

Language

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Most of India's languages have their own script, but written English can also be quite common; in some states, such as Gujarat, you'll hardly see a word of it, whereas in Himachal Pradesh virtually everything is in English. An Rs 5 or larger banknote shows the scripts of 14 of India's languages. As well as Hindi and English there's a list of 12 other languages: from the top, they are Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Kannada, Kashmiri, Malayalam, Marathi, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu and Urdu. (See the boxed text, opposite, for more information.)

Major efforts have been made to promote Hindi as the national language of India and to gradually phase out English. A stumbling block to this plan is that Hindi is the predominant language in the north, but it bears little relation to the Dravidian languages of the south. Subsequently, very few people in the south speak Hindi. It is from here, particularly in the state of Tamil Nadu, that the most vocal opposition to the countrywide adoption of Hindi comes, along with the strongest support for the retention of English.

For many educated Indians, English is virtually their first language, and for the large number of Indians who speak more than one language, English is often their second tongue. Thus it's very easy to get around India with English, but it's always good to know at least a little of the local language.

HINDI

Hindi is written from left to right in Devanagari script. While the script may be unfamiliar, English speakers will recognise many of Hindi's grammatical features.

For a far more comprehensive guide to Hindi, get a copy of Lonely Planet's *Hindi, Urdu & Bengali Phrasebook*.

PRONUNCIATION

Most Hindi sounds are similar to their English counterparts, but there are a few tricky ones. There's a difference between 'aspirated' and 'unaspirated' consonants – the aspirated

There is no one 'Indian' language as such. This is part of the reason why English is still widely spoken more than 50 years after the British left India and why it's still the official language of the judiciary.

Eighteen languages are recognised by the constitution, and these fall into two major groups: Indic, or Indo-Aryan, and Dravidian. Additionally, over 1600 minor languages and dialects were listed in the latest census. The scope for misunderstanding can be easily appreciated!

The Indic languages are a branch of the Indo-European group of languages (to which English belongs). The Indic languages were spoken by the Central Asian peoples who invaded what is now India. The Dravidian languages such as Tamil are native to South India, although they have been influenced by Sanskrit and Hindi over the years.

INDIA'S OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Assamese State language of Assam, and spoken by nearly 60% of that state's population. Dates back to the 13th century.

Bengali Spoken by nearly 200 million people (mostly in what is now Bangladesh), and the state language of West Bengal. Developed as a language in the 13th century.

Gujarati State language of Gujarat, it is an Indic language.

Hindi The most important Indian language, although it is only spoken as a mother tongue by about 20% of the population, mainly in the area known as the Hindi-belt, the cow-belt or Bimaru, which includes Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. This Indic language is the official language of the Indian government, the states already mentioned, plus Haryana and Himachal Pradesh.

Kannada State language of Karnataka, spoken by about 65% of that state's population.

Kashmiri Kashmiri speakers account for about 55% of the population of Jammu and Kashmir. It is an Indic language written in the Perso-Arabic script.

Konkani A Dravidian language spoken by people in the Goa region.

Malayalam A Dravidian language, and the state language of Kerala.

Manipuri An Indic language of the northeast region.

Marathi An Indic language dating back to around the 13th century, Marathi is the state language of Maharashtra.

Nepali The predominant language of Sikkim, where around 75% of the people are ethnic Nepalis.

Oriya An Indic language, it is the state language of Orissa where it is spoken by around 90% of the population.

Punjabi Another Indic language, this is the state language of Punjab. Although based on Devanagari (the same script as Hindi), it is written in a 16th-century script known as Gurumukhi, which was created by the Sikh guru, Guru Angad.

Sanskrit One of the oldest languages in the world, and the language of classical India. All the Vedas and classical literature such as the Mahabharata and the Ramayana were written in this Indic language.

Sindhi A significant number of Sindhi speakers are found in what is now Pakistan, although the greater number are in India. In Pakistan, the language is written in a Perso-Arabic script, while in India it uses the Devanagari script.

Tamil An ancient Dravidian language at least 2000 years old, and the state language of Tamil Nadu. It is spoken by 65 million people.

Telugu The Dravidian language spoken by the largest number of people, it is the state language of Andhra Pradesh.

Urdu This is the state language of Jammu and Kashmir. Along with Hindi, it evolved in early Delhi. While Hindi was largely adopted by the Hindu population, the Muslims embraced Urdu, and so the latter is written in the Perso-Arabic script and includes many Persian words.

ones are pronounced with a strong puff of air, like saying 'h' after the sound. There are also 'retroflex' consonants, produced by curling the tongue up and back to make contact with the ridge of tissue behind the top teeth. The transliteration system we've used for Hindi in this language guide is designed to be as simple as possible, and for this reason it doesn't distinguish between all the sounds of spoken Hindi.

It's important to pay attention to the pronunciation of vowels and especially to their length, eg **a** compared to **aa**. The combination **ng** after a vowel indicates that it is nasalised (ie pronounced through the nose).

Vowels

- a** as the 'u' in 'sun'
- aa** as in 'father'
- ai** as in 'hair' before a consonant; as in 'aisle' at the end of a word
- au** as in 'haul' before a consonant; as the 'ou' in 'ouch' at the end of a word

- e** as in 'they'
- ee** as the 'ee' in 'feet'
- i** as in 'sit'
- o** as in 'shot'
- oo** as the 'oo' in 'fool'
- u** as in 'put'

Consonants

- ch** as in 'cheese'
- g** always as in 'gun', never as in 'age'
- r** slightly trilled
- y** as in 'yak'
- g** as in 'go'

ACCOMMODATION

Where is the (best/cheapest) hotel?

sab se (achaa/sastaa) hotel kahaang hai?

Please write the address.

zaraa us kaa pataa lik deejie

Do you have any rooms available?

kyaa koe kamraa kaalee hai?

