

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-46625-7 - Death in Banaras
Jonathan P. Parry
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

As a place to die, to dispose of the physical remains of the deceased and to perform the rites which ensure that the departed attains a 'good state' after death, the north Indian city of Banaras attracts pilgrims and mourners from all over the Hindu world. This book is primarily about the priests and other kinds of 'sacred specialist' who serve them: about the way in which they organise their business, and about their representations of death and understanding of the rituals over which they preside. All three levels are informed by a common ideological preoccupation with controlling chaos and contingency. The anthropologist who writes about death inevitably writes about the world of the living, and Dr Parry is centrally concerned with concepts of the body and the person in contemporary Hinduism, with ideas about hierarchy, renunciation and sacrifice, and with the relationship between hierarchy and notions of complementarity and holism.

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-46625-7 - Death in Banaras
Jonathan P. Parry
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Death in Banaras

Cambridge University Press
 978-0-521-46625-7 - Death in Banaras
 Jonathan P. Parry
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

THE LEWIS HENRY MORGAN LECTURES 1988

*presented at
 The University of Rochester
 Rochester, New York*



Lewis Henry Morgan Lecture Series

- Fred Eggan: *The American Indian: Perspectives for the Study of Social Change*
 Ward H. Goodenough: *Description and Comparison in Cultural Anthropology*
 Robert J. Smith: *Japanese Society: Tradition, Self, and the Social Order*
 Sally Falk Moore: *Social Facts and Fabrications: "Customary Law" on Kilimanjaro, 1880-1980*
 Nancy Munn: *The Fame of Gawa: A Symbolic Study of Value Transformation in a Mussim (Papua New Guinea) Society*
 Lawrence Rosen: *The Anthropology of Justice: Law as culture in Islamic Society*
 Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah: *Magic, Science, Religion and the Scope of Rationality*
 Maurice Bloch: *Prey into Hunter: The Politics of Religious Experience*
 Marilyn Strathern: *After Nature: English Kinship in the Late Twentieth Century*
 Byron J. Good: *Medicine, Rationality and Experience: An Anthropological Perspective*

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-46625-7 - Death in Banaras
Jonathan P. Parry
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Death in Banaras

JONATHAN P. PARRY

London School of Economics and Political Science



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press
 978-0-521-46625-7 - Death in Banaras
 Jonathan P. Parry
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge
 The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP
 40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
 10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Victoria 3166, Australia

© Cambridge University Press 1994

First published 1994

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress cataloguing in publication data

Parry, Jonathan P.
 Death in Banaras / Jonathan P. Parry.
 p. cm. – (The Lewis Henry Morgan lectures 1988)
 ISBN 0 521 46074 3 (hardback). – ISBN 0 521 46625 3 (paperback).
 1. Funeral rites and ceremonies, Hindu – India – Vārānasi.
 2. Death – Religious aspects – Hinduism. 3. Cremation – Religious
 aspects – Hinduism. 4. Vārānasi (India) – Religious life and customs
 5. Hinduism – Customs and practices. I. Title. II. Series.
 BL 1226.82.F86P37 1994
 294.5'38 -dc20 93-31990CIP

ISBN 0 521 46074 3 hardback
 ISBN 0 521 46625 3 paperback

Transferred to digital printing 2000

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-46625-7 - Death in Banaras
Jonathan P. Parry
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Dusra rin
For André, with affectionate respect

Contents

<i>List of illustrations</i>	<i>page xi</i>
<i>List of tables</i>	xii
<i>Foreword</i> by ANTHONY T. CARTER	xiii
<i>Preface</i>	xix
<i>Glossary</i>	xxi
Introduction	1
PART I DEATH AND THE CITY	
1 Through 'divine eyes'	11
1.1 The scene of cosmogony	11
1.2 In and out of time and space	15
1.3 A full life and a liberating death	20
1.4 The dialectics of 'liberation'	26
1.5 Death and cosmogony	30
2 A profane perspective	33
2.1 By way of background	33
2.2 'From time without beginning'	38
2.3 On the footsteps of Vishnu	44
2.4 The scale of the business	50
PART II DEATH AS A LIVING	
3 Shares and chicanery	75
3.1 Turns to be 'ghosts'	75
3.2 Other variants of <i>pari</i>	90
3.3 <i>Pandagiri</i> – the profession of pilgrimage-priest	97
3.4 The values of purity	109
3.5 'The law of the fishes'	112
3.6 <i>Pari</i> – practical reason or symbol determination?	115

