

Languages of India

Languages spoken in India belong to several language families, the major ones being the Indo-Aryan languages spoken by 75% of Indians and the Dravidian languages spoken by 20% of Indians.^{[6][7]} Other languages belong to the Austroasiatic, Sino-Tibetan, Tai-Kadai, and a few other minor language families and isolates.^{[8]:283} India (780) has the world's second highest number of languages, after Papua New Guinea(839).^[9]

Article 343 of the Indian constitution states that the official language of the Union shall become Hindi in Devanagari script instead of the extant English, but is superseded by English subsequently too as mentioned in section 3 of the same constitutional article that is put to effect by The Official Languages Act, 1963.^[2] The form of numerals to be used for the official purposes of the Union were supposed to become international form of Indian numerals consequently apart from numerals in English language.^[1] Despite the misconceptions, Hindi is not the national language of India. The Constitution of India does not give any language the status of national language.^{[10][11]}

English was legislated to be reduced to the status of a "subsidiary official language" after fifteen years. But this provision of the constitution was negated by a provision in Section 3, of the same Article 343 that gave primacy to The Official Languages Act, 1963.^[2] The Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution lists 22 languages,^[12] which have been referred to as *scheduled* languages and given recognition, status and official encouragement. In addition, the Government of India has awarded the distinction of *classical language* to Kannada, Malayalam, Odia, Sanskrit, Tamil and Telugu.

According to Census of India of 2001, India has 122 major languages and 1599 other languages. However, figures from other sources vary, primarily due to differences in definition of the terms "language" and "dialect". The 2001 Census recorded 30 languages which were spoken by more than a million native speakers and 122 which were spoken by more than 10,000 people.^[13] Two contact languages have played an important role in the history of India: Persian^[14] and English.^[15] Persian was the court language during the Mughal period in India. It reigned as an administrative language for several centuries until the era of British colonisation.^[16] English continues to be an important language in India. It is used in higher education and in some areas of the Indian government.Hindi, the most widely spoken language in a large region of India today, serves as the *lingua franca* across much of North and Central India.^[17] However, there have been anti-Hindi agitations in South India, most notably in the states of Tamil Nadu.^[18] There is also opposition in non-Hindi belt states towards imposition of Hindi in these areas.^{[19][20]}

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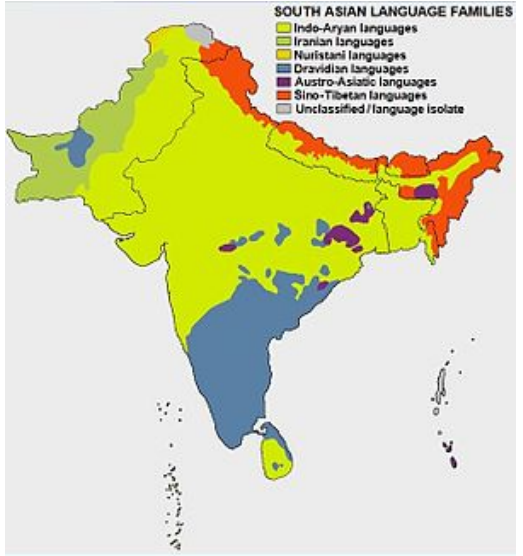
Language families

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Official languages

Federal level

Languages of India



Language families of the Indian subcontinent; Nihali, Kusunda, and Thai languages are not shown.

Official languages	Assamese Bengali Bodo Dogri English ^{[1][2][3]} Gujarati Hindi ^{[1][4]} Kannada Kashmiri Konkani Maithili Malayalam Marathi Meitei (Manipuri) Nepali Odia Punjabi Sanskrit Santali Sindhi Tamil Telugu Urdu (total: 23, including 22 8th Schedule languages and additional official language, English)
Main foreign languages	English – around 125 million speakers^[5]

Different sources give widely differing figures, primarily based on how the terms "language" and "dialect" are defined and grouped. *Ethnologue*, produced by the Christian evangelist organisation SIL International, lists 461 tongues for India (out of 6,912 worldwide), 447 of which are living, while 14 are extinct. The 447 living languages are further subclassified in *Ethnologue* as follows:^{[30][31]}

- Institutional – 63
- Developing – 130
- Vigorous – 187
- In trouble – 54
- Dying – 13

The People's Linguistic Survey of India, a privately owned research institution in India, has recorded over 66 different scripts and more than 780 languages in India during its nationwide survey which the organisation claims to be the biggest linguistic survey in India.^[32]

The People of India (POI) project of Anthropological Survey of India reported 325 languages which are used for in-group communication by 5,633 Indian communities.^[33]

Census of India figures

The Census of India records and publishes data with respect to the number of speakers for languages and dialects, but uses its own unique terminology, distinguishing between *language* and *mother tongue*. The mother tongues are grouped within each language. Many of the mother tongues so defined could be considered a language rather than a dialect by linguistic standards. This is especially so for many mother tongues with tens of millions of speakers that are officially grouped under the language Hindi.