I'd like to share a dorm.

maing dharm me tharnaa chaahtaa/ee hoong (m/f)

EMERGENCIES

Help!	<i>mada keejiye!</i>
Stop!	<i>ruko!</i>
Thief!	<i>chor!</i>
Call a doctor!	<i>daaktar ko bulaa!</i>
Call an ambulance!	<i>ambulains le aanaa!</i>
Call the police!	<i>pulis ko bulaa!</i>
I'm lost.	<i>maing raastaa bhool gayaa/ gayee hoong (f/m)</i>

Where is the ...?	<i>... kahaang hai?</i>
police station	<i>taanaa</i>
toilet	<i>gusalkaanaa</i>

I wish to contact my embassy/consulate.	
<i>maing apne embassy ke sebaat katnaa logō chaahaa/chaahtee hoong (f/m)</i>	

How much for ...?	<i>... kaa kiraayaa kitnaa hai?</i>
one night	<i>ek din</i>
one week	<i>ek hafte</i>

I'd like a ...	<i>mulje ... chaahiye</i>
double room	<i>dabal kamraa</i>
room with a bathroom	<i>gusalkaanevaalaa kamraa</i>
single room	<i>singal kamraa</i>

May I see it?	
<i>kyaa maing kamraa dek saktaa/ee hoong? (m/f)</i>	

Is there any other room?	
<i>koe aur kamraa hai?</i>	

Where's the bathroom?	
<i>gusalkaanaa kahaang hai?</i>	

bed	<i>palang</i>
blanket	<i>kambaal</i>
key	<i>chaabee</i>
shower	<i>shaavar</i>
toilet paper	<i>taaitet pepar</i>
water (cold/hot)	<i>paanee (tandaa/garam)</i>
with a window	<i>kirkeevaalaa</i>

CONVERSATION & ESSENTIALS

Hello.	<i>namaste/namskaar</i>
Goodbye.	<i>namaste/namskaar</i>
Yes.	<i>jee haang</i>
No.	<i>jee naheeng</i>

'Please' is usually conveyed through the polite form of the imperative, or through other expressions. This book uses polite expressions and the polite forms of words.

Thank you.	<i>shukriyaa/danyavaad</i>
You're welcome.	<i>koe baat naheeng</i>
Excuse me/Sorry.	<i>kshamaa keejiye</i>
How are you?	<i>aap kaise/kaise haing? (m/f)</i>
Fine, and you?	<i>maing teek hoong aap sunaaiye?</i>
What's your name?	<i>aap kaa shubh naam kyaa hai?</i>

DIRECTIONS

Where's a/the ...	<i>... kahaang hai?</i>
bank	<i>baink</i>
consulate	<i>kaungnsal</i>
embassy	<i>dootaavaas</i>
Hindu temple	<i>mandir</i>
mosque	<i>masjid</i>
post office	<i>daackkaanaa</i>
public phone	<i>saarvjanik fon</i>
public toilet	<i>shauchaaloy</i>
Sikh temple	<i>gurudvaaraa</i>
town square	<i>chauk</i>

Is it far from/near here?	
<i>kyaa voh yahaang se door/hazdeek hai?</i>	

SIGNS

प्रवेश/अन्दर	Entrance
निकार/बाहर	Exit
खुला	Open
बन्द	Closed
अन्दर आना [निषि/मना] है	No Entry
धूम्रपान करना [निषि/मना] है	No Smoking
निषि	Prohibited
गर्म	Hot
ठंडा	Cold
शौचालय	Toilets

HEALTH

Where is a/the ...?	<i>... kahaang hai?</i>
clinic	<i>davaakaanaa</i>
doctor	<i>daaktar</i>
hospital	<i>aspataal</i>

I'm sick.	<i>maing beemaar hoong</i>
antiseptic	<i>ainteeseptik</i>
antibiotics	<i>ainteebayotik</i>
aspirin	<i>(esprin) sirdard kee davaa</i>
condoms	<i>nirodak</i>
contraceptives	<i>garbnirodak</i>
diarrhoea	<i>dast</i>
medicine	<i>davaa</i>
nausea	<i>gin</i>
syringe	<i>sooee</i>
tampons	<i>taimpon</i>

LANGUAGE DIFFICULTIES

Do you speak English?

kyaa aap ko angrezee aatee hai?

Does anyone here speak English?

kyaa kisee ko angrezee aatee hai?

I understand.

maing samjhaa/ee

I don't understand.

maing naheeng samjhaa/ee

Please write it down.

zaraa lik deejije

NUMBERS

Whereas we count in tens, hundreds, thousands, millions and billions, the Indian numbering system uses tens, hundreds, thousands, hundred thousands and ten millions. A hundred thousand is a *laakh*, and 10 million is a *krone*. These two words are almost always used in place of their English equivalents.

Once in the thousands, written numbers have commas every two places, not three.

1	<i>ek</i>
2	<i>do</i>
3	<i>teen</i>
4	<i>chaar</i>
5	<i>paangch</i>
6	<i>chai</i>
7	<i>saat</i>
8	<i>aat</i>
9	<i>nau</i>
10	<i>das</i>
11	<i>gyaarah</i>
12	<i>bara</i>
13	<i>terah</i>
14	<i>chaudah</i>
15	<i>pandrah</i>
16	<i>solah</i>
17	<i>satrah</i>
18	<i>attaarah</i>
19	<i>unnees</i>
20	<i>bees</i>
21	<i>ikkees</i>
22	<i>baaees</i>
30	<i>tees</i>
40	<i>chaaless</i>
50	<i>pachaaas</i>
60	<i>saat</i>
70	<i>sattar</i>
80	<i>assee</i>
90	<i>nabbe/navve</i>
100	<i>sau</i>
1000	<i>hazaar</i>

100,000

10,000,000

ek laak (written 1,00,000)

ek krore (written 1,00,00,000)

SHOPPING & SERVICES

Where's the nearest ...?

sab se karib ... kah hai?

bookshop	<i>kitaab kee dukaan</i>
chemist/pharmacy	<i>davaaee kee dukaan</i>
general store	<i>dukaan</i>
market	<i>baazaar</i>
washerwoman	<i>dobee</i>

Where can I buy ...?

maing ... kah kareed sakta hoong?

I'd like to buy ...

mujhe ... karidnaa hai

clothes	<i>kapre</i>
colour film	<i>rangin film</i>
envelope	<i>lifaafaa</i>
handicrafts	<i>haat kee banee cheeze</i>
magazines	<i>patrikaae</i>
map	<i>nakshaa</i>
newspaper (in English)	<i>(angrezee kaa) akbaar</i>
paper	<i>kaagaz</i>
razor	<i>ustaraa</i>
soap	<i>saabun</i>
stamp	<i>tikat</i>
toothpaste	<i>manjan</i>
washing powder	<i>kapre done kaa saabun</i>

a little

tora

big

baraa

enough

kaafee

more

aur

small

chotaa

too much/many

bahut/adik

How much is this?

is kaa daam kyaa hai?

I think it's too expensive.

yeh bahut maheгаа/i hai (m/f)

Can you lower the price?

is kaa daam kam keejije?

Do you accept credit cards?

kyaa aap vizaа kaard vagairah lete ha?

TIME & DATES

What time is it?

kitne baje haing?/taaim kyaa hai?

It's (10) o'clock.

