

# SOUTH ASIAN, HINDI



**Location:** An estimated 140,000 Hindi-speaking people live in Myanmar. They are scattered near urban areas, especially Yangon and Mandalay. Surprisingly, half of all Hindi speakers in Myanmar inhabit about 40 villages near the small town of Zeyawaddy in the Taungoo District of Bago Region, 134 miles (215 km) north of Yangon.<sup>1</sup> The Hindi population in Myanmar has decreased since the 1931 census, when 174,967 "Hindustani" people were recorded, as many families moved back to India during tumultuous times. Hindi is the *lingua franca* (common speech) in 15 states and union territories of India, including New Delhi. Although 602 million people in India can speak Hindi, 339 million speak it as their first language, and an additional 263 million use it as a second language. Hindi is also an official language in five countries, including South Africa and Fiji, and is spoken in dozens of other nations around the world.<sup>2</sup>

**Identity:** Hindi is not the name of a specific ethnic group; rather, it is a regional language spoken as the first language by approximately 700 different people groups

around the world and as a second language by over 1,000 more groups.<sup>3</sup> The name Hindi comes from ancient Persian, denoting someone who comes from "Hind" (India) or from the Indus River basin. Hindi speakers have been in Myanmar almost 140 years and have made a strong contribution to society. Although Hindi is the national language of India, it is only the fourth most spoken Indian language in Myanmar after Bengali (300,000), Tamil (148,000), and Telugu (147,000).

**Language:** Since 1950 Hindi has been the official national language of India and is the fourth most spoken language in the world after Mandarin, English, and Spanish.<sup>4</sup> Many Hindi words are borrowed from the Sanskrit language, and it is written in the Devanagari script.

**History:** The tens of thousands of Hindi speakers in the small town of Zeyawaddy are the descendants of settlers who came from India over a century ago after the British offered large tracts of land to Indian rulers who would clear the jungle and make it productive. In Zeyawaddy, 18,340 acres were granted and over time, rice paddies and sugarcane were

planted. The first Hindi migrants were 3,500 farmers from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh who came in 1889, with another wave of 4,000 farmers arriving in 1902. In 1934 a sugar mill was shipped from Britain, which produced 2,500 tons of sugar annually until it was taken over by the Burmese government in 1954. The families of those original settlers still live in Zeyawaddy.<sup>5</sup> The early 1930s marked the height of Indian influence in Myanmar, with more than one million settlers throughout the country. In 1965, "when all business concerns, land, banks and schools, including those owned by Indians, were nationalized by the Burmese government, around 2,000 families from Zeyawaddy went back to Bihar."<sup>6</sup>

**Customs:** The caste system, with its innumerable sub-castes which governed Hindu life in India for countless centuries is also practiced among Hindi speakers in Myanmar, dividing them into many social and occupational groups according to a hierarchical order based on the principles of "purity and pollution." Brahmins are at the top of the hierarchy and serve as priests and scholars. Marriage seldom takes place between people of different castes.

**Religion:** Almost all Hindi speakers in Myanmar are Hindus, while 1,500 are Muslims<sup>7</sup> and a similar number are Christians. Few families have ever taken the bold step of breaking away to become Christians, as it almost certainly means they will be ostracized from their communities and face an uncertain future.

**Christianity:** The 1931 Burma census recorded 687 Hindi-speaking Christians in the country, or one out of every 250 people. The rest were Hindus and Muslims. Things have scarcely improved for the Gospel since that time, and the Hindi remain one of the least reached and most unevangelized groups in Myanmar today. Most have never heard a clear presentation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

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Population in Myanmar: 140,000 (2024)

Location: Yangon Region, Mandalay Region, Bago Region

Language Family: Indo-European

Main Religion: Hinduism (98.0%)

Christians: 1,400 (1.0%)

## OVERVIEW

**Population:** 140,000 in Myanmar (2024 Asia Harvest)

133,000 (2017 J. Leclerc)  
174,967 (1931 census)

**Other Countries:**  
602 million in India  
1,320,000 in Nepal  
938,000 in United Arab Emirates  
885,000 in USA  
817,000 in Saudi Arabia  
761,000 in Canada<sup>2</sup>

**Other Names:** Hindustani, Manak Hindi

**Location:** Yangon Region;  
Mandalay Region;  
Bago Region: Pyu Township  
in Taungoo District

**Language:** Hindi [hin]

**Dialects:** 6

**Scripture:**  
Bible 1835  
New Testament 1811  
Portions 1806

**Jesus film:** Hindi

**Global Recordings:**  
Hindi #26

**People ID:** 12106

