

Indian Languages

India is a land of vastness and continuity. It is now certain that the inhabitants of the country are not her original people.

	<u>SHORT VOWELS</u>					<u>LONG VOWELS</u>				
B-SCRIPT:	A	E	I	O	U	AA	EE	II	OO	UU
MALAYALAM:	അ	എ	ഇ	ഒ	ഉ	ആ	ഈ	ഈ	ഓ	ഊ
DEVANAGIRI:	अ	ए	इ	ओ	उ	आ	ए	ई	ओ	ऊ
	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
	101	102	103	104	105	106	107	108	109	110

	<u>OTHER VOWELS</u>									
B-SCRIPT:	AI	AU	RW	RWU	LW	LWU	AMX	ANX	AM	AHX
MALAYALAM:	ഐ	ഔ	ഋ	-	-	-	-	-	അം	അഃ
DEVANAGIRI:	ऐ	औ	ऋ	ॠ	ऌ	ॡ	अं	अँ	अम्	अः
	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
	111	112	113	114	115	116	117	118	119	120

VOWELS

They entered India in different spans of time and got settled here. Most of them belong to the Asian parts-Central, Eastern and Western.

It is natural that differences and variations exist in their languages and dialects owing to their coming into India from different parts of Asia. After coming into India, cultural mixing has taken place among various races and it led to the mixing of their languages and dialects to a great extent. Despite all this, people of different races and classes live in different parts of the country and they speak different languages and dialects.

Classification of Indian Languages:

People of India speak a large number of languages which are broadly divided into the following four families:

1. Indo-European Family (Arya),
2. Dravidian Family (Dravida),
3. Austric Family (Nishada), and
4. Sino Tibetan Family (Kirata).

The above classification is based upon the number of people speaking each family of languages. The first is the Aryan family which is numerically and also culturally, the most important in India.

About 73% of the Indian population speaks different languages of the Aryan family. Next comes the Dravidian family which is spoken by about 20 per cent of the Indian population. The Austric and the Sino-Tibetan languages are spoken by small percentage of people.

1. The Aryan Languages:

This is the most important of all the families of languages and spoken by a little less than three fourths of the Indian population. The Aryan languages are divided into following two main branches:

- (i) The Dardic Aryan Languages and
- (ii) The Indo Aryan Languages

(i) The Dardic Aryan Languages:

This group comprises a number of languages which are current among very small mountain communities in Kashmir. Out of India, it is spoken by small communities living on the frontier between Pakistan and Afghanistan. The Dardic languages fall into three branches: (a) Shina including Kashmiri, Shina proper and Kohistani; (b) Khowar or Chatran or Chitrali and (c) Kafuistan (or Nuristani) dialects.

In Kashmir, there is Shina and Kashmiri, and some dialects allied to Kashmiri. Kashmiri appears to be in its bases a Dardic Aryan dialect. But it has been profoundly influenced by Sanskrit and the Prakrits from the very early times. Many scholars are of the opinion that Kashmiri is Indo-Aryan rather than Dardic.

Most scholars consider Dardic to be just a branch of Indo-Aryan. These Dardic dialects are largely on the way to extinct. Kashmiri, however, is one of the recognised national languages of the Indian Union. Except Kashmiri, which is spoken by more than 20 lakh people, no other language of the Dardic Aryan languages is spoken by more than 7 thousand people.

(ii) The Indo-Aryan Languages:

This is the second sub-group of the Aryan languages in which Hindi, Bengali, Punjabi, Rajasthani, Gujarati, Sindhi, Kachchi, Marathi, Oriya, Sanskrit, Assamese and Urdu are included. Based upon the regional distribution of the people speaking these languages, they are further grouped as under:

(a) Northern Aryan Languages:

Languages of this group belong to the dialects spoken by the hilly people in North India. They include Nepali, Central Pahari and Western Pahari Aryan languages.

(b) North-Western Aryan Languages:

Khanda, Kachchi and Sindhi are the well-known Aryan languages which are spoken by the people living in the north-western part of the country.