4	Giving, receiving and bargaining over gifts	119
4.1	Sweating it out on the <i>ghats</i>	119
4.2	The accumulation of sin	122
4.3	The source of the peril	130
4.4	Some comparative considerations	135
4.5	Bargaining for salvation	139
PART III DEATH INTO BIRTH		
5	The last sacrifice	151
5.1	Introduction	151
5.2	The expression of grief	152
5.3	'Good' and 'bad' death	158
5.4	The body and its refinement	167
5.5	The end of the ('gross') body	172
5.6	Birth, sex and sacrificial violence	178
5.7	The immersion of bodies and ashes	184
5.8	The language of sacrifice and renunciation	188
6	Ghosts into ancestors	191
6.1	The structure of the rites	191
6.2	'The impure sixteen'	194
6.3	'The middle sixteen'	199
6.4	'The highest sixteen'	203
6.5	Remembering and effacing the dead	207
6.6	Digestion and transformation	211
6.7	On the impurity of death	215
7	Spirit possession as 'superstition'	226
7.1	Propositions	226
7.2	Ghosts, victims and exorcists	229
7.3	Panna <i>ojha</i>	237
7.4	The tomb of Bahadur the martyr	240
7.5	Seating a ghost at Pishach Mochan	242
7.6	On 'levels' and hierarchy	245
PART IV THE END OF DEATH		
8	Asceticism and the conquest of death	251
8.1	Getting back to the beginning	251
8.2	Hierarchy, complementarity and ascetic autonomy: some concluding remarks on salvation and society	264
	<i>Notes</i>	272
	<i>References</i>	293
	<i>Index</i>	305

Illustrations

Plates

1	A segment of the Manikarnika bathing <i>ghat</i>	<i>page</i> 71
2	Part of the Manikarnika cremation ground	71
3	Pyres at Manikarnika at the beginning of this century	72
4	Pyres at Manikarnika in the late 1970s	72
5	A <i>ghatiya</i> on his platform	118
6	Body-builders on the <i>ghats</i>	118
7	Farewell to the corpse	159
8	The funeral procession	159
9	Offerings to the water-pot dwelling of the ghost	223
10	Crossing the Vaiturni river	223
11	Offerings to sustain the deceased on his journey	224
12	The <i>sapindikaran</i> ritual of the twelfth day after death	224
13	The gift of <i>sajja dan</i>	225
14	Recognising the heirs	225

Figures

1	Inheritance of <i>pachchh</i> and <i>pari</i>	83
2	Genealogical details relating to <i>panda</i> case histories	101

Maps

1	Location of Banaras	12
2	Kashi	14
3	Districts of origin of 558 people brought for Kashi- <i>labh</i> in 1976	54
4	Districts of origin of corpses brought for cremation in selected years between 1917–18 and 1976–7	60
5	Districts of origin of corpses brought for cremation in 1917–18	61
6	Districts of origin of corpses brought for cremation in 1976–7	62

Cambridge University Press
 978-0-521-46625-7 - Death in Banaras
 Jonathan P. Parry
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

xii

Illustrations

Tables

1	Geographical origins of corpses brought to the two cremation <i>ghats</i>	56
2	Corpses brought from outside the city and district of Banaras	58
3	Corpses from adjacent districts	59
4	Corpses immersed from other <i>ghats</i>	68
5	Rules for reckoning <i>pari</i>	84
6	The operation of <i>pari</i> rules	85
7	Estimated distribution of Mahabrahman <i>pari</i> rights	87
8	Remuneration of the <i>karindas</i>	88
9	The duration of mourning for connections of different <i>varna</i>	219

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-46625-7 - Death in Banaras
Jonathan P. Parry
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Foreword

Jonathan Parry delivered the Lewis Henry Morgan Lectures on which this book is based at the University of Rochester in April 1988. This marked the twenty-sixth year in which the Lectures were offered to the public by the Department of Anthropology at the University of Rochester. The thirty-second Morgan Lectures will be delivered in March 1994.

The Lectures serve in part as a memorial to Lewis Henry Morgan. A prominent Rochester attorney as well as a founder of modern anthropology, Morgan never found it necessary to accept a formal academic position. Nevertheless, he was connected with the University of Rochester from its beginning. A major early benefactor, he left the University money for a women's college. He also left it his manuscripts and library. Until the creation of the Morgan Lectures, however, the only memorial to him at the University was a residence hall wing named in his honour.

