

# FOOD FOR THOUGHT

## A GASTRONOMIC GLOSSARY

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Like most languages, Hindi has a wide range of expressions based on food and cooking. This short (and infinitely extendable) glossary is a list of words which generate such idioms, or which have interesting etymologies (given in square brackets at the end of each entry). Sanskrit ('Skt') etymologies are mostly from R. L. Turner, *A Comparative Dictionary of the Indo-Aryan Languages* (London 1966), the essential reference for information about word origins. An asterisk indicates a hypothetical form — a Sanskrit etymon reconstructed from the evidence of presumed derivatives in New Indo-Aryan languages.

Further idioms will be found in Bholanath Tiwari, *Hindī muhāvarā koś*, 3rd edn (Allahabad 1977); many Anglo-Indian usages are discussed in Henry Yule and A.C. Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson*, 2nd edn (London 1985) and Ivor Lewis, *Sahibs, nabobs and boxwallahs: a dictionary of the words of Anglo-India* (Bombay 1991).

Both CDIAL (Turner) and Hobson-Jobson, together with many other invaluable dictionaries, are available online at <http://dsal.uchicago.edu/dictionaries/>.

- आटा 'wholemeal flour'. आटे दाल का भाव मालूम होना 'to face the grim realities of life' (literally 'to know the price of flour and dal'); आटे में नमक 'very little, in small quantity (like salt in flour)'. [Skt \*आर्त ]
- कढ़ी<sup>f</sup> 'a spicy curry made of pulse flour and yoghurt'; the word is not related to the English word 'curry' (as sometimes alleged), which comes rather from Tamil *kari*. [Skt क्वथित 'boiled']
- काँटा<sup>m</sup> 'fork' (also 'thorn, spike'). [Skt कण्ट 'thorn']
- क़ीमा<sup>m</sup> 'minced meat'. क़ीमा करना 'to make mincemeat of' (either literally or metaphorically). [Persian *qīma* ]

- कुकुरमुत्ता<sup>m</sup> ‘mushroom’ (literally ‘dog’s piss’). [Skt ०मूत्र ]
- खिचड़ी<sup>f</sup> ‘a dish of boiled rice and dal cooked together, especially as the diet for a sick person’. (‘Kedgerie’, the Anglo-Indian derivative, substitutes fish and egg for the dal.) Metaphorically, ‘a hotch-potch, a mish-mash (French ‘salade’); ‘a mixed form of language’; खिचड़ी पकाना ‘to cook up a plan, to plot’. [Skt किञ्चा]
- खीर<sup>m</sup> ‘milk and rice pudding’. टेढ़ी खीर ‘a difficult task, a tough nut to crack’. [Skt क्षीर ‘milk’]
- गिलास<sup>m</sup> ‘a glass, cup — anything to drink from’. [Eng. ‘glass’]
- घी<sup>m</sup> ‘ghee, clarified butter used in cooking’ (increasingly substituted by vegetable-based oils and fats, ghee being both expensive and unhealthy even if prestigious and luxurious). घी के दीये/चिराग जलाना ‘to celebrate’ (literally ‘to light ghee lamps’); पाँचों उंगली घी में होना ‘to be enjoying good times, to be in clover’ (literally ‘to have all five fingers in the ghee’).
- चटनी<sup>f</sup> ‘chutney’ — a loan from Hindi to English. चटनी करना ‘to mash, to reduce to a pulp’. [Skt \*चट्ट- ‘to lick, taste’]
- चना<sup>m</sup> ‘chickpea, gram’. लोहे के चने चबाना ‘to do an arduous task’ (literally ‘to chew iron chickpeas’). [Skt चण ]
- चम्मच<sup>m</sup> ‘spoon’. Cf. चमचा ‘a sycophant, yes-man’. [Skt चमस ‘sacrificial ladle’ ?]
- चाय<sup>f</sup> ‘tea’. [See Hobson-Jobson, ‘tea’, for etymology of both ‘tea’ and चाय / चा ]
- चावल<sup>m</sup> ‘rice’. Used in the plural in expressions such as मैंने चावल बनाए हैं ‘I have prepared rice’. Compare also भात ‘boiled rice’, and धान ‘paddy, the rice plant’.
- छुरी<sup>f</sup> ‘knife’. बगल में छुरी मुँह में राम-राम a wolf in sheep’s clothing, a pleasant exterior concealing hidden malevolence (literally ‘a knife at one’s side, a greeting on the lips’).
- तवा<sup>m</sup> ‘griddle, convex metal plate on which roti etc is baked’. तवे की बूद something which lasts only a very short time, a flash in the pan (literally ‘a drop [of water] on the griddle’). [Skt \*तपक]
- दाल<sup>f</sup> ‘lentil, split pea’ — the staple vegetarian food, rich in protein. The word is from the same root as दल ‘faction, group, political party’, with which it shares the

‘split’ sense. Principