

## Glossary

**Gurubhav:** A term used especially by hagiographers to denote the stage when Ramakrishna transits from the spiritual adept to the position of Guru

**Hindutva:** An essentializing term increasingly used in modern parlance to suggest a homogenized, pervasive Hindu worldview; this has proved to be quite susceptible to political use by fundamentalist organizations

**Jnan:** Gnosis, in the Hindu religious tradition representing one of the three paths to the realization of God—Jnan, Bhakti and Yoga

**Kali:** Essentially a Puranic goddess, associated with Sakta-Tantra worship; in Bengal also the centre of a deeply devotional cult which has produced fine lyrical poets

**Kali Yuga:** The last of the four epochs or Yugas in Hindu view of time. It is said to have begun with the end of the great Mahabharata war. The Yuga theory implies a degenerative time, the worst manifestation of which is said to be Kali Yuga

**Karma:** Literally it means work or action but there is also a more soteriological meaning where it is held to be synonymous with preordained fate. In the latter context, action becomes the determinant of present and future lives.

**Krishna:** The popular Hindu god whose origin may be rooted in pre-Sanskritic folk culture; of the two images of Krishna, that of the playful child of Vraj country (Mathura-Vrindavan) and the warrior-statesman from the epic Mahabharata, the former is by far the more popular and forms the subject-matter of the Hindu religious classic *Bhagavat Purana*

**Maya:** An important metaphysical concept especially used in Advaita Vedanta to signify the idea of an illusive and insubstantive world.

**Mimamsa:** One of the six schools of Hindu philosophy dealing largely with the elaborate rites and rituals of Vedic religion

**Monism:** A world-view that believes Reality to be one kind. Philosophically, the position is subtly different from non-duality which affirms the One but does not as categorically deny the many

**Nyaya:** One of the six major schools of Hindu philosophy principally involved with questions of logic and epistemology

**Pantheism:** The belief that the whole of reality is synonymous with or

**Abhaya:** liberation from fear, a state of fearlessness

**Advaita:** Non-duality, one of the several philosophical positions in Vedanta, the best known exponent of which is Sankara (c. 8-9th century)

**Ahimsa:** non-injury or non-violence

**Atman:** Self as different from Ego; the worldly soul as distinguished from Brahman, the Cosmic Soul

**Bhagavad Gita:** A greatly venerated theistic text of Hindus, known to synthesize several schools of Hindu religious philosophy, greatly influenced resurgence of modern Hinduism; several commentaries on the work have been written in the last one hundred years

**Bhagavat Purana:** A deeply influential and revered text among the Vaishnav communities, describes the childhood exploits of Krishna, generally considered to be a tenth century work and originally composed in south India

**bhakti:** Literally, devotion to God but also a complex concept to which many metaphysical and soteriological ideas have been added over time  
**Brahmacharya:** Celibacy, the observance of which is often seen to produce special powers in the novitiate  
**Brahman:** The Supreme Soul/Truth, not to be confused with Brahmin, a member of the priestly class

**Dharma:** A term not precisely translatable into English but generally representing a universal moral and spiritual order; may also be rendered as practical duty of caste or community in which case it is often modified to read as *Svadharma*



filled with divine presence. Here two variations are possible, one that equates God with nature and the other where God permeates his creation but cannot be perceived through our sense-experience.

**Prapatti:** A concept especially in use by Vaishnavs to denote willing and complete self-surrender to God

**Sakti:** Literally power, in the Hindu religious power and creativity of the female, an idea essentially borrowed from the Samkhya school; the practitioners of the Sakti cult are called Sakta who worship female divinities in various forms

**Samadhi:** A term usually associated with a yogic state of sublime vision.

Yogic techniques are however freely used by practitioners from other schools of thought such as Vedantists or mystic devotees.

**Samkhya:** One of the six established schools of Hindu philosophy; often also held to be among the oldest; the Samkhya however, is quite non-theistic in its essential principles

**Sankara:** By birth a Nambudri Brahmin, generally believed to be from the 8-9th centuries. Perhaps the greatest spokesman of Advaita Vedanta; some devotional verses are also attributed to him

**sarvik:** One of the three dispositions (*gunas*) into which Hindu philosophy divides human character or the nature of activities; sarvik stands for the purest state

**Shruti:** Literally, that which is heard; however, this is also a term used for the Vedas or other texts given the authoritative status of the Vedas, an apt term in this context, considering that the Vedas were not available as texts for a very long time

**Tantra:** The origin of the word is obscure but may be loosely translated as 'science of worship'. Tantric beliefs or practices are known to be common in the later Buddhist tradition as well as the Hindu. Within both, Tantra is intimately connected with the worship of female power (Sakti). Its elaborate rituals however, are known to have been borrowed even by Vaishnavs. There is an esoteric side involving nocturnal ritual meetings and the participation of women and lower castes which has always been socially unacceptable to genteel society

**Upanishads:** A highly speculative body of literature mostly in dialogic form and part of the vast Vedic literature but differing in significant respects from early Vedic tradition

**Vedas:** A vast body of literature considered to be the most sacred religious texts for Hindus though it would appear that the idea of the Vedas occupying a position similar to that occupied by the Koran among Muslims or the Bible among Christians is comparatively recent in origin

**Vedanta:** Also known as the Uttara Mimamsa or later Mimamsa, suggesting its differences with Purva Mimamsa that deals with elaborate Vedic ritualism. There are several schools of thought within Vedanta, some of which are more theistic than others. All Vedanta however is said to be based on the so-called *Prashan Traya* i.e., the *Upanishads*, *Brahma Sutra* and the *Gita*.

**Yoga:** Essentially the disciplining of the mind, yogic practices are also believed to create supernatural powers; the *Yoga Sutra* of Patanjali also established as a school of philosophy has significant overlaps with Vedanta

**Yuga theory:** Based on a cyclical view of time which is repeated through four epochs (Yugas): Satya (Krita), Treta, Dwapar and Kali. The completion of one cycle is a *kalpa* consisting of million earthly years. This however represents only one 'day of Brahma' (Creator). The Yugas generally speak of degenerative time, the worst manifestation of which is Kali Yuga