1951 Census

Separate figures for Hindi, Urdu, and Punjabi were not issued, due to the fact the returns were intentionally recorded incorrect in states such as East Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Delhi, PEPSU, and Bilaspur.^[34]

1961 Census

The 1961 census recognised 1,652 mother tongues spoken by 438,936,918 people, counting all declarations made by any individual at the time when the census was conducted.^[35] However, the declaring individuals often mixed names of languages with those of dialects, subdialects and dialect clusters or even castes, professions, religions, localities, regions, countries and nationalities.^[35] The list therefore includes languages with barely a few individual speakers as well as 530 unclassified mother tongues and more than 100 idioms that are non-native to India, including linguistically unspecific demonyms such as "African", "Canadian" or "Belgian".^[35]

1991 Census

The 1991 census recognises 1,576 classified mother tongues.^[36] According to the 1991 census, 22 languages had more than a million native speakers, 50 had more than 100,000 and 114 had more than 10,000 native speakers. The remaining accounted for a total of 566,000 native speakers (out of a total of 838 million Indians in 1991).^{[36][37]}

2001 Census

According to the most recent census of 2001, there are 1635 rationalised mother tongues, 234 identifiable mother tongues and 22 major languages.^[13] Of these, 29 languages have more than a million native speakers, 60 have more than 100,000 and 122 have more than 10,000 native speakers.^[38] There are a few languages like Kodava that do not have a script but have a group of native speakers in Coorg (Kodagu).^[39]

2011 Census

The language-related data results of the 2011 Census have not yet been released by the Government of India.^[40]

Multilingualism

First, Second, and Third languages by number of speakers in India (2001 Census)

Language	First language speakers ^{[41][42]}	First language speakers as a percentage of total population ^[43]	Second language speakers ^[42]	Third language speakers ^[42]	Total speakers ^{[5][42]}	Total speakers as a percentage of total population ^[43]
<u>Hindi</u>	422,048,642	41.03	98,207,180	31,160,696	551,416,518	53.60
<u>English</u>	226,449	0.02	86,125,221	38,993,066	125,344,736	12.18
<u>Bengali</u>	83,369,769	8.10	6,637,222	1,108,088	91,115,079	8.86
<u>Telugu</u>	74,002,856	7.19	9,723,626	1,266,019	84,992,501	8.26
<u>Marathi</u>	71,936,894	6.99	9,546,414	2,701,498	84,184,806	8.18
<u>Tamil</u>	60,793,814	5.91	4,992,253	956,335	66,742,402	6.49
<u>Urdu</u>	51,536,111	5.01	6,535,489	1,007,912	59,079,512	5.74
<u>Kannada</u>	37,924,011	3.69	11,455,287	1,396,428	50,775,726	4.94
<u>Gujarati</u>	46,091,617	4.48	3,476,355	703,989	50,271,961	4.89
<u>Odia</u>	33,017,446	3.21	3,272,151	319,525	36,609,122	3.56
<u>Malayalam</u>	33,066,392	3.21	499,188	195,885	33,761,465	3.28
<u>Sanskrit</u>	14,135	<0.01	1,234,931	3,742,223	4,991,289	0.49

Language families

Ethnolinguistically, the languages of South Asia, echoing the complex history and geography of the region, form a complex patchwork of language families, language phyla and isolates.^{[8]:283} The languages of India belong to several language families, the most important of which are:^[44]

- Indo-Aryan language family
- Dravidian language family
- Austroasiatic language family
- Sino-Tibetan language family
- Tai–Kadai language family
- Great Andamanese languages

Indo-Aryan language family

The largest of the language families represented in India, in terms of speakers, is the Indo-Aryan language family, a branch of the Indo-Iranian family, itself the easternmost, extant subfamily of the Indo-European language family. This language family predominates, accounting for some 790 million speakers, or over 75% of the population, as per data collated during the Census of 2001.^[6] The most widely spoken languages of this group are Hindi (or more correctly, Hindustani, which includes Hindi and Urdu), Bengali, Konkani, Marathi, Gujarati, Punjabi, Kashmiri, Rajasthani, Sindhi, Assamese (Asamiya), Maithili and Odia.^[45] Aside from the Indo-Aryan languages, other Indo-European languages are also spoken in India, the most prominent of which is English, as a *lingua franca*.

Dravidian language family

The second largest language family is the Dravidian language family, accounting for some 215 million speakers, or approximately 20%, as per data collected during the Census of 2001.^[7] The Dravidian languages are spoken mainly in southern India and parts of eastern and central India as well as in parts of northeastern Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh. The Dravidian languages with the most speakers are Telugu, Tamil, Kannada and Malayalam.^[7] Besides the mainstream population, Dravidian languages are also spoken by small scheduled tribe communities, such as the Oraon and Gond tribes.^[46] Only two Dravidian languages are exclusively spoken outside India: Brahui in Pakistan and Dhangar, a dialect of Kurukh, in Nepal.^[47]

Austroasiatic language family

Families with smaller numbers of speakers are Austroasiatic and numerous small Sino-Tibetan languages, with some 10 and 6 million speakers, respectively, together 5% of the population.^[48]

The Austroasiatic language family (*austr* meaning South) is the autochthonous language in South Asia and Southeast Asia, other language families having arrived by migration. Austroasiatic languages of mainland India are the Khasi and Munda languages, including Santhali. The languages of the Nicobar islands also form part of this language family. With the exceptions of Khasi and Santhali, all Austroasiatic languages on Indian territory are endangered.^{[8]:456–457}

Sino-Tibetan language family

The Sino-Tibetan language family are well represented in India. However, their interrelationships are not discernible, and the family has been described as "a patch of leaves on the forest floor" rather than with the conventional metaphor of a "family tree"^{[8]:283–5}

Sino-Tibetan languages are spoken across the Himalayas in the regions of Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, Arunachal Pradesh, and also in the Indian states of West Bengal, Assam, (*hills and autonomous councils - BTC*)^{[49][50]} Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura and Mizoram. Sino-Tibetan languages spoken in India include the scheduled languages Meitei and Bodo, the non-scheduled languages of Karbi, Lepcha, and many varieties of several related Tibetic, West Himalayish, Tani, Brahmaputran, Angami–Pochuri, Tangkhul, Zeme, Kukish language groups, amongst many others.

Tai-Kadai language family

Ahom language belonging to Southwestern Tai language had been once the dominant language of Ahom Kingdom in modern-day Assam but had been replaced later by Assamese language (known as Kamrupi in ancient era which is the pre-form of the kamrupia dialect of today). Nowadays, small Tai communities and their languages remain in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh together with Sino-Tibetans, e.g. Tai Phake, Tai Aiton and Tai Khamti language, which are similar to Shan language of Shan state of Myanmar, Dai language in Yunnan of China, Lao language of Laos, Thai language of Thailand and Zhuang language in Guangxi of China.

