sixteen traditional **upacharas** ("**offerings**") given to a **deity** as part of worship, on the model of treating the deity as an honored guest. In this offering, the deity is bathed, either literally or symbolically. The underlying motive here, as for all the upacharas, is to show one's love for the deity and minister to the deity's needs.

## Snataka

("[one who has] bathed") In the **dharma literature**, this is the name for a young man who had performed the **samavartana samskara**, the life-cycle ceremony that marks the end of his **stage of life** as a celibate student (**brahmacharin**) and return to his parental home. The most important element in the rite was a bath, after which he changed into new clothes, marking his change in status. Before doing this he was supposed to ask his **guru's** permission, and also to give him his teacher's fee (**dakshina**), both as payment for services rendered and as a sign of respect. A young man who had performed this rite would be eligible to get married, and the literature prescribes that this should follow in short order.

## Solah Somvar Vrat

A religious vow (**vrat**) that is a variant of the **worship** of the god **Shiva** prescribed for every **Monday** (**Somvar**), the day of the **week** over which he is believed to preside. In the Solah Somvar Vrat, the observer vows to do perform this rite for sixteen (solah) consecutive Mondays. Each week's observance is marked by fasting (**upavasa**), worship, and reading aloud the charter myth for this particular observance. As with most literature pertaining to such rites, the text ends with a catalog of the benefits brought by the rite—in essence, it gives whatever one desires.

According to the vow's charter myth, as Shiva and his wife **Parvati** are playing dice in a temple, Parvati asks a nearby **brahmin** which of them will win, and when he replies that it will be Shiva, she angrily curses him to be afflicted with leprosy. The curse comes true (as with all **curses** in Indian mythology) and the brahmin is in a terrible state. Shiva takes pity on the brahmin, tells him to perform the Solah Somvar Vrat, and on the sixteenth Monday, the brahmin is completely cured. Some time later Parvati sees him and is amazed at his recovery. When she asks how he has been cured, the brahmin tells her about the vow, which she later uses to cure her son of disobedience (thus emphasizing the power of the vow, since it is even used by the gods themselves).

## Solar Line

In Hindu mythology, one of the two great lineages, the other being the **Lunar Line**. The Solar Line traces its descent from **Ikshvaku**, the grandson of the **Sun** himself. Its descendants include many of the principal characters in the *Ramayana*, the earlier of the two great Indian epics. One of these descendants is **Rama** himself. In many of the small former princely states in **Rajasthan**, the rulers claimed descent from the Solar Line as a way to establish and support their royal authority. Although they no longer wield ruling power, many of these royal houses still exist, and thus this lineage is believed to be still extant.

## Soma

Soma is one of the most enigmatic **deities** in the Hindu tradition. The 120 hymns to soma in the **Rg Veda**, the oldest Hindu sacred text, variously describe soma as a plant, as the juice pressed from that plant, and as the deified form of both juice and plant. The Vedic hymns give detailed descriptions of how the sacrificial priests pressed it, strained and filtered it, and finally consumed it, which then brought visions upon them. These hymns portray soma as some sort of mind-altering substance, although there is no general agreement on what the soma plant might be. Its identity has been lost since late Vedic times, and since then various substitutes have been used in rituals.

Although the hymns describe soma as hallucinogenic, one need not take this literally. One can explain such visions in purely psychological terms, as induced or fostered by the priests' heightened expectations in the sacrificial arena. If one assumes that soma was actually mind-altering, it could not have been an alcoholic beverage—since it was prepared and consumed on the same day, this would have given no time for fermentation. One theory is that soma was hashish (**charas**), which is still consumed in certain ritual contexts. The most intriguing theory was proposed by R. G. Wasson, who contended that soma was *Amonita muscaria*, a mind-altering mushroom that has a long history of use in Asian shamanic traditions. Although Wasson's theory would explain soma's ability to take immediate effect, many Indologists have taken issue with this claim. See Robert Gordon Wasson, *Soma*, 1971; for contrary remarks, see J. Brough, "Soma and Amonita Muscaria," in *The Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies,* Vol. 34, 1971.

## Somavati Amavasya

Religious observance celebrated when a **new moon** (**amavasya**) falls on a **Monday**, which can thus occur in any month in the **year**. On the new moon day the **sun** and moon travel together during the daylight sky, and when this happens on the Monday, whose presiding **planet** is the moon, this confluence is deemed particularly favorable. Another auspicious connection arises because Monday's presiding **deity**, the god **Shiva**, also has mythic connections with the moon. A Somavati Amavasya is thus judged a particularly beneficial time to **worship** Shiva, as well as to bathe (**snana**) in a sacred river such as the **Ganges**, or to perform any other religious act.

## Someshvara I

(r. 1042–1068) Monarch in the **Chalukya dynasty**. Aside from his long reign, he is most noted for performing religious **suicide** by intentionally drowning himself in the **Tungabhadra River** when his mental faculties began to wane. Although in general suicide was strongly condemned, suicide by a person suffering from a terminal disease or enduring chronic pain was a well-attested exception to this rule. This sort of suicide was performed according to a well-defined ritual, which was intended to put the performer in the proper frame of mind. In about the twelfth century this was declared one of the rites "forbidden in

Somnath Shore Temple, Gujarat.

the **Kali** [Age]" (**Kalivarjya**), although it had been permitted in earlier times.

## Somnath

Temple and sacred site (**tirtha**) in the state of **Gujarat**. The temple is named for its presiding **deity**—the god **Shiva** in his manifestation as the "Lord of the **Moon**." Shiva is present at Somnath in the form of a **linga**, the pillar-shaped image that is his symbolic form, and the Somnath linga is one of the twelve **jyotirlingas**, a network of sites deemed especially sacred to Shiva, and at which he is uniquely present. According to the site's charter myth, the moon is married to all of the twenty-seven **nakshatras**, or signs in the lunar **zodiac**, but he loves **Rohini** nakshatra so much that he stays with her all the time, and neglects his other twenty-six wives. His father-in-law **Daksha** protests to the moon, but when he refuses to give them equal time, Daksha lays a curse on him that he will lose all his light. The moon overcomes this **curse** by worshiping Shiva at Somnath for six continuous months and is given the boon that he will only shrink during half the **lunar month**, and that during the other half he will grow. As a sign of this gift, Shiva takes residence there as Somnath, and remains to this day.

Aside from its importance as a sacred site, the Somnath temple is a potent political symbol. The original temple was razed and pillaged by **Mahmud of Ghazni** in 1024, who reportedly carried off astounding booty. The present temple at Somnath was built after Indian independence in 1947 and consecrated in 1951. As a symbol, Somnath is thus associated with past oppression and depredation, and with the revitalization of Hindu culture in India. For this reason, the Somnath temple is a popular image for proponents of **Hindutva**, an idea that identifies Hindu identity and Indian citizenship.

## Sonar

In traditional northern Indian society, a Hindu **jati** whose hereditary occupation was gold smithing and jewelry making. Traditional Indian society was modeled as a collection of **endogamous**, or inter-married, subgroups known as jatis ("birth"). These jatis were organized

(and their social status determined) by the group's hereditary occupation, over which each group held a monopoly.

## Song of Manik Chandra

Traditional **Bengali** song describing the adventures of the mythical king Manik Chandra, his wife Mayana, and their **son Gopi** Chand; the latter figures are the primary characters, since Manik Chandra dies early in the story. The text is a romance but also contains many of the doctrines associated with the **Nathpanthi** ascetics. In particular, Queen Mayana has power over **Yama** (death personified), which was one of the primary aims of the Nathpanthi ascetics. Furthermore, she acquired this power through the spiritual instruction given by her **guru Gorakhnath**, the Nathpanthi founder.

Her power over death is shown in various ways. When her husband dies, Mayana descends to Yama's realm and physically abuses both Yama and his minions. In his flight Yama changes into various forms to escape Mayana's wrath, but she is never deceived and continues to harass him. On other occasions, she shows her power over death by her inability to be killed. She mounts her husband's funeral pyre, and although the **fire** burns for seven days and nine nights, not even her clothing is scorched. Many years later, Mayana survives seven fearsome ordeals, such as boiling in oil. When asked how she acquired these magical arts, she replies that Gorakhnath himself taught her. The appearance of such ideas in an essentially popular tale shows how deeply these ideas had sunk into the popular mind.

## Sons

It is difficult to overstate the importance traditional Hindu culture has placed on the need for sons, and the cultural bias for sons over **daughters**. Religious motives underlie one important reason for this bias, since only sons are entitled to perform the memorial **offerings** for the dead known as **shraddhas**. The men in each generation are responsible for making these offerings to their ancestors. They are in turn obliged to have sons of their own, so that the family lineage and the chain of ancestral offerings remains unbroken through the generations. Sonless couples are not completely out of luck, since sons can be obtained through **adoption**.

The other major reason behind the preference for sons lies in far more pragmatic motives. According to the traditional Indian marriage pattern, daughters move into their marital homes and become members of their marital families, whereas sons bring their brides into the home and through their own families continue the family line. Thus, parents sometimes see their daughters as "temporary" family members, while their sons are "permanent." The sons will dwell in their natal house their entire lives, support their parents in old age, and produce the family's future generations. These traditional practices and beliefs still hold very strong, although the forces of modernity have affected the joint family. It has become more common for husbands and wives to live separately from the husband's parents.

The religious, economic, and social factors behind this preference for sons have sometimes had terrible consequences. Consciously or unconsciously, sons may be favored over daughters in many significant ways. Sons are often given better access to education and economic opportunities, because men are traditionally required to support their families. A similar presumption lies behind the inequities in traditional Hindu **inheritance** laws, which give the sons a much larger share of the inheritance. In poorer families, sons may even get preference for basic needs such as food and access to medical care. Despite these patterns, in contemporary times many families treat all their children with equal love and care. Given the trend toward smaller families, the

birth of a daughter can be cause for as much rejoicing as that of a son.

## Sopashraya

("using a support") One of the sitting postures (**asana**) described in commentaries to the **Yoga Sutras** of **Patanjali**, the foundational text for the practice of **yoga**. The name of this posture derives from a wooden support used by the sitter to keep erect, often portrayed as a crutch-shaped prop under the chin.

## Soratha

Metrical form in northern Indian devotional (**bhakti**) poetry, made up of two lines of twenty-four metric beats, divided unevenly after the eleventh beat. The metric pattern for the first line is 6+4+1, with the pattern for the second line being 6+4+3. The soratha is thus an inversion of the metrical form **doha**. Although the soratha was a common poetic form, the doha was far more popular and widely used.

## South Africa

One of the countries with significant Hindu **diaspora populations**. This is particularly true in Natal province, where Hindus were first brought as indentured agricultural laborers, but there is a significant Hindu presence in other parts of the country as well. South Africa is best known as the place where **Mohandas K. Gandhi** first developed and refined his program of nonviolent resistance, or **satyagraha**, which he employed in the service of the Indian community there. In contemporary times the South African Hindu community, as with many Hindu diaspora communities, has loosened religious ties to India, and is in the process of forming a Hindu religious life in another geographical setting.

## Space

One of the five **elements** in traditional Indian **cosmology**, the others being **earth**, **fire**, **water**, and **wind**. **Akasha** or "space" is not conceived in the sense of "outer space," but rather the space between or within visible objects on earth. For example, an "empty" pitcher was not actually empty, but was filled with space, until it was displaced by some fluid. This elemental sense of space was thus something closer to what might be considered the "atmosphere," and was actually seen as having fluidlike properties. In some philosophical schools, each of the elements is paired with one of the five senses; here akasha is associated with hearing, since it is believed to convey the sound from place to place.

## Sphota

("disclosure") Crucial element in the theory of language propounded by **Bhartrhari** (7th c.). Bhartrhari was the founder of the **Grammarians**, a philosophical school that conceived of **Brahman**, the Supreme Reality, as being manifested in sound, particularly the sound of the spoken word. According to this theory, a verbal utterance had three elements: the sound or sounds produced by the speaker and heard by the listener; a phonological pattern, of which that utterance is an instance; and finally the sphota, which was expressed by the sounds and signified the object of that utterance. According to Bhartrhari, sphota had to be postulated to explain how words could carry meaning. They do so because they are connected to the sphota, which designated a particular object, and in producing the sounds the speaker expressed that sphota.

## Sri Lanka

Island nation off the southeastern coast of India, formerly known as Ceylon. Local tradition claims that Sri Lanka was the place at which the biblical Adam alighted from paradise. Yet despite the island's idyllic natural beauty, its human geography has been far more troubled. Since 1981 the nation has been in the

throes of civil war between the Sinhalese and the Tamils, the island's two major ethnic groups. The Sinhalese comprise about 70 percent of the population, are largely Buddhist, live mainly in southern, western, and central Sri Lanka, and consider themselves the island's traditional inhabitants. The Tamils comprise little more than 20 percent of the population, are both Hindu and Christian, and are concentrated in the north and east. The Tamils came to Sri Lanka in two different ways—about half are descended from medieval invaders, who established Tamil kingdoms in northern Sri Lanka after crossing the straits from southern India, others were brought to Sri Lanka in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to serve as laborers on tea plantations.

Since independence in 1948, the Tamils have been at a distinct disadvantage *vis-à-vis* the Sinhalese, whose majority has allowed them to control virtually all aspects of national life. This precarious position was often further undermined by anti-Tamil riots, particularly in Colombo, the nation's capital. In 1981 Tamil groups began a struggle for an independent nation in the Tamil-majority areas. The Sinhalese majority was deathly opposed to this notion, and since then Sri Lanka has been marked by periods of vicious civil war. Given their slimmer resources, the Tamils have tended to wage guerrilla warfare. Their soldiers are famous for wearing a cyanide capsule around their necks with which to commit **suicide** if captured. These soldiers are also notorious for their willingness to serve as human bombs, striking against civilian populations in urban areas. In 1991 one such human bomb was responsible for the assassination of former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in revenge for Gandhi's perceived treachery in cooperating with the Sri Lankan government. Although the Tamil regions have been offered limited autonomy by Chandrika Kumaratunga, Sri Lanka's present prime minister, the conflict has been so bitter that it is not likely to be easily resolved.

Sri Lanka has traditionally been part of the Indian cultural orbit and has a long history of cultural exchanges with India. According to local tradition, Buddhism was brought to Sri Lanka from India in the third century B.C.E. by Mahinda, who was the son of the Mauryan emperor **Ashoka**. Another sign of this connection is that Sri Lanka contains an important Hindu pilgrimage place (**tirtha**), **Kataragama**, located near the island's southern coast. Kataragama's perceived power draws Hindus from abroad as well as Sri Lankans from all religious communities. Although Kataragama is Sri Lanka's only major Hindu site, the northern regions strongly reflect the Tamil culture of the region's population, which stems from their geographic roots. See also **Tamil Nadu**.

## Stages of Life

As described in the **dharma literature**, there were four stages (ashramas) in the life of a **twice-born** man, that is, a man born into one of the three "twice-born" groups in Indian society—**brahmin**, **kshatriya**, or **vaishya**—who are eligible for the adolescent religious **initiation** known as the "second birth." In the first stage, immediately after this initiation, the young man would live as a celibate student (**brahmacharin**) studying the Vedas in his **guru's** household. The second stage was that of the householder (**grhastha**), in which he would marry, raise a family, and engage in worldly life. In the third stage, as a forest-dwelling hermit (**vanaprastha**), he would gradually detach himself from worldly entanglements. The final stage was as a total renunciant (**Sanyasi**), who had given up all things in a search for the ultimate religious truth. These four stages are an idealized progression and should not be understood as describing actual practice, since most men never pass beyond the householder stage of life and have no desire to do so.

Beneath this idealized progression lies the tension between two differing

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modes of religious life—that of the householder, which is based in the world, and that of the **ascetic**, which renounces the world. The latter ideal originated with the religious adepts known as the **shramanas** and evolved into the monastic **asceticism** of the Buddhists and Jains, which was portrayed as a superior religious path than the householder's life. Both these groups were highly influential—the Jains had a significant presence in southern Indian society up to the eighth century C.E.—and it is generally accepted that the pattern of the four ashramas was evolved as a way to appropriate and transform this stress on ascetic life. The doctrine of the four stages provided a place and time for asceticism, but as the last stage, at the end of one's life. The clear message was that one should engage in the search for religious truth only after fulfilling one's social and ancestral duties.

## Steya

("theft") In the **dharma literature**, one of the **Four Great Crimes** whose commission made one an outcast from society; steya was theft of a **brahmin's** gold, above a certain specified amount. One guilty of this crime was to go to the king bearing an iron club and receive a blow to the head intended to be fatal. This blow would absolve the sin, whether or not one actually died, although one was also expected to restore the stolen property. For lesser amounts of gold the punishment was less severe and satisfied by fasting (**upavasa**) and other penance (**prayashchitta**). The stress on the seriousness of this sin clearly reflects the interests of the brahmins, who undoubtedly wrote most of the dharma literature.

## Sthala Murti

("fixed image") Image of a **deity** that is fixed in a certain place and does not move from it (in the case of stone images, this is often because such images are so large and heavy that

moving them is virtually impossible). The other sort of image is the **utsava murti**, a movable image used during festival processions.

## Sthunakarna

In the *Mahabharata*, the later of the two great Hindu epics, Sthunakarna is a nature spirit (**yaksha**) who exchanges sexes with **Shikhandi**, the rebirth of the maiden **Amba**, daughter of the king of **Kashi**.

## Stridhan

("woman's wealth") Term denoting any property owned or inherited by a woman, which usually included any gifts given to her by her family or money that she earned herself. In the patrilineal **inheritance** systems prescribed by texts such as the *Mitakshara* and the *Dayabhaga*, stridhan was not considered part of the family property, but a woman's personal property that she could dispose of as she pleased. Stridhan could be inherited, but the inheritance patterns were different than those for family property. The primary inheritors were a woman's **daughters**; for **women** with no daughters, the ownership would devolve to her husband and his heirs, or to her birth family.

## Stridharma

Term denoting "**women's** religious duty" (**dharma**), the set of social roles, rules, and duties broadly conceived as applying to all women. In the **dharma literature**, it was generally assumed that appropriate women's roles were as daughters, wives, and mothers, and that their lives would be primarily defined by their relationships with men—whether fathers, brothers, husbands, or sons. As described in the dharma literature, their position seems to have had status, but little authority. One well-known passage from the *Manu Smrti* warns that a woman must never be independent, but always under the guardianship of a man; this is followed by an equally famous

passage warning that the treatment of women was a marker of the family's honor, and that a household in which the women were badly treated would disappear. In real life women exercised considerably more power than in this theoretical model, but such power usually came later in life, when a woman's sons had formed families of their own, and she had thus become the matriarch of an extended family.

## Subhadra

The divine sister of the god **Jagannath**, who is invariably pictured with him and their brother **Balabhadra**. The most important site for these three **deities** is the Jagannath temple in the city of **Puri**, at which Jagannath is the presiding deity. Although Jagannath is identified with the god **Krishna**, he is generally considered an autochthonous ("of the land") deity who was originally the local deity of Puri. He has been assimilated into the Hindu pantheon by his identification with Krishna.

One piece of evidence for this theory is the deities' invariable appearance, with Jagannath (Krishna) on the right, his brother Balabhadra (**Balarama**) on the left, and Subhadra as a smaller figure in the center. Such a triadic grouping is virtually unknown in Krishna devotion, which tends to stress either Krishna alone or the divine couple of Krishna and **Radha**. The female figure of Subhadra is also very unusual, since as Jagannath's sister she is ineligible for the amorous adventures usually associated with Krishna. Although Jagannath is the most important of the three deities, the identifications with the other two also reveal larger syncretizing tendencies. Balabhadra is sometimes identified as a form of the god **Shiva**, and Subhadra as the powerful **goddess Durga**. In this way, Puri's divine trio embody the three most important Hindu deities. For further information on Subhadra and her brothers, the best source is Anncharlott Eschmann, Hermann Kulke, and Gaya Charan Tripathi, *The Cult of Jagannath and the Regional Traditions of Orissa*, 1978.

## Subodhini

("Greatly enlightening") A name given to commentaries on various texts—presumably because of the commentary's ability to illuminate the text. The most famous of these commentaries, to which the name *Subodhini* is often understood to refer, is the one by **Vallabhacharya** (1479–1531) on the ***Bhagavata Purana***. The *Bhagavata Purana* is one of the later sectarian compendia known as **puranas**, and it is the most important source for the mythology of the god **Krishna**, whom Vallabhacharya considered the Supreme Being. Vallabhacharya's *Subodhini* lays out the basic doctrines of his religious community, known as the **Pushti Marg** because of their stress on god's **grace**, which they called *pushti*, meaning "that which nourishes the soul."

## Subrahmanya

("dear to brahmins") Epithet of the god **Skanda**, particularly in his southern Indian manifestation as **Murugan**. See **Skanda** and **Murugan**.

## Subtle Body

Alternate human physiological system that exists on a different plane than gross matter, but has certain correspondences with the anatomy of the material body. Different parts of the subtle body contain the microcosmic forms of the **deities Shiva** and **Shakti**, the bipolar forces believed to be the powers behind the cosmos. The subtle body is thus based on the principle of the homology, or essential similarities, of macrocosm and microcosm, a fundamental Hindu idea since the time of the **Upanishads**. The **Sanskrit** texts describing the subtle body assume that there are different planes of reality, and thus that the subtle body actually exists, but given the network of symbols associated with it, one

Vishnu, surrounded by worshipers, wielding Sudarshana, his discus weapon.

need not accept its literal reality for it to be religiously meaningful.

The subtle body is visualized as a set of six psychic centers (**chakras**), running roughly along the course of the spine: the **muladhara chakra** at the base of the spine, the **svadhishthana chakra** in the genital region, the **manipura chakra** in the navel region, the **anahata chakra** in the heart region, the **vishuddha chakra** in the throat region, and the **ajna chakra** is in the forehead between the eyebrows. Associated with each of these chakras is an elaborate symbolic system: All six can be seen as symbols for a human physiological capacity; the first five are associated with one of the subtle elements (**tanmatras**), and the sixth with thought.

The lotus petals on each chakra contain a letter of the Sanskrit alphabet, thus encompassing all sacred sounds. Some models of the subtle body are even more developed, with each chakra associated with a certain color and a certain presiding deity.

These centers are capped at the top of the head by the "thousand-petaled lotus" (**sahasradalapadma**), which is the abode of Shiva in the human body. Connecting all of the centers are three vertical channels (**nadi**)—the **ida nadi** on the left, the **pingala nadi** on the right, and the **sushumna** in the center. Coiled three times around the muladhara chakra is the **kundalini**, the latent spiritual force in all human beings. This is considered an aspect of the universal Shakti, or feminine **divine power**, but in most people is regarded as dormant, symbolized by its coiled state. The separation of Shakti and Shiva at the opposite ends of the subtle body also symbolizes the ordinary person's unenlightened state, since enlightenment transcends this duality, and the two deities are united and identical.

The subtle body is a fundamental aspect of **tantra** practices and some forms of **yoga**. In the types of yoga that focus on the subtle body, including **kundalini yoga**, the ultimate aim is to awaken and straighten the kundalini, moving it up the sushumna through the chakras to the abode of Shiva. Since the kundalini is nothing but raw energy, the process must be carefully controlled to prevent the aspirant from unleashing uncontrollable forces, and manuals warn against doing this without being under the supervision of a spiritual teacher (**guru**). The union of Shiva and Shakti in the aspirant's body mirrors the action of these divine forces in the macrocosm, and with this union the aspirant gains bliss and final liberation of the soul (**moksha**). For further information see Arthur Avalon (Sir John Woodroffe), *Shakti and Shakta*, 1959; Philip S. Rawson, *The Art of Tantra*, 1973; Swami Agehananda Bharati, *The Tantric Tradition*, 1977; and

Douglas Renfrew Brooks, *The Secret of the Three Cities*, 1990.

## Suchi Hasta

In Indian **dance**, **sculpture**, and ritual, a particular hand **gesture** (**hasta**), in which the hand is closed except for the index finger, which is pointing downward to indicate something to the viewer. The word *suchi* means "needle" but is derived from a verb that can mean either "to pierce" or "to indicate"—both meanings that imply focusing on a particular place.

## Sudama

In Hindu mythology, one of the god **Krishna's** childhood friends who is a symbol for god's **grace** and providence. In later life Sudama is desperately poor and, at his wife's urging, goes to beg for help from his childhood friend, who is now the king of **Dwaraka**. Sudama is so poor that the only gift he can bring for Krishna is a small packet of parched rice, but Krishna greets him and graciously accepts it. The two have an enjoyable visit in which they reminisce about old times, and Sudama goes home without asking for anything. Some of the stories explain this lapse as stemming from shame, but in others Sudama is portrayed as having had such a nice time that he simply forgets. During his homeward journey Sudama worries over the reception he will get from his wife, but when he arrives he discovers that his hut has been transformed into a palace by Krishna's **divine power**, and from that day he is never poor again.

## Sudarshana

In Hindu mythology, the name for the god **Vishnu's** discus weapon (**chakra**), which is fashioned by **Vishvakarma**, the workman and architect of the gods. According to the story, Vishvakarma has married his daughter **Sanjna** to the **sun**, but she finds her husband's brightness too much to bear. To help his daughter adjust, Vishvakarma trims off some bits

of the sun with his divine tools, removing enough of his radiance that Sanjna can bear to be with him. He then fashions the trimmed-off portions into Vishnu's Sudarshana chakra, **Shiva's** trident, and various other divine weapons, as well as the **Pushpak Viman**, an **aerial car**. Sudarshana's divine source makes it a fearful weapon, and it is thus able to decimate any enemy.

## Sudarshana Sampraday

Another name for the **Nimbarki** religious community, since their founder **Nimbarka** was believed to be an incarnation of **Sudarshana**, **Vishnu's** weapon.

## Sugriva

In the ***Ramayana***, the earlier of the two great Indian epics, a monkey king and an ally of the god **Rama** in his struggle to regain his kidnapped wife **Sita**. Sugriva and his brother **Bali** jointly rule the kingdom of **Kishkindha** but become enemies because of a misunderstanding. On one occasion the two are fighting a magician who has taken refuge in a cave. Bali goes in, after instructing Sugriva on certain signs that will indicate which of them has been killed. Sugriva waits outside the cave for a year, and then sees the sign indicating his brother's death, which the cunning magician has engineered during his own death. Thinking that his brother is dead, Sugriva rolls a stone over the mouth of the cave to trap the magician, and returns home. Bali eventually manages to get out of the cave and, thinking that his brother has used this opportunity to get rid of him, forces Sugriva into exile and keeps Sugriva's wife as his own. Sugriva lives in exile until he makes an alliance with Rama, who kills Bali by shooting him while Bali fights with Sugriva. After regaining his kingdom, Sugriva is a faithful ally to Rama, and with his monkey armies aids in the conquest of **Lanka**.

## Suicide

An act whose permissibility and consequences have elicited varying opinions over time. In medieval times commentators distinguished between several types of suicide, depending on the circumstances surrounding the act. Any suicide prompted by an overpowering emotional impulse such as rage or grief was always strictly forbidden, and those who did this were said to reap dire karmic consequences. Another case entirely was suicide performed as an expiation (**prayashchitta**) for one's sins, which was often prescribed to expiate one of the **Four Great Crimes**. A third type was suicide by people suffering from a terminal disease, or who were in chronic pain. This sort of suicide was performed according to a well-defined ritual, intended to put the performer in the proper frame of mind. This third category was one of the rites designated as "forbidden in the **Kali** [Age]" (**Kalivarjya**), although it had been permitted in earlier times. The most fascinating sort of suicide was at pilgrimage places (**tirtha**), particularly at **Allahabad**. This was also done according to a very specific ritual, and part of the ritual required the performer to name the benefit for which the rite was being performed—in some cases liberation of the soul (**moksha**), in other cases life in **heaven** for many eons. This practice is well documented up to the seventeenth century, although it is no longer done in contemporary times.

## Sulfur

A pivotal substance in Indian **alchemy**, the conceptual foundation for which is its analysis of the world as a series of bipolar opposites in tension with one another, and the conviction that unifying these opposing forces brings spiritual progress and the end of reincarnation (**samsara**). Hindu alchemy shares this model of uniting or transcending opposing forces with Hindu **tantra**, a secret, ritually based system of religious practice, and with **hatha yoga**, which is

based on a series of physical exercises that are also believed to affect the **subtle body**.

In the alchemical tradition, the governing metaphor for this combination of opposites is the union of **sun** and **moon**. Both are connected to other opposing principles through an elaborate series of associations, in keeping with this bipolar symbolism. In Hindu alchemical conceptions, sulfur is conceived of as the uterine **blood** of **Shakti**, and thus a powerful element. It is also identified with the sun, with heat, dryness, and withering force. When sulfur is mixed and consumed with elemental **mercury**, which is identified with the god **Shiva's semen**, the aspirant's gross body is purified and refined, eventually rendering it immortal. Modern descriptions of this practice invariably warn that it should only be carried out under the direction of one's **guru** (spiritual teacher), since otherwise the combination will be harmful. This warning is not surprising, since by itself mercury is a deadly poison. For further information see Shashibhushan B. Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cults*, 1962; and David Gordon White, *The Alchemical Body*, 1996.

## Sulva Sutras

("aphorisms on measurement") A collection of brief sayings giving the exact rules for constructing the sacrificial altars for the public Vedic sacrifices. The Sulva Sutras were connected to the **Shrauta Sutras**, which laid down the ritual prescriptions for these rites, of which the preparation of the site was an obvious necessity. Given the premise that the **sacrifice** would be unsuccessful unless it was performed exactly right, such precise attention to the altar's construction seems a necessary consequence.

## Sumantra

In the *Ramayana*, the earlier of the two great Indian epics, Sumantra is one of the ministers of King **Dasharatha**, the father of **Rama**. As Rama, his wife **Sita**, and his brother **Lakshmana** are going into exile, Sumantra accompanies them to the River **Ganges** to make sure that the trio will comply with their orders. When the three board the boat on which the boatman **Guha** will take them over the river, Sumantra bids Rama a tearful farewell.

## Sumati

In Hindu mythology, one of the wives of King **Sagar**. Through a sage's boon, Sumati and her co-wife **Keshini** are given a choice in the number of children they would bear—one will bear a single son through whom the lineage will continue, whereas the other will bear sixty thousand sons who will die before they have any offspring. Sumati chooses the latter, and when her sixty thousand handsome sons go out to search for their father's sacrificial horse, they are burned to ash by the fury of the sage **Kapila**. Although these sons die without issue they still have a profound affect on the world, since Keshini's descendants bring the River **Ganges** down to earth to bring peace to their souls.

## Sumitra

In the *Ramayana*, the earlier of the two great Indian epics, Sumitra is one of the three wives of King **Dasharatha** and the mother of **Rama's** half-brothers, the twins **Lakshmana** and **Shatrughna**. In their fidelity and service to Rama, her **sons** are important characters in the epic, but aside from bearing them, Sumitra has little importance.

## Sun

In Hindu astrology (**jyotisha**), a **planet** generally associated with strength and vitality, although it can be malevolent, possibly reflecting the relentless destructive power of the Indian sun. The sun's vitality makes it a strong planet, and as in Western astrology the sun's position in the **zodiac** plays a major role in fixing a person's **natal horoscope**

The Sun Temple at Konarak, Orissa. It was built in the thirteenth century
to resemble the chariot that was believed to carry the sun.

(janampatrika). The sun presides over **Sunday**, a **day** of the **week** that is not strongly marked as either auspicious or inauspicious. See also **Surya**.

## Sundaramurtti

(8th c.) The last of the **Nayanars**, a group of sixty-three southern Indian poet-saints who were devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva**. Along with their contemporaries the **Alvars**, who were devotees of **Vishnu**, the Nayanars spearheaded the revitalization of Hindu religion through their passionate devotion (**bhakti**) to a personal god, conveyed through hymns sung in the **Tamil language**. Along with his predecessors, **Appar** and **Sambandar**, Sundaramurtti actively opposed the heterodox sects of the times, particularly the Jains, whom he reviles in his poems. The collected hymns of the three most important Nayanars—Appar, Sambandar, and Sundaramurtti—comprise the *Devaram*, the most sacred of the Tamil Shaivite texts. Sundaramurtti is also important for his catalog of the sixty-three Nayanars, which forms the first literary source for Tamil Shaivite hagiography.

## Sundareshvara

(The "Handsome Lord") Epithet of the god **Shiva** in his manifestation as the husband of the **goddess Minakshi**. Minakshi is the presiding **deity** of the Minakshi temple in the city of **Madurai** in the state of **Tamil Nadu**. See **Shiva**.

## Sunday

(Ravivar) First **day** of the Hindu **week**, whose presiding **planet** (and **deity**) is the **sun** (ravi). As a day, Sunday is considered generally auspicious but not particularly powerful, probably because the sun is acknowledged as a deity but is not widely worshiped as a primary one.

## Sun Temple

The most famous temple to the **sun** is at **Konarak** in **Orissa** state, right on the shore of the Bay of Bengal. The temple was built by King Narasimhadeva (r. 1238–1264), a monarch in the **Ganga dynasty**, and the entire temple was intended to be a likeness of the sun's chariot. It has twelve great wheels carved on the sides at the temple's lowest level, and in front, statues of several colossal horses. As at the temples of **Khajuraho**, the lower levels here are covered with **erotic** and sexually explicit carvings, to which people have given differing interpretations: Some claim that these sanction carnal pleasure as a religious path, some interpret them allegorically as representing human union with the divine, and still others view them as teaching that the desire for pleasure must ultimately be transcended to attain the divine.

The temple was built on a massive scale; according to one estimate, the central spire would have been over 200 feet high. It is uncertain whether this spire was ever actually completed, since the sandy soil on which the temple platform was built would have been unable to support the weight of such an enormous structure. This same unstable soil has been the greatest contributor to the temple's increasing deterioration. The primary structure left at the site is the **jagamohan** (assembly hall), which was filled with sand in the nineteenth century, in an effort to prevent further collapse. For further information see Roy Craven, *Indian Art*, 1997.

## Suparna

("having beautiful wings") Epithet of the god **Vishnu's** vehicle, the divine eagle **Garuda**. See **Garuda**.

## Superhuman Powers

Widely believed to be attainable, either through voluntarily suffering harsh physical **asceticism** (**tapas**) or as products of high spiritual attainment. See **Siddhi**.

## Surapana

("**liquor**-drinking") In the **dharma literature**, one of the **Four Great Crimes** whose commission made one an outcast from society. Although in modern times the word *sura* is the term for "wine," here it was believed to refer to a particular type of spirituous liquor made from rice flour. For members of the three highest social groups—**brahmins**, **kshatriyas**, and **vaishyas**, the most commonly prescribed penance (**prayashchitta**) for habitually drinking sura was to drink this same beverage boiling hot, until one died. Interestingly, this penalty does not apply to members of the lowest social class, the **shudras**. This difference reflected their lower status, in which they were not held to the same sorts of scrupulous standards as the "**twice-born**." Despite the harsh penalty for drinking sura, there were other sorts of **intoxicants** that kshatriyas and vaishyas could drink without penalty, although brahmins who drank these had to perform mild penances.

## Surasa

In Hindu mythology, Surasa is the mother of all the **Nagas**, a class of minor divinities conceived in the form of serpents. In the ***Ramayana***, the earlier of the two great Indian epics, Surasa takes the form of a gigantic serpent to test the fortitude of the monkey-god **Hanuman**, who jumps over the sea to **Lanka** to search for **Sita**, the god **Rama's** kidnapped wife. Surasa tells Hanuman that no one can go by without passing through her mouth, and in response Hanuman makes himself larger and larger. Surasa in turn opens her jaws wider and wider, and finally Hanuman becomes very small and darts in and out of her mouth. Surasa, pleased with Hanuman's ingenuity and courage, gives him her blessing.

## Surat-Shabd-Yoga

Mystical discipline in the **Radha Soami** religious community, which stresses the

joining (**yoga**) of the spirit (surat) with the Divine Sound (shabd). The Divine Sound emanates from the Supreme Being and is always present. Most people cannot hear it due to their preoccupation with worldly things. With proper training and devotion to a true **guru** (**satguru**), anyone can eventually become attuned to the Divine Sound, and resonate in harmony with it. The most important part of this path is contact with a true guru, since only a true guru has access to the divine and is considered a manifestation of the divine itself. Devotion to a true guru is the single most important factor in a person's spiritual development, and this spiritual progress hinges on complete surrender to the guru's **grace**.

This metaphor of the Divine Sound, and human resonance with it, has much in common with the images used by Guru Nanak, the first of the Sikh gurus, and with the **Nathpanthis** before him. The overwhelming stress on a guru makes it possible for this religious discipline to be practiced by just about anyone, and most of the Radha Soami followers are householders living in the world rather than ascetics. For further information see Sudhir Kakar, *Shamans*, *Mystics*, *and Doctors*, 1990; Lawrence Babb, *Redemptive Encounters*, 1987; and Mark Juergensmeyer, *Radhasoami Reality*, 1991.

## Surdas

(early 16th c.) One of the **ashtachap**, a group of eight northern Indian **bhakti** (devotional) poets. The compositions of these eight poets were used for liturgical purposes by the **Pushti Marg**, a religious community whose members are devotees (**bhakta**) of **Krishna**. In the Pushti Marg's sectarian literature, all eight poets are also named as members of the community and as associates of either the community's founder, **Vallabhacharya**, or his successor **Vitthalnath**. In this literature, as recounted in the *Chaurasi Vaishnavan ki Varta* ("Lives of eighty-four

Vaishnavas"), it was at Vallabhacharya's order that **Surdas** began to compose poems about **Krishna's lila**, his playful interactions with the world and his devotees. He then proceeded to compose the 5,000-odd poems of the *Sursagar*.

The oldest manuscripts paint a much different picture of Surdas, for most of them contain only a few hundred poems, which are usually quite short. The most important themes in the early poetry are supplication (**vinaya**) and separation (**viraha**), and although one also finds the depictions of Krishna's childhood for which Surdas has become most famous, these themes are more important later in the poetic tradition. Surdas's poetry thus shows a wide range of themes, from his own spiritual life to devotional "glimpses" of Krishna; the latter most commonly explore the religious tension between the image of Krishna as a charming child and his alter ego as lord of the universe. As in much of **Vaishnava** devotional poetry, Surdas composed these poems to invite his hearers to enter Krishna's world.

The difference between these pictures raises doubts about the connection between Surdas and Vallabhacharya. Although songs by Surdas have been worked into the rites of the **Pushti Marg**, Surdas composed no poetry in praise of Vallabhacharya, unlike the other ashtachap poets. It seems just as likely that, as the popularity of Surdas's poems grew, he was "claimed" by the Pushti Marg as a fellow Krishna devotee. In fact, there is very little definitely known about him, including whether or not he was actually blind, as is generally accepted. Only two of the oldest poems mention blindness; one of these is clearly metaphorical, and the other is part of a litany of the woes of old age. As with so many of the bhakti poets, one knows a great deal more about the poems than the poet. For further information see John Stratton Hawley, *Krishna*: *The Butter Thief*, 1983; and *Surdas: Poet*, *Singer*, *Saint*, 1984; see also John Stratton Hawley and

Mark Juergensmeyer (trans.), *Songs of the Saints of India*, 1988.

## Sureshvara

Philosopher in the **Advaita Vedanta** school, and one of two attested disciples of the school's founder, **Shankaracharya** (788–820?), the other being **Padmapada**. The Advaita school upholds a philosophical position known as monism, which is the belief that a single Ultimate Reality lies behind all things, and that all things are merely differing forms of that reality. Advaita proponents exemplify this belief in their claim that reality is nondual (**advaita**)—that is, that all things are nothing but the formless, unqualified **Brahman**, despite the appearance of difference and diversity. For Advaita proponents, the assumption that the world is real as perceived is a fundamental misunderstanding of the ultimate nature of things and a manifestation of **avidya**. Although often translated as "ignorance," avidya is better understood as the lack of genuine understanding, which ultimately causes human beings to be trapped in karmic bondage, reincarnation (**samsara**), and suffering.

In Hindu thought, Sureshvara is the only explicit proponent of **leap philosophy**, although one can see traces of this in the other figures in **Advaita Vedanta**, particularly in his teacher. Leap philosophy affirms that one can attain complete freedom from bondage, which in the Indian context is identified as the end of reincarnation and final liberation of the soul (**moksha**), but that such freedom cannot be gained by a precisely specified sequence of causes and effects. According to Sureshvara, since the ultimate problem stems from one's mistaken understanding, the only solution can come from purified, correct understanding. Sureshvara's path, such as it is, is to use a negative dialectic to distinguish clearly what the Self is not, and when one's mind has been prepared, to gain a flash of mystic insight through hearing one of the **mahavakyas**

("great utterances") that identify the Self with **Brahman**. Sureshvara affirms that actions can have no part in this process, since action is bound up with the world and is pervaded by ignorance. For further information see A. J. Alston (trans.), *The Naiskarmya Siddhi of Sri Suresvara*, 1959; and Karl H. Potter (ed.), *Advaita Vedanta up to Samkara and His Pupils*, 1981.

## Sursagar

("Ocean of Sur") Corpus of poetry in the **Braj Bhasha** language ascribed to the northern Indian poet-saint **Surdas**. Traditional versions of the *Sursagar* are divided into twelve parts, to mirror the structure of the ***Bhagavata Purana***, which is the most important **Sanskrit** source for the mythology of the god **Krishna**. Surdas was a Krishna devotee (**bhakta**), and this arrangement is a way to confer the luster of an authoritative Sanskrit text on vernacular religious poetry. Just as the *Bhagavata Purana* lavishly describes Krishna's youthful exploits, the *Sursagar* is most commonly associated with poems painting intimate and affectionate pictures of Krishna's childhood.

Although the poetry published in editions of the *Sursagar* is ascribed to Surdas, most of it is certainly pseudonymous. The oldest manuscripts of Surdas's poetry have at most a few hundred poems, and the size of this corpus roughly doubles every century, reaching the five thousand poems in the present Sursagar. The general tone of the earliest poems also shows a marked thematic difference. Although they include Krishna's childhood, a far greater percentage express the poet's pangs of separation (**viraha**) from Krishna or complaint (**vinaya**) about his spiritual troubles. Even the earliest manuscripts show no common body of poems, and it seems likely that from the very beginning the "Surdas" poetic tradition was drawn from the songs of wandering singers, a characterization that fits well with the image of the poet himself. For

A painted relief of Surya, the sun god.

further information see John Stratton Hawley, *Krishna: The Butter Thief*, 1983, and *Surdas: Poet, Singer, Saint* 1984; see also John Stratton Hawley and Mark Juergensmeyer (trans.), *Songs of the Saints of India*, 1988.

## Surya

The **sun**, both in its physical form as a celestial phenomenon and personified as a **deity**. The sun has been an important deity as far back as the **Vedas**, the earliest and most authoritative Hindu religious texts, and has retained a position of some importance since that time. One example of this is the **Gayatri Mantra**, a sacred formula that is supposed to be recited every day by **twice-born** males, that is, men from the three "twice-born" groups—**brahmin**, **kshatriya**, and **vaishya**—who have undergone the adolescent religious **initiation** known as the "second birth." The Gayatri Mantra invokes the sun as the generator and nourisher of all things, and requests him to stimulate the minds of those who perceive him. Surya is still worshiped by many **Smarta** brahmins as one of the "five-fold" (panchayatana) deities (the others being **Shiva**, **Vishnu**, the **Goddess**, and **Ganesh**), a practice attributed to the Advaita philosopher **Shankaracharya**. For some time Surya was also the primary deity for certain communities, particularly in eastern India, although his cult has been largely eclipsed in recent times. The most spectacular example of this **worship** is the temple of the sun at **Konarak** (now ruined), whose claims to fame stem from its enormous size and the profuse **erotic** sculptures on its exterior walls. For further information see Vibhuti Bhushan Mishra, *Religious Beliefs and Practices of North India During the Early Medieval Period*, 1973; and Sarat Chandra Mitra, *The Cult of the Sun God in Medieval Eastern Bengal*, 1986. See also **panchayatana puja**.

## Suryapraksha

("effulgence of the **sun**") Name given to the banner that is the symbolic emblem of the **Mahanirvani Akhara**, a particular group of the **Naga** class of the **Dashanami Sanyasis**. The Nagas are devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva**, organized into different **akharas** or regiments on the model of an army. Until the beginning of the nineteenth century the *Nagas*' primary occupation was as mercenary soldiers, although they also had substantial trading interests; both of these have largely disappeared in contemporary times. All of the akharas have particular features that signify their organizational identity, and this particular banner—one with strong connections to a martial identity—is one such feature.

## Suryavarman II

(r. 1112–1153) Ruler of the Khmer people in Cambodia, whose reign saw the construction of the massive temple complex at **Angkor** Wat. Although Suryavarman and his people were native Cambodians, the temples at Angkor Wat were dedicated to Hindu **deities**, showing the vast influence of contemporary Indian culture.

## Sushruta

(4th c.) Physician and writer who is traditionally regarded as the author of the ***Sushruta Samhita***. Along with the slightly earlier ***Charaka Samhita***, the *Sushruta Samhita* is one of the two major sources for **ayurveda**, an Indian medical tradition.

## Sushruta Samhita

Along with the slightly earlier ***Charaka Samhita***, one of the two major sources for the Indian medical tradition known as **ayurveda**. Underlying ayurveda is the theory of the three bodily humors—**vata** (**wind**), **pitta** (bile), and **kapha** (phlegm). Each is composed of different elements, and although everyone has all three

humors, their varying proportions are used to explain differing body types, metabolic dispositions, and personalities. The cause of disease is an imbalance of these humors—whether caused by environmental sources or personal habits—whereas the state of this equilibrium is the state of health. The *Sushruta Samhita* has been edited and translated into various languages, and served as a source for secondary studies, such as Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya, *Science and Society in Ancient India*, 1977.

## Sushumna

One of the vertical channels (**nadi**) in the traditional conceptions of the **subtle body**. The subtle body is an alternate physiological system believed to exist on a different plane than gross matter but with certain correspondences to the material body. It is visualized as a set of six psychic centers (**chakras**) running roughly along the course of the spine, connected by three parallel vertical channels. Above and below these centers are the bodily abodes of the two divine principles, **Shiva** (awareness) and **Shakti** (power)—the latter as the latent spiritual energy known as **kundalini**—conceived in the form of a coiled serpent. In the types of **yoga** that focus on the subtle body, the ultimate aim is to awaken the kundalini, and move it up through the chakras to the abode of Shiva. The union of Shiva and Shakti in the aspirant's body mirrors the action of these divine forces in the macrocosm, and with this union the aspirant gains bliss and final liberation of the soul (**moksha**).