(c) Southern Aryan Languages:

Marathi and Konkani are the languages included in the Southern group of Aryan languages.

(d) Eastern Aryan Languages:

The region of these languages lies in the eastern parts of the country, Bihari, Oriya, Bengali and Assamese languages constitute this group of Aryan languages.

(e) East Central Aryan Languages:

Avadh, Bundelkhand and Chhattisgarh regions include these languages as the languages of the people living there. Avadhi, Bugheli and Chhattisgarhi are their languages.

(f) Central Aryan Languages:

The central region of India is the region of Central Aryan languages. The major languages of this region are Hindi, Punjabi, Rajasthani and Alawari.

Among the Aryan languages, Hindi is the most important language, spoken by a large percentage people of the country. In every Indian state, Hindi-speaking people are commonly found. Even the illiterate people can speak and understand Hindi. It would, therefore, be in the interest of one and all to give Hindi the status of a national language.

2. Dravidian Languages:

Dravidian languages are older than the Aryan languages. According to an estimate, Dravidians entered India much before the Aryans. Other estimates indicate that they are the original inhabitants of the country, who were driven away towards south by the Aryans at a later stage.

Today, the Dravidian languages form a well knit family by themselves and unlike the Aryan, the Austric and the Sino- Tibetan speeches they have no relations outside the Indian subcontinent. The Dravidian languages fall into several groups. Two major groups are as under:

(i) The North Dravidian Languages:

Telugu and a number of other languages such as various Gondi dialects, Kuruth or Oraon, Maler or Malpahariya, Kui or Kandh, Parji, Kolami and a few others are included in this group. Telugu is numerically the most important of all the Dravidian languages and has a very rich literature. This language has spread outside India also—in Myanmar, Indo-China and South Africa. It is usually called the Italian of the East by its admirers. Its vocabulary is much influenced by Sanskrit.

(ii) South Dravidian Languages:

This group of languages includes Tamil, Kannada and Malayalam. A number of speeches like Tulu, Kota, Kurgi (or Kedagu) and Toda are also included in this group. Tamil is spoken in large parts of Tamil Nadu. Outside India, it is spoken by a large number of people in Sri Lanka.

This language has preserved the old Dravidian spirit in its original form to a great extent. Tamil literature goes back to many centuries before Christ. Tamil presents certain new literary types which are not found in Sanskrit and other Aryan languages. While it includes extensive Sanskrit element, this language has retained the purity of its Dravidian vocabulary to a much greater extent than any other cultivated Dravidian language.

Malayalam is currently the language of Kerala and Lakshadweep. It had its origin in the old Tamil about 1,500 years ago. The Old Tamil speech started showing simplifications as early as 10th century A.D. Then it followed its own path away from its sister dialects. The speech of Kerala developed independently and became transformed into Malayalam.

The first Malayalam writings are said to go back into the period from 13th century to 15th century, when it was established as an independent language. Malayalam has been influenced by Sanskrit more than any other language of India.

Kannada is the main language of the present Karnataka state. The literary cultivation of this language began from the middle of the first millennium A.D. Kannada has passed through three stages: (a) Old Kannada upto 13th century (b) Medieval Kannada upto 16th century and (c) Hosa Kannada which is the language of the present day.

3. Austric Languages:

The Austric languages of India belong to the Austro-Asiatic sub-family. This category is further sub-divided into Munda and Mon-Khmer.

(i) Munda or Kol Languages:

Munda languages are the largest of the Austric group of languages. They consist of fourteen tribal languages. The Kherwari is the major group, which is current in Eastern India (Chota

Nagpur, Orissa, Chhattisgarh and West Bengal) and includes Santhali, Mundari, Ho, Birhor, Bhumiej, Korwa and Korku (or Kurku). Santhali, Mundari, and Ho languages have a noteworthy literature preserved orally, consisting of songs and mythological romantic stories.