Great Andamanese language family

The extinct and endangered languages of the Andaman Islands form a fifth family- the Great Andamanese language family, comprising two families, namely:^[51]

- the Great Andamanese, comprising a number of extinct languages apart from one highly endangered language with a dwindling number of speakers.
- the Ongan family of the southern Andaman Islands, comprising two extant languages, Önge and Jarawa, and one extinct tongue, Jangil.

In addition, Sentinelese, an unattested language of the Andaman Islands, is generally considered to be related and part of the language family^[61]

Language isolates

The only language found in the Indian mainland that is considered a language isolate is Nahali.^{[8]:337} The status of Nahali is ambiguous, having been considered as a distinct Austro-Asiatic language, as a dialect of Munda language and also as being a "thieves' agot" rather than a legitimate language.^{[52][53]}

The other language isolates found in the rest of South Asia include Burushaski, a language spoken in Gilgit–Baltistan (administered by Pakistan), Kusunda (in western Nepal) and Vedda (in Sri Lanka).^{[8]:283} The validity of the Great Andamanese language group as a language family has been questioned and it has been considered a language isolate by some authorities.^{[8]:283[54][55]}

In addition, a Bantu language, Sidi, was spoken until the mid-20th century in Gujarat.^{[8]:528}

Influences

The language families in India are not necessarily related to the various ethnic groups in India, specifically the Indo-Aryan and Dravidian people. The languages within each family have been influenced to a large extent by both families.

Urdu has also had a significant influence on many of today's Indian languages. Many North Indian languages have lost much of their Sanskritised base (50% current vocabulary) to a more Urdu-based form. In terms of the written script, most Indian languages, except the Tamil script, nearly perfectly accommodate the Sanskrit language. South Indian languages have adopted new letters to write various Indo-Aryan based words as well, and have added new letters to their native alphabets as the languages began to mix and influence each other

Though various Indo-Aryan and Dravidian languages may seem mutually exclusive when first heard, there is a much deeper underlying influence that both language families have had on each other down to a linguistic science. There is proof of the intermixing of Dravidian and Indo-Aryan languages through the pockets of Dravidian-based languages on remote areas of Pakistan, and interspersed areas of North India. In addition, there is a whole science regarding the tonal and cultural expression within the languages that are quite standard across India. Languages may have different vocabulary, but various hand and tonal gestures within two unrelated languages can still be common due to cultural amalgamations between invading people and the natives over time; in this case, the Indo-Aryan peoples and the native Dravidian people.

Official languages

Federal level

Prior to Independence, in British India, English was the sole language used for administrative purposes as well as for higher education purposes.^[19]

In 1946, the issue of national language was a bitterly contested subject in the proceedings of the Constituent Assembly of India, specifically what should be the language in which the Constitution of India is written and the language spoken during the proceedings of Parliament and thus deserving of the epithet "national". Members belonging to the northern parts of India insisted that the Constitution be drafted in Hindi with the unofficial translation in English. This was not agreed to by the drafting Committee on the grounds that English was much better to craft the nuanced prose on constitutional subjects. The efforts to make Hindi the pre-eminent language were bitterly resisted by the members from those parts of India where Hindi was not spoken natively. Eventually, a compromise was reached with Hindi in Devanagari script to be the official language of the union but for "fifteen years from the commencement of the Constitution, the English Language shall continue to be used for all the official purposes of the Union for which it was being used immediately before such commencement".^[19]

Article 343 (1) of the Constitution of India states "The Official Language of the Union government shall be Hindi in Devanagari script."^{[56]:212[57]} Unless Parliament decided otherwise, the use of English for official purposes was to cease 15 years after the constitution came into effect, i.e. on 26 January 1965.^{[56]:212[57]}

As the date for changeover approached, however, there was much alarm in the non Hindi-speaking areas of India, especially in Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, West Bengal, Karnataka, Puducherry and Andhra Pradesh. Accordingly, Jawaharlal Nehru ensured the enactment of the Official Languages Act, 1963,^{[58][59]} which provided that English "may" still be used with Hindi for official purposes, even after 1965.^[19] The wording of the text proved unfortunate in that while Nehru understood that "may" meant shall, politicians championing the cause of Hindi thought it implied exactly the opposite.^[19]

In the event, as 1965 approached, India's new Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri prepared to make Hindi paramount with effect from 26 January 1965. This led to widespread agitation, riots, self-immolations and suicides in Tamil Nadu. The split of Congress politicians from the South from their party stance, the resignation of two Union ministers from the South and the increasing threat to the country's unity forced Shastri to concede.^{[19][20]}

As a result, the proposal was dropped,^{[60][61]} and the Act itself was amended in 1967 to provide that the use of English would not be ended until a resolution to that effect was passed by the legislature of every state that had not adopted Hindi as its official language, and by each house of the Indian Parliament.^[58]

The Constitution of India does not give any language the status of national language.^{[10][11]}

Hindi

Hindi, written in Devanagari script, is the most prominent language spoken in the country. In the 2001 census, 422 million (422,048,642) people in India reported Hindi to be their native language.^[62] This figure not only included Hindi speakers of Hindustani, but also people who identify as native speakers of related languages who consider their speech to be a dialect of Hindi, the Hindi belt. Hindi (or Hindustani) is the native language of most people living in Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, Chandigarh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, and Rajasthan.^[63]

"Modern Standard Hindi", a standardised language is the official language of the Union of India. In addition, it is one of only two languages used for business in Parliament.

Hindustani, evolved from *khari boli*, a prominent tongue of Mughal times, which itself evolved from Apabhramśa, an intermediary transition stage from Prakrit, from which the major North Indian Indo-Aryan languages have evolved.