(das) baje haing

It's half past two.

daae baje haing

When?	<i>kab?</i>
now	<i>ab</i>
today	<i>aaj</i>
tomorrow/yesterday	<i>kal</i> (while <i>kal</i> is used for both, the meaning is made clear by context)

day	<i>din</i>
evening	<i>shaam</i>
month	<i>maheena</i>
morning	<i>saveraa/subhaa</i>
night	<i>raat</i>
week	<i>haftaa</i>
year	<i>saal/baras</i>

Monday	<i>somvaar</i>
Tuesday	<i>mangalvaar</i>
Wednesday	<i>budvaar</i>
Thursday	<i>guruvaar/brihaspativaar</i>
Friday	<i>shukravaar</i>
Saturday	<i>shanivaar</i>
Sunday	<i>itvaar/ravivaar</i>

TRANSPORT

How do we get to ...? ... *kaise jaate haing?*

When is the ... bus?	... <i>bas kab jaaegee?</i>
first	<i>pehlaa/pehlee</i>
next	<i>aglaa/aglee</i>
last	<i>aakiree</i>

What time does the ... leave?

... *kitne baje jaayegaa/jaayegee?* (m/f)

What time does the ... arrive?

... *kitne baje pahungchegaa/pahungchege?* (m/f)

boat	<i>naav</i> (f)
bus	<i>bas</i> (f)
plane	<i>havaaee jahaaz</i> (m)
train	<i>relgaaree</i> (f)

I'd like a ... ticket.

mujhe ek ... tikat chaahiye

one way	<i>ek-tarafaa</i>
return	<i>do-tarafaa</i>

1st class	<i>pratam shreni</i>
2nd class	<i>dviteey shreni</i>

TAMIL

Tamil is the official language in the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu and the Union Territory of Puducherry (Pondicherry). It is one of the major Dravidian languages of South India.

SCRIPT & TRANSLITERATION

Tamil has its own alphabetic script which has not been included in this language guide. The transliteration system used here is intended as a simplified method for representing the sounds of Tamil using the Roman alphabet.

PRONUNCIATION

Like Hindi, the Tamil sound system includes a number of retroflex consonants, which are pronounced by curling the tongue up and back so that the tip makes contact with the ridge of tissue on the roof of the mouth. For the sake of simplicity, in this language guide we haven't distinguished the retroflex consonants from their nonretroflex counterparts. You'll find that your meaning will still be clear from the context of what you're saying.

Vowels

a	as the 'u' in 'run'
aa	as in 'rather'
ai	as in 'aisle'
au	as the 'ow' in 'how'
e	as in 'met'
ee	as in 'meet'
i	as in 'bit'
o	as in 'hot'
oo	as in 'rule'
u	as in 'chute'

Consonants

g	as in 'go'
k	as in 'kit'
ñ	as the 'ni' in 'onion'
s	as in 'sit'
zh	as the 's' in 'pleasure'

ACCOMMODATION

Do you have any rooms available?

araikal kitaikkumaa?

for one/two people

oruvar/iruvuru

for one/two nights

oru/irantu iravukal

How much is it per night/per person?

oru iravukku/oru nabarukku evallavu?

Is breakfast included?

kaalai sirruntiyutan serttaa?

EMERGENCIES

Help!	<i>utavi!</i>
Leave me alone!	<i>ennai taniyaaka irukkavitu!</i>
Go away!	<i>tolaintu po!</i>
Call a doctor!	<i>taaktarai kooppitavum!</i>
Call the police!	<i>poleesai kooppitavum!</i>
I'm lost.	<i>naan vazhi taviritten</i>

camping ground	<i>tangumitam</i>
guesthouse	<i>viruntinar vituti</i>
hotel	<i>hotal/vituti</i>
youth hostel	<i>ilainar vituti</i>

CONVERSATION & ESSENTIALS

Hello.	<i>vanakkam</i>
Goodbye.	<i>poyittu varukiren</i>
Yes/No.	<i>aam/illai</i>
Please.	<i>tayavu seytu</i>
Thank you.	<i>nanri</i>
You're welcome.	<i>nallatu varuka</i>
Excuse me/Sorry.	<i>mannikkavum</i>
Do you speak English?	<i>neenkal aankilam pesuveerkalaa?</i>
How much is it?	<i>atu evvalavu?</i>
What's your name?	<i>unkal peyar enna?</i>
My name is ...	<i>en peyar ...</i>

DIRECTIONS

Where is (a/the) ...?	<i>... enke irukkiratu?</i>
Go straight ahead.	<i>neraaka sellavum</i>
Turn left.	<i>valatu pakkam tirumbavum</i>
Turn right.	<i>itatu pakkam tirumbavum</i>
far	<i>tooram</i>
near	<i>arukil</i>

NUMBERS

0	<i>boojyam</i>
1	<i>ondru</i>
2	<i>iranyu</i>
3	<i>moonru</i>
4	<i>naanku</i>
5	<i>aintu</i>
6	<i>aaru</i>
7	<i>ezhu</i>
8	<i>ettu</i>
9	<i>onpatu</i>
10	<i>pattu</i>
100	<i>nooru</i>
1000	<i>aayiram</i>
2000	<i>irantaayiram</i>
100,000	<i>latsam (written 1,00,000)</i>
1,000,000	<i>pattu latsam (written 10,00,000)</i>
10,000,000	<i>koti (written 1,00,00,000)</i>

SIGNS

வழி உள்ளே	Entrance
வழி வெளியே	Exit
திறந்த	Open
மூடிய	Closed
தகவல்	Information
அனுமதி இல்லை	Prohibited
காவல் நிலையம்	Police Station
மலசலகூடம்	Toilets
ஆண்	Men
பெண்	Women

SHOPPING & SERVICES**What time does it open/close?***tirakkum/mootum neram enna?*

bank	<i>vangi</i>
chemist/ pharmacy	<i>aruntukkataikkaarar/ maruntakam</i>
... embassy	<i>... tootarakam</i>
my hotel	<i>en unavu vituti</i>
market	<i>maarkket</i>
newsagency	<i>niiyoos ejensi</i>
post office	<i>tabaal nilayam</i>
public phone	<i>potu tolaipesi</i>
stationers	<i>elutuporul vanikar</i>
tourist information office	<i>surrulaa seyti totarpu aluvalakam</i>

big	<i>periya</i>
small	<i>siriya</i>

TIME & DATES

What time is it ?	<i>mani ettanai?</i>
afternoon	<i>matiyam</i>
day	<i>pakal</i>
month	<i>maatam</i>
morning	<i>kaalai</i>
night	<i>iravu</i>
today	<i>inru</i>
tomorrow	<i>naalai</i>
week	<i>vaaram</i>
yesterday	<i>nerru</i>

Monday	<i>tinkal</i>
Tuesday	<i>sevvaay</i>
Wednesday	<i>putan</i>
Thursday	<i>viyaazhan</i>
Friday	<i>velli</i>
Saturday	<i>sani</i>
Sunday	<i>naayiru</i>

TRANSPORT

When does the next ... leave/arrive? *eppozhutu atutta ... varum/sellum?*

boat *pataku*

bus (city) *peruntu (nakaram/ulloor)*

bus (intercity) *peruntu (veliyoor)*

train *rayil*

I'd like a one-way/return ticket.

