

शब्दार्थ

HINDI WORDS, THEIR MEANINGS, THEIR ORIGINS

To know something about where words come from enriches our appreciation of a language; and to discover patterns of connectivity *between* different languages adds greatly to our understanding of cultural history. The fact that Hindi ‘comes from’ Sanskrit is clear to all, but awareness of the historical connectivity between Hindi and *English* is less widely disseminated.

It is easy enough for anyone to draw a line between a दाँत and a *dentist*, or between नाम and *name*, or between दो and *two* or *duality*; but the link between the verbs होना and *be*, though equally real, is more deeply hidden. These connections are mapped out by philologists, but their discipline is a technical one whose findings are not always accessible to the layman, and the specialists’ heavy use of technical abbreviations may challenge ord. rdrs. The intention of शब्दार्थ, therefore, is simply to dip a toe into the waters of philology, giving Hindi learners some examples of the connectivities between Hindi and English, and looking also at the internal connectivities *within* the Indic field, for example between रखना and रक्षा, or between सच and सत्य, or between सकना and शक्ति. How are दल *group, party*, दलित *oppressed (caste)* and दाल *lentils* related? What is the common ancestry of the words सितार, तान, तंत्र, *tone, tent, and tension*? What is the chilly connection between हीमालय and *hibernation*? What resources offer the best help in pursuing the histories of these words? These are some of the Frequently Avoided Questions that शब्दार्थ seeks to address.

Guesswork can take us a *little* way in apprehending etymological connections, and folk etymologies can be wonderfully creative (I was once told that कांक्रीट *concrete* was an Indic word deriving from कंकड़ and ईंट, yielding a nicely logical compound meaning ‘gravel-brick’); but the philologist’s work involves a much more precise reading of evidence, and it detects *patterns* of derivation that enable linguistic history to be perceived — just as forensic detective work can lead from clues at the crime-scene to the reconstruction of ‘what happened’. My hope is that learners of Hindi can benefit from a modest introduction to a complex area that usually deters the general reader.

Patterns: when we know that Hindi काम *work* derives from Sanskrit कर्म *action*, we notice that the reduction of a conjunct to a single consonant may be accompanied by the compensatory lengthening of a preceding short vowel; and this same pattern explains पूत *son* (as in राजपूत) as deriving from पुत्र, and साँप as deriving from सर्प *serpent*, and चाँद as deriving from चंद्र *moon*. The evidence of vernacular words even enables philologists to postulate the now-defunct Sanskrit words from which they must have derived.

The fact that both काम and कर्म exist in modern Hindi usage, but with different meanings, shows how a language is enriched by historical change; and on the other hand, the fact that today’s

Hindi features पुत्र (while पूत now sounds archaic) demonstrates the processes of Sanskritisation, in which ancient forms of a word are ‘borrowed’ back into the modern language.

Though awareness of the shared heritage of Indo-European languages has existed for centuries, many of the most valuable resources are quite recent. R.S. McGregor’s *Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary* shows Sanskrit etymons (source words) in square brackets after the headword, as we see in the following openings to entries for पुत्र, रखना, and and साँप. Note that Sanskrit verbs are traditionally quoted in their third-person singular form rather than in an ‘infinitive’; hence रक्षति *he protects* etc.

पूत pūt [putra-], m. a son.

रखना rakhnā [rakṣati], v.t. 1. to put, to place;

पूत pūt [putra-], m. a son.

साँप sāṃp [sarpa-], m. 1. a snake.

A broader picture of derivations from Sanskrit is to be found in R.L. Turner’s *Comparative Dictionary of the Indo-Aryan Languages*. The example below is a slightly simplified version of the entry for the headword *ardhatṛtīya* (अर्धतृतीय) — literally ‘half [less than] three’, i.e. 2½. We see how the Pali derivative of this Sanskrit word introduces the retroflexion (in *aḍḍhatiya*) that remains a feature of the vernacular words that flow from it, including Hindi *dhāī* (ढाई). The entry also shows a moment of controversy when the editor disagrees with the *Critical Pali Dictionary* (CPD) in respect of one part of the derivation!