Varieties of Hindi spoken in India include Rajasthani, Brj Bhasha, Haryanvi, Bundeli, Kannauji, Hindustani, Awadhi, Bagheli, Bhojpuri, Magahi and Chhattisgarhi. By virtue of its being a *lingua franca*, Hindi has also developed regional dialects such as Bambaiya Hindi in Mumbai. In addition, a trade language, Andaman Creole Hindi has also developed in the Andaman Islands.

In addition, by use in popular culture such as songs and films, Hindi also serves as *lingua franca* across both North and Central India.

Hindi is widely taught both as a primary language and language of instruction, and as a second tongue in most states.

English

British colonial legacy has resulted in English being a language for government, business and education. English, along with Hindi, is one of the two languages permitted in the Constitution of India for business in Parliament. Despite the fact that Hindi has official Government patronage and serves as a *lingua franca* over large parts of India, there was considerable opposition to the use of Hindi in the southern states of India, and English has emerged as a *de facto lingua franca* over much of India.^{[19][20]}

Scheduled languages



The Hindi-belt, including Hindi-related languages such as Rajasthani and Bhojpuri.

Until the Twenty-first Amendment of the Constitution of India in 1967, the country recognised 14 official regional languages. The Eighth Schedule and the Seventy-First Amendment provided for the inclusion of Sindhi, Konkani, Meitei and Nepali, thereby increasing the number of official regional languages of India to 18. The Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India, as of 1 December 2007, lists 22 languages,^{[56]:330} which are given in the table below together with the speaking population and the regions where they are used.^[62]

Language	Family
Assamese	<u>Indo-Aryan</u>
Bengali (Bangla)	<u>Indo-Aryan</u>
Bodo	<u>Sino-Tibetan</u>
Dogri	<u>Indo-Aryan</u>
Gujarati	<u>Indo-Aryan</u>
Hindi	<u>Indo-Aryan</u>
Kannada	<u>Dravidian</u>
Kashmiri	<u>Indo-Aryan</u>
Konkani	<u>Indo-Aryan</u>
Maithili	<u>Indo-Aryan</u>
Malayalam	<u>Dravidian</u>
Meitei	<u>Sino-Tibetan</u>
Marathi	<u>Indo-Aryan</u>
Nepali	<u>Indo-Aryan</u>
Odia	<u>Indo-Aryan</u>
Punjabi	<u>Indo-Aryan</u>
Sanskrit	<u>Indo-Aryan</u>
Santali	<u>Austroasiatic</u>
Sindhi	<u>Indo-Aryan</u>
Tamil	<u>Dravidian</u>
Telugu	<u>Dravidian</u>
Urdu	<u>Indo-Aryan</u>

The individual states, the borders of most of which are or were drawn on socio-linguistic lines, can legislate their own official languages, depending on their linguistic demographics. The official languages chosen reflect the predominant as well as politically significant languages spoken in that state. Certain states having a linguistically defined territory may have only the predominant language in that state as its official language, examples being Karnataka and Gujarat, which have Kannada and Gujarati as their sole official language respectively. Telangana, with a sizeable Urdu-speaking Muslim population, has two languages, Telugu and Urdu, as its official languages.

Some states buck the trend by using minority languages as official languages. Jammu and Kashmir uses Urdu, which is spoken by fewer than 1% of the population. Meghalaya uses English spoken by 0.01% of the population. This phenomenon has turned majority languages into "minority languages" in a functional sense.^[65]

Lists of Official Languages of States and Union Territories of India

In addition to states and union territories, India has autonomous administrative regions which may be permitted to select their own official language – a case in point being the Bodoland Territorial Council in Assam which has declared the Bodo language as official for the region, in addition to Assamese and English already in use^[66] and Bengali in the Barak Valley,^[67] as its official languages.

Prominent languages of India

Bengali



Provision: India Census, 2011

Main languages of India and their relative size according to how many speakers each has!^[64]

Native to the Bengal region, comprising the nation of [Bangladesh](#) and the [states](#) of [West Bengal](#), [Tripura](#) and [Barak Valley](#) region of [Assam](#). Bengali (also spelt as *Bangla*: বাংলা) is the fifth most spoken language in the world. After partition of India (1947), refugees from East Pakistan were settled in [Tripura](#), and [Jharkhand](#) and the union territory of [Andaman and Nicobar Islands](#). There is also a large number of Bengali-speaking people in Maharashtra and Gujarat where they work as artisans in jewellery industries. Bengali developed from [Abahatta](#), a derivative of [Apabhramsha](#), itself derived from [Magadhi Prakrit](#). The modern [Bengali vocabulary](#) contains the vocabulary base from [Magadhi Prakrit](#) and [Pali](#), also [borrowings](#) & [reborrowings](#) from [Sanskrit](#) and other major borrowings from [Persian](#), [Arabic](#), [Austroasiatic languages](#) and other languages in contact with. Like most Indian languages, Bengali has a number of dialects. Interestingly it exhibits [diglossia](#), with the literary and standard form differing greatly from the colloquial speech of the regions that identify with the language.^[68] Bengali language has developed a rich cultural base spanning art, music, literature and religion. There have been many movements in defense of this language and in 1999 [UNESCO](#) declared 21 Feb as the [International Mother Language Day](#) in commemoration of the [Bengali Language Movement](#) in 1952.^[69]

Telugu

Telugu is the most widely spoken [Dravidian language](#) in India. Telugu is an official language in [Andhra Pradesh](#), [Telangana](#) and the union territory of [Puducherry](#), making it one of the few languages (along with Hindi, Bengali, and Urdu) with official status in more than one state. It is also spoken by significant minorities in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, and by the Sri Lankan Gypsy people. It is one of six languages with [classical status in India](#) Telugu ranks third by the number of native speakers in India (74 million in the 2001 Census), fifteenth in the *Ethnologue* list of most-spoken languages worldwide and is the most widely spoken Dravidian language.

