

Glossary

<i>aaru padai veedu</i>	the six camps or sacred sites of Lord Murugan
<i>abishekam</i>	ritual bathing of the <i>murthi</i> during a <i>puja</i>
<i>Adi Dravida</i>	literally “first” or “original” Dravidians; Dalits or depressed castes
<i>advidya</i>	spiritual ignorance
<i>Agamas</i>	literally “that which has come down”; a body of texts regarded as revealed, and consisting of mythology, ritual and philosophy
<i>aluga</i>	beautiful
<i>Alvars</i>	the twelve Vaishnavite Saints, contemporaneous with the Saivite <i>Nayanars</i>
<i>Amman</i>	a generic name for a mother goddess
<i>anava</i>	egotism; the principal impurity which enmeshes the soul
<i>annathanam</i>	a mass feeding
<i>arati</i>	showing a camphor flame before the image of a deity, normally in the context of a <i>puja</i>
<i>archanai</i>	a form of worship devoted to a specific <i>murthi</i> , and by extension to the deity
<i>arul</i>	divine grace
<i>asrama</i>	an ashram, a spiritual retreat
<i>asuras</i>	demons
<i>bhajan</i>	singing of devotional hymns
<i>bhakti</i>	the cultivation of devotion; devotional Hinduism
<i>bhuta</i>	spirits which possess specific powers
<i>brahmadeyas</i>	Brahman settlements, specifically sites of Sanskrit learning, culture and philosophical speculation
<i>cakras</i>	centres of spiritual energy, symbolically located along the spine
<i>darsan</i>	auspicious sight of the <i>murthi</i> during a <i>puja</i>

<i>devas</i>	gods
<i>dharma</i>	a specific code of conduct intrinsic to a given entity
<i>garbhagriha</i>	literally “womb chamber”, the <i>sanctum sanctorum</i> of a Hindu temple
<i>gramadevata</i>	a lesser “village” deity, often a village goddess
<i>gunas</i>	the three qualities of Nature, namely <i>sattva</i> , <i>rajas</i> and <i>tamas</i>
<i>jalrah</i>	hand cymbals
<i>jati</i>	a particular lineage which sits within the overall caste structure
<i>Kaliyuga</i>	the current age, considered to be degenerate (<i>yuga</i> : epoch; <i>kaliyuga</i> is thus literally the age of Kali)
<i>karma</i>	the consequences of actions, both good and bad; the outcomes of all actions can occur within this or subsequent lives
<i>kolattam</i>	a complex dance performed with sticks; in South India traditionally danced by girls
<i>kovil (koyil)</i>	a Hindu temple
<i>ksatriyas</i>	the second highest caste of the <i>varna</i> system, representing the warrior caste
<i>kumbabishekam</i>	a ceremony conducted to dedicate deities during temple consecration
<i>kundalini</i>	the spiritual power, typically depicted as a serpent, which symbolically uncoils to travel up the spinal column to successively activate the <i>cakras</i>
<i>kurrukals</i>	Brahman priests in the Saivite tradition
<i>lilas</i>	the play of the Divine
<i>lingam</i>	the aniconic form representing the formless Siva
<i>Mahadeva</i>	the supreme deity, Siva, or more generically one of the other high gods/goddesses
<i>malas</i>	the impurities which bind the soul
<i>mantras</i>	“sacred chant”; formulaic words constituting an inner truth
<i>marga</i>	a pathway; a stage of spiritual development
<i>matha (Tamil: madam)</i>	a monastery
<i>mauna</i>	silence, often in the form of a vow
<i>maya</i>	illusion (in the broadest sense of the term)
<i>meelam</i>	a kind of drum
<i>moksha</i>	liberation from the cycle of <i>samsara</i>
<i>mukti</i>	release from the cycle of birth, death and rebirth
<i>murthi</i>	the image of the deity

<i>nadaswaram</i>	a woodwind instrument, shaped like a clarinet
<i>Nayanars</i>	The sixty-three Tamil Saivite saints who composed the hymns which make up the sacred work, the <i>Tirumurai</i>
<i>nirguna</i>	God beyond form and time
<i>paal kudam</i>	a milk pot
<i>paca</i>	matter, the fetters or bondages of ignorance
<i>pacu</i>	the individual soul
<i>pada yatra</i>	a foot pilgrimage
<i>Palaiyakkarars</i>	“little kings”, the monarchs of the series of states which succeeded the Vijayanagara dynasty
<i>pantaram</i>	a non-Brahman trained priest
<i>Pati</i>	The Supreme Lord, the Godhead
<i>pattars</i>	Brahman priests in the Vaishnavite tradition
<i>pey</i>	a malevolent spirit, a ghost of the dead
<i>prasadam</i>	food offered to the deity, sanctified and then returned to devotees
<i>preta</i>	spirits of the departed
<i>puja</i>	a ritual of formal worship
<i>pujari</i>	a non-Brahman priest
<i>Purana</i>	compendia of myths and religious philosophy
<i>rajas</i>	the intermediate of three qualities (<i>gunas</i>) or strands of Nature; embracing the characteristics of passion, energy, desire
<i>rishi</i>	a sage possessing great spiritual power
<i>sadhaka</i>	a spiritual seeker, an aspirant
<i>sadhu</i>	a wandering holy man
<i>Sakti Vel</i>	the <i>Vel</i> given by Parvati to Murugan
<i>sakti</i>	divine power envisaged as feminine (as <i>Sakti</i> , the term refers to the Goddess, often as the consort of Siva)
<i>samsara</i>	the ceaseless cycle of birth, death and rebirth
<i>Sangam (Cankam)</i>	traditionally the colloquium of poets who established Tamil literature; more recently a term used to denote a Hindu peak body
<i>sanguna</i>	God worshipped in a specific form and with specified qualities
<i>sannyasin</i>	an ascetic renunciant
<i>sattva</i>	the first quality (<i>guna</i>) of Nature: the higher characteristics of translucence, harmony, balance
<i>sishya</i>	the disciple of a guru
<i>sudras</i>	the fourth caste of the <i>varna</i> system; those who, in theory, form the caste of labourers and other menials

<i>svayambhu</i>	holy images or places that have appeared spontaneously
<i>Tai</i>	the Tamil month (January–February) in which Thaipusam is held
<i>tamas</i>	the third of the qualities (<i>gunas</i>) of Nature: the dense characteristics of darkness, ignorance, sloth
<i>tapas</i>	performance of spiritually directed austerities
<i>tattvas</i>	the thirty-six primal states of existence from which the universe is composed
<i>thaneer panthal</i>	stalls which provide food, drink and other forms of service
<i>timiti</i>	ritual fire-walking
<i>tinai</i>	a traditional eco-zone of the Tamil country
<i>tirtha yatra</i>	pilgrimage
<i>utsava murthi</i>	the festival image of the deity
<i>vahana</i>	the animal that serves as a god's mount
<i>vaisyas</i>	the caste that in theory comprises the land-holding and merchant castes
<i>varna</i>	the theoretical system of caste; one of four categories of caste
<i>vastu</i>	the Hindu science of building and construction
<i>vel</i>	spear, lance
<i>vellalars</i>	the highest non-Brahman Tamil caste
<i>Vetrivel</i>	the cosmic spear
<i>vibhuti</i>	the sacred ash used in ritual worship
<i>vidya</i>	spiritual knowledge
<i>vira</i>	a deified hero
<i>yantra</i>	a mystical diagram