

# GLOSSARY



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## *Ganesha*

*A Hindu god of wisdom  
and auspicious beginnings,  
the remover of obstacles,  
patron of arts and sciences.*

## **A** Aftaba

A water ewer used for daily ablutions like washing hands. Since the ewers were used in living rooms, they were crafted with plenty of embellishments, intricate designs, and innovative handles. Aftabas are used across North India and can be traced back to influences from Western Asia.

## **All India Handicrafts Board**

An organisation in India established in 1952, which aimed to advise the Ministry of Textiles on development programmes for handicrafts. It was abolished on 27th July 2020 by the Government of India during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **Arghya patra**

A vessel shaped like a yoni, the abstract representation of female genitalia. Ritual vessels such as these are used to pour water over the linga or the phallic form of the Hindu god Shiva. The use of abstract forms of the yoni in worship can be linked more to the Tantric traditions of Hinduism.

## **B** Baba Ramdeo

A martial hero, a saint very popular with the lower castes in West India. Originally his devotees largely came from the communities associated with leather work. His grave in Rajasthan is a popular pilgrimage site.

## **Batua or Batwa**

A handbag, traditionally part of a Bride's trousseau.

## **Benares sari**

A sari which is made in the city of Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh, though the clusters of weavers are now spread beyond the city. It is done on a handloom from katan silk and gold and silver threads or zari. It takes a weaver anywhere between two weeks to six months to finish a sari. The bright red Benares sari is usually part of a bride's trousseau, especially in Bengali and North Indian families. In 2013, Benares textiles, including pure silk (*katan*), organza (*kora*) and silk embroidery were included in the Geographical Indications (GI) tag of India.

## **Bhairava**

A form of the Hindu god Shiva. Bhairava is a fearsome form of Shiva associated with the annihilation of enemies and fear.

## **Bhudevi**

A form of the Hindu goddess Lakshmi. In this form, she is the consort of the Vishnu. Bhudevi represents the earth.

## **Bichhiya**

Toe rings, worn by married women as a symbol of marriage. They are made of silver and worn in pairs on the second finger.

## **Block printing**

Textile printing type that has been known in India since the 12th century. Wooden blocks are carved from teak. Each block has a wooden handle and a relief pattern cut into the underside. The fabric to be printed is stretched on the table, the block is dipped into the colour tray and then firmly pressed onto the material. There is a dot on the block to help maintain the accuracy of the repeating pattern.

## **C** Chanderi fabrics

The tradition of Chanderi weaving flourished during the Mughal period (1526–1857). There are three types of Chanderi saris: pure silk, cotton or silk and cotton. Traditionally, a floral pattern is used, but nowadays – geometric ornaments. Gold motifs were introduced to the muslin thin cotton saris in the early 20th century.

### **Changalavattam Villakku**

An oil lamp, traditionally used in temple and house rituals in South India, especially in Kerala.

### **Chikankari embroidery**

Chikankari is a fine, artistic embroidery on various fabrics like muslin, silk, chiffon, organza, etc.

The word *Chikan* appears to have been derived from the Persian word *chikin* or *chakin*, meaning cloth wrought with needlework. The pattern design is determined by the type of stitches and the thickness of the thread. 32 different stitches are known. Chikankari work is influenced by the royal patronage of the Mughals, especially the Emperor Jahangir (1569–1627) and his Queen Noor Jahan (c. 1577–1645) who is credited with having a hand at the origin of the craft. In the 1800s, the craft was further patronised by the rulers of Awadh, which then allowed for the textile to grow in popularity amongst British colonial officials taking the embroidery from worn textiles to decorative items and daily use objects.

## **D** Deccan

Plateau in India from the south of the Narmada River, between the Western Ghats and the Eastern Ghats.

### **Diya**

An oil lamp. Lamps are widely used in the Indian subcontinent and play an important role in prayers, rituals, ceremonies, and celebrations of various religions such as Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism. They are an integral part of house and temple facilities. The flame symbolizes enlightenment, prosperity, knowledge and wisdom, the victory of light over darkness, and of good over evil.