The sushumna is the middle of the three vertical channels in the subtle body—the side channels are the **ida nadi** and the **pingala nadi**—and it is by far the most important of the three. The sushumna provides the pathway for the rising kundalini as it awakens and straightens during the aspirant's spiritual exercises, piercing through the chakras on its way. In most people the

sushumna is closed where it intersects the chakras, which blocks the flow of energy from moving smoothly through it. When the chakras have been pierced and opened by the rising kundalini, the passageway has been opened for the kundalini to rise to the abode of Shiva, and effect the union of Shakti and Shiva that will bring ultimate realization. For further information see Arthur Avalon (Sir John Woodroffe), *Shakti and Shakta*, 1978; Philip S. Rawson, *The Art of Tantra*, 1973; Swami Agehananda Bharati, *The Tantric Tradition*, 1975; and Douglas Renfrew Brooks, *The Secret of the Three Cities*, 1990.

## Suta

In Hindu mythology, a disciple of the sage **Vyasa**, who is said to have recounted the **puranas** to other renunciants in the **Naimisha** forest. The puranas are an important genre of religious texts that collect all types of sacred lore, from mythic tales to ritual instruction to exaltation of various sacred sites (**tirthas**) and actions. Individual puranas are usually highly sectarian and intended to promote the **worship** of one of the Hindu gods, whether **Vishnu**, **Shiva**, or the **Goddess**. The traditional puranas are numbered at eighteen, and in many of them Suta is named as the narrator, in accordance with the legend mentioned above.

## Sutakashaucha

The impurity (**ashaucha**) caused by childbirth (sutaka). All bodily effluvia (**hair**, spittle, pus, **blood**, etc.) are considered to be sources of impurity, and because **birth** is attended with these it is considered impure, even though it is always regarded as an auspicious and happy event. There is also impurity caused by death, known as **maranashaucha**, but the presence of the **corpse** renders this impurity more violent; needless to say, it is also considered inauspicious.

## Sutra

("thread") In a metaphorical sense, a sutra is a short phrase or aphorism that can easily be committed to memory. Many early philosophical and grammatical texts were collections of such sutras, which are so brief that they virtually presuppose a commentary to explain their meaning. In many cases the commentary would have been an oral exchange between teacher and student, thus effecting the living transmission that is still the norm in **tantra**, a secret, ritually based religious practice. Memorizing such sutras was a way to gain mastery over an entire text, and the sutras could also serve as an aid to memory for the commentary, thus enabling a person to preserve the "thread" of the argument. In a more literal sense, the word sutra can also refer to the cord or cords strung through the centers of **palm leaf** manuscripts, which kept the pages of the text in their proper order.

## Svadharma

("one's own **dharma**") In the **dharma literature**, svadharma is an individual's unique religious duty (dharma), based on that person's social position, **stage of life**, and gender. The governing assumption behind this notion is that every person has a social role to fulfill, and each of these roles is necessary for the maintenance of society, no matter how humble it might be. For each person, his or her svadharma carries the highest authority, and supersedes all other religious laws. As one example, violence is generally prohibited, but it is a necessary part of a ruler's svadharma—both to protect the land from external invaders, and to punish criminals within the country. In both cases the use of violence helps to maintain social order, which is the king's primary duty. In the same way, society depends on a host of other people fulfilling their particular social roles. This notion of social responsibility and interconnectedness is tied to religious fulfillment through the notion of the Path of Action (**karmamarga**). According to this

idea, selflessly performing one's social duty, for the good of the world rather than through selfish desire, was also a path to ultimate spiritual fulfillment and final liberation of the soul (**moksha**). According to this conception, since every svadharma is potentially a path to final liberation, each person has a path that only he or she can tread.

## Svadhishthana Chakra

In many schools of **yoga**, and in the esoteric ritual tradition known as **tantra**, the svadhishthana chakra is one of the six psychic centers (**chakras**) believed to exist in the **subtle body**. The subtle body is an alternate physiological system, believed to exist on a different plane than gross matter but with certain correspondences to the material body. It is visualized as a set of six psychic centers, which are conceived as multipetaled lotus flowers running roughly along the course of the spine, connected by three vertical channels. Each of these chakras has important symbolic associations—with differing human capacities, with different subtle elements (**tanmatras**), and with different seed syllables (**bijaksharas**) formed from the letters of the **Sanskrit** alphabet, thus encompassing all sacred sound. Above and below these centers are the bodily abodes of **Shiva** (awareness) and **Shakti** (power), the two divine principles through which the entire universe has come into being. The underlying assumption behind this concept of the subtle body is thus the fundamental similarity and interconnectedness of macrocosm and microcosm, an essential Hindu idea since the time of the mystical texts known as the **Upanishads**.

The six chakras are traditionally listed from the bottom up, and the svadhishthana chakra is the second. It is visualized as a six-petaled lotus located in the region of the genitals. The petals each contain a seed syllable formed from a letter of the Sanskrit alphabet, in this case the consonants from "ba" to "la." On a symbolic level, the svadhishthana chakra is associated with the human capacity for reproduction. It is also identified as the bodily seat for the subtle element of **water**, the fluid medium through which reproduction is possible. For further information see Arthur Avalon (Sir John Woodroffe), *Shakti and Shakta*, 1978; and Philip S. Rawson, *The Art of Tantra*, 1973.

## Svadhyaya

("study") Study of the sacred texts, which connotes oral recitation, since these texts were traditionally studied by reciting them. This is one of the methods named in the **Yoga Sutras** as one of the preparatory elements to yoga, since the text claims that such study attenuates one's karmic hindrances and fosters the ability to enter trance. Even in modern times the act of reciting a religious text is seen to have multiple spiritual benefits and, if performed over a long period of time, to be able to transform the person reciting.

## Svakiya

("belonging to oneself") Mode of conceiving the relationship between lover and beloved, in which the man and woman are married to each other. The **svakiya** relationship is socially respectable—sanctioned by society, upholding social propriety, fruitful, and procreative in its course. Although this mode of relationship is rich and celebrated, this very social approval is said to make it less intense than the adulterous **parakiya** relationship, in which the lovers gain nothing but their love itself. Although in most cases the union between the god **Krishna** and his consort **Radha** is described as parakiya, some **Vaishnava** communities—such as the **Radhavallabh** community—claim that this relationship is svakiya, perhaps reflecting reservations about endorsing **adultery**, even by the **deities**.

In Indian traditions the image of a svastika, arms pointed in a clockwise direction, symbolizes life, prosperity, and good fortune.

## Svaprakasha

("self-revealing") In Indian **philosophy**, the notion that certain things such as knowledge are self-revealing and do not need anything else in order to be known. The issue about whether these things existed, and what they were if they did, was a source of lively disagreement among Indian thinkers.

## Svarup

("own-form") In popular devotional dramas such as the **Ram Lila**, which is based on the story of the *Ramayana*, svarup is the name for the child-actors (most often **brahmin** boys) playing the parts of the gods and goddesses. Viewing these performances is not simply entertainment but also an act of religious devotion, since such dramas are considered to be ways in which the gods reveal themselves to their devotees (**bhakta**). When the actors are in makeup and in character—or wearing crowns, as in the case of the **Krishna**

lilas in the town of **Brindavan**—they are actually considered to be forms of the **deity**, revealed within the context of the lila. As one sign of this status, a regular feature of such performances is time set aside for **darshan**, in which the actors sit perfectly still for the viewers to view them as an act of **worship**, in the same way that people would interact with an image in a temple.

## Svastika

Although in the modern mind the svastika is indelibly associated with Adolph Hitler's Germany, it has a long and venerable history as an Indian symbol, predating the Nazis by several thousand years. The name is compounded from *su* ("good") + *asti* ("to be") + *ka* ("making"), and a general translation would be something like "bringing good fortune." In Hindu India the svastika is a symbol of life, prosperity, and good fortune, at least when the arms are pointing in a clockwise direction. Circling an object in this direction presents one's right side to the central object, and since this side is considered purer, the svastika with arms pointing clockwise is considered more auspicious than its counterclockwise counterpart.

## Svastikasana

("**svastika**-posture") One of the sitting postures (**asana**) described in commentaries to the **Yoga Sutras**. In this position, the right foot is inserted into the space between the left thigh and calf, and the left foot into the space between the right thigh and calf (one of the feet is pointing upwards, and the other downward). The opposing directions of the feet and the crossed legs evokes images of the svastika, hence the name.

## Svatahpramanya

("self-validating") In Indian **philosophy**, the notion that certain things, such as knowledge, are self-validating. This means that they can be definitively known to be true in themselves, without

reference to any of the other **pramanas**, the means by which human beings can gain true and accurate knowledge. The issue about whether these things existed, and what they were if they did, was a source of lively disagreement among Indian thinkers.

## Svayambhu

("self-born") Epithet of the god **Brahma**. This name underscores his role as the fashioner of the worlds—as the agent responsible for arranging the cosmos, he cannot himself be a created being. According to Hindu mythology, at the beginning of each cycle of creation Brahma emerges from the calyx of a lotus that sprouts from the god **Vishnu's** navel; at the time of cosmic dissolution he again enters the lotus, and is reabsorbed into Vishnu's body. See **Brahma**.

## Svayambhu ("self-manifested") Images

Name denoting any image of a Hindu divinity believed to exist by virtue of divine self-revelation, rather than by being made or established by human hands. These images are believed to be intensely holy and powerful, and to have a more pronounced sense of the **deity's** presence. They mark instances where these deities have revealed themselves out of **grace**, in order to become accessible to their devotees (**bhakta**), and they are places where the deities are believed to be particularly present and "awake," and thus more receptive to requests for favors.

Svayambhu images can be found for each of the three major Hindu deities. Images of the **Goddess** are often natural rock formations, such as the image of the goddess **Kamakhya**, which is a natural cleft in the rock, or the stone images of many of the **Shiwalik goddesses**; they can take other forms as well, such as the image of the goddess **Jwalamukhi**, which is a burning vent of natural gas. For the god **Vishnu**, the best-known self-manifested form is the **shalagram**, a black stone containing the spiral-shaped fossil shell of a prehistoric sea creature, which is believed to be a symbol of his discus (**chakra**). The god **Shiva's** pillar-shaped symbol known as the **linga** appears in the widest variety of self-manifested forms. Many of these self-manifested lingas are found in natural rock formations, such as at **Kedarnath**; **Amarnath**, where the linga appears as a pillar of ice; and the **bana linga**, which is a naturally rounded stone, usually small enough to be easily portable. Further, in the Hindu religious groups that stress the **subtle body**, both Shiva and the Goddess are believed to be present within one's own body. In some cases for all these deities, carved images are claimed to be self-manifest forms; in their usual motif the statue's location is revealed to a favored devotee in a **dream**. A self-manifested image is a powerful claim for any site and will bolster its importance as a place of divine access.

## Svayamsevak

("volunteer") Rank-and-file member of the **Rashtriya Svayamsevak Sangh** (RSS). The RSS is a conservative Hindu organization the express purpose of which is to provide the leadership cadre for a revitalized Hindu India; for most of its history it has characterized its mission as cultural and character-building rather than religious or political. The svayamsevaks are the rank-and-file members of the local RSS branches (**shakhas**), and are thus "foot soldiers" who make up the organization's core membership. The shakhas in any given area are overseen by a full-time RSS worker known as a **pracharak** ("director"), who serves as a liaison between the local units and the RSS leadership, and oversees RSS activity in his area.

The svayamsevak is the lowest level of RSS membership. Most members do not advance beyond this rank, since to do so requires complete commitment to the RSS and its ideals; those who do, however, are usually gifted leaders. The

primary stress at the shakha level is on forming personal relationships with other members, as a way to develop loyalty to the organization. Each shakha, or local unit, holds a daily meeting. Activities include an opening ceremony in which the organization's saffron banner is raised; traditional games or exercises, including a martial drill; and a discussion period in which RSS ideals can be disseminated and propagated.

## Svayamvara

("self-choice") In Hindu mythology, a form of marriage in which the bride would choose the groom she wanted, indicating her choice by placing her garland around his neck. In the stories in which a svayamvara occurs, the bride-to-be is usually of royal lineage, as are her suitors, so the bride's choice was an exercise fraught with potential political consequences. One famous mythic svayamvara was that of **Nala** and **Damayanti**, in which Damayanti prefers Nala even to the gods who have come as suitors. This story also illustrates the dangers of such a choice, when an unhappy suitor cursed the couple to endure separation and privation.

## Swami Malai

Temple and sacred site (**tirtha**) on a hill in the **Tanjore** district of **Tamil Nadu**, just outside the temple-town of **Kumbhakonam**. Swami Malai is part of the network of six temples in Tamil Nadu built to honor **Murugan**, a hill **deity** who has been assimilated into the larger pantheon as a form of the god **Skanda**, the son of **Shiva**. Five of these temples have been definitively identified, and each is associated with a particular region, a particular ecosystem, and a particular incident in Murugan's mythic career. In the case of Swami Malai, it is said to be where he taught the meaning of the sacred syllable (**Om**) to his father **Shiva**, and thus presents him in the aspect of a teacher, which is one of his identifying features in **Shaiva**

**Siddhanta** (a series of fourteen texts, all completed by the fourteenth century C.E., which reinterpret the ideas about Shiva found in **Nayanar** devotional poetry). The sixth of these temples is said to be every other shrine to Murugan in Tamil Nadu. This belief seems to stress Murugan's presence throughout Tamil Nadu and sacrilize the entire landscape, giving mythic significance to every Murugan temple, no matter how small. The cult of Murugan is thus a symbolic vehicle for Tamil pride and identity, and since the number six has connotations of completeness—as in the six directions, or the six **chakras** in the **subtle body**—it also suggests that nothing outside is needed. For further information see Fred Clothey, "Pilgrimage Centers in the Tamil Cultus of Murukan," in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion,* Vol. 40, No. 1, 1972.

## Swaminarayan Sect

Modern religious community devoted to the god **Vishnu**; its practice is based on the life and teachings of Sahajananda Swami (1781–1830), who was born near the sacred city of **Ayodhya** in eastern India but spent much of his life in the western Indian state of **Gujarat**. Sahajananda took **initiation** as an **ascetic** and soon became a **mahant**, or ascetic leader. His followers revered him first as a religious preceptor (**guru**), and later as a partial incarnation of the god **Krishna** himself. They believed that manifestations of the god Vishnu, such as Krishna, are born on earth in times of extreme trouble. It was in this latter aspect that he was given the name Swaminarayan ("Lord Narayan"), and his followers believed that he was the highest manifestation of God in human form. The Swaminarayan sect has several million lay devotees (**bhakta**), most of whom are affluent **Gujarati** merchants. In keeping with the community's ascetic roots, however, its most important figures are the ascetics who run the organization and who serve as teachers and advisers to them. For further

information see Raymond Brady Williams, *A New Face of Hinduism*, 1984.

## SYDA

(**Siddha Yoga** Dham America) Religious organization founded by Swami **Muktananda** (1908–1982), which has ashrams and centers around the world. Siddha Yoga's metaphysics are a modified form of Kashmiri Shaivism, but its signature teaching is the notion that the **guru's grace** can immediately awaken the disciple's latent **kundalini** (spiritual power, the most vital substance of the **subtle body**) and speed the process of spiritual development. This teaching puts an even greater emphasis on the importance of the guru as spiritual teacher, and the overwhelming emphasis pervades the whole movement. Although it has Indian members, most of its followers are non-Indian converts, who may be engaged in a spiritual search but who have little interest in becoming culturally Indian. The organization was headed by Muktananda until his death in 1982; for most of the time since then it has been presided over by his successor, **Chidvilasananda**.

# T

## Tad Ekam

("That One") Epithet used in **Rg Veda** hymn 10.129, the so-called **Creation Hymn**, to designate the first living being on the **earth**. The four **Vedas** are the oldest Hindu religious texts, and based on its style and content, the Rg Veda is the oldest of the Vedas. Most of the hymns in the Rg Veda are invocations addressed to various divinities, sung to propitiate these divinities so that human beings may enjoy the good things of this life. The Creation Hymn takes a far more speculative tone, standing in marked contrast to the confidence and optimism found in the earlier hymns. In the Creation Hymn, the poet begins by imagining a time before the existence of Being and Nonbeing and speculates on how the world came to be.

In the end, the poet ascribes all creation to a single impersonal agent, That One (Tad Ekam). This hymn is noteworthy for ascribing the creation of the world to a single power, an idea that foreshadows the notion of **Brahman** in the **Upanishads**, the speculative texts that form the final stratum of the Vedic literature. The name Tad Ekam, which is grammatically a neuter noun, also foreshadows the notion found in the Upanishads that Brahman is an impersonal force. After describing how That One formed the cosmos and knew all its secrets, the poem ends with the conjecture that perhaps That One may not be omniscient and omnipotent after all. This hymn thus further foreshadows the Upanishads in its speculative tone and its admission that the ultimate answer may be unknown.

## Tagore, Rabindranath

(1861–1941) Poet and Nobel laureate in Literature, an honor bestowed in 1912 for his *Gitanjali* ("Garland of Songs"). Tagore came from an influential and extremely wealthy landed family and was thus able to focus all his energy on his literary work. Aside from his prodigious literary output, he lectured extensively both in India and in other countries; in the latter he emphasized the need to retain spiritual values, whereas in India he more often gave his attention to the need to fulfill people's material needs. In 1921 he established the Vishva-Bharati University at **Shantiniketan** in the state of **West Bengal**. The university was dedicated to providing an education that would satisfy both of these needs and thus develop an integrated human being. For further information see Krishna Kripalani, *Rabindranath Tagore: A Biography,* 1980; and Donald R. Tuck, "Rabindranath Tagore: Religion as a Constant Struggle for Balance," in Robert D. Baird (ed.), *Religion in Modern India*, 1998.

## Tagore Jayanti

Holiday marking the birth date of the Bengali poet, writer, and thinker **Rabindranath Tagore**, celebrated on May 8, the day he was born in 1861. As with most twentieth-century figures, Tagore's birthday is celebrated according to the solar **calendar** of the common era, rather than the lunar calendar that governs most religious observances. Although Tagore is best known for his literary work, he was also considered a religious preceptor (**guru**), and thus his birthday carries extra meaning.

## Tai

Tenth month in the Tamil solar **year**, corresponding to the northern Indian solar month of Makara (the zodiacal sign of Capricorn), which usually falls within January and February. The existence of several different **calendars** is one clear sign of the continuing

Teens drum and dance in Ghoom, Darjeeling. Tala, or rhythm, is a typical part of festival celebrations.

importance of regional cultural patterns. One way that the Tamils retain their culture is by preserving their traditional calendar. Tamil is one of the few regional languages in India with an ancient, well-established literary tradition. See also **Tamil months**, **Tamil Nadu**, and **Tamil language**.

## Takshaka

In Hindu mythology, a venomous serpent-king from whose bite King **Parikshit** is killed. After insulting a powerful sage, Parikshit is cursed to die of a snakebite within seven days. Parikshit takes all possible precautions to avoid his fate: He builds a house on a huge pillar, has all things entering the house carefully searched, and surrounds himself with physicians who can cure snakebite. Six days pass without incident, but as the seventh day ends, people begin to relax and bring in some fruit to eat. Takshaka has concealed himself as a tiny worm in one of the pieces of fruit and, when the fruit is cut open, changes into his real shape, bites the king, and kills him.

Despite his fearsome role in this story, an earlier story illustrates that Takshaka is not entirely evil. Takshaka's mother, **Kadru**, bets her sister **Vinata** that the tail of a certain celestial horse is black, whereas Vinata claims it is white; the sister agrees that the loser will become a servant to the winner. Kadru asks her children, the serpents, to hang from the back of the horse to make it appear as if it is black and thus takes unfair advantage. Some of her children, including Takshaka, refuse to take part in such deceit, and Kadru curses them to be killed by **Janamjeya**, King Parikshit's **son**. Takshaka manages to escape this **curse**—one of the few times that this happens in Hindu mythic stories—but most of his siblings are not so lucky.

## Tala

In Indian music and **dance**, the most general term for "rhythm," either as an accompaniment to music or dance or played on a drum as a solo instrument. The rhythmic systems in all varieties of Indian music are extremely rich and complex and require years of study to master.

## Talikota

City in the Bijapur district of the state of **Karnataka**, which in 1565 was the site of a battle between the **Vijayanagar dynasty** king Rama Raja and a coalition of Muslim sultans from farther north in the **Deccan** peninsula. Rama Raja's disastrous defeat brought the Vijayanagar dynasty to an abrupt end. The sultans sacked the empire's capital at **Hampi**, and it has never been inhabited since that time.

## Tamas

("darkness") One of the three fundamental qualities (**gunas**) believed to be present in all things, the other two being **sattva** ("goodness") and **rajas** ("passion"). According to this model, the differing proportions of these qualities account for the differences both in the inherent nature of things and in individual human capacities and tendencies. Of the three, tamas is always negative and is associated with darkness, disease, ignorance, sloth, spoilage, and death. The notion of these three gunas originated in the metaphysics of the **Samkhya** school, one of the **six schools** of traditional Hindu **philosophy**, and although much of Samkhya metaphysics connected with the gunas has long been discredited, the idea of the gunas and their qualities has become a pervasive assumption in Indian culture.

## Tamil Epics

Collective name for three early Tamil epic poems: the ***Shilappadigaram***, the ***Manimegalai***, and the ***Shivaga-Sindamani***. These poems were composed in about the sixth and seventh centuries of the common era, when religious forms and cultural influence (among them, the composition of epic poems) were seeping in from the north and influencing indigenous forms. Aside from **Sanskrit**, Tamil is the only major ancient literary language. All three of these poems provide important information about life in their contemporary times, including religious life. In brief, the *Shilappadigaram* ("The Jeweled Anklet") is a tragedy that highlights several important themes that have pervaded Hindu culture, particularly the need for a king to rule righteously and the power gained by a wife through her devotion to her husband. The *Manimegalai* focuses on a young woman of the same name, who is wooed by the local prince but eventually becomes a Buddhist nun. Although the story clearly has a Buddhist bias, Manimegalai has numerous debates with people from competing religious traditions. Finally, the *Shivaga-Sindamani* describes the adventures of Shivaga, a man who excels at every possible manly art, who with each new challenge wins a new wife for his harem but in the end renounces everything to become a Jain monk. Although the later two epics are respectively biased toward Buddhist and Jain religious values, they all give valuable information about contemporary religious life. See also **Tamil language**.

## Tamil Language

One of the four **Dravidian** languages, along with **Kannada**, Telegu, and Malayalam; all four languages are spoken primarily in southern India. Tamil is the predominant language in modern **Tamil Nadu**, which is one of the "linguistic states" formed after the Indians gained independence. This state was formed to unite people with a common language and culture under one state government. Although all four languages have literary and cultural significance, Tamil has by far the richest history as a literary language. Tamil literature begins in the early centuries of the common era with the **Sangam literature**, eight collections of poetry that focused equally on the external description of battle or internal descriptions of love. The Sangam literature was followed by the three **Tamil epics**: the **Shilappadigaram**, the **Manimegalai**, and the **Shivaga-Sindamani**. Between the seventh and tenth centuries came

the devotional (**bhakti**) literature composed by the **Alvars** and the **Nayanars**, with the former expressing their devotion to the god **Vishnu** and the latter to the god **Shiva**. Their devotional poetry was unprecedented in Hindu religious history because it utilized everyday vernacular language as a spectacular vehicle for profound religious expression. The Alvars' poems became a foundational text for the **Shrivaishnava** community, and the Nayanars' for **Shaiva Siddhanta**, and thus both of these collections continue to be important in Hindu religious life. Even today Tamil is a vibrant literary language and a source of intense regional pride to the people living there; some of the most violent recent demonstrations in southern India were the so-called language riots, protesting the imposition of **Hindi** as the government language, a move that was seen as a conscious attempt to marginalize Tamil language and culture.

## Tamil Months

Although the lunar **calendar** is by far the most important means for determining the Hindu religious calendar, these **lunar months** are also set in the framework of a solar calendar. The latter is used for the calculation of the **intercalary month**, which helps keep the lunar and solar calendars in rough correspondence. In northern India the months of the solar calendar correlate with the **zodiac**, with each month named after the sign into which the sun is reckoned as entering at the beginning of that month. In southern India the divisions of the solar calendar are exactly the same as in the north, but the twelve months are given different names. The Tamil months take their names from some of the **nakshatras**, or features in the lunar zodiac, or from modifications of the lunar months. The Tamil **year** begins with the month of **Chittirai**, which corresponds to the northern Indian solar month of Mesha (the zodiacal sign of Aries), which by the Indian calculations, falls within April and May.

The eleven months following Chittirai are **Vaikasi**, **Ani**, **Adi**, **Avani**, **Purattasi**, **Aippasi**, **Kartigai**, **Margali**, **Tai**, **Masi**, and **Panguni**. Such different calendars are one clear sign of the continuing importance of regional cultural patterns. This regional culture is particularly important in the Tamil cultural area because Tamil is one of the few regional languages with an ancient, well-established literary tradition.

## Tamil Nadu

("land of the Tamils") Modern Indian state at the southern tip of the subcontinent, on the Bay of Bengal. Tamil Nadu is one of the so-called linguistic states, formed after Indian independence in 1947 to unite people with a common language and culture under one state government. Tamil Nadu was thus formed from the Tamil-speaking areas of the former state of Madras. Tamil Nadu has a long and rich history, and the Tamil literary tradition stretches back to the early centuries of the common era. Successive regional dynasties—the **Pallavas**, **Cholas**, and **Pandyas**—built a host of temples in the characteristic **Dravida** architectural style, and even today Tamil Nadu has hundreds of temple towns, that is, towns in which the urban hub is an enormous temple complex that includes shops, markets, offices, and residential space. Modern Tamil culture is the product of this long and ancient tradition, and Tamils pride themselves in having been influenced little by outsiders—neither by the Hindu influences from northern India, nor by the Muslim culture whose influence was so profound in regions farther north. Tamil Nadu has so many cultural sites and holy places that it is impossible to name them, but the most important are **Rameshvaram**, **Chidambaram**, **Madurai**, **Tiruchirappalli**, **Kanchipuram**, **Mahabalipuram**, **Kumbhakonam**, **Thiruvaiyaru**, **Tanjore**, and **Kanyakumari**; there is also a network of six temples to the god **Murugan** scattered in different areas of the state,

Tamil Nadu is home to the tallest temple tower in India, which is part of the Ranganathaswamy Temple in Shrirangam.

which between them lay out the parameters of the Tamil country. For general information about Tamil Nadu and all the regions of India, an accessible reference is Christine Nivin et al., *India*, 8th ed., Lonely Planet, 1998. See also **Tamil language**.

## Tamoyoga

One of the three classes of beings in the **Dvaita Vedanta** philosophical school, founded by the philosopher **Madhva** (1197–1276). Madhva's fundamental assumption was that God was utterly transcendent, above and beyond the world and human beings. The strength of this conviction led him to stress the

importance of **grace** as the sole means of salvation because human beings were unable to save themselves. Given this dire view of human capacities, Madhva divided the beings of the world into three classes: The **muktiyogas** were destined for final liberation, the **nityasamsarins** were destined for eternal rebirth, and the **tamoyogas** were predestined for eternal damnation.

## Tandava

Name denoting one of the two broad categories in Indian **dance**. The tandava style is athletic and dramatic and conveys violence and power, whereas the other dance form, **lasya**, is soft and lyrical and conveys a mood of love. The tandava style received its name from the tandava dance of the god **Shiva**. According to tradition, this is the dance through which Shiva destroys the world when its time has come. Not all of the dance's mythic connotations are violent, since this athletic dance is also said to be the one through which Shiva vanquished the **goddess Kali** in a dance contest, when her feminine modesty prevented her from imitating his style.

## Tanjore

City and district in the southern Indian state of **Tamil Nadu**, the eastern boundary of which is the Bay of Bengal. The Tanjore district lies in the **Cauvery River** delta, south of the river's main channel; even today this extremely fertile area grows a large percentage of India's rice. This district was the core homeland of the **Chola dynasty**, and the land's agricultural fecundity was the underlying source of the dynasty's power, which at one point stretched through most of southern India and even extended to Malaysia. The Chola dynasty used their wealth and power to build enormous temples throughout Tamil Nadu, but especially in the Tanjore district and Tanjore city, their capital. The Chola zenith came with King **Raja Raja** (r. 985–1014 C.E.), who built Tanjore

city's **Brhadeshvar** temple, and his **son Rajendra** (r. 1014–1042 C.E.), whose greatest monument is the temple at **Gangaikondacholapuran**. The Brhadeshvar temple is dedicated to **Shiva** as the "Great Lord"; some of the most notable of the other temples built or improved by the Cholas were at **Kumbhakonam**, **Thiruvaiyaru**, **Chidambaram**, and **Shrirangam**.

## Tanka

Name for a small chisel used by stone workers, one of the characteristic objects in Hindu iconography. The tanka is mainly associated with **Shiva** and is a minor artifact because it generally appears only when the **deity** has multiple arms and is holding a number of objects.

## Tanmatras

The tanmatras are the subtle elements, the subtle forms of the five gross elements (**earth**, **air**, **fire**, **water**, **and akasha**) from which the gross elements are derived. The senses corresponding to the subtle elements are gandha (smell) for earth, sparsha (touch) for air, rupa (shape) for fire, rasa (taste) for water, and **shabda** (sound) for akasha. The tanmatras first appeared in the account of the **evolution** of the universe propounded by the **Samkhya** school, one of the **six schools** of traditional Hindu **philosophy**. In the Samkhya account, the subtle elements are the stage of evolution preceding the evolution of the gross elements. The Samkhya school espoused an atheistic dualism in which the two fundamental principles were **purusha** (spirit) and **prakrti** (matter); all of this evolution was associated with prakrti because, according to the Samkhyas, the purusha never changed. The Samkhya account of evolution was appropriated by other groups—although these groups often adapted it to reflect theistic assumptions in which the world came from God—and thus the notion

of the subtle elements became an accepted philosophical convention.

## Tantra

General term for a genre of secret ritually based religious practices. These are most often laid out in texts also known as tantras ("loom"), so named because these texts weave a distinctive picture of reality. In popular Hindu culture, tantric practitioners (**tantrikas**) are associated with illicit sexuality, with consuming forbidden things such as meat and **liquor**, and with having the ability to kill or harm others through black **magic**. Such power and perceived amorality make tantrikas objects of fear, a quality that some people have used to their advantage. A more neutral assessment of tantra would stress three qualities: secrecy, power, and nondualism, the ultimate unity of all things.

Secrecy in tantra serves two functions. On the one hand, it conceals the rites and practices from the uninitiated, who are seen as unqualified to receive it, and on the other, it creates a religious subcommunity with a particularly defined identity and sense of privilege. This sense of exclusivity, of being privy to something to which few have access, is one of the reasons that tantra is seen as a higher religious practice. Even when the text of a tantra has been written down, it is always assumed that the texts are lifeless without the instruction of a qualified person. This stress on personal transmission means that **diksha** (a type of **initiation**) is the only way to gain access to this tradition, and thus tantra stresses the importance of the **guru**-disciple relationship even more strongly than does the Hindu tradition as a whole. Gurus are free to initiate anyone they deem qualified. Although many tantrikas are **twice-born** men, that is, members of the three highest classes (**varnas**)—**brahmins**, **kshatriyas**, and **vaishyas**—who have received the adolescent religious initiation known as the second birth, in theory tantric practice is open to all people, regardless of gender or social status.

Power in tantra is manifested in various ways. One of these comes in the transmission of the teaching itself, in which the guru's empowerment is believed necessary to "activate" the transmitted material, particularly **mantras**. Tantric practice is also claimed to be far more powerful than regular religious practice and thus more efficacious in bringing final liberation of the soul (**moksha**). The usual claim is that tantra's potency can bring such liberation in a single lifetime, whereas other forms of religious practice take untold aeons. Such powerful forces must be kept secret from the uninitiated, thus the stress on secrecy. It is widely accepted that the spiritual attainments gained through tantric practice also bring superhuman powers (**siddhi**), as a natural byproduct of such attainment. Although aspirants are discouraged from seeking such powers because the act of seeking is seen as rooted in selfish desire, those who gain such powers without seeking are believed to be able to exercise them without being corrupted.

For tantrikas, nondualism—the assertion that all reality is ultimately one thing—is both a philosophical affirmation and the operative principle behind their religious practice. Tantrikas usually conceive of this unity theistically, seeing their chosen **deity** (**ishtadevata**) as the material, efficient, and final cause of all reality. For tantrikas, definitively realizing the essential oneness of all things removes the mistaken understanding that causes bondage and rebirth and brings final liberation. Tantric practice affirms this nondualism, often through rituals stressing the unification of opposites. For this reason, some tantrikas make ritual use of things that are normally forbidden, most notably the "Five Forbidden Things" (**panchamakara**): fish, wine, meat, parched grain, and sexual intercourse. In theory, this rite is a means to break down duality because it violates societal norms forbidding consumption of **intoxicants**, nonvegetarian food, and illicit sexuality, in a conscious effort to sacralize what is normally

forbidden. Although this rite collapses conventional boundaries of good and bad, pure and impure, the goal is to replace external rites (**bahiryaga**) with interior ones (**antaryaga**), thus exploding the duality of subject and object. The paradigm for this interior practice is tantric **yoga**. This is usually some variant of **kundalini yoga**, in which the two divine principles of **Shiva** and **Shakti** are ultimately united in the expert's **subtle body**. The final vehicle for tantric practice comes in rituals using symbolic diagrams (**yantra**), of which one example is the **shrichakra**. These are often particular to specific tantric lineages (**parampara**) and thus ground the aspirant in a particular tradition. For further information see Arthur Avalon (Sir John Woodroffe), *Shakti and Shakta,* 1978; Swami Agehananda Bharati, *The Tantric Tradition,* 1977; and Douglas Renfrew Brooks, *The Secret of the Three Cities*, 1990.

## Tantrika

Name denoting a practitioner of **tantra**, a secret ritually based religious practice.

## Tapas

("heat") Term denoting any physical **asceticism**, or what in earlier times was referred to as mortification of the flesh. The term *tapas* encompasses rites of denial, such as fasting (**upavasa**) or **celibacy**, as well as rites of enduring physical pain, such as the "five fires" (**panchagni**) rite. In this rite a person sits during the hot **season** surrounded by four fires, with the fifth fire being the sun overhead. Other rites include enduring cold from bathing (**snana**) in snow-fed rivers, and enduring any other sort of physical discomfort. The word *tapas* can also describe bizarre and even masochistic behaviors, such as remaining standing for years on end; keeping an arm upraised until the muscles atrophy, and it cannot be lowered; lying on beds of thorns and nails, and so forth. The governing assumption behind all of

these practices is that they generate spiritual power (seen figuratively as "heat") and that a person who generates and amasses enough of this power will gain supernormal powers or the ability to demand boons from the gods themselves. Even though many contemporary Hindus are skeptical of the more extreme practices and may dismiss them, there is still great cultural respect for **ascetic** self-control, and combined with the right personality, such practices can still confer considerable religious authority.

In Hindu mythology **Indra**, king of the gods, pays close attention to those amassing such powers to protect himself from being replaced by someone more powerful. When an ascetic starts to amass enough power to displace him, Indra's heavenly throne becomes hot through the "heat" generated by the tapas. Indra must search for the aspirant and defuse this power in one of two ways—either by giving the aspirant a boon, which in many cases is the reason for performing the tapas in the first place, or by sending a celestial nymph (**apsara**) to seduce the ascetic, whose power will be discharged along with his **semen**. This mythology reflects the basic Hindu belief that the starting point for ascetic power is celibacy, which conserves a man's vital energies by conserving his semen.

## Taraka

In Hindu mythology, an extremely powerful **demon**, who endures such severe physical **asceticism** (**tapas**) that he receives a boon that he can be killed only by a **son** of the god **Shiva**. This boon seems to make Taraka invulnerable because at the time, Shiva is lost in meditation and is still grieving for his dead wife **Sati**. For a long time Taraka grows more powerful and more arrogant until he is eventually able to defeat the gods in battle and exile them from **heaven**. In their despair the gods turn to the god of love, **Kama**, and beg him to shoot Shiva with an arrow of desire so that he

will marry the **goddess Parvati**, and thus make it possible to bring about Taraka's death. Shiva, however, destroys Kama before he can shoot, burning him to ash with a stream of fire from his third eye. Shiva later marries Parvati, and their son, **Skanda**, kills Taraka in battle.

## Tarakeshvar

City and sacred site (**tirtha**) thirty miles northwest of Calcutta in the state of **West Bengal**, which because of its proximity to Calcutta, is the most widely visited pilgrimage place in the state. Tarakeshvar is famous for the temple of **Baba** Tarakanath, who is the god **Shiva** in his form as the "Lord of Liberation." Shiva is present at Tarakeshvar in the form of a **linga**, the pillar-shaped object that is Shiva's symbolic form. The Tarakeshvar linga is claimed to be a "self-manifested" (**svayambhu**) image, which was not made by human hands but established through an act of divine self-revelation. The site's charter myth describes how the linga of Shiva is buried in the **earth** but is discovered when a **cow** habitually lets down her milk on the spot above it as an act of **worship**. The charter myth also describes how a man afflicted with agonizing hemorrhoids finds relief by drinking the **water** that has been poured on the linga as an **offering** and thus is blessed by Shiva's touch. With these two stories, the charter conveys the image of a **deity** who is present and responsive to his devotees (**bhakta**) as well as the sense of a place where human beings can go to find relief from their afflictions. One of the most unusual manifestations of this is the practice of **dharna**, in which pilgrims lie on the temple's outer porch, fasting (**upavasa**) for as long as it takes the deity to communicate with them, usually in a **dream**. For further information see E. Alan Morinis, *Pilgrimage in the Hindu Tradition*, 1984.

## Tarapith

("Tara's seat") Town and sacred site (**tirtha**) in the state of **West Bengal**, about 130 miles northwest of Calcutta. Tarapith is famous as one of the **Shakti Pithas**, a network of sites sacred to the **Goddess** that spreads throughout the subcontinent. Each Shakti Pitha marks the site where a body part of the dismembered goddess **Sati** fell to **earth**, taking form there as a different goddess; in the case of Tarapith, the body part was Sati's cornea (tara). Tarapith's presiding goddess, Tara, is a fierce form of the Goddess, who has strong associations with **tantra**, a secret ritually based religious practice. In modern times much of the shrine's fame comes from an unusual **ascetic** named **Vamakhepa** (1843–1911), whose apparent irrationality and lack of respect for generally accepted norms—he once urinated on the temple's image of Tara to show his contempt for a **deity** made of iron—was a perfect match for Tara herself. Tarapith is said to bestow supernormal powers (**siddhis**) on those who **worship** there; this makes Tarapith not only a very powerful place but also a potentially dangerous one. For further information see E. Alan Morinis, *Pilgrimage in the Hindu Tradition*, 1984. See also **pitha**.

## Tarjini Hasta

In Indian **dance**, **sculpture**, and ritual, tarjini hasta is the name for a particular hand **gesture** (**hasta**) in which the hand is closed except for the index finger, which is pointing upward as if to admonish or scold the viewer. The word *tarjini* is derived from a verb that can mean either "to threaten" or "to censure"—both of which can be understood from this gesture.

## Tarka

("reasoning") In Indian logic, tarka denotes the mode of argument that focuses on the identification and classification of **fallacies**. When it is used in argumentation, tarka does not advance one's own point of view but is used to discredit an opponent's assertion, either by reducing it to absurdity, by showing that the argument does not fulfill
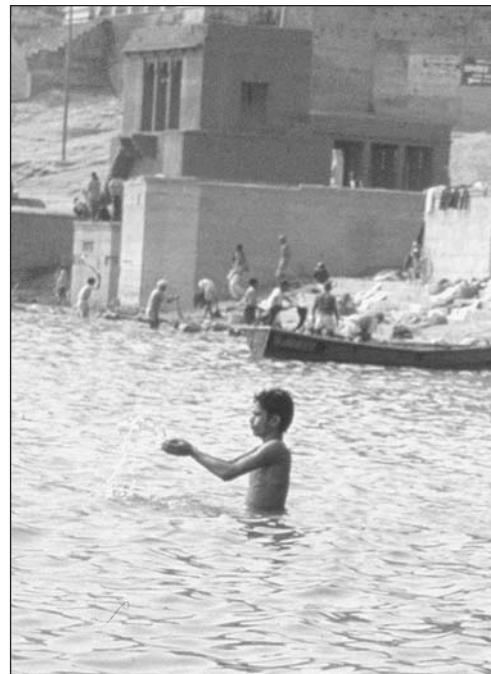
necessary conditions, or by showing that it suffers from a fallacy that renders it untenable.

## Tarpana

("satisfying") Tarpana is a memorial rite performed for the satisfaction of one's ancestors, in which one offers them libations of **water** to quench their thirst. Tarpana satisfies the "**sacrifice** to the ancestors," which is one of the Five Great Sacrifices. These five sacrifices are mandatory daily religious observances (**nitya karma**) for a "**twice-born**" householder, that is, a householder who has been born into one of the three "twice-born" groups in Indian society—**brahmin**, **kshatriya**, or **vaishya**—and who has received the adolescent religious **initiation** known as the second birth. Tarpana is also sometimes an occasional religious act (**naimittika karma**), which should be performed on occasions when one is bathing (**snana**) at pilgrimage places (**tirthas**). The rite itself is quite simple. The performer first bathes to become ritually pure, scoops up water in his joined hands, then tips his fingers forward to let the water drain out. Some sources also specify that the water should be mixed with sesame seeds, a substance associated with **offerings** to the dead. Tarpana was considered a companion rite to the memorial ceremony known as **shraddha**, although as an obligatory daily act, tarpana was performed much more frequently. In the shraddha ritual, one symbolically feeds one's ancestors to satisfy their hunger, whereas in the tarpana ritual, one gives them water to quench their thirst.

## Tat Tvam Asi

("You are that") In the Hindu philosophical tradition, one of the "great utterances" (**mahavakyas**) expressing the ultimate truth. The truth referred to here is the identity of **atman** (the individual Self) and **Brahman** (Supreme Reality); this identity is the heart of the speculative



Bather performs the tarpana memorial rite in the sacred Ganges River, Varanasi.

texts called the **Upanishads**. This particular passage is found repeatedly in the sixth book of the **Chandogya Upanishad**, in which the boy **Shvetaketu** is being instructed by his father. The boy's father uses a series of analogies to convey his instruction regarding the identical natures of the **atman** and Brahman, ending every such analogy with this concluding phrase, which contains the wisdom of the whole.

In addition to its textual importance, this and three other mahavakyas—as utterances that capsulize fundamental truth—were appropriated as identifying symbols by the four divisions of the **Dashanami Sanyasi** ascetics. Each division had a different mahavakya, just as each had a different **Veda**, a different primary sacred center, and a different paradigmatic **ascetic** quality. Tat tvam asi is the mahavakya associated with the **Kitawara** division of the Dashanami Sanyasis.

## Teej

Teej is a name denoting two different Hindu religious observances, both falling in the **lunar month** of **Bhadrapada** (August–September). Kajari Teej falls on the third day of the dark (waxing) half of the month and Hartalika Teej two weeks later, on the third day of the bright (waxing) half. Both of these observances have a mythic charter connected with the god **Shiva** and his wife **Parvati**, but the latter is far more important. Kajari Teej is a festival marking the coming of the **monsoons**, a season that once rendered travel impossible. For lovers who were together, the monsoon months were very sweet, but for those who were apart, the coming of the rains foretold a time of separation. One of the standard poetic images is the woman watching the darkening sky, wondering whether her beloved will make it home in time. On this day people sing songs in the Kajari **raga**, a melodic mode associated both with the rains and with songs of separation and longing. On this day people also welcome the rainy season by setting up swings and swinging on them. The festival is celebrated through much of India, but especially in the **Benares** and Mirzapur districts of the eastern part of **Uttar Pradesh**.

Hartalika Teej (also known as Hariyali Teej) is a religious observance practiced by young unmarried **women** in order to gain a good husband and have a happy marriage. In Hindu culture the model for the ideal husband is the god Shiva, who despite his wild appearance and his unusual habits, is completely devoted to his wife. One sign of this devotion is that Shiva and his wife Parvati are married only to each other, no matter which forms they take—as, for instance, when one or the other is cursed to be born as a human being. As the ideal divine couple, Shiva and Parvati are the patron **deities** of this religious observance. Women observing this festival should **worship** Shiva and Parvati (as the model couple whose happiness they hope to share), decorate their houses, put on new clothes, and pass the night singing songs of **auspiciousness**. This festival reveals the cultural importance of marriage for Indian women. Because the identity for many Indian women is still formed primarily through their traditional roles as wives and mothers, for many women their marriage is the most important event in their lives.

The charter myth for Hartalika Teej not only underlines the importance of a happy marriage but also points to the woman's role in gaining her husband. After the death of the **goddess Sati**, she is reborn as Parvati in the house of **Himalaya**, the mountains personified. Very early in life, Parvati vows that she will have no husband except for Shiva. Her parents try to discourage her from this wish because Shiva has taken a vow of **asceticism** and passes his time deep in meditation on Mount **Kailas**. Undeterred, Parvati goes up into the mountains and begins to do harsh physical asceticism (**tapas**) of her own. The power generated by her asceticism eventually awakens Shiva, and on Hartalika Teej he comes to where she is staying, disguised as an aged **brahmin**. He first tries to discourage Parvati by making disparaging remarks about Shiva's lifestyle and personality, but Parvati refuses to listen and remains unshaken in her resolve. Eventually Shiva reveals his true form to her, and on that day they are betrothed to be married.

## Teli

Traditional Indian society was modeled as a collection of **endogamous**, or intermarried, subgroups known as **jatis** ("birth"). These jatis were organized (and their social status determined) by the group's hereditary occupation, over which each group had a monopoly. In traditional northern Indian society, the Telis were a Hindu jati whose hereditary occupation was making vegetable oil by pressing oil seeds.

Temple car from the city of Shrirangapatnam, in the state of Karnataka. It is used to transport an image of the temple's primary deity during festival processions.

## Temple Cars

Name for the ceremonial carts in which the movable image of a **deity** (**utsava murti**) can be transported throughout the town or, in the case of the temples of southern India, around the processional streets that often ring the temple in concentric layers. In some cases the carts are made new every **year**, as at the temple of the god **Jagannath** in the city of **Puri**; in other cases (as one finds in many of the southern Indian temples) the temple car is one of the deity's standard accouterments, and it is made from precious metals and is richly decorated. In either case the deity is being treated in a manner parallel to that of a king, and the car is a means to move the deity in procession to view his or her earthly domain.