651 **ardhatṛtīya** ‘two and a half’

Pa. *aḍḍhatiya*- (< **aḍḍhatatiya*- and replacement of suffix *-īya*- by *-iya*-), *aḍḍhateyya*- (with replacement of *-īya*- by *-eyya*-: scarcely with CPD s.v. < **ardha*-> *trayya*-), Aś. *aḍḍhātiya*-, *aḍḍha*°, Pk. *addhatāi*ya-, *aḍḍhāi*ya-, *aḍḍhāi*ija-, *aḍḍhāi*°, K. *ḍāy*, S. L. *aḍḍhāī*, P. *ḍhāī*, WPah. bhal. *aḍḍhāī*, cur. *aḍḍhāe*, bhad. pañ. cam. *dhāī*, Ku. *aṛhāī*, N. *aṛāi*, A. *ārai*, B. *āṛāi*, Or. *aṛhāi*; Mth. *aṛhāi*ā ‘brass vessel containing 2½ sers’; Bhoj. *aṛhāi*yā ‘2½’, Aw. lakh. H. *aṛhāī*, *ḍhāī*, G. *aḍḍhī*, *aḍḍī*.

The relatively new facility of being able to access these dictionaries online, and hence to search for items ‘globally’ rather than through headwords alone, is an enormous step forward. For example, we can use OHED as a reverse dictionary, searching for the word ‘sword’ and finding not only the abundance of Hindi words translated as ‘sword’ but also a wide range of references to the *qualities* of a sword, or idioms relating to swords and sword-play. The days when using a dictionary meant simply looking up a headword, and gratefully accepting its single entry, are behind us.

Hindi’s ancestral debt to Sanskrit is so obvious, and so clearly established, that it is tempting to regard this Sanskritic heritage as a closed system, complete unto itself; and the Hindi tradition does fondly promote the concept of शुद्ध हिन्दी as having a pedigree so ‘pure’ that it contains no hint of influence from beyond the subcontinent. But even Sanskrit has a past; it too *comes from somewhere*, and to recognize its place in the great sprawling map of Indo-European languages is

to take a great leap forward in the understanding of history and the migration of culture. To look further than Sanskrit in tracing the origins of individual words is a bridge too far for शब्दार्थ; but it is worth bearing in mind that when we ask the दाम *price* of something in Hindi, we use a word which looks back not only to Sanskrit द्रम्म, but also to the even earlier history of an origin in Greek δραχμή — the *drachma*, well-known to those of us whose memories extend back beyond the ill-fated Euro.

Hindi is not, thank goodness, a ‘pure’ language (is there such a thing?) It includes everyday words that come from Sanskrit, Prakrit, Pali, English, Portuguese, Chinese, Persian, Arabic, Turkish — to name only its main sources. Its very name is Persian.

Readers may wonder about the selection of words included in शब्दार्थ; it follows no systematic path in its selection of words; it is a ragbag of meditations on whatever words happen to have intrigued the fevered brain of the compiler.

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GLOSSARY *etcetera*

- * marks a word or expression that is either reconstructed from later evidence (such as **girati*, a reconstructed etymon for Hindi गिरना), or is a hypothetically possible form that does not actually occur (such as *बंदना to close). OHED adds another convention, using an asterisk to specify which of several listed meanings of a word is the most common one; for example, the entry for शब्द begins like this: 'शब्द śabd [S.], m. 1. sound, noise (esp. as produced by any action). *2. a word (spoken or written)'.
- > indicates that the word before the sign is the origin of the word after it, e.g. क्षेत्र > खेत.
- < indicates the reverse of the above: खेत < क्षेत्र.

calque — a loan translation; an expression adopted by translation from another language, such as Hindi भूमंडलीकरण *globalization*, or शुभ रात्रि *goodnight!*

cognate — describes a word having the same etymological history as another (such as हो and *be*).

doublet — one of a pair of words that come from the same source but have entered the language at different times, often with different meanings or nuances (such as Hindi काम and कर्म).

etymon — a word from which a later word is derived: tatsama क्षेत्र is the etymon of tadbhava खेत.

homonym — each of two or more words having the same spelling but different meanings and origins (e.g. 'rear' – *the back part of something* and 'rear' *to raise and care for*; or लाल *darling* and लाल *red*).