(ii) Mon-Khmer Languages:

Mon-Khmer group of Austric languages has two sub-groups— Khasi and Nicobari. Khasi languages are spoken by Khasi tribal people of Meghalaya, while Nicobari languages are the languages of the tribal people of the Nicobar Islands. Khasi used to be written in Bengali-Assamese script about a century ago. Through the influence of Welsh Methodist missionaries, the Roman alphabet has been adopted for Khasi and some literature has been produced.

4. Sino-Tibetan Languages:

The Sino-Tibetan languages are spoken by a variety of people. Depending upon the region of settlement, these languages are put into several groups and sub-groups. Sino-Tibetan languages have three major sub-divisions:

- (i) The Tibeto-Himalayan.
- (ii) The North-Assam
- (iii) The Assam-Myanmari (Burmese)

(i) The Tibeto-Himalayan Languages:

This sub-division of the Sino-Tibetan group of languages is further sub-divided as the Himalayan group and the Bhutia group.

(a) The Himalayan Group:

The Himalayan group consists of 4 languages. They are Chamba, Lahauli, Kannaure and Lepcha. Kannaure is the most widely spoken language of the Himalayan group.

(b) The Bhutia Group:

Tibetan, Balti, Ladakhi, Lahauli, Sherpa and Sikkim Bhutia are included in the Bhutia group of Sino-Tibetan languages. Ladakhi has largest number of Bhutia speakers. It is followed by Sikkim Bhutia and the Tibetan languages in that order.

(ii) North Assam Languages:

The North Assam branch of languages of the Sino-Tibetan group is also called the Arunachal branch. It consists of six languages, such as Aka, Daflta, Abor, Miri, Mishnil and Mishing. Largest number of people speaks Miri language.

(iii) The Assam Myanmari Languages:

This group of languages includes Boro or Bodo, Naga, Cochin, Kukichin and Myanmar groups. Naga is the largest speaking language of this group.

Besides these, the Sino-Tibetan group of languages have some other important languages. They are Manipuri, Garo, Tripuri, Mikir and Lusai. Lusai is also termed as Mizo.

Linguistic Regions:

It is said that India is a (veritable) forest of languages. In the Linguistic Survey conducted during the British period it was concluded that there were 179 languages and 544 dialects in this region (Linguistic Survey of India, 1903-1928).

The principal credit for this significant piece of work is given to its editor-in-chief Sir George A. Grierson. In this survey of modern Indian languages, he classified them into language families along historical (comparative) lines.

Out of a total of 179 languages mentioned in the Linguistic Survey, 116 are small tribal speeches. They are spoken only on the northern and north-eastern fringes of India and are current among less than one per cent of the total population of the country. Nearly two dozen more are, likewise, insignificant speeches of other language groups; or they are languages not truly belonging to India.

The most comprehensive data on languages was collected at the time of 1961 Census. According to these census figures, there were 187 languages spoken in India. Out of these, as many as 94 languages are spoken by less than 10,000 persons each and 23 languages together account for 77 per cent of the total population of the country.

Of these 23 languages, 15 languages in addition to English have been specified in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India. Three more languages have been added to Eighth Schedule by a Parliamentary Act on 20th August, 1992. These languages are Nepali, Konkani and Manipuri. Thus, the total of languages specified in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution is 18 in addition to English.

They are (1) Kashmiri, (2) Punjabi, (3) Hindi, (4) Urdu, (5) Bengali, (6) Assamese, (7) Gujarati, (8) Marathi, (9) Kannada, (10) Tamil, (11) Telugu, (12) Malayalam, (13) Sindhi, (14) Sanskrit, (15) Oriya, (16) Nepali, (17) Konkani and (18) Manipuri.

Speakers of certain other languages left out of the Eighth schedule are demanding the inclusion of their languages in the list of the languages. Some of the important languages of this category are Sindhi, Rajasthani, Maithili, Khasi, Santhali and Gondi.

Language became a very important basis for the formation of states in India after Independence, thereby adding a new political meaning to the geographical distribution of languages. Today, most of the states of the Indian Union have been delimited on the basis of linguistic pattern of languages.

