

Hindi is the official language of India and a predominant language in the so-called Hindi belt, i.e. the states and territories of Himachal Pradesh, Delhi, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Uttaranchal, Jharkhand, Rajasthan and Chattisgarh.

Outside these areas, Hindi is widely spoken in cities such as Mumbai, Hyderabad or Kolkatta as well. Furthermore, according to the 1998 survey it is the second most spoken language in the world, with 333 million native speakers, i.e. 40 % of the Indian population. Besides, Hindi is used by another 300 million Indians as their second language and by another 8 million speakers outside of India. Thus this number includes both the countries where Hindi is the common second language, such as Mauritius, Fiji, Trinidad, Guyana or Surinam and the countries, where Hindi is the first language of large Indian communities settled all over the world, such as South Africa, Yemen, Uganda, Northern America, Great Britain, Australia, Germany etc.

Concerning the linguistic point of view, Hindi belongs to a vast family of Indo-European languages, particularly to its Indo-Aryan branch. It is a descendent of Sanskrit, the earliest speech of the Aryan conquerors who settled in the north-west frontiers of India around 2000 BC.

The history of Sanskrit dates more than three thousands years back to the hymns of Rigveda, composed in Vedic Sanskrit. If, on one hand, Sanskrit was codified and served as the language of literature, high ritual and was used mainly passively, then Prakrits ("natural") were used as media of conversation. Subsequently around the 10th century AD Hindi and other Indian languages such as Panjabi, Bengali, Marathi, etc. developed from these later Prakrits, called Apabhramsa.