Indic — relating to the culture and history of the Indian subcontinent without reference to its political borders.

Proto Indo-European (PIE) — the 'lost' or unrecorded language from which Indo-European languages are considered to have derived; its character is reconstructed by collating the evidence of derived words in later languages.

Sanskritic — belonging to the Sanskrit tradition, including the legacy of languages derived from Sanskrit

tadbhava *come-from-that* — describing a vernacular word whose form differs from that of its parent word: see next.

tatsama *same as that* — describing a Sanskrit word used in its 'unchanged' form within a vernacular Sanskritic language (thus Hindi खेत is the tadbhava form of tatsama क्षेत्र). Typists: beware auto-correct, which may change tatsama to 'satsuma' in a heartbeat.

RESOURCES

CDIAL: R.L. Turner, *A Comparative Dictionary of the Indo-Aryan Languages*, London 1969.
<http://dsal.uchicago.edu/dictionaries/soas/>

Douglas Harper, *Online Etymology Dictionary*
<http://www.etymonline.com/>

MW: Monier Monier-Williams, *A Dictionary, Sanskrit and English*, Oxford 1950.
<http://www.ibiblio.org/sripedia/ebooks/mw/>
<http://www.sanskrit-lexicon.uni-koeln.de/monier/>

Masica: Colin P. Masica, *The Indo-Aryan Languages*. Cambridge 1991.

Platts: John T. Platts, *A Dictionary of Urdū, Classical Hindī, and English*, London 1930.
<http://dsal.uchicago.edu/dictionaries/platts/>

OED: *The Oxford English Dictionary* [current online edition].
Available online through university libraries etc.

OHED: R. S. McGregor, *The Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary*. Oxford, 1993.
<http://dsal.uchicago.edu/dictionaries/mcgregor/>

शब्दसागर — श्यामसुन्दर दास, *हिन्दी शब्दसागर*, इलाहाबाद 1965.
<http://dsal.uchicago.edu/dictionaries/dasa-hindi/>

Trawling the internet for examples of Hindi usage

शब्दार्थ takes examples of current Hindi usage from news headlines that have appeared on the internet from December 2014 and thereafter. Readers should bear in mind that *headlines have their own rhetoric*, and that their word-order may differ from that of more neutral usages: the headline *इश्क के नशे में ये क्या कर बैठा इंजीनियर !* (used in the article on *बैठना*) positions the subject at the end of the line, so that the image of this Romeo lingers in our consciousness as the line ends. Similarly a more neutral version of the sentence *श्री जी से बदल जाएगी मोबाइल फोन की दुनिया* (a headline from the article on *बदलना*) would be *मोबाइल फोन की दुनिया श्री जी से बदल जाएगी*. Another example is *करोड़पति बनने के चक्कर में युवती ने गंवाए डेढ़ लाख*, in which the shocking figure of ₹150,000 is given emphasis by coming at sentence end (instead of before the verb).

The Hindi word for ‘headline’, incidentally, is *सुर्खी*, from Persian *سرخ surkh* ‘red’, in reference to an old tradition of penning headlines in red ink; compare the English word ‘rubric’, from the Latin *rubrica* ‘red ochre’, similarly used. (The word ‘rubric’ itself is cognate with Hindi/Sanskrit *रुधिर red-coloured; blood*, the Proto Indo-European root being **rudhro*.) As you may notice, the habit of tracing words to their source, and of looking for connections and patterns between words, can become quite obsessive. You have been warned!