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Gujarati

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Gujarātī belongs to the southwestern family of Modern/New Indo-Aryan, a subgroup of the Indo-Iranian branch of Indo-European languages. The official language of Gujarat state, it is spoken across South Asia in Maharashtra (especially Bombay), Rajasthan, Sind, lower Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, and in Karnataka and among the Parsi, Hindu, Muslim, and Jain diaspora in the Persian Gulf, East and South Africa, Britain, North America, and Australia. There were approximately 45 479 000 speakers reported in 1997 (*Indian Missions Abroad*).

History and Literature

Scholars historically distinguish Old Gujarātī (12th–15th centuries); Middle Gujarātī (15th–18th centuries); and Modern Gujarātī (18th century onward).

Its antecedents are traceable to a distinct Old Western Rajasthānī literary form, despite the attestation of Jain Prakrit treatises and studies by Middle Indian grammarians of *Nāgara Apabhraṃśa*, a literary *Apabhraṃśa* of Gujarat. The 12th-century *Bharatēś-varabāhubalirāsa* (1185) is the earliest work written in Gujarātī. Prose and verse compilations written from the 13th century onward exist and include the seasonal poem *Vasantavilāsa* and the 14th-century commentary, the *Ṣadāvaśyakabālabodhavṛtti*. Narasiṃha Mehta's (c. 1414–1480) devotional ballads marked a new era in poetry, acquiring pride of place in its literary annals. The Gujarātī daily, *Mumbai Samācār* (established in 1822), is one of the oldest newspapers in Asia. Bombay Parsis were pioneers in Gujarātī and Urdū theater from the 1850s.

Dialects

Gujarātī spoken along the Baroda-Ahmedabad corridor is regarded as the standard/prestige dialect. (Whether the register of Nāgarī Brāhmaṃs carries

'RP' status remains debatable). Other dialects are Suratī (southern Gujarat), Carotarī (Charotari; central Gujarat), Kāthiāwārī (Saurashtra), and Pātānī (northern Gujarat). Pakistani Gujarātī is probably a Pātānī subdialect, and code switching is waning as the younger generation shifts to Urdu and provincial languages. Muslim speakers there and elsewhere obviously adopt Perso-Arabic lexicons – its largest word stock after Sanskrit – especially in religious-cultural discourse. Parsi Gujarātī, an ethnolect of the subcontinent's Zoroastrians is, however, readily intelligible. East African Gujarātī now contains Swahili loanwords. Kacchī (Kachchi) is semantically intermediate between Gujarātī and Sindhī and is also influenced by Mārwarī.

Grammar

Phonetically, Gujarātī is unique for murmured vowels developed from final /h/ and two open vowels, /e/ and /o/. An absence of contrast exists between short and long /i/ and /u/ vowels. Variable or invariable substantives and adjectives, as well as pronominals, have three genders (including the neuter) and two numbers; they inflect for direct and oblique forms, the latter with post-positions and clitics. Verbal forms have temporal, modal, and aspectual contrasts. Combinations of verbal nouns and adjectives with auxiliaries produce an elaborate variety of obligational and desiderative forms, and the vocabulary is rich in passive, causative, and double causative verbs (Cardona, 1965). Vector/compound verbs, a common New Indo-Aryan feature, are employed in restricted contexts with specific semantics.

Orthography

A manuscript dated 1592 (Mistry, 1996) attests that an alphasyllabic script derived from a Devanāgarī variant has been employed for writing Gujarātī and Kacchī since the 16th century. A cursive style replaced the standard Sanskrit script used in prose and verse when printing began during the 1830s. Independent and conjunct forms are expressed by 45 symbols: 8 vowels, 34 consonants, *anusvāra*, *visarga*, and a velar nasal grapheme. Written from left to right, Gujarātī is conspicuous for its absence of head strokes and varying phonemic modifications. As in other Brāhmī-derived scripts, the post-consonantal *lal* is evidently assumed in a consonant lacking diacritics. Devanāgarī-derived numerals were adopted with modified shapes for the digits 3, 5, 6, and 9.

See also: Çode Switching; India: Language Situation; Indo-Aryan Languages; Indo-Iranian; Pakistan: Language Situation; Sindhi; Swahili; Zoroastrianism.

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