## Tengalai

One of the two main subsects in the **Shrivaishnava** religious community, the other being the **Vadagalai**. The

Shrivaishnavas are devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Vishnu**, and their roots lie in the devotional hymns of the **Alvars**, a group of twelve poet-saints who lived in southern India between the seventh and tenth centuries. Two centuries later, the Alvars' devotional outpouring was organized and systematized by the philosopher **Ramanuja** (11th c.), who is considered the Shrivaishnava founder. Ramanuja was convinced that **Brahman**, or Supreme Reality, was a personal **deity** rather than an impersonal abstract principle, and he was also convinced that devotion (**bhakti**) was the most important form of religious practice. **Vishishthadvaita Vedanta**, his philosophical position, stressed both of these convictions and thus opposed the **Advaita Vedanta** school, founded by the philosopher **Shankaracharya**, which believed that the Supreme Being was impersonal and that realization (**jnana**) was the best spiritual path.

The split between the Tengalais and the Vadagalais came several centuries after Ramanuja and stemmed from differing perspectives on what the individual must do to gain final liberation of the soul (**moksha**). The Tengalais emphasize the need for absolute surrender (**prapatti**) to the **grace** of God, through which devotees will be saved with no action of their own; the Vadagalais stress that devotees must also exert themselves on their own behalf. The Tengalai founder was Pillai **Lokacharya** (14th c.), who is also the community's most important figure.

## Thakur

("master") The model for traditional Indian society was as a collection of **endogamous** subgroups (i.e., groups in which marriages occurred only between members of the same group) known as **jatis** ("birth"). These jatis were organized (and their social status determined) by the group's hereditary occupation, over which each group had a monopoly. In northern India, the Thakurs were a jati considered to be

kshatriyas, who have traditionally functioned as landlords and village leaders. Its most famous member was the Nobel laureate **Rabindranath Tagore**.

## Thandai

("cooling") A refreshing sweetened drink made of milk or yogurt, ground nuts, and spices often used as the medium for the consumption of ground marijuana (**bhang**). As with all milk products, the thandai is considered to have cooling properties; this effect may be intended to balance the bhang, which is considered to be "hot" because of its intoxicating properties.

## Thanesar

City and sacred site (**tirtha**) adjoining the sacred site of **Kurukshetra** in the northern part of the state of **Haryana**. Thanesar is a famous site in the *Mahabharata*, the later of the two Sanskrit epics. The epic's climax comes at Kurukshetra in an eighteen-day battle between two factions of an extended family, along with their allies and supporters. On one side, there are the five **Pandava** brothers, who are the epic's protagonists, and on the other, their cousins the **Kauravas**, who are the antagonists. According to the epic, on the eve of the battle, the Pandavas worshiped the god **Shiva** in a temple at Thanesar, and after their **worship** Shiva assured them that they would be victorious. Aside from the temple, Thanesar also has a renowned bathing tank said to contain all the sacred rivers of India, at which the primary bathing (**snana**) day is **Sunday**. Nearby is the Gita **Mandir**, at which **Arjuna**, one of the Pandava brothers, is said to have received the teaching of the **Bhagavad Gita** from **Krishna** in the moments before the battle began.

## Thanjavur

A variant name for the southern Indian city of **Tanjore**. See **Tanjore**.

## Thief Castes

The model for traditional Indian society was as a collection of **endogamous** sub-groups (i.e., groups in which marriages occurred only between members of the same group) known as **jatis** ("birth"). These jatis were organized (and their social status determined) by the group's hereditary occupation, over which each group had a monopoly. Although it sounds bizarre, this specialization extended to all occupations, and there were hereditary occupational groups whose profession was thievery and banditry. The most famous individual from these was **Tirumangai** (9th c.), by far the most picturesque of the **Alvars**, a group of twelve poet-saints who lived in southern India between the seventh and tenth centuries. In the nineteenth century the British composed a list of several hundred such groups, who were subject to relentless scrutiny, opposition, and in many cases resettlement.

## Thiruvaiyaru

Temple town and sacred site (**tirtha**) in the **Tanjore** district of **Tamil Nadu**, about 170 miles south and west of Madras. Thiruvaiyaru's major temple is dedicated to the god **Shiva**, but the site is most famous for being the home of the late-eighteenth-century saint and musician Tyagaraja.

## Thoreau, Henry David

(1817–1862) American writer and philosopher, who by his own account was powerfully influenced by the Hindu religious text known as the **Bhagavad Gita**, particularly the text's instruction to perform one's duties selflessly for the good of society, without any thought of personal reward. Thoreau refers to this text in both *Walden* and *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, and in letters to his friends, Thoreau talks about his desire to practice **yoga**.

## Three Debts

According to tradition, repayment of three "debts" was incumbent on all "**twice-born**" men, that is, men born into one of the three "twice-born" groups in Indian society—**brahmin**, **kshatriya**, or **vaishya**—who had undergone the adolescent religious **initiation** known as the second birth. The first of these debts was to the gods and was repaid by **offering** sacrifices. The second debt was to the sages and was satisfied by studying the **Vedas**, the oldest and most authoritative religious texts. The final debt was to the ancestors (**pitrs**) and was satisfied by procreating a **son**, to ensure that the ancestral rites would be carried out without interruption.

## 3HO/Sikh Dharma Brotherhood

Modern religious organization founded by **Yogi Bhajan**; the movement's two names reflect differing emphases in the phases in Yogi Bhajan's teaching. His initial teachings were the traditional disciplines of **hatha yoga** and **kundalini yoga**, with his followers organized into a group known as the Happy, Healthy, Holy Organization (3HO). Hatha yoga is a system of religious discipline (**yoga**) based on a series of bodily postures known as **asanas**; this practice is widely believed to provide various physical benefits, including increased bodily flexibility and the ability to heal chronic ailments. Kundalini yoga is the religious discipline whose primary focus is awakening the **kundalini**, the latent spiritual force that exists in every person in the **subtle body**. The kundalini is awakened through a combination of yoga practice and ritual action and is believed to bring further spiritual capacities and final liberation (**moksha**) of the soul.

These two disciplines remain an important part of Yogi Bhajan's teachings, for he claims to be a master of **tantra**, a secret, ritually based religious practice. In the 1970s his teaching widened to include traditional Sikh teachings and symbols. The most prominent of these symbols are the "five

*K's"* that all Sikhs are supposed to wear, so called because each of them begins with the letter *k*: uncut **hair** (kesh), a comb (kangha), a bangle on the right wrist (kara), shorts (kacch), and a ceremonial sword (kirpan). Many of Yogi Bhajan's followers keep the Sikh symbols far more strictly than most people born as Sikhs, but the movement has two important divergences with the traditional Sikh community. One of these is its emphasis on tantra, which has little importance in the Sikh community. The most significant difference, however, is the religious authority that Yogi Bhajan holds over his followers, which is very different from the decentralized, essentially democratic form of the traditional Sikh community.

## Thug

In the colonialist mythology describing the savagery of the East and the demonic qualities of Hinduism, one of the most compelling stories is that of the Thugs, a group of robbers who were devotees (**bhakta**) of the **goddess Kali**. According to popular belief, the Thugs were widespread throughout India and frequented the highways, seeking travelers as their prey. They would travel with their victims, sometimes for days on end, and then kill them—sometimes after giving them sweets laced with **drugs**, and sometimes simply by taking them by surprise. The victims would be strangled with a silken scarf, and whenever possible, no **blood** would be shed, for the victims' blood was considered an **offering** to the goddess Kali and thus should not be spilled and wasted. The victims' worldly possessions were claimed by the Thugs themselves, in a division of the spoils between **deity** and devotee. This demonic practice persisted until the 1830s, when it was finally uprooted and destroyed by the British.

Although the tale of the Thugs makes a gripping story, much of it has been dispelled by more careful recent scholarship. One of the major factors in the rise of the Thugs was the radical economic dislocation caused by the arrival of the British themselves. Many of the people marginalized by these forces took to wandering and, in their desperation, resorted to banditry. These small-scale and essentially local depredations were transformed into a widespread religious conspiracy. The myth of the Thugs certainly showed concern about the prevailing law-and-order situation in central India, but it may also have reflected British colonial fears about their ability to control their territory. Even though there are references to the Thugs in texts predating British contact, on the whole, this was one of the more enduring colonial stereotypes. For further information see C. A. Bayly, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire*, 1988; and *The Raj*, 1990.

## Thursday

(Brhaspativar) The fifth day of the **week**, whose presiding **planet** is **Jupiter** (**Brhaspati**). Since in Hindu mythology the sage **Brhaspati** is the religious preceptor (**guru**) of the gods, another common name for Thursday is Guruvar. In Hindu astrology (**jyotisha**) Jupiter is an extremely powerful planet, and because in religious life one's spiritual preceptor is often likened to a god, this makes Thursday a ritually important and powerful day. One of the "**deities**" to be honored and served on this day is one's religious preceptor.

Another deity worshiped on this day is the **goddess Lakshmi**, who is worshiped mainly by **women**. Lakshmi is the wife of the god **Vishnu** and the embodiment of wealth, prosperity, and good fortune, which she brings with her wherever she goes and removes when she leaves. As the human counterpart to Lakshmi, married women **worship** her to obtain these things or to retain them if they already have them. Because it is well known that good fortune is not permanent and can often change, Lakshmi is also seen as a capricious and somewhat fickle divine presence. One of the taboos for women, at least in parts of

northern India, is changing their jewelry on that day because this is said to annoy Lakshmi and raise the danger that she might depart because of her vexation.

## Tiger

In Hindu mythology, a tiger or **lion** is the animal vehicle of the powerful forms of the **Goddess**, such as **Durga**. Modern iconography shows both lions and tigers with no apparent difference between them, perhaps reflecting the fact that the **Hindi** word *sher* can refer to either animal. In either case, the fact that the Goddess rides such a dangerous animal is clearly a symbol of her power and capacity, because in her mythology these **animals** are often described as her allies, doing battle on her part in response to her command.

## Tika

In modern **Hindi**, a word denoting either a commentary on a text or a colored mark (often red vermilion) on one's forehead. These forehead marks are applied for various reasons: for sheer ornamentation, to indicate sectarian affiliation, or as an outward symbol of having worshiped in a temple that day (since a common element in this **worship** is to receive some of the vermilion daubed on the feet of the **deity's** image, as a sign of **grace** and one's subordinate status). The former of these two meanings is the original sense of the word, but the latter meaning is far more common in contemporary times. The connection between these two meanings could be the notion that just as a primary text is ornamented and highlighted by a commentary, in the same way a forehead mark could ornament the body.

## Tilak

A mark on the forehead, also colloquially known as a **tika**, made from colored powders mixed with oil, sandalwood paste, or cosmetics. These forehead marks are applied for various reasons: for sheer ornamentation, to indicate



This ascetic's tika markings indicate that he belongs to the Ramanandi group.

sectarian affiliation, or as an outward symbol of having worshiped in a temple that day. See **tika**.

## Tilak, Bal Gangadhar

(1856–1920) Maharashtrian political activist who was once characterized as "the father of Indian unrest." Unlike his Maharashtrian contemporaries **Ranade** and **Gokhale**, who stressed working within existing institutions, Tilak never compromised his conviction that the British had no right to rule India. He resigned from Gokhale's reformist group in 1890 and devoted himself to educating and organizing ordinary people in **Maharashtra**. One vehicle for such organizing comprised two newspapers, one written in English and one in Marathi. The other involved organizing and promoting two new festivals. One of these festivals was devoted to the **Maratha** king **Shivaji**, a regional hero who had spent his life fighting

domination by the Moghul empire. The other festival was **Ganesh Chaturthi**, which Tilak promoted as a visible way to assert and celebrate a Hindu nationalist identity during the time of British imperial rule. Given British power, outright rebellion was simply impossible, and the British government heavily restricted all forms of political dissent. The Ganesh festival provided a way to circumvent these restrictions because the British had a long-standing policy of not interfering with religious observances. Tilak was imprisoned several times on the charge of inciting political assassinations, but he always returned directly to the political fray. Aside from his political agitation, his greatest intellectual work is a commentary on the **Bhagavad Gita**, a religious text, in which he stresses the need for this-worldly activism to defeat evil, including violence if necessary. See also **Moghul dynasty**.

## Time

For various articulations of time in traditional Hindu culture, see **cosmic time**, **calendar**, and **lunar month**.

## Tirruppavai

One of the two collections of poetry composed by the poet-saint **Andal** (9th c.), the other being the *Nacciyar Tirumoli*. Andal was the only woman among the **Alvars**, a group of twelve poet-saints who lived in southern India between the seventh and tenth centuries. All of the Alvars were devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Vishnu**, and their stress on passionate devotion (**bhakti**) to a personal god, conveyed through hymns sung in the **Tamil language**, transformed and revitalized Hindu religious life. Andal's chosen **deity** was **Ranganatha**, the particular form of Vishnu presiding at the temple of **Shrirangam**, yet both collections of her poetry are dedicated to **Krishna**, a different form of Vishnu.

This seeming divergence may reflect her conviction that all manifestations of Vishnu were the same or else may indicate a difference between personal devotion and literary expression. Ranganatha was a specific form of Vishnu presiding over a specific place—which at the time was true for most southern Indian temples—whereas Krishna was a form of Vishnu for whom there was already a large body of literature, but who was not geographically limited. The contents of the *Tirruppavai* are poems of separation in which Andal mourns the absence of Krishna, using the language and images of the forlorn lover, feverishly hoping for Krishna's return.

## Tirtha

("crossing place") The most general name for any holy place. Just as a ford on a riverbank provides a safe place to cross from one side to the other, in the same way a tirtha provides a way for one to "cross over" from mundane life to a sanctified one or, on an even greater scale, to "cross over" from this ephemeral and ever changing world to the unchanging, blissful, final liberation of the soul (**moksha**). Many tirthas are actual places—and many of them are on the shores of India's sacred rivers, particularly the **Ganges**—and in its most colloquial meaning, the word *tirtha* connotes a pilgrimage place. Yet the traditional pilgrimage literature is emphatic that tirthas are not just restricted to mere physical places: The word can also refer to holy people (such as **ascetics**, saints, **gurus**, and sages) as well as to virtues such as charity, wisdom, compassion, and **purity** of heart.

A tirtha is first and foremost a place or thing that gives one access to sanctity and religious power, and in the case of the physical places (rivers, mountains, cities, temples, or images), this power is accessible to all. Such holy places are seen not only as giving easier access to the divine but also as being areas where religious merit is more readily and bountifully obtained. When one surveys the literature connected with certain

areas, one of the most common themes is the claim that the merit from religious acts performed at place X (the physical tirtha) equals that of a thousand (or a million, or a billion) such religious acts done in ordinary places. The rarefied atmosphere at tirthas has a similar effect on evil acts, multiplying their consequences manifold. In this way the action of a tirtha can be compared to that of a microphone; just as a microphone magnifies any sound, whether harsh or pleasant, in the same way a tirtha magnifies, for good or ill, the consequences of any action. The pilgrimage literature thus commonly reminds people of the religious merit that their acts can bring, and it warns them that careless or evil actions can have equally severe consequences. For this reason, people performing religious pilgrimage (**tirthayatra**) were encouraged to live an austere, self-conscious life, both to save themselves from any lapses and to make the journey a self-conscious process of transformation. For further information see Diana Eck, *Banaras*, 1999; E. Alan Morinis, *Pilgrimage in the Hindu Tradition,* 1984; A. W. Entwistle, *Braj,* 1987; Ann Grodzins Gold, *Fruitful Journeys,* 1988; and Peter van der Veer, *Gods on Earth,* 1988.

## Tirtha Dashanami

One of the ten divisions of the **Dashanami Sanyasis**, renunciant **ascetics** who are devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva**. The Dashanamis were supposedly established by the ninth-century philosopher **Shankaracharya**, in an effort to create a corps of learned men who could help revitalize Hindu life. Each of the divisions is designated by a different name—in this case, *tirtha* ("sacred site"). On **initiation**, new members are given this name as a surname to their new ascetic names, thus allowing for immediate group identification.

Aside from their individual identity, these ten "named" divisions are divided into four larger organizational groups. Each group has its headquarters in one of the four monastic centers (**maths**) supposedly established by Shankaracharya, as well as other particular religious associations. The Tirtha Dashanamis belong to the **Kitawara** group, which is affiliated with the **Sharada math** in the city of **Dwaraka**, on the shore of the Arabian Sea. The Tirtha division is unique in that it is one of the few that will initiate only **brahmins**. (The other such divisions are **Saraswati**, **Ashrama**, and part of the **Bharati** order.)

## Tirtha Shraddha

Name for a particular type of **shraddha** (ancestral memorial rite) performed when visiting a pilgrimage place (**tirtha**). A shraddha has two major features: symbolically feeding one's ancestor(s) by **offering** balls of cooked grain (**pindas**), and feeding real food to a group of **brahmins** representing one's ancestors. Tirtha shraddhas belong to a class of action known as occasional actions (**naimittika karma**) because they are incumbent only under certain conditions. Under ordinary circumstances one would not have to perform this action, but it becomes required when one visits a pilgrimage place. The traditional pilgrimage literature, much of it clearly written by the brahmins who received such meals and other gifts, is emphatic that this obligation should not be neglected.

## Tirthayatra

("Journey to a **tirtha**") The general term denoting religious pilgrimage, which is seen as an act generating considerable religious merit (**punya**). The major focus of such travel was a visit to a "crossing place" (tirtha), a sacred site or person through which one could more easily communicate with the worlds beyond. One of the major themes in the traditional pilgrimage literature was the inherent holiness of whatever place was being described at that time, which was invariably described as bringing

A group of pilgrims on a tirthayatra (pilgrimage), Tibet.

incalculable benefits, even for actions performed unknowingly or in jest. A second and seemingly contradictory theme was the stress on the inner state of the pilgrims themselves and the warning that they would gain no benefits unless they were serious about their visit. In its ideal, pilgrimage to the holy places was not a pleasure tour but a vehicle for spiritual development, through bathing (**snana**) in holy rivers, visiting and worshiping powerful **deities**, enduring hardships, making **offerings** to the ancestors, gift-giving, and living a sober, disciplined life.

In fact, the traditional literature affirms both sides of this tension—the need for individual commitment and the inherent sanctity of the places themselves—although the emphasis may shift depending on the needs of the moment. One explanation, combining both of these themes, is that these holy places amplified the effects of all of one's actions there, whether good or bad. Pilgrims were thus encouraged to benefit from performing meritorious actions but warned of the heightened consequences from evil deeds, which were much more severe than normal.

In earlier times pilgrimage required a large investment of time and money. People would often spend months or years on pilgrimage, usually visiting a series of pilgrimage places. This was seen as a religiously meritorious use of one's money, a notion still current in contemporary times. For most people, such an opportunity would come only once in their lifetime, generally in their later years, and this long-awaited fulfillment must have heightened their experience. The advent of railroad travel in the late 1800s largely reshaped this pattern, although it persisted in the **Himalayas** until well into the twentieth century. With the advent of railroad travel, people were able to visit places with relative ease and speed. This convenience encouraged multiple visits, but also ones in which the person stopped at fewer places on the way.

The most recent change in pilgrimage patterns has come with the development of tourism, which is being marketed by state governments as a way to generate income for the local people. It cannot be denied that "seeing the sights" has always been a part of pilgrimage, which provided a religiously sanctioned motive for travel. Yet the ideal, then as now, was that this journey should not be undertaken merely for enjoyment, but for serious purposes. Some contemporary Hindus worry that the growth of tourism has commercialized the sanctity of their holy places; other more sanguine souls consider the stress on tourism simply a stronger manifestation of trends that have always existed, which will have no effect on the truly pious.

## Tiruchendur

Temple and sacred site (**tirtha**) on the Bay of Bengal in **Tamil Nadu**, sixty miles up the coast from **Kanyakumari**. Tiruchendur is part of the network of six

temples in Tamil Nadu built to honor **Murugan**, a hill **deity** who has been assimilated into the larger pantheon as a form of the god **Skanda**, the **son** of **Shiva**. Five of these temples have been definitively identified, and each is associated with a particular region, a specific ecosystem, and a particular incident in Murugan's mythic career. In the case of Tiruchendur, it is said to be where he killed a **demon** enemy and thus presents him in his warrior aspect. The sixth of these temples is said to be every other shrine to Murugan in Tamil Nadu. The cult of Murugan is thus a symbolic vehicle for Tamil pride and identity, and because the number six has connotations of completeness—as in the six directions or the six **chakras** in the **subtle body**—it also connotes that nothing outside is needed. For further information see Fred Clothey, "Pilgrimage Centers in the Tamil Cultus of Murukan," in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion,* Vol. 40, No. 1, 1972.

## Tiruchirappalli

City on the **Cauvery** River in the central part of the state of **Tamil Nadu**, and the capital of the district with the same name. The city's strategic position meant that it was contested by various southern Indian dynasties, of which the most recent were the **Nayaks** of **Madurai**, who built an imposing fort on a stone outcrop in the center of the city. It is most famous, however, for the great temples of **Shrirangam** and **Jambukeshvar**, both of which are on an island in the Cauvery, north of the city. The former is a temple to the god **Vishnu**, which has important symbolic associations with southern Indian kings and kingship; the latter is dedicated to the god **Shiva** in his aspect as "Lord of the Rose-Apple (**jambu**) Tree."

## Tirukkural

One of the most important pieces of early Tamil literature, along with the slightly later *Naladiyar*. The Tirukkural



Depiction of Tirumalai Nayak.

is a collection of brief verses on religious, social, and moral life, organized according to various themes; it is attributed to the poet **Tiruvalluvar** and is believed to have been written late in the fifth century. The *Tirukkural*'s underlying assumptions are theistic, and in this it differs from the *Naladiyar*, the tone of which is primarily ethical, with no mention of divinity. Many of these epigrams have become proverbial expressions in Tamil and have become the cultural property of Tamils from all religious communities. See also **Tamil language** and **Tamil epics**.

## Tirumalai Nayak

(r. 1623–1659) Greatest ruler in the southern Indian **Nayak dynasty**, who took advantage of the collapse of the **Vijayanagar dynasty** to rule much of modern **Tamil Nadu** from the capital city of **Madurai**. The peace and prosperity during Tirumalai's reign was expressed with two large pieces of monumental **architecture**—his royal palace,

and the enormous **Minakshi** temple, named after the **goddess** considered to be Madurai's patron **deity**. Interestingly, the temple was the real ritual center of the city, as is clearly shown by its placement and the processional streets surrounding it.

## Tirumalisai

(9th c.) One of the **Alvars**, a group of twelve poet-saints who lived in southern India between the seventh and tenth centuries. All of the Alvars were devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Vishnu**, and their stress on passionate devotion (**bhakti**) to a personal god, conveyed through hymns sung in the **Tamil language**, transformed and revitalized Hindu religious life. According to tradition, Tirumalisai was the son of a sage and a celestial nymph (**apsara**), who was abandoned by his parents at birth. He was found and raised by a man of very humble status who called his foster son by the name of their village. For further information see Kamil Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature*, 1975.

## Tirumangai

(9th c.) By far the most picturesque of the **Alvars**, a group of twelve poet-saints who lived in southern India between the seventh and tenth centuries. All the Alvars were devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Vishnu**, and their stress on passionate devotion (**bhakti**) to a personal god, conveyed through hymns sung in the **Tamil language**, transformed and revitalized Hindu religious life. According to tradition, Tirumangai was born into a **caste** of thieves, and theft, robbery, and deceit play an important role in the stories associated with him. One story reports that after taking a vow to feed 1,008 **Vaishnavas** for a year, he resorted to highway robbery to raise the necessary funds; on another occasion he took to robbery to raise funds to enlarge the temple at **Shrirangam**. In these and other works, he had the continual help of Vishnu, his chosen **deity**; regardless of

their truth or falsity, these stories reveal a great deal about the passionate devotional commitment of his time. For further information see Kamil Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature*, 1975; and John Stirling Morley Hooper, *Hymns of the Alvars,* 1929.

## Tirunavukkarashu

(7th c.) This was the given name of the **Nayanar** poet-saint most commonly referred to as **Appar** ("father"). Appar was one of the earliest of the Nayanars, a group of sixty-three southern Indian poet-saints who were devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva** and who lived in southern India in the seventh and eighth centuries. Along with their contemporaries the **Alvars**, who were devotees of **Vishnu**, the Nayanars spearheaded the revitalization of Hindu religion through their passionate devotion (**bhakti**) to a personal god, conveyed through hymns sung in the **Tamil language**.

## Tirupati

Town in the far southern part of the state of **Andhra Pradesh**, about 160 miles northwest of Madras. It is most famous for the Holy Hill (Tirumalai) eight miles to the north, which is the location of the temple to **Venkateshvara** and for which Tirupati is the major gateway.

## Tirupati/Tirumalai Devasthanam

Official name for the managing committee of the **Venkateshvara** temple, near the town of **Tirupati** in the state of **Andhra Pradesh**. This temple is the richest one in India, based largely on the popular belief that any wish made in the **deity's** presence will invariably come true. In earlier times all of the temple receipts were taken by the priests running the temple, but since Indian independence in 1947, the temple committee has been responsible for them. The committee has channeled these funds into hundreds of charities, but particularly into education and temple building: the former in schools from

the primary to the university level, and the latter in providing the funds to help build many of the larger Hindu temples in the United States and Europe.

## Tiruppan

(9th c.) One of the **Alvars**, a group of twelve poet-saints who lived in southern India between the seventh and tenth centuries. All of the Alvars were devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Vishnu**, and their stress on passionate devotion (**bhakti**) to a personal god, conveyed through hymns sung in the **Tamil language**, transformed and revitalized Hindu religious life. According to tradition, Tiruppan was a foundling who was adopted by a musician. As he grew up, he developed deep devotion for **Vishnu** in his form as **Ranganatha** at the temple of **Shrirangam**, but because his family status was unknown, he never went into the temple itself out of fear that his presence might render it impure. Tiruppan finally gained entrance when one of the temple's **brahmin** priests, who had earlier insulted him, received a divine command to carry Tiruppan on his shoulders to Ranganatha's image. As with many stories in the lives of the bhakti saints, the lesson here clearly emphasizes the superiority of devotion over birth. For further information see Kamil Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature*, 1975; and John Stirling Morley Hooper, *Hymns of the Alvars*, 1929.

## Tirupparankunram

**Tirtha** (sacred site) ten miles southwest of **Madurai** in central **Tamil Nadu**. Tirupparankunram is famous for one of the six temples in Tamil Nadu built to honor **Murugan**, a hill **deity** assimilated into the pantheon as a form of **Skanda**. It is said to be where he marries **Devasena**, the bride given by **Indra** and the gods after he has proven his mettle in battle, and thus reflects his acceptance into the larger pantheon. Five of these temples are definitively identified and scattered throughout the state, but

the sixth is said to be every other shrine to Murugan in Tamil Nadu. The cult of Murugan is thus a symbolic vehicle for Tamil pride and identity, and because the number six has connotations of completeness—as in the six directions, or the six **chakras** in the **subtle body**—it also connotes that nothing outside is needed. For further information see Fred Clothey, "Pilgrimage Centers in the Tamil Cultus of Murukan," in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion,* Vol. 40, No. 1, 1972.

## Tiruttani

**Tirtha** (sacred site) in the hills of **Tamil Nadu**, seventy-five miles of Madras. It is famous for one of the six temples in Tamil Nadu built to honor **Murugan**, a hill **deity** assimilated into the pantheon as a form of **Skanda**. Tiruttani is celebrated as the place where he marries his tribal bride **Valli**, which gives him a family connection with southern India. Five of these temples are definitively identified and scattered throughout the state, but the sixth is said to be every other shrine to Murugan in Tamil Nadu. The cult of Murugan is thus a symbolic vehicle for Tamil pride and identity, and because the number six has connotations of completeness—as in the six directions or the six **chakras** in the **subtle body**—it also connotes that nothing outside is needed. For further information see Fred Clothey, "Pilgrimage Centers in the Tamil Cultus of Murukan," in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion,* Vol. 40, No. 1, 1972.

## Tiruttontar Puranam

("history of the holy servants [of **Shiva**]") Another name for the ***Periya Purana***, a hagiographical account (an idealizing biography of saints or venerated figures) of the lives of the sixty-three **Nayanars**, written by the twelfth-century figure **Cekkilar**. The Nayanars were a group of **Shaiva** poet-saints who lived in southern India in the seventh and eighth centuries. See ***Periya Purana***.

## Tiruvachakam

("holy utterances") Collection of poetry composed in the ninth century by the Tamil poet-saint **Manikkavachakar**, who was a passionate devotee (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva**. Manikkavachakar's work comes in the tradition of the **Nayanars** (a group of sixty-three **Shaiva** poet-saints who lived in southern India in the seventh and eighth centuries), although he is not counted as one of them because he was about a century later than the last Nayanar, **Sundara-murtti**. The hymns in the *Tiruvachakam* bear witness to Manikkavachakar's intense devotion to Shiva, and in their devotional fervor, they can be seen as the culmination of the earlier devotional (**bhakti**) tradition. Manikkavachakar's hymns are also the basis for the development of the philosophical tradition known as **Shaiva Siddhanta**, which makes Manikkavachakar a pivotal figure in southern Indian Shaivism. For further information see Glenn Yocum, *Hymns to the Dancing Siva*, 1982. See also **Tamil language** and **Tamil epics**.

## Tiruvalluvar

(5th–6th c.) According to tradition, the author of the ***Tirukkural***, one of the most important pieces of early Tamil literature. The *Tirukkural* is a collection of brief verses on religious, social, and moral life, organized according to various themes. Many of these epigrams have become proverbial expressions in Tamil and have become the cultural property of Tamils from all religious communities. See also **Tamil language** and **Tamil epics**.

## Tiruvannamalai

Temple town and sacred site (**tirtha**) in the northern part of the state of **Tamil Nadu**, about 100 miles southwest of Madras, the capital. Tiruvannamalai is most famous as a temple to the god **Shiva** in his form as Arunachaleshvar, "the Lord of Arunachal [Hill]," the hill on which the temple is built.

Tiruvannamalai is also one of the **bhutalingas** ("elemental **lingas**"), a network of five southern Indian sites sacred to Shiva. In each of these sites, Shiva is worshiped as a linga, the pillar-shaped object that is his symbolic form, and at each site the linga is believed to be formed from one of the five primordial **elements** (bhuta)—**earth**, **wind**, **fire**, **water**, and **space** (**akasha**). Tiruvannamalai's linga is associated with the primordial element of fire, making this an extremely powerful image. Aside from the image and the temple, Tiruvannamalai is also famous as the place in which the modern Indian saint **Ramana Maharshi** spent most of his life, from 1896 until his death in 1950.

## Tiruvaymoli

("Holy words") Collection of 1,102 stanzas written in the tenth century by the poet-saint **Nammalvar**. Nammalvar was one of the **Alvars**, a group of twelve poet-saints who lived in southern India between the seventh and tenth centuries. All of the Alvars were devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Vishnu**, and their stress on passionate devotion (**bhakti**) to a personal god, conveyed through hymns sung in the **Tamil language**, transformed and revitalized Hindu religious life. Nammalvar's *Tiruvaymoli* is an outpouring of ecstatic **Vaishnava** devotionalism and forms the concluding section of the ***Nalayira Divya-prabandham***, the collected compositions of the Alvars. For further information see Kamil Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature*, 1975; John Stirling Morley Hooper, *Hymns of the Alvars*, 1929; A. Shrinivasa Raghavan, *Nammalvar*, 1975; and A. K. Ramanujan (trans.), *Hymns for the Drowning*, 1981.

## Tiruvayur

Southern Indian temple town about thirty-five miles east of the city of **Tanjore** in the state of **Tamil Nadu**. The town is most famous for an enormous

temple to the god **Shiva**, and as with many southern Indian temples, the temple is located in the heart of the city and forms a substantial part of the city itself.

## Tithi

A lunar **day**, that is to say, one of the thirty days occurring during a single **lunar month**, from **full moon** to full moon. Because these thirty lunar days take place in about twenty-eight solar days, each lunar day is thus slightly shorter than a solar day. Even in contemporary times, most Hindu religious observances are determined by the lunar **calendar**, which makes the determination of these lunar days an important matter. Most people keep track of these holidays with a **panchang**, an almanac that gives all the lunar days.

## Toddy Palm

Palm tree that is both the source of the slightly fermented beverage tapped from its sap known as toddy, and the long, flat leaves that were traditionally used for writing down all sorts of texts, including religious ones. The former use led this tree to be considered unclean, since alcoholic beverages are proscribed in "respectable" Hindu society; the manuscripts written on the leaves, however, could be the holiest of texts. The poet-saint **Ravidas** uses this palm to illustrate how the power of the divine name can transform something normally believed to be base and vile. In doing so he is also referring to himself, who as a tanner and **leather** worker was believed to be defiled because his work involves handling the skins of dead **animals**.

## Tondaradippodi

(9th c.) One of the **Alvars**, a group of twelve poet-saints who lived in southern India between the seventh and tenth centuries. All of the Alvars were devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Vishnu**, and their stress on passionate devotion (**bhakti**) to a personal god, conveyed through hymns sung in the **Tamil language**,

transformed and revitalized Hindu religious life. According to tradition, **Tondaradippodi** was born as a **brahmin** named Vipra **Narayana**, and his family's hereditary labor was to arrange the flowers for the **worship** of **Ranganatha**, a form of Vishnu who is the presiding **deity** at the temple of **Shrirangam**. He became enamored of a courtesan who cast her spell on him, and for a time paid attention to nothing else. In the end he was saved by Ranganatha, to whom Vipra Narayana devoted himself for the rest of his life, taking as a symbol of this his new name ("Dust of the Feet of the Slaves [of God]"). For further information see Kamil Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature*, 1975; and John Stirling Morley Hooper, *Hymns of the Alvars*, 1929.

## Tortoise Avatar

Second **avatar** or incarnation of the god **Vishnu**. As with all of Vishnu's avatars, the Tortoise avatar came into being in a time of crisis and served to restore the cosmic balance that had been thrown out of equilibrium. In this case the source of trouble was the sage **Durvasas**, who had cursed the gods to become mortal and their heavenly luster to fade. To counter this, the gods made a pact with the **demons** that they would jointly churn the Ocean of Milk to obtain the nectar of immortality, which would be equally divided.

The image of churning here is based on traditional dairy practices, in which the person churning uses a string to rotate a churning paddle. In this instance, however, the churning takes place on a cosmic scale: The churning stick is Mount **Mandara**, the mountain that is at the center of the earth; the churning string is the divine serpent **Vasuki**, who encircles the world; and Vishnu himself, in the form of a tortoise, dives to the bottom of the ocean to provide a stable base for the churning stick. The gods and demons pull Vasuki back and forth, spinning the mountain and churning the Ocean of Milk. The churning separates the Ocean of Milk into

The god Vishnu's Tortoise avatar. He takes this form to help the gods regain their immortality.

various components, both good and bad. One product is the deadly **halahala** poison, which is neutralized by having **Shiva** hold it in his throat. Some of the other products are the **Kaustubha** jewel, the wishing **cow** Surabhi, the **goddess Lakshmi**, and finally the physician of the gods, **Dhanvantari**, who emerges from the sea bearing the pot containing the nectar of immortality.

The demons grab the pot of nectar and begin to escape, but Vishnu takes the form of the enchantress **Mohini** and beguiles the demons into giving the pot back to her. She gives the pot to the gods, who take off with the demons in hot pursuit. According to more recent traditions, in their flight the gods stop at four different holy places on earth—**Allahabad**, **Haridwar**, **Ujjain**, and **Nasik**—over a twelve-(divine) day span; this latter incident is cited as the charter myth for the celebration of the **Kumbha Mela** at these sites on a twelve-**year** basis (because a divine day is believed to equal a human year).

The gods finally manage to escape their pursuers and divide the nectar among themselves, but they fail to notice that the demon **Sainhikeya** slips

into their midst in disguise. As the demon begins to drink, the **sun** and **moon** alert Vishnu, who uses his discus to cut off the demon's head. Sainhikeya's two halves become immortal because they have come into contact with the nectar, and both halves are considered malevolent celestial beings: the head as **Rahu**, the body as **Ketu**. Rahu has particular enmity for the sun and moon, since these **deities** are responsible for his demise, and tries to swallow them whenever he meets them in the **heavens**. He always succeeds, but because he no longer has a body to digest them, they escape unharmed through Rahu's severed neck. This, of course, is the traditional explanation for solar and lunar **eclipses**; the association with the malevolent Rahu has thus led eclipses to be seen as highly inauspicious times. See also **ocean, churning of the**.

## Tota Puri

An **ascetic** initiated into the **Puri** order of the **Dashanami Sanyasis**, as can be seen from his surname. Tota Puri was one of the teachers of the Bengali saint **Ramakrishna**, who appeared to instruct Ramakrishna in **Advaita Vedanta** as part of the latter's continuing exposure to many different types of religious practice. In his earlier religious practice, Ramakrishna had been a fervent devotee (**bhakta**) of the **goddess Kali**, whereas the Advaita Vedanta **philosophy** claims that behind all things lies a single impersonal reality that has no defining attributes except for being, consciousness, and bliss (**sacchidananda**). In the Advaita understanding, because all conceptions of particular **deities** have specific attributes, they are thus conditioned forms of the ultimate **Brahman** (Supreme Reality).

Although this conception ran counter to his own previous experience, Ramakrishna practiced diligently under Tota Puri's direction. When Ramakrishna attained enlightenment through the practices of Advaita, he discovered that the essence of this

experience was the same as that gained from his earlier devotional practices. This inner experience of identity was a pivotal experience for Ramakrishna and reinforced his conviction that all forms of religious practice led the seeker to the same place. After Ramakrishna's experience of enlightenment, Tota Puri disappeared.

## Transcendental Meditation

Religious organization founded by **Maharishi Mahesh Yogi**, whose teachings on meditation comprise its major thrust. As its name would indicate, Transcendental Meditation (TM) stresses the multiple benefits of meditation: For the individual, it promotes physical, mental, and spiritual health, whereas for the larger environment, it is claimed to have pacific effects, resulting in reduced crime and hatred. All of these results can be obtained only by diligent practice, but the **initiation** itself is easy to obtain—all one has to do is to attend a seminar sponsored by a TM instructor and pay the required fee to obtain one's **mantra**, or sacred utterance. In more recent years, TM has offered programs leading to the acquisition of superhuman powers (**siddhis**) at its headquarters at Maharishi International University in Fairfield, Iowa. The claims of these programs have been toned down since a disgruntled buyer—who had been unable to learn to levitate—won a lawsuit for damages.

Although meditation and the use of mantras are well-established Hindu practices, many traditional Hindus are uncomfortable with other elements of TM's marketing. One controversial point is the practice of buying (or selling) a mantra, which was traditionally transmitted from teacher (**guru**) to disciple only after significant association. A similar problem comes from the notion that one can buy and sell superhuman powers. These powers are seen as highly seductive because they can be used for both good and evil and as having the potential to destroy a spiritually immature person. Traditional wisdom is unanimous that a person should not consciously seek such powers, because the very act of seeking is seen as being rooted in selfish desires. In contrast, when one has gained such powers as a byproduct of spiritual attainment, one is believed to be able to keep them in proper perspective.

## Treta Yuga

A particular age of the world in **cosmic time**. According to traditional belief, time has neither a beginning nor an end, but alternates between cycles of creation and activity, followed by cessation and quietude. Each of these cycles lasts for 4.32 billion years, with the active phase known as the **Day of Brahma**, and the quiet phase as the Night of Brahma. In cosmic time, the Day of Brahma is divided into one thousand **mahayugas** ("great cosmic ages"), each of which lasts for 4.32 million years. Each mahayuga is composed of four constituent **yugas** (cosmic ages), named the **Krta Yuga**, Treta Yuga, **Dvapara Yuga**, and **Kali Yuga**. Each of these four yugas is shorter than its predecessor and ushers in an era more degenerate and depraved. By the end of the Kali Yuga, things have gotten so bad that the only solution is the destruction and recreation of the **earth**, at which time the next Krta era begins.

The Treta Yuga is the second of the four yugas, lasting for 1,296,000 years. Although the Treta Age is still relatively **auspicious**, it is less so than the Krta Age, symbolized by its identification with the metal silver—not as valuable as the gold associated with the preceding Krta Yuga, but more valuable than the bronze and iron associated with the two following yugas. In popular belief the Treta Yuga is believed to be the time when the god **Rama** reigned on earth.

## Tribhanga

("three breaks") Name denoting one of the best-known poses in Indian **dance**

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and **sculpture**, in which the line of the body has three distinct breaks, or changes in direction. In this pose, the body's weight is mainly supported on one foot, with the corresponding knee and shoulder inclined toward one side and the hips inclined in the opposite direction.

## Tridosha

In **ayurveda**, the term for the set of three bodily humours, **vata** ("air"), **pitta** ("bile"), and **kapha** ("phlegm"). Each of these humours is associated with certain physiological tendencies, particularly with regard to digestion and metabolism. Every person has all three of these humours, although one of them is generally dominant. In a healthy person the three humours are in general equilibrium, but an imbalance can lead to illness or chronic health problems. The solution to these lies in regaining the proper balance between the doshas, or humours, for which one of the major solutions is **eating** a proper diet.

## Trika

Kashmiri religious community whose members were devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva**; the greatest figure in the Trika school was the tenth-century philosopher and aesthetic theorist **Abhinavagupta**. Trika Shaivism is a tantric tradition—that is, a secret, ritually based religious practice—whose philosophical underpinnings merge two philosophical positions, theism and monism. Theism is the notion that a divinity is the Supreme Reality in the universe, whereas monism conceives a more abstract principle as the basis of all reality. For Trika Shaivism, the sole true reality is the god Shiva, who is both Supreme God and the source for emanations from which the material universe is formed. Final liberation of the soul (**moksha**) comes through a process of "recognition" (**pratyabhijna**), in which one realizes that the entire universe is nothing but a manifestation of Shiva

alone. Here one "recognizes" something that has always been true but until that time had been obscured by a mistaken understanding. For further information see Paul Eduardo Muller-Ortega, *The Triadic Heart of Siva*, 1989. See also **tantra** and **Shaiva**.

## Trilochan

(15th c.?) A **sant** poet who is generally associated with the poet-saint **Namdev**. The name *sant* is an umbrella term for a loose group of central and northern Indian poet-saints who shared several general tendencies: a stress on individualized, interior religion leading to a personal experience of the divine; a disdain for external ritual, particularly image **worship**; a faith in the power of the divine name; and a tendency to ignore conventional **caste** distinctions. Trilochan's only existing poems are a few verses in the **Adigranth**, the sacred scripture of the Sikh community. These verses describe his devotion to **Vithoba**, the presiding **deity** of the temple at **Pandharpur** in **Maharashtra**, who was also Namdev's chosen deity. Thus, the poems seem consistent with Maharashtrian origins. Trilochan is also mentioned as a devotee (**bhakta**) by other **bhakti** poets, most notably by the poet-saint **Ravidas**.

## Trimbak

Sacred site (**tirtha**) at the headwaters of the **Godavari River**, in the **Nasik** district of the state of **Maharashtra**. Trimbak is famous as the site for **Tryambakeshvar**, one of the twelve **jyotirlingas**, the most sacred spot for devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva**.

## Trimurti

("three forms") The three **deities** of **Brahma**, **Vishnu**, and **Shiva**, often represented as three faces on a single image, to symbolize the ultimate identity of all three forms of divinity and divine activity: Brahma as creator, Vishnu as preserver and sustainer, and Shiva as destroyer.

## Triphala

Another name for the **Urdhvapundra**, the characteristic forehead mark of renunciant **ascetics** who are devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Vishnu**. Although there is considerable variation, the basic form is three vertical lines, in contrast to the three horizontal lines worn by **Shaivite** ascetics. See **Urdhvapundra**.

## Tripundra
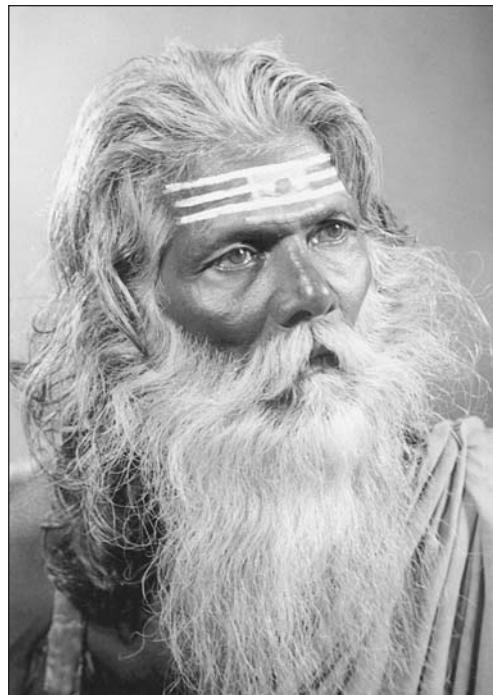
Sectarian mark of three horizontal lines, most commonly applied to the forehead but which can also be applied to the back, heart, shoulders, arms, and legs. The tripundra marks the person wearing it as a devotee (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva**, and although this mark is most commonly worn by renunciant **ascetics**, householders also wear it. According to one interpretation, the three lines represent the three prongs of Shiva's trident; according to another, they symbolize Shiva's third eye. The three lines are drawn by dipping the first three fingers of the right hand into a sacred ash known as **vibhuti** ("power") and then drawing them across the forehead. In earlier times vibhuti was made from wood ash that had been sifted through cloth until it was as fine as talcum powder. This is still done today, primarily by ascetics who usually use the ash from a **dhuni**, or smoldering ascetic **fire**, which has sacred characteristics; vibhuti can also be bought in stores selling religious supplies.

## Tripura

("three cities") In Hindu mythology, the triple city built by the three sons of the **demon Taraka**: Kamalaksha, Tarakaksha, and Vidyunmali. **Shiva** eventually destroyed the demons' three cities, and as a result one of Shiva's epithets is **Tripurari**, the "Enemy of the Three City."

## Tripurari

Epithet of **Shiva** as the enemy (ari) of the Triple City (**Tripura**). According to the mythic charter, three **demons** are



An ascetic wearing tripundra markings, three horizontal lines that indicate he is a devotee of the god Shiva.

dismayed by their continuing defeats at the hands of the gods, and they begin to perform harsh **asceticism** (**tapas**) to find the means to counter this. The god **Brahma** finally comes to them, willing to reward them with boons. However, when the demons learn that absolute invulnerability is impossible, they lay down the condition that each of them should build a city that can move over the earth, which will come together only once in a long time, and that these cities can be destroyed only by a single arrow that pierces through them all at the same time.