enakku oru vazhi/iru vazhi tikket venum

1st class *mutalaam vakuppu*

2nd class *irantaam vakuppu*

bus/trolley stop *peruntu nilayam*

left luggage *tavara vitta saamaan*

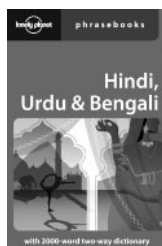
timetable *kaala attavanais*

train station *rayil nilayam*

I'd like to hire a ... *enakku ... vaatakaikku venum*

bicycle *saikkil*

car *kaara*



Also available from Lonely Planet:
Hindi, Urdu & Bengali Phrasebook

Glossary

This glossary is a sample of the words and terms you may come across during your Indian wanderings. For definitions of food and drink, see p116.

abbi – waterfall

Abhimani – eldest son of *Brahma*

Abhimanyu – son of *Arjuna*

acha – 'OK' or 'I understand'

acharya – revered teacher; spiritual guide

Adivasi – tribal person

agarbathi – incense

Agasti – legendary Hindu sage, revered in the south, as he is credited with introducing Hinduism and developing the Tamil language

Agni – major deity in the *Vedas*; mediator between men and the gods; also fire

ahimsa – discipline of nonviolence

AIR – All India Radio, the national broadcaster

air-cooler – big, noisy water-filled fan

Amir – Muslim nobleman

amrita – immortality

Ananda – *Buddha's* cousin and personal attendant

Ananta – snake on which *Vishnu* reclined

Andhaka – 1000-headed demon, killed by *Shiva*

angrezi – foreigner

anikut – dam

anna – 16th of a rupee; no longer legal tender

Annapurna – form of *Durga*; worshipped for her power to provide food

apsara – heavenly nymph

Aranyani – Hindu goddess of forests

Ardhanari – *Shiva's* half-male, half-female form

Arishta – *daitya* who, having taken the form of a bull, attacked *Krishna* and was killed by him

Arjuna – *Mahabharata* hero and military commander who married *Subhadra*, took up arms and overcame many demons; he had the *Bhagavad Gita* related to him by *Krishna*, led *Krishna's* funeral ceremony and finally retired to the Himalaya

Aryan – Sanskrit for 'noble'; those who migrated from Persia and settled in northern India

ashram – spiritual community or retreat

ashrama – Hindu system; there are three stages in life recognised by this system: *brahmachari*, *grihastha* and *sanyasin*, but this kind of merit is only available to the upper three castes

ASI – Archaeological Survey of India; an organisation involved in monument preservation

atman – soul

attar – essential oil; used as a base for perfumes

autorickshaw – noisy, three-wheeled, motorised contraption for transporting passengers, livestock etc for short distances; found throughout the country, they are cheaper than taxis

Avalokiteshvara – in *Mahayana* Buddhism, the *bodhisattva* of compassion

avatar – incarnation, usually of a deity

ayah – children's nurse or nanny

Ayurveda – the ancient and complex science of Indian herbal medicine and healing

azad – free (Urdu), as in Azad Jammu & Kashmir

azan – Muslim call to prayer

baba – religious master or father; term of respect

bagh – garden

bahadur – brave or chivalrous; an honorific title

baksheesh – tip, donation (alms) or bribe

Balarama – brother of *Krishna*

bandar – monkey

bandh – general strike

bandhani – tie-dye

banian – T-shirt or undervest

baniya – moneylender or trader

banyan – Indian fig tree; spiritual to many Indians

baoli – see *baori*

baori – well, particularly a step-well with landings and galleries; in Gujarat it is more commonly referred to as a *baoli*

bearer – like a butler

begum – Muslim princess or woman of high rank

Bhagavad Gita – Hindu Song of the Divine One; *Krishna's* lessons to *Arjuna*, the main thrust of which was to emphasise the philosophy of *bhakti*; it is part of the *Mahabharata*

Bhairava – the Terrible; refers to the eighth incarnation of *Shiva* in his demonic form

bhajan – devotional song

bhakti – surrendering to the gods; faith

bharg – dried leaves and flowering shoots of the marijuana plant

bhanga – rhythmic Punjabi music/dance

Bharat – Hindi for India

Bharata – half-brother of *Rama*; ruled while *Rama* was in exile

bhavan – house, building; also spelt *bhawan*

bheesti – see *bhisti*

Bhima – *Mahabharata* hero; he is the brother of *Hanuman* and renowned for his great strength

bhisti – water carrier

bhoga-mandapa – Orissan hall of offering

bhojanalya – see *dhaba*

bidi – small, hand-rolled cigarette

bindi – forehead mark (often dot-shaped) worn by women

BJP – Bharatiya Janata Party

Bodhi Tree – tree under which the *Buddha* sat when he attained enlightenment

bodhisattva – literally 'one whose essence is perfected wisdom'; in *Early Buddhism*, bodhisattva refers only to the *Buddha* during the period between his conceiving the intention to strive for Buddhahood and the moment he attained it; in *Mahayana Buddhism*, one who renounces *nirvana* in order to help others attain it

Bollywood – India's answer to Hollywood; the booming film industry of Mumbai (Bombay)

Brahma – Hindu god; worshipped as the creator in the *Trimurti*

brahmachari – chaste student stage of the *ashrama* system

Brahmanism – early form of Hinduism that evolved from Vedism (see *Vedas*); named after *Brahmin* priests and *Brahma*

Brahmin – member of the priest/scholar caste, the highest Hindu caste

Buddha – Awakened One; the originator of Buddhism; also regarded by Hindus as the ninth incarnation of *Vishnu*

Buddhism – see *Early Buddhism*

bugyal – high-altitude meadow

bund – embankment or dyke

burka – one-piece garment used by conservative Muslim women to cover themselves from head to toe

bustee – slum

cantonment – administrative and military area of a Raj-era town

caravanserai – traditional accommodation for camel caravans

Carnatic music – classical music of South India

caste – a Hindu's hereditary station (social standing) in life; there are four castes: the *Brahmin*, the *Kshatriya*, the *Vaishya* and the *Shudra*

cenotaph – a monument honouring a dead person whose body is somewhere else

chaam – ritual masked dance performed by some Buddhist monks in *gompas* to celebrate the victory of good over evil and of Buddhism over pre-existing religions

chaitya – Sanskrit form of 'cetiya', meaning shrine or object of worship; has come to mean temple, and more specifically, a hall divided into a central nave and two side aisles by a line of columns, with a votive *stupa* at the end

chakra – focus of one's spiritual power; dislike weapon of *Vishnu*

chalo, chalo, chalo – 'let's go, let's go, let's go'

