

The Tapa Co. — Glossary

Every word we use, explained once - thetapaco.com/glossary

Aarti आरती

The closing act of a puja. A lit lamp is circled in front of the deity while a song is sung, and the flame is then offered to everyone present.

Abeer अबीर

A fine coloured powder, often scented, offered during puja. Close to gulal; many households use the two words for the same thing.

Abhishek अभिषेक

Bathing the deity — water, milk, honey or panchamrit poured over an idol or Shivalinga while mantras are recited.

Abhrak अभ्रक

Powdered mica with a soft shimmer. Offered alongside abeer and kumkum, most often in Devi puja.

Achaman आचमन

Sipping a little water three times at the start of a puja, each sip with a name of Vishnu. It marks the move from ordinary activity into the ritual.

Adhik Maas अधिक मास

An extra lunar month added roughly every three years so that the lunar calendar keeps pace with the solar year.

Agama आगम

A body of texts that sets out temple worship, the consecration of images and ritual procedure.

Ahuti आहुति

A single offering placed into the havan fire, usually ghee or samagri, made as the mantra ends on the word svaha.

Akhand Jyoti अखण्ड ज्योति

A lamp kept continuously lit through an observance, most often across the nine nights of Navratri. Relight it if it goes out; nothing is void.

Akshat अक्षत

Unbroken rice grains, usually mixed with a little turmeric or kumkum. Offered in almost every puja. The point is that the grains are whole.

Amanta अमान्त

The calendar system in which a lunar month ends on Amavasya. Followed in Gujarat, Maharashtra and the south. Festival days are the same; some month names differ.

Amavasya अमावस्या

The new-moon day, the last tithi of Krishna Paksha. Diwali falls on the Amavasya of Kartik.

Annakut अन्नकूट

Literally a mountain of food. The large spread of dishes offered to Krishna on Govardhan Puja, the day after Diwali.

Antyeshthi अन्त्येष्टि

The last rites. The final sanskar, performed for a person after death.

Arghya अर्घ्य

Water offered with both hands, most often to the rising or setting Sun, or to the Moon.

Asana आसन

The mat or cloth you sit on for a puja. Also the seat offered to the deity as one step of worship.

Ashtagandha अष्टगन्ध

A blend of eight fragrant substances used for tilak, commonly including sandalwood, saffron and camphor. The exact ecient vary by tradition.

Ashtami अष्टमी

The eighth tithi of a paksha. Janmashtami, Radha Ashtami, Ahoi Ashtami and Durga Ashtami all fall on it.

Ashwin अश्विन

The lunar month that falls around September and October. Sharad Navratri and Dussehra fall in its Shukla Paksha.

Avahan आवाहन

The invocation. The step at which the deity is invited into the murti, kalash or image before worship begins.

Baati बाती

A cotton wick for a diya. Round wicks stand upright in the ghee; long wicks lie along the lip of the lamp.

Batasha बतारा

Light, hollow drops of dried sugar syrup. Offered as naivedya, and paired with kheel in Diwali Lakshmi Puja.

Bhadrapada भद्रपद

The lunar month that falls around August and September. Janmashtami, Ganesh Chaturthi and Aja Ekadashi fall in it.

Bhajan भजन

A devotional song, sung alone or in a group. No fixed text and no count is required.

Bhakti भक्ति

Devotion. Love and trust directed towards the deity, expressed through puja, song, recitation or service.

Bhog भोग

Food prepared and offered to the deity before anyone eats. Once offered, it is shared as prasad.

Bhranti भ्रान्ति

A widely repeated belief that no named source supports. Each guide corrects these in its Myths & Facts section. A Bhranti carries no score.

Bilva बिल्व

The leaf offered to Shiva, in threes on one stem. Also called bel patra. Offered smooth side down by widespread practice.

Brahma Muhurta ब्राह्म मुहूर्त

The last stretch of the night, beginning about an hour and a half before sunrise. Traditionally preferred for japa and study.

Chalisa चालीसा

A hymn of forty verses in praise of one deity. The Hanuman Chalisa, composed by Tulsidas, is the best known.

Chandan चन्दन

Sandalwood, as powder or paste. Applied as tilak and offered to the deity. Rakta chandani is the red variety.

Charanamrit चरणामृत

The water or panchamrit that has bathed the deity, collected and given in the palm as prasad.

Chaturdashi चतुर्दशी

The fourteenth tithi of a paksha. Anant Chaturdashi and Naraka Chaturdashi fall on it.

Chaturmas चतुर्मास

The four monsoon months from Devshayani to Devutthana Ekadashi. Weddings and some new undertakings are traditionally deferred through this period.

Chaturmukh Diya चतुर्मुख दीया

A lamp with four spouts, each holding a wick, so that it gives light in four directions.

Chaturthi चतुर्थी

The fourth tithi of a paksha. Ganesh Chaturthi and Karva Chauth fall on it.