This boon renders the demons practically invulnerable, and they proceed to build three magnificent cities—one of iron, one of silver, and one of gold. They grow rich and prosperous, but over time they are corrupted by power and began to oppress the earth. Finally the gods petition Brahma for help, and Brahma informs them that the only one with the strength to fulfill this condition is the god Shiva. The gods build him a bow and arrow, and when the conjunction of the three cities takes place, Shiva sends a

single arrow through all three, kindling a fire that burns the cities and destroys their inhabitants.

This story illustrates one important facet of Shiva's character—unlike the god **Vishnu,** who often manages to trick those he subdues, Shiva is much less complex and attains his end by using power against which no one can stand. In some of the stories, one of the three demons is himself a devotee (**bhakta**) of Shiva, and when the arrow is loosed and hurtles to destroy the Triple City, Shiva himself rescues his devotee and his family. This is in character, for Shiva is portrayed as gracious to his devotees and will do just about anything for them. It also shows that the demons are conceived not as completely debased but as another race of beings with different powers and capacities, and who have as much potential as **deities** and human beings.

## Trishanku

("three sins") In Hindu mythology, a celebrated king of the **Solar Line.** He is named Satyavrata at **birth** but is cursed by the sage **Vasishtha** to bear the name Trishanku because of three major sins: He abducts another man's wife, he incurs the anger of his father, and he eats beef (which he has earlier obtained by slaughtering Vasishtha's **cow**). Along with this uncomplimentary name, Vasishtha also curses Trishanku to be a chandala (**untouchable**), which Trishanku suffers for some time before being restored to his kingship.

After regaining his throne, Trishanku is a good king, but he desires to be taken bodily into **heaven.** Vasishtha and his sons ridicule this desire, but Trishanku finds an ally in the sage **Vishvamitra,** who has a long history of conflict with Vasishtha. Vishvamitra performs the **sacrifice** to take Trishanku to heaven, but when he arrives there, he is pushed back down by **Indra,** the ruler of heaven, and Trishanku falls head downward. Vishvamitra orders Trishanku to remain where he is, and since Indra will not let

him up and Vishvamitra will not let him down, he is suspended in midair. Indra begins to construct a separate heaven for Trishanku, but when Vishvamitra threatens to create a new Indra for the new heaven, Indra relents and takes Trishanku to heaven in his material body. The name *Trishanku* has since become proverbial to refer to a person trapped between two options.

## Trishiras

In the ***Ramayana***, the earlier of the two great Hindu epics, Trishiras is a **demon** ally of **Ravana**, the demon-king of **Lanka**. Along with Ravana's brothers, **Khara** and **Dushana**, Trishiras leads a frontal attack against the god **Rama**, the epic's protagonist. The attack is an effort to avenge the insult to Ravana's sister **Shurpanakha**, who has been mutilated by Rama's brother **Lakshmana**. Although he is a valiant warrior, Trishiras is eventually killed by Rama, as are Khara and Dushana. The failure of such frontal attacks convince Ravana that Rama is too powerful to kill in combat, so he decides to take revenge by kidnapping Rama's wife **Sita**.

## Trishul

("three points") The trident, which is an important weapon associated with both the god **Shiva** and the **Goddess**. The trident is a modified form of the spear (**shula**).

## Tristhalisetu

("The bridge to the Three Holy Cities") Pilgrimage text written by the great scholar **Narayana Bhatta** (approx. 1513–1570) that was intended to give the readers precise instructions for correctly performing the pilgrimage rites at three important sites: **Allahabad**, a bathing (**snana**) place at the junction of the **Ganges** and **Yamuna Rivers**; **Benares**, which is renowned as a city of culture and religious learning; and **Gaya** in **Bihar**, a major site for the **shraddha** rites for the dead. The text begins with a

section devoted to pilgrimage in general, giving the rules for its performance, and continues with three sections giving the prescriptions for pilgrimages to Allahabad, Benares, and Gaya. The Tristhalisetu is an important example of the class of commentarial literature known as **nibandhas** ("collections"). The nibandhas were compendia of Hindu lore, in which the compilers culled references on a particular theme from the **Vedas**, **dharma literature**, **puranas**, and other authoritative religious texts, and then compiled these excerpts into a single volume, often with their own commentary. Narayana Bhatta was one of the most learned men of his time, and he was attempting to define everything precisely, based on his sources, so that people would know how to do the right thing. The initial section of this text has been edited and translated by Richard Salomon as *The Bridge to the Three Holy Cities,* 1985.

## Triveni

("Triple stream") Traditional epithet for the confluence of the **Ganges** and **Yamuna Rivers** in the city of **Allahabad**, in the state of **Uttar Pradesh**. Although only two rivers can be seen at the confluence, the name Triveni comes from the traditional belief that they are joined by a third river, the **Saraswati**, which flows underground and is unseen to the naked eye.

## Trivikrama

("[taking] Three Steps") Epithet of the god **Vishnu** in his **avatar**, or incarnation, as a dwarf (**Vamana**). The name exists because diminutive Vamana begs three paces of land from the **demon**-king **Bali** and then grows to such a large size that these three paces measure out the universe. See **Vamana avatar**.

## Triyuginarayan

Village and sacred site (**tirtha**) in the **Mandakini River** valley in the **Garhwal** region of the **Himalayas**,

fifteen miles down from **Kedarnath**. The site for Triyuginarayan is on the top of a mountain, surrounded by forest. Triyuginarayan's major temple is dedicated to the god **Vishnu** in his form as **Narayana**, and in front of the temple is a pit in which a **fire** is said to have been smoldering for the past three cosmic ages (triyugi). According to its charter myth, Triyuginarayan is the site at which the **deities Shiva** and **Parvati** were married, a ceremony to which this continuously smoldering fire (in its guise as **Agni**, the fire-god) stands as the witness.

## Trnavarta

In Hindu mythology, Trnavarta is one of the **demon** assassins sent by **Kamsa**, the **demon**-king of **Mathura**, in an attempt to kill his nephew, the child-god **Krishna**. Trnavarta is a whirlwind that sweeps Krishna up into the air, but Krishna holds tight to Trnavarta until he simply blows himself out.

## Truth, Power of

In popular Hindu belief, truth is seen as having magical power of its own, a power to which people can appeal in their time of distress. One way of appealing to this power is through the famous **act of truth**, a conditional statement in which the first part is a true statement about one's past behavior and the second part a request for some specific result (for example, "If I have always given to those who begged from me, may this fire not burn me"). The power of truth was also invoked in trial by **ordeal** and was seen as the power that made the ordeal a valid means of testing people.

## Tryambakeshvar

Temple and sacred site (**tirtha**) in the village of **Trimbak** in the **Nasik** district of the state of **Maharashtra**, at the headwaters of the **Godavari River**. The temple is named for its presiding **deity**, the god **Shiva** in his manifestation as the "Three-Eyed Lord." Shiva is present at

Tryambakeshvar in the form of a **linga**, the pillar-shaped image that is his symbolic form. The Tryambakeshvar linga is one of the twelve **jyotirlingas**, a network of sites deemed especially sacred to Shiva and at which Shiva is uniquely present. The charter myth for Tryambakeshvar begins with the sage **Gautama**, who unwisely hits an old **cow** with a stick, killing it, and thus incurs the sin of cow slaughter. Gautama is told that to expiate his sin, he first has to amass enough merit to bring the **Ganges** down to **earth**, and after he has purified himself by bathing (**snana**) in the Ganges, he has to make and **worship** 10 million Shiva lingas formed from the sand on its banks. Gautama undertakes his penance (**prayashchitta**) diligently. Upon worshiping the 10 millionth linga he is rewarded by a vision of Shiva, who grants his wish that both the Ganges and Shiva will remain there forever—the former in her form as the Godavari, the latter as Tryambakeshvar.

## Tuesday

(Mangalvar) The third day of the **week**, presided over by the **planet Mars** (Mangal). The planet Mars is deemed inauspicious, both because of its red color (reminiscent of **blood**) and because of its associations with war and disorder. Tuesday is widely considered an unlucky day, and many people abstain from certain kinds of activity on it. Travel is particularly discouraged unless absolutely necessary. Cutting the **hair** and beard is also discouraged, and in much of northern India, barbers take Tuesday off. To counter the day's potential **inauspiciousness**, many people also perform **rites of protection**, such as worshiping strong protective **deities** such as **Hanuman**—who is close enough to human beings to understand the problems they face, but divine enough to be able to protect them. Paradoxically, the literal meaning of the name for Tuesday is the "auspicious" (mangal) day. Giving it this euphemistic name may simply be a bit of reverse

**magic**; that if one calls it the lucky day, it may, in fact, turn out to be.

## Tukaram

(1598–1650) Poet and saint in the **Varkari Panth**, a religious community centered on the **worship** of the god **Vithoba**, at his temple at **Pandharpur** in the modern state of **Maharashtra**. According to tradition, Tukaram was a **shudra** (in traditional Hinduism, there are four main social groups, the **shudras** being the lowest and least influential) born in the small village of **Dehu**, where his father was a petty merchant. Tukaram continued in the family business, which eventually failed because he had little interest in worldly life. He longed instead for the life of a renunciant, in which he could completely devote himself to God. As with many of the other **bhakti** saints, he is reported to have suffered considerable persecution by traditionally minded **brahmins**, who were uneasy about a person of his low status gaining spiritual greatness. An unlettered man, he is most famous for the songs known as **abhangs**, which are still widely sung in Maharashtra. He had many disciples, including the poet-saint **Bahina Bai**, and according to tradition, he ended his life by being taken up to **heaven** in a chariot of fire. For further information see G. A. Deleury, *The Cult of Vithoba*,1960; and Justin E. Abbott (trans.), *The Life of Tukaram,* 1980.

## Tulsi

A small shrublike plant commonly denoted the "holy basil." For devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Vishnu**, the tulsi plant is a form of Vishnu's wife **Lakshmi**, who is cursed to take birth as a plant. According to the story, Lakshmi sits with **Vishnu's** wives, the goddesses **Ganga** and **Saraswati**. Ganga makes amorous eyes at Vishnu, and when Saraswati protests this indecency, a quarrel breaks out. By the time it is over, Ganga and Saraswati have cursed each other to be born on earth as rivers. Vishnu has been

cursed to be born as a stone (the **shala-gram**); and Lakshmi, who tries only to mediate the quarrel, is cursed to be born as a plant. This plant is thus a form of Lakshmi, and pious **Vaishnavas** culti-vate a tulsi plant as an act of devotion. The plant is especially dear to Vishnu, and it is believed that all parts of the plant are purifying. Any parts of it used in **worship** are especially meritorious—whether grinding the leaves to a paste to mark one's body, taking the leaves as **prasad** (food offered to a **deity** as an act of worship), or using tulsi wood for implements or sacrificial fuel.

## Tulsidas

(1532–1623) Poet-saint and devotee (**bhakta**) of the god **Rama**, whose great-est work, the *Ramcharitmanas*, retells the epic *Ramayana* in the vernacular language of his day. According to evi-dence in his poetry, Tulsidas was born into a desperately poor **brahmin** family, but his life was transformed by the power of Rama's name. This can be taken as a reference to his teacher, who is believed to have been a **Ramanandi**, but it can also be taken literally. Tulsidas continually stresses that the name of Rama embodies the divinity's power and thus makes that power accessible to devotees. According to tradition, he lived a fairly hard life despite his fame, and because of his emphasis on devo-tion, he reportedly faced problems from other brahmins, who were concerned about maintaining their social status.

As with all of the *Ramayana*'s vernac-ular retellings, Tulsidas did not merely translate the story of Rama but inter-preted it according to his own religious convictions. The two most important shifts are his overwhelming emphasis on the importance of devotion (**bhakti**) and the saving power of the name of Rama, to which Tulsidas gives greater importance than Rama himself. Tulsidas also brings in mythic material from a variety of other sources, most notably the ***Shiva Purana*** and the *Adhyatmaramayana*. This material is

largely added to the first and last chap-ters, where Tulsidas makes his greatest changes from the original epic. One the-ory to explain why Tulsidas brought in this other material is that he was trying to transcend narrow sectarian bound-aries, and a sign of this is that much of the text is narrated by the god **Shiva**, in the form of a dialogue to his wife **Parvati**. For part of the final book, Shiva is supplanted as narrator by the crow **Bhushundi**, who symbolizes the power of devotion to rescue even a common carrion-eating crow. Aside from the *Ramcharitmanas*, Tulsidas composed many other works in varying regional languages and dedicated to various **deities**; the most important are the ***Kavitavali***, the ***Vinaya Patrika***, the ***Ramavali***, and the ***Shrikrishnavali***. Tulsidas himself refers to writing down his poems, and although the manuscript tradition is uncertain for some of his texts, the transition from song to written text took place much faster than for most of his contemporary poet-saints, many of whom were illiterate. For fur-ther information see F. Raymond Allchin (trans.), *Kavitavali*, 1964; W. Douglas P. Hill (trans.), *The Holy Lake of the Acts of Rama*, 1971; and John Stratton Hawley and Mark Juergensmeyer (trans.), *Songs of the Saints of India*, 1988.

## Tulsidas Jayanti

Festival falling on the seventh day of the bright (waxing) half of the **lunar month** of **Shravan** (July–August), cele-brating the birthday of the medieval devotional (**bhakti**) poet-saint **Tulsidas** (1532–1623). Tulsidas composed many different texts, and he is one of the few medieval poet-saints believed to have been literate and to have actually writ-ten down his work. His most celebrated text is the ***Ramcharitmanas***, a vernacu-lar retelling of the epic ***Ramayana***.

## Tulsi Vivah

Festival marking the marriage of the **goddess Lakshmi** and the god **Vishnu**,

Tulsi plant used in Tulsi Vivah festival.

celebrated on the eleventh day of the bright (waxing) half of the **lunar month** of **Kartik**. It is also celebrated as **Devotthayan Ekadashi**. On this day devotees (**bhakta**) place a **shalagram** (a black stone containing the spiral-shaped fossil shell of a prehistoric sea creature, understood as a "self-manifest" form of Vishnu) in a pot containing a **tulsi** plant (considered a form of Lakshmi). Thus they symbolically unite Vishnu and Lakshmi and perform the **marriage ceremony** for them, complete with festive songs.

## Tumari

Vessel used by renunciant **ascetics**. In earlier times it would have been made of a gourd, although today the shape is often replicated in brass or some other metal. The tumari is taller than it is wide, with an open top over which the carrying handle arches. Unlike another piece of ascetic equipment, the **kamandalu**, which has both a spout and a covered top, the tumari is an open vessel. When made of a gourd, it would simply have entailed cutting parts off of the top for the opening, with the remaining top parts forming the vessel's handle. Because of its simplicity and use of readily available materials, the tumari was a symbol of ascetic life.

## Tungabhadra River

Important tributary of the **Krishna River**, which has its source in the Western Ghats in southern **Karnataka** and then flows north and east toward the Krishna. The most important place on its banks is **Hampi**, the ruined city that was the capital of the Vijayanagar empire. See also **Vijayanagar dynasty**.

## Tungnath

Temple and sacred site (**tirtha**) in the **Garhwal** region of the **Himalayas** in the valley between the **Mandakini** and the **Alakananda Rivers**, fourteen miles by footpath north of the village of **Ukhimath**. The temple's presiding **deity** is the god **Shiva** in his manifestation as the "Lofty Lord." Tungnath is one of the **Panchkedar**, a network of five sacred sites spread throughout the Garhwal region; the other four are **Kedarnath**, **Kalpeshvar**, **Rudranath**, and **Madmaheshvar**. This network of five sites is seen as a symbolic representation of Shiva's body, understandably so, since Shiva is believed to dwell in the Himalayas. Of these five, Tungnath is believed to be Shiva's arm.

## Turiya

("fourth") The name for the innermost quarter of the Self (**atman**), as described in the **Mandukya Upanishad**, one of the speculative religious texts that form the latest stratum of the **Vedas**, the oldest Hindu sacred texts. As with most of the Upanishads, the Mandukya Upanishad's underlying concern is to investigate ultimate questions, in particular the nature of the Self. The upanishad describes the Self as having four quarters, each of which removes another layer of egoism. The first quarter is waking consciousness, which is
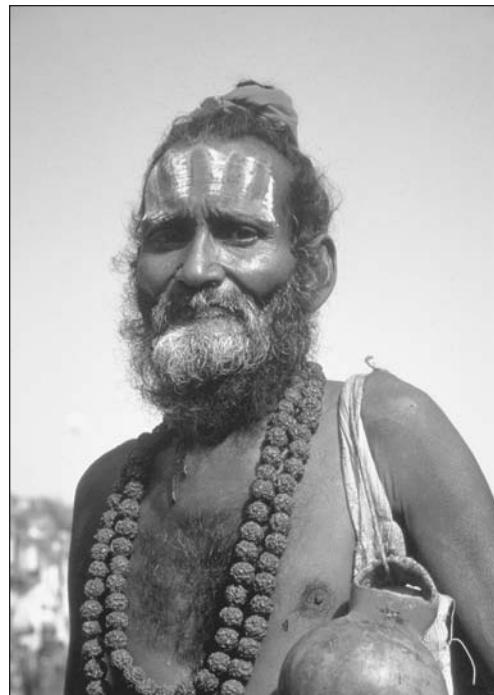
characterized by perceptions of subject and object; the second is **dream** sleep, which is sheer subjectivity; the third is deep sleep, which has neither subject nor object; and the last is a mysterious state simply called "the fourth" (turiya), which is the Self. This state is identified as the ultimate truth, and knowledge of this brings final liberation of the soul (**moksha**).

## Tvashtr

("maker of carriages") In the **Vedas**, the oldest and most authoritative Hindu religious texts, Tvashtr is a minor **deity** known as the workman of the Vedic gods. The Vedic hymns frequently mention wheeled chariots as military devices, and his name's literal meaning shows the esteem in which this craft was held, as the apex of creative work. In the Vedas, Tvashtr is famous for crafting the weapons of the gods, especially the mace with which the storm-god **Indra** slays the serpent **Vrtra** (**Rg Veda** 1.32). In later times Tvashtr is identified with the minor deity **Vishvakarma**, who in later Hindu life becomes the architect and craftsman of the gods. Since Tvashtr has a much older textual presence than Vishvakarma, this seems to be an attempt to identify one divine workman as another, based on their similar functions.

## Twice-Born

(dvija) In its most specific sense, this word denotes a man from the highest traditional social groups (**varnas**)—**brahmin**, **kshatriya**, and **vaishya**—who has undergone the adolescent ritual **initiation** known as the **upanayana samskara**. This initiation gives the entitlement and the obligation to study the **Vedas**, the oldest Hindu religious texts, and definitively divides society between those who have this entitlement and those who do not— namely, all children, **women**, and men not belonging to these three groups. Because of this initiation's ritual significance,



Sadhu carrying a tumari.

it was known as the second birth, and thus the initiates were "twice-born." The first birth was biological and based on nature, whereas the second was cultural and marked higher religious status. Although in its strictest sense this word refers only to such initiates, in a more general sense it can denote any person belonging to a varna whose members are eligible for this initiation—that is, any brahmin, kshatriya, or vaishya.

## Twilight Language

One of the translations for the term *Sandhabhasha*. Sandhabhasha is a symbolic language used in **tantra**, a secret, ritually based religious practice, in which the elements of tantric **worship** are described in a coded language often drawn from the private parts and functions of the human body. This is done to hide the tradition's particulars from the uninitiated. See **Sandhabhasha**.

## Tyag

("renunciation") Practice of renunciation stressed most by **ascetics**, but even among this group, some stress it more than others. Some ascetics carry this to extreme lengths. One famous ascetic, Swami **Karpatri**, was famous for receiving the food he was given as alms into his cupped hands, signifying the renunciation of an eating-vessel. The most extreme examples are ascetics who have given up all clothing as a symbol of renunciation of conventional standards, including shame. The ultimate purpose in such renunciation varies with the individual, but one of the common themes is to serve as a model of how little one really needs to live a happy and fulfilling life and thus to illustrate the fundamental values that people often forget in the bustle of everyday life. Many ordinary people also share this value in seeking to simplify their lives through giving up attachments and entanglements.

# U

## Udana

In traditional Indian physiology, one of the five bodily "**winds**" considered to be responsible for basic bodily functions, the others being **prana**, **apana**, **vyana**, and **samana**. The udana wind is considered to reside in the throat and to be the force that conveys things out of the mouth—primarily speech and song, but also burps and (presumably) vomit.

## Udasi

**Ascetic** community founded by **Shrichandra** (traditional dates 1492–1612), the elder son of Guru Nanak, the first of the ten Sikh gurus. According to one tradition, Nanak passed over Shrichandra as his successor because Shrichandra had become an ascetic. Guru Nanak disapproved of this, believing that his followers should live married lives in society. The Udasis have always been an ascetic sect, and since their formation they have been seen as distinct from the two other major ascetic communities, the **Sanyasis** and the **Bairagis**. The latter are separated on sectarian grounds: The Sanyasis **worship** the god **Shiva**, and the Bairagis the god **Vishnu**, whereas the Udasis worship the Panchayatana grouping of five Hindu **deities** (Shiva, Vishnu, **Ganesh**, **Surya**, and **Durga**) rather than one or another alone. During the bathing (**snana**) processions at the **Kumbha Mela**, the Udasis march third, behind the Sanyasis and the Bairagis. Through the legacy of their founder, they have retained some informal connections with the Sikh community, but by and large they have always been considered to belong in the Hindu fold. There was considerable friction between the Udasis and the Sikh community in the early twentieth century because the Sikhs were more self-consciously asserting their separate identity. See also **Panchayatana Puja**.

## Udayagiri

Village just north of the city of Bhopal in the state of **Madhya Pradesh**. Udayagiri is famous for its rock-cut cave sculptures from the Gupta era (350–550 C.E), particularly a twenty-foot **sculpture** of the god **Vishnu** in his form as the **Boar avatar**, with the **earth** balanced on his tusk. See also **Gupta dynasty**.

## Uddalaka Aruni

A character in the **Chandogya Upanishad**, one of the speculative texts that form the latest stratum of the **Vedas**. In the upanishad, Uddalaka is the father and teacher of the boy **Shvetaketu** Aruneya, and the two are a model for the transmission of secret teachings passed between **guru** and disciple. According to a story in the upanishad's sixth chapter, Shvetaketu is sent away by his father to study the Vedas, and when he returns twelve years later, having mastered all the Vedas, he incorrectly considers himself learned. His father punctures his arrogance by asking Shvetaketu questions about the nature of the cosmos and thus shows him the difference between memorization and true knowledge. When Shvetaketu cannot answer these, he admits his ignorance and accepts instruction from his father on the nature of the Self (**atman**). This instruction contains the teaching "That thou art" (**Tat tvam asi**). This is one of the "great statements" (**mahavakya**) in Indian **philosophy** and asserts the ultimate identity between **Brahman** and atman, the cosmos and the individual Self.

## Uddhava

In Hindu mythology, one of the god **Krishna's** friends and companions. In

The Mahakaleshvar Temple in Ujjain.
It is dedicated to the god Shiva
in the form of the "Lord of Death."

the devotional (**bhakti**) literature, Uddhava is most famous for the message he carries from Krishna back to the **gopis**, the cowherd **women** of **Braj** (a northern Indian region on the **Yamuna River** south of the modern city of Delhi) who are Krishna's devotees (**bhakta**) and who love him more than life. Uddhava tells the gopis not to be concerned with Krishna's physical absence, since as the supreme divinity, Krishna is always with them, even though he may not be visible. The gopis reply that such talk is fine for intellectual folk such as Uddhava, but that for simple women like themselves, who have had the delight of associating with Krishna in the flesh, such abstractions are absolutely useless. Uddhava and the gopis are symbols for two different types of religious life: one cool and abstract, focused on an impersonal divinity, and the other based on passionate love for a particular **deity**. Differing accounts of this story give different endings, according to the writers' inclinations. In some of the stories, including the earliest version in the ***Bhagavata Purana***, the story ends in a

standoff, with each side unable to convince the other. Yet in at least one of the accounts, Uddhava is converted to the gopis' point of view. For further information see R. S. McGregor (ed. and trans.), *Nanddas*, 1973.

## Udgatr

Type of sacrificial priest in the **Brahmana** literature, one of the later strands in the sacred literature known as the **Vedas**. The Brahmanas largely functioned as manuals describing how to perform sacrificial rites—which primarily involved burning **offerings** in a sacred **fire**—and the care and attention devoted to detailing these **sacrifices** leads to the inference that these were the primary religious act. These rites were so complex that they required specialized ritual technicians: the **adhvaryum**, the **hotr**, the udgatr, and the **brahman**. Of these, the udgatr was the sacrificial priest who chanted the hymns from the **Sama Veda** that were used in the sacrifice.

## Udupi

Town and sacred site (**tirtha**) on the Arabian Sea in the state of **Karnataka**, about thirty miles north of Mangalore. Udupi's most famous temple is to the god **Krishna**, but it is best known as the home of the philosopher **Madhva**, founder of the **Dvaita Vedanta**.

## Ugrasena

In Hindu mythology, the king of **Mathura** who is the grandfather of the god **Krishna**. Ugrasena is supplanted by the evil **Kamsa**, who is believed to be Ugrasena's son but is actually not. According to legend, Kamsa is the son of a **demon** who has taken Ugrasena's form, and who under this guise has intercourse with Ugrasena's wife.

## Ujjain

City and sacred site (**tirtha**) on the **Shipra River** in the state of **Madhya**

**Pradesh**, about 100 miles west of Bhopal, the state capital. Ujjain is the traditional center of the **Malwa** plateau and has a long history as a commercial, political, cultural, and sacred center. In earlier times Ujjain was a major stop on the central trade route, through which goods from southern India were funneled to other places farther north. Just before the common era, Ujjain is said to have been the capital of King **Vikramaditya**, after whom the **Vikram era** was named. Vikramaditya's stepbrother, **Bhartrhari**, reportedly renounced the throne to become an **ascetic** but is best known for his poetry. In later days Ujjain was the *de facto* capital of the Gupta ruler **Chandra Gupta II** (r. 380–414 C.E.), under whose patronage the greatest **Sanskrit** poet, **Kalidasa**, is said to have worked.

As a sacred center, Ujjain has multiple attractions, and this is its major source of contemporary importance. It is one of the **Seven Sacred Cities** of India. Dying in one of these cities is said to bring liberation. Every twelve years Ujjain plays host to the bathing (**snana**) festival known as the **Kumbha Mela**, although the **mela** there is smaller than the ones at **Haridwar** and **Allahabad**. Given its history, Ujjain is studded with important religious sites. The most important site is the temple to **Shiva** in his form as **Mahakaleshvar**, the "Lord of Death." Shiva is present at Mahakaleshvar in the form of a **linga**, the pillar-shaped image that is his symbolic form. The Mahakaleshvar linga is one of the twelve **jyotirlingas**, a network of sites deemed especially sacred to Shiva and at which Shiva is uniquely present. Ujjain is also famous for a temple associated with **Matsyendranath**, the religious preceptor (**guru**) of **Gorakhnath**, the founder of the **Nathpanthi** ascetics. In addition, Ujjain has a temple to the nine **planets**, as well as one of the **baithaks**, a group of 108 sacred sites associated with the life and activity of the philosopher **Vallabhacharya**. Ujjain's most unusual site is the temple to the **deity** Kal Bhairav. Kal Bhairav is another name for **Bhairava**, a horrific form of Shiva, and the traditional **offering** at the temple is **liquor**—a substance proscribed and condemned by "respectable" Hindus and thus the ideal offering for a marginal deity such as Bhairava. See also **Gupta dynasty**.

## Ukhimath

Himalayan town on the **Mandakini River** in the hills of **Uttar Pradesh**, across the river from **Guptakashi**. Ukhimath is the winter seat of **Kedarnath**, a form of **Shiva** whose summer home is a temple in the village of Kedarnath, high in the mountains at the Mandakini's headwaters. The village is at such high altitude that it is only accessible between late April and October, after the snows have melted; in October the temple is ritually closed until the next spring. When the temple at Kedarnath has been closed for the winter, the **deity** (symbolically represented by a movable image) takes residence in Ukhimath for the winter and then moves back to Kedarnath the following spring.

## Ulatbamsi

("upside-down language") Word denoting paradoxical language in which the speaker's utterances are reversals of "normal" events, such as "The cow is sucking the calf's teat," "Mouse stalks cat," "Rain falls from **earth** to sky." The most famous composer of such utterances was the devotional (**bhakti**) poet-saint **Kabir**, who inherited a tradition of coded language (**sandhabhasha**) from the **Nathpanthi** and **Sahajiya** religious communities. Ulatbamsi utterances are not intended to be simply nonsensical, nor is it simply a coded language in which one term stands for another; they are rather intended to stimulate the hearer to active listening, interpretation, and searching for a truth that lies beyond right side up and upside down. For a long discussion of

ulatbamsi, see Appendix A in Linda Hess and Shukdev Singh (trans.), *The Bijak of Kabir*, 1983.

## Uma

Epithet of the **goddess Parvati**, wife of the god **Shiva**. The name supposedly comes from the exclamation uttered by Parvati's mother, **Mena**, when Parvati announces that she intends to perform **asceticism** to win Shiva as a husband. According to the story, Mena covers her ears with her hands and replies "U Ma!" (Oh, don't!) As with all forms of Parvati (and all married goddesses), Uma is a beneficent and benevolent presence, maternal and life affirming, although at times she can be capricious and spiteful if insulted. For more information on Uma and all the goddesses of Hinduism, see David R. Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, 1986.

## Untouchable

Name denoting certain **jatis** who were considered so impure that their very presence was polluting to **caste** Hindus, that is, Hindus belonging to the four **varnas** (major social divisions). Jatis are **endogamous** social subgroups—groups in which members are forbidden to marry outside of their particular group—that were often defined by the group's hereditary occupation. Untouchability usually stemmed from occupations considered impure or debased, such as working with **leather**, in the case of the **Chamars**, or the groups whose hereditary occupation was to remove night soil, often by carrying it in baskets balanced on their heads. In traditional society, untouchables were subject to numerous restrictions and prohibitions on where they could live, work, draw water, and even move about. In many cases they had to announce their presence to allow caste Hindus to remove themselves from the area. Although untouchability has been illegal since independence, social attitudes supporting it persist, and in a country in which one's name often conveys one's jati, such discrimination is difficult to escape. In many places these people are still underprivileged and desperately poor, as a legacy of the past. In recent years they have become more militant—among other things, adopting the name **dalit** ("oppressed") to describe themselves—and have begun to exercise their power at the ballot box, trying to take advantage of their considerable numbers.

## Upachara

("honoring," "entertaining") In its literal meaning, this word denotes the act of showing politeness, courtesy, or honor to any superior. In the context of **worship**, the meaning has been extended to refer to the things that are normally offered to the **deity** as part of the standard hospitality that would be offered to any honored guest. Although there are differing enumerations of these **offerings**, one of the most common lists has sixteen of them: summoning (**avahana**), offering a seat (**asana**), water for washing the feet (**padya**), thirst-quenching beverages (**arghya**), water for rinsing the mouth (**achamaniya**), bathing (**snana**), clothing (**vastra**), affixing the **sacred thread** (yajnopavit), fragrant unguents (**anulepana**), flowers (**pushpa**), incense (**dhupa**), lamp (**dipa**), food (**naivedya**), reverential salutation (**namaskara**), circumambulation (**pradakshina**), and dismissal (**visarjana**). To give all sixteen offerings is a long and detailed ritual, and the most common of the offerings is the eleventh, the offering of light, which is also known as **arati**.

## Upadana

In Indian **philosophy**, the word *upadana* denotes the "material cause" for something, that is, the stuff from which it is formed. Although this notion seems obvious to modern materialist ears, it carries several important assumptions that not all Indian philosophical schools were willing to

concede—namely, that there were real objects in the world, that they were made from other things, and that these things underwent real transformations. The notion of a material cause was held by the "realist" schools, most notably the **Samkhya**, **Nyaya-Vaisheshika**, and **Vishishthadvaita Vedanta**. It was opposed by the Buddhist schools, whose assumption that reality was constantly changing made the notion of real things problematic. It was also opposed by the **Advaita Vedanta** school, whose starting assumption was that ultimately there was only one "real" thing—the formless **Brahman** (Supreme Reality)—and thus that the notion of anything becoming anything else was in error.

## Upadhi

("obstruction") In Indian logic, a counterexample that renders an inference (**anumana**) invalid by showing that the reason (**hetu**) given as evidence for the initial assertion (**sadhya**) is not invariably true. For example, the inference that "there is smoke because there is fire" was judged invalid because of the counterexample of the red-hot iron ball, which was considered fiery but not smoky. Since the red-hot iron ball was a class of fiery things that did not smoke, it showed that the reason given for the inference did not account for every case of the thing to be proved (sadhya)—and thus raised the possibility that there were other such cases as well. This invalid inference fails the requirement known as pervasion (**vyapti**), in which the reason must account for every possible case; this is critical for validity in an inference. Needless to say, the search for such counterexamples was an essential part of Indian logic, since one such example could discredit an opponent's argument. For further information and elaboration, see Karl H. Potter (ed.), *Presuppositions of India's Philosophies*, 1972.

## Upamana

("analogy") According to some philosophical schools, upamana was one of the **pramanas**, or the means by which human beings can gain true and accurate knowledge. The classic example of this pramana describes a traveler going to a certain region who is told that he will encounter a certain animal that looks somewhat like a cow; upon going there this analogy helps him identify the animal. Some philosophical schools deny that this is a separate pramana and classify it as a variety of inference (**anumana**). Those who accept it as a fourth pramana—primarily the **Nyaya-Vaisheshika** school—stress that according to the rules of inference, a valid inference must be grounded in previous perceptions. In the case of the traveler, his ability to identify is not based on any differences drawn from previous perceptions of that type of animal, since he has never before seen the type of animal he actually encounters. He knows what it is because it looks "somewhat like a cow." Thus an additional pramana was needed to account for this. See also **philosophy**.

## Upanayana
## ("bringing-near") Samskara

Traditionally, the eleventh of the life cycle ceremonies (**samskaras**), in which a young man received a religious **initiation** that functioned as a symbolic "second birth," conferring on him new capacities and responsibilities. This ceremony marks the symbolic end of childhood and, as with many such rites of passage, the creation of a new social identity. After this rite the initiate becomes a **brahmacharin**, the first of the **stages of life** (ashramas) for a "**twice-born**" man. This initiation gives the entitlement and the obligation to study the **Vedas**, the oldest and most authoritative Hindu religious texts, and according to the traditional model, the young man would have done this while living in the household of his **guru**. With

this entitlement came responsibilities, particularly to observe **purity** laws, to which younger children were not subject. If nothing else, this rite is an essential prerequisite to marriage, since without it the young man is still considered a child, and in some contemporary cases it is performed immediately before the wedding.

According to the **dharma literature**, this rite was restricted to young men from the three highest traditional social classes (**varnas**), namely, **brahmins**, **kshatriyas**, and **vaishyas**. Indeed, it is the entitlement for this rite that makes these three the "twice-born" groups. For each group, a different age was prescribed for initiation and a different duration fixed for study, with brahmins being both earliest to start and the longest to study. The heart of the upanayana samskara is investing the young man with the **sacred thread** (janeu), which he must wear from that day forth, and teaching him the sacred formula known as the **Gayatri mantra**. This rite is still important and still widely performed, although it tends to be stressed most by brahmins. This is not surprising, given their traditional position as teachers and scholars and their concern for conserving that status, even in modern times. For further information see Pandurang Vaman Kane (trans.), *A History of Dharmasastra*, 1968; and Raj Bali Pandey, *Hindu Samskaras,* 1969. The former is encyclopedic and the latter more accessible; despite their age, they remain the best sources for traditional Hindu rites.

## Upanishad

The latest textual stratum in the **Vedas**, the oldest and most authoritative Hindu religious texts. The literal meaning of the word *upanishad* is "to sit near [a teacher]," but a better sense of its true meaning would be "secret teaching." The Upanishads mark a clean break from the immediately preceding Vedic literature, the **Brahmanas**, in which the essential concern was to lay out the concrete procedures for performing highly complex **sacrificial** rites. In contrast, the Upanishads were concerned with more speculative and abstract questions: the essential nature of the cosmos, the essence of the human being, and the relationship between these two. The conclusion in the Upanishads is that the essence of the universe is an impersonal reality known as **Brahman**, and that the essence of the human being is called the "Self" (**atman**). The fundamental insight and essential teaching in the Upanishads is the identity of Brahman and atman, and thus of the macrocosm and the microcosm. This identity is one of the most fundamental Hindu religious ideas and underlies religious thought up to the present time.

The twelve or thirteen oldest upanishads are not a cohesive set but a series of independent documents, although the later ones were clearly influenced by the earlier ones. The two oldest are the **Brhadaranyaka Upanishad** and the **Chandogya Upanishad**. Each is much longer than all the others combined, they are written in prose as a series of dialogues between famous sages, the **Sanskrit** language in them is clearly more archaic, and their ideas are embryonic and undeveloped. Later upanishads—such as the **Isha**, **Kena**, **Katha**, **Prashna**, and **Mandukya**—are much shorter, are written in verse, and have well-developed ideas. Some of these introduce the notion of theism, but not until the **Shvetashvatara Upanishad** is the Supreme Being identified as a god, in this case **Rudra**. For much of their history, the Upanishads would have been transmitted orally from master to student; this makes it unlikely that these texts were widely known because they would have been secret and carefully guarded teachings.

The Upanishads are important because of the speculative questions they ask and because many of their teachings are fundamental assumptions in Hindu religious life, even today: the notion of an eternal Self that gives a

being continuous identity; the idea of reincarnation (**samsara**) commensurate with one's deeds; the concept that some single unifying power lies behind the world's apparent diversity; and the conviction that this can be attained only through individual realization, usually described as a flash of mystic insight. As texts carrying the religious authority of the Vedas, the Upanishads were also extremely important in the development of Hindu philosophical schools, particularly **Advaita Vedanta**, which shares this overriding emphasis on inner realization. For information on the Upanishads themselves, see Robert Ernest Hume (trans.), *Thirteen Principal Upanisads*, 1965. See also **philosophy**.

## Upasaka

("servant") A person engaged in **upasana**—that is, having an intent focus on serving and worshiping a **deity**.

## Upasana

("service") General term denoting religious practice or spiritual discipline as a whole. Aside from the explicit notion of serving the **deity** (or **guru**), the word also connotes an intent focus on the part of the performer—not so much the particular things one is doing, but the overall attitude of care and attention with which one does them.

## Upavasa

General term denoting fasting, which is sometimes performed as a prescribed action for particular religious observances such as festivals and vows (**vrats**), and which is also done as a means of expiating one's sins. Although upavasa can refer to total abstinence from food and drink, it usually entails modification of one's diet. In some cases, as on the festival of **Shivaratri**, such "fasting" entails abstaining from cooked grains, which are considered such an essential element in a meal that in parts of India the word rice is also used to mean

"food." In other cases one will abstain from certain types of food, such as for the **Santoshi Ma Vrat**, in which the person must not eat anything containing sour or bitter flavors.

When fasting is performed as expiation (**prayashchitta**), the prescriptions are usually concerned with the amount of food eaten rather than the particular type. The best-known rite of this kind is the **chandrayana**, a penitential rite lasting for one **lunar month** in which the penitent's food consumption mirrors the monthly course of the **moon**. The performer begins by eating fourteen mouthfuls of food on the first day of the waning moon, then one less mouthful on each successive day, with a complete fast on the **new moon** day. On each successive day during the waxing moon, the penitent eats one more mouthful, finishing at fifteen on the day of the **full moon**.

## Upendra
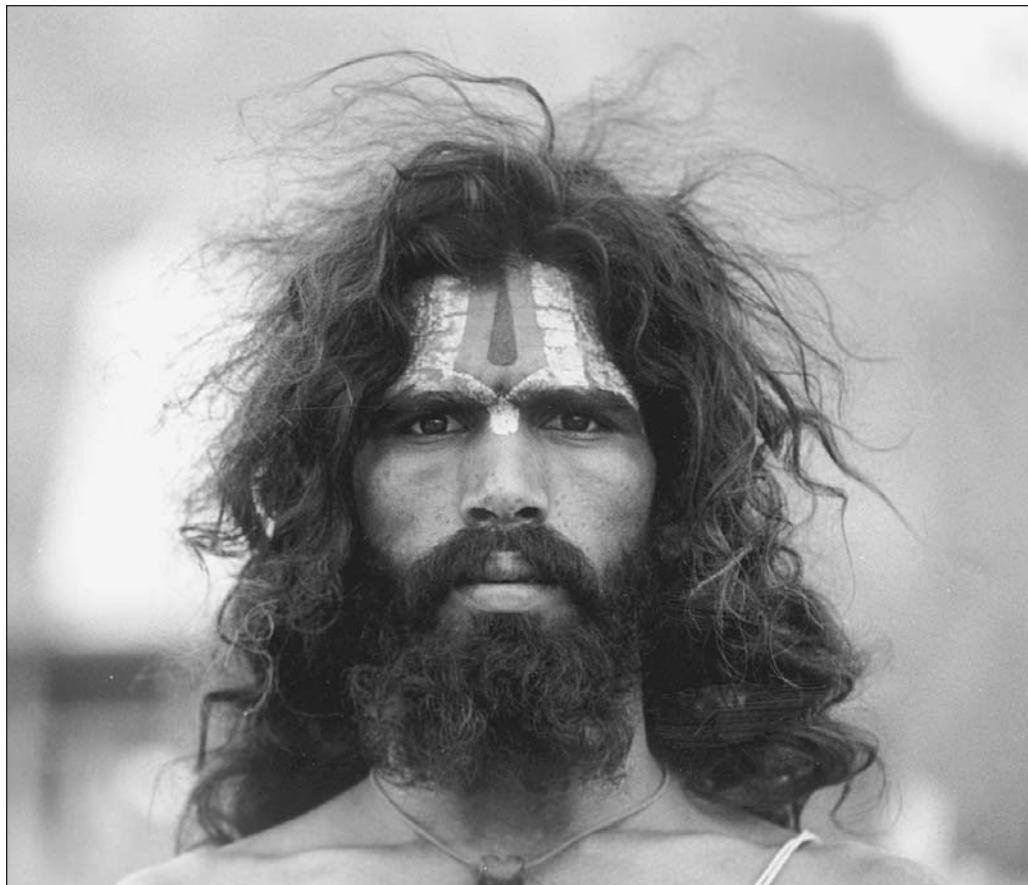
("junior **Indra**") Epithet of the god **Vishnu**. It is first used in some late hymns in the **Vedas**, the earliest Hindu religious texts, in which Vishnu is portrayed as a subordinate and companion of the storm-god Indra, who is the primary Vedic **deity**. The epithet continues to be used later despite Indra's eclipse as a significant deity, and thus its literal meaning is no longer true. See **Vishnu**.

## Upside-Down Language

Term designating the type of utterances known as **ulatbamsi**, so called because these utterances intentionally describe things contrary to the way they are in the "normal" world. See **ulatbamsi**.

## Urdhvabahu

("[one whose] arm is upraised") Name for a person practicing a particularly severe form of physical mortification, in which one or both arms are kept continually raised. After some time the muscles atrophy, and the arms cannot be lowered again. Although urdhvabahu is

An ascetic with the urdhvapundra mark on his forehead.
It consists of three vertical lines and indicates that he is a devotee of the god Vishnu.

not very common, it has a long-attested history as an **ascetic** practice. As with all such harsh physical **asceticism**, this is believed to give one the great benefits of spiritual awareness and magical power. This belief is based partly on the culturally accepted notion that the willingness to endure physical suffering generates such spiritual power, but this belief could also stem from the strength of will needed to carry this out—a strength of will that would presumably have correlates in other dimensions of one's personality.

## Urdhvapundra

Name denoting the characteristic forehead mark (**tika**) worn by the **ascetic** devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Vishnu**. The urdhvapundra's basic pattern is made of three vertical lines, in contrast to the three horizontal lines worn by the **Sanyasis**, who are devotees of **Shiva**. There are many variations in the design, and many different materials can be used: sandalwood paste, white clay, yellow clay, and red vermilion. The only thing that is never used is the sacred ash (**vibhuti**) characteristic of the Sanyasis. The design and materials used for the urdhvapundra are quite distinctive among various **Vaishnava** ascetic communities, and from this, one can easily identify a particular ascetic's affiliation. For further information see A. W. Entwistle, "Vaishnava Tilakas—Sectarian Marks Worn by Worshipers of Visnu," *IAVRI-Bulletin* 11 and 12, 1982.

## Urdhvaretas

("[one whose] **semen** is drawn upward") Epithet for someone keeping

a vow of **celibacy**, particularly a lifelong vow. In the Hindu tradition, celibacy is important not only for removing one from enjoying the pleasures of the flesh but because on a more basic level, semen is considered the concentrated essence of a man's vital energies. Expending semen is necessary for procreation, but otherwise it should be retained, as a way to conserve one's vital forces. In popular belief, when a man has been celibate for a certain time, the semen is drawn upward to the brain, where it nourishes one's intellectual and spiritual faculties.

## Urushringa

Architectural detail in the temple **architecture** of **Khajuraho**, one of the major forms of the northern Indian **Nagara** style. The Nagara style's primary feature is a **shikhara**, or tower. This primary shikhara is often surrounded by smaller, subsidiary towers, to lead the eye up to the highest point, which is directly over the image of the temple's primary **deity**. The urushringas are turrets built on the sides of these towers, whose shape replicates that of the tallest central tower and that serve to draw the eye upward to the highest tower.

## Urvashi

In Hindu mythology, a particular celestial nymph (**apsara**) who is most famous for her association with King **Pururavas**. Urvashi comes to stay with Pururavas under several conditions, including that she should never see him naked. When she has been gone from **heaven** for a while, the god **Indra** notices her absence and schemes to get her back. One night he sends several minor **deities** to steal two lambs of which Urvashi is very fond, and when Pururavas leaps up to regain them, a flash of lightning reveals him naked, and Urvashi leaves him. They are separate for some time but are eventually reunited—in some accounts for good, and in others for only one night a year.

## Ushas

In the **Vedas**, the oldest and most authoritative Hindu religious texts, Ushas is a **goddess** associated and sometimes identified with the dawn. She is described as lighting the path for the **sun** and driving away the darkness and evil; her presence is thus associated with the regularity of the cosmic order. Ushas is most notable not for what she does—she is a minor **deity**, mentioned in only a handful of the Vedic hymns—but because she is one of the few goddesses in the Vedas. The virtual absence of female divinities in the Vedas is one of the factors behind the notion that the great Goddess, one of the three major deities in later religious life, has her roots in indigenous goddess **worship**. For more information on Ushas and all the goddesses of Hinduism, see David R. Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, 1986.

