

Language and culture guide

Hindi



Language experts agree that language learning is most effective when language and culture are linked. *The Polyglots* apps aim to spark children's interest in language and culture through play. This guide provides some general information about Hindi language and Indian culture that may be of interest to you and may extend children's learning.

About Hindi

Hindi is an official language of India and Fiji. It is the most widely spoken language of the Indian subcontinent and is spoken by more than half the overall population of India. Hindi has a number of related languages and dialects. It is also spoken in many other parts of the world, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, South Africa, Mauritius, some Caribbean countries, the Gulf States and Australia.

Early childhood education in India and Fiji

In India, the National Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Policy, coordinated by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, caters for children from 0–6. It commits to universal access to quality early childhood education, but many children are not enrolled in preschools.¹ In 2024, enrolment rates in pre-primary education were 56.7 per cent. There are public, private and NGO-sponsored programs, and pre-primary sections in schools (3–6 years).²

Fiji included early childhood education in its Education Act in 2015. This Act includes one year of non-compulsory free education. In 2021, 89 per cent of new entrants in primary school were reported to have had an early childhood education experience.³

Language

The language spoken in *The Polyglots* apps is Modern Standard Hindi. This is descended from Sanskrit but has been influenced by various other languages, including Persian, Arabic, Turkish, Portuguese, English, Dravidian and other Indian languages.

Hindi is written in Devanagari script. It has 13 vowels and 33 consonants and is written from left to right with no distinction between upper case and lower case. The Hindi full stop looks like a vertical bar (।).

Devanagari is a phonetic script and the written form generally directly represents the pronunciation of Hindi words.

Grammatically, Hindi is a gendered language. Nouns have a gender; they are either masculine or feminine.

For correct pronunciation, listen carefully to the words as they are spoken in the app or in the sound library in the app toolkit on the ELLA website.

Culture

In the apps, the cultural references are from the broader Indian culture as well as specifically Hindi-speaking communities. Around 80 per cent of people in India follow the Hindu religion, 14 per cent follow Islam, with the remaining 6 per cent being of Christian, Buddhist, Sikh, Jain and other faiths.

In Fiji, 37.5 per cent of the population identify as Indo-Fijian. Around 69 per cent of Fijians are Christian, 24 per cent follow the Hindu religion, 5.8 per cent follow Islam, 0.3 per cent are Sikh and the remainder follow another or no religion.

Not all people who speak Hindi practise the Hindu religion, and not all Hindus speak Hindi.

Politeness and customs

In India, the traditional greeting is to bring your hands together with palms touching and say 'Namaste', which literally means 'I bow to the divine in you'. The namaste is also used to say goodbye, and the gesture can be used without saying anything. It can be used with people of any age and at any time of day or night. A younger person would greet an older person first.

Use only your right hand for picking up and eating your food.

¹ UNICEF: India, *Early childhood education*, <https://www.unicef.org/india/what-we-do/early-childhood-education>

² 'Gross enrollment rate, early childhood education (%)', Human Capital Project, World Bank, 2026, https://humancapital.worldbank.org/en/indicator/WB_HCP_ECEDU

³ 2024 Status Report on Early Childhood Care and Education in 15 Pacific Island Countries, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2024

Culture in *The Polyglots* apps

As children play with the apps, they can discover fun and intriguing Indian cultural references, such as a peacock, a tiger, a mango, a sitar and samosas. You can learn more about the cultural references in the app toolkit.

Interesting topics

Animals

Some animals of India include:

- Indian elephants
- bears, including sun bears, Himalayan bears, brown bears and sloth bears
- horses and Indian rhinoceroses
- dogs, foxes, jackals, hyenas, wolves and mongooses
- pangolins and porcupines
- monkeys, including macaques and langurs, and gibbons
- martens, weasels, stoats, badgers, otters, civets and red pandas
- big cats, including tigers, lions and leopards
- wild sheep and goats, ibex, deer, wild buffaloes, wild yaks and wild pigs
- birds such as Indian peacocks, Indian cranes, Indian bustards and vultures
- river dolphins, including Ganges River dolphins and Indus River dolphins
- crocodiles, gharials, kraits and cobras
- sea animals such as dolphins and whales.

Animals of Fiji include flying foxes, snakes, iguanas and other lizards and many different birds.