However, the languages and dialects of the tribal people living in the northeastern, eastern and central parts of the country do not fit in any linguistic pattern, as they are varying in number and their speakers live in unspecified areas or regions. In all, there are 12 languages in India, which are widely spoken.

Based on these languages, there are twelve linguistic states, of which states delimited from the political point of view are depicted in Table 11.5 and Fig. 11.5.

TABLE 11.5

Linguistic Region	Political State/ U.T.
1. Kashmiri	Valley of Kashmir
2. Punjabi	Punjab and adjoining parts of Haryana
3. Hindi	U.P., Haryana, H.P., M.P., Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Uttaranchal, Delhi, Bihar and Rajasthan
4. Bengali	W. Bengal and Parts of Tripura
5. Assamese	Assam and other northeastern states
6. Oriya	Orissa
7. Gujarati	Gujarat
8. Marathi	Maharashtra, Goa
9. Kannada	Karnataka
10. Telugu	Andhra Pradesh
11. Tamil	Tamil Nadu, Pondicherry
12. Malayalam	Kerala, Lakshadweep

The relative importance of different languages had undergone drastic change in the historical time. Until the ninth century, Sanskrit was the language for administration and of the cultural

elite. Today, Sanskrit is no longer a spoken language, although it is mother of any Indian language. Persian and later Urdu became the court and the administrative language of the Mughal and other Muslim rulers.

In the eighteenth century when the Britishers established their supremacy and became the rulers of India, English replaced Persian as the language of courts, administration and higher learning. In the post-independent period, Hindi has emerged as the most popular language and is spoken by majority of people living particularly in north India.

This is the official language of several Hindi speaking states like Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Rajasthan, and Himachal Pradesh. Including its variants like the Bihari, Rajasthani, Marwari, Magadhi, Chhattisgarhi, Maithili, Pahari, Bhojpuri, etc. Hindi ranks numerically third most widely spoken language of the world after Mandarin Chinese and English.

As per 1991 Census figures, Hindi along with its recognised regional variants is spoken by 337.3 million Indians which is about 39.85% of the total population. The other major languages are Bengali (8.2%), Telugu (7.8%), Marathi (7.4%), Tamil (6.3%) and Urdu (5.1%).

Each of Gujarati, Kannada, Malayalam, Oriya, Punjabi and Assamese are spoken by less than 5 per cent but more than one per cent of total population. Sindhi, Nepali, Konkani, Manipuri, Kashmiri and Sanskrit are spoken by less than one per cent population each.

It is worth mentioning here that although, the present political map of India represents more or less the language map of the country, the state boundaries do not always correspond to linguistic boundaries. The example of Hindi belt may be cited here.

This belt covers major states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand including the union territories of Delhi and Chandigarh.

In these areas, various languages and dialects have all been brought under the aegis of Hindi and without considering the spoken languages in Garhwal or Kumaon, Magadha or South Bihar, Rajasthan and Bastar district of Chhattisgarh the entire region has been labelled as the Hindi area.

As a matter of fact, the linguistic boundary itself is not well defined. Instead of being a sharp line, it is a transitional zone over which one language gradually loses its dominance and gives way to the other.

The complexity and diversity of India's linguistic landscape is further compounded by the prevalence of considerable bilingualism or multilingualism along the inter-state boundaries where two or three languages merge into each other. It is estimated that about 10 per cent of India's population is bilingual or trilingual.

In several states, the major language of one adjacent state is the second largest language of the state. For example Tamil is the second most important language in Kerala; in Tamil Nadu it is Telugu; in Andhra Pradesh it is Urdu. As a matter of fact, Urdu is the “second language” of over 43 million speakers in several states (Fig. 11.5).

Hindi is claimed to be the “second language” by about 30 million speakers living out of the “Hindi belt”. States of Uttar Pradesh, Uttaranchal, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Rajasthan are included in the “Hindi belt”.

Further, nearly 10 per cent of the Telugu-speakers live outside the Telugu-speaking state of Andhra Pradesh. Cosmopolitan cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai contain significant number of speakers of several languages.