## Utkala

Northern Indian **brahmin** group that makes up one of the five northern brahmin communities (**Pancha Gauda**); the other four are the **Kanaujias**, the **Maithilas**, the **Gaudas**, and the **Saraswats**. Utkala brahmins are found only in the coastal regions of **Orissa**, on the Bay of Bengal, but their ritual control over the pilgrimage sites there, particularly the city of **Puri**, have helped them remain a significant group.

## Utkutikasana

Sitting posture (**asana**) in **yoga** practice in which the legs are contracted, with the soles of the feet pressed against each other and the outer part of the feet and legs flat on the ground. This posture is the one in which images of the **deities** are portrayed in Hindu iconography, and it seems to be the position called samasthana in the commentaries to the **Yoga Sutras**. This position is also notable because it appears to be portrayed on one of the seals from the **Indus Valley civilization**; the figure in this position is the mysterious horned

deity that some viewers have sought to identify as a "proto-**Shiva**."

## Utpanna Ekadashi

Religious observance falling on the eleventh day (**ekadashi**) of the dark (waning) half of the **lunar month** of **Margashirsha** (November–December). As for all of the eleventh-day observances, this is dedicated to the **worship** of **Vishnu**, and on this day especially, in his form as **Krishna**. Most Hindu festivals have certain prescribed rites, which usually involve fasting (**upavasa**) and worship and often promise specific benefits for faithful performance. Those observing this vow should fast completely on the tenth and perform full worship during the **brahma muhurta** of the eleventh. On this ekadashi, only fruits should be offered as food for the **deity**. Faithfully keeping this festival is believed to bring liberation of the soul (**moksha**). The name *Utpanna* means "born," and the charter myth for this celebration is that of **Anasuya**, wife of the sage **Atri**. Anasuya is famous for her devotion to her husband, and the wives of the gods become jealous of her. **Lakshmi**, **Parvati**, and **Saraswati** send their husbands (Vishnu, **Shiva**, and **Brahma**) to try to compromise her fidelity; the gods come **begging** for food, but they refuse to accept it unless Anasuya gives it to them naked. Through the power she has gained from her devotion to her husband, Anasuya turns the three gods into infants and then nurses them until they are satisfied; these three gods are later "born" into her household: Vishnu as **Dattatreya**, Shiva as **Durvasas**, and Brahma as **Chandra**.

## Utsava Murti

("festival image") Image of a **deity** that is able (and intended) to be moved. These are used mainly during festivals, when the image of the deity is paraded around the town or city on the model of a kingly procession, symbolically surveying his or her realm. The other general class of

Hindu images is the **sthala murti**, which is fixed in one place and never moves from it.

## Uttara ("Later") Mimamsa

Another name for the philosophical school also known as **Vedanta**, which was called Uttara Mimamsa to distinguish it from **Purva Mimamsa**, another philosophical school. See **Vedanta**.

## Uttararamacharita

("Later Acts of **Rama**") Drama written by the **Sanskrit** playwright **Bhavabhuti** (8th c.), which retells the story of the *Ramayana*, the earlier of the two Sanskrit epics. Bhavabhuti's play largely follows the plot of the original **Valmiki** *Ramayana*, with one important difference. Valmiki's text ends with Rama's banishing **Sita** because of suspicions about her virtue and Sita's being swallowed up by the **earth**, which is her mother and witness to her chastity. The *Uttararamacharita*, on the other hand, ends with a complete reconciliation between Rama and Sita. This change may have been prompted solely by the desire for a happy ending, which is one of the characteristic features of Sanskrit drama. It may also indicate that some people were not comfortable with the moral ambiguities of the original text, in which Rama, although claimed to be divine, sometimes acts in unscrupulous and disturbing ways.

## Uttarayana

Term denoting the six months of the solar **year** in which the **sun** is believed to be moving northward. In the common era, this would be the period between the winter solstice and the summer solstice (roughly December 20 to June 20) and would be based on the actual motion of the sun with respect to the **earth**. The Indian solar year is based on the motion of the sun through the **zodiac**, which is calculated differently than in Western astrology. The uttarayana begins on **Makara Sankranti** (the **day**

the sun is calculated as entering Capricorn, usually January 14) and ends the day before **Karka Sankranti** (the day the sun enters Cancer, usually calculated as July 14). The uttarayana is considered a more **auspicious** time than the **Dakshinayana** (in which the sun is traveling toward the south) because the guardian **deity** for the southern direction is **Yama**, who is death personified.

## Uttarkashi

("northern **Benares**") Himalayan town and sacred site (**tirtha**) on the **Bhagirathi River** in northern **Uttar Pradesh**. As its name indicates, Uttarkashi is claimed as the northern form of the city of Benares, the city of the god **Shiva** that is one of the most sacred sites in India. Uttarkashi's charter myths also claim that in the present age, Shiva no longer dwells in Benares, but instead lives in Uttarkashi. To buttress the claim to being the northern Benares Uttarkashi shows many parallels and homologies with Benares itself: In both, the **Ganges River** flows in a northern direction through the city; both have their core region defined as the area between the **Varuna** and Asi Rivers; both are enclosed by a **panchakroshi** pilgrimage route; and in both, the primary **deity** is Shiva in his form as **Vishvanath**. Uttarkashi is a site of great antiquity—**inscriptions** have been discovered from the seventh century C.E.—and although these parallels to Benares might seem slavish, the basis of this claim is not just that Uttarkashi is a holy place, just as Benares is a holy place, but that the holiness of Uttarkashi is equal to that of Benares. Aside from its importance as a pilgrimage town, Uttarkashi is also the district headquarters and a major supply point to the other sites in the region. The town was severely damaged in an earthquake in early 1993 and has been rebuilding slowly since that time.

## Uttar Pradesh

("northern state") Modern Indian state running along the border with **Nepal**. Uttar Pradesh is India's most populous state and is thus one of its most politically important. The state has a range of different ecosystems, from the high **Himalayas** to the rice-growing plains in its eastern basin, which gives it immense natural and social variety. Uttar Pradesh also contains the sources and much of the length for both the **Ganges** and **Yamuna Rivers**, and the state thus contains many of the holiest sites in India. Although a full catalog would be difficult to give, some of the state's major sacred sites (**tirthas**) are the four Himalayan Dhams ("[divine] abodes"), **Yamunotri**, **Gangotri**, **Kedarnath**, and **Badrinath**; the sacred cities of **Haridwar**, **Allahabad**, and **Benares**; the city of **Ayodhya**, the mythic home of the god **Rama**; and the **Braj** region south of Delhi, which is mythically associated with the god **Krishna**. For general information about Uttar Pradesh and all the regions of India, an accessible reference is Christine Nivin et al., *India*, 8th ed., Lonely Planet, 1998. See also **four dhams**.

# V

## Vachaspati Mishra

(ca. late 15th c.) Commentator and compiler of the **dharma literature**. He composed dozens of texts in his working life, including a number of digests (**nibandha**) organized around various subjects, including daily religious rites, purification, **pilgrimage**, death rites (**antyeshthi samskara**), political life, judicial procedures, and funeral rites. In these digests Mishra would draw material relating to the theme from a number of different religious texts, weigh them, and sometimes interpret their position on a religious issue. Mishra was much respected for his learning and piety, and his texts were an important resource to those who followed him.

## Vadagalai

One of the two main subsects in the **Shrivaishnava** religious community, the other being the **Tengalai**. The Shrivaishnavas are devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Vishnu**, and the community's roots lie in the devotional hymns of the **Alvars**, a group of twelve poet-saints who lived in southern India between the seventh and tenth centuries. Two centuries later, the Alvars' devotional outpouring was organized and systematized by the philosopher **Ramanuja** (11th c.), who is considered the Shrivaishnava founder. Ramanuja was convinced that **Brahman**, or Supreme Reality, was a personal **deity** rather than an impersonal abstract principle, and he was also convinced that devotion (**bhakti**) was the most important form of religious practice. **Vishishthadvaita Vedanta**, his philosophical position, stressed both of these convictions and

thus opposed the **Advaita Vedanta** school, founded by the philosopher **Shankaracharya**, which believed that the Supreme Being was impersonal and that realization (**jnana**) was the best spiritual path.

The split between the Tengalais and the Vadagalais came several centuries later and stemmed from differing perspectives on what the individual must do to gain final liberation of the soul (**moksha**). The Vadagalais not only stress the saving power of God's **grace**, but also assert that the individual must respond to that grace and take an active role in his or her salvation. This belief is in complete contrast to the Tengalais, who emphasize the need for absolute surrender (**prapatti**) to the grace of God, through which devotees are saved with no action of their own.

## Vagish

("Lord of Speech") Epithet of the poet-saint **Appar**, reflecting the power of his devotional poetry. Appar was one of the earliest of the **Nayanars**, a group of sixty-three southern Indian poet-saints of the seventh and eighth centuries who were devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva**. See **Appar**.

## Vaidyanath

Form of the god **Shiva**, in his manifestation as the "Lord of Physicians" (vaidya). A temple is named for him at **Deoghar** in the state of **Bihar**. Shiva is present at Vaidyanath in the form of a **linga**, the pillar-shaped image that is his symbolic form, and the Vaidyanath linga is one of the twelve **jyotirlingas**, a network of sites deemed especially sacred to Shiva, and at which Shiva is uniquely present. Vaidyanath's charter myth is associated with the **demon**-king **Ravana**, who is said to be a great devotee (**bhakta**) of Shiva. Ravana travels to Shiva's home on Mount **Kailas** and practices harsh **asceticism** for years, hoping to gain a vision of Shiva. When his asceticism proves unsuccessful, the ten-headed

Ravana proceeds to cut off his heads, one by one, and to offer them to Shiva. As he is about to cut off the last of his heads, Shiva appears before him and grants Ravana a boon. Ravana asks for Shiva to come and live in his palace in **Lanka**, a request that would have made Ravana invincible. Shiva agrees to come in the form of a linga, but warns Ravana that wherever the linga touches the **earth**, it will stay there forever. As Ravana begins traveling back to Lanka, he feels the urge to urinate (which in some versions is described as being caused by Shiva himself, because the other gods have begged Shiva not to go to Lanka). Given the condition of his boon, he cannot put the linga down; moreover, since urination renders one ritually impure, the linga would be defiled if he holds it while answering nature's call (or touches it before he has taken a purifying bath). Ravana ends up handing the linga to a cowherd, giving him strict orders to keep it off the ground. The linga is so heavy, however, that the cowherd eventually has to let it rest on the ground, where it sticks fast, and remains there to this day.

## Vaijayanti Shakti

In the *Mahabharata*, the later of the two great Hindu epics, this is the name of an all-conquering weapon that the storm-god **Indra** gives to the warrior **Karna**. Karna has been born wearing earrings and a suit of armor, and Karna's father, the **sun**-god **Surya**, has ordained that as long as Karna wears these, he cannot be harmed. Indra gains them from Karna by taking the guise of a **brahmin**, and **begging** for them as alms from Karna, who is famous for his generosity. Despite being warned in a **dream**, Karna cannot bring himself to refuse and gives them to Indra. When Indra gives him a boon in return, Karna asks for the Vaijayanti Shakti. Karna keeps this weapon in reserve to kill his nemesis, **Arjuna**, but is forced to use it against another mighty warrior, **Ghatotkacha**, when the latter proves

unconquerable during the Mahabharata war. The loss of this weapon leaves Karna at a disadvantage against Arjuna, and Karna is eventually killed.

## Vaikasi

Second month in the **Tamil year**, corresponding to the northern Indian solar month of Vrshabha (the zodiacal sign of Taurus), which usually falls within May and June. This name is a modification of **Baisakh**, the second month in the lunar **calendar**. The existence of several different calendars is one clear sign of the continuing importance of regional cultural patterns. One way that the Tamils retain their culture is by preserving their traditional calendar. Tamil is one of the few regional languages in India with an ancient, well-established literary tradition. See also **Tamil language**, **Tamil months**, and **Tamil Nadu**.

## Vaikuntha

In Hindu mythology, the name of the **heaven** in which the god **Vishnu** lives.

## Vaishali

City and region in northern **Bihar**; the region's western border is the **Gandaki** River, and its southern border the **Ganges** river. Although now the region is extremely backward, at the time of the Buddha, Vaishali was one of the largest cities in India and a center of intellectual culture of the time. Vaishali is famous as the birthplace of Mahavira. He was the last of the Jain tirthankars, the founding figures in the Jain religious tradition. Tradition also holds Vaishali as the site of the second Buddhist council, convened one hundred years after the death of the Buddha (ca. 386 B.C.E.), at which the Buddhist community split between the Sthaviravadins and the Mahasanghikas.

## Vaisheshika

("noting characteristics") One of the **six schools** of traditional Hindu

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*Vichnou.*

One of the many forms of Vishnu. Vishnu's followers are known as Vaishnavas.

**philosophy**, and a school whose special concern was the elucidation of physics and metaphysics. The Vaisheshika analysis of the categories for the universe was later combined with the stress on reasoning in another of the six schools, the **Nyayas**, to form the Nyaya-Vaisheshika school, sometimes called the **Naiyayikas**. The Vaisheshika school was atomistic—that is, it espoused the belief that all things were made up of a few basic constituent things—and this atomism was the root of the school's metaphysics. Philosophically speaking, the Vaisheshikas were realists—that is, they thought that the world was made up of many different things and that these things actually existed as perceived, except in cases of perceptual error. They believed that all things were composed of nine fundamental substances—the five **elements**, **space**, time,

mind, and Selves—and that whatever exists was both knowable and nameable. The Vaisheshikas subscribed to the **causal model** known as **asatkaryavada**, which posited that when a thing was created, it was a whole new aggregate, completely different from its constituent parts. This causal model tends to multiply the number of things in the universe because each act of creation brings a new thing into being. It also admits that human efforts and actions are one of the causes influencing these effects, making it theoretically possible to act in a way that brings final liberation of the soul (**moksha**).

According to the Vaisheshika analysis, the objects of experience can be divided into six categories: substances, qualities, activity, universals, particulars, and **inherence** (**samavaya**); some later Vaisheshikas add a seventh category, absences. The first three categories can be perceived, whereas the others must be inferred, but the concept of inherence is central to their system of thought. Inherence is the subtle glue connecting all the elements of the universe: wholes and their parts, substances and their qualities, motions and the things that move, general properties with their particular instances, and most important, pleasure and pain to the Self. The philosophical problems with inherence—particularly the notion that it was one single principle and not a collection of things—caused them great difficulty and were responsible for the rise of **Navyanyaya** school, which attempted to explain these relationships in a more sophisticated way. For further information see Karl H. Potter and Sibajiban Bhattacharyya (ed.), *Indian Philosophical Analysis*, 1992; and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore (eds.), *A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy*, 1957.

## Vaishnava

Name denoting a devotee (**bhakta**) of the god **Vishnu**, in any of his myriad forms. Vaishnava theology is most prominently characterized by the doctrine of the ten **avatars**, or divine incarnations: **Fish**, **Tortoise**, **Boar**, **Man-Lion**, **Vamana** (dwarf), **Parashuram**, **Rama**, **Krishna**, **Buddha**, and **Kalki**. It is generally accepted that the avatar doctrine provided a way to assimilate smaller regional **deities** into the larger pantheon by designating them as forms of Vishnu, and it is in the form of these avatars that Vishnu is most commonly worshiped. Of the ten avatars, the two most important ones have been Rama and Krishna, although in the early centuries of the common era, the Boar avatar and the Man-Lion avatar were influential regional deities.

Early Vaishnava religion is cloudy and mysterious. Although Vishnu appears in several hymns in the **Vedas**, the oldest Hindu religious texts, he was clearly a minor deity, and it is difficult to get from there to being the supreme power in the universe. Some scholars have speculated that the cult of Krishna—a deified local cowherd hero—originally came from outside the Vedic religious matrix, and that Krishna was identified with Vishnu as a way to assimilate Krishna's cult into respectable Vedic religion. Such ideas are intriguing but have little hard evidence to support them. Inscriptional evidence clearly shows that the **worship** of Krishna was well-established by the first century B.C.E. These devotees are generally described as **Bhagavatas** ("devotees of the Blessed One"), a name that for the next thousand years is used to refer to Vaishnavas in general. One particular subset of this early Bhagavata community was known as the Pancharatrikas ("followers of the **Pancharatra**"), who later evolved distinctive cosmological doctrines. These mainstream Bhagavatas expressed their devotion to Krishna by composing texts, including parts of the **Bhagavad Gita**, the *Harivamsha*, and various **puranas**, culminating with the *Bhagavata Purana* in about the tenth century.

The tone of Vaishnava devotion took a dramatic turn with the advent of the

**Alvars**, a group of twelve devotional (**bhakti**) poet-saints who lived in southern India between the seventh and tenth centuries. Singing their hymns in the **Tamil language**, the vernacular tongue of their times, the Alvars propounded a bhakti that was marked by passionate devotion to God and characterized by a profound emotional attachment between deity and devotee. Along with their **Shaiva** counterparts, the **Nayanars**, the Alvars spearheaded the revitalization of Hindu religion *vis-à-vis* the Buddhists and the Jains, and in the process, transformed the tradition as the devotional wave they had begun moved northward. The period between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries saw the development of various Vaishnava communities, often stemming from a particular charismatic religious figure.

This process began in southern India, where the philosopher **Ramanuja** (11th c.) founded the **Shrivaishnava** community, while the philosopher **Madhva** (1197–1276) founded the community that bears his name. The next great center was in **Maharashtra**, particularly in the **Varkari Panth**, which was centered on the temple of **Vithoba** in **Pandharpur**; some of this community's greatest figures were **Jnaneshvar** (1275–1296?), **Namdev** (1270–1350), **Chokamela** (d. 1338), **Eknath** (1533–1599), and **Tukaram** (1598–1650). The Maharashtra region also saw the rise of the **Mahanubhav** sect, from the thirteenth century. At **Puri** on India's eastern coast one finds the worship of **Jagannath**, a tribal deity assimilated into the pantheon as a form of Krishna. This was well established by the twelfth century, as the poet **Jayadeva's** *Gitagovinda* clearly shows. Finally, in northern India one finds several vibrant religious groups. A very early figure is the twelfth-century philosopher **Nimbarka**, whose **Nimbarki** community bears his name; several centuries later came **Vishnuswami**, about whom little is known. The greatest explosion of northern Indian devotionalism came in the sixteenth century, with the philosopher **Vallabhacharya** founding the **Pushti Marg**, the Bengali saint **Chaitanya** founding the **Gaudiya Vaishnava** community, and the poet-saint **Harivamsh** (d. 1552) founding the **Radhavallabh** community. All these were based in the **Braj** region that is Krishna's mythic home, and all of them worshiped Krishna: The Pushti Marg and the Gaudiya Vaishnavas considered him to be the supreme divinity, whereas the Nimbarkis and the Radhavallabh community worshiped him in conjunction with his consort **Radha**, whom they considered Krishna's wife and equal. It is also in northern India that the worship of Rama has its deepest roots, as exemplified in the songs of the poet-saint **Tulsidas** (1532–1623?). Many of these schools with long histories are still vital in modern times.

The final Vaishnava community that must be addressed is comprised of **ascetics**. Vaishnava **asceticism** is a more recent development than that of the Shaivas (though dates are uncertain), and it is largely located in the northern part of India (the Shaivas are spread throughout the country). Vaishnava ascetics are known as **Bairagis** ("dispassionate") and are primarily organized into four **sampradays** (religious sects distinguished by unique bodies of teachings), each connected with a major Vaishnava figure. By far the most powerful is the **Shri Sampraday** of the **Ramanandi** ascetics, which traces its spiritual lineage through the poet-saint **Ramananda** to the southern Indian philosopher Ramanuja, whom they claim was Ramananda's **guru**. The **Sanaka Sampraday** of the Nimbarki ascetics traces its spiritual lineage to the philosopher Nimbarka. The **Rudra Sampraday** of the Vishnuswami ascetics traces its lineage through the philosopher Vallabhacharya to an earlier figure, Vishnuswami. Finally, the **Brahma Sampraday**, an ascetic subset of the Gaudiya Vaishnava ascetics, traces its spiritual line through the Bengali saint Chaitanya to the southern Indian philosopher Madhva.

Each of these sampradays is differentiated not only by its founder, but also by its tutelary deity or deities. The Ramanandis **worship** the god Rama, whereas the others worship the god Krishna and his consort Radha, but differ in the position that they give to Radha. Scholars have noted that these historical claims are either highly suspect or completely spurious and that the distinctions among the sampradays are largely academic. Given that the overwhelming majority of these ascetics are Ramanandis, the others seem important only for symbolic reasons, to include a representative from each of the great Vaishnava religious figures.

## Vaishno Devi

Presiding **goddess** of the Vaishno Devi shrine, located in a cave on Trikut mountain in the hills near **Jammu**, and one of the nine **Shiwalik goddesses**. Pilgrims to Vaishno Devi travel by road via Jammu to the village of Katra, whence they walk the ten miles to the shrine itself. As with many of the images of the Shiwalik goddesses, the images at Vaishno Devi are "self-manifested" (**svayambhu**), in the form of three stone outcrops. These outcrops are considered to be **Mahakali**, **Mahalakshmi**, and **Mahasaraswati**, the three forms of the Goddess mentioned in the **Devimahatmya**, the earliest and most authoritative source for the mythology of the Goddess. The presence of all three goddesses is believed to make this site extremely powerful, and according to popular belief, Vaishno Devi grants whatever request her devotees (**bhakta**) make. According to some accounts, those whose wishes are granted are highly advised to make a second trip, both to thank the Goddess and to bear witness to her **grace**. The number of visitors to the site has increased dramatically in the recent past, perhaps reflecting anxieties about modern Indian life.

There are several stories connected with Vaishno Devi's charter myth. The name *Vaishno* is a derivation of **Vishnu**, reflecting the claim that Vaishno Devi was born as a partial **avatar** of Vishnu. One sign of this connection is that Vaishno Devi is a vegetarian goddess, for whom no **animal sacrifices** can be performed. According to another story, Vaishno Devi was the spot at which the arms of the dismembered goddess **Sati** fell to **earth**. Since this story is never further connected to Vaishno Devi, this seems a transparent attempt to tie into the network of the **Shakti Pithas**, a group of shrines sacred to the Goddess, which stretch throughout the subcontinent. The longest version of the charter myth reports that the cave is discovered by a **brahmin** named Shridhara. Shridhara, a great devotee of the Goddess (who tested him in various ways), is disturbed by the fact that he has no children. The Goddess reveals the location of the Vaishno Devi cave to him in a **dream**. After an extensive search he finally finds the cave and is soon blessed with four **sons**, emphasizing the claim that Vaishno Devi will grant the desires of her devotees, whatever they may be. For further information see Kathleen Erndl, *Victory to the Mother*, 1993. See also **pitha**.

## Vaishya

In the traditional Hindu social theory of the four major social groups (**varnas**), the vaishyas were the third group—less influential than the **brahmins** and **kshatriyas**, but with greater status than the **shudras**. In this model of society, the vaishyas' social function was economic activity, to provide the material basis for social life. This image is reflected in the creation story known as the **Purusha Sukta**, in which the vaishyas are described as being created from the Primeval Man's (**purusha's**) thighs—a standard euphemism for the genitals, and thus the most direct connection with fruition and procreation. In fact, the **jatis** (**endogamous** social subgroups, often determined by hereditary occupation) considered to be

vaishyas did all sorts of economic activity, from farming to **animal** husbandry to all sorts of trades and services.

## Vaitarani

In Hindu mythology, a river flowing through the underworld over which souls must cross on the way to their audience with the god **Yama**, the god of the dead. For righteous people the crossing is fairly easy, and they are widely believed to get over by holding the tail of a **cow**. For wicked people, on the other hand, the Vaitarani is a river of pus, **blood**, spit, and other polluting substances, in which various ferocious beasts lie in wait.

## Vajapeya

Along with the **Rajasuya**, one of the two most famous of the Vedic sacrifices. The Vajapeya **sacrifice** was essentially intended to provide an established king with continuing strength and vitality, magically rejuvenating him after a long reign and in the face of advancing age. In ancient times the rite was elaborate and entailed the sacrifice of **animals**; when it is performed in modern times it is performed in one day, and the **animal sacrifice** is symbolic.

## Vajra

Name for the thunderbolt, conceived as one of the divine weapons. It has two symmetrical sides, sometimes pointed, with a handle in the middle. The vajra is an enormously important symbol in Buddhism, particularly the tantric forms (i.e., secret, ritually based religious practices) found in Tibet, but it appears very seldom in Hindu iconography. It is attested to be an attribute of certain forms of the gods **Ganesh** and **Vishnu**, but on the whole it is not as important as some of the other symbols. See also **tantra**.

## Vajreshvari Devi

("**Goddess** of the Thunderbolt") Presiding **deity** of the Vajreshvari temple in **Kangra**, **Himachal Pradesh**, and the only one of the nine **Shiwalik goddesses** whose temple is in an urban center. Kangra has a long tradition as a center of Goddess **worship** and may have been a site for practitioners of **tantra**, a secret, ritually based religious practice. The charter myth identifies Vajreshvari Devi as one of the **Shakti Pithas**, a network of sites sacred to the Goddess, which spreads throughout the subcontinent. Each Shakti Pitha marks the site where a body part of the dismembered goddess **Sati** fell to **earth**, taking form there as a different goddess; in the case of Vajreshvari Devi the body part was Sati's breast—certainly a highly charged part of the female body, thus making it a more attractive place for tantric practitioners. Another indication of her possible connection comes from her name, in which the image of the thunderbolt carries associations with Buddhist tantric practice. For further information see Kathleen Erndl, *Victory to the Mother*, 1993. See also **pitha**.

## Vajroli Mudra

Yogic practice attributed to **Nathpanthi** ascetics, as part of their effort to attain physical immortality through the practice of **hatha yoga**. The dominant metaphor used in describing the process of gaining immortality in this manner is the union of **sun** and **moon**, in which the sun stands for the processes of change and destruction, and the moon for stability and immortality. In some cases this union was described in very abstract terms, as a process in the **subtle body**, at other times in the most concrete possible fashion, for which the best example is vajroli mudra. This is urethral suction or the "fountain-pen technique," in which a man, having ejaculated into his female partner, draws his **semen**, now refined through contact with the woman's uterine **blood**, back into his

body, along with a certain amount of his partner's blood. Despite some commentators' discomfort and denials (characteristic of most references to sexual activity as part of Hindu spiritual practice), vajroli mudra is consistently named as one of the Nathpanthi practices. For further information see George W. Briggs, *Gorakhnath and the Kanphata Yogis*, 1982.

## Vakataka Dynasty

(4th–6th c.) Central Indian dynasty whose ancestral homeland was in the center of modern India. The Vakataka zenith came between the fourth and sixth centuries, during which their sway extended through most of the **Deccan** plateau. At the turn of the fifth century, the Vakataka king Rudrasena II married Prabhavati Gupta, creating a marriage alliance with the northern Indian **Gupta dynasty** that gave the two dynasties sway over much of India. Prabhavati Gupta ruled as regent following Rudrasena's untimely death, during which the Vakataka kingdom was a virtual part of the Gupta empire, but in the time after that the Vakatakas regained greater autonomy.

## Vallabhacharya

(1479–1531) Philosopher, teacher, and founder of the religious community known as the **Pushti Marg**. Vallabhacharya propounded a philosophical position called **Shuddadvaita** ("pure non-dualism"), in which the Ultimate Reality was conceived as personalized, in the form of **Krishna**, rather than the impersonal **Brahman** propounded by the **Advaita Vedanta** school. Since Vallabhacharya had personalized his conception of the Supreme Reality, the supreme religious goal was conceived in terms of relationship with that divine person. This stress on devotion was soon articulated in elaborately arranged forms of image **worship** in the Pushti Marg's temples. The devotees (**bhakta**) would visualize themselves as Krishna's

companions during his daily activities—waking, **eating**, taking the **cows** to graze, coming home, etc.—and thus gain the opportunity to take part in the divine play (**lila**). This emphasis on visualization and participation was fostered through the development of vast liturgical resources, which were composed by eight poets (the **ashtachap**) who were associated with Vallabhacharya and **Vitthalnath**, his **son** and successor. For further information see R.K. Barz, *The Bhakti Sect of Vallabhacarya*, 1976.

## Vallabhite

Popular name for the followers of **Vallabhacharya**. As the suffix clearly shows, this term is one term formed by non-Hindus that was used to describe a particular Hindu group. In earlier times it was used by British government officials, but today it is used mainly by scholars, usually foreigners. Vallabha's own followers would be far more likely to describe themselves as belonging to the **Pushti Marg**.

## Valli

In the mythology of southern India, the god **Skanda** (in his southern Indian form as **Murugan**) becomes enamored of and marries Valli, a young girl from a group of tribal hunters. The marriage takes place despite his earlier marriage to the **goddess Devasena**, who has been given to him by **Indra** and the established Hindu gods. Murugan's marriage with Valli is a sign of his connection with the land and probably reflects his earlier past as a tribal **deity**. The marriage is described as taking place at **Tiruttani** in **Tamil Nadu**, but he is also described as settling at **Kataragama** in **Sri Lanka**.

## Valmiki

In Hindu mythology, a sage who is regarded as the first poet, and who is traditionally cited as the author of the *Ramayana*, the earlier of the two great **Sanskrit** epics. According to legend,

The god Vishnu's Vamana avatar, a dwarf. Vishnu takes this form to release the universe from the control of the demon Bali.

Valmiki is a bandit in his early life. One day, one of his victims asks him whether his family will also share the sins he is committing, and when Valmiki finds out that they will not, he has a change of heart. He sits down in a secluded place and begins to do **japa** (recitation), but his heart is so blackened by his sins that the only words he can say are "mara mara" ("death, death"). After a long time the syllables become reversed, and by reciting "Rama Rama" he expiates his former sins. This recitation is so long that a colony of white ants (in Sanskrit, named "valmika") builds a hill over him, and when he emerges from this he is given the name Valmiki.

After his emergence, Valmiki builds an **ashram** on the banks of the Tamasa River and lives a quiet life. He gives shelter to **Sita** after she has been exiled from **Ayodhya** by her husband, **Rama**, and also cares for her **sons**, **Lava** and **Kusha**. One day when Valmiki is walking by the Tamasa River, he sees a hunter shoot a pair of courting Krauncha birds, and in his intense anger, his rebuke to the hunter comes out in verse; according to legend, this is the first poem ever composed. After this first verse composition, the god **Brahma** appears, and at Brahma's encouragement Valmiki composes the *Ramayana*.

## Valmiki Jayanti

Festival celebrated on the **full moon** in the **lunar month** of **Ashvin** (September–October). This day is considered to be the birthday of the poet **Valmiki**, who according to tradition is the author of the ***Ramayana***, the earlier of the two **Sanskrit** epics.

## Vamachara

("left-hand practice") In the secret, ritually based religious practice known as **tantra**, this term denotes a type of tantric practice that makes ritual use of forbidden substances, such as the Five Forbidden Things (**panchamakara**), or promotes behavior that the orthodox would consider scandalous or objectionable. When seen in a tantric context, the use of such normally forbidden substances is not mere license, but a powerful ritual tool. One of the most pervasive tantric assumptions is the ultimate unity of everything that exists. From a tantric perspective, to affirm that the entire universe is one principle—often, conceived as the activity of a particular **deity**—means that the adept must reject all concepts based on dualistic thinking. The "Five Forbidden Things" provide a ritual means for breaking down duality because in this ritual the adept breaks societal norms forbidding consumption of **intoxicants**, nonvegetarian food, and illicit sexuality, in a conscious effort to sacralize what is normally forbidden. Within the tantric tradition itself there is a long-standing debate about the propriety of such acts, and whereas the vamachara practice uses these elements in their actual forms, in the **dakshinachara** ("right-hand") practice, other items are substituted for the forbidden ones. This distinction between "right" and "left" hand also reveals the pervasive polarity between right and left in

Indian culture, with the former being deemed better.

## Vamakhepa

(1843–1911) **Ascetic** devotee (**bhakta**) of the **Goddess** in her fierce and powerful form as Tara; his presence and supposed miraculous powers are largely responsible for the importance of **Tarapith** as an important regional sacred site (**tirtha**) in **West Bengal**. From his earliest childhood, Vamakhepa was occupied with thoughts of the Goddess, and from an early age he took up residence in the **cremation ground** at Tarapith, where he undertook the **worship** of Tara. Various stories describe his power to heal people of all sorts of ailments, as well as his complete disregard for all accepted standards—according to tradition, he once urinated on the temple's image of Tara, to show his contempt for a **deity** made of iron, and was struck in punishment by the Goddess.

## Vamana Avatar

Fifth **avatar** of **Vishnu**, this one in the form of a dwarf ("vamana"). As with all of Vishnu's avatars, the Vamana avatar comes into being in a time of crisis and serves to restore the cosmic balance that has been thrown out of equilibrium. In this case the source of trouble stems from a **demon** (asura) named **Bali**, who has grown so powerful that he is able to rule the entire universe, doing as he wishes. As in many other cases, Vishnu is able to counter and conquer this disruptive force through cunning and trickery, rather than simple overt power.

The mythic tale describes how Bali is sponsoring a great **sacrifice**, to which all the gods and sages have come. Vishnu comes in the form of a dwarf, disguised as a mendicant **brahmin**. Bali gives many rich gifts to those attending, as part of the gift-giving (**dana**) associated with sacrifice, and he offers to give Vamana anything that he asks for. Vamana refuses the offer of riches, land, and material wealth, and asks only for three paces worth of land to set up his own sacrificial altar. Bali is amused by the request and grants it flippantly despite the warnings of **Shukra**, his religious preceptor (**guru**), that he should not do this.

As soon as Bali pours **water** on Vamana's hand, marking that the gift has been given irrevocably, Vamana suddenly begins to grow. He grows so large that he takes up all the space in the cosmos and then begins to take his three steps. With his first step he traverses the **earth**, with his second the **heavens**, and with his third step there is nowhere else to go. Bali realizes that he has been defeated, and as a **gesture** of submission indicates that Vishnu's third step should fall on his head. Vishnu's third step pushes Bali down into the netherworld, where he still remains as the ruler. As for many of the other avatars, Bali's fate gives an important lesson: Vishnu's purpose is not to destroy him, but to restore the cosmic balance that has been lost through one being gaining disproportionate or inappropriate power. Through his submission to Vishnu, Bali remains a powerful being, but on a diminished scale.

The motif of measuring out the universe in three steps is part of the oldest stratum of Vishnu's mythology. In one of the few hymns to Vishnu in the **Rg Veda** (1.154), the oldest Hindu religious text, he is described as a protective and benevolent **deity**, who with three steps defines the boundaries of the universe. This manifestation of Vishnu is named Trivikrama ("[taking] three steps"); it seems likely that the motif from this hymn was grafted onto the Vamana story as part of the process of assimilation into the pantheon.

## Vana Dashanami

One of the ten divisions of the **Dashanami Sanyasis**, renunciant ascetics who are devotees (**bhakta**) of **Shiva**. The Dashanamis were supposedly established by the ninth-century

Varanasi ghats with pilgrims bathing in the Ganges.

philosopher, **Shankaracharya**, in an effort to create a corps of learned men who could help revitalize Hindu life. Each of the divisions is designated by a different name—in this case, vana ("forest"). Upon **initiation**, new members are given this name as a surname to their new **ascetic** names, thus allowing for immediate group identification.

Aside from their individual identities, these ten "named" divisions are divided into four larger organizational groups. Each group has its headquarters in one of the four monastic centers (**maths**) supposedly established by Shankaracharya, as well as other particular religious associations. The Vana Dashanamis belong to the **Bhogawara** group, which is affiliated with the **Govardhan Math** in the city of **Puri**, on the bay of Bengal.

## Vanamalin

("wearing a garland of forest flowers") Epithet of the god **Krishna**. See **Krishna**.

## Vanaprastha

("forest-dweller") According to the **dharma literature**, the vanaprastha was the third of the idealized **stages of life** (ashrama) for a **twice-born** man, that is, a man born into the **brahmin**, **kshatriya**, or **vaishya** communities, who had undergone the adolescent religious **initiation** known as the "second birth." According to this idealized pattern, after engaging in religious learning as a celibate student (**brahmacharin**), the first stage; marrying and raising a family as a householder (**grhastha**), the second stage; a man should, in the third, gradually disengage himself from the world by giving up his attachments and withdrawing to a more secluded place. The renunciation in this third stage of life is

less severe than the last stage, the **Sanyasi**—the texts are very clear that he should remain with his wife and that he should continue to perform the prescribed daily domestic sacrifices. Although in contemporary times it is fairly common for older people to live a more retired life, bequeathing the bulk of the family affairs to their children, few people live by the strict prescriptions for the vanaprastha. The prescription for this third stage of life is generally considered to be a reaction to the growth of **asceticism** in the centuries before the turn of the common era, particularly the monastic asceticism of the Buddhists and Jains, which they claimed was religiously superior to the life of a householder. The vanaprastha is a transitional stage that paves the way for an **ascetic** life, but it is set in one's old age and thus allows for the fulfilling of one's duties to family and society.

## Varada Hasta

In Indian **dance**, **sculpture**, and ritual, a particular hand **gesture** (**hasta**), in which the left hand is held with the fingers pointing downward and the palm exposed to the viewer, with the fingers either fully extended or slightly curled. The word *varada* means "boon-granting," and the gesture is meant to indicate beneficence and generosity.

## Varaha Avatar

The third **avatar** or incarnation of the god **Vishnu**, in the form of a boar. See **Boar avatar**.

## Varanasi

Traditional name for the sacred city of **Benares**. The name *Varanasi* may be generally used to denote the whole city, but in a more specific context this refers to one of the concentric sacred zones surrounding the **Vishvanath** temple, the city's ritual center. The smallest of these zones is called **Avimukta**, the second is Varanasi, and the largest is named **Kashi**. The sacred zone of Varanasi is conceived as the area between the Varana and the Asi rivers—the traditional boundaries of the city of Benares—but Varanasi's boundaries do not stretch inland as far as those of Kashi.

## Varkari

Religious community of devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Vishnu**, in his manifestation as **Vithoba**. Varkari **worship** has centered on Vithoba's temple at **Pandharpur** in the southern part of the state of **Maharashtra**. The community's history begins with a series of extraordinary devotional (**bhakti**) poet-saints, dating from the twelfth to the seventeenth century: **Jnaneshvar**, **Namdev**, **Eknath**, **Tukaram**, **Chokamela**, **Gora**, **Janabai**, **Bahina Bai**, and many others. One of the ways that these saints expressed their devotion was in pilgrimage to Pandharpur, and this pilgrimage is still the major ritual act in the Varkari community. Twice a **year** Varkaris come on pilgrimage to Pandharpur and time their travel so that all the pilgrims arrive on the same **day**—the eleventh day (**ekadashi**) in the bright half of **Ashadh** (June–July) in the summer, and the eleventh day in the bright half of **Kartik** (October–November) in the fall. Individual pilgrims travel in small groups called **dindis**, often made up of people from the same neighborhood or locality. The dindis are organized into larger groups known as **palkhis**, each of which is associated with one of the Varkari poet-saints and is led by a **palanquin** (palkhi, an enclosed single-person litter borne on the shoulders of bearers by means of poles) bearing the sandals of that saint. Each palkhi departs from a place associated with its particular saint—for example, the palkhi of Jnaneshvar leaves from the town of **Alandi** in which he lived—and thus he and all the other saints are still symbolically journeying to Pandharpur twice a year. During their journey pilgrims sing the devotional songs composed by these poet-saints. In this way, the pilgrims are emulating the saints

Child celebrating Vasant Panchami.

before them, both by treading in their physical footsteps and by singing their songs of devotion. Although the pilgrimage concludes with the entry to Pandharpur and the worship of Vithoba, the most important part is the journey itself. For more information see G. A. Deleury, *The Cult of Vithoba*, 1960; I. B. Karve, "On the Road," in the *Journal of Asian Studies,* Vol. 22, No. 1, 1962; and Digambar Balkrishna Mokashi, *Palkhi*, 1987.

## Varna

("color") Theoretical system dividing Indian society into four major groups, each with a differing occupation and status: **brahmin**, **kshatriya**, **vaishya**, and **shudra**. The highest status was held by the brahmins, who were priests and scholars, next came the kshatriyas, who were kings and soldiers, then the vaishyas, whose purview was economic life, and finally the shudras, who were supposed to serve the others. This picture is articulated as early as the **Vedas**, the oldest Hindu religious texts, in particular by a hymn in the **Rg Veda** (10.90)

known the **Purusha Sukta**. The Purusha Sukta describes the creation of the world and of society as stemming from the **sacrifice** of the Primeval Man (**purusha**), with the brahmins coming from his mouth, the kshatriyas from his shoulders, the vaishyas from his thighs (a common euphemism for the genitals), and the shudras from his feet.

This four-fold scheme is conceptually neat, but the real picture was far more complex. For one thing, none of these four varnas was as uniform as this scheme might lead one to suppose: Each of the varnas had multiple occupationally defined subcommunities known as **jatis**, which often competed for status with one another, even though they may have been members of the same varna. The other discrepancy was that local circumstances had a great effect on any particular community's social status. As one example, the **Vellala** community in **Tamil Nadu** had a great deal of status and power, even though they were technically **shudras**, because they were a landholding community. On the opposite end, it is not uncommon for brahmins in northern

India to earn their living by trading or other businesses. This four-fold varna plan does give the general status picture, but the specifics are much more detailed.

## Varnashrama Dharma

In the **dharma literature**, varnashrama dharma is the ordering of **dharma** or religious duty based on the hierarchical social ordering of the four major social groups (**varnas**) and the four successive **stages of life** (ashramas). According to this theory, all people would be able to discern their social status and appropriate function based on their social class and stage of life. The interrelationship between these two sets of categories is often used to denote traditional Hindu society, in theory if not always in fact. The term survives in modern times, but because the doctrine of the ashramas is now largely ignored, those who uphold varnashrama dharma are primarily defending the hierarchical social divisions commonly known as the **caste** system.

## Varuna

In the **Vedas**, the oldest and most authoritative religious texts, Varuna is a **deity** associated with the sky, with waters, with justice, and with truth. Varuna belongs to the earliest layer of the Indo-**Aryan** deities; this is clearly shown by comparisons with the Avesta, an ancient Iranian sacred text that shows many parallels with the Vedas, and with even older epigraphic sources. As portrayed in the Vedas, however, Varuna's influence has clearly declined—there are far fewer hymns addressed to him than to deities such as **Indra**, **Agni**, and **Soma**, and he seems to have played a far less important role than these other deities in Vedic religion.

In the Vedas, Varuna is portrayed as the guardian of **rta**, the cosmic order through which the world proceeds. As the deity associated with the high **heaven**, he also watches over the deeds of human beings and punishes them for any transgressions. The best known hymn to Varuna, **Rg Veda** 7.86, shows Varuna's connection with justice, moral order, and the waters. The hymn is the lament of a person who has committed some offense against Varuna and whose sin has become visible through being afflicted with **dropsy**, in which the body retains its fluids and swells. The speaker begs Varuna to reveal the forbidden act, "committed under the influence of **liquor**, anger, or heedlessness," so that Varuna may be propitiated and the sufferer healed.

Despite his virtual eclipse early in the tradition, in the later tradition, Varuna retains his association as the god presiding over the waters. He is also considered to be one of the eight **Guardians of the Directions**, each of which is associated with one of eight points on the compass. Varuna presides over the western direction.

## Vasant Panchami

Festival falling on the fifth **day** (panchami) of the bright (waxing) half of the **lunar month** of **Magh** (January–February), celebrated as the first day of spring (vasant). This day is considered sacred to the **goddess Saraswati**, patron **deity** of the arts, music, and learning. In her honor, celebrants sing songs in melodic modes (**ragas**) associated with spring. Given Saraswati's connection with learning, this is also traditionally reckoned as the day on which young children should begin their studies.

Vasant Panchami is also associated with **Kama**, the god of love, since the coming of spring brings the reappearance of flowering plants, with their scents and colors. This is supposedly the day that Kama attempts to instill **erotic** desire in the god **Shiva's** heart, first by bringing spring to Mount **Kailas**, where Shiva is meditating, and then shooting Shiva with one of his flower arrows. Shiva awakens from his meditation, becomes angry at Kama,

and reduces him to ashes with a burst of flame from his third eye. Despite being destroyed, in the end Kama is successful—after being awakened, Shiva becomes aware of **Parvati's ascetic** practice and eventually becomes her husband.

## Vashitvam

("control") One of the eight superhuman powers (**siddhi**) traditionally believed to be conferred by high spiritual attainment. This particular power gives one the ability to control others, while remaining free from outside control.

## Vasishtha

In Hindu mythology, one of the Seven Sages whose names mark exogamous clan "lineages" (**gotra**; in exogamous groups members must marry outside the group); the others are **Gautama**, **Bharadvaja**, **Kashyapa**, **Bhrgu**, **Atri**, and **Vishvamitra**. All **brahmins** are believed to be descended from these seven sages, with each family taking the name of its progenitor as its gotra name. In modern times, these gotra divisions are still important, since marriage within the gotra is forbidden. After her marriage, the new bride adopts her husband's gotra as part of her new identity.

In the *Ramayana*, the earlier of the two great Hindu epics, Vasishtha is a very powerful sage who is the **guru** to the kings of the Solar dynasty, including King **Dasharatha** and his **son**, **Rama**. Vasishtha is also famous for his long-standing feud with the sage Vishvamitra, which causes numerous confrontations. The feud's genesis is ultimately rooted in the difference in status between **kshatriyas** and brahmins. Vishvamitra is a king who stops with a host of retainers at the forest **ashram** of the brahmin Vasishtha. Upon asking for food, Vishvamitra is amazed at the ability of Vasishtha's **cow**, the **Kamadhenu**, to provide food for everyone. Vishvamitra first tries to buy the Kamadhenu, then tries to take it by

force, but his minions are defeated by the **magic** powers generated by Vasishtha's **tapas** (**ascetic** practices). Vishvamitra finally admits defeat and begins to do ascetic practices to generate power of his own. Two of their most celebrated clashes are over King **Trishanku** and his son, **Harishchandra**; in each case the real issue is the mutual antipathy of these two sages. See also **marriage prohibitions**.

## Vastra

("clothing") The seventh of the sixteen traditional **upacharas** ("**offerings**") given to a **deity** as part of **worship**, on the model of treating the deity as an honored guest. In this offering, the deity is offered clothing, either through symbolic presentation or through physically dressing the image. The underlying motive here, as for all the upacharas, is to show one's love for the deity and minister to the deity's needs.

## Vastradhari

("wearing the clothes") Name for a newly initiated **Sanyasi ascetic**, one who has put on the ascetic robes, but still has to undergo a period of training as a disciple to his **guru**.

## Vasudeva

The god **Krishna's** father. His most important role in Krishna's mythology comes on the night of Krishna's **birth**, when Vasudeva is able to spirit the infant Krishna out of prison, his birthplace, to the home of his foster parents, **Nanda** and **Yashoda**. Vasudeva returns that night, bearing Yashoda's newborn girl, who is really the **goddess Bhadrakali** in disguise. The next morning **Kamsa** kills the child by dashing it against a stone, but from the body arises the goddess, who taunts Kamsa that the person who will slay him has escaped.

## Vasudeva

(2)("**son** of Vasudeva") Epithet of the god **Krishna**, a patronymic formed from the name of his father, Vasudeva, by lengthening the initial vowel. See **Krishna**.

## Vasuki

In Hindu mythology, a famous **Naga** (mythical serpent). Vasuki's most famous mythic role comes in the story in which the gods and **demons** churn the Ocean of Milk to obtain the nectar of immortality (**amrta**). In the form of his **Tortoise avatar**, the god **Vishnu** serves as the churning-base, Mount **Mandara** serves as the churning-stick, and Vasuki, with his enormous length, as the churning-rope. With the gods on one side and the demons on the other, they pull Vasuki back and forth until the sea of milk gives up its treasures.

## Vata

("air") Along with **pitta** ("bile") and **kapha** ("phlegm"), one of the three humors (**tridosha**) in **ayurveda**, the traditional system of Indian medicine. Every person has all three of these humors, but usually one is predominant, and this marks a person in certain ways, particularly with regard to health, digestion, and metabolism. Vata is associated with the element of air, which is quick, light, and dry. People whose predominant humor is vata are said to have quick minds, light bodies, and tend to always be doing something. At the same time, they lack substantiality and can run down easily if not careful.

## Vatsalya ("calf-like") Bhava

The fourth of the five **modes of devotion** to God that were most prominently articulated by **Rupa Goswami**, a devotee (**bhakta**) of the god **Krishna** and a follower of the Bengali saint **Chaitanya**. Rupa used differing types of human relationships as models for differing conceptions of the link between **deity** and devotee. These five models showed growing emotional intensity, from the peaceful (**shanta**) sense that comes from realizing one's complete identity with **Brahman** or Supreme Reality, to conceiving of God as one's master, friend, child, or lover. In the Vatsalya mode of devotion, devotees consider themselves as God's parents, lavishing love and care on the deity as a **cow** cares for her calf. This is an emotionally intense mode of relationship, but without the **erotic** element present in the fifth mode, **madhurya bhava**.

## Vatsyayana

According to tradition, the author of the *Kama Sutra*. This text is usually associated with an exhaustive catalog of sexual positions and pleasures, which it certainly contains, but in fact, the text goes far beyond this. Vatsyayana was interested in exploring desire in all its manifestations, and the text begins with a consideration of the four **aims of life** (purushartha): worldly goods (**artha**), desire (**kama**), religious duty (**dharma**), and liberation of the soul (**moksha**). Vatsyayana argued that because desire was one of the established ends of human life, its pursuit was thus a good thing, as long as this pursuit did not interfere with the other ends.

Having established the legitimacy of desire, Vatsyayana then talks about how to foster it. The *Kama Sutra*'s second book contains the text's best-known material, the discussion and categorization of various types of sexual union. It begins by characterizing various types of sexual endowment, both male and female, then proceeds to describe different sorts of embracing, kissing, scratching, and biting as symbols of passion, sexual positions, and oral sex. This is followed by chapters on gaining a wife, attracting other men's wives (which the text discourages, except in cases where one's passion is "too strong"), courtesans, and general remarks on attraction. The text is thus a manual for all phases of **erotic** life, in which sex can be refined into a vehicle for

aesthetic experience, as well as pure carnal pleasure.

## Vatsyayana

(2) (4th c.) Writer and commentator in the **Nyaya** school, one of the **six schools** of traditional Hindu **philosophy**, which since early in the common era has been combined with another of the six schools, the **Vaisheshikas**. Vatsyayana is best known for his commentary on **Gautama's Nyaya Sutras**, themselves the foundational text for the Nyaya school.

## Vayu

In Hindu mythology, the **deity** who is **wind** personified. Vayu is a minor deity who is one of the eight **Guardians of the Directions**; his direction is the northwest. Aside from being the external winds, Vayu is also believed to be present inside the body, in the five "**vital winds**" (**prana**) through which all physiological processes are believed to occur. Although Vayu is a minor deity, two of his **sons** are extremely significant. His son, **Bhima**, is one of the five **Pandava** brothers who are the protagonists in the *Mahabharata*, the later of the two great **Sanskrit** epics. Bhima is famous for his size and strength, and also for his earthy appetites, both of which reflect the wind's raw, uncontrollable nature. Vayu's other famous son is the monkey-god, **Hanuman**. Even though mythically Hanuman is most famous for his devotion and service to the god **Rama**, in practical terms he is one of the most popular and widely worshiped deities in northern India. This popularity may stem from his intermediate status; because Hanuman is also a servant, he is less remote and majestic than Rama and, therefore, accessible to human petitions. Another important factor is that this accessibility is coupled with power and the ability to protect those who call on him.

## Veda

("knowledge") The oldest and most authoritative group of Hindu sacred texts, also designated by the term **shruti** ("heard"). According to tradition, these texts were not composed by human beings, but are based in the primordial vibrations of the cosmos itself. The ancient sages, whose faculties of perception had been honed through arduous religious practice, were able to "hear" and understand these vibrations, and transmitted them to others in a lineage of learning. On one level, the term *veda* is part of the names of four individual texts—the **Rg Veda**, **Sama Veda**, **Yajur Veda**, and **Atharva Veda**, each of which has a differing focus and content. The term *veda* is also a collective term for the material in these texts or their associated appendices: the Vedic hymns (**samhitas**), the **Brahmanas**, the **Aranyakas**, and the **Upanishads**. Although these four groups of texts are all considered part of the Vedas, they have very different forms and characteristics. The samhitas are hymns of praise addressed to particular **deities**, and are found mainly in the Rg Veda and the Sama Veda. In contrast, the Brahmanas are detailed ritual manuals, giving the instructions for performing complex sacrificial rites; the Aranyakas and the Upanishads are speculative ponderings on the nature of the cosmos. The Vedas were considered so sacred that for 3,000 years they were not written down, but transmitted orally, a mode of transmission that still persists today. The Vedas' power comes not from their literal meaning, but from their very sound, which is the identical sound heard by the sages long ago. To safeguard this tradition, Hindus developed an elaborate system of **mnemonics** to ensure that the texts would not be altered or corrupted, thus preserving their efficacy.

## Vedanga

("[subsidiary] member of the **Veda**") General name for six classes of works considered auxiliary to the Vedas

because they were intended to facilitate its use. These six were guides to proper articulation and pronunciation (**shiksha**), metrical forms (**chandas**), **Sanskrit** grammar (**vyakarana**), etymological explanations of archaic words (**nirukta**), determining astrologically appropriate times for **sacrifice** (**jyotisha**), and ritual and ceremonial guides (**kalpa**).

## Vedanta

The latest of the **six schools** in traditional Hindu **philosophy**. The name Vedanta literally means "the end of the Vedas," and reflects their contention that they were revealing the ultimate meaning of these sacred texts. Vedanta proponents gave particular attention to the **Upanishads**, which were also the latest stratum of Vedic texts, and thus their "end" in a different sense. These texts have served as authoritative sources for several major schools, with widely differing philosophical positions. The best known and most important of these is the **Advaita Vedanta** school, propounded by the philosopher **Shankaracharya** and his followers. The Advaita school upholds a philosophical position known as monism, which is the belief in a single impersonal Ultimate Reality that they call **Brahman**. For Advaita proponents, reality is thus "nondual" (advaita)—that is, all things are nothing but the formless, unqualified Brahman, despite the appearance of difference and diversity. For the Advaitins, this assumption of diversity is a fundamental misunderstanding of the ultimate nature of things and a manifestation of **avidya**. Although often translated as "ignorance," avidya is better understood as the lack of genuine understanding, which causes human beings to be trapped in karmic bondage, reincarnation (**samsara**), and suffering.

Whereas the Advaita school conceives of this Ultimate Reality in abstract impersonal terms, the other Vedanta schools are theistic—that is, they conceive the Ultimate Reality as a personal God, namely the god **Vishnu**. The two other major schools are the **Vishishthadvaita** vedanta ("qualified nondualism") propounded by **Ramanuja** and the **Dvaita** Vedanta ("dualist") propounded by **Madhva**. The major differences between these two schools stem from assumptions about connections between God, human souls, and the world. Ramanuja tends to see these in a continuum, with the world and human souls sharing in the divine nature, whereas Madhva stresses the great gulf between God and all other things. Another minor school is the **dvaitadvaita** vedanta ("dualism and nondualism") of **Nimbarka**, which strives to find some middle ground between Advaita Vedanta's monism, and Dvaita Vedanta's dualism. Nimbarka stressed that the world and souls were dependent on God, in whom they exist, and with whom they had a subtle connection. Even from their names, it is obvious that there are significant differences between these positions.

## Vedanta Deshika

(13th c.) Writer and commentator in the **Vishishthadvaita Vedanta** philosophical school. Vedanta Deshika was a follower of **Ramanuja** and interpreted Ramanuja as teaching that there were two sorts of liberation: a lower one in which one was subject to no outside forces, and a higher one in which one's entire being was focused on the Lord, whom Ramanuja identified as the god **Vishnu**. The human being is considered both identical to and different from the Lord, which means the perfect identity is never possible; God's transcendence leads to the exaltation of devotion (**bhakti**) and the stress on submission to God's **grace**.

## Vedanta Society

The oldest Hindu missionary organization in America, established in 1897 by **Swami Vivekananda**. The society stresses the philosophical teachings of **Vedanta**, which it understands as referring solely

to the **Advaita Vedanta** school, Vivekananda's major emphasis. The society's tone has been nontheistic, nonritual, and rationalist; its constituency has been drawn from liberals and intellectuals, such as the writer Aldous Huxley.

## Vedanta Sutras

Text ascribed to the sage **Badarayana** in the third to fifth century B.C.E. Along with the **Upanishads** and the **Bhagavad Gita**, the *Vedanta Sutras* is one of the three traditional sources for the **Vedanta** school, one of the **six schools** of traditional Hindu **philosophy**. The text itself is a collection of 555 brief aphorisms (**sutras**), which are so terse that they presuppose a commentary. The sutras focus particularly on the ideas about **Brahman**, hence their other common name, the **Brahma Sutra**. In content, the first section describes the nature of Absolute Reality, the second responds to objections and criticizes other positions, the third details the means to acquire knowledge, and the fourth describes the benefits of such knowledge.

## Vedarambha ("beginning of Veda [study]") Samskara

Traditionally, the twelfth of the life-cycle ceremonies (**samskaras**). In this ceremony, a newly initiated **brahmacharin**—a young man who had entered the celibate student phase of life—would commence to study the Vedas, the oldest Hindu religious texts. This rite is not mentioned in the earliest texts in the **dharma literature**, perhaps under the assumption that **Veda** study would commence at an appropriate time, after learning had commenced with the earlier **vidyarambha samskara**.

## Vegetarianism

A dietary practice that carries extremely high status among Hindu people, probably because of its associations with strict **brahmin** practice; even people who are nonvegetarian themselves will commonly think of a vegetarian diet as "purer." Strict vegetarians eat no flesh or eggs, but milk and milk products are always eaten and are considered pure and health-giving, probably because they come from the **cow**. Those people who keep the strictest diets will also often refrain from onions and garlic, which are considered to excite the passions. This religious commitment to vegetarianism by a certain part of the population, and the general status given to "pure" vegetarian food, are both responsible for the great variety of vegetarian cooking found in Indian culture. Despite the higher status given to a vegetarian diet, most modern Hindus are not vegetarian—a recent poll of urban Hindus found that only about 25 percent were pure vegetarian, although the number may be higher in villages, which tend to be more traditional.

## Vellala

The landlord community throughout much of traditional **Tamil Nadu**. Although technically the Vellalas were of **shudra** status, their control over the land gave them considerable influence and prestige in the region. The Vellala community was the source for many of the **Alvars**, a group of twelve poet-saints whose stress on passionate devotion (**bhakti**) to the god **Vishnu** transformed and revitalized Hindu religious life. Most of the Alvars' influence undoubtedly stemmed from the strength of their religious devotion, but this was undoubtedly reinforced by Vellala status as a landholding community.

## Velur

Village in the Aurangabad district of the state of **Maharashtra**, a few miles from the cave temples at **Ellora**. Velur is famous as the site for the temple to the god **Shiva** in his form as **Ghrneshvar**, the "Lord of Compassion." Shiva is present at this temple in the form of a **linga**,

the pillar-shaped image that is his symbolic form, and the Ghrneshvar linga is one of the twelve **jyotirlingas**, a network of sites deemed especially sacred to Shiva, and at which Shiva is uniquely present.

## Vena

In Hindu mythology, a wicked king who prohibits all religious rites and gift-giving except those dedicated to him. He is finally killed by a group of outraged sages, who through their **magic** powers transform blades of sacred **kusha** grass into spears. After Vena has been killed, the problem of the royal succession arises. The sages first churn from his thigh a small, malformed, dark-skinned man named Nishada, who is believed to be the ancestor of the tribal people known as the Nishadas. Nishada takes upon himself all Vena's manifold sins, thus purging them from Vena. After Vena has been cleansed, the sages churn his right hand, from which emerges a radiant and shining boy, who is King **Prthu**.

## Venkateshvara

("the Lord of Venkata [Hill]") Presiding **deity** of the Venkateshvara temple near the town of Tirupati in the state of **Andhra Pradesh**; the temple is north and east of Madras. Venkateshvara is a local deity who has been assimilated into the larger pantheon as a form of the god **Vishnu**. The temple is in the Tirumalai hills, a cluster of seven hills believed to represent the seven cobra hoods of **Shesha**, the mythic serpent who serves as Vishnu's couch. Venkateshvara's image is unusual, in that his forehead is covered with a plate. The two branches of the **Shrivaishnava** community, the **Tengalais** and the **Vadagalais**, each wear distinctive sectarian markings, and this plate conceals these markings on the image and thus allows both communities to claim him as their own.

Venkateshvara is also famous for having the single richest temple in India. People come to Tirupati from all over the country, largely because of the popular belief that any wish made in the deity's presence will invariably be granted. Aside from significant monetary **offerings**, it is also very common for pilgrims to have their heads shaved, as a sign of their visit and to make an offering of the **hair**, as well. In the time since independence the temple's wealth has been administered by a trust, which has been particularly attentive in fostering publishing, educational institutions, and in helping to build Hindu temples outside India.

## Venu

("bamboo") A bamboo flute, which is an important instrument in Indian classical music. In Hindu iconography, it is the characteristic instrument of the god **Krishna**, who used its sweet sounds to summon his devotees (**bhakta**) to him, to spend their nights dancing on the shores of the **Yamuna River**.

## Venus

In Hindu astrology (**jyotisha**), a planet associated with love and pleasure. It is considered a strong planet, with pronounced benevolent qualities, although like all the other **planets**, its powers will vary according to context. Venus presides over **Friday**, and its positive qualities make this an auspicious **day**.

## Veshara

One of the three developed styles in medieval Hindu temple **architecture**, the others being the **Nagara** and the **Dravida**. The Veshara style is primarily found in western India and the **Deccan** and was the least significant and widespread of the three styles. Whereas the Nagara style was characterized by vertical uplift achieved by a temple's towers (**shikharas**), and the Dravida style by lower temples covering enormous tracts of ground, the Veshara style's most identifiable feature is a barrel roof above the

A pilgrim in Benares wears vibhuti markings, which consist of three horizontal lines and identify him as a devotee of the god Shiva.

sanctuary, which has its roots in the rock-cut caves (**chaityas**) first sculpted by the Buddhists. This sort of roof is midway between the Nagara towers and the Dravida horizontal tiers, just as the Deccan was the intermediate region between the two.

## Vetala

In Hindu mythology, one of the classes of malevolent spirits that can be subsumed under the general rubric of **demons**. Vetalas are usually described as **eating** human flesh and are sometimes said to haunt battlefields to get their fill.

## Vibhishana

In the ***Ramayana***, the earlier of the two great Indian epics, Vibhishana is the youngest brother of **Ravana**, the **demon** king of **Lanka**. In their youth Vibhishana, Ravana, and their third brother, **Kumbhakarna**, have performed harsh physical **asceticism** (**tapas**) to gain boons from the gods. Whereas his brothers have chosen boons designed to advance their military ability and glory, Vibhishana asks

that he remain righteous in times of danger, and this quality marks his life. When Ravana holds a council of war preceding the battle with **Rama's** army, Vibhishana is the only one to vote against battle and instead advises Ravana to return Rama's kidnapped wife, **Sita**, and to beg Rama's pardon. For these words, Ravana expells his brother from the city, and Vibhishana goes over to Rama's army, where he fights valiantly throughout the war. After the death of Ravana, Rama crowns Vibhishana the king of Lanka, as a reward for his fidelity and his virtue. Vibhishana is a perfect example of the fact that **demons** (in this case the type of demons known as **rakshasas**) are not inherently evil in Indian mythology. They are powerful beings who may clash with gods and men, but they have many virtues as well. In the ***Ramcharitmanas***, the vernacular retelling of the *Ramayana* written by the poet-saint **Tulsidas** (1532–1623?), Vibhishana is portrayed as a great devotee (**bhakta**) of Rama, in keeping with the emphasis of Tulsidas on the primacy of devotion over all other forms of religious life.

## Vibhuti

("power") Name for the sacred ash with which devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Shiva** mark their bodies, usually with three horizontal lines (**tripundra**). According to one interpretation, the three lines represent the three prongs of Shiva's trident, according to another, they symbolize Shiva's third eye. Ash is associated with Shiva in several different contexts. On one hand, he is said to smear his body with ashes from the **cremation ground**, which indicates his lack of concern for all conventional distinctions between **purity** and impurity (**ashaucha**); the ash could also symbolize Shiva's destruction of **Kama**, the god of love, who is burned to ash by Shiva's third eye. In earlier times vibhuti was made from wood ash that had been sifted through cloth until it was as fine as

talcum powder. This is still done today, particularly by ascetics who usually use the ash from a **dhuni** or smoldering **ascetic fire**, which is believed to give the ash a sacred quality; in modern times vibhuti has become available in stores that sell religious supplies.

## Vichitravirya

In Hindu mythology, the **son** of **Satyavati** and king **Shantanu**. Vichitravirya dies after his marriage to **Ambika** and **Ambalika**, but before he has fathered any children. In her desperation to perpetuate King Shantanu's lineage, Satyavati calls on her eldest son, **Vyasa**, to sleep with the two wives. From this union Vyasa sires **Pandu** and **Dhrtarashtra**, whose descendants form the major warring factions in the *Mahabharata*, the later of the two great **Sanskrit** epics.

## Vicious Circle

In Indian logic, one of the **fallacies** to be avoided in constructing an argument. A vicious circle occurs when a series of things stand in a cause-and-effect relationship to one another, with any one of them standing as both cause and effect. For example, when "a" causes "b," and "b" causes "c," (somewhere down the line) "x" causes "a." This is seen as an extended case of **self-residence**—saying that "a" is both cause and effect—and is equally objectionable.

## Vidhi

Philosophical concept that is found in the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, the two great **Sanskrit** epics. As portrayed there, vidhi is an impersonal force controlling and constraining both the gods and human beings; this notion corresponds best to the idea of fate.

## Vidura

In Hindu mythology, the son of the sage **Vyasa** and the serving maid of Queen **Ambika**. Ambika and her sister **Ambalika** are the wives of King **Vichitravirya**, who has died without heirs. In a desperate attempt to save the lineage, Vichitravirya's mother, **Satyavati**, summons her son, **Vyasa**, to sleep with his brother's two wives. Ambika and Ambalika both spontaneously recoil from Vyasa, and each of their **sons** is born with a defect: Ambalika turns pale, causing her son **Pandu** to be born with an unnaturally pale complexion; Ambika covers her eyes,causing her son **Dhrtarashtra** to be born blind. Ambika is so repulsed by Vyasa's appearance that when she is told to sleep with him again, she sends her serving maid instead. In contrast to the two sisters, Ambika's maid gives herself willingly to Vyasa, and as a reward delivers a handsome son named Vidura.

According to one legend, Vidura is a partial **avatar** of **Dharma**, the god who is righteousness personified. Vidura always shows his righteousness in his dealings with the **Pandavas** and the **Kauravas**, the epic's two warring factions. As the Kauravas become more and more wicked, this inclines him more toward the Pandavas, for whom he serves as a trusted and faithful adviser. It is Vidura who realizes the danger in the **House of Lac**—a house built entirely of highly flammable materials—and makes arrangements for the Pandavas to escape from it. During the **Mahabharata** war, he remains neutral, but after the war is over he again serves as an adviser to King **Yudhishthira**, the eldest of the Pandavas, and to Yudhishthira's brothers.

## Vidyadhara

("wisdom-bearer") Class of semidivine beings. The Vidyadharas are generally believed to live in the **Himalayas** and are thus often associated with the god **Shiva**, whose home is also said to be there. Vidyadharas are generally benevolent toward human beings and are often (as their name suggests) associated with bringing wisdom to those they favor.

Ruins of Vijayanagar, capital of the Vijayanagar dynasty.

## Vidyapati

(ca. 1400) **Brahmin** court poet in the Hindu kingdom of **Mithila** in northern **Bihar**. Although Vidyapati wrote works in **Sanskrit**, he is best known for his love poetry, which was written in the vernacular Maithali language. In this poetry he drew on the literary traditions of Sanskrit love poetry, but his favorite subjects for this poetry were the divine lovers **Radha** and **Krishna**. Although later **Vaishnavas** considered Vidyapati's love poetry as devotional works, Vidyapati's own religious writings definitively describe **Shiva** as the Supreme Being, clearly showing that he was a **Shaiva**. For further information see Edward C. Dimock Jr. and Denise Levertov (trans.), *In Praise of Krishna*, 1981; and R. S. McGregor, *The Love Songs of Vidyapati*, 1987.

## Vidyarambha ("beginning of study") Samskara

Traditionally, the tenth of the life-cycle ceremonies (**samskaras**), in which the child begins formal education, usually by starting to learn the alphabet. Although people in modern India may not perform this rite according to its prescribed form (which includes making **offerings** to a sacrificial **fire** and giving gifts to **brahmins**), families in which education is taken seriously usually have a ritualized commencement of study, often when the child is as young as three.

## Vighneshvar

("Lord of Obstacles") Epithet of the god **Ganesh**, reflecting the belief that he wields control over all obstacles, and thus can make things easy or hard on a person. See **Ganesh**.

## Vihara

An early architectural form, in which a central courtyard was surrounded by a series of small rooms. This was originally a Buddhist architectural form, intended to create a living space for the monks— individual cells in the small rooms and a

common area in the large center space. The design was adapted into the earliest forms of the Hindu temples, such as those at **Aihole**.

## Vijaya

In Hindu mythology, one of the gate-keepers of **Vaikuntha**, who with his brother **Jaya**, is cursed by the sage **Sanaka** to be born three times as an asura (**demon**), and to be killed each time by **Vishnu**. In their first birth Jaya and Vijaya incarnate as **Hiran-yaksha** and **Hiranyakashipu**, who are killed by the **Boar avatar** and the **Man-Lion avatar**, respectively. In their second they are born as **Ravana** and **Kumbhakarna**, who are killed by **Rama**. In their final birth they take form as **Shishupala** and **Dantavaktra**, who are killed by **Krishna**. After this they return to their duties as Vishnu's gatekeepers.

## Vijaya Dashami

("victory tenth") Another name for the festival of **Dussehra**, which falls on the tenth **day** of the **lunar month**. The festival has two mythic charters, one with the god **Rama** and one with the **Goddess**, and both these myths point to this as the day on which the **deity** wins a definitive victory. See **Dussehra**.

## Vijaya Ekadashi

Religious observance falling on the eleventh **day** (**ekadashi**) of the dark (waning) half of the **lunar month** of **Phalgun** (February–March). As for all the eleventh-day observances, this is dedicated to the **worship** of **Vishnu**. Most Hindu festivals have certain prescribed rites, which usually involve fasting (**upavasa**) and worship and often promise specific benefits for faithful performance. Those performing this vow should fill an earthen pot with the seven kinds of grain, set an image of Vishnu on the pot, and for twenty-four hours, remain engaged in chanting the names of Vishnu. On the twelfth the pot

of grain should be given to a **brahmin**. As for results, faithfully observing this festival is said to bring victory (**vijaya**) over poverty and unhappiness.

## Vijayanagar Dynasty

("City of Victory") The last of the great southern Indian Hindu kingdoms, which took its name from its capital city, near modern **Hampi** in **Karnataka**. The kingdom was founded in 1336 by **Harihara**, a regional governor in the Tughluq dynasty who broke away to carve out a kingdom in the central **Deccan** plateau. The kingdom went through several periods of expansion and decay. In the early fifteenth century it controlled most of southern India, but then passed through a period of decline and loss of territory; this was followed by renewal in the early sixteenth century, during the reign of **Krishna Deva Raya**, and finally ended after the battle of **Talikota** in 1565, in which the ruling prince Rama Raja was decisively defeated by a coalition of the sultans from the northern part of the Deccan. The city of Vijayanagar was abandoned almost immediately, and although it has suffered the ravages of time, it still contains stunning examples of late medieval Hindu art and **architecture**.

## Vijnaneshvara

(12th c.) Author of the ***Mitakshara***, a voluminous commentary on the ***Yajnavalkya Smrti***, itself an example of the **dharma literature**, or texts on religious duty. This particular commentary played a pivotal role in the British administration of India. The British were largely content to have their Indian subjects governed by traditional religious laws, but to do so, they needed an accepted standard. For large sections of British India, the *Mitakshara* was given the status of traditional law and was used as a legal code. The only major part of India in which Hindus were not subject to this was in Bengal, where the legal authority was the ***Dayabhaga***. One of

the major differences between the two was in matters of **inheritance**. The *Mitakshara* stresses inheritance by survivorship, in which only living males can inherit property, whereas the *Dayabhaga* stresses inheritance by succession, in which a dead man's heirs can inherit in his name.

## Vikramaditya

("**Sun** of Prowess") Title taken by King **Chandra Gupta II** (r. 376–415) as a symbol of his royal mastery. This monarch is traditionally identified as the Vikramaditya who established the **Vikram era**, but because the Vikram era was established a little less than sixty years before the common era, this claim is clearly untenable.

## Vikram Era

One of the most common dating systems, particularly in northern India. It is generally believed that the Vikram era takes its name from King **Vikramaditya** of **Ujjain**, who is supposed to have ruled over much of India. The Vikram era date is fifty-six or fifty-seven years later than that of the common era; the discrepancy stems from the differing first days of the **year** in the two systems. In the common era the year begins on January 1, but in the Vikram era the year begins with the **sun's** transition into Aries, considered in India as occurring on April 14. Hence, to convert a Vikram era date to a common era date, one subtracts fifty-six years for dates between January 1 and April 14, and fifty-seven years for dates between April 15 and December 31.

## Vikramorvashiya

("**Urvashi** won by valor") Drama written by the poet **Kalidasa**, generally considered the greatest classical **Sanskrit** poet. The *Vikramorvashiya* is a musical play in five acts, whose mythic theme is the liaison of King **Pururavas** and the celestial nymph Urvashi, a story mentioned both in **Rg Veda** 1.95 and in the **Shatapatha Brahmana**. In both these earlier sources the story ends unhappily, with the separation of Urvashi and Pururavas, but in Kalidasa's version the estranged lovers are finally happily reunited. This change may have been prompted solely from the desire for a happy ending, which is one of the most characteristic features of Sanskrit drama.

## Village Deities

According to popular Hindu tradition, the universe has 330 million gods. The richness of this mythic imagination can be seen in the composition of the Hindu pantheon, in which hundreds of major and minor **deities** have been given form, identity, and mythic history. Yet aside from these deities, who have been given an identifiable form, there are also a host of village deities found throughout India. In most cases, the village deity is exactly that—the deity who protects, watches over, and acts as a divine overseer for a particular village or locale. One of their most common functions is to protect the village from disease, either of people or livestock, and to provide remedies when disease strikes. They are also the guardians of the village, defending it from **ghosts** and unseen powers, as well as protecting the villagers from danger and misfortune.

The authority of these deities is generally quite limited—in most cases, it does not extend beyond the village itself. In most cases, village deities have no well-defined mythic history, form, or personality. At times they will have a temple dedicated to them, but in other cases the village deity is believed to be associated with a particular tree or is represented by a post in the village square. Village deities are usually nonvegetarian, demanding **animal sacrifices** and **offerings** of **blood** in exchange for their services. Relationships with these deities are highly pragmatic—the villagers make offerings, and the deities protect, but beyond these offerings there is usually little organized **worship**. If these deities have any organized priesthood, it is almost always non-**brahmin** because the impurity (**ashaucha**) generated by animal sacrifices would be unacceptable to

brahmins. These priesthoods are intermediaries between the deity and the villagers, usually communicating with the deities through **dreams** or **possession**. In this way the deities' wishes become known, and problems or concerns can find their solution.
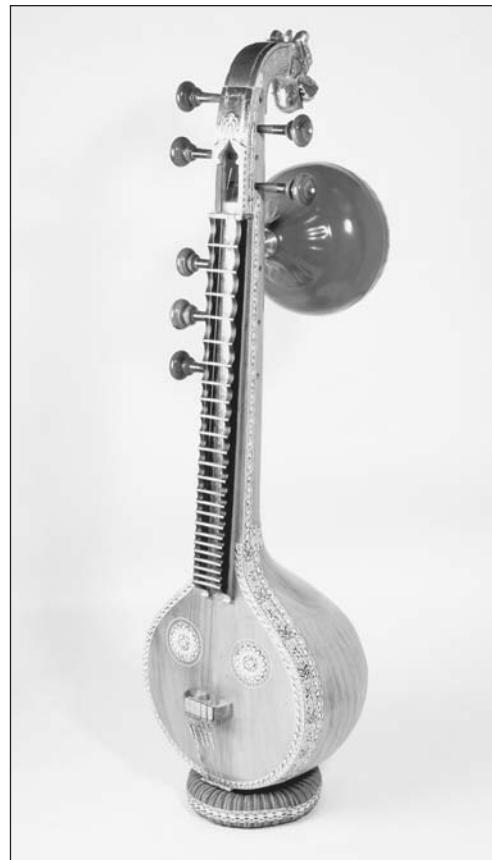
In some cases, local deities have gained greater stature and have been assimilated into the pantheon. For female deities, this process is fairly simple, since they can be brought into the pantheon by claiming that their temples are one of the **Shakti Pithas**, a network of sites sacred to the **Goddess** that spreads throughout the subcontinent. Each Shakti Pitha marks the site where a body part of the dismembered goddess **Sati** fell to **earth**, taking form there as a different goddess; all these individual goddesses are thus seen as manifestations of a single great Goddess. Male deities are more commonly assimilated into the pantheon as manifestations of the god **Vishnu**, and three prominent examples of the former are **Jagannath**, **Vithoba**, and **Venkateshvara**. Village deities are less commonly said to be forms of the god **Shiva**, but this has happened with **Khandoba**, an important regional deity in the state of **Maharashtra**. See also **pitha**.

## Vimana

("vehicle") A word with different specific meanings in different contexts, a common feature in the **Sanskrit** language. It can refer to the vehicles used by a **deity**—either in a mythic sense, because each of the **deities** has an **animal** considered to be his or her vehicle, or in a literal sense as the cart used to carry them in procession, or to the human being who "carries" them through becoming possessed. In the context of **architecture**, the word *vimana* is used to refer to that part of the temple that "carries" the deity, that is, the sanctuary as a whole.

## Vimarsha

("reflection") In Hindu **tantra**, a secret, ritually based religious practice, **vimarsha** is one of the bipolar opposites that are used to characterize the nature of all



The vina is a classical Indian musical instrument.

reality, with its counterpart being illumination (**prakasha**). These two terms are particularly important for the creation of the world, which is said to happen when the pure and radiant consciousness (prakasha) of the ultimate **Brahman** becomes self-conscious through the reflection (vimarsha) of this original consciousness. From one single consciousness, the absolute then evolves into a binary divinity—the god **Shiva** and his consort **Shakti**—whose continued interaction combines to create the world. This dyad of prakasha-vimarsha is particularly important in the **Trika** school of Kashmiri Shaivism. For further information see Jaideva Singh, *Pratyabhijnanahrdayam*, 1982.

## Vina

Multistringed musical instrument with a long hollow body and a sounding box at the bottom; the top has a

large hollow gourd projecting from the back, which further amplifies the sound. The vina is one of the classical musical instruments, particularly in southern India, where its mastery is still held in high regard. In Indian iconography, the vina is most strongly associated with the **goddess Saraswati**, in keeping with her identity as the patron **deity** of the arts, culture, and learning.

## Vinata

In Hindu mythology, the **daughter** of the divine sage **Daksha**, and the sister of **Kadru**. Vinata gives **birth** to a line of eagles—of whom the most famous is **Garuda**—whereas Kadru gives birth to a line of serpents. The proverbial antipathy between these two kinds of **animals** is described as stemming from conflict between these two sisters. One day the sisters get into an argument about the tail color of a certain celestial horse, with Vinata arguing that it is white, and Kadru asserting that it is black. The disagreement becomes more intense, until they finally agree that the person who is wrong will become a slave to the other. To ensure her victory, Kadru persuades a number of her children to hang from the back of the horse, which from a distance makes the tail appear to be black. When Vinata sees the black snakes, she accepts her defeat, and for many years has to serve Kadru under extremely harsh conditions. She is finally rescued by her **son**, Garuda, who when he discovers what has happened, embarks on a program of killing snakes that has never abated.

## Vinaya Patrika

("letter of petition") One of the later poetic works by the poet-saint **Tulsidas** (1532–1623?), in the form of a series of 280 short poems written in the **Braj Bhasha** dialect. The entire work is presented as a letter of petition to Tulsidas's chosen **deity**, **Rama**, using as his intermediary the monkey-god **Hanuman**. The letter's general theme is a plea for deliverance from the evils of the current degenerate age (**kali yuga**). The first sixty-odd verses are a series of invocations paying homage to various deities, showing the ecumenical quality that more generally marks Tulsidas's devotion. The remainder of the poem is directed to Rama and stresses other themes that run throughout Tulsidas's poetry. One theme is the corrupted nature of the present cosmic age, the kali yuga, which makes devotion the only effective means to salvation. Another pervasive theme is the power of God's name and its incomparable ability to rescue the devotee (**bhakta**). Finally, there are warnings to the hearers not to waste the opportunity of a human **birth**. Much of the poetry has an intimate personal quality, and it seems to reflect both the poet's despair at his own frailty and his eventual hope for salvation. From this general tone, the *Vinaya Patrika* is generally assumed to have been written in the later part of the poet's life, although it cannot be precisely dated.

## Vindhya Mountains

Mountain range running from east to west in central India. Despite their modest height, they have traditionally served as the cultural dividing line between northern and southern India. The Vindhyas themselves were seen as an uncivilized and potentially dangerous place, inhabited by **ghosts**, **demons**, and tribal peoples; these dangers were exemplified by the untamed nature of its presiding **goddess**, **Vindhyavasini**.

## Vindhyavasini

("dweller in the Vindhyas") Powerful form of the great **Goddess**. The **Vindhyas** are a mountain range in central India that are difficult to reach, inhabited by tribal peoples,

and seen as a place at the margins of civilized society. As the goddess who dwells in that place, Vindhyavasini is equally marginal, often seen as a fierce and dangerous **deity** who demands **blood sacrifices** from her devotees (**bhakta**). The mythology of Vindhyavasini is associated with various places in the Vindhyas, but for centuries, her primary temple has been in the village of Vindhyachal near the city of Mirzapur in the state of **Uttar Pradesh**, although she is worshiped in other places in northern India. One of her charter myths identifies her as the goddess (in infant form) exchanged for the infant god **Krishna** and killed by Krishna's wicked uncle, **Kamsa**. After taunting Kamsa that the child he seeks has already escaped, she flies off and takes up residence in the Vindhyas. Since other accounts identify this goddess as **Bhadrakali**, this points to the fluidity of the Hindu pantheon, in which the renditions differ in the various accounts, according to the purpose of the writers. For further information see David R. Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, 1986; and Cynthia Humes, "The Goddess of the Vindhyas in Banaras," in Cynthia Humes and Bradley R. Hertel, *Living Banaras*, 1993.

## Vipaksha

In Indian **philosophy**, one of the parts in the accepted form of an inference (**anumana**). The accepted form of an inference has three parts: an assertion (**pratijna**), a reason (**hetu**), and examples (**drshtanta**); each of these three have their own constituent parts. The vipaksha is part of the third term, the examples, and is a negative example given to show that the claim made in the initial assertion is one that reflects the action of particular causes. For example, in the inference, "there is fire on the mountain because there is smoke on the mountain," the vipaksha could be "unlike a lake" since

lakes are places with neither fire nor smoke, and thus shows that these conditions are not universally present (fire is found in mountains, but not in lakes). By convention, an inference also had to have a positive example, the **sapaksha**, to show that similar things happened in similar cases (i.e., that there were other cases in which there was both fire and smoke).

## Viparitakhyati

("contrary discrimination") **Theory of error** propounded by the **Mimamsa** philosopher **Kumarila**, who lived in the seventh century C.E. All the theories of error aim to explain why people make errors in judgment, such as the stock example of mistaking the silvery flash of seashell for a piece of silver.

Like **Prabhakara** and the **Naiyayikas**, Kumarila believes that the simple judgments "that object is silvery" and "silver is silvery" are both true and indisputable. Kumarila also agrees with the Naiyayika that the error comes from a discrimination that is contrary to reality. His difference with the Naiyayikas comes with the latter's postulation of the **inherence**-relationship as connecting subjects and predicates ("silver color" and "silver"). Kumarila's theory is identity-and-difference (**bhedabhada**) in which all things are what they are and are not what they are not. Thus the perception (**pratyaksha**) of the shell on the beach would involve its similarities and differences from silveriness, combined with silver's similarities and differences from silveriness. One can combine the similarities and get a false judgment, or the differences and come up with a true one. As in the Naiyayika theory of error, the root cause for combining the similarities rather than the differences comes from karmic dispositions stemming from **avidya**, specifically the greed for silver that prompts us to look for such items of value. For further information see Bijayananda Kar,

*The Theories of Error in Indian Philosophy*, 1978; and Karl H. Potter (ed.), *Presuppositions of India's Philosophies*, 1972.

## Vira

("hero") In the context of **tantra**, a secret, ritually based religious practice, the vira is one of the modes of ritual expression. The tantric "hero" is said to be one who not only partakes of the Five Forbidden Things (**panchamakara**)—wine, fish, meat, parched grain, and sexual intercourse—in their elemental forms, but also uses this inversion of normal moral rules as a way to affirm the ultimate unity of all things in the universe. Aspirants adopting a heroic mode will often **worship** a powerful but dangerous **deity**, in which the ultimate affirmation of this unity is to affirm one's identity with that deity. If one can do this successfully, it is believed to confer various powers, but if one fails it is said to lead to illness, insanity, or death. This is not a path without hazards, but through it the heroes quickly attain their desired goals.

## Virabhadra

In Hindu mythology, a powerful being who is created by the god **Shiva** to humble the demigod **Daksha** and to destroy Daksha's **sacrifice**. Daksha gives his **daughter**, **Sati**, to marry Shiva, but later he feels that Shiva has not shown him proper respect. To humble Shiva, Daksha plans a great sacrifice and invites all the gods except Shiva. When Sati asks her father why he has done so, Daksha responds with a stream of abuse, excoriating Shiva as worthless and despicable. Humiliated by these public insults, Sati commits **suicide**—in some versions, by leaping into the sacrificial **fire**, and in others by withdrawing into a yogic trance and giving up her life.

In the most common version of Virabhadra's creation, Shiva is so enraged when he learns of Sati's death that he tears out two matted locks (**jata**) from his head and dashes them to the ground. One matted lock takes form as Virabhadra, and the second takes form as **Bhadrakali**, a powerful and terrifying form of the **Goddess**. Just as Virabhadra represents Shiva's destructive aspect, Bhadrakali represents the ferocious and dangerous side of the Goddess, in contrast with the gentle and loyal Sati. At Shiva's orders, the two demolish Daksha's sacrifice, scattering the guests and destroying the sacred fires, until Daksha finally repents and worships Shiva as the supreme **deity**. Although Virabhadra's actions in this story are destructive, he is and remains Shiva's servant, carrying out his divine master's commands, a mandate that ultimately upholds the created order.

## Viragal

("Hero-stone") Stone erected in memory of a warrior, often the village headman, who perished in battle while defending the village cattle from pillage. Such stones can be found all over the **Deccan** region, and Deleury speculates that the origins of the Maharashtrian god **Vithoba** lay in such a deified hero, who was later assimilated into the pantheon as a form of **Vishnu**.

## Viraha

("separation") Well-established poetic genre in classical **Sanskrit** poetry and in much of vernacular devotional (**bhakti**) poetry. The genre focuses on describing the pain resulting from the separation of lover and beloved, whether the separated lovers are two human beings or devotee (**bhakta**) and **deity**. Such separation is believed to bring on specific physical symptoms, which the poets describe in detail—lack of appetite, insomnia, inability to attend to daily life, or to think about anyone but the beloved. The sort of love felt in such separation is believed to engender an even more intense love for the beloved than love in union because the latter is sweetened by the presence of the beloved, whereas the former has to stand by itself.

## Viramamunivar

Pseudonym of Father Constanzio Beschi (1680–1747), an Italian Jesuit who lived in **Tamil Nadu** for thirty-six years. Like many of the other early Jesuits, Beschi learned the local language and adopted the local way of life. As part of his missionary work, he translated parts of the Old and New Testament into literary Tamil, and his facility with the language and its poetic conventions make this work a significant milestone in later Tamil literature.

## Viramitrodaya

One of the latest and the largest of the **nibandhas** ("collections"), compiled in the early seventeenth century by the scholar **Mitra Mishra**. The nibandhas were compendia of Hindu lore, in which the compilers culled references on a particular theme from the **Vedas**, **dharma literature**, **puranas**, and other authoritative religious texts, and then compiled these excerpts into a single volume. The *Viramitrodaya* is a massive compendium of Hindu lore, each of whose twenty-two sections is devoted to a particular aspect of Hindu life, such as daily practice, **worship**, gift-giving (**dana**), vows, pilgrimage, penances (**prayashchitta**), purification, death rites (**antyeshthi samskara**), law, and so forth, finally ending with liberation (**moksha**). Aside from citing the relevant scriptural passages, Mitra Mishra also provides extensive learned commentary, and his work became an important source for later legal interpretation, particularly in eastern India.

## Virasana

One of the sitting postures (**asana**) described in commentaries to the **Yoga Sutras**; this is also one of the sitting postures in which **deities** are portrayed in Hindu iconography. As described in the commentaries to the Yoga Sutras, in this position one foot rests on the ground, under the opposite thigh, while the other foot rests on top of the opposite knee. In modern yoga manuals this posture is described quite differently, as a sitting posture with the legs folded back outside the body, with the feet pressed against the thighs and buttocks.

## Virashaiva

("Heroic Shaivas") Another name for the **Lingayat** religious community, stemming from the Lingayat insistence that the god **Shiva** was the only real god. See **Lingayat**.

## Virata

In the *Mahabharata*, the later of the two great Hindu epics, Virata is the king who shelters the five **Pandava** brothers, the epic's protagonists, during the year they spend incognito, following their twelve years of exile in the forest. This year is critical because according to the agreement that the Pandavas have made with their adversary, **Duryodhana**, if they are discovered during this year the cycle of exile and living incognito will begin again. Due to Virata's care and foresight the Pandavas are not discovered, even though Duryodhana has sent legions of spies to find them. During the Mahabharata war he continues to support the Pandavas and is eventually killed by the archery master **Drona**.

## Visarjana

("dismissing") The sixteenth and last of the traditional **upacharas** ("**offerings**") given to a **deity** as part of **worship**, on the model of treating the deity as an honored guest. In this offering, the devotee (**bhakta**) gives the deity leave to go, as the concluding rite in worship. Although the word dismissal sounds presumptuous in any interaction with a deity, this term really refers to the words of parting that one would say to any departing guest. The underlying motive here, as for all the upacharas, is to show one's love for the deity and minister to the deity's needs.

## Vishakhadatta

(6th c.) **Sanskrit** dramatist whose only surviving work is the play *Mudrarakshasa* ("**Rakshasa's** Ring"). The play is of some historical interest, for its major theme is the rise of **Chandragupta Maurya** (r. 321–297 B.C.E.), founder of the **Maurya dynasty**, although the play ascribes his success to the machinations of his cunning **brahmin** minister, **Chanakya**. The play paints the king as a weak figure, with the minister as the real power behind the throne, although in fairness to the historical king this portrayal seems inaccurate. The drama's plot is highly complex, as with many **Sanskrit** plays, but its climax comes when the principal characters are dramatically rescued from execution at the last moment. The play has been translated into English by Michael Coulson, and published in an anthology titled *Three Sanskrit Plays*, 1981.

## Vishishthadvaita ("Qualified Non-Dualism") Vedanta

One of the branches of **Vedanta**, the philosophical school purporting to reveal the ultimate meaning and purpose (anta) of the **Vedas**, the oldest and most authoritative Hindu religious texts. Vishishthadvaita's greatest figure is the eleventh-century philosopher, **Ramanuja**, who was central to its formation, although he was building on earlier work. Ramanuja was convinced that **Brahman** or Supreme Reality was a personal **deity**, rather than an impersonal abstract principle, and he was also convinced that devotion (**bhakti**) was the most important form of religious practice. Vishishthadvaita Vedanta, his philosophical position, stressed both of these convictions and thus opposed the position of the **Advaita Vedanta** school, founded by the philosopher **Shankaracharya**.

The Advaita school upholds a philosophical position known as monism, which is the belief in a single impersonal Ultimate Reality, which they call Brahman. For Advaita proponents, reality is "nondual" (**advaita**)—that is, all things are nothing but the formless Brahman, despite the appearance of difference and diversity in the perceivable world. For the Advaitins, this assumption of diversity is a fundamental misunderstanding of the ultimate nature of things and a manifestation of **avidya**. Although often translated as "ignorance," avidya is better understood as the lack of genuine understanding, which ultimately causes human beings to be trapped in karmic bondage, reincarnation (**samsara**), and suffering. Since for the Advaitins the real problem is this mistaken understanding, this means that realization (**jnana**) was the best spiritual path to gain final liberation (**moksha**).