Marathi

[Marathi](#) is an Indo-Aryan language. It is the official language and co-official language in [Maharashtra](#) and [Goa](#) states of Western India respectively, and is one of the official languages of India. There were 71 million speakers in 2001 and 73 million speakers in 2007, ranking 19th in the [list of most spoken languages](#). Marathi has the fourth largest number of native speakers in India. Marathi has some of the oldest literature of all modern Indo-Aryan languages, dating from about 1200 AD (Mukundraj's *Vivek Sindhu* from the close of the 12th century). The major dialects of Marathi are Standard Marathi and the Varhadi dialect. There are other related languages such as [Khandeshi](#), [Dangi](#), [Vadvali](#) and [Samavedi](#). [Malvani Konkani](#) has been heavily influenced by Marathi varieties. Marathi is one of several languages that descend from Maharashtri Prakrit. Further change led to the [Apabhramsha](#) languages like [Old Marathi](#).

Marathi is the official language of Maharashtra and co-official language in the union territories of Daman and Diu and Dadra and Nagar Haveli. In [Goa](#), [Konkani](#) is the sole official language; however Marathi may also be used for all official purposes.

Over a period of many centuries the Marathi language and people came into contact with many other languages and dialects. The primary influences [Prakrit](#), [Maharashtri](#), [Dravidian languages](#), [Apabhramsha](#) and [Sanskrit](#) is understandable. At least 50% of the words in Marathi are either taken or derived from Sanskrit. Many scholars claim that Sanskrit has derived many words from Marathi. Marathi has also shared directions, vocabulary and grammar with languages such as Indian Dravidian languages, and foreign languages such as [Persian](#), [Arabic](#), [English](#) and a little from [Portuguese](#).

Tamil

Tamil (also spelt as *Thamizh*: தமிழ்) is a [Dravidian language](#) predominantly spoken in [Tamil Nadu](#), [Puduchery](#) and many parts of [Sri Lanka](#). It is also spoken by large minorities in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, [Malaysia](#), [Singapore](#), [Mauritius](#) and throughout the world. Tamil ranks fifth by the number of native speakers in India (61 million in the 2001 Census^[70]) and ranks 20th in the [list of most spoken languages](#). It is one of the 22 [scheduled languages of India](#) and was the first Indian language to be declared a [classical language](#) by the Government of India in 2004. Tamil is one of the longest surviving [classical languages](#) in the world.^{[71][72]} It has been described as "the only language of contemporary India which is recognisably continuous with a classical past."^[73] The two earliest manuscripts from India,^{[74][75]} acknowledged and registered by UNESCO Memory of the World register in 1997 and 2005, are in Tamil.^[76] Tamil is an official language of [Tamil Nadu](#), [Puducherry](#), [Andaman and Nicobar Islands](#), [Sri Lanka](#) and [Singapore](#). It is also recognized as minority language in [Canada](#), [Malaysia](#), [Mauritius](#) and [South Africa](#).



15th-century anthology of Tamil religious poem dedicated to lord Ganesha

Urdu

After independence, Modern Standard Urdu the Persianised register of Hindustani became the [national language of Pakistan](#). During British colonial times, a knowledge of Hindustani or Urdu was a must for officials. Hindustani was made the second language of British Indian Empire after English and considered as the language of administration. The British introduced the use of Roman script for Hindustani as well as other languages. Urdu had 70 million speakers in India (as per the Census of 2001), and, along with Hindi, is one of the 22 officially recognised regional languages of India and also an official language in the Indian states of [Jammu and Kashmir](#), [Delhi](#), [Uttar Pradesh](#), [Bihar](#) and [Telangana](#) that have significant Muslim populations. Some dialects of Hindi, especially those that arose in Muslim-dominated areas.

Gujarati

Gujarati is an Indo-Aryan language. It is native to the west Indian region of Gujarat. Gujarati is part of the greater Indo-European language family. Gujarati is descended from Old Gujarati (c. 1100 – 1500 CE), the same source as that of Rajasthani. Gujarati is the chief language in the Indian state of Gujarat. It is also an official language in the union territories of Daman and Diu and Dadra and Nagar Haveli. According to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), 4.5% of population of India (1.21 billion according to 201 census) speaks Gujarati. This amounts to 54.6 million speakers in India.^[7]

Kannada

Kannada language is a Dravidian language which branched off from Kannada-Tamil sub group around 500 B.C.E according to the Dravidian scholar Zvelebil.^[78] According to the Dravidian scholars Steever and Krishnamurthy, the study of Kannada language is usually divided into three linguistic phases: Old (450–1200 CE), Middle (1200–1700 CE) and Modern (1700–present).^{[79][80]} The earliest written records are from the 5th century,^[81] and the earliest available literature in rich manuscript (*Kavirajamarga*) is from c. 850.^{[82][83]} Kannada language has the second oldest written tradition of all vernacular languages of India.^{[84][85]} Current estimates of the total number of epigraph present in Karnataka range from 25,000 by the scholar Sheldon Pollock to over 30,000 by the Sahitya Akademi,^[86] making Karnataka state "one of the most densely inscribed pieces of real estate in the world".^[87] According to Garg and Shipely, more than a thousand notable writers have contributed to the wealth of the language.^{[88][89]}

Malayalam

Malayalam (/ˈmələˈjɑːləm/^[90] മലയാളം, *Malayāḷam* [?] [maləjaː[ə̃m]]) has official language status in the state of Kerala and in the union territories of Lakshadweep and Puducherry. It belongs to the Dravidian family of languages and is spoken by some 38 million people. Malayalam is also spoken in the neighboring states of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, with some speakers in the Nilgiris, Kanyakumari and Coimbatore districts of Tamil Nadu, and the Dakshina Kannada and the Kodagu district of Karnataka.^{[91][92][93]} Malayalam originated from Middle Tamil (Sen-Tamil) in the 7th century.^[94] As Malayalam began to freely borrow words as well as the rules of grammar from Sanskrit, the Grantha alphabet was adopted for writing and came to be known as *Arya Eluttu*.^[95] This developed into the modern Malayalam script.^[96]