Chamunda – form of *Durga*; a real terror, armed with a scimitar, noose and mace, and clothed in elephant hide, her mission was to kill the demons Chanda and Munda

chandra – moon, or the moon as a god

Chandragupta – Indian ruler, 3rd century BC

chappals – sandals or leather thonglike footwear; flip-flops

Char Dham – four pilgrimage destinations of Badrinath, Kedarnath, Yamunotri and Gangotri

charas – resin of the marijuana plant; also referred to as 'hashish'

charbagh – formal Persian garden, divided into quarters (literally 'four gardens')

charpoy – simple bed made of ropes knotted together on a wooden frame

chedi – see *chaitya*

chela – pupil or follower, as George Harrison was to Ravi Shankar

chhatra – cenotaph (literally 'umbrella')

chikan – embroidered cloth (speciality of Lucknow)

chillum – pipe of a hookah; commonly used to describe the pipes used for smoking *ganja*

chinkara – gazelle

chital – spotted deer

chogyal – king

choli – sari blouse

chomos – Tibetan Buddhist nuns

chorten – Tibetan for *stupa*

choultry – pilgrim's rest house; also called '*dharamsala*'

chowk – town square, intersection or marketplace

chowkidar – night watchman, caretaker

chuba – dress worn by Tibetan women

Cong (I) – Congress Party of India; also known as Congress (I)

coolie – labourer or porter

CPI – Communist Party of India

CPI (M) – Communist Party of India (Marxist)

crore – 10 million

dacoit – bandit (particularly armed bandit), outlaw

dada – paternal grandfather or elder brother

dagoba – see *stupa*

dais – raised platform

daitya – demon or giant who fought against the gods

dak – staging post, government-run accommodation

Dalit – preferred term for India's *Untouchable* caste; see also *Harijan*

Damodara – another name for *Krishna*

dargah – shrine or place of burial of a Muslim saint

darshan – offering or audience with someone; auspicious viewing of a deity

darwaza – gateway or door

Dasaratha – father of *Rama* in the *Ramayana*

Dattatreya – *Brahmin* saint who embodied the *Trimurti*

Delhiite – resident of Delhi

desi – local, Indian

deul – temple sanctuary

devadasi – temple dancer

Devi – *Shiva's* wife; goddess

dhaba – basic restaurant or snack bar

dham – holiest pilgrimage places of India
dharamsala – pilgrim's rest house
dharma – for Hindus, the moral code of behaviour or social duty; for Buddhists, following the law of nature, or path, as taught by the *Buddha*
dharna – nonviolent protest
dhobi – person who washes clothes; commonly referred to as *dhobi-wallah*
dhobi ghat – place where clothes are washed
dhul – traditional, large, two-sided Punjabi drum
dholi – man-carried portable 'chairs'; people are carried in them to hill-top temples etc
dhoti – like a *lungi*, but the ankle-length cloth is then pulled up between the legs; worn by men
dhurrie – rug
Digambara – 'Sky-Clad'; Jain group that demonstrates disdain for worldly goods by going naked
dikpala – temple guardian
Din-i-Ilahi – Akbar's philosophy asserting the common truth in all religions
diwan – principal officer in a princely state; royal court or council
Diwan-i-Am – hall of public audience
Diwan-i-Khas – hall of private audience
dowry – money and/or goods given by a bride's parents to their son-in-law's family; it's illegal but still widely exists in many arranged marriages
Draupadi – wife of the five Pandava princes in the *Mahabharata*
Dravidian – general term for the cultures and languages of the deep south of India, including Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu and Kannada
dukhang – Tibetan prayer hall
dun – valley
dupatta – long scarf for women often worn with the *salwar kameez*
darbar – royal court; also a government
Durga – the Inaccessible; a form of *Shiva's* wife, *Devi*, a beautiful, fierce woman riding a tiger/lion; a major goddess of the *Shakti* sect
dwarpal – doorkeeper; sculpture beside the doorways to Hindu or Buddhist shrines

Early Buddhism – any of the schools of Buddhism established directly after *Buddha's* death and before the advent of *Mahayana*; a modern form is the *Theravada* (Teaching of the Elders) practised in Sri Lanka and South-east Asia; Early Buddhism differed from the *Mahayana* in that it did not teach the *bodhisattva* ideal
elatalam – small hand-held cymbals
election symbols – identifying symbols for the various political parties, used to canvas illiterate voters
Emergency – period in the 1970s during which Indira Gandhi suspended many political rights
Eve-teasing – sexual harassment

fakir – Muslim who has taken a vow of poverty; may also apply to *sadhus* and other Hindu ascetics
filmi – slang term describing anything to do with Indian movies
firman – royal order or grant

gabba – appliquéd Kashmiri rug
gaddi – throne of a Hindu prince
gali – lane or alleyway
Ganesh – Hindu god of good fortune; popular elephant-headed son of *Shiva* and *Parvati*, he is also known as Ganpati and his vehicle is a ratlike creature
Ganga – Hindu goddess representing the sacred Ganges River; said to flow from *Vishnu's* toe
ganga aarti – river worship ceremony
ganj – market
ganja – dried flowering tips of the marijuana plant
gaon – village
garh – fort
gari – vehicle; 'motor gari' is a car and 'rail gari' is a train
Garuda – man-bird vehicle of *Vishnu*
gaur – Indian bison
Gayatri – sacred verse of *Rig-Veda* repeated mentally by *Brahmins* twice a day
geyser – hot-water unit found in many bathrooms
ghat – steps or landing on a river, range of hills, or road up hills
ghazal – Urdu song derived from poetry; poignant love theme
gherao – industrial action where the workers lock in their employers
giri – hill
Gita Govinda – erotic poem by Jayadeva relating *Krishna's* early life as *Govinda*
godmen – commercially minded gurus
godown – warehouse
gompa – Tibetan Buddhist monastery
Gonds – aboriginal Indian race, now mainly found in the jungles of central India
goonda – ruffian or tough; political parties have been known to employ them in gangs
Gopala – see *Govinda*
gopi – milkmaid; *Krishna* was fond of them
gopuram – soaring pyramidal gateway tower of *Dravidian* temples
gora – white person, European
Govinda – *Krishna* as a cowherd; also just cowherd
grihastha – householder stage of the *ashrama* system; followers discharge their duty to ancestors by having sons and making sacrifices to the gods
gufa – cave
gumbad – dome on an Islamic tomb or mosque
gurdwara – Sikh temple
Gurmukhi – the script of the *Guru Granth Sahib*; Punjabi script

guru – holy teacher; in Sanskrit literally ‘goe’ (darkness) and ‘roe’ (to dispel)

Guru Granth Sahib – Sikh holy book

haat – village market

haj – Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca

haji – Muslim who has made the *haj*

hammam – Turkish bath; public bathhouse

Hanuman – Hindu monkey god, prominent in the *Ramayana*, and a follower of *Rama*