### **Dupatta**

A long scarf, part of women's attire in the Indian subcontinent. Traditionally, married women would wear the dupatta over their heads in temples or in front of elders.

### **Durga**

The fierce form of the Hindu goddess Parvati. She is an embodiment of the powerful, ferocious, cosmic feminine energy of Shakti. Durga is called upon to defeat the buffalo demon Mahishasura. Her weapons are gifted to her by the other gods to aid in the quest. *Mahishasuramardini* means "Slayer of Mahishasura". In Hindu mythology, she embodies the power of all the gods.

## **G** Gajalakshmi

A form of Hindu goddess Lakshmi. Also known as 'elephant Lakshmi' or 'Lakshmi with elephants'. Symbolises good fortune, abundance, fertility, and well-being.



### **Ganesha**

A Hindu god of wisdom and auspicious beginnings, the remover of obstacles, patron of arts and sciences. He is depicted with the body of a man and the head of an elephant, sitting on a lotus flower. God's vahana or means of transportation is a mouse. In Hindu mythology, he is the son of Shiva and Parvati. Most Hindu religious rituals begin with a prayer to Ganesha, he also has his own festival which is widely celebrated across western and southern India.

### **Gaumukha Kamandalu**

A water pot with a spout in a shape of a cow's head, used for containing water for rituals and the household.

### **Ghata**

A pot that a priest or his attendant traditionally uses to bring fresh water either from a river, pond, or well as part of the ritual of worship in a temple. If a pot has engraved deities on it, its purpose was for rituals or pouring sacred water onto the deity.

### **Gopis**

Milk maidens, the consorts, and devotees of Hindu god Krishna. They are often considered as the expansion of Radha, the chief consort of Krishna. The raslila dance of gopis with Krishna has inspired various art forms in India.

### **Gota**

Gold and silver lace from Lucknow, North India.

## **H** **Hasli or hansuli**

A torque necklace. The name is derived from the Hindi word for collar bone, on which these necklaces sit. This kind of necklace is a personal adornment of women, young boys and men.

### **Huqqa**

Water pipe. By the end of the century smoking a hookah was established by Persian doctor Hakim Abu'l-Fath Gilani. He created a system that allowed smoke to be passed through water. It became a status symbol for the Indian aristocracy. A huqqa usually consists of a bowl for coal and tobacco, central hollow shaft, a smoking pipe, and a base which is filled with water. To this day, the bases of the huqqa are the best preserved.

## **I** **Ikat**

Weaving technique tightly binding warp or weft threads according to a preconceived pattern. When dyed and the binding removed, a white pattern on coloured ground is achieved. The state of Odisha has the second largest number of weavers in India and the variety of handicrafts is influenced by the various tribal communities of the state, representing their cultural identity with exquisite fabrics, designs, and vibrant colours. In 2006, Odisha ikat textiles were included in the Geographical Indications (GI) tag.

## **Indra**

Hindu god of the gods and of thunder. Usually represented in mythology riding on his white elephant Airavata.

## **J**

### **Jhumkas or Jhumki**

Earrings and part of traditional Indian jewellery. Many varied designs and patterns of the jhumka exist.

## **K**

### **Kanchipuram silk sari**

Sari that uses gold and silver threads in the weave making it as heavy as 2 kilograms. The motifs woven into the saris are closely tied to the history of the city of Kanchipuram, which is known as an important pilgrimage site and used to be the capital city of the Pallavas dynasty who ruled the city from the 4th to 9th century. Saris from Kanchipuram are usually part of a bride's trousseau. In 2005, Kanchipuram silk were included in the Geographical Indications (GI) tag.

### **Karthikeya, or Subrahmanya**

Hindu war god, the son of Shiva and Parvati. He is worshipped extensively across southern India. His vahana or mount is a peacock.