The Morgan Lectures, the published volumes as well as the public lectures in Rochester, also are the site of a complex series of intersecting and overlapping conversations. Most importantly, of course, the Lecturer addresses other anthropologists and scholars in a variety of allied fields on his or her own behalf. The Lectures also provide an opportunity for the Department – undergraduates, graduate students and faculty alike – to engage in close interaction with scholars working on a wide range of problems in our discipline, many of which we cannot hope to represent in a single department. Ideally, their work challenges as well as complements our own. Through its selection of Lecturers, the Rochester Department of Anthropology is able to convey its sense of the growing points of the discipline as a whole. Here our audience is both local and international, anthropological and interdisciplinary. First through the public lectures in Rochester and then through the published volumes, the Lectures serve as a forum in which scholars from a variety of disciplines and members of the public may meet to discuss matters of general as well as academic interest.

As Maurice Bloch and Parry noted in the Introduction to their edited volume on *Death and the regeneration of life*, the anthropology of the

symbolism of death has had a chequered history. Prominent in the Victorian anthropology of J. J. Bachofen, J. G. Frazer, Robert Hertz and Jane Harrison, the analysis of mortuary symbolism largely disappeared from view in the work on social morphology that predominated in the middle of the twentieth century. The topic has returned to prominence in the last decade or so with the renewed anthropological interest in systems of thought.

Jonathan Parry has had a particularly important place in the resumption of anthropological work on the symbolism of death. *Death in Banaras* brings to a conclusion a line of analysis first opened in a series of articles and chapters that have generated considerable anticipation. In addition, to the Introduction to *Death and the regeneration of life*, co-authored with Maurice Bloch, these include 'Ghosts, greed and sin: the occupational identity of the Banaras funeral priests' (*Man*, 1980), 'Death and cosmogony in Kashi' (*Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 1981) and 'Sacrificial death and the necrophagous ascetic' (*Death and the regeneration of life*).

Death in Banaras focuses on the priests and other sacred specialists who serve the enormous numbers of mourners and pilgrims who are drawn to Banaras from throughout the Hindu world. A clear and coherent descriptive analysis of the rituals performed by these specialists, their exegeses of those rituals and their ideas concerning death, and of the ways in which they organise their 'business', the book is at once more particular than an account of mortuary rituals and soteriology in Hindu South Asia and larger than a case study. This is *death in Banaras*, modern India's pre-eminent pilgrimage centre and a preferred place to die. A city of just over 700,000 persons, Banaras confounds conventional theories of social and cultural change. The 'traditions' discerned in India's villages are not attenuated by the forces of modernisation, but instead appear in particularly striking form. It is especially in urban centres such as Banaras that the traditions of contemporary India are invented and reproduced. Here, too, in Parry's striking phrase, death is 'big business'. The choice of Banaras as a fieldwork site and of mortuary rituals as a research topic reflects a fine sense of the processes of cultural production at work in India.

The framework of *Death in Banaras* is comprised of an introductory chapter, three substantive parts and a concluding chapter, itself largely ethnographic. In addition to sketching the overall argument of the book, the Introduction notes a special feature of the material on which it is based. As Parry puts it, the practitioners with which his book is concerned are 'propagandists' as well as ritualists. They are experts in the production of ritual exegesis and of commentary on exegesis, perfectly willing to 'extemporise' on questions that have no standard answer. If, as they rather frequently aver, they are rogues, they certainly are lively and witty rogues, worthy participants in a work of anthropology.

The two chapters that comprise the first substantive part of the book examine the relationship between Banaras and death. Chapter 1 is concerned

with the ways in which the city is represented in its sacred literature. These are the conceptions of space and time and of the relations between death and (re)birth that sustain the pre-eminent place of Banaras and its ritual specialists in the Hindu world. Chapter 2 traces the history of Banaras as a pilgrimage centre and sketches the scale and shape of the contemporary 'business'. Adopting the perspective of an outside observer, which in this case seems remarkably close to the backstage voices of the ritual specialists themselves, the chapter argues that the traditions of Banaras are, in fact, produced and reproduced in the rituals performed by and for the thousands of pilgrims and mourners.

The second substantive part of the book is concerned with the 'business' of mortuary rituals. Chapter 3 deals with the ways in which various categories of ritual specialists allocate opportunities to serve their patrons. Chapter 4 is concerned with the manner in which priests are remunerated, focusing especially on the ideology of the gift and on the fierce bargaining that pervades the interaction of priests with their clients.

