

## Topic Page: [Gujarati language](#)

Definition: **Gujarati language** from *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

Member of the Indo-Iranian branch of the Indo-European language family, spoken in and around the state of Gujarat in western India. It is written in its own script, a variant of the Devanagari script used for Sanskrit and Hindi.



Summary Article: **GUJARATI**  
From *Dictionary of Languages*

**45,000,000 SPEAKERS**

Image from:

[GUJARATI](#) in  
[Dictionary of Languages](#)

*India, Great Britain*

Gujarati is the Indo-Aryan language of the Indian state of Gujarat – and of numerous migrant communities in many parts of the world.

*The name is undoubtedly that of the Gujjars, a widespread caste, traditionally cattle-farmers. Nomadic members of the community are nowadays most commonly found far to the north, in Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh, where they speak Gujuri (see INDO-ARYAN LANGUAGES).*

Old Gujarati, ancestor of both Gujarati and Rajasthani, is recorded in texts of the 12th to 14th centuries. Gujarati literature really begins in the 15th century, however, with mystical poets such as Mirabai. Both Persian-Urdu and Sanskrit traditions of poetry continue to influence Gujarati authors. The statesman and writer Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948), born in the Gujarat town of Porbandar, helped to inspire a 20th-century renewal in the literature of his mother tongue.

Although the major regional dialects differ little, there are also social dialects of several kinds. There are strong differences in intonation between men's Gujarati and women's Gujarati. Among tribal dialects are the mountain languages Bhili and Khandesi (see map). An important caste dialect is that of the Parsis, clustering in the southern part of the state. They have a press and literature of their own, quite distinct from standard Gujarati in style and idiom.

Muslim speakers of Gujarati – now mostly settled in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Britain – tend to be at least trilingual, being familiar also with Urdu and having studied classical Arabic. Their Gujarati, like that of the Parsis, contains many Persian loanwords. Another dialect of historical importance is that of Kathiawari sailors, who travelled all over the world as steamship crewmen. Their speech included loanwords from Urdu and several European languages.

In Kutch, in north-western Gujarat state, the 500,000 speakers of the Sindhi dialect *Kacchī* use Gujarati as their literary language.

Outside the borders of Gujarat state, Gujarati speakers are widely scattered: in Maharashtra state; in Pakistan and Bangladesh; in South Africa; in Singapore. One of the oldest communities of the diaspora is in East Africa, where Indian traders (Gujarati, Kacchī and Konkani) were already established in the

1490s when Portuguese explorers reached the Indian Ocean. This linguistic enclave was reinforced when Gujaratis were recruited in large numbers by both British and German governments to work in East Africa around 1990. East African Gujarati became a distinct dialect. Many East African Gujaratis, faced with an increasingly uncertain future and mounting discrimination in newly independent East African countries – especially Uganda – migrated to Britain, where there are now a third of a million speakers of the language, many of them in the London areas of Wembley, Harrow and Newham and in Leicester, Coventry and Bradford.

#### The Gujarati alphabet

અ આ ઈ ઈ ઉ ઊ ઋ એ ઐ ઓ ઔ ક ખ ગ ઘ ઙ ચ છ જ ઝ ઞ ઠ ડ ઢ ણ ત થ દ ધ ન પ ફ બ ભ મ ય ર લ વ શ ખ સ ળ  
a ā i t u ū ṛ e ai o au k kh g gh ṅ c ch j jh ṇ ṭ ṭh d dh ṇ t th d dh n p ph b bh m y r l v ś ṣ h

#### Numerals in Gujarati

એક	૧	1	ek
બે	૨	2	be
ત્રણ	૩	3	traṇ
ચાર	૪	4	cār
પાંચ	૫	5	pāñc
છ	૬	6	cha
સાત	૭	7	sāt
આઠ	૮	8	āṭh
નવ	૯	9	nav
દસ	૧૦	10	das

### The Gujarati Script

The Gujarati script, which is similar to Devanagari but without the headstrokes or ‘washing line’, was standardised in its present form in the 19th century. The usual transliteration is given in the box. Both script and transliteration are poor at representing the vowel sounds of Gujarati, which actually has 8 normal vowels əɑɛɛiɔou, no distinction of vowel length, but (especially in the standard and central dialects) a range of breathy vowels.

### Gujarati and Rajasthani on the map

Standard literary Gujarati is based on the central dialect of Baroda and Ahmadabad. Other dialects of Gujarati are Pattani (north), Surati or Surti (south) and Kāthiyāwaḍī of Saurashtra. They differ relatively little from the standard.