Hara – one of *Shiva*'s names

Hari – another name for *Vishnu*

Harijan – name (no longer considered acceptable) given by Gandhi to India's *Untouchable* caste, meaning ‘children of god’

hartal – strike

hashish – see *charas*

hathi – elephant

haveli – traditional, often ornately decorated, residences, particularly those found in Rajasthan and Gujarat

havidar – army officer

hijab – headscarf used by Muslim women

hijra – eunuch, transvestite

Hinayana – see *Early Buddhism*

hindola – swing

Hiranyakasipu – *daitya* king killed by *Narasimha*

hookah – water pipe used for smoking *ganja* or strong tobacco

howdah – seat for carrying people on an elephant's back

iftar – breaking of the *Ramadan* fast at sunset

ikat – fabric made with thread which is tie-dyed before weaving

imam – Muslim religious leader

imambara – tomb dedicated to a Shiite Muslim holy man

IMFL – Indian-made foreign liquor

Indo-Saracenic – style of colonial architecture that integrated Western designs with Islamic, Hindu and Jain influences

Indra – significant and prestigious Vedic god; god of rain, thunder, lightning and war

Ishwara – another name given to *Shiva*; lord

Jagadhatri – Mother of the World; another name for *Devi*

agamohan – assembly hall

Jagannath – Lord of the Universe; a form of *Krishna*

jali – carved lattice (often marble) screen, also refers to the holes or spaces produced through carving timber or stone

Janaka – father of *Sita*

jataka – tale from *Buddha*'s various lives

jauhar – ritual mass suicide by immolation, traditionally performed by Rajput women at times of military defeat to avoid being dishonoured by their captors

jawan – policeman or soldier

jheel – swampy area

jhuggi – shanty settlement; also called *bustee*

jhula – bridge

ji – honorific that can be added to the end of almost anything as a form of respect; thus ‘Babaji’, ‘Gandhiji’

jihad – holy war (Islam)

JKLF – Jammu & Kashmir Liberation Front

jooti – traditional, often pointy-toed, slip-in shoes; commonly found in North India

juggernaut – huge, extravagantly decorated temple ‘car’ dragged through the streets during certain Hindu festivals

jumkabs – earrings

jiyoti linga – most important shrines to *Shiva*, of which there are 12

kabaddi – traditional game (similar to tag)

Kailasa – sacred Himalayan mountain; home of *Shiva*

Kali – the ominous-looking evil-destroying form of *Devi*; commonly depicted with black skin, dripping with blood, and wearing a necklace of skulls

Kalki – White Horse; future (10th) incarnation of *Vishnu* which will appear at the end of Kali-Yug, when the world ceases to be; has been compared to *Maitreya* in Buddhist cosmology

Kama – Hindu god of love

kameez – woman's shirtlike tunic

Kanishka – important king of the Kushana empire who reigned in the early Christian era

Kanyakumari – Virgin Maiden; another name for *Durga*

kapali – sacred bowl made from a human skull

karma – Hindu, Buddhist and Sikh principle of retributive justice for past deeds

karmachario – workers

Kartikiya – Hindu god of war, *Shiva*'s son

kata – Tibetan prayer shawl, traditionally given to a *lama* when pilgrims come into his presence

kathputli – puppeteer; also known as *putli-wallah*

Kedarnath – name of *Shiva* and one of the 12 *jiyoti linga*

khadi – homespun cloth; Mahatma Gandhi encouraged people to spin this rather than buy English cloth

Khalistan – former Sikh secessionists' proposed name for an independent Punjab

Khalsa – Sikh brotherhood

Khan – Muslim honorific title

kho-kho – traditional game (similar to tag)

khol – black eyeliner

khur – Asiatic wild ass

kiang – wild ass found in Ladakh

kirtan – Sikh devotional singing

koil – Hindu temple

kolam – see *rangoli*

kompu – C-shaped metal trumpet

kos minar – milestone

kot – fort

kothi – residence or mansion

kotwali – police station

Krishna – *Vishnu's* eighth incarnation, often coloured blue; he revealed the *Bhagavad Gita* to *Arjuna*

Kshatriya – Hindu caste of soldiers or administrators; second in the caste hierarchy

kund – lake or tank; Toda village

kurta – long shirt with either short collar or no collar

Kusa – one of *Rama's* twin sons

lakh – 100,000

Lakshmana – half-brother and aide of *Rama* in the *Ramayana*

Lakshmi – *Vishnu's* consort, Hindu goddess of wealth; she sprang forth from the ocean holding a lotus

lama – Tibetan Buddhist priest or monk

lathi – heavy stick used by police, especially for crowd control

Laxmi – see *Lakshmi*

lehanga – very full skirt with a waist cord

lhamo – Tibetan opera

lingam – phallic symbol; auspicious symbol of *Shiva*;

plural 'linga'

lok – people

Lok Sabha – lower house in the Indian parliament

(House of the People)

loka – realm

Losar – Tibetan new year

lungi – worn by men, this loose, coloured garment (similar to a sarong) is pleated by the wearer at the waist to fit

machaan – observation tower

madrasa – Islamic seminary

maha – prefix meaning 'great'

Mahabharata – Great Hindu Vedic epic poem of the *Bharata* dynasty; containing approximately 10,000 verses describing the battle between the Pandavas and the Kauravas

Mahabodhi Society – founded in 1891 to encourage Buddhist studies

Mahadeva – Great God; *Shiva*

Mahadevi – Great Goddess; *Devi*

Mahakala – Great Time; *Shiva* and one of 12 *jiyoti linga*

mahal – house or palace

maharaja – literally 'great king'; princely ruler

maharaja – see *maharaja*

maharao – see *maharaja*

maharawal – see *maharaja*

maharani – wife of a princely ruler or a ruler in her own right

mahatma – literally 'great soul'

Mahavir – last *tirthankar*

Mahayana – the 'greater-vehicle' of Buddhism; a later adaptation of the teaching that lays emphasis on the *bodhisattva* ideal, teaching the renunciation of *nirvana* (ultimate peace and cessation of rebirth) in order to help other beings along the way to enlightenment

Mahayogi – Great Ascetic; *Shiva*

Maheshwara – Great Lord; *Shiva*

Mahisa – Hindu demon

mahout – elephant rider or master

Mahratta – see *Maratha*

maidan – open (often grassed) area; parade ground

Maitreya – future *Buddha*

Makara – mythical sea creature and *Varuna's* vehicle; crocodile

mala – garland or necklace

mali – gardener

mandal – shrine

mandala – circle; symbol used in Hindu and Buddhist art to symbolise the universe

mandapa – pillared pavilion a temple forechamber

mandi – market

mandir – temple

mani stone – stone carved with the Tibetan-Buddhist mantra 'Om mani padme hum' ('Hail the jewel in the lotus')

mani walls – Tibetan stone walls with sacred inscriptions

mantra – sacred word or syllable used by Buddhists and Hindus to aid concentration; metrical psalms of praise found in the *Vedas*