Part III turns to a close analysis of a variety of mortuary rituals and associated exegesis. Chapter 5 is concerned with the rituals surrounding the disposal of the body, especially cremation and immersion. Cremation is a kind of sacrifice. It reproduces the cosmogonic sacrifice of Vishnu at the centre of the representations of Banaras as a sacred space and results in the rebirth of the deceased and of the chief mourner. Chapter 6 focuses on the series of rituals performed in the days, weeks and months following the disposal of the body. Chapter 7 examines rituals attendant upon 'bad death'. The bodies of those who die 'bad deaths' are immersed rather than cremated. The souls of these unfortunates are thought to become unsatisfied and dangerous ghosts who may possess the living. The rituals analysed in chapter 7 are intended to diagnose cases of spirit possession and exorcise the victims.

The concluding chapter turns to the Aghori renouncers whose ascetic practices are meant to 'conquer death entirely by escaping from the endless cycle of rebirths'. The practices of the Aghoris 'are peculiarly extreme', but, in addition to describing the end of death in Banaras, Parry uses this material to confirm his analysis of the ritual services offered to the vast majority of householder pilgrims and mourners. Extreme and everyday, the two sets of practices are informed by the same set of ideas.

Parry's lucid analysis of the symbolism of mortuary rituals and of the organisation of the funeral and pilgrimage trades forms a compelling narrative. It surely will become required reading for those interested in topics as diverse as death and death rituals, pilgrimage, exchange and occupational hierarchies. Refreshingly, Parry is content to let his ethnography speak for itself. He abstains from any extraneous theoretical claims, though it must be admitted that in these postmodern times this in itself amounts to a theoretical claim about the capacity of ethnographic writing to represent reality. This is not to imply, however, that Parry's work will be of interest only to South

Asianists or to those interested in the particular topics he treats. On the contrary, running through his analysis are several arguments of very broad sociological interest.

In order to put these arguments into context, it is useful to recall that Parry was a student of Edmund Leach and that he belongs to the generation of anthropologists who began doing research in and writing about India in the mid to late 1960s, just as Louis Dumont's enormously important structural synthesis, *Homo hierarchicus*, was published in French and translated into English. These scholars held contrasting positions. For Dumont sociological analysis began with systems of values. In the Indian case, he emphasised the principle of hierarchy, the hierarchical interdependence of purity and impurity, and the ways in the values of ritual hierarchy encompassed and rendered residual the brute facts of power. Leach, of course, accorded considerably more importance to considerations of power and is famous for arguing, in *Political systems of highland Burma*, that ritual actions may be understood as symbolic statements about the distribution of power in the social order. Parry has managed to remain faithful to both models. The tensions between their positions plays a productive role in his work.

Perhaps this appears most clearly in his references to Marshall Sahlins and the notion of practical reason. Such references run throughout Parry's discussion of the business of death in Banaras, especially the rota systems that allocate opportunities to serve clients among ritual specialists (e.g. pp. 115–17) and the bargaining over the value of the 'gifts' (*dan*) presented to these specialists (e.g. 139–48). It appears, too, in his persuasive attempt to reconcile the sacred text's concern with salvation with his own and Peter van der Veer's perceptions of the crass competition and exploitation that pervade the relations among ritual specialists and between the specialists and their clients in pilgrimage centres such as Banaras and Ayodhya (pp. 119–22), perceptions that are shared by the priests among whom Parry worked. Van der Veer sees the proper function of the pilgrimage system in Ayodhya as collapsing under the pressures of democratisation and economic change. Sahlins, on the other hand, rejects the notion that cultural forms are determined by 'practical reason', arguing instead that utilitarian interests are shaped by culture. Parry regards both positions as oversimplifications. In his view the apparent venality of the Banaras ritual specialists is 'over-determined . . . the product of a complex interplay between culture *and* practical reason'.

The same tensions inform Parry's important insights concerning the principle of hierarchy. One of these concerns the relations between Dumont's principle of hierarchy and McKim Marriot's concept of the individual. These concepts have been seen by their authors as mutually exclusive alternatives and generally have been received in that way. Parry, however, proposes an ingenious reconciliation of these analyses. This reconciliation turns upon what he shows to be an essential feature of rituals, namely that they must first recognise what they subsequently devalue. In other words, if Hindu mortuary

rituals are to re-enact convincingly the creation of a holistic social order that instantiates the hierarchical opposition of purity and impurity, they also must represent the world as a place in which that order is threatened by a looming chaos. The 'law of the fishes', the notion that the little fish of the social world are constantly in danger of being eaten by the big fish, is one such image of chaos. Representations of the persons as a dividual, continuously open to change and decay through interaction with others, is another. From this perspective, the Hindu conceptions observed by Dumont and Marriot are not competing truths, but rather 'ideologies in the Marxist sense' (pp. 112–15). Each relies upon the other for its persuasive power.