### **Kashmiri shawl**

Fine wool shawls that are woven and embroidered in the northern part of the Indian subcontinent. At the end of the 18th century, they came to Great Britain and France, where they became an exclusive fashion accessory of high society. Until the 19th century, they were made by hand, and it took six months to a year to make one scarf. They were light and delicate – a fabric two meters long and one meter wide could be pulled through the ring. In order to satisfy demand, in the second half of the 19th century Europe began to industrially produce their imitations.

### **Khandoba**

Manifestation of Hindu god Shiva, worshipped in the Deccan. His first wife Mhalsa is said to be an avatar of the goddess Parvati.

### **Kota Doria**

A square-check pattern weave technique, which is practised in the city of Kota in Rajasthan. By popular lore, the weavers attribute patronage to a Rao Kishore Singh, who served as a general in Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan's (1592–1666) army.

### **Krishna**

The eighth incarnation of Vishnu, protector, and saviour. Ichnographically, he is depicted as dark blue or black skinned, as a cowherd in a dancing raslila pose, playing the bansuri flute with a turban with a peacock feather, or with the gopis. A favourite subject is Krishna's childhood – balakrishna. Since he was very fond of butter as a child, many depictions show him as a child holding a ball of butter in his right hand. The image of the god as a lover, Krishna with his beloved Radha, is also popular. In poetry and art, this image has various views – both religiously allegorical and secular.

## **L** Lakshmi

Hindu goddess of fortune, wealth, and beauty. She is usually depicted as a golden-skinned woman wearing a red sari, standing, or sitting on a lotus flower. Her four hands symbolize duty, prosperity, desire, and the attainment of the highest human enlightenment. In her hand, she holds a lotus flower, which symbolizes fortune, self-knowledge, and spiritual liberation. Lakshmi, along with Parvati and Sarasvati, is the Tridevi or the triad of goddesses.

## **Lepcha weaves**

Woven textiles on small, vertical looms. Before the use of cotton and other material, yarn made from a stinging nettle plant was used.

## **Lota**

A pot that has had a tremendous significance in Hindu, Buddhist and Jain ritualism as a symbol of wealth and fertility. Used in everyday life for both rituals and daily ablutions. It is also used in ceremonies for pouring liquid ritual ingredients or anointing sacred idols. On other occasions, it is used to serve ghee or water at traditional community dinners.

## **M** Madaliya

Amulet in Rajasthan, North India.

## **Madhubani or Mithila painting**

Madhubani artworks are created by women from different communities of the Mithila region. Traditionally wall paintings, but nowadays they are also executed on canvas or handmade paper. Madhubani painting is characterized by the geometrization used in the works, the natural colours in red-brown and black tones and the motifs used. Deities, scenes from epics, festivities, people, and natural objects such as the sun and the moon are traditionally depicted. The empty spaces are filled with flowers, animals, birds, or geometric ornaments. In 2007, Madhubani painting was included in the Geographical Indications (GI) registry.

## **Madurai Veeran**

Warrior-hero of Madurai. Devotee of the god Shiva. According to epic narratives he was under the employ of Tirumala Nayakkar (1623–1659), when he fell in love with the temple dancer Vellaiyammal. He was caught trying to elope with her from the Madurai Meenakshi temple. Madurai Veeran is worshipped as a family deity in Tamil Nadu. The iconography of Madurai Veeran is very similar those of the deity Khandoba, who is worshipped in Maharashtra and Karnataka. During the rule of the Tanjore Maratha, some of the features of Khandoba iconography merged with that of Madurai Veeran, resulting in similarities.

## **Madur Kathi**

Rugs and mats are an essential part of daily life in the hot and humid climate of West Bengal – they are used for sitting and sleeping on tables, as door curtains, for making bags and for religious rituals. They are woven on bamboo frames. The warp is cotton thread, while the weft is the soft reed Madur Kathi which thrives in the marshy landscapes around the Medinipur area. Traditionally, natural dyes were used to give colour to the reeds. In 2018, Madur Kathi was included in the Geographical Indications (GI) tag.