Odia

Odia (formerly spelled *Oriya*)^[97] is the only Indian classical language from Indo-Aryan group alongside Sanskrit. Odia is primarily spoken in the Indian state of Odisha and has over 40 million speakers. It was declared as a classical language of India in 2014. Native speakers comprise 80% of the population in Odisha.^[98] Odia is thought to have originated from Magadhi Prakrit similar to Ardha Magadhi, a language spoken in eastern India over 1,500 years ago. The history of Odia language can be divided to Old Odia^[99] (7th century–1200), Early Middle Odia (1200–1400), Middle Odia (1400–1700), Late Middle Odia (1700–1850) and Modern Odia (1850 till present day). The National Manuscripts Mission of India have found around 213,000 unearthed and preserved manuscripts written in Odia.^[100]

Punjabi

Punjabi, written in the Gurmukhi script in India, is one of the prominent languages of India with about 32 million speakers. In Pakistan it is spoken by over 8 million people and is written in the Shahmukhi alphabet. It is mainly spoken in Punjab but also in neighboring areas. It is an official language of Delhi and Punjab.

Assamese

Asamiya or Assamese language is most popular in the state of Assam and Brahmaputra Valley.^[101] It's an Eastern Indo-Aryan language having more than 10 million speakers as per world estimates by Encarta.^[102]

Maithili

Maithili (/ˈmaɪtɪli/^[103] *Maithilī*) is an Indo-Aryan language spoken in the Bihar and Jharkhand states of India.^{[104][105]} In Nepal, it is spoken in the eastern Terai, and is the second most prevalent language of Nepal.^[106] Tirhuta was formerly the primary script for written Maithili. Less commonly, it was also written in the local variant of Kaithi.^[107] Today it is written in the Devanagari script.^[108]

In 2003, Maithili was included in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution as a recognised regional language of India, which allows it to be used in education, government, and other official contexts.^[109]

Classical languages

In 2004, the Government of India declared that languages that met certain requirements could be accorded the status of a "Classical Language in India".^[110] Languages thus far declared to be Classical:

- Tamil (in 2004),^[111]
- Sanskrit (in 2005),^[112]

- Kannada (in 2008),
- Telugu (in 2008),^[113]
- Malayalam (in 2013),^[114]
- Odia (in 2014),^{[115][116]}

In a 2006 press release, Minister of Tourism & Culture Ambika Soni told the Rajya Sabha the following criteria were laid down to determine the eligibility of languages to be considered for classification as a "Classical Language"^[117]

High antiquity of its early texts/recorded history over a period of 1500–2000 years; a body of ancient literature/texts, which is considered a valuable heritage by generations of speakers; the literary tradition be original and not borrowed from another speech community; the classical language and literature being distinct from modern, there may also be a discontinuity between the classical language and its later forms or its offshoots.

The Government has been criticized for not including Pali as a classical language, as experts have argued that it fits all the above criteria.^{[118][119]}

Benefits

As per Government of India's Resolution No. 2-16/2004-US(Akademies) dated 1 November 2004, the benefits that will accrue to a language declared as "Classical Language" are

1. Two major international awards for scholars of eminence in Classical Indian Languages are awarded annually
2. A 'Center of Excellence for Studies in Classical Languages' is set up.
3. The University Grants Commission be requested to create, to start with at least in the Central Universities, a certain number of Professional Chairs for Classical Languages for scholars of eminence in Classical Indian Languages.^[120]

Other local languages and dialects

The 2001 census identified the following native languages having more than one million speakers. Most of them are dialects/variants grouped under Hindi.^[62]

Languages	No. of native speakers ^[62]
Bhojpuri	33,099,497
Rajasthani	18,355,613
Magadhi/Magahi	13,978,565
Chhattisgarhi	13,260,186
Haryanvi	7,997,192
Marwari	7,936,183
Malvi	5,565,167
Mewari	5,091,697
Khorth/Khotta	4,725,927
Bundeli	3,072,147
Bagheli	2,865,011
Pahari	2,832,825
Laman/Lambadi	2,707,562
Awadhi	2,529,308
Harauti	2,462,867
Garhwali	2,267,314
Nimadi	2,148,146
Sadan/Sadri	2,044,776
Kumauni	2,003,783
Dhundhari	1,871,130
Tulu	1,722,768
Surgujia	1,458,533
Bagri Rajasthani	1,434,123
Banjari	1,259,821
Nagpuria (Varhadi)	1,242,586
Surajpuri	1,217,019
Sylheti	3,612,653
Kangri	1,122,843

Practical problems

India has several languages in use; choosing any single language as an official language presents problems to all those whose "mother tongue" is different. However, all the boards of education across India recognise the need for training people to one common language.^[121] There are complaints that in North India, non-Hindi speakers have language trouble. Similarly, there are complaints that North Indians have to undergo difficulties on account of language when travelling to South India. It is common to hear of incidents that result due to friction between those who strongly believe in the chosen official language, and those who follow the thought that the chosen language(s) do not take into account everyone's preferences.^[122] Local official language commissions have been established and various steps are being taken in a direction to reduce tensions and friction.