Mara – Buddhist personification of that which obstructs the cultivation of virtue, often depicted with hundreds of arms; also the god of death

Maratha – central Indian people who controlled much of India at various times and fought the Mughals and Rajputs

marg – road

Maruts – Hindu storm gods

masjid – mosque

mata – mother

math – monastery

maund – unit of weight now superseded (about 20kg)

maya – illusion

mehndi – henna; ornate henna designs on women's hands (and often feet), traditionally for certain festivals or ceremonies (eg marriage)

mela – fair or festival

memsahib – Madam; respectful way of addressing women

Meru – mythical mountain found in the centre of the earth; on it is *Swarga*

mihrab – mosque 'prayer niche' that faces Mecca

mithuna – pairs of men and women; often seen in temple sculpture

Moghul – see *Mughal*

Mohini – *Vishnu* in his female incarnation

moksha – liberation from *samsara*

monsoon – rainy season

morcha – mob march or protest

mudra – ritual hand movements used in Hindu religious dancing; gesture of *Buddha* figure

muezzin – one who calls Muslims to prayer, traditionally from the minaret of a mosque

Mughal – Muslim dynasty of subcontinental emperors from Babur to Aurangzeb

mujtahid – divine

mullah – Muslim scholar or religious leader
Mumbaikar – resident of Mumbai (Bombay)
mund – village
murti – statue, often of a deity

nadi – river
Naga – mythical serpentlike beings capable of changing into human form
namaskar – see *namaste*
namaste – traditional Hindu greeting (hello or goodbye), often accompanied by a respectful small bow with the hands together at the chest or head level; also *namaskar*
namaz – Muslim prayers
Nanda – cowherd who raised *Krishna*
Nandi – bull, vehicle of *Shiva*
Narasimha – man-lion incarnation of *Vishnu*
Narayan – incarnation of *Vishnu* the creator
Narsingh – see *Narasimha*
natamandir – dancing hall
Nataraja – *Shiva* as the cosmic dancer
nautch – dance
nautch girls – dancing girls
nawab – Muslim ruling prince or powerful landowner
Naxalites – ultra-leftist political movement begun in West Bengal as a peasant rebellion; characterised by violence
Nilakantha – form of *Shiva*; his blue throat is a result of swallowing poison that would have destroyed the world
nilgai – antelope
nirvana – this is the ultimate aim of Buddhists and the final release from the cycle of existence
niwas – house, building
nizam – hereditary title of the rulers of Hyderabad
noth – the Lord (Jain)
NRI – Non-Resident Indian; of economic significance to modern India
nullah – ditch or small stream

Om – sacred invocation representing the essence of the divine principle; for Buddhists, if repeated often enough with complete concentration, it leads to a state of emptiness
Osho – the late Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, a popular, controversial guru

padma – lotus; another name for the Hindu goddess *Lakshmi*
padyatra – ‘foot journey’ made by politicians to raise support at village level
pagal – insane, crazy; often said in jest
pagoda – see *stupa*
paise – the Indian rupee is divided into 100 paise
palanquin – boxlike enclosure carried on poles on four men’s shoulders; the occupant sits inside on a seat
Pali – the language, related to Sanskrit, in which the Buddhist scriptures were recorded; scholars still refer to the original Pali texts
palia – memorial stone

palli – village
Panchatantra – series of traditional Hindu stories about the natural world, human behaviour and survival
panchayat – village council
pandal – marquee
pandit – expert or wise person; sometimes used to mean a bookworm
Parasurama – *Rama* with the axe; sixth incarnation of *Vishnu*
Parsi – adherent of the Zoroastrian faith
Partition – formal division of British India in 1947 into two separate countries, India and Pakistan
Parvati – another form of *Devi*
pashmina – fine woollen shawl
patachitra – Orissan cloth painting
PCO – Public Call Office from where you can make local, interstate and international phone calls
peepul – fig tree, especially a bo tree
peon – lowest grade clerical worker
pietra dura – marble inlay work characteristic of the Taj Mahal
pinjrapol – animal hospital run by Jains
pir – Muslim holy man; title of a Sufi saint
POK – Pakistan Occupied Kashmir
pradesh – state
pranayama – study of breath control; meditative practice
prasad – temple-blessed food offering
puja – literally ‘respect’; offering or prayers
pujari – temple priest
pukka – proper; a Raj-era term
pukka sahib – proper gentleman
punka – cloth fan, swung by pulling a cord
Puranas – set of 18 encyclopaedic Sanskrit stories, written in verse, relating to the three gods, dating from the 5th century AD
purdah – custom among some conservative Muslims (also adopted by some Hindus, especially the Rajputs) of keeping women in seclusion; veiled
Purnima – full moon; considered to be an auspicious time
putli-wallah – puppeteer; also known as *kathputli*

qawwali – Islamic devotional singing
qila – fort
Quran – the holy book of Islam, also spelt Koran

Radha – favourite mistress of *Krishna* when he lived as a cowherd
raga – any of several conventional patterns of melody and rhythm that form the basis for freely interpreted compositions
railhead – station or town at the end of a railway line; termination point
raj – rule or sovereignty; British Raj (sometimes just Raj) refers to British rule
raja – king; sometimes *rana*

rajkumar – prince
Rajput – Hindu warrior caste, former rulers of north-western India
Rajya Sabha – upper house in the Indian parliament (Council of States)
rakhi – amulet
Rama – seventh incarnation of *Vishnu*
Ramadan – the Islamic holy month of sunrise-to-sunset fasting (no eating, drinking or smoking); also referred to as Ramadan
Ramayana – the story of *Rama* and *Sita* and their conflict with *Ravana* is one of India's best-known epics
rana – king; sometimes *raja*
rangoli – elaborate chalk, rice-paste or coloured powder design; also known as *kolam*
rani – female ruler or wife of a king
ranns – deserts
rasta roko – roadblock set up for protest purposes
rath – temple chariot or car used in religious festivals
rathas – rock-cut *Dravidian* temples
Ravana – demon king of Lanka who abducted *Sita*; the titanic battle between him and *Rama* is told in the *Ramayana*
rawal – nobleman
rickshaw – small, two- or three-wheeled passenger vehicle
Rig-Veda – original and longest of the four main *Vedas*, or holy Sanskrit texts
rishi – any poet, philosopher, saint or sage; originally a sage to whom the hymns of the *Vedas* were revealed
Road – railway town that serves as a communication point to a larger town off the line, eg Mt Abu and Abu Road
rudraksh mala – strings of beads used in *puja*
Rukmani – wife of *Krishna*; died on his funeral pyre
sadar – main
sadhu – ascetic, holy person, one who is trying to achieve enlightenment; often addressed as '*swamiji*' or '*babaji*'
safa – turban
sagar – lake, reservoir
sahib – respectful title applied to a gentleman
salai – road
salwar – trousers usually worn with a *kameez*
salwar kameez – traditional dresslike tunic and trouser combination for women
samadhi – in Hinduism, ecstatic state, sometimes defined as 'ecstasy, trance, communion with God'; in Buddhism, concentration; also a place where a holy man has been cremated/buried, usually venerated as a shrine
sambalpuri – Orissan fabric
sambar – deer
samsara – Buddhists, Hindus and Sikhs believe earthly life is cyclical; you are born again and again, the quality of these rebirths being dependent upon your *karma* in previous lives
sangam – meeting of two rivers
sangeet – music