Parry also argues that Dumont's principle of hierarchy itself must be modified, at least in Banaras. Dumont sees the pure and the impure as mutually dependent. The Brahman priest requires the services of the low castes just as the low caste requires the services of the Brahman. Like C. J. Fuller, who also worked in a major religious centre, Parry argues that the high status accorded to ascetic renouncers has separated holism from hierarchy. The inferior acknowledges his or her dependence on the superior, but the superior is acknowledged by both parties as an autonomous entity who does not require the services of the inferior. The idea that this transformation of the values of hierarchy is influenced by the values of the renouncer suggests that the relation between status and relative autonomy is likely to be quite general in India. At the same time, however, Parry is careful to keep in mind the varying ideological salience of alternative versions of Indian values in historically specific settings. This remains Banaras.

ANTHONY T. CARTER, *Editor*
The Lewis Henry Morgan Lectures

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-46625-7 - Death in Banaras
Jonathan P. Parry
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Preface

The fieldwork on which this book is based has been conducted at intervals over the past fifteen years. Some of this material appears here for the first time; some of it has been previously published in scattered articles, parts of which have been incorporated into the present text in a slightly re-worked form.

Research in Banaras was carried out between September 1976 and November 1977 and in August 1978, August–September 1981, March–April 1983 and April 1992. Though the last of these visits was extremely brief, it was long enough to establish that there had been some important changes in the previous nine years. As far as the subject matter of this book is concerned, two of these are particularly significant. Though I realise with hindsight that I should have anticipated the first, I was shocked to discover that a distressingly large number of my best informants, and most of the main protagonists to the disputes referred to in the early chapters of this book, had themselves died in the interim. New bones of contention have arisen on the *ghats*, and new factional alliances formed between rival groups of sacred specialists. The second striking change has been the opening of an electric crematorium at Harishchandra *ghat*, a technological innovation which has not only had a dramatic impact on the ‘traditional’ division of mortuary labour, but which has also led to significant modifications in the rituals which accompany cremation. Though I briefly report on some of these recent changes, the ‘ethnographic present’ to which this book primarily refers should be taken as the period between 1976 and 1983. The illusion of timelessness which so much in the mortuary rites is concerned to create is just that – an illusion.

In the long gestation of this book I have incurred a long list of debts – so long that it is impossible to acknowledge them all. Thanks must first of all go to the large number of friends and informants on the *ghats* of Banaras who patiently put up with my sometimes intrusive presence, answered my tiresome questions with an often delightful sense of humour, went out of their way to instruct me and offered me hospitality in their homes. The families of Rani Maharaj, Om Prakash and Krishna Pande, Lachminarayan Pande, Bholanath and Pomar Chaube, Dr Daya Shankar Pande and Muktanand

Chaubé all have a particular claim on my gratitude. The quantity and quality of the data I was able to obtain, and my enjoyment of the fieldwork itself, were immeasurably enhanced by the extraordinarily able language instruction and research assistance I received from Virendra Singh and Om Prakash Sharma. Both of them have had the role of genuine collaborators in the project of this book, though I alone am responsible for its deficiencies.

David Pocock and Loki Madan originally gave me the idea for this study, and to both of them I owe thanks for much kindness and encouragement over the years. There is by now a large company of scholars who have worked on various aspects of Banarasi culture. I gratefully acknowledge the particular stimulus I have received from exchanges with, and the writings of, Chris Bayly, Diana Eck, Nita Kumar, Baidyanath Saraswati and Mary Searle-Chatterjee. Outside the not-so-little world of Banaras specialists, I am conscious of having particularly benefited at various stages from the help and advice of Richard Burghart, Audrey Cantlie, Tony Carter, Veena Das, Tim Dyson, Alfred Gell, Raymond Jamous, Murray Milner, Gloria Raheja, Marie-Louise Reiniche, Tom Trautmann, Peter van der Veer and Woody Watson. André Béteille, Maurice Bloch, Chris Fuller and Jock Stirrat require special thanks – both for many invaluable comments on embarrassingly many versions of these chapters and for much moral support. Margaret Dickinson has suffered the birth of this book with even greater fortitude, and has been a constant source of encouragement and extremely acute comments. She and Kate shared the original fieldwork; and Kate and Joe have suffered from it being re-run at supper-time ever since.