## **Makara**

A mythical water creature that resembles a crocodile. Symbol of strength and fertility.

## **Mango motif**

Its origin can be traced back to around 221 AD to the Sassanid dynasty in Persia. The motif was called the *boteh jegheh* and represented the cypress tree in Zoroastrianism, which symbolised everlasting life. It is still a popular motif in Iran and South and Central Asian countries. In South India, the motif is known as the *manga* and *mankolam*, in north India as *ambi*, *kairi* and *kalga*. Clothing and accessories with this motif are deemed auspicious and are considered a symbol of fertility, making it a preferred choice for occasions like weddings. Mango patterned jewellery is called *manga malai*. The South Indian version of this motif is more stylised, whereas the North Indian version retains its characteristic shape and has longer curves.

## **Mojari or jutti**

Traditional Indian shoes. Design originated during the Mughal rule and has survived through to this day. The Mughal emperor Jahangir (1569–1627) greatly favoured this style of footwear, giving them the name ‘Salim Shahis’ (from the emperor’s name Salim). Initially, they were a sign of royal status – made of leather, velvet, embroidered with silver and gold zari thread, decorated with precious stones and beads. The shoes have a flat sole, they are very comfortable and there is no difference between left and right – they are the same.

## **Morpankhi**

A barge. At the prow is a peacock with its wings spread and feathers panning out across the body of the boat. At the stern is a makara. These types of barges were commonly used for travelling the rivers, for entertainment or ceremonies during the 17th–18th century.

## **Mughal Empire**

Empire that lasted from 1526 until 1857 covering territories of modern-day India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh.

## **Muslin**

Fine, light cotton fabric.

## **N** **Namda**

Felted rugs that are made by flattening many layers of wool. It is believed that this tradition goes back to the reign of the Mughal Emperor Akbar (1542–1605), who wanted warm coverings for his horse in the cold winters. Namda are being produced in large numbers in the Kashmir valley. Rugs are extensively used in Kashmiri households as floor coverings and mattresses. Namda rugs also contribute to the kashida embroidery industry. A characteristic of kashida embroidery is that the darker contours are first created on the fabric, then the rest of the ornament. The most common motifs are flowers and birds.

## **Nataraja**

The dancing form of Hindu god Shiva. Shows Shiva as the patron of dance and dramatic arts. With a prabhavali, halo of fire around them Nataraja tramples Apasmara, the demon of ignorance. In this form, the god performs his functions of creation, destruction, preservation, and the act of blessing his devotees.



### **Nillavillaku**

Traditional lamp, commonly used in Kerala, South India. The lamp is lit in temples before the worship starts and before various official functions.

### **O Omersee Mawjee & Sons**

Indian silversmith from Bhuj, in the Kutch district of Western India. Active from 1840 until around 1930. The region of Kutch has a long tradition of silversmiths, who developed an elaborate technique of repeatedly heating and cooling the silver to allow it to be hammered, repoussed and embossed into intricate patterns.

### **P Paandaan or khaasdaan**

Paandaan is a container for storing paan ingredients. To prepare paan betel leaves (*Piper betel*), slaked lime, and other ingredients like betel nut (*Areca catechu*), cardamom, tobacco, cloves etc. can be added. Paan is served folded into a triangle or rolled up and is either spit out or swallowed after chewing. The culture of eating betel leaves already existed in India in the 3rd century. Paan was an important and prestigious aspect of hospitality in south Asia, the intricacy of the paandaan is reflective of the importance of the ritual.

### **Palki**

Mode of transport. Used to carry both important personages, and in temples during religious festivities. The palki entourage consisted of carriers, lamp bearers and others. Travellers would often carry necessary items which were used in the daily routine since the journeys would sometimes take days.