According to Ramanuja's formulation, the material world and selves have real and independent existence, although their existence is ultimately rooted in God, whom he identifies as **Vishnu**. The world comes from God in a process of **evolution** adapted from the **Samkhya** model, but since matter is unconscious, it is both similar to and different from God. In the same way, human beings share similarity to God in having God as their source, and difference from him in being subject to ignorance and suffering. For Ramanuja and his followers, God is not identical to Selves or the world, all of which are perceived as having real and independent existence. This doctrine of identity and difference makes the perceivable world real, in a sense that the Advaita proponents would never admit. This same contention of simultaneous identity and difference distinguishes Ramanuja's position from that of a later thinker, **Madhva**, whose **Dvaita Vedanta** stressed the great gulf between God and all other things. Given this difference in capacities between deity and devotee (**bhakta**), Ramanuja and his followers have stressed bhakti as the most efficacious means to salvation. Even after liberation the souls retain enough of a distinction

Vishnu as depicted in a granite carving, Hampi.

from God to make devotion possible; liberation is seen not as loss of identity, but as eternal communion with God. For further information see John Braisted Carman, *The Theology of Ramanuja*, 1974; and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore (eds.), *A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy*, 1957.

## Vishnu

("all-pervasive") Along with **Shiva** and the **Goddess**, one of the three most important **deities** in the Hindu pantheon. All three of these are notable for being almost unmentioned in the **Vedas**, the earliest Hindu religious texts, and the ascendancy of these three and the gradual eclipse of the Vedic gods points clearly to a definitive shift in Hindu religious life. Of the three, Vishnu has the most significant presence in the Vedas. Many of the hymns in which he is mentioned describe him as a helper to the storm-god **Indra**, the primary Vedic god, and one of Vishnu's epithets here is Upendra ("junior Indra"). Yet he also appears in some of the late hymns as an

independent agent, who is associated with marvelous deeds for the good of the cosmos, such as taking three steps to measure out the universe. Vishnu is also associated with the **sun**, both in his ability to move through the **heavens**, and to fall on (and thus "observe") all things.

In the divine triad of **Brahma**-Vishnu-Shiva, Vishnu is identified as the sustainer or maintainer of the cosmos. One manifestation of this can be seen in a common creation myth, which begins with Vishnu lying on the back of his serpent couch, **Shesha**, in the primordial ocean at the time of cosmic dissolution (**pralaya**). A lotus sprouts from Vishnu's navel, which opens to reveal Brahma, the creator, who begins the work of creation. Vishnu presides over the creation, and when the time for dissolution comes again, the entire process reverses, and the universe is drawn back into Vishnu, who is thus seen as the source of all.

The other way that Vishnu sustains the cosmos is through the action of his **avatars** or incarnations, who come into the world to restore balance to a universe dangerously out of equilibrium,

usually because of a **demon** grown disproportionately strong. There are ten generally reckoned avatars. The first four are in nonhuman forms: the **Fish avatar**, **Tortoise avatar**, **Boar avatar**, and **Man-Lion avatar**. The other six are in human form, often as sages or heroes: **Vamana avatar**, **Parashuram avatar**, **Rama avatar**, **Krishna avatar**, **Buddha avatar**, and **Kalki avatar**; the last has yet to come. In each of these cases, Vishnu takes form to avert some sort of disaster and to maintain the integrity of the cosmos. The doctrine of the avatars provided a mechanism to assimilate existing deities into the larger pantheon and to give them recognizable status of their own. Although most of the avatars are no longer objects of **worship** (the Boar and Man-Lion avatars each had a substantial following early in the common era), in much of northern India the worship of Rama and Krishna has largely eclipsed that of Vishnu himself, who has largely faded into the background. In southern India, Vishnu is still an important object of worship, particularly in the **Shrivaishnava** community. Aside from the doctrine of the avatars, important local deities have also been assimilated into the pantheon as forms of Vishnu; the most significant examples are **Jagannath**, **Venkateshvara**, and **Vithoba**.

In medieval Hinduism sectarian rivalry developed between **Vaishnavas** and **Shaivas**, with each claiming that their chosen deity (Vishnu and Shiva, respectively) was supreme. Although Vaishnavas see Vishnu as the supreme power in the universe, his mythic character and activity differ sharply from Shiva's. Whereas Shiva is associated with **ascetic** life and practices (**tapas**), and thus with the religious power generated by such practices, Vishnu's headdress is a crown, and his persona is that of an all-ruling king. Whereas Shiva destroys his mythic adversaries using raw power, from which all subtlety is absent, Vishnu more often triumphs through cunning, cleverness, and trickery. Each deity's adherents affirm their divinity as the preeminent power in the universe, from which all the other gods gain their power, and both are seen as gracious and loving to their devotees (**bhakta**).

## Vishnuchittar

An epithet of the **Alvar** poet-saint **Periyalvar**. The Alvars were a group of twelve poet-saints who lived in southern India between the seventh and tenth centuries. All the Alvars were devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Vishnu**, and their stress on passionate devotion (**bhakti**) to a personal god, conveyed through hymns sung in the **Tamil language**, transformed Hindu religious life. See **Periyalvar**.

## Vishnu Purana

One of the eighteen traditional **puranas**, which were an important genre of **smrti** texts, and the repository of much of traditional Indian mythology. The smrtis or "remembered" texts were a class of literature that although deemed important, were considered less authoritative than the **shrutis** or "heard" texts. In brief, the shrutis denoted the **Vedas**, the oldest and most authoritative Hindu religious texts, whereas the smrtis included the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, the **dharma literature**, the **Bhagavad Gita**, and the puranas. The puranas are compendia of all types of sacred lore, from mythic tales to ritual instruction to exaltation of various sacred sites (**tirthas**) and actions. Most of the puranas are highly sectarian, and as this one's name clearly shows, it is focused on the **worship** of **Vishnu**. It gives an exhaustive account of Vishnu's mythic deeds—many of which have become the common mythic currency for many traditional Hindus—as well as instructions for how, where, and when Vishnu is to be worshiped.

## Vishnuswami

("[He whose] Lord is **Vishnu**") According to tradition, the founder of the **Rudra Sampraday** of the **Vaishnava**

ascetics. (The Rudra Sampraday is one of the four branches, "sampraday," of the **Bairagi Naga** ascetics, who are devotees (**bhakta**) of the god Vishnu; vaishnava refers to devotees of Vishnu.) Vishnuswami was an **ascetic**, whom some sources name as the **guru** of both **Jnaneshvar** and **Namdev**. As his name clearly shows, Vishnuswami was a Vaishnava, although other than this little is known about him. His ascetic line and its position as one of the four Vaishnava ascetic sampradays have been appropriated by the followers of **Vallabhacharya**, whose **Shuddadvaita**, or "Pure Monism," stresses the **worship** of **Krishna**, with **Radha** as his consort.

## Vishuddha Chakra

In many schools of **yoga**, and in the secret, ritually based religious practice known as **tantra**, the vishuddha chakra is one of the six psychic centers (**chakras**) believed to exist in the **subtle body**. The subtle body is an alternate physiological system, believed to exist on a different plane than gross matter, but with certain correspondences to the material body. It is visualized as a set of six psychic centers, which are visualized as multipetaled lotus flowers running roughly along the course of the spine, connected by three vertical channels. Each of these chakras has important symbolic associations—with differing human capacities, with different subtle elements (**tanmatras**), and with different seed syllables (**bijaksharas**) formed from the letters of the **Sanskrit** alphabet, thus encompassing all sacred sound. Above and below these centers are the bodily abodes of **Shiva** (awareness) and **Shakti** (power), the two divine principles through which the entire universe has come into being. The underlying assumption behind this concept of the subtle body is thus the homology of macrocosm and microcosm, an essential Hindu idea since the time of the mystical texts known as the **Upanishads**.

The six chakras are traditionally enumerated from the bottom up, and the vishuddha chakra is the fifth. It is visualized as a sixteen-petaled lotus, located in the region of the throat. The petals each contain a seed syllable formed from a letter of the Sanskrit alphabet, in this case all sixteen of the Sanskrit vowels, the essential connecting elements for any meaningful speech. On a symbolic level, the vishuddha chakra is associated with the human capacity for speech and respiration. It is also identified as the bodily seat for the subtle element of **space** (**akasha**), through which hearing is believed to take place. For further information see Arthur Avalon (Sir John Woodroffe), *Shakti and Shakta*, 1978; and Philip S. Rawson, *The Art of Tantra*, 1973.

## Vishva Hindu Parishad

("World Hindu Organization," hereafter VHP) Modern Hindu religious organization affiliated with the **Rashtriya Svayamsevak Sangh** (RSS), a conservative Hindu organization whose express purpose is to provide the leadership cadre for a revitalized Hindu India. The VHP was formed in 1964, when RSS leader **Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar** met in Bombay with a group of Hindu religious leaders. Their immediate concern was the upcoming visit of Pope Paul VI to India, which they interpreted as a concealed attempt to convert Hindus to Christianity, and resolved to oppose by forming an organization dedicated to the propagation of Hinduism. For the next fifteen years, the VHP focused its attention on countering Christian missionary efforts in northeastern India, with little fanfare and little impact on the public consciousness.

A watershed in the VHP's public image came in 1982, following the conversion of some untouchables to Islam in the **Tamil Nadu** village of Minakshipuram. The VHP used this much-publicized event as evidence that Hindu identity was endangered and countered it by launching a series of innovative public

actions, first in Tamil Nadu, but later extending throughout the entire nation. The VHP's renewed activity corresponded with a more activist bent in its parent organization, the RSS, as well as the decision by the **Bharatiya Janata Party** (BJP), a political organization that is also an RSS affiliate, to assume a more militantly Hindu identity. Many of the VHP's national campaigns coincided with national or state elections, and many of these centered on the campaign to build a temple to the god **Rama** in the city of **Ayodhya**, at the site claimed to be Rama's birthplace. The site on which they proposed to build the temple was occupied by a Muslim mosque, the **Babri Masjid**, which the VHP claimed had been built only after tearing down the original Rama temple. This temple campaign thus carried powerful images of past oppression, as well as the assertiveness of a renascent Hindu identity. The VHP's activism has enormously boosted the BJP's political fortunes, and helped make it the dominant political party through much of northern India.

The VHP's activism has generated sharply contrasting emotions throughout India. Proponents point to its long record of social service and its role in helping strengthen and define a modern Hindu identity. Detractors point to its disregard for the niceties of law, which was epitomized by the destruction of the Babri Masjid in December 1992, its often vitriolic anti-Muslim rhetoric, and its ultimate control by the RSS, despite its separate institutional identity. Other critics have censured the VHP for attempting to declare certain "required" Hindu rites as antithetical to the Hindu tradition and for attempting to define and control the nature of "Hinduism." Other critics question the organization's claim to speak for all Hindus, noting that its real power lies in the hands of **brahmins** and other privileged classes; these critics see the VHP as an organization designed to conceal its true purpose, the maintenance of upper-class influence and privilege. For further information see Walter

K. Andersen and Shridhar D. Damle, *The Brotherhood in Saffron*, 1987; James Warner Björkman, *Fundamentalism, Revivalists, and Violence in South Asia*, 1988; Tapan Basu et al., *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags*, 1993; Lise McKean, *Divine Enterprise*, 1996; and Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*, 1996.

## Vishvakarma

("doing all things") A minor **deity** whose mythic roles include being the architect of the gods; creator of innumerable handicrafts, ornaments, and weapons; the finest sculptor; and the inventor of the aerial chariots used by the gods. He is the patron and paradigm for all the skilled crafts in which materials are shaped and formed, and in particular he is said to have fixed the canons for carving images of the gods. According to one story, Vishvakarma's **daughter**, **Sanjna**, is married to **Surya**, the **sun**, but because of the sun's radiance cannot bear to be with him. Vishvakarma takes the sun to his workshop and trims off enough of his effulgence so that Sanjna can bear his brightness. He then shapes the cut-off pieces of the sun into the god **Vishnu's** discus (**Sudarshana**), the god **Shiva's** trident (**trishul**), various other divine weapons, and the **Pushpak Viman**, the most famous of the aerial chariots.

Vishvakarma is sometimes identified with **Tvashtr**, the workman of the gods in the **Vedas**, the oldest Hindu religious texts. Yet it seems that these are two different deities, homologized to each other through their common function. Tvashtr's name means "builder of carriages," and this seems to have been his primary function, although he is also noted for crafting the weapons of the gods, especially the mace with which the storm-god **Indra** slays the serpent **Vrtra**. Still, his name seems to indicate that his major function is in building carriages, which is believed to be highly significant in a Vedic context, since many Vedic hymns mention

the use of military chariots. Vishvakarma, on the other hand, has much more wide-ranging skills, and this would seem to indicate that the two are not the same deity.

## Vishvamitra

In Hindu mythology, one of the Seven Sages whose names mark exogamous clan "lineages" (**gotra**; in exogamous clans, members marry outside their own clan); the others are **Gautama**, **Bharadvaja**, **Kashyapa**, **Bhrgu**, **Atri**, and **Vasishtha**. All **brahmins** are believed to be descended from these seven sages, with each family taking the name of its progenitor as its gotra name. In modern times, these gotra divisions are still important because marriage within the gotra is forbidden. After her marriage, the new bride adopts her husband's gotra as part of her new identity.

Vishvamitra is most famous for his long-standing feud with the sage Vasishtha, which causes numerous confrontations. The feud begins as a result of the difference in status between **kshatriyas** and brahmins. Vishvamitra is a king, who once stops with a host of retainers at the forest **ashram** of the brahmin Vasishtha. Upon asking for food, Vishvamitra is amazed at the ability of Vasishtha's **cow**, the **Kamadhenu**, to provide food for everyone. Vishvamitra first tries to buy the Kamadhenu, then tries to take it by force, but his minions are defeated by the **magic** powers generated by Vasishtha's **tapas** (**ascetic** practices). Vishvamitra finally admits defeat and begins to do ascetic practices to generate power of his own. Two of their most celebrated clashes are over King **Trishanku** and his **son**, **Harishchandra**; in each case the real issue is the mutual antipathy of these two sages. See also **marriage prohibitions**.

## Vishvanath

Form of the god **Shiva**, in his manifestation as the "Lord of the Universe" at the



Vishvanath Temple

Vishvanath temple in **Benares**. Shiva is present at Vishvanath in the form of a **linga**, the pillar-shaped image that is his symbolic form; the Vishvanath linga is one of the twelve **jyotirlingas**, a network of sites deemed especially sacred to Shiva, and at which **Shiva** is uniquely present. Benares, or **Varanasi**, is one of the most sacred cities in India; it is considered particularly sacred to Shiva, and of all the Shiva temples there, Vishvanath is the most important. The original temple was destroyed by the Moghul emperor **Aurangzeb**, who built a mosque on the site, and the only remaining part of the original temple is the **Gyan Vapi** ("well of knowledge"), into which the original Shiva linga was reportedly cast (to save it from desecration by Aurangzeb's soldiers). The present temple was built in 1776 by the **Maratha** queen **Ahalya Bai Holkar**, on a site adjoining the original temple. It was later roofed with gold by Maharaja Ranjit Singh of Lahore, and thus one of its nicknames is the "Golden Temple."

Even in preceding centuries the history and proximity of the Vishvanath

Dancer displaying the vismaya hasta.

temple and Aurangzeb's mosque made for delicate relations between the Hindu and Muslim communities, and like many northern Indian cities Benares has seen its share of bloodshed between these two communities. In recent times the destruction of the original Vishvanath temple has been taken up as a political issue by the **Vishva Hindu Parishad** (VHP), a Hindu activist organization calling for the "return" of this and other northern Indian sites by force if necessary. The VHP's presence and activity have significantly escalated tensions between Hindus and Muslims as a whole. Given the political gains that these confrontational strategies have brought, it seems likely that they will continue in the future and that the Vishvanath temple will be a site connected with conflict.

## Vishva Nirmala Dharam

Religious organization founded by the modern Hindu teacher **Nirmala Devi** (b. 1923), to propagate her teachings throughout the world.

## Vishvedevas

This name can either be construed as referring to all the gods, based on the term's literal meaning ("all the gods"), or it can refer to a group of **deities** reckoned as the **sons** of **Vishva**, the **daughter** of the divine sage **Daksha**. The number of sons differs according to different texts and is reckoned at either ten or thirteen. The Vishvedevas are especially worshiped at the memorial rites for the dead known as **shraddhas**, although the *Manu Smrti*, one of the authoritative texts in the **dharma literature**, prescribes **offerings** to them every day. These prescribed daily offerings are said to have been their reward for having performed particularly harsh **asceticism** (**tapas**).

## Vismaya ("surprise") Hasta

In Indian **dance**, **sculpture**, and ritual, a particular hand **gesture** (**hasta**), in which the forearm and the fingers are pointing upward, with the back of the hand turned toward the viewer. This

particular hasta is meant to convey any sort of surprise, including wonder and astonishment.

## Vital Winds

General term to designate the five internal winds collectively known as **prana**, through which all human physiological processes are believed to occur.

## Vithoba

Presiding **deity** of the temple with the same name in the city of **Pandharpur** in the state of **Maharashtra**; other epithets for Vithoba include Vitthala and Pandurang. Vithoba was originally a local deity—according to some theories, a deified hero—who has been assimilated into the larger Hindu pantheon as a form of the god **Vishnu**. According to the temple's charter myth, Vishnu comes to Pandharpur drawn by the filial devotion of a young boy named Pundalika. When Vishnu arrives Pundalika is massaging his father's feet, and when Vishnu asks for the hospitality due to any guest, Pundalika stops only long enough to throw a brick over his shoulder, to give the god a place to stand out of the mud. Impressed that Pundalika's devotion to his parents supersedes even his devotion to God, Vishnu becomes rooted to that spot and has remained there ever since; Vithoba's image shows him with his hands on his hips (still waiting, perhaps, for Pundalika). Aside from this story, Vithoba has surprisingly little mythic history, although he has become an important regional deity.

Vithoba is most famous for the activities of his devotees (**bhakta**), the **Varkari Panth** religious community, who make pilgrimages to Pandharpur twice a year. Pandharpur sits in the **Bhima River** valley on the edge of the Maharashtra-**Karnataka** border, and pilgrims come from all directions. Individual pilgrims travel in small groups called **dindis**, often made up of people from the same neighborhood or locality. The dindis are organized into larger groups known as **palkhis**, each of which is associated with one of the Varkari poet-saints, and which is led by a **palanquin** (palkhi) bearing the sandals of that saint. Each palkhi departs from a place associated with its particular saint—for example, the palkhi of **Jnaneshvar** leaves from the town of **Alandi** in which he lived, and thus he and all the other saints are still symbolically journeying to Pandharpur twice a year. Each of these palkhis travels a prescribed route, and pilgrims time their departure and their travel to arrive in Pandharpur on the same day—the eleventh day (**ekadashi**) in the bright half of **Ashadh** (June–July) in the summer, and the eleventh day in the bright half of **Kartik** (October–November) in the fall. Pilgrims compare their journey to that of a small stream merging with other streams, gradually forming a mighty river converging on Pandharpur. During their journey pilgrims sing the devotional songs composed by these poet-saints, among them **Jnaneshvar**, **Namdev**, **Eknath**, **Tukaram**, **Chokamela**, **Gora**, **Janabai**, and **Bahina Bai**. In this way, the pilgrims are emulating the saints before them, both by treading in their physical footsteps and by singing their songs of devotion. Although the pilgrimage ends with the entry to Pandharpur and the **worship** of Vithoba, the most important part is the journey itself. For more information on Vithoba and the Varkari sect, see G. A. Deleury, *The Cult Of Vithoba*, 1960; I. B. Karve, "On the Road," *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 22 No. 1, 1962; and Digambar Balkrishna. Mokashi, *Palkhi: An Indian Pilgrimage*, 1987.

## Vitthala

Common epithet of **Vithoba**, the presiding **deity** of a famous temple at **Pandharpur** in the state of **Maharashtra**. The name *Vitthala* is a more literary form, and according to **Deleury**, the oldest attested name for the Pandharpur deity. See **Vithoba**.

## Vitthalnath

(r. 1566–1585) Second **guru** of the **Pushti Marg** (a religious community), which was founded by his father, **Vallabhacharya**. Vitthalnath continued the consolidation of the Pushti Marg, in particular the organization of its rites, and in fostering the composition of songs and poetry to accompany them. According to tradition, the eight poets known as the **ashtachap** were all active during his tenure, although four of them are more closely associated with his father. The four poets associated with Vitthalnath were clearly members of the Pushti Marg, for among their poetry can be found hymns praising him and his leadership. He was succeeded by his **son Gokulnath**, under whose direction the lives of these and other saints were finally written down, with each being given a **Vallabhite** emphasis.

## Vivaha ("uplift") Samskara

Traditionally, the fifteenth of the life-cycle ceremonies (**samskaras**), in which a man and woman became husband and wife. Except for those rare individuals who remained lifelong celibates (**naisthika brahmacharin**), marriage was an essential element in the life of every man (and woman), since the children procreated through marriage allowed him to retire one of the **three debts**, this one to the **ancestral spirits** (pitr). One mark of the importance given to marriage can be seen in the literal translation of the word *vivaha*—it signifies that by which a man is "uplifted" and made complete. Given the stress on family in Indian society, marriage has also been a gravely important matter, and for many Indians, it remains the most important day of their life. The **dharma literature** underlines the importance of marriage by cataloging eight different forms. See also **marriage**, **eight classical forms**.

## Vivarana Advaita

One of the later schools of **Advaita Vedanta**, a philosophical school, the greatest figure in which was **Shankaracharya**. The Advaita school upholds a philosophical position known as monism, which is the belief in a single impersonal Ultimate Reality, which they call **Brahman**. For Advaita proponents, reality is "nondual" (**advaita**)—that is, all things are nothing but the formless Brahman, despite the appearance of difference and diversity in the perceivable world. For the Advaitins, this assumption of diversity is a fundamental misunderstanding of the ultimate nature of things and a manifestation of **avidya**. Although often translated as "ignorance," avidya is better understood as the lack of genuine understanding, which ultimately causes human beings to be trapped in karmic bondage, reincarnation (**samsara**), and suffering. Because the real problem for the Advaitins is this mistaken understanding, this means that realization (**jnana**) was the best spiritual path to gain final liberation (**moksha**).

The Vivarana Advaita school is based on the thought of **Padmapada** (9th c.), one of Shankaracharya's disciples, but takes its name from a commentary written by the thirteenth-century **Prakashatman**. The latter is traditionally a disciple of Padmapada's, but this seems problematic. As with the **Bhamati** school, the Vivarana school took definitive stands on several points on which Shankaracharya had remained silent. One of these was on the locus of ignorance, which the Vivarana school describes as being located in Brahman. In explaining how this can be, since it seems to compromise the integrity of Brahman, the Vivarana Advaitins invoke the theory of **reflectionism** to explain the apparent difference between Brahman and the Self, although, in fact, the Selves are identical with Brahman. Their position seems based more than anything on an uncompromising affirmation of Brahman as the sole "reality," in which anything that exists must belong to it.

## Vivartavada

A philosophical model used to explain the relationship between the Ultimate Reality or Realities and the perceivable world; this model describes the world as an illusory transformation of this reality. The vivartavada model is unique to the **Advaita Vedanta** philosophical school. The Advaitins are proponents of a **causal model** called **satkaryavada**, which assumes that effects already exist in their causes, and that when these effects appear, they represent transformations (**parinama**) of those causes. The classic example is the transformation of milk to curds, butter, and clarified butter. According to asatkarya's proponents, each of these effects was already present in the cause and emerges from it through a natural transformation of that cause.

The Advaita school upholds a philosophical position known as monism, which is the belief that a single Ultimate Reality lies behind all things and that all things are merely differing forms of that reality. Advaita proponents exemplify this belief in their claim that reality is nondual (**advaita**)—that is, that all things are "actually" nothing but the formless, unqualified **Brahman**, despite the appearance of difference and diversity in the world. The Advaitins' belief that an effect already exists in its cause comes from the principle that all things in the universe ultimately depend on Brahman as a first cause. At the same time the Advaitins are unwilling to admit that Brahman ever undergoes actual change because this would nullify its eternal and unchanging nature. For this reason, they speak of an illusory transformation (vivartavada). For the Advaitins, Brahman never really changes, because it is eternal and thus unchanging; the apparent changes are only illusory, based on human ignorance through changing patterns of superimposition (**adhyasa**). In this way the Advaitins can maintain the transcendence of Brahman and at the same time account for the (apparent) changes in the phenomenal world.

This position is contested by proponents of another model, which describes the perceivable world as an actual transformation of this single reality. This position is espoused by proponents of the **Samkhya**, **Vishishthadvaita Vedanta**, and **Bhedabhada** philosophical schools, who like the Advaitins are also proponents of satkaryavada. Each of these three schools believes that the world as perceived is real, that it has some single ultimate source behind it, and that this first principle undergoes a real transformation by which the world comes into being. This parinama relationship allows these schools to explain the phenomenal world but in a way that compromises the transcendence of these first principles by making them part of the world. Philosophically, their difficulties come in describing how the transcendent can become mundane, and then become transcendent again.

## Vivasvan

("shining forth") Epithet of the god **Surya**, the **Sun**. See **Surya**.

## Vivekananda, Swami

(b. Narendranath Datta 1863–1902) Best-known disciple of the Bengali mystic **Ramakrishna** and also the first Hindu missionary to the West. Narendranath had received a good education and had originally intended to be a lawyer; on meeting Ramakrishna he was initially skeptical and questioning but in the course of a year became transformed. After Ramakrishna's death he spent several years roaming through India, gradually coming to the conclusion that religious life had to address India's material needs as well as its spiritual ones. Vivekananda is most famous for his address to the First **World Parliament of Religions** in Chicago in 1893, in which Hinduism—in its rational, Vedantic form—was first seriously received by his Western hearers. For the next four years, he lectured in America and in England and returned to India to widespread acclaim. He devoted the rest of his short life to fostering the **Ramakrishna Mission**, a religious organization intended to promote social uplift as

well as religious education. For further information see Christopher Isherwood, *Ramakrishna and His Disciples*, 1965; Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 1970; and George M. Williams, "Swami Vivekananda," and "The Ramakrishna Movement: A Study in Religious Change," both in Robert D. Baird (ed.), *Religion in Modern India*, 1998.

## Vraj

Variant form of the region known as **Braj**. This is the land in which the god **Krishna** is believed to have lived, located in the southwestern part of the state of **Uttar Pradesh** just south of Delhi, the national capital. See **Braj**.

## Vrat

Term denoting a religious vow, usually thought to be derived from the verb meaning "to choose." As religious observances, vrats are an important part of modern Hindu life. They may refer to religious practices performed once a **year** with particular festivals, such as the vrat performed on **Shivaratri**, or to more regular religious observances, such as those connected to the monthly lunar **calendar** (e.g., the **ekadashi** rites) or those performed on the day of the **week** associated with a particular patron **deity**. The specific prescriptions for these vrats vary widely, but there are several common features. They usually involve modification of diet—sometimes through fasting (**upavasa**), and other times by **eating** or avoiding certain types of food. Another constant feature is **worship** of the presiding deity. Part of this worship usually involves reading or hearing the vrat's charter myth, which tells how the vrat was established, how one should perform it, and what sort of benefits it brings. Vrats connected with festivals are performed by all sorts of people, but weekly vrats (such as the **Santoshi Ma Vrat**) are most often performed by married **women** to promote the health, safety, and prosperity of their families. Although such

weekly vrats are theoretically voluntary, they have become an expected element in women's religious life, through which women by their sacrifices can safeguard their family's welfare. For further consideration of women's rites, see Mary McGee, "Desired Fruits: Motive And Intention in the Votive Rites of Hindu Women," in Julia Leslie, ed., *Roles and Rituals for Hindu Women*, 1991; and Doranne Jacobson and Susan S. Wadley, *Women in India*, 1992.

## Vratya

In the **Atharva Veda**, one of the earliest Hindu religious texts, the vratyas were a particular class of vagrant ascetics who were priests of a non-Vedic fertility cult. Not much is known about them because there are no other sources, but they were clearly outside the Vedic cult and thus looked down upon. In later times, the word is used to designate a person who has lost **caste** through nonobservance of one of the necessary **samskaras** (life-cycle ceremonies).

## Vrindavan

Variant form of **Brindavan**, the village in southeastern part of the state of **Uttar Pradesh** in which the god **Krishna** is believed to have lived from infancy to adolescence. See **Brindavan**.

## Vrtra

("obstruction") The name of the **demon** killed by the storm-god **Indra** in one of the hymns from the **Rg Veda** (1.32), the oldest Hindu religious text. In this hymn Vrtra is described as a serpent obstructing the free flow of waters, hence his name. The action in this hymn is one of Indra's defining deeds, in which he destroys the serpent, cuts it into pieces, and releases the waters to run free. Some interpreters inclined to read the **Vedas** as historical record have seen in this hymn the breaching of the dams constructed by the **Indus Valley civilization** by the incoming **Aryans**, but there is little proof that such an incident ever happened.

## Vyakarana

("analysis") One of the six **Vedangas**. These were the auxiliary branches of knowledge connected with the **Vedas**, the oldest Hindu religious texts, and all the Vedangas were associated with the use of the Vedas. In its essence, vyakarana is the study of **Sanskrit** grammar, which was obviously essential to understanding the Vedic texts (which were written in Sanskrit). Vyakarana's role as the gatekeeper to the Sanskrit language made grammar the queen of the traditional learned sciences, and in many contexts it is what is meant by the term *vidya* ("knowledge"). Aside from vyakarana, the other Vedangas are **shiksha** (correct pronunciation), **chandas** (Sanskrit prosody), **kalpa** (ritual instructions), **nirukta** (etymology), and **jyotisha** (auspicious times for sacrifices).

## Vyakhyana ("teaching") Mudra

In Indian **dance**, **sculpture**, and ritual, a particular symbolic hand **gesture** (**mudra**), in which the tips of the thumb and index finger are touching, with the rest of the fingers extended, and the palm facing the viewer. This is the hand gesture used to signify explanation or exposition; for this reason, it is also known as the **sandarshana** ("expositing") **mudra**. Since the teaching gesture indicates a person of higher spiritual attainment, it is also known as the **chin** ("consciousness") **mudra**.

## Vyana

In traditional Indian physiology, one of the five bodily "**winds**" considered to be responsible for basic bodily functions, the others being **prana**, **apana**, **udana**, and **samana**. Unlike all the others, which are given specific locations in the body, the vyana **wind** is believed to pervade throughout the body, to keep things moving and mixed together.



A vyas, or stage director, at a performance of the Ram Lila, Bombay.

## Vyapti

("pervasion") In classical Indian **philosophy**, vyapti is the key condition determining the validity of an inference (**anumana**). The accepted form of an inference has three terms: An assertion (**pratijna**) containing the thing to be proved, a reason (**hetu**) containing evidence to support the assertion, and supporting examples (**drshtanta**). In the stock example "there is fire on the mountain, because there is smoke on the mountain," the assertion is that there is fire, and the reason is that there is smoke—with the underlying assumption that smoke invariably accompanies fire. In a valid inference, the reason accounts for every case of the thing to be proven; vyapti, or pervasion, is the term for this invariable association between cause and effect. For further information see Karl H. Potter (ed.), *Presuppositions of India's Philosophies*, 1972.

## Vyas

In the traditional **Ram Lila** (name given to any public dramatic presentation of the *Ramayana*, the earlier of the two great Hindu epics), vyas is the name

given to the stage directors. The Ramnagar Ram Lila is the longest, most elaborate, and arguably the oldest of these dramas. In the Ramnagar Ram Lila, one vyas is responsible for the **svarups**, the **brahmin** boys who are playing the parts of the divinities, and who are considered manifestations of the **deities** when they are "in character." The other vyas is responsible for the rest of the cast. Between them they shift the action between chorus and cast, give the actors minute directions for their acting, and prompt them when they forget their lines. As such, they are visible agents themselves and an important part of the Ram Lila.

## Vyasa

In Hindu mythology, a sage who is traditionally considered to be the author of the *Mahabharata*, the later of the two great **Sanskrit** epics. Vyasa is the **son** of the sage **Parashara** as a result of his dalliance with the ferrywoman **Satyavati**. Later in life Satyavati marries King **Shantanu** but only after extracting the promise that their children will rule, instead of Shantanu's eldest son, **Bhishma**. Satyavati's first son dies in childhood, and the second dies after his marriage but before having any children. In her desperation to preserve Shantanu's line, Satyavati calls on Vyasa to sleep with her younger son's wives, **Ambika** and **Ambalika**. According to tradition Vyasa is very ugly, and both of the **women** involuntarily react when Vyasa appears in her bed. Ambalika turns pale, causing her son, **Pandu**, to be born with an unnaturally pale complexion, and Ambika covers her eyes, causing her son, **Dhrtarashtra**, to be born blind. Vyasa also has sexual relations with Ambika's maidservant, who gives herself to him willingly, and from her is born **Vidura**. The descendants of Pandu and Dhrtarashtra are the **Pandavas** and **Kauravas**, respectively, who are the two warring factions whose enmity drives the *Mahabharata*. Thus Vyasa is not only the author of the *Mahabharata*, but also the source of the two families whose struggle is described in it.

# W

## Water

One of the five elements in traditional Indian **cosmology**, the others being **earth**, **fire**, **wind**, and **akasha**. In some philosophical schools, each of the elements is paired with one of the senses; here water is associated with taste. Within the body, water is also associated with certain bodily functions, especially reproduction (involving the mixing of fluids) and the elimination of fluid wastes.

## Wednesday

(Budhvar) The fourth **day** of the **week**, the presiding **planet** of which is **Mercury** (Budh). Although not inauspicious, the day has few strong associations and is not linked to the **worship** of any major **deity**. The planet Mercury is seen as an auspicious but weak planet, based on its small size and its quick rotation around the **sun**.

## Week, Structure of

The Hindu week has seven days, just like the European **calendar**. Each of the days has a presiding planet, is associated with one or more presiding **deities**, and (in keeping with the general Indian attitude toward time) is deemed more or less auspicious. The most unlucky days are **Tuesday** and **Saturday**, associated respectively with the **planets Mars** and **Saturn**. **Monday** (the **moon**), **Thursday** (**Jupiter**), and **Friday** (**Venus**) are usually regarded as auspicious days since these are judged to be benevolent and powerful planets. **Sunday** (the **sun**) and **Wednesday** (**Mercury**) have no strong associations, because although these bodies are seen as benevolent, they are also seen as relatively weak in their influence.

## West Bengal
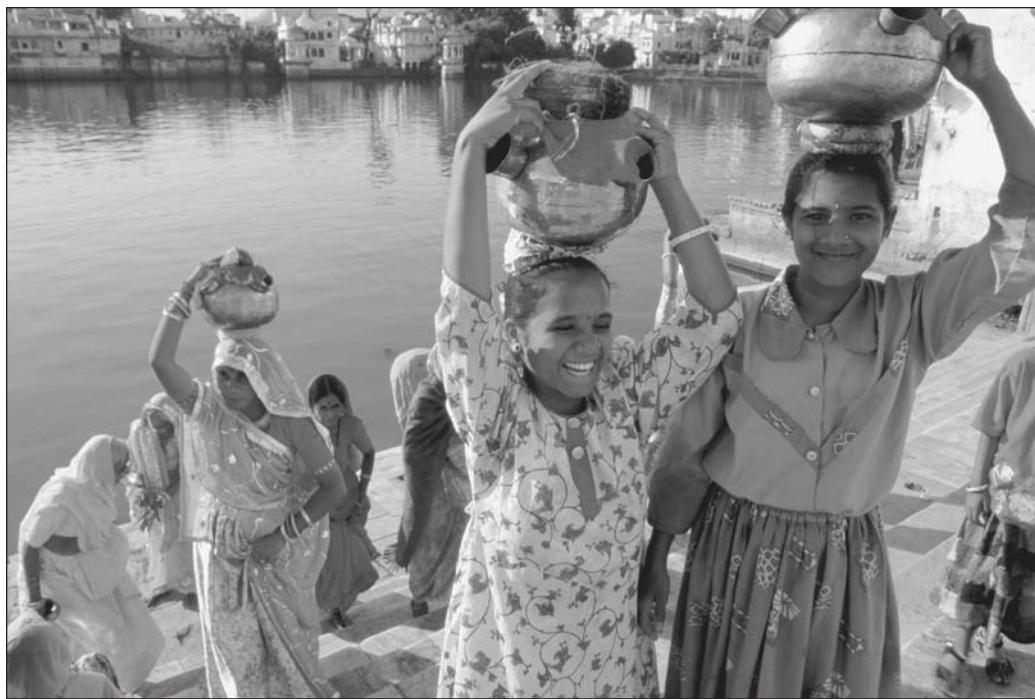
Modern Indian state. It was formed after Indian independence in 1947, after the partition of the state of Bengal into West Bengal and West Pakistan, the latter now known as Bangladesh. Most of the state lies in the lowland of the **Ganges** River delta, although in the north, Darjeeling extends into the **Himalayas**. West Bengal's capital, Calcutta, was the administrative center of British India until the beginning of the twentieth century. It was also a hotbed of anti-British resistance and has remained one of India's great artistic and intellectual centers. West Bengal has a number of important religious sites: **Kalighat**, in the heart of Calcutta, and **Dakshineshwar**, **Tarakeshvar**, **Tarapith**, and **Navadvip**. For general information about West Bengal and all the regions of India, an accessible reference is Christine Nivin et al., *India*, 8th ed., Lonely Planet, 1998.

## West Indies

A cluster of Caribbean islands with a significant Hindu **diaspora population**. As in many other cases, they were originally brought to the West Indies as indentured agricultural laborers, particularly on the sugar plantations, but have now lived there so long that they have become a part of the local community. On some of the islands, particularly Trinidad, Hindus have constructed temples and established sacred sites (**tirthas**) there, as a way of connecting their religious lives to their local environment.

## White Yajur Veda

Along with the **Black Yajur Veda**, this is one of the two major forms of the Yajur Veda, one of the oldest Hindu religious texts. The major difference between these two forms comes from the

Women carry water from the lake in a wedding procession in the town of Udaipur.

differing placement of explanatory notes on the Vedic mantras and their significance. The "White" Yajur Veda gathers these notes into an appendix known as a **Brahmana**—namely, the **Shatapatha Brahmana**, which gives its name to the second major stratum of Vedic texts. In contrast, the four recensions of the Black Yajur Veda include these notes in the text itself.

## Widows

Given the traditional assumption that a Hindu woman's central role is as a wife and mother, becoming a widow is deemed the worst fate that can befall a woman and is seen as the karmic fruition of some ghastly former deed. Because the underlying assumption of the **marriage ceremony** is that the bride's identity becomes assimilated to the groom's, a woman without a husband was seen as having lost her identity. Furthermore, because she had already taken on her dead husband's identity, remarriage was not an option for her. Immediately after her husband's death a woman was supposed to remove

all the symbols of a married woman—rubbing the red vermilion from the part in her **hair**, breaking her glass bangles, and in southern India, cutting the thread on her **mangal sutra**. For the rest of her life, she was forbidden to wear jewelry, colored clothing, or other bodily adornments, was supposed to keep her hair cropped short, and was supposed to devote herself to religious acts for the benefit of her dead husband. Because she had been widowed, she was also considered an unlucky and inauspicious person, banned from any and all auspicious events, living out her life doing the drudge work in the household. In certain parts of India, it was common practice to burn a widow on her husband's funeral pyre, a rite known as **sati**, although there were many other regions in which this practice was unheard of.

In real life, there was considerable variation on this grim picture. The most significant factors were a woman's age at the time she was widowed, whether she had children, and the social status of her husband's family. A woman widowed in old age would likely continue as matriarch of the family, a young widow with

**sons** would retain family status through her children, while even a **child widow** in a wealthy family could have a fairly comfortable life, although subject to numerous restrictions. Where one or another of these factors was lacking, then a widow's position would be much more precarious, and there is no doubt that in earlier times many widows led very difficult lives. Even in modern times a woman whose husband dies at a young age is often considered to be inauspicious, and thus a source of bad fortune. Ameliorating the condition of widows was one of the major goals of nineteenth-century Hindu reformers, and it has become more common for widows to remarry, although some of the most traditionally minded people do not accept this.

## Wind

One of the five elements in traditional Indian **cosmology**, the others being **earth**, **fire**, **water**, and **akasha**. In some philosophical schools, each of the elements is paired with one of the five senses; here wind is associated with touch. The various "**vital winds**" (**prana**) inside the body are also associated with a number of bodily functions, including respiration and circulation.

## Witchcraft

The existence of witchcraft is generally accepted in many segments of contemporary Hindu culture, even by many "modern" urban Hindus. The root forces behind witchcraft are malevolence, envy, and greed, through which some people try to harm others or to ruin what they have gained. Witches may work through spells, through the evil eye (**nazar**), or through pronouncing **curses** on others. Pregnant **women** and young children are thought to be particularly susceptible to their powers, and these parties are also deemed particularly likely to be cursed, because the envy over their good fortune is said to excite a witch's passion. The appropriate

counteraction is to perform various **rites of protection**, which will safeguard the person from being affected. Those afflicted by witchcraft may exhibit this as an unusually persistent illness or as strange behavior; for these people, stronger remedies are needed. As Sudhir Kakar masterfully shows, the language of **possession** and exorcism can be interpreted as an "idiom" (using traditional Indian cultural categories) for what modern psychiatrists might call the diagnosis and treatment of mental illness. For further information see Sudhir Kakar, *Shamans*, *Mystics*, *and Doctors*, 1991; and David F. Pocock, "The Evil Eye," in T. N. Madan (ed.), *Religion in India*, 1991.

## Women

In the **dharma literature**, women from all social groups were considered at the same ritual level as **shudras**—they could not undergo a second birth, were forbidden to hear the **Vedas**, were forbidden to perform certain religious rites, and in many places could not own property or resources, except by extension through their husbands. At the same time, women played (and play) an immensely important part in Hindu religious life, as **daughters**, mothers, wives, and patrons. According to the traditional dharma literature women had their own special role to play, based on their status as women. See also **stridharma**.

## Woodroffe, Sir John

(1865–1936) Calcutta High Court Justice who also, under the pseudonym of Arthur Avalon, translated and published works on **tantra**, a secret, ritually based religious practice. Woodroffe was one of the earliest European exponents of tantra as a coherent religious path and served as an apologist for the seemingly "impure" or "immoral" ritual acts described in the texts. In his expositions of the tantras, Woodroffe was trying to convince a dual audience, both of whom were horrified at the licentiousness

described in the tantric texts, which involve violating deeply embedded taboos on nonvegetarian food, consumption of alcohol, and illicit sexuality. On the one hand, Woodroffe was addressing the British, who were the political masters of the time, and on the other, educated Indians, many of whom would have preferred to dismiss the tantras as an aberration. His publications and lectures were instrumental in helping make tantrism respectable, although more careful scholarly work has been done since that time.

## World Parliament of Religions

Meeting in Chicago in 1893 to which representatives from major world religions were invited, including Asian religions. It marks a watershed in the Euro-American conception of non-Christian religions, in which they were no longer seen as simple idolatry but taken seriously as genuine religious paths. It is also notable that many mainline Christian churches were not represented there, and that the main Christian presence came from historically black churches. One of the Parliament's highlights was the address by **Swami Vivekananda**, in which Hinduism—in its rational, Vedantic form—was first seriously received by his Western hearers. Vivekananda's presence was charismatic enough that he spent the next four years living in America and in 1897 founded the **Vedanta Society**.

## Worship

Two separate words can be used to describe Hindu worship, with two groups of assumptions that come with it. The first and most common act of worship is called **darshan** ("seeing"), in which devotees (**bhakta**) view the image of the **deity**, and believe that the deity is also looking at them. Darshan is thus an interaction between deity and devotee, an exchange of glances that carries understanding. Worship

involving **offerings** and objects usually falls under the rubric of the word **Puja** ("homage").

## Worship of Tools

A rite traditionally performed on the festival of **Dussehra** by members of certain artisan groups. This festival has two different charter myths, both of which mark the triumph of good over evil. It is celebrated as the day that the god **Rama** slew the demon **Ravana**, and is also associated with the triumph of the **Goddess** over a **demon** named **Mahishasura**. For the artisans, such **worship** ritually marks the importance of their tools as a means to earn their livelihood, and such propitiation is also believed to guarantee success for the following **year**.

## Worship of Weapons

In earlier times, a common rite among the warrior classes on the festival of **Dussehra** (usually occurring within October and November). This festival has two different charter myths, both of which mark the triumph of good over evil. It is celebrated as the day that the god **Rama** slew the demon **Ravana**, and is also associated with the triumph of the **Goddess** over a **demon** named **Mahishasura**. Given the martial tone of both charter myths, it is easy to see how it would be associated with soldiers and fighting, and thus this was considered a day to **worship** one's weapons, as a symbol of the **deity**. According to popular belief, any endeavor begun on this festival day will invariably succeed, and for this reason, Dussehra has been a favored day to begin military campaigns. Since Dussehra comes after the end of the monsoon rains, in which any travel is nearly impossible, this is a favorable time from a strategic perspective as well.

# Y

## Yadava

In Hindu mythology, the tribe from which the god **Krishna** is said to have come and over which he ruled after he gained his kingdom in the city of **Dwaraka**. In Indian history, the Yadava dynasty controlled the **Deccan** region in modern **Maharashtra** between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In northern Indian society, this is the name of a particular **jati**, an **endogamous** social subgroup that was organized (and whose social status was determined) by the group's hereditary occupation. In past generations the Yadavas had fairly low status, but they have recently gained much greater political power—Mulayam Singh Yadav has twice been elected chief minister of **Uttar Pradesh** and has also served as India's minister of Defense; Laloo Prasad Yadav has been the chief minister of **Bihar** (either directly or by proxy through his wife) throughout the 1990s.

## Yadunandana

("joy of the **Yadus**") Epithet of the god **Krishna**. The Yadus were reckoned as Krishna's clan, and thus he was their joy. See **Krishna**.

## Yajamana

("patron of the **sacrifice**") In the cult of sacrifice found in the **Vedas**, the oldest Hindu religious texts, the yajamana was the person who commissioned the sacrifice and paid for its performance, and who thus stood to gain its anticipated benefits. This term draws a crucial distinction between priest and patron and points to the relationship between them—the former were learned men and ritual technicians, who knew how to perform complex sacrificial rites, but they were dependent for their livelihood on the patronage of their sponsors.