The first period of fieldwork was supported by the Social Science Research Council, and subsequent visits to Banaras by the London School of Economics. Much of this book was drafted while I was a Fellow at the Netherlands Institute of Advanced Study, and I gratefully record my thanks to its Director and staff for the extremely congenial time I spent there. I also thank the University of Rochester for the opportunity to present the Morgan Lectures in which I was able to explore some of the data presented in this monograph.

Glossary

In transliterating Hindi words I have generally given priority to the way they sound rather than to the conventions of Sanskrit orthography. I therefore drop the final unsounded ‘a’ – to write, for example, *tirath-purohit* and *pret* (rather than *titratha-purohita* and *preta*). It has not, however, seemed sensible to apply this rule with pedantic consistency to terms which are extremely common in the Indological literature and in works on Hinduism, and which are more likely to be familiar to the general reader if conventionally rendered. I have, for example, preferred *Veda*, *Purana*, *dharma* and *karma* over the spoken forms *Ved*, *Puran*, *dharam* and *karam*. Indian words are pluralised in the text in the English manner by adding an ‘s’. When performed by the members of the specific ‘caste’ (e.g. Barber) – or ‘sub-caste’ (e.g. Mahabrahman) – with which they are associated, the names of occupations begin with a capital letter; occupations which are not associated with a specific ‘caste’ (e.g. exorcist) or ‘sub-caste’ (e.g. *panda*) begin with a lower case letter. Diacritical marks are used in the glossary, but not in the text itself. The glossary is primarily intended as an aid to the general reader, and includes only those words which occur several times and which have not been glossed within a few lines of each occurrence.

<i>akāl mrityū</i>	untimely death
<i>akhārā</i>	wrestling school; an ascetic order
<i>āgnīhotrī</i>	a householder who offers daily oblations to the three sacrificial fires
<i>amāvasyā</i>	the new-moon day of the Hindu lunar calendar
<i>Antargrahī</i>	the pilgrimage which circumambulates the innermost core of Banaras
<i>antyeshti</i>	cremation; literally ‘last sacrifice’
<i>artha</i>	the domain of material and political advantage
<i>āshram</i>	hermitage or retreat; one of the four stages of life for a male Hindu: student, householder, forest hermit and renouncer

<i>Aughar</i>	<i>Mashān</i> the ghost of an Aghori ascetic who died in the performance of his terrible austerities
<i>avatār</i>	the incarnation of a deity (especially Vishnu)
<i>bahī</i>	a record or account book
<i>Bhairavī yātnā</i>	tortures of the god Bhairav inflicted on those who die in Banaras
<i>bhakti</i>	devotion, love (especially for a deity)
<i>bhavānī</i>	the ghost of an unmarried female
<i>bhūt-pret</i>	a generic term for malevolent ghosts
<i>bīr</i>	a 'hero'-ghost; the ghost of one who has died by violence in a just cause
<i>brahm</i>	the vengeful spirit of a Brahman who died a 'bad' death
<i>Brahman</i>	the supreme and transcendent reality that subsumes all oppositions within itself
<i>chakra-pūjā</i>	a secret tantric rite involving the use of the five 'Ms': <i>mans</i> (meat), <i>machchhli</i> (fish), <i>madhya</i> (liquor), <i>mudra</i> (parched grain or kidney beans) and <i>maithun</i> (sexual intercourse)
<i>chaukī</i>	a wooden platform
<i>dāgīyā</i>	'the one who gave fire'; the chief mourner
<i>dakshinā</i>	a fee paid to a Brahman priest for his ritual services; a supplementary gift added to the main gift of <i>dan</i> to make good any deficiencies in it
<i>dakshināyan</i>	the six months of the year when the sun appears to move south
<i>dalāl</i>	a commission agent; tout
<i>damri</i>	an obsolete unit of coinage worth one-eighth of a <i>paisa</i> ; a Mahabrahman <i>pari</i> yielding one day's turn in the year is described as a one <i>damri pari</i>
<i>dān</i>	an unreciprocated gift which makes merit for the donor and/or rids him or her of sin
<i>dhananjay</i>	one of the five (or ten) types of 'breath' or 'wind', it pervades the body and is liberated from the corpse at the rite of <i>kapal kriya</i>
<i>dharamshālā</i>	a pilgrim lodge
<i>dharma</i>	religious and moral duty; righteousness
<i>dhotī</i>	a loin garment
<i>dūdih-bhāt</i>	'milk-rice'; the name of the meal held for close kin on the day after cremation
<i>gaddī</i>	throne; figuratively used for the ancestral property of a priest or merchant
<i>gamchhā</i>	cloth or towel, generally check
<i>Gangā-putra</i>	'son of the Ganges'; a title claimed by certain families of pilgrimage-priests