sangha – community of monks and nuns
Sankara – *Shiva* as the creator
sanyasin – like a *sadhu*; a wandering ascetic who has renounced all worldly things as part of the *ashrama* system
Saraswati – wife of *Brahma*, goddess of learning; sits on a white swan, holding a *veena*
Sati – wife of *Shiva*; became a *sati* ('honourable woman') by immolating herself; although banned more than a century ago, the act of *sati* is still occasionally performed
satra – Hindu Vaishnavite monastery and centre for art
satsang – discourse by a swami or guru
satyagraha – nonviolent protest involving a hunger strike, popularised by Mahatma Gandhi; from Sanskrit, literally meaning 'insistence on truth'
Scheduled Castes – official term used for the *Untouchable* or *Dalit* caste
sepoys – formerly an Indian soldier in British service
serai – accommodation for travellers
seva – voluntary work, especially in a temple
shahadah – Muslim declaration of faith ('There is no God but Allah; Mohammed is his prophet')
Shaivism – worship of *Shiva*
Shaivite – follower of *Shiva*
shakti – creative energies perceived as female deities; devotees follow Shaktism
sharia – Islamic law
shikara – gondola-like boat used on lakes in Srinagar (Kashmir)
shikhar – hunting expedition
shirting – material from which shirts are made
Shiva – Destroyer; also the Creator, in which form he is worshipped as a *lingam*
shola – virgin forest
shree – see *shri*
shri – honorific male prefix; Indian equivalent of 'Respected Sir'
shruti – heard
Shudra – caste of labourers
sikhara – Hindu temple-spire or temple
Singh – literally 'lion'; a surname adopted by Sikhs
sirdar – leader or commander
Sita – the Hindu goddess of agriculture; more commonly associated with the *Ramayana*
sitar – Indian stringed instrument
Siva – see *Shiva*
Skanda – another name for *Kartikiya*
sonam – *karma* accumulated in successive reincarnations
sree – see *shri*
sri – see *shri*
stupa – Buddhist religious monument composed of a solid hemisphere topped by a spire, containing relics of the *Buddha*; also known as a 'dagoba' or 'pagoda'
Subhadra – *Krishna*'s incestuous sister
Subrahmanya – another name for *Kartikiya*
Sufi – Muslim mystic

Sufism – Islamic mysticism

suiting – material from which suits are made

Surya – the sun; a major deity in the *Vedas*

sutra – string; list of rules expressed in verse

swami – title of respect meaning ‘lord of the self’; given to initiated Hindu monks

swaraj – independence

Swarga – heaven of *Indra*

sweeper – lowest caste servant, performs the most menial of tasks

tabla – twin drums

tal – lake

taluk – district

tandava – *Shiva's* cosmic victory dance

tank – reservoir; pool or large receptacle of holy water found at some temples

tantric Buddhism – Tibetan Buddhism with strong sexual and occult overtones

tatty – woven grass screen soaked in water and hung outside windows to cool the air

tempo – noisy three-wheeler public transport vehicle; bigger than an autorickshaw

thakur – nobleman

thangka – Tibetan cloth painting

theertham – temple tank

Theravada – orthodox form of Buddhism practised in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia that is characterised by its adherence to the Pali canon; literally ‘dwelling’

thiru – holy

tikka – a mark Hindus put on their foreheads

tilak – auspicious forehead mark of devout Hindu men

tirthankars – the 24 great Jain teachers

tonga – two-wheeled horse or pony carriage

topi – cap

torana – architrave over a temple entrance

toy train – narrow-gauge train; mini-train

trekkers – jeeps; hikers

Trimurti – triple form; the Hindu triad of *Brahma*, *Shiva* and *Vishnu*

Tripitaka – classic Buddhist scriptures, divided into three categories, hence the name ‘Three Baskets’

tripolia – triple gateway

Uma – *Shiva's* consort; light

Untouchable – lowest caste or ‘casteless’, for whom the most menial tasks are reserved; the name derives from the belief that higher castes risk defilement if they touch one; formerly known as *Harijan*, now *Dalit*

Upanishads – esoteric doctrine; ancient texts forming part of the *Vedas*; delving into weighty matters such as the nature of the universe and soul

urs – death anniversary of a revered Muslim; festival in memory of a Muslim saint

vaastu – creation of a cosmically favourable environment

Vaishya – member of the Hindu caste of merchants

Valmiki – author of the *Ramayana*

Vamana – fifth incarnation of *Vishnu*, as the dwarf

varku – sacred flute made from a thigh bone

varna – concept of caste

Varuna – supreme Vedic god

Vedas – Hindu sacred books; collection of hymns composed in preclassical Sanskrit during the second millennium BC and divided into four books: *Rig-Veda*, *Yajur-Veda*, *Sama-Veda* and *Atharva-Veda*

veena – stringed instrument

vihara – Buddhist monastery, generally with central court or hall off which open residential cells, usually with a *Buddha* shrine at one end

vikram – tempo or a larger version of the standard tempo

vimana – principal part of Hindu temple

vipassana – the insight meditation technique of *Theravada* Buddhism in which mind and body are closely examined as changing phenomena

Vishnu – part of the *Trimurti*; *Vishnu* is the Preserver and Restorer who so far has nine avatars: the fish *Matsya*; the tortoise *Kurma*; the wild boar *Naraha*; *Narasimha*; *Vamana*; *Parasurama*; *Rama*; *Krishna*; and *Buddha*

wadi – hamlet

wallah – man; added onto almost anything, eg *dhobi-wallah*, *chai-wallah*, *taxi-wallah*

wavs – step-wells, northern India

wazir – title of chief minister used in some former Muslim princely states

yagna – self-mortification

yakshi – maiden

yali – mythical lion creature

yantra – geometric plan said to create energy

yatra – pilgrimage

yatri – pilgrim

yogini – female goddess attendants

yoni – female fertility symbol

zakat – tax in the form of a charitable donation, one of the five ‘Pillars of Islam’

zamindar – landowner

zari – gold or silver thread used in weaving

zenana – area of a home where women are secluded; women’s quarters

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