

Language

Three main languages of India

- Ancient Indian
- Middle Indian languages and dialects
- Modern Indian language and dialects

Ancient Indian

Sanskrit was not a popular language but it continued to be the language spoken in educated circles. There were different grades of spoken Sanskrit- epic Sanskrit, Classical Sanskrit, and Ancient Sanskrit of the Vedas.

Middle Indian Languages and Dialects

The popular dialects are derived directly from the Indo-Aryan group of languages. The most important Middle Indian literary languages were Pali (used by the Buddhists) and Prakrit (used by the Jains).

Pali language is regarded as the language prevalent in the centuries prior to the Asokan inscriptions, prior to the Christian era.

Prakrit developed in the Christian era and is mainly used in the Drama and Jain canon. Prakrit was a dialect spoken in Magadha.

The official language of the administration was Prakrit and not Sanskrit. However, by the end of the Mauryan period, 300 BC, Sanskrit became increasingly important for use in literature, culture and administration. In the early centuries AD, Sanskrit begins to appear on inscriptions, at first in competition with Prakrit which it eventually replaces. Thus, by the end of 4th-5th century AD, the end of the Gupta period, Prakrit as a language is discarded.

Modern Indian Languages and Dialects

India has fourteen official languages and nineteen scripts.

Variants of the Brahmi script, which is the basis of the modern Indian languages, developed from the 2nd century BC.

Development of the scripts.

All scripts are derived from Brahmi.

There are three main families of scripts:

- Devanagari which is the basis of the languages of northern and western India: Hindi, Gujarati, Bengali, Marathi, Dogri, Panjabi, etc.
- Dravidian which is the basis of Telugu, Kannada

- Grantha is a subsection of the Dravidian languages such as Tamil and Malayalam, but is not as important as the other two.

Devanagari Language and script

- Devanagari script developed in the 4th century AD.
- Bengali with its distinct script and language was developed in the 5th century AD.
- The variant languages and scripts which developed and came to be used circa the 16th century were Hindi, Marathi, and Gujarati. These dates are based on the earliest inscriptional evidence.