<i>gāyatrī</i>	<i>jap</i> repetition of the <i>gayatri mantra</i>
<i>gāyatrī mantra</i>	the <i>mantra</i> whispered into the initiate's ear at the time of his investiture with the sacred thread
<i>ghāt</i>	a segment of river frontage
<i>ghātiyā</i>	a sacred specialist who sits on the <i>ghat</i> to perform various ritual functions for the pilgrims and bathers; notionally (though not always in practice) a Brahman
<i>guna</i>	one of the three qualities or dispositions of all existent beings
<i>gumāshṭā</i>	an agent or representative
<i>Hazār bhāi</i>	'the thousand brothers', a title claimed by certain families of pilgrimage-priests
<i>hijrā</i>	transvestites who sing and dance on the birth of a son
<i>hom</i>	fire sacrifice
<i>jājmān</i>	client (especially of a Brahman priest)
<i>jap</i>	repetition of sacred formulae or the names of a deity
<i>jinn</i>	a generic term for Muslim ghosts
<i>jīvit-shrāddh</i>	mortuary rites performed by, and for, a person who is still alive
<i>Kali Yuga</i>	the last and most degenerate epoch in the cycle of the universe
<i>kamīn</i>	provider of services for a high-caste patron
<i>kapāl kriyā</i>	the rite of breaking open the skull of the deceased on the cremation pyre
<i>Kāshī khandā</i>	the best known eulogistic text on Banaras
<i>kar</i>	tax; 'payment' made to the Dom at the time of cremation
<i>karam kāndī</i>	a Brahman ritual specialist
<i>kārindā</i>	agent; servant (especially of a Mahabrahman right-holder)
<i>Kāshī-lābh</i>	'the profit of Kashi' (i.e. the promise of salvation for those who die in Banaras)
<i>Kāshī-vās(i)</i>	'residence (resident) in Kashi' (applied to those who move to the city in anticipation of dying there)
<i>khand</i>	a division or section (of space, or of a longer literary work)
<i>khīr</i>	a sweet rice pudding
<i>kīrtan</i>	devotional singing/song
<i>kshetrā-purohit</i>	'an area-priest' (applied to certain south India priests who had the right to look after pilgrims but allegedly not the right to accept their gifts on the banks of the Ganges)
<i>kund</i>	a tank or sacred pool
<i>kushā</i>	a kind of sacred grass

<i>Lāl Mohrīyā pandā</i>	the pilgrimage-priest with the 'red seal' of the Raja of Nepal
<i>laukik</i>	popular practice (as opposed to that which is scripturally sanctioned)
<i>ling</i>	phallic emblem of Shiva
<i>lok</i>	one of the three worlds (heaven, earth and nether-world)
<i>lotā</i>	a small rounded metal pot
<i>mahant</i>	head priest or monk
<i>māhātmya</i>	eulogistic text lauding a particular place, time or deity
<i>mantra</i>	asacred formula or incantation
<i>marī</i>	a female ghost (generally said to be of Untouchable caste)
<i>maruā</i>	the ghost of a young child or aborted foetus
<i>math</i>	a monastery
<i>mohallā</i>	neighbourhood
<i>moksha</i>	salvation or liberation (especially from the cycle of rebirth)
<i>mukti</i>	salvation or liberation (especially from the cycle of rebirth)
<i>Narayani bali</i>	rite performed in cases of 'bad' death to rid the ghost of its ghostly condition
<i>Nau kul sardār</i>	'the nine chiefly descent lines' of the pilgrimage-priest community
<i>neg</i>	a presentation given in return for a ritual service
<i>ojhā</i>	an exorcist
<i>pachchh</i>	Mahabrahmans' rota system for allocating rights to serve mourners from the surrounding countryside
<i>pān</i>	betel-leaf, nut and associated condiments
<i>panchak</i>	a set of five lunar asterisms in which it is particularly inauspicious to die/cremate a corpse
<i>panchak shānti</i>	the rite of 'pacifying' the evil effects of a death/cremation during <i>panchak</i>
<i>Panch-kosi</i>	the pilgrimage which circumambulates the entire sacred space of Banaras
<i>pandā</i>	pilgrimage- or temple-priest
<i>pandāgīrī</i>	the profession of the <i>panda</i>
<i>pārī</i>	a shift or turn; the system of allocating rights to perform some office on a rota basis
<i>paisā</i>	the smallest unit of currency; money
<i>payas dān</i>	'the gift of milk' (offered to the Funeral-priest before his departure on the eleventh day)
<i>pind</i>	a ball of rice or grains offered to the dead; an embryo
<i>pindū-dān</i>	the gift of <i>pinds</i> to the departed