### **Panchapatra**

A common feature in Hindu rituals – the panchapatra is filled with water and sometimes leaves of five different plants to help purify the water. Usually, panchapatra ritualistic utensil set is accompanied with a ritual spoon udharane. Utensils are used during Hindu pooja rituals at home, temples, and offices and during celebrations. The spoon is used to pour water, ghee or milk onto the idols or into the ritual fire. It is also used to offer holy water to devotees.

### **Parvati**

Hindu goddess of fertility, protector of families. Wife of Shiva. She embodies power, energy, harmony, devotion, love, beauty, and motherhood. Parvati, along with Lakshmi and Sarasvati, is the Tridevi or the triad of goddesses.

### **Patri**

Hindu amulet commonly used in Rajasthan and Gujarat, West India.

### **Payala**

Traditional Indian anklet.

### **Pichwai**

Devotional painting that depicts Krishna. Traditionally used in temples and placed behind the figure of the deity to visually tell the story of Krishna's life.

## **Puja**

Hindu worship ritual to offer devotional homage and prayer to one or more deities, to host and honour a guest, or to spiritually celebrate an event. The name *puja* means honour, respect, worship, adoration. During the ritual an offering of light, flowers, and water or food is made to the divine. It can be performed in either a temple or home.

## **R Radha**

Consort of Hindu god Krishna. Krishna and Radha are considered the embodiment of love and the love they share is the subject of many epic poems, as well as miniature paintings.

## **Rama**

An incarnation of the Hindu god Vishnu. He is the protagonist of the epic Ramayana where he defeats the demon king Ravana in battle. Bronze images of Rama are usually accompanied by figures of his wife Sita, his brother Lakshmana, and his devotee Hanuman. Figures like these are made for personal worship either by individuals or families, to represent the larger images in temples. Kodanda Rama means '*one who holds the bow*'. The bow is one of Vishnu's attributes, which is associated with his incarnation Rama in the South India.

## **Ratha**

Carriage that is used mostly by the Hindu temples for Rathoutsava festival. During the festival, the temple deities are driven through the streets. The shape of the carriage is characteristic of a Bengali Hindu temple, with its multiple levels and tapering spires surmounted by prayer flags.

## **S Salma sitare**

Traditional Indian embroidery technique using gold and silver threads and small shimmering sequins.

## **Sandalwood carving**

Sandalwood is a sacred wood. It has an ancient carving tradition in India. The fragrant wood is used in Hindu, Buddhism, and Islam rituals. It is common in the South Indian states of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala.

## **Shakti**

One of the forms of Hindu goddess Parvati. Personification of the destructive feminine energy.

## **Shatranj**

An old form of chess played in the Sasanian Empire (224–651). Its origins are in the Indian game of *chaturanga*. Modern chess gradually developed from this game as it was introduced to Europe by contacts in Muslim Al-Andalus (modern Spain) and Sicily in the 10th century.

### **Shisha**

Mirror embroidery, also known as *aabhla*. Popular in the Rajasthan and Gujarat region, and especially in the Kathiawar region. Traditionally involved a range of different stitches employed to hold the mirrors in place. Shisha embroidery originated in 17th century India, imitating jewelled clothing. Regional differences are marked by the embroidery stitch technique.

### **Shiva**

One of the gods from the sacred Hindu trinity (Trimurti) together with Brahma and Vishnu. He is both the destroyer and creator of all things. His wife is the goddess Parvati, sons Ganesha and Kartikeya. Shiva's vahana, his means of transportation, is the bull Nandi.

### **Sini**

Tray which is used under the huqqa. Part of the huqqa smoking set.

### **Sridevi**

A form of Hindu goddess Lakshmi. In South India, Lakshmi is seen in two forms, Sridevi and Bhudevi. Sridevi is the spiritual world or energy called the Prakriti.

### **Srinathji**

A form of Hindu deity Krishna as a seven-year-old child.

### **Surahi**

A pot for storing water. Traditionally made from clay or metal.