*Bhīlī* is spoken by the mountain tribes of Bhil, to the east and north-east of Gujarat state. It has numerous dialects: Wāgḍī alone claims 750,000 speakers. The whole dialect group may have as many as 2,500,000. Bhīlī is often counted a separate language.

To the south of Bhili, *Khandeśī* is another group of hill dialects, with up to a million speakers. Khandesi is heavily influenced by Marathi.

RAJASTHANI, by contrast with Gujarati, has no strong modern literary tradition. Its main dialects are Marwari, Jaipuri, Mewati and Malvi. Nimadi, an isolated southern dialect in a mainly ‘tribal’ area, has

developed special peculiarities.

*Gujuri* is the language of nearly half a million semi-nomadic herdsmen in Indian and Pakistani Kashmir and in Himachal Pradesh. Gujjars keep buffaloes and cows, while Bakarwals, who speak the same language, keep goats and sheep. Most speakers own their winter pastures, moving to high meadows, *tok*, during the summer season, April to August. The language is close to Rajasthani.

*Parya* is a recently discovered Indo-Aryan language spoken by about 1,000 people in the Hissar valley, Tajikistan. Its history is unknown – but linguistically it seems to belong with Rajasthani and Panjabi.

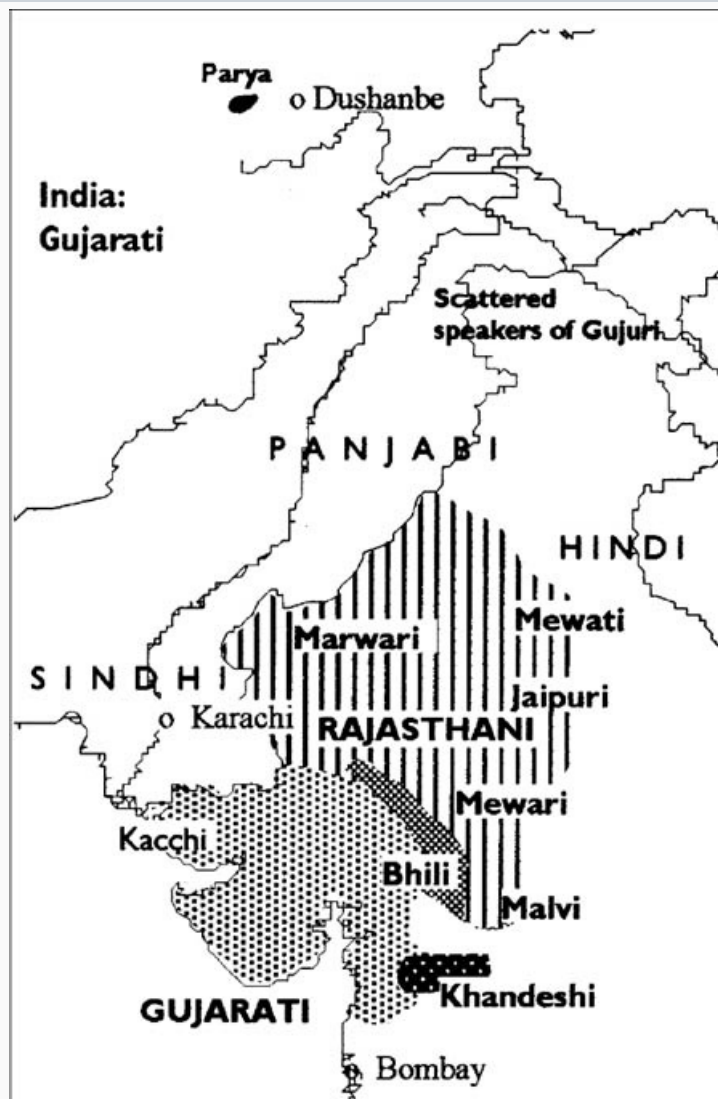
### Rule of thumb

Aro gharOne, nhālli va'w par āvine paro.

Whatever happens, the youngest  
daughter-in-law gets the blame.

Shrikrishna N. Gajendragadkar,

*Parsi-Gujarati* (Bombay: University of Bombay, 1974) p. 153



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Gujarati. (2004). In A. Dalby, *Dictionary of languages* (3rd ed.). London, UK: A&C Black. Retrieved from [https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/gujarati\\_language](https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/gujarati_language)

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## Harvard

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## MLA

"Gujarati." *Dictionary of Languages*, Andrew Dalby, A&C Black, 3rd edition, 2004. *Credo Reference*, [https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/gujarati\\_language](https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/gujarati_language). Accessed 18 Oct. 2019.