<i>pishāch</i>	a demonic being
<i>pitr</i>	an ancestor
<i>pitrī paksh</i>	'the fortnight of the ancestors'
<i>pralay</i>	the dissolution of the cosmos at the end of each world cycle
<i>prān</i>	the vital breath
<i>prāyashchitt</i>	penance, atonement (but in Banaras the word is also commonly used for that which must be atoned for – i.e. sin)
<i>pret</i>	an unincorporated ghost
<i>pūjā</i>	worship (normally consisting of a series of offerings or services)
<i>pūranmāsī</i>	full-moon day; fifteenth day of the bright fortnight
<i>pūranmāsī</i>	full-moon day; fifteenth day of the bright fortnight
<i>purohit</i>	a Brahman priest (generally used for one with who there is a long-term relationship)
<i>purushārtha</i>	the four goals of human existence (viz. <i>dharma</i> , <i>artha</i> , <i>kama</i> and <i>moksha</i>)
<i>putla vidhan</i>	'the method of the effigy'; the construction and cremation of an effigy of the deceased performed in cases in which the corpse itself is not cremated
<i>rāj ansh</i>	'the kingdom's share'; a share in the gifts of pilgrims from Banaras State claimed by the Maharaja's pilgrimage-priest
<i>Rām Līlā</i>	festival during which events in the life of Lord Ram are enacted
<i>Rūdrabhishek</i>	anointment or bathing ritual performed for Shiva
<i>sajjā dān</i>	gift made in the name of the deceased to the Funeral-priest, and to the household-/ pilgrimage-priest
<i>samādhi</i>	the tomb of an ascetic; the ascetic's state of suspended animation within it
<i>sandhyā</i>	Vedic recitations which should ideally be performed three times per day
<i>sankalp</i>	a binding ritual resolution to gift away
<i>sanskār</i>	one of the sixteen life-cycle rituals which perfect and refine the person
<i>sapinda</i>	kin with whom one shares the same body particles
<i>sapindikaran</i>	rite performed on the twelfth day after death at which the deceased is made into an ancestor
<i>sattvik</i>	disposed or conducive to purity and tranquility
<i>Satya Yuga</i>	the first of the four world epochs; the (golden) Age of Truth
<i>sādhana</i>	ritual practice or discipline
<i>shakti</i>	power; energy

<i>Shāstras</i>	scripture; teaching (especially Dharmashastra 'teachings about <i>dharma</i> ')
<i>shāstrik</i>	scriptural
<i>shraddh</i>	rites performed for the dead
<i>siddhis</i>	supernatural powers or accomplishments
<i>sutak</i>	pollution caused by birth and death (can also be used of menstrual pollution and the pollution occasioned by an eclipse)
<i>tapas (yā)</i>	ascetic austerity
<i>tīrath</i>	place of pilgrimage; ford or crossing point
<i>tīrath-purohit</i>	pilgrimage-priest
<i>tripindī shraddh</i>	Sanskritic rite performed for those who have got stuck in a ghostly condition on a long-term basis
<i>tulsī</i>	basil (sacred to Vishnu)
<i>uttarāyan</i>	the six months of the year when the sun appears to move north
<i>vaikunth</i>	(Vishnu's) heaven
<i>varna</i>	the four theoretical classes of Hindu society: Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra
<i>vrishotsarg</i>	rite for the deceased in which a bull is married to heifers, branded and set free to wander
<i>yagya</i>	sacrifice
<i>Yamraj</i>	the Lord of Death
<i>yamdūt</i>	messenger of the god of death
<i>zamindar</i>	landholder