

Glossary

- Acha* Good
Allah hu-Akbar! God is Great! (Muslim prayer)
Amir Muslim nobleman (lit. 'rich')
Asalaam alekum Peace be upon you (Muslim greeting)
Avadi Golay Fast-flying pigeon from Lucknow
Avatar Incarnation
Ayah Nanny
Azan The Muslim call to prayer
Bahot Very
Bait al-Hikmah Renowned mediaeval hospital in Baghdad
Baksheesh A tip or offering
Bandh Closed or on strike; also a dam
Barsati A top floor flat (lit. 'rain shelter')
Bhagavad Gita Crucial section in the *Mahabharata* when Krishna persuades a faltering Arjuna to fight in the great battle of Kurukshetra, telling him that he must do his duty and that anyway all is illusion. The *Gita* is the most holy text in all Hinduism.
Bharat India (in Hindi and Sanskrit)
Bidi Cheap Indian cigarette (made from tobacco dust wrapped in a leaf)
Biryani Fancy rice dish
Bogie Hinglish (qv) word for railway carriage
Burqa Tent-like covering of Muslim women (extended version of the chador, qv)
Burra Sahib Big man (lit. 'Great Sir')
Bustan The Orchard (a famous Persian poem by Sa'di)
Caravanserai Lodging house for mediaeval merchants throughout Islam
Chador Muslim woman's veil (lit. 'sheet'). Can involve anything from a headscarf or sack to a fully fledged tent (see *burqa*).
Chai Tea
Chajja Long outward-jutting eave on a Mughal or Sultanate building designed to give maximum shade
Chamcha Sycophant (lit. 'spoon')
Champa Frangipani
Chapati Disc of unleavened bread
Char-bagh Garden of Persian inspiration divided into four parts by irrigation runnels
Charpoy Rope-strung bed on which the population of rural India spend much of their lives (lit. 'four feet')
Chattri A domed Mughal kiosk supported on pillars, often used as decorative feature to top turrets and minarets (lit. 'umbrella')
Chela Daughter, disciple, follower or slave
Chillum Hashish pipe
Chota hazari Bed tea (lit. 'little breakfast')
Chowkidar Watchman, guard or groundsman
Chunar Plaster
Dargah Muslim Sufi shrine
Das Ashwamedha Yuga The Ten Horse Sacrifice, only to be performed by maharajas, great kings and emperors. At the end of the *Mahabharata* the Pandavas perform the *Das Ashwamedha Yuga* (according to some on the banks of the Jumna near Indraprastha).
Dawa Medicine
Dervish Muslim holy man or mystic; same as a fakir or Sufi
Derzi-wallah Tailor
Dhaba Roadside restaurant
Dharna A peaceful protest (usually involving a long period spent sitting outside the house or office of a person considered to be responsible for some injustice)
Dhobi Laundryman
Dhoti Traditional loin-wrap of Hindu males
Diwali Hindu festival of lights

Diwan-i-am Hall of Public Audience in the Red Fort
Diwan-i-khas Hall of Private Audience in the Red Fort
Djinn An invisible spirit, composed of flame, often (though not necessarily always) mischievous. The djinns are referred to in the Quran and were introduced into India by the Muslims, but are now believed in by both Hindus and Muslims. Same word (though with slightly different connotations) as 'genie'.
Dom Untouchable responsible for cremations and cremation grounds; Hindu equivalent of undertaker
Durbar A courtly levee or reception at an Indian palace
Dussehra Hindu festival celebrating Lord Ram's victory over the demon Ravanna
Fakir Muslim holy man or mystic: same as a dervish or Sufi
Galee Abuse
Ghazal Urdu or Persian love lyric
Ghee Clarified butter
Godown Warehouse or storeroom
Gora White man
Golay Racing pigeon
Granthi Sikh reader (or official) in a gurdwara (qv)
Gulistan The Rose Garden (a famous Persian poem by Sa'di)
Gulmohar Orange-red flower which blooms in the hottest period of the summer (lit. 'Peacock Flower')
Gunda Hired tug
Gurdwara Sikh temple (lit. 'the Guru's doorway')
Hadiths The Traditions of the Prophet Muhammad; sayings and injunctions not included in the Quran
Hajj The Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca
Hajji One who has been thereon
Hakim Muslim doctor practising ancient Greek or *Unani* (qv) medicine
Haveli Courtyard house
Hayyat Baksh The 'Life Giving' Garden in the Red Fort
Hazar Ustan The Hall of a Thousand Pillars
Hijra Eunuch
Hinglish Modern Indian English
Holi Hindu spring festival; the occasion is normally celebrated by the throwing of