### **Surmadaani**

Surmadaani containers held a cosmetic like red vermilion for the forehead, collyrium (*kajal* or *kohl*) on the eyes, or turmeric (*kaldic*) or rose powder (*gulal*) either for personal adornment or applying on the household gods. Silver craft smiths in the eastern states of India, especially in Bengal, were specialists in making reticulated surmadaanis in the 19th century.

### **Surya**

Hindu solar deity. Surya literary means the sun. He illuminates the world, eradicates illnesses and destroys enemies. He is depicted with a human face with stylised rays radiating from his round head. In mythological representations of Surya, he is usually seen riding a chariot with seven horses that represent the seven colours of the rainbow and days of the week.

## **T** **Tara**

The Buddhist deity. Is considered to be an earlier form of the Buddha in various subjects.

### **Taweez**

An amulet characteristic to South Asia. Holy verses are written on paper or cloth and rolled into the hollow cylinder. These amulets are worn around the neck and the arm. The belief is that it offers protection not just from supernatural elements, but also from disease and illness.

### **Thali**

Metal tray or plate used for ritual flowers, fruits, presenting offerings for daily or decorative purposes.

### **Thanjavur Art Plate**

The 'Thanjavur Art Plate' was given a Geographical Indications (GI) tag in 2007, as proof of its long heritage. It was patronised by the Tanjore Maratha ruler Serfoji II (1777-1832), which he then presented as a royal gift.

### **Thanjavur painting**

Painting on glass continued developing in Thanjavur until the 20th century. The aim was mainly to provide affordable devotional and religious images to middle class households, small temples and other religious gatherings.

### **Tirthankara - Parshvanatha**

In Jainism, a person who has reached the highest state of the soul and ended the rebirth.

Parshvanatha is the 23rd Jain Tirthankara. A symbol associated with Parshvanatha is the seven headed snake. He was born into a royal family before he renounced the world, the snakes Dharnendra and Padmavati protected his body from incessant rains that threatened to disrupt his penance. He preached the doctrines of non-violence associated with Jainism before he attained moksha or death.

**U** Ugaldan  
Spittoon.

**V** **Veerabhadra**  
A fierce form of the Hindu god Shiva. Veerabhadra is an aspect of Shiva who emerges when Sati – first wife of Shiva, who is Himalayan king Daksha's daughter, jumps into a sacrificial fire. Shiva's anger in the form of Veerabhadra avenges and destroys Daksha, as it was his refusal to accept the union of Shiva and Sati, which led to the death of Sati.

### **Venugopala**

A form of Hindu deity Krishna who plays the flute. Literally means a cow protector as bearer of the flute *venu*.

### **Vishnu**

One of the gods form the sacred Hindu trinity (Trimurti) together with Brahma, and Shiva. Vishnu is the preserver of the worlds, the embodiment of goodness and mercy. Vishnu has ten avatars in which he descends to earth to save humanity from a great calamity. Vishnu's vahana or means of transportation is the mythical bird Garuda – the messenger of the gods and the ruler of birds. The consort of Vishnu is the goddess Lakshmi.

### **Vithoba**

The Hindu deity who is popularly worshipped in the states of Maharashtra and Karnataka in the southern and Deccan regions of India. Visual representations of Vithoba are modelled after the sculpture in Pandharpur, Maharashtra, where devotees believe Vishnu in the form of Vithoba resides. Vithoba is visualised as a young, dark skinned boy, who usually stands on a brick.

## **W**

### **Walnut wood carving**

A craft practised by the craftsmen of Kashmir, especially in Srinagar city where walnut trees grow in abundance. The root or the trunk is used. The dense and finely grained wood lends itself well to the intricate carving process.

## **Z**

### **Zardozi**

Embroidery with gold or silver thread done on silk, satin, and velvet.

### **Zari**

Gold or silver thread. Zari thread is one of the most important decorative elements of silk saris and other Indian garments.



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