Glossary

Anchara /Aanchal अंचल: It refers to the part of the saree that covers the women’s bosom. Culturally, Aanchal symbolizes maternal beneficence and piety. At times when the aanchal is held forward in the codified symbolic ways it is an expression of accepting gift from a socially superior person.

Agarbatti अगरबत्ती: Incense Sticks.

Aghori अघोरी: A Shaivite male ascetic who is considered to be a dweller of the cremation ground. The aghories are also seen as followers of extreme practices like eating out of the cremated person’s skull as well as inverting the normative distinctions of the pure and polluted.

Avdhoot Baba अवधूत बाबा: The Aghoris are also called as Avdhoot. This is a sanskritic reference to disassociate the saints from the allusions of corpse, cremation ground and intoxication.

Dagiya दागीया: The male kin, mostly a Son, Husband or Father, real or classificatory, who offers the sacrificial fire at the time of the cremation.

Dhuni धूनी: The fire (place) at the cremation Ghat which is perpetually lit.

Divya Niptan दिव्य निपटान: This could be literally translated as ‘cosmic ablation’.

Dom डोम: Doms are the caste group in North India who are primarily associated with the work of cremation. They use various surnames to designate themselves. ‘Chaudhary’ is the most common one.

Gamcha / Angauccha गम्चा /अंगूच्छ: It is a rectangular piece of cloth that is usually carried by men over their shoulders. The gamcha could be put to different cultural uses and works as a multi-purpose accessory for men.

Gangajal गंगा जल: The holy water of the River Ganga that is primarily used in Hindu households for its ritual cleansing and purifying properties.

Ghar घर: Home.

Ghat घाट: The concrete rectangular staircases that descend to the river Ganga.
Gointha गोइंठा: Cowdung fuel.

Gumti गुम्ती: A wooden Port-a-cabin used as shops to sell funerary items at the Ghat.

Hav-bhav हाव-भाव: Colloquial term to describe the perceptible appearance of things or people.

Jal-samadhi जल-समाधि: The mode of immersing the dead Sadhu in the river without cremation by fire.

Kashivas काशिवास: The term refers to the residence of those who come to die or mourn in the city of death. The typical Kashivasi in the city would be the widows as well as the old and the aged.

Khandit खण्डित: Broken, fragmented, incomplete.

Kulla कुल्ला: One of the characteristic ways in which people gargle while cleaning their mouth as part of morning ablation with Ganga’s water.

Lok (Pitrlok and Pretlok) लोक (पित्रलोक और प्रेतलोक): Lok is considered as the tangible, material, non-illusionary world. Pitrlok is the ancestral world and pretlok is the netherworld.

Maati माटी: It may refer to Earth, soil or clay. Here the reference is to the corpse outside the Ghat, where it is referred as maati.

Madh मध: The animal carcasses or the decomposed corpses in the river are called as Madh.

Mauj-Masti मौज-मस्ती: An allusion to fun and enjoyment that may include verbal, spatial, sexual and culinary transgressions that are more or less permitted within the cultural sphere to a set of people.

Mukhagni मुखाग्नि: The Sacrificial fire that is offered to the Symbolic face of the dead at the time of cremation.

Mukhya pachak मुख्य पाचक: Literally ‘The Chief Digester’, is a reference to the Dagiya, the one who offers the sacrificial fire. During the mourning period, just after death, Dagiya is seen as eating for the dead to facilitate their journey from this world to the world of ancestors.
Murda मूर्दा: Corpse.

Naanh Jat नान्ह जात: ‘Naanh’ literally means ‘little’. The phrase then is a derogatory reference to the “lower” castes as “little” castes.


Pahunche hue पहुँचे हुए: The term is used with reference to the Aghories to suggest that ‘they have already reached there’ where the ordinary mortals can only strive to reach.

Pari पारी: To take turns. This is the way in which most occupations like boating, cremating, washing clothes and so on are organized at the Ghats as part of the river economy.

Parvah पर्वाह: The Bhojpuri term for immersing the last remaining ‘flesh and bone’, saved through the cremation into Ganga.

Prana प्राण: Vital breath, life force.

Pran-asthapan प्राण-अस्थापन: Infusing life in a newly installed idol through a ritual ceremony conducted by the Brahmins.

Pravah प्रवाह: The Sanskrit-Hindi reference to the immersion of the last ‘flesh and bone’ in the river, alluding that the immersed object becomes part of the never-ending flow of the river (of life).

Sabko, ghum phir ke yahin aana hai! सबको, घूम फिर के यहाँ आना है: The common sigh by the Shavyatris at the cremation Ghat: ‘after wandering, everyone has to come here, one way or the other’.

Sadhu साधू: An ascetic, generally male, who could be a renunciate.

Shanti-grihya शान्तिगृह: House of Peace: The proper name for the morgue in the Hospital.

Shav शव: Corpse, the homological affinity with Shiv has to be noted here.

Shavvahan शव वाहन: The designated vehicles that carry the corpses from the Hospital to the Ghat.
Shavyatris शवयात्री: The contingent community that comes to the funeral at the Ghat, from Home to the Ghat or from Hospital to the Ghat.

Shulk शुल्क: Negotiable Fees (for cremation).

Sulabh Sauchalaya सुलभ शौचालय: Public convenience easy toilet

Tarna तर्ना: Tarna refers to being blessed by way of taking a dip in the river.

Us Paar उस पार: Us paar is the proverbial other side of the river, a space of Mauj-Masti.