Chola चोला

The coating of orange sindoor mixed with chameli oil that is applied to a Hanuman murti.

Chowki चौकी

A low wooden platform. Covered with a red or yellow cloth, it becomes the seat on which the deity is placed for puja.

Chunri चुनरी

A red cloth, usually edged with gold gota, offered to Devi and draped over her image or over the Tulsi plant.

Daan दान

Giving. Food, clothing, money or service given without expecting a return, often at the close of a vrat or on a festival day.

Dakshina दक्षिणा

What is offered to a purohit after a ritual. Traditionally given according to means and not fixed as a fee.

Darshan दर्शन

Seeing the deity, and being seen. The moment of standing before a murti, in a temple or at home.

Dashami दशमी

The tenth tithi of a paksha, the day before Ekadashi. Vijayadashami, or Dussehra, falls on it.

Deep Daan दीप दान

Offering a lit lamp. Yama Deep Daan is the lamp placed outside the home, facing south, on the evening of Dhanteras.

Dhaan धान

Unhusked rice, the grain still in its husk. Offered whole in some pujas; kheel is the same grain puffed.

Dharma धर्म

On this site, a practice that a named text states. Each Dharma tag carries a score from 3 to 5 for how directly the text states it.

Dharmashastra धर्मशास्त्र

Texts on conduct and observance, such as the Manu and Yajnavalkya Smritis and the later digests built on them.

Dhoop धूप

Incense burnt for its fragrant smoke, as sticks, cones or loose resin. Offering it is one step of the puja.

Diya दीया

A small lamp, usually clay, filled with ghee or oil and lit with a cotton wick.

Durva दुर्वा

A fine grass offered to Ganesha, most commonly as twenty-one blades or small bunches.

Dwadashi द्वादशी

The twelfth tithi of a paksha, the day after Ekadashi. The Ekadashi fast is broken on Dwadashi morning, inside the Paaran window.

Ekadashi एकादशी

The eleventh tithi of a paksha, kept as a vrat for Vishnu. Twenty-four fall in a year, two in every lunar month.

Ganga Jal गंगाजल

Water from the river Ganga. Sprinkled to purify the space and the samagri, and added to the kalash.

Ghatasthapana घटस्थापना

The installation of the kalash on the first day of Navratri, performed in the morning while Pratipada prevails and before Hindu midday.

Ghee घी

Clarified butter. Used to light the diya, poured into the havan fire, and one of the five ingredients of panchamrit.

Gomati Chakra गोमती चक्र

A small flat disc of shell with a natural spiral on one face, found at Dwarka. Placed in Lakshmi puja.

Gotra गौत्र

The family lineage, named after a rishi. Spoken in the sankalp. If you do not know yours, leave it out.

Grahan ग्रहण

An eclipse. Surya Grahan is a solar eclipse, Chandra Grahan a lunar one.

Griha Pravesh गृह प्रवेश

The ceremony of entering a new home for the first time, usually with a puja and a havan.

Guggul गुग्गुल

A fragrant tree resin. Burnt on hot coals as dhoop and added to havan samagri.

Guna गुण

One of the three qualities the Bhagavad Gita describes in all of nature: sattva, rajas and tamas.

Haldi हल्दी

Turmeric. Used as powder for tilak and for colouring akshat. Haldi gaanth is the whole dried root, offered uncut.

Hari Vasara हरि वासर

The first quarter of the Dwadashi tithi. The Ekadashi fast is not broken until it has ended.

Havan हवन

Offerings of ghee and samagri made into a consecrated fire while mantras are recited.

Havan Kund हवन कुण्ड

The vessel or pit that holds the havan fire. At home, usually a square vessel of copper or iron.

Havan Samagri हवन सामग्री

A mixture of dried herbs, roots, resins and grains offered into the havan fire with each ahuti.

Jagran जागरण

Staying awake through the night in song, reading or recitation. Kept on some vrats by those who choose to; many do not.

Janeu जनेऊ

The sacred thread. In puja it is offered to the deity as one step of worship.

Japa जप

Repeating a mantra, aloud or silently, usually counted on a mala. 108 is the conventional count.

Jau जौ

Barley. Sown in a clay bowl at Ghatasthapana on the first day of Navratri, and offered into the havan fire.

Kalash कलश

A brass or copper pot filled with water, topped with mango leaves and a coconut. It stands for the presence invited into the space.

Kalpa Sutra कल्प सूत्र

Ritual manuals attached to the Vedas, covering both the large public rites and the rites of the household.

Kamal Gatta कमल गट्टा

Dried lotus seeds. Offered to Lakshmi, and strung as a mala for her japa.

Kanda काण्ड

A book or section of the Ramayana. The Ramcharitmanas has seven; Sundarkand is the fifth.

Kanya Pujan कन्या पूजन

Honouring young girls as forms of Devi on Ashtami or Navami of Navratri, by washing their feet and serving them a meal.

