

Topic Page: [Prakrit](#)

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

General name for the ancient Indo-European dialects of northern India, contrasted with the sacred classical language Sanskrit.

The word is itself Sanskrit, meaning 'natural', as opposed to *Sanskrit*, which means 'perfected'. The Prakrits are considered to be the ancestors of such modern northern Indian languages as Hindi, Punjabi, and Bengali.

Summary Article: **Prakrit**

From *The Columbia Encyclopedia*

(prākṛīṭ), any of a number of languages belonging to the Indic group of the Indo-Iranian subfamily of the Indo-European family of languages (see Indo-Iranian). The Prakrits are usually classified as Middle Indic languages that followed the Old Indic stage of Sanskrit and Vedic but preceded the Modern Indic period. Some scholars, however, use the term *Prakrit* to include the Modern Indic vernaculars as well as those of the Middle Indic period—in short, to designate all Indic languages other than Sanskrit and Vedic. Other authorities say that the Modern Indic languages, which began to take form between 1000 and 1200, developed from the various medieval Prakrits. The oldest written records of the Prakrits are inscriptions of the 3d cent. B.C., but the languages were in use as vernaculars by the 6th cent. B.C. The Prakrits have been described as regional or vernacular dialects of classical Sanskrit. They were popular forms of speech, but a few of them developed into literary languages. Some estimates put the number of Prakrits at 38. In the ancient Indian drama, upper-class male (and sometimes female) characters use Sanskrit, while the characters (both male and female) of the lower classes speak various Prakrits. It can therefore be inferred that in this early period the Prakrits as popular forms of speech were used side by side with Sanskrit, the language of the priests and the nobility. Pali, a Middle Indic language that became the language of the Buddhists and their sacred literature, is considered a Prakrit by some scholars, though not by all. There are important phonetic and grammatical differences between the Old Indic and Middle Indic languages. For example, the Prakrits were much simpler grammatically than classical Sanskrit, having discarded the dual number for noun and verb, reduced the eight-case system of Sanskrit for the noun, and generally simplified the verb. On the whole, the vocabulary of Prakrit is of Old Indic origin.

See Woolner, A. C. , Introduction to Prakrit (2d ed. 1928, repr. 1986).

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Prakrit. (2018). In P. Lagasse, & Columbia University, *The Columbia encyclopedia* (8th ed.). New York, NY: Columbia University Press. Retrieved from



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