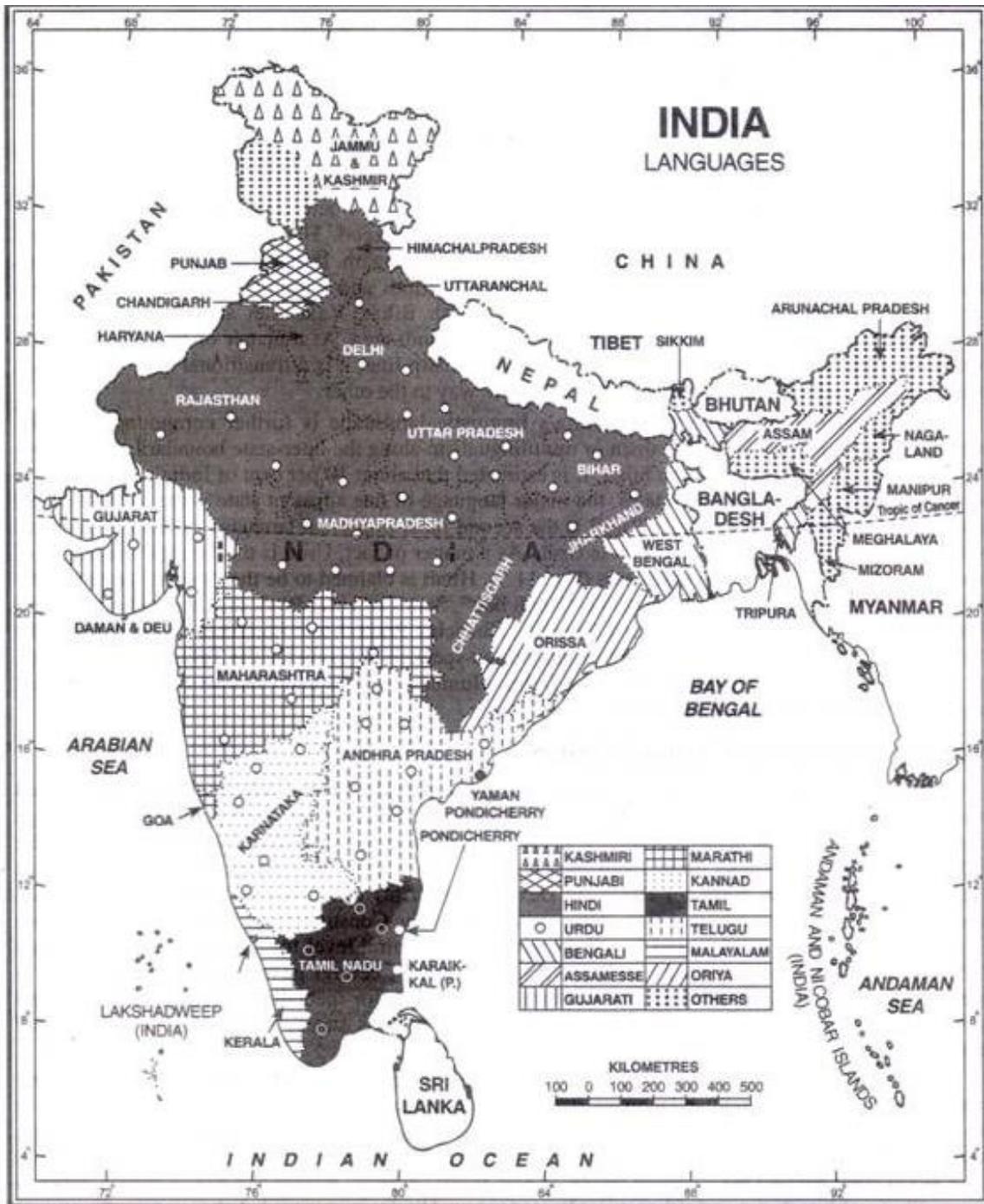


Fig. 11.5. Linguistic Regions