Kapoor कपूर

Camphor. Lit for the aarti; it burns away completely and leaves nothing behind.

Karana करण

A day tithi. One of the five limbs the panchang tracks each day.

Kartik कार्तिक

The lunar month that falls around October and November. Karva Chauth, Diwali, Chhath and Tulsi Vivah fall in it.

Karva कर्वा

A small clay pot with a spout, filled with water and used to offer arghya to the Moon on Karva Chauth.

Katha कथा

The narrative recited as part of an observance, such as the Satyanarayan Katha or an Ekadashi vrat katha. It is read out in full.

Kaudi कौडी

Cowrie shells. Once used as currency, they are placed in Lakshmi puja at Diwali.

Kesar केसर

Saffron. A few strands are added to chandan for tilak, and to milk or kheer offered as bhog.

Kheel खील

Puffed paddy. Offered with batasha in Diwali Lakshmi Puja.

Krishna Paksha कृष्ण पक्ष

The waning half of a lunar month, from the day after Purnima to Amavasya.

Kumkum कुमकुम

A red powder made from turmeric and lime. Used for tilak and offered to the deity in almost every puja.

Kusha कुश

A sacred grass. Worn as a ring and laid as a seat in shraddha and tarpan.

Kuttu कुट्टू

Buckwheat. A seed, not a grain, which is why its flour is eaten on fast days.

Lakshmi Charan लक्ष्मी चरण

A pair of small footprints, drawn or placed at the entrance at Diwali, pointing into the home.

Loban लोबान

Benzoin resin. Burnt on hot coals for its dense, sweet smoke.

Maas मास

A lunar month, made of two pakshas. Twelve make a year; an Adhik Maas is added when the calendar needs to catch up.

Mahatmya माहात्म्य

A passage or text that sets out the merit of a particular vrat, place or deity. The Ekadashi kathas of the Padma Purana are Vrata Mahatmyas.

Mala माला

A string of 108 beads, of tulsi or rudraksha, used to count japa. The same word means a flower garland.

Mantra मन्त्र

A fixed set of sacred syllables or verses, recited as given. Used in puja, japa and havan.

Mauli मौली

A red and yellow cotton thread. Tied on the wrist at the start of a puja and wound around the kalash.

Mishri मिश्री

Rock sugar in crystals. Offered as naivedya and shared as prasad.

Modak मोदक

A sweet dumpling of rice flour filled with coconut and jaggery. The offering most associated with Ganesha.

Muhurat मुहूर्त

A window of time considered suitable for a ritual, calculated from the panchang. A recommendation, not a deadline — a puja done later is still complete.

Murti मूर्ति

The image of a deity, in clay, metal or stone, before which puja is offered.

Naivedya नैवेद्य

Food offered to the deity as one step of the puja. The everyday word is bhog.

Nakshatra नक्षत्र

One of twenty-seven segments of the sky through which the Moon moves. One of the five limbs the panchang tracks each day.

Nariyal नारियल

Coconut. Placed on top of the kalash, and a whole dry coconut is offered into the havan fire at the end.

Navadurga नवदुर्गा

The nine forms of Durga, one honoured on each day of Navratri, from Shailaputri to Siddhidatri.

Navami नवमी

The ninth tithi of a paksha. Rama Navami and Maha Navami fall on it.

Nirjala निर्जला

A fast kept without food or water. One recognised form among several, and not a requirement.

Nishita Kaal निशीथ काल

The midnight period. The Krishna Janmashtami puja is timed to it.

Paan पान

Betel leaf. Offered with supari to the deity at the close of the puja.

Paaran पारण

Breaking a fast, within a stated window at the morning after. For Ekadashi it must fall after sunrise and before Dwadashi ends.

Paath पाठ

Reading a sacred text aloud from beginning to end, as in a Sundarkand Paath.

Paddhati पद्धति

A handbook of procedure that sets out how a ritual is carried out, step by step. A convention of practice, distinct from the scripture it serves.

Paksha पक्ष

Half a lunar month. Shukla is the waxing half, Krishna the waning half. Every festival date names one.

Panch Meva पंच मेवा

Five dry fruits offered together as naivedya. Which five varies by region and household.

Panchamrit पञ्चामृत

Five ingredients mixed for abhishek and prasad — milk, curd, ghee, honey and sugar. Made fresh, distributed after.

Panchang पञ्चाङ्ग

The almanac. It tracks five things for each day: tithi, vara, nakshatra, yoga and karana.

Panchopachara पञ्चोपचार

Worship in five steps: sandal paste, flowers, incense, a lamp and food.

Peeli Sarson पीली सरसों

Yellow mustard seeds. Added to the havan offerings and scattered around the space at the start of some pujas.

Phalahar फलाहार

A fast kept on fruit, milk and permitted flours. The most commonly kept form.

Pind Daan पिण्ड दान

The offering of rice balls to departed ancestors, made during shraddha.