Language conflicts

There are conflicts over linguistic rights in India. The first major linguistic conflict, known as the Anti-Hindi agitations of Tamil Nadu, took place in Tamil Nadu against the implementation of Hindi as the official language of India. Political analysts consider this as a major factor in bringing DMK to power and leading to the ousting and nearly total elimination of the Congress party in Tamil Nadu.^[123] Strong cultural pride based on language is also found in other Indian states such as Bengal, Punjab and Maharashtra. To express disapproval of the imposition of Hindi on its states' people as a result of the central government, the government of Maharashtra made the state languages mandatory in educational institutions.^[124]

The Government of India attempts to assuage these conflicts with various campaigns, coordinated by the Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysore, a branch of the Department of Higher Education, Language Bureau, and the Ministry of Human Resource Development

Writing systems

Most languages in India are written in Brahmi-derived scripts, such as Devanagari, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Odia, Eastern Nagari - Assamese/Bengali, etc., though Urdu is written in a script derived from Arabic and a few minor languages such as Santali use independent scripts.

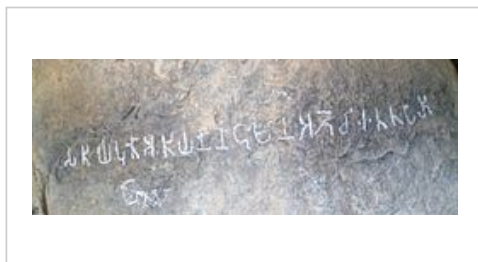
Various Indian languages have their own scripts. Hindi, Marathi and Angika are languages written using the Devanagari script. Most major languages are written using a script specific to them, such as Assamese (Asamiya)^{[125][126][127]} with Asamiya^[128] Bengali with Bengali, Punjabi with Gurmukhi, Odia with Odia script, Gujarati with Gujarati, etc. Urdu and sometimes Kashmiri, Saraiki and Sindhi are written in modified versions of the Perso-Arabic script. With this one exception, the scripts of Indian languages are native to India. Languages like Kodava that didn't have a script whereas Tulu which had a script adopted Kannada due to its readily available printing settings; these languages have taken up the scripts of the local official languages as their own and are written in the Kannada script^[129]