Arts

India is rich in the arts, including visual arts, music, theatre, film, architecture and literature.

- India is renowned for its arts and crafts, such as pottery, sculpture (metal, stone and terracotta), jewellery, woodcarving and textiles, and also for wall paintings and miniature paintings.
- Two ancient Sanskrit epic poems, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, are considered by Hindus to be both stories of past events and the goals of life. Both poems are extremely long.
- Bollywood is the Indian Hindi-language film industry, based in the city of Mumbai. The movies often include singing and dancing.



Interesting topics

Food	Food varies greatly across India, with many regional variations. • Main meals may consist of rice, roti (flatbread), vegetable and lentil dishes, salad, yoghurt and pickles. Non-vegetarians may include meat dishes. • Some well-known dishes are dosas, dhal, biriyani, bhajis, chana masala, pakoras, paratha, chaat, kofta and samosas. • There are many delicious sweets and desserts, such as gulab jamun, jalebi, laddu, barfi, gajar halwa and kheer. • Spices are an important ingredient in Indian cooking. Many are native to India and others are produced there or imported. Some common spices used are coriander, cumin, turmeric, mustard seed, cardamom, cinnamon, chilli, ginger, cloves, curry leaves and fenugreek.
Games	Traditional children's games include: • kho kho: a game of tag played in teams. One team are the chasers, who take turns trying to touch 'out' all the players on the opposite team in the fastest time. • gutte/pacheta: a game requiring five small stones. One stone is thrown in the air. The child tries to pick up the other stones from the ground with one hand and then, with the same hand, catch the thrown stone before it hits the ground.
Places	• The Taj Mahal is a white marble building built in the 17th century in Agra by emperor Shah Jahan in memory of his favourite wife, Mumtaz Mahal. It took more than 20 years, 20,000 workers and 1,000 elephants to build. It is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. • The city of Varanasi is a major pilgrimage site for followers of the Hindu religion. It is situated on the Ganges River, which is one of the religion's most sacred symbols. Hindus bathe in the river before prayers. • The Jantar Mantar is an observatory in Jaipur City. It was built from stone and bronze by Maharaja Jai Singh II between 1727 and 1734, to help tell the time and predict weather. • The Sun Temple at Konark dates from the 13th century and was built in the shape of a chariot being pulled by seven horses. It represents the chariot of the Sun God, Surya. • The Ellora Caves at Aurangabad were built between the 5th and 10th centuries by Buddhist, Jain and Hindu monks. Monasteries, chapels and temples were carved out of the rock. • Western Ghats is a mountain range that runs along the western side of India. It is recognised as one of the world's eight 'hottest hotspots' of biological diversity. It also influences the Indian monsoon weather pattern.



Interesting topics

Geography

There is huge variation in climate across India, which has six major climate zones. These range from dry desert in the west, to alpine tundra in the north, to humid tropical regions with rainforests in the south-west and the islands. There are four seasons: winter; summer or pre-monsoon season; monsoon or rainy season; and autumn or post-monsoon season. The Himalayan states in northern India also have spring.

In India, the deserts and nearby areas heat up during the summer and then moisture-laden monsoon winds rush in from the Indian Ocean. The summer monsoons supply over 80 per cent of India's annual rainfall. The heavy rainfall can cause flooding and landslides but it is essential for agriculture.

The two rainiest places in the world are in India. Mawsynram in Meghalaya state has 11,873 millimetres of rain per year and nearby Cherrapunji has 11,430 millimetres. Meghalaya means 'land of the clouds'. Most of the rain occurs during the monsoon season. Surprisingly, these places can suffer drought outside the monsoon season.

Traditions

Below are just two of India's many rich traditions. India is so diverse that there are many different meanings and stories behind traditions and the way they are celebrated.

- Diwali, the festival of lights, is celebrated by Hindus, Sikhs and Jains. The festival celebrates the victory of good over evil, light over darkness, and knowledge over ignorance.
- Holi is a festival that marks the end of winter and celebrates the coming of the spring harvest. Crowds of people sing religious songs and throw 'gula' (brightly coloured powder) over each other.

Note: This document contains content that has been gathered through independent research and consultation with subject matter experts. The figures and information included in this document should be reviewed for accuracy over time.