## Yajna

("**sacrifice**") A **fire** sacrifice, which was the primary religious act in the earliest stratum of Indian religion. This cult of sacrifice is elaborated in the greatest detail in the **Brahmana** literature, in which sacrifice is portrayed as the means by which the universe came into being. The performance of sacrifice needed highly trained priestly technicians (**rtvij**), who were differently responsible for chanting parts of the **Rg**, **Sama**, and **Yajur Vedas**, as well as building and maintaining the sacred fire that was the heart of the sacrificial action. This cult of sacrifice was essentially based on burning things in this sacred fire, conceived as the god **Agni**, so that Agni could convey the **offerings** to the other **deities**. These rites were so elaborate and expensive that they eventually fell into disuse; by the turn of the common era, there was also considerable ambivalence about the **animal sacrifices** that were originally an important part of many of these sacrifices. These ancient rites are rarely performed today, but in the present context the word *yajna* can be used for any rite involving the sacred fire, particularly one carried out by a **brahmin** for a patron.

## Yajnavalkya

In the **Upanishads**, the speculative texts that form the latest textual stratum in the **Veda**, Yajnavalkya is named as a sage associated with the court of King **Janaka**, who was able to show that he had greater wisdom than the others. He is also ascribed as the author of the *Yajnavalkya Smrti*, one of the texts that comprise the **dharma literature**, based on the pattern of mythic ascription found in these texts.

## Yajnavalkya Smrti

One of the **smrtis** or "remembered" texts, a class of literature deemed important but

less authoritative than the other textual category, the **shrutis** or "heard" texts. This smrti is ascribed to the sage **Yajnavalkya** and is an example of one of the **Dharma Shastras**, which were manuals prescribing rules for correct human behavior and ideal social life. Unlike the **Dharma Sutras**, which are ascribed to recognizable individuals, the Dharma Shastras are usually ascribed to mythic sages, as a strategy to reinforce the authority of these texts. The extant text is about a thousand verses, divided into sections on religious custom (**achara**), the administration of justice (vyavahara), and expiation (**prayashchitta**). Estimates on its date of composition range from the first to the sixth century, but it is clearly later than the *Manu Smrti* because some parts of the middle section are far more developed. The *Yajnavalkya Smrti* was the subject of numerous commentaries, one of which, the **Mitakshara**, was given the status of a legal code for the greater part of India during the British empire.

## Yajnopavit

Another name for the **sacred thread**. See **sacred thread**.

## Yajur Veda

Traditionally, the third of the four **Vedas**. As with the **Rg Veda** and the **Sama Veda**, the Yajur Veda was associated with sacrificial rituals, and the text itself consists mainly of the **mantras** to be uttered while the **sacrifice** was being carried out. The Yajur Veda exists in five major recensions, of which four are "black" and one is "white." Their differences stem from the placement of explanatory notes on the mantras and their significance: The recensions of the **Black Yajur Veda** contain these notes in the text itself, whereas the **White Yajur Veda** gathers these notes into an appendix known as a **Brahmana**—namely, the **Shatapatha Brahmana**—and this Brahmana literature becomes the next major stratum of Vedic texts.

## Yaksha

(feminine *yakshi*) A class of minor **deities** who are essentially nature spirits and are often narrowly associated with particular places. Yakshas are reckoned as the attendants of the **deity Kubera**, who is regarded as the guardian of the northern direction and the lord of wealth. The yakshas are generally regarded as beneficent toward human beings, and because of their associations with the generative power of nature and with Kubera's wealth, they are often regarded as bestowing wealth and fertility. Yakshas have a long history of appearances in Indian sectarian literature, where they are either portrayed as guardian spirits or as examples of depravity. Although it is fairly old, the only extensive monograph on yakshas is Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Yaksas*, 1971.

## Yama

God of death and Death personified. Yama is one of the eight **Guardians of the Directions**, associated with the southern direction, and for this reason, the south is considered an inauspicious direction. Yama first appears in the **Vedas**, the oldest Hindu religious texts, where he is described as the first mortal. By virtue of being the first person to suffer death, he was seen as presiding over the **World of the Fathers**, where the virtuous dead feasted and enjoyed themselves (much as they had on **earth**). As the tradition developed, conceptions of Yama shifted in turn, until he was considered the judge of the dead, ruling mainly over the regions of punishment, primarily **hells**, in which people suffered until they were reborn. Yama is often portrayed holding a noose, with which he draws out the person's spirit at the time of death and leads it bound to judgment. Modern poster images of Yama show him seated on a throne as king of the dead, majestic and dark in color; to his left sits the scribe Chitragupta, who keeps a ledger book recording the actions of human beings. Yama's role as the judge of the dead makes him greatly feared in everyday Hindu life. Ideally, this fear can have a pos-

Low fog hovers over the Yamuna River with the Taj Mahal in the distance.

itive outcome—reinforcing people's inclination to abstain from evil—and one of the names for Yama is **Dharmaraja**, the "Lord of Righteous Action." Hindu mythology also has tales of people who somehow manage to outsmart Yama, of whom the best known is **Savitri**, who manages to gain back the life of her husband, **Satyavan**.

## Yama

(2) In the **ashtanga** ("eight-part") **yoga** first codified by **Patanjali** (1st c. C.E.?), yama ("restraint") is the first and most basic of the eight constituent elements of yoga practice. Patanjali lists these as five: abstaining from harm to other living things (**ahimsa**), abstaining from theft, truthfulness, **celibacy** (**brahmacharya**), and abstaining from avarice. These can all be characterized as "restraints" because their intent is negative—they do not call for positive actions as much as they entail refraining from certain thoughts or actions deemed especially injurious.

## Yamunacharya

(10th c.) According to tradition, a devotee (**bhakta**) of the god **Vishnu**, who is claimed to be the grandson of **Nathamuni**, and the teacher of **Ramanuja**. Nathamuni was the compiler of the *Nalayira Divyaprabandham*, the collected hymns

of the **Alvars**, a group of poet-saints who lived in southern India between the seventh and the tenth centuries. All the Alvars were devotees of Vishnu, and they expressed this devotion in passionate hymns sung in the **Tamil language**; among southern Indian **Vaishnavas** (devotees of Vishnu), these hymns are so holy that they are referred to as the "Tamil **Veda**." Ramanuja, on the other hand, was a philosopher who organized and systematized this devotional outpouring into a coherent philosophical position and thus is considered the founder of the **Shrivaishnava** religious community.

It is generally believed that Yamunacharya was Nathamuni's grandson, and thus he was heir to the religious tradition his grandfather had helped create. There is much more doubt about the claim that he was Ramanuja's religious preceptor (**guru**) because it seems more likely that Yamuna's influence on Ramanuja was transmitted by Yamuna's disciples. Still, what is indisputable is that these three are the three main figures in the development of the **Shrivaishnava** tradition, and thus that Yamunacharya occupies a pivotal spot.

## Yamuna River

Northern Indian river rising at **Yamunotri** in the **Himalayas**, and flowing

west and south of the **Ganges** River, which the Yamuna finally joins at **Allahabad** in the state of **Uttar Pradesh**. The Yamuna is traditionally considered one of the seven sacred rivers of India, along with the Ganges, **Godavari**, **Saraswati**, **Narmada**, **Indus**, and **Cauvery**. The Yamuna flows through the **Braj** region south of Delhi, which is traditionally associated as the homeland of **Krishna**, and his devotees (**bhakta**) revere it even more than the Ganges. For his devotees, places throughout the Braj region carry strong associations with the life of Krishna, but the most important sites are at **Mathura** and **Brindavan**.

## Yamunotri

Sacred site (**tirtha**) in the **Himalayas** at the headwaters of the **Yamuna River**. Ritually speaking, Yamunotri is considered to be the source of the Yamuna, although the actual source lies farther upstream, at the foot of the Bandarpunch Mountain. Its high altitude also means that it is only accessible between late April and October, after which it is closed for the winter months—a pattern echoed at **Gangotri**, **Kedarnath**, and **Badrinath**, the other three major Himalayan pilgrim sites. One ritual center in Yamunotri is the river itself, in which pilgrims bathe (**snana**), braving the frigid waters. There are also several temples—the oldest built by one of the kings of **Nepal**—but the temples at Yamunotri are quite modest compared with those at **Gangotri**, and the only large one was built in the 1980s. Aside from the holy river and its temples, Yamunotri is also noted for several hot springs from which **water** emerges almost boiling; some of these hot springs have been channeled into a tank, and many pilgrims take advantage of the hot baths.

## Yantra

("instrument") In astrology (**jyotisha**), and in **tantra**, a secret, ritually based religious practice, the word *yantra* most commonly refers to a symbolic diagram, often believed to confer **magic** or spiritual power on those who know how to use it. In some cases such yantras are considered to be an **aniconic** form of a **deity**, as is the case of the most famous yantra, the Shriyantra or **Shrichakra**, which is used in ritual for the **worship** of the **goddess** Tripura Sundari. The most literal meaning of the word is "device for restraining," and in an astrological setting the yantras of the various **planets** are used in rituals to change their effects, usually to restrain or diminish the power of planets judged to be malefic or **inauspicious**.

## Yashoda

In Hindu mythology, the god **Krishna's** foster mother, who receives him on the night he is born, and cares for him until he is old enough to return to **Mathura** to claim his throne. Yashoda is a paradigm for selfless devotion, who loves Krishna as if he is her own biological child. Her mythic example of loving, motherly care has provided the model for **vatsalya bhava**, one of the five **modes of devotion** most prominently articulated by **Rupa Goswami**, a devotee (**bhakta**) of the god **Krishna** and a follower of the Bengali saint **Chaitanya**. In the vatsalya mode of devotion, devotees consider themselves as God's parents, lavishing love and care on the **deity** as a **cow** cares for her calf.

## Yaska

(5th c. B.C.E.?) Traditionally cited as the author of the *Nirukta*, a text giving etymological explanations for archaic words in the **Veda**. Almost a quarter of the words in the Veda appear only once. Even by Yaska's

A yantra is a symbolic diagram often believed to confer
magic or spiritual power on those who know how to use it.

time, the meanings for many of these words had become either uncertain or completely lost, as the spoken language had changed. Although at times it is clear that Yaska himself is guessing—as when modern linguists can make comparisons to the Iranian *Avesta*, a related sacred text—his work was immeasurably helpful to later readers.

## Yathakhyati

("discrimination [of things] as they are") Another name for the **theory of error** known as **satkhyati**. See **satkhyati**.

## Yati

(from **Sanskrit** *yam*, "to restrain") From the time of the **Vedas**, the earliest Hindu religious texts, the word *yati* has been one of the terms used to designate an **ascetic**, as someone who had gained control over himself. At the time of the Vedas there seems to be some ambivalence for the yatis, since the storm-god **Indra** is said to have fought with them, but in later times the word takes on an unequivocally positive connotation.

## Yatra

("journey") Although in its literal meaning the word *yatra* can refer to any sort of travel, in modern **Hindi** its semantic field is considerably narrower and connotes travel with some serious purpose, rather than a stroll around the block or a sightseeing trip. The word yatra's most important connotation is travel for religious purposes, particularly pilgrimage to the sacred sites (**tirthas**). A yatra is thus a journey, but a particular type of journey.

## Yatri

In an **ascetic** context, the word *yatri* denotes a novitiate **Bairagi**, a renunciant ascetic community comprising devotees (**bhakta**) of the god **Vishnu**. As an everyday word it means a person performing a **yatra** ("journey"; more specifically, a trip with the significance of a religious pilgrimage).

## Yayati

In Hindu mythology, the son of King **Nahusha** and a king in the lunar dynasty.

## Year, Structure of

The Hindu ritual year is determined according to both a solar **calendar** and a lunar calendar. Aside from the Gregorian calendar and the common era, there are two indigenous Hindu calculations of the solar year, both of which have twelve solar months. In northern India these months correspond to the twelve signs of the **zodiac**, and the months change as the **sun** moves through them. As in the Western zodiac, the year begins when the sun enters Aries, although according to Indian astrology this transition takes place around April 14, rather than March 21, as figured in Euro-American astrology. In southern India there is an identical solar calendar, whose names are drawn from the names of certain **nakshatras** or lunar asterisms. Aside from the solar months, the solar year is also divided into halves based on the movement of the sun: the **Uttarayana** for the period when the sun is moving north, and the **Dakshinayana** in the time the sun is moving south. The sun begins its northward journey, considered the more auspicious time, on **Makara Sankranti**, reckoned as falling on January 14; it begins its southward journey six months later on **Karka Sankranti** on July 14.

Far more important for religious purposes is the lunar calendar, which has twelve **lunar months**: **Chaitra** (March–April), **Baisakh** (April–May), **Jyeshth** (May–June), **Ashadh** (June–July), **Shravan** (July–August), **Bhadrapada** (August–September), **Ashvin** (September–October), **Kartik** (October–November), **Margashirsha** (November–December), **Paush** (December–January), **Magh** (January–February), and **Phalgun** (February–March). In northern India, the calendar usually begins in the first day of the bright half of Chaitra, meaning that the last days of the year are those in the dark half of this same month.

Since these lunar months are based on the phases of the **moon** (ending with the **full moon** in northern India and the **new moon** in southern India), the festivals determined by this lunar calendar fall at different times each year with respect to the solar calendar. This is because the twelve lunar months are completed in about 354 solar days, and thus, each lunar year begins eleven days earlier than the last. About every 2½ years this discrepancy is corrected by the addition of an extra lunar month, known as the **intercalary month**, through which the solar and lunar calendars are kept in general correspondence. The intercalary month is added to any lunar month in which the sun does not enter a new sign of the zodiac and can thus fall in any month of the year. In this way, although the solar calendar is less important in everyday life, it helps maintain the general correspondence between the lunar calendar and the seasonal festivals associated with that calendar.

At least in northern India, the three major **seasons** (hot, **monsoon**, and cool) have important links with the **festival calendar**. In general, the most ritually active time is the cool season between October and February; in many places this is also the time following the harvest, when many people have more time and money to spend on religious observances. The hot season has many rites associated with heat, whereas the rainy season, as a time of peril, is often connected with **rites of protection**.

## Yellamma

Presiding **goddess** of the shrine on Yellama hill, in the town of Saundatti in

the Belgaum district of the state of **Karnataka**. Yellama's temple is infamous for being a traditional center for the dedication of **devadasis** ("[female] servant of the Lord"), a class of **women** kept in temples as singers and dancers in the service of the temple's presiding **deity** and to whom they were usually considered to be "married." In Yellama's temple, however, both boys and girls can be dedicated. Although for the past two centuries the **devadasi** tradition has carried associations with common **prostitution**, in earlier times it was far more common for a devadasi to live with a single man for her entire life, although she could not marry him because she was considered dedicated to the deity.

At times this dedication is done because of a demand by the goddess herself, revealed through **possession**; in other cases the parents do this, hoping to gain some concrete benefit, particularly healing from disease. Yellamma is associated with **fire** and also with causing (and potentially curing) skin diseases, which can be seen as symbolic "burning."

According to the traditional model, devadasis held a definite social position and had special legal rights—they were entitled to family **inheritance** and to perform religious rites, which other women were not. These special rights have disappeared with the outlawing of the devadasi system, done, in part, by the British, and definitively in post-Independence India. Although such dedications still take place, in many cases they are little more than a cover for procurement, with the girls being shipped to brothels in Bombay, Pune, and other central Indian cities. In most cases the girls come from extremely poor families, and the dedication to Yellamma is a way to avoid paying for a wedding, a major expense in contemporary Indian society. The dedications take place on the **full moon** in the **lunar month** of **Magh** (January–February), and are reportedly widespread, but because of secrecy, the laws prohibiting this are rarely enforced. For further consideration of the devadasi system, in this case at the **Jagannath** temple in **Puri**, see Frederique Apffel Marglin, *Wives of the God-King*, 1985.

## Yoga

The literal meaning of the word *yoga* is "the act of joining," and it is cognate with the English word "yoke." Just as the latter word can serve as either a verb or a noun—either the act of yoking, or the thing to which animals are yoked—in the same way the word yoga can refer both to the act or process of spiritual development and also to a specific set of teachings fostering this development. Both these meanings can be conveyed by the word "discipline," and this is one of the preferred translations.

There are many specific teachings styling themselves as yogas. The oldest one is laid out in the **Yoga Sutras** attributed to the sage **Patanjali**; this system is known as **ashtanga** ("eight-limbed") **yoga**, because of its eight constituent parts. Other well-known yogas are the three "paths" described by the god **Krishna** in the **Bhagavad Gita**, an important religious text: the yogas of action (**karma**), wisdom (**jnana**), and devotion (**bhakti**). Another well-known yoga is **kundalini yoga**, the practice of which is entirely internal, in the alternate physiological system known as the **subtle body**. Kundalini yoga stresses awakening the kundalini, the latent spiritual power that exists in every person, and through this gaining spiritual benefits. These make up the main categories of teachings, but the members of many particular religious communities will describe their religious practice as yoga: Thus there is the **surat-shabd-yoga** of the **Radha Soamis**, the Raja Yoga of the **Brahma Kumaris**, or the **Siddha** Yoga of the SYDA Foundation. In such cases the word is used to identify a particular religious group's characteristic teaching, which usually includes elements from the classical articulations of yoga.

## Yoga Mudra

In Indian **dance**, **sculpture**, and ritual, a particular symbolic hand **gesture** (**mudra**), in which the right hand is placed flat on the left, with both palms pointing up, and the joined hands are laid on the crossed legs. In a sculptural image, this mudra indicates that the figure is adept in **yoga**.

## Yogananda, Paramahamsa

(b. Mukunda Lal Ghosh 1893–1952) Modern Hindu teacher and founder of the Self-Realization Fellowship. Yogananda was one of the earliest Hindu missionaries to come to America. He came to Boston in 1920, to address the International Congress of Religious Liberals in Boston and never returned to India. He eventually settled outside Los Angeles, where he established a center and lived for the rest of his life. In his early years in America he was considered something of a curiosity, and there are photos of him taken with President Calvin Coolidge. Yogananda's teachings were largely based in the **ashtanga yoga** of the classical **Yoga Sutras**, but he also stressed the doctrine of kriya ("active") yoga, which is claimed to accelerate spiritual attainment. Most of Yogananda's disciples and both his successors were Americans, and the Self-Realization Fellowship is essentially an American organization with historical roots in India. For further information see Paramahansa Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi*, 1997.

## Yoganidra

("sleep of **yoga**") Epithet of the **Goddess** in the first episode of the *Devimahatmya*, the earliest and most authoritative text for the mythology of the Goddess. In this episode, the Goddess has lulled **Vishnu** into a stupor through her power of illusion, making him oblivious to **Brahma's** cries for help when he is menaced by the **demons Madhu** and **Kaitabha**. Brahma is saved when he praises the Goddess, after which she withdraws her yogic sleep from Vishnu; he then regains consciousness and rescues Brahma by killing the demons.

## Yoga Sutras

("aphorisms on **yoga**") A set of brief sayings traditionally ascribed to the sage **Patanjali**, which are the foundational texts for the Yoga school, one of the **six schools** of traditional Hindu **philosophy**. Patanjali's Yoga Sutras are usually read with a commentary ascribed to the sage **Vyasa**, and this commentary has become accepted as an integral part of the text. The text of the Yoga Sutras is divided into four parts, with each part devoted to a particular theme: The first part focuses on concentration (**samadhi**), the second part on the mechanics of spiritual development (**sadhana**), the third part treats various attainments (**vibhuti**), including **magic** powers (**siddhi**), and the last part describes the state of yogic isolation (**kaivalya**), which the text describes as liberation. The text presupposes the **cosmology** taught by the **Samkhya** school, another of the six schools, and the Yoga school is often considered the "practical" articulation of Samkhya theory.

## Yogi

Literally meaning "one possessing **yoga**," in practice the word refers only to a yogic adept—someone who "possesses" yoga in the sense of having mastered it—rather than to anyone simply practicing yoga. True yogis are widely believed to have superhuman powers (**siddhi**) as a by-product of their long spiritual development, which they can and will exercise for the benefit of their disciples—for physical healing of diseases, for psychological help, or for giving guidance on both spiritual and mundane matters. The yogi is seen as a spiritually realized person, and their authority stems completely from this attribution, which paradoxically is not subject to any sort of external verification.

Consequently, there are significant differences of opinion on whether or not any particular person is a yogi.

## Yogi Bhajan

(b. Harbhajan Singh Puri, 1927) Modern Hindu missionary and founder of the **3HO/Sikh Dharma Brotherhood**. He first came to the United States in 1969, leaving behind his position as a customs official at the Delhi airport. His initial teachings were the traditional disciplines of **hatha yoga** and **kundalini yoga**, with his followers organized into a group known as the "Happy, Healthy, Holy Organization" (3HO). Hatha yoga is a system of religious discipline (**yoga**) based on a series of bodily postures known as **asanas**; this practice is widely believed to provide various physical benefits, including increased bodily flexibility and the ability to heal chronic ailments. Kundalini yoga is a religious discipline, the primary focus of which is awakening the **kundalini**, the latent spiritual force that exists in every person in the **subtle body**. The kundalini is awakened through a combination of yoga practice and ritual action and is believed to bring further spiritual capacities and ultimately final liberation (**moksha**) of the soul.

These two disciplines remain an important part of Yogi Bhajan's teachings, for he claims to be a master of **tantra**, a secret, ritually based religious practice, but in the 1970s his teaching widened to include traditional Sikh teachings and symbols. The most prominent of these symbols are the "five Ks" that all Sikhs are supposed to wear, so called because each of them begins with the letter *k*: uncut **hair** (kesh), a comb (kangha), a bangle on the right wrist (kara), shorts (kacch), and a ceremonial sword (kirpan). Many of Yogi Bhajan's followers keep the Sikh symbols far more strictly than most people born as Sikhs, but the movement has two important divergences with the traditional Sikh community. One of these is its emphasis on tantra, which has little

importance in the Sikh community. The most significant difference, however, is the religious authority that Yogi Bhajan holds over his followers, which is very different from the decentralized, essentially democratic form of the traditional Sikh community.

## Yogini Ekadashi

Religious observance falling on the eleventh day (**ekadashi**) of the dark (waning) half of the **lunar month** of **Ashadh** (June–July). As for all the eleventh-day observances, this is dedicated to the **worship** of **Vishnu**, particularly in his form as **Narayana**. Most Hindu festivals have certain prescribed rites, which usually involve fasting (**upavasa**) and worship and often promise specific benefits for faithful performance. On this day the prescribed action is to give gifts to poor brahmins; faithfully observing this festival washes away the sin of cutting down a pipal tree (**ashvattha**) and also brings one **birth** in **heaven**.

## Yogmaya

Powerful form of the **Goddess**, particularly noted for her power to bewitch and bewilder people—in other words, her ability to wield **maya**, the power of illusion. In some modern sources Yogmaya is named as the **deity** who takes the form of the infant girl exchanged for the infant god **Krishna** and is later killed by Krishna's wicked uncle, **Kamsa**. According to these sources, it is under her spell the previous night that all the inhabitants of Kamsa's palace fall asleep, and Krishna's father, **Vasudeva**, is able to spirit the infant away. Later in Krishna's career, Yogmaya is believed to facilitate his clandestine meetings with the women of **Braj**—when Krishna plays his flute, the women come to him, but all the others fall into the spell cast by Yogmaya and are unaware of their absence. Because of her ability to wield maya, Yogmaya is a powerful deity; she is worshiped on the fourth day of the fall

**Navaratri**, the festival of the "nine nights" that are sacred to the Goddess in her varying forms.

## Yoni

Although in modern **Hindi** this has become a vulgar word for female genitalia, its most literal meaning is "womb," both in a literal sense as the place of gestation and in a metaphorical sense as any place of origin, source, or generative power.

## Yudhishthira

("firm in battle") In the *Mahabharata*, the later of the two great Hindu epics, Yudhishthira is the eldest of the **Pandava** brothers who are the epic's protagonists. Yudhishthira is magically born when his mother, **Kunti**, uses a powerful **mantra** to have a son by **Dharma**, the god of righteousness. Yudhishthira is in all ways his father's son; he is described in the epic as the manifestation of Dharma on earth. He is proverbial for his strict adherence to the truth, is courteous to all, and is committed to righteousness. His only personal flaw is a love of **gambling**, a love matched only by his complete lack of gaming skill, and this flaw has major repercussions.

Because of his virtues, Yudhishthira is selected as heir to the throne by his uncle, **Dhrtarashtra**. This choice raises the jealousy of Dhrtarashtra's son, **Duryodhana**. He first tries to kill the Pandavas by building the flammable **house of lac**. The house is burned, but the Pandavas are able to escape unharmed. Some time later, Duryodhana decides to win Yudhishthira's rights to the kingship in a game of dice. Here Yudhishthira's love for gambling gets the better of his judgment, for he is playing against Duryodhana's maternal uncle, **Shakuni**, who is very skilled. As Yudhishthira begins to lose, he keeps betting bigger and bigger stakes, in an effort to win back what he has lost. After losing their kingdom and all their posses-

sions, Yudhishthira wagers himself and his brothers. After losing this bet, he wagers and loses the Pandava brothers' common wife, **Draupadi**. This loss leads to Draupadi's humiliation, in which she is paraded through the assembly hall by Duryodhana and his brother, **Duhshasana**, her clothes stained with her menstrual **blood**. This event sharpens the already strong enmities between the two groups. Shocked at such treatment, Duryodhana's father, King Dhrtarashtra, gives the Pandavas back their freedom, but because of the loss in the game of dice, the Pandavas agree to go into exile for twelve years and live incognito for the thirteenth, with the condition that if they are discovered in the thirteenth year the cycle will begin anew.

Yudhishthira and his brothers peacefully pass their twelve years in exile. During the thirteenth year, they live in the court of King **Virata**, where they remain undiscovered, despite frantic searching by Duryodhana's spies. When the thirteen years have passed, Yudhishthira and his brothers return to claim their part of the kingdom. Yudhishthira hopes for some sort of peaceful settlement and sends a message to Duryodhana saying that they will be satisfied with a mere five villages, one for each brother. When Duryodhana responds that they will not get as much land as could fit under the point of a needle, Yudhishthira realizes that they will not get their rights without a battle. He reluctantly mobilizes his brothers for war. He fights valiantly in the great war and is crowned the king after their victory.

After ruling for many years, Yudhishthira sets out with his brothers and their wife, Draupadi, for the **Himalayas**, followed by a small **dog**. As they climb the mountains Draupadi and his brothers die one by one, but the dog remains with Yudhishthira. At the top of the Himalayas Yudhishthira finds the god **Indra**, the king of **heaven**, waiting for him in a golden chariot. Indra tells Yudhishthira that he will take him to heaven but that Yudhishthira will have

to leave the dog behind. Yudhishthira flatly refuses to abandon his faithful companion, even if it means that he will not go to heaven. The dog then reveals himself to be the god Dharma in disguise. The lesson in this story is that throughout his life Yudhishthira never allows himself to stray far from righteousness; even at the end he refuses to forsake it.

## Yuga

A name denoting a unit of **cosmic time**, with two possible meanings. According to traditional belief, time has neither beginning nor end, but alternates between cycles of creation and activity, followed by cessation and quietude. Each of these cycles lasts for 4.32 billion years, with the active phase known as the **Day of Brahma**, and the quiet phase the Night of Brahma. In cosmic time, the Day of Brahma is divided into one thousand **mahayugas** ("great cosmic ages"), each of which lasts for 4.32 million years, and this is one possible meaning of the word *yuga*. The more common use is to refer to a **mahayuga's** four constituent yugas, named the **Krta Yuga**, **Treta Yuga**, **Dvapara Yuga**, and **Kali Yuga**.

# Z

are judged to be the winter and the summer solstices but occur in the second weeks of January and July. Given a difference of about three weeks, it is not surprising that there are significant differences in the astrological calculations between these two systems.

## Zodiac

The signs of the zodiac in Indian astrology (**jyotisha**) are virtually identical with that of Western astrology, and it is generally accepted that the Greek zodiac was brought to India in the first to third centuries via the Greek kingdoms in modern Afghanistan. There are slight differences in the nomenclature; the Indian zodiac has **Dhanus** ("bow") in place of Sagittarius, Makara (a sea monster sometimes identified as a crocodile) for Capricorn, and Kumbha ("[water] pot") for Aquarius. As with Western astrology, each of the twelve signs has certain characteristics, with which people born in these signs are imbued.

The two systems differ sharply in how they figure the annual starting point, although both begin with the sign of Aries. The zodiac used in Western astrology begins on the vernal equinox, on which the sign of Aries is the beginning. By Indian accounts the starting point of the zodiac comes when the **sun** intersects the midpoint of a group of stars named Ashvini. It is thus based on the position of the sun with regard to the fixed stars, whereas the Western zodiac is based on the position of the sun with regard to the **earth**—that is, when it intersects the equator, and is thus independent of the fixed stars. These differing methods have produced a discrepancy between the two systems, which are now more than three weeks apart—in the Western zodiac Aries begins on March 21, whereas in the Indian zodiac it does not begin until about April 14. This discrepancy can also be seen in the account of **Makara Sankranti** and **Karka Sankranti**, which

# A Note on Transliteration

I have transliterated Hindi and Sanskrit terms into English to match their original pronunciation as closely as possible. In most cases, the transliteration is a straightforward substitution of Hindi or Sanskrit letters with their counterparts in English. However, discrepancies in the languages create some difficulties in transliteration.

In this book, Hindi and Sanskrit words are made plural by adding the English *s* to the end. This is done to conform the transliterated words to English grammar, even though this is not standard in Hindi or Sanskrit.

For some terms there exist both Sanskritic and Hindi forms, each with different pronunciations. I have transliterated these words from Hindi or Sanskrit depending on the most appropriate context; Sanskritic forms seem fitting when one is discussing Sanskrit texts, but not when reporting a remark by a Hindi speaker.

Transliteration also becomes complicated for words where there is a Hindi or Sanskrit letter that does not directly correspond to a letter in English. For example, single characters in the Hindi alphabet represent sounds that require consonant combinations in English, such as "ch" and "sh." I have used these letter combinations to substitute for the Hindi letters whenever possible. In other cases, transliterating Hindi and Sanskrit pronunciation is not as straightforward. The following list contains Hindi and Sanskrit terms from this book that do not follow standard English pronunciation. They are written here with diacritical marks to indicate the proper pronunciation.

# Pronunciation Guide

## Vowels

| | |
|---|---|
| a | as in b<u>u</u>t |
| ā | as in f<u>a</u>ther |
| ai | as in b<u>i</u>te |
| au | as in tr<u>ou</u>t |
| e | as in p<u>ay</u> |
| i | as in k<u>i</u>t |
| ī | as in f<u>ee</u>t |
| o | as in c<u>oa</u>t |
| u | as in p<u>u</u>t |
| ū | as in b<u>oo</u>t |

## Consonants

| | |
|---|---|
| c | as in <u>ch</u>eck |
| ḷ | as in <u>l</u>ip (with the "l" sound rolled) |
| ḻ | This is the Tamil "l." To make this sound place the tip of the tongue back in the palate and hold it there while making an "l" sound. |
| ṁ | This indicates that the previous vowel is nazalized (pronounced through the nose) |
| ṅ | as in si<u>ng</u> or si<u>nk</u> |
| ñ | as pronounced in Spanish (eg. mañana) |
| ṛ | as in <u>r</u>ip (with the "r" sound rolled) |
| ṟ | This sound is found in Tamil, but not Sanskrit. The "r" sound is pronounced with a trill. |
| ś | as in <u>sh</u>irt |

As for ṭ/ṭh, ḍ/ḍh, ṇ, and ṣ, these are pronounced by placing the tip of the tongue at the top of the palate and flexing it forward.

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Abhaṅg

Abhāva

Abhīra

Ācamanīya

Ācāra

Adhikamāsa

Adhikāra

Adhvāryum

Adhyāsa

Ādigranth

Āditya

Ādivāsi

Advaita Vedānta

Āgama

Aghorī

Agrahāra

Ahalyā

Aham Brahmāsmi

Ahaṁkār

Ahiṁsa

Ahīr

Airāvata

Aiteraya

  Brāhmaṇa

Ajāmila

Ājīvika

Ājñā Cakra

Ākāśa

Akhaṇḍ Pāṭh

Akhyāti

Akrūra

Akṣaya Tṛtīyā

Alaṁkāra

Ālīḍhāsana

Āḻvār

Āmalaka

Ambālika

Amṛta

Ānanda

Ānanda Akhāra

Ānandamaṭh

Ānandawāra

Anaṅga

Anasūyā

Anekāntavāda

Aṅgiras

Aṇimā

Añjali hasta

Añjanā

Annakūṭ

Anṛta

Antaḥpura

Antarāla

Antaryāga

Anumāna

Anyathākhyāti

Apāna

Apūrva

Āraṇyaka

Ārati

Ārdha Kumbha

  Melā

Ārdhamaṇḍapa

Arthāpatti

Arundhatī

Ārya Samāj

Āṣāḍh

Asamañjasa

Āsana

Asatkāryavāda

Aṣṭādhāyī

Atikāya

Atīta

Ātman

Atrī

Avadhī

Avadhūta

Āvāhana

Āvāhana Akhāra

Avatār

Avidyā

Ayamātma Brahman

Āyurveda

Bāba

Bahī

Bahiryāga

Bahūdaka

Bairāgi

Baisākh

Baisākhī

Baiṭhak

Bakāsur

Bālabhadra

Bālajī

Balarāma

Bāṇa

Bāṇa Liṅga

Baniā

Banjāra

Barahmāsa

Bārāt

Barūthānī

  Ekādaśī

Begampūra

Bhadrakālī

Bhādrapada

Bhadrāsana

Bhagavān

Bhāgavata

Bhāgavata Purāṇa

Bhagīrath

Bhagīrathī

Bhāṣya

Bhairava Jayantī

Bhairavī

Bhaiyā Dūj

Bhaktamāl

Bhaktilīlāmṛta

Bhaktimārga

Bhaktirasabodhinī

Bhāmatī Advaita

Bhaṇḍāra

Bhaṇita

Bhāradvaja

Bhārata

Bhāratanāṭyam

Bhārat Mātā

Bharatmilāp

Bhasmāsur

Bhāva

Bhavānī

Bhedābhada

Bhīma

Bhogamaṇḍapa

Bhogawāra

Bholanāth

Bhramargīt

Bhramarī

Bhṛgu

Bhudevī

Bhujaṅgavalaya

Bhūriwāra

Bhuśuṇḍi

Bhūt

Bhūta

Bhūtaliṅgas

Bhūtayajña

Bidhāī Samaroh

Bījak

Brahmā

Brahmahatyā

Brahmā Muhūrta

Brāhmaṇa

Brahmāṇḍa

Brahmā

  Sampradāy

Brahmasūtra

Bhāṣya

Brahma Sūtras

Brahmayajña

Brahmī

Brahmo Samāj

Bṛhannala

Bṛhaspati

Buddha Avatār

Buddha Pūrṇimā

Caṇḍa

Caṇḍī

Caṇḍikā

Cārvāka

Cāyāgrāhī

Cinnamāsta

Cittirāī

Cuḍākarana

  Saṁskāra

Dābistan-I-Mazahib

Kānvar
Kanyādān
Kapāla
Kāpālika
Kapālin
Karaṇa
Karaṇḍamakuṭa
Karka Saṅkrānti
Karmamārga
Karmendriya
Karṇa
Karnāta
Karṇavedha
  Saṃskāra
Karṇī Mātā
Kartigai
Kārtik
Kārtik Pūrṇimā
Kārttikeya
Kaṭaka Hasta
Kathā
Kaṭyavalambita
  Hasta
Katyāyana Smṛti
Kausalyā
Kavitāvalī
Kāvya
Kedārnāth
Khaḍga
Khāṇḍava Forest
Khaṇḍobā
Khaṭvāṅga
Kirītamakuṭa
Kīrtan
Kīrtimukha
Kitawāra
Koīl
Koṅkanastha
Kṛpācārya
Kṛta Yuga
Kubjā
Kuladevatā
Kumāra
Kumārasambhava

Kumbhakarṇa
Kumbha Melā
Kumhār
Kuṇḍalinī
Kuṇḍalinī Yoga
Kūrma Avatār
Kurmāsana
Kuṭīcaka
Lāghava
Laghimā
Lāllāvakyāni
Laṅkā
Laṅkālakṣmī
Līlā
Liṅga
Liṅgarāja Temple
Liṅgāyat
Lohār
Loharī
Lokāyata
Lopāmudrā
Loṭa
Mādhava
Mādhurya Bhāva
Mādrī
Māgh
Māgh Melā
Mahābhārata
Mahābhāṣya
Mahābrahman
Mahādeva
Mahākāleśvar
Mahākālī
Mahākāvya
Mahālakṣmi
Mahāmaṇḍaleśvar
Mahāmaṇḍapa
Mahāmantra
Mahāmāyā
Mahānubhav
Mahāpātaka
Mahāpātra
Mahār
Mahāvākya

Mahāvidyās
Mahāyuga
Mahimā
Mahiṣāsura
Mahiṣī
Makarāsana
Makara Saṅkrānti
Mālā
Malamāsa
Mālatīmādhava
Mālī
Mallikārjuna
Maṃsa
Manasā
Maṇḍala
Maṇḍapa
Maṇḍodarī
Maṅgalam
Maṇimegalai
Mān Līlā
Maṇipūra Cakra
Mansā Devī
Mantharā
Mantrarājā
Manu Smṛti
Maraṇāśauca
Marātha
Mārgaśīrṣa
Mārkaṇḍeya
Mārkaṇḍeya
  Purāṇa
Marwāri
Maṭh
Matsya Avatār
Matsyagandhī
Mauni Amāvasyā
Māyā
Māyā Devī
Meghadūta
Meghanāda
Melā
Menā
Menakā
Mīnākṣi

Mitākṣara
Mithilā
Mohinī
Mohinī Ekādaśī
Mokṣadā Ekādaśī
Mṛcchakatika
Mṛtyunjaya
Mudrā
Muhūrta
Mūlādhāra Cakra
Mūlāmantra
Muṇḍa
Muṇḍan
Muralī
Murārī
Mūrti
Nācciyār Tirumoḻi
Nāḍī
Nāga
Nāgara
Nāg Pañcamī
Nāī
Nainā Devī
Naiṣṭhika
Nāladiyār
Nalayīra Divya-
  prabandham
Nāmakaraṇa
Nāmarūpa
Namaskāra
Nambūdiri
Nānak Jayantī
Nanda Devī
Nandī
Nandigrāma
Nārada
Nārada Smṛti
Nara-Nārāyaṇa
Narasimha Avatār
Nārāyaṇa
Nasik Melā
Nāstika
Naṭamandira
Naṭarājā

Nāth

Nāṭya

Navarātrī

Navyanyāya

Nāyak Dynasty

Nāyanār

Nāyar

Nīlakaṇṭh

Nimbārki

Nirākara

Nirguṇa

Nirikāri

Nirṛti

Nirvāṇi Ani

Nityasamsārin

Nṛtya

Nṛyajña

Nyāsa

Nyāya

Nyāya Sūtras

Padmāsana

Pāduka

Pān

Pañcāgnitapa

Pañcāmahāyajña

Pancāyat

Pañcāyatana Pūjā

Pañcvānī

Paṇḍa

Pāṇḍava

Paṇḍit

Paṇḍu

Pāṇḍurang

Pāṇigrahaṇa

Pāp

Pāpamocanī
  Ekādaśī

Pāpāṅkuśa
  Ekādaśī

Parakīya

Paramātman

Paramparā

Pārasurām Avatār

Pariṇāmavāda

Parivrājaka

Pārvaṇa

Pārvatī

Paryaṅka

Pāśa

Patāla

Pattuppāṭṭu

Periya Purāṇam

Pināka

Piṇḍa

Piṇḍadān

Piṅgala Nāḍī

Pippalāda

Pītāmbara

Pītavāsana

Pīṭha

Pitṛ

Pitṛyajña

Poṅgal

Pradakṣiṇa

Pradhāna

Prahlāda

Prajāpatya
  Marriage

Prajñānam
  Brahman

Prākāmyam

Prakāśa

Prakāśātman

Prakṛti

Pramāṇa

Prāṇa

Pranava

Prāṇāyāma

Prāpti

Prārthanā Samāj

Prasād

Pratijñā

Pratyabhijñā

Pratyāhāra

Prāyaścitta

Pṛthivī

Pṛthu

Pūjā

Pūjārī

Puṁsavana
  Saṁskāra

Puṇya

Purāṇa

Purūravas

Pūrva Mīmāṁsā

Pūtanā

Putradā Ekādaśī

Rādhā

Rādhāṣṭamī

Radhavallabh
  Sampradāy

Rāga

Rāhu

Rājābhiṣeka

Rājadharma

Rājagṛha

Rājasūya

Rājataraṅginī

Rājput

Raktabīja

Rāmānandī

Ramāvalī

Rāmāyaṇa

Rām Līlā

Rām Navamī

Raṅganātha

Rās Līlā

Rath Yātrā

Ratī

Rātrī

Rāvaṇa

Ravidās Jayantī

Rāwal

Rāwat

Renukā

Ṛg Veda

Rohiṇī

Ṛṣi

Ṛṣyaśṛnga

Ṛta

Ṛtvij

Rudranāth

Rudra Sampradāy

Rukmiṇī

Sadācāra

Sadasatkhyāti

Sādhana

Sādhāraṇa
  Dharma

Sādhu

Sādhya

Safaī

Sāgar

Saguṇa

Sahajīya

Śākadvīpa

Śākhā

Sakhā Bhāva

Sāla

Salmaladvīpa

Samādhi

Samāna

Samasthāna

Samāvartana
  Saṁskāra

Samavāya

Sāma Veda

Saṁhārakrama

Samhitā

Saṁkalpa

Sāṁkhya
  Sampradāy

Saṁsāra

Saṁskāra

Samvād

Sanakādi

Sanaka
  Sampradāy

Sanātana

Sanātanadharma

Sanātana
  Sampradāy

Sanatkumāra

Sandhābhāṣa

Sandhyā

Saṅgam

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Sañjaya
Sañjnā
Saṅkaṭ Mocan
Saṅkrānti
Śānta Bhāva
Santāl
Sanyāsī
Sapiṇḍa
Sapiṇḍikaraṇa
Śārada Maṭh
Saramā
Sarvasvāra
Śatākṣī
Satī
Satkāryavāda
Satkhyāti
Ṣaṭṭilā Ekādaśī
Satyabhāma
Satyagrāha
Satyakāma
Satyanārāyan
  Vrat
Satyavān
Satyavatī
Saundāryalaharī
Sāvitrī
Sāvitrī Pūjā
Sevā
Siddhapīṭh
Siddhāsana
Sīmantonnayana
  Saṁskāra
Simhakarṇa
Sinhastha Melā
Śiṣṭācāra
Śiśupāla-vadha
Sītā
Śītalā
Śītalāṣṭamī
Śīvaga-sindāmaṇi
Śivarātrī
Smaraṇa
Smārta
Smṛti

Snāna
Snātaka
Solah Somvār
  Vrat
Somāvatī
  Amāvasyā
Somnāth
Sonār
Sorathā
Sphoṭa
Śramaṇa
Śrīnāthjī
Śṛṅgerī Maṭh
Sthala Mūrti
Sthūṇākarṇa
Strīdhan
Strīdharma
Śrīvidyā
Subhadrā
Subodhinī
Subrahmaṇya
Sudāma
Sugrīva
Sulva Sūtras
Sumatī
Sumitrā
Suparṇa
Surapāna
Śūrpanakhā
Sūrsāgar
Sūrya
Suśruta Samhitā
Suṣumṇā
Sūta
Sūtakāśauca
Svādhiṣṭhāna
  Cakra
Svadhyāya
Svakīya
Svarūp
Svāstika
Svastikāsana
Svataḥprāmāṇya
Svayambhū

Svayambhū
  Images
Tagore Jayantī
Tāla
Tāṇḍava
Ṭaṅka
Tanmātras
Tāraka
Tārakeśvar
Tarjinī Hasta
Tarpaṇa
Telī
Thākur
Thaṇḍāī
Ṭīka
Tirruppāvai
Tīrtha
Tīrthayātrā
Tīrukkuṟal
Tirunāvukkaraśu
Tirupati/Tirumāla
  Devasthānam
Tiruttontar
  Purāṇam
Tribhaṅga
Trimūrti
Tripuṇḍra
Tripurāri
Triveṇi
Tṛṇāvarta
Tulsī
Tulsidās Jayantī
Tulsī Vivāh
Tuṅgnāth
Turīya
Tvāṣṭṛ
Tyāg
Udāna
Udāsī
Uddālaka Aruni
Udgātṛ
Ulaṭbāṁsī
Umā
Upacāra

Upadāna
Upādhi
Upamāna
Upanayana
  Saṁskāra
Upāsaka
Upāsana
Upavāsa
Ūrdhvabāhu
Ūrdhvapuṇḍra
Ūrdhvaretas
Utkuṭikāsana
Utsava Mūrti
Uttara Mīmāṁsā
Uttarāyana
Vaidyanāth
Vaikuṇṭha
Vaitaraṇī
Vājapeya
Vallī
Vālmīki
Vālmīki Jayantī
Vāmācāra
Vāmana Avatār
Vanamālin
Vānaprastha
Varadā Hasta
Varāha Avatār
Varkāri
Varṇa
Varuṇa
Vastradhārī
Vāsudeva
Vāsuki
Vāta
Vātsalya Bhāva
Vāyu
Vedaṅga
Vedānta
Vedānta Sūtras
Vedārambha
  Saṁskāra
Vellāla
Veṇu

Vetāla
Vibhūti
Vidyādhāra
Vidyārambha
  Saṃskāra
Vihāra
Vijñāneśvara
Vimāna
Vīnā
Vinatā
Vindhyavāsinī
Viparītakhyāti
Vīra
Vīrabhadra
Vīragal
Vīrāsana
Virāṭa
Viśiṣṭhādvaita
  Vedānta

Viṭhoba
Viṭṭhala
Viṭṭhalnāth
Vivāha
  Saṃskāra
Vivaraṇa
  Advaita
Vivartavāda
Vivasvān
Vrātya
Vṛtra
Vyākaraṇa
Vyākhyāna
  Mudrā
Vyāna
Vyāpti
Vyās
Vyāsa

Yādava
Yādunandana
Yajamāna
Yajña
Yājñavalkya
Yājñavalkya
  Smṛti
Yajñopavit
Yathākhyāti
Yātrā
Yātri
Yayāti
Yoga Mudrā
Yoganidrā
Yoga Sūtras
Yoginī Ekādaśī
Yogmāyā

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