coloured water and the consumption of a great deal of hashish and opium
Hookah Waterpipe or hubble-bubble
Howdah Seat carried on an elephant's back, usually canopied
Id The two great Muslim festivals: Id ul-Fitr marks the end of Ramadan, while Id ul-Zuha (or Bakr-id) commemorates the delivery of Isaac. To celebrate the latter a ram or goat is slaughtered, as on the original occasion recorded in the Old Testament.
Idgah Open-air mosque used biannually for Id prayers. Idgahs are normally very large and are designed to take the overspill from the proper mosques on the Id festivals.
Ifar Meal eaten at sunset during the Ramadan fast
Inshallah God willing
Ivan High entrance portal normally bounded by a pair of minarets; same as a *pishmaq*
Jalebi Sticky Indian sweet made by deep-frying sugar syrup
Jali Lattice-work stone screen
Jamevar Antique Kashmiri shawl
Jataka Buddhist legend
Jawan Police constable (lit. 'young man')
Jaya Victory
Jharokha Projecting window or balcony
Jizya Quranic tax imposed on non-Muslims
Jhuggi Shanty settlement
Jungli Wild, unrefined
Kabooter Pigeon
Kabooter baz Pigeon flier
Kalidasa Great classical Sanskrit poet and playwright; lived first millennium BC in Ujjain, Central India.
Kali Yuga The age of Kali; an epoch of destruction and disintegration
Karkhana Factory
Keffiyeh Arab headcloth
Khalifa Official at a cock or partridge fight (lit. 'Caliph')
Khanqah Dervish monastery
Khitmagar Bearer, table-servant
Khoon Blood
Kirpan Sikh ceremonial sword
Kos The Mughal mile (about 2½ British miles). The measure is still used in remote parts of rural India.
Kshatriya The warrior caste

- Kucha* Alley
- Kufic* Arabic calligraphy used for monumental purposes
- Kurta* Long, loose Indian shirt worn with pyjama bottoms; traditional Delhi garb
- Langoor* Free kitchen; food alms given by Sikhs at a gurdwara
- Langur* Type of monkey
- Lathi* Bamboo staff used by Indian police to control crowds
- Lingam* The phallic symbol associated with Lord Shiva in his role as Divine Creator
- Lu* The hot desert wind which blows in from Rajasthan during midsummer
- Lungi* Sarong-style loin-wrap; simplification of the dhoti
- Mahabharata* The great Indian epic; the *Iliad*, *Odyssey* and Bible of the subcontinent, all combined into the longest single literary composition on earth, 100,000 stanzas long.
- Mahal* Palace
- Mahar* Severance fee paid to a Muslim woman by her husband in the event of a divorce
- Maidan* A park or common in the centre of an Indian city
- Mali* Gardener
- Mameluk* Warrior slave
- Masala* Spicy
- Masjid* Mosque
- Mataji* Lit. 'Respected Mother'
- Maulvi* Quranic scholar
- Medresse* Islamic theological college and seminary
- Mehfil* An evening of courtly Mughal entertainment, normally including dancing, the recitation of poetry and the singing of *ghazals* (qv).
- Mithai* Sweets
- Mohalla* Sub-division of a Mughal city: a group of residential lanes, entered through a single gate.
- Muezzin* Muslim prayer leader. In the old days used to chant the prescribed prayers from minarets five times a day. An endangered species since the advent of the cassette recorder.
- Munshi* Teacher, clerk or secretary
- Murqana* Stalactite-type decoration over mosque doorway
- Mushaira* Mughal literary evening
- Naan* Type of bread, cooked in a tandoor
- Namaste* Hindu greeting (lit. 'I bow to you')
- Namaz* Muslim prayers, traditionally offered five times daily
- Naqqar Khana* Drum House
- Nastaliq* Type of Urdu script
- Nautch* Type of dance performance popular in the early nineteenth century
- Nihang* Sikh guard, dedicated to protecting the faith
- Nulla* Ditch
- Omrak* Mughal nobleman
- Paan* An Indian delicacy and digestive; consists of a folded leaf containing (and other goodies) betel nut, a mild stimulant
- Padshah* Emperor
- Pakora* Indian fritter: cheese or vegetables coated in batter and deep-fried
- Pandit* Brahmin (lit. 'scholar'); origin of the English word 'pundit'
- Pankah* Fan
- Pankah-wallah* Man engaged to operate said fan before the advent of electricity
- Pirzada* Official at a Sufi shrine. Official descendant of the saint around whose tomb the shrine is built.
- Pradhan* Village headman
- Puja* Hindu prayers (lit. 'adoration')
- Pujari* One who prays (i.e. the Brahmin in charge of a temple or a Hindu *wali* ceremony)
- Pukka* Proper, civilized, refined; *opps* of *jungli* (qv)
- Qalander* Ecstatic mystic or Holy Fool usually itinerant; often mentally unbalanced
- Qawwali* Devotional verses sung at Sufi shrines with the intention of increasing the fervour of devotees and transporting them into a state of trance or *wajd* (qv)
- Qawwals* The group of musicians who sing *qawwalis*
- Qazi* Muslim judge
- Ramadan* Muslim month of fasting, normally some time around March
- Ramayana* The great Sanskrit epic telling the story of Lord Ram's rescue of his wife Sita from the clutches of the demon king Ravanna who lives on the island of Lanka (lit. 'Ram's Road')
- Rangila* Colourful; nickname of the Emperor Muhammed Shah (1720-1748), one of the more decadent of the Mughal emperors
- Rath* Chariot
- Rishis* Hindu holy men, hermits or sages