DEVELOPMENT OF ORISSAN SCRIPTS

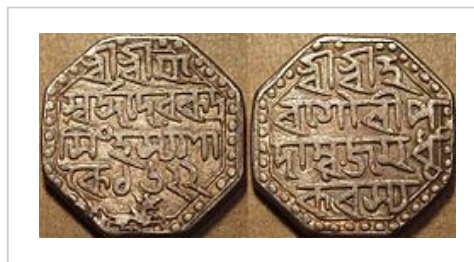
ଓଡ଼ିଆ ଲିପିର କ୍ରମ ବିକାଶ

KEY	A	I	U	E	O	KA	KHA	GA	GHA	CHA	CHHA	JA	JHA	TA	THA	NA	TA	THA	DA	DHA	NA	PA	PHA	BA	BHA	MA	YA	RA	LA	VA	SA	SHA	SA	HA	KA	KI	KI	KU	KE	KAI	KO	KAU	
୧୭୭୦	ଅ	ଇ	ଉ	ଈ	ଊ	କ	ଖ	ଗ	ଘ	ଙ	ଚ	ଛ	ଜ	ଝ	ଟ	ଠ	ଡ	ଢ	ଣ	ତ	ଥ	ନ	ପ	ଫ	ବ	ଭ	ମ	ଯ	ର	ଲ	ୱ	ଶ	ଷ	ସ	ହ	କା	କି	କି	କୁ	କେ	କା	କୋ	କା
3rd Cent. B.C. ୧୮୫-୩୮୫ B.C.	ଅ	ଇ	ଉ	ଈ	ଊ	କ	ଖ	ଗ	ଘ	ଙ	ଚ	ଛ	ଜ	ଝ	ଟ	ଠ	ଡ	ଢ	ଣ	ତ	ଥ	ନ	ପ	ଫ	ବ	ଭ	ମ	ଯ	ର	ଲ	ୱ	ଶ	ଷ	ସ	ହ	କା	କି	କି	କୁ	କେ	କା	କୋ	କା
1st Cent. B.C. ୩୮୫-୧୮୫ B.C.	ଅ	ଇ	ଉ	ଈ	ଊ	କ	ଖ	ଗ	ଘ	ଙ	ଚ	ଛ	ଜ	ଝ	ଟ	ଠ	ଡ	ଢ	ଣ	ତ	ଥ	ନ	ପ	ଫ	ବ	ଭ	ମ	ଯ	ର	ଲ	ୱ	ଶ	ଷ	ସ	ହ	କା	କି	କି	କୁ	କେ	କା	କୋ	କା
4th Cent. A.D. ୩୮୫-୬୫୦ A.D.	ଅ	ଇ	ଉ	ଈ	ଊ	କ	ଖ	ଗ	ଘ	ଙ	ଚ	ଛ	ଜ	ଝ	ଟ	ଠ	ଡ	ଢ	ଣ	ତ	ଥ	ନ	ପ	ଫ	ବ	ଭ	ମ	ଯ	ର	ଲ	ୱ	ଶ	ଷ	ସ	ହ	କା	କି	କି	କୁ	କେ	କା	କୋ	କା
5th Cent. A.D. ୬୫୦-୮୫୦ A.D.	ଅ	ଇ	ଉ	ଈ	ଊ	କ	ଖ	ଗ	ଘ	ଙ	ଚ	ଛ	ଜ	ଝ	ଟ	ଠ	ଡ	ଢ	ଣ	ତ	ଥ	ନ	ପ	ଫ	ବ	ଭ	ମ	ଯ	ର	ଲ	ୱ	ଶ	ଷ	ସ	ହ	କା	କି	କି	କୁ	କେ	କା	କୋ	କା
6th Cent. A.D. ୮୫୦-୯୫୦ A.D.	ଅ	ଇ	ଉ	ଈ	ଊ	କ	ଖ	ଗ	ଘ	ଙ	ଚ	ଛ	ଜ	ଝ	ଟ	ଠ	ଡ	ଢ	ଣ	ତ	ଥ	ନ	ପ	ଫ	ବ	ଭ	ମ	ଯ	ର	ଲ	ୱ	ଶ	ଷ	ସ	ହ	କା	କି	କି	କୁ	କେ	କା	କୋ	କା
7th Cent. A.D. ୯୫୦-୧୦୫୦ A.D.	ଅ	ଇ	ଉ	ଈ	ଊ	କ	ଖ	ଗ	ଘ	ଙ	ଚ	ଛ	ଜ	ଝ	ଟ	ଠ	ଡ	ଢ	ଣ	ତ	ଥ	ନ	ପ	ଫ	ବ	ଭ	ମ	ଯ	ର	ଲ	ୱ	ଶ	ଷ	ସ	ହ	କା	କି	କି	କୁ	କେ	କା	କୋ	କା
8th & 9th Cent. A.D. ୧୦୫୦-୧୨୫୦ A.D.	ଅ	ଇ	ଉ	ଈ	ଊ	କ	ଖ	ଗ	ଘ	ଙ	ଚ	ଛ	ଜ	ଝ	ଟ	ଠ	ଡ	ଢ	ଣ	ତ	ଥ	ନ	ପ	ଫ	ବ	ଭ	ମ	ଯ	ର	ଲ	ୱ	ଶ	ଷ	ସ	ହ	କା	କି	କି	କୁ	କେ	କା	କୋ	କା
10th & 11th Cent. A.D. ୧୨୫୦-୧୫୫୦ A.D.	ଅ	ଇ	ଉ	ଈ	ଊ	କ	ଖ	ଗ	ଘ	ଙ	ଚ	ଛ	ଜ	ଝ	ଟ	ଠ	ଡ	ଢ	ଣ	ତ	ଥ	ନ	ପ	ଫ	ବ	ଭ	ମ	ଯ	ର	ଲ	ୱ	ଶ	ଷ	ସ	ହ	କା	କି	କି	କୁ	କେ	କା	କୋ	କା
12th & 13th Cent. A.D. ୧୫୫୦-୧୮୫୦ A.D.	ଅ	ଇ	ଉ	ଈ	ଊ	କ	ଖ	ଗ	ଘ	ଙ	ଚ	ଛ	ଜ	ଝ	ଟ	ଠ	ଡ	ଢ	ଣ	ତ	ଥ	ନ	ପ	ଫ	ବ	ଭ	ମ	ଯ	ର	ଲ	ୱ	ଶ	ଷ	ସ	ହ	କା	କି	କି	କୁ	କେ	କା	କୋ	କା
14th & 15th Cent. A.D. ୧୮୫୦-୧୯୫୦ A.D.	ଅ	ଇ	ଉ	ଈ	ଊ	କ	ଖ	ଗ	ଘ	ଙ	ଚ	ଛ	ଜ	ଝ	ଟ	ଠ	ଡ	ଢ	ଣ	ତ	ଥ	ନ	ପ	ଫ	ବ	ଭ	ମ	ଯ	ର	ଲ	ୱ	ଶ	ଷ	ସ	ହ	କା	କି	କି	କୁ	କେ	କା	କୋ	କା
16th & 17th Cent. A.D. ୧୯୫୦-୧୯୫୦ A.D.	ଅ	ଇ	ଉ	ଈ	ଊ	କ	ଖ	ଗ	ଘ	ଙ	ଚ	ଛ	ଜ	ଝ	ଟ	ଠ	ଡ	ଢ	ଣ	ତ	ଥ	ନ	ପ	ଫ	ବ	ଭ	ମ	ଯ	ର	ଲ	ୱ	ଶ	ଷ	ସ	ହ	କା	କି	କି	କୁ	କେ	କା	କୋ	କା
18th & 19th Cent. A.D. ୧୯୫୦-୧୯୫୦ A.D.	ଅ	ଇ	ଉ	ଈ	ଊ	କ	ଖ	ଗ	ଘ	ଙ	ଚ	ଛ	ଜ	ଝ	ଟ	ଠ	ଡ	ଢ	ଣ	ତ	ଥ	ନ	ପ	ଫ	ବ	ଭ	ମ	ଯ	ର	ଲ	ୱ	ଶ	ଷ	ସ	ହ	କା	କି	କି	କୁ	କେ	କା	କୋ	କା
20th Cent. A.D. ୧୯୫୦-୧୯୫୦ A.D.	ଅ	ଇ	ଉ	ଈ	ଊ	କ	ଖ	ଗ	ଘ	ଙ	ଚ	ଛ	ଜ	ଝ	ଟ	ଠ	ଡ	ଢ	ଣ	ତ	ଥ	ନ	ପ	ଫ	ବ	ଭ	ମ	ଯ	ର	ଲ	ୱ	ଶ	ଷ	ସ	ହ	କା	କି	କି	କୁ	କେ	କା	କୋ	କା

Development of Odia script



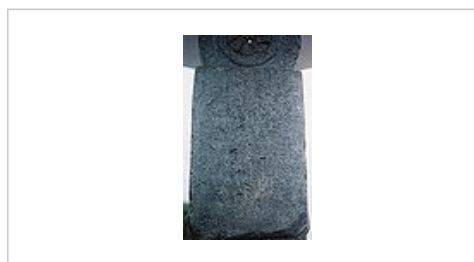
Tamil-Brahmi inscription in Jambaimalai



Silver coin issued during the reign of Rudra Singha with Assamese inscriptions.



North Indian Brahmi found in Ashok pillar



The Halmidi inscription, the oldest known inscription in the Kannada script and language. The inscription is dated to the 450 CE - 500 CE period.



An early Telugu inscription found in the Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh

Notes

See also

- List of endangered languages in India
- List of languages by number of native speakers in India
- National Translation Mission

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