teachers who lived long ago in the foothills of the Himalayas; similar to modern *sadhus*

Sadhu Hindu holy man

Salwar kameez Long tunic and matching loose trousers favoured mainly by girls in North India and by both sexes in Pakistan and Afghanistan

Samosa Curried puff pastry triangle. Delicious

Sannyasi One who has shed his worldly ties and become a wanderer

Sanskrit Indo-European language (lit. 'Purified') probably brought to India by the Aryans during the second millennium B.C. The sacred tongue of Hinduism, it is still used by Brahmins for their worship.

Sarangi Violin-type musical instrument played with a bow

Sati Old Hindu custom of widow-burning; now illegal and largely discontinued, but for the odd case in Rajasthan

Sepoy Indian soldier in the service of the East India Company

Seraglio Harem

Shaitan Muslim name for Satan

Shaykh Head dervish in a Sufi monastery or *khanqah* (qv)

Sherwani Long Muslim frock coat

Shikar Hunting

Shikastah Old-fashioned classical Urdu script

Shish Mahal 'Palace of Mirrors', found in the Red Fort and in the larger Indian forts and *havelis*

Sikh Follower of the religion founded by Guru Nanak in the Punjab in the fifteenth century – a sort of compromise between Islam and Hinduism. Sikhs believe in one God and are opposed to idol worship. They are hard-working and, though they make up less than 1% of India's population, are both prominent and unmistakable: in obedience to Guru Nanak's command, observant Sikh men never cut their hair, and sport a turban and a long beard.

Sitar Indian instrument not dissimilar to an elongated lute

Sloka Stanza in a Sanskrit composition

Sufi Muslim holy man or mystic; same as a dervish or fakir

Syce Groom, stable lad

Tabla Type of drum

Tambura Another type of drum

Ta'wiz Sufi charm

Teh khana, *Tykhana* Underground cool house, much favoured in Mughal palaces

Tiffin Luncheon; originally eighteenth-century English slang, but still in use in Delhi

Tiffin tins Set of metal containers in which a commuter carries his home-cooked luncheon to his office

Tikka Caste-mark worn by Hindu women on their forehead; also a popular preparation of tandoori chicken

Titar Partridge

Tonga Two-wheeled horse-drawn taxi-carriage

Unani Greek (Ionian)

Urdu National language of Pakistan, almost identical to the Hindustani spoken today in Delhi. The language developed as a compromise between Persian and the different Indian languages in use in the Mughal army. (Its name is a reference to this military background and derives from the same root as the English 'horde'.) In the eighteenth century, Urdu developed into a language of great beauty, but few residents of Delhi can still speak this fine courtly version of the tongue.

Urs Annual festival held in Sufi shrines to commemorate the death of the founding Shaykh

Vedas The oldest Hindu religious texts; the four Vedas form the Hindu equivalent of the Old Testament

Veena Indian lute

Wajd Mystical trance

Wallah Man

Yoni Hindu vaginal symbol; usually represented cupping the Shiva *lingam* or phallus

Zenana Women's part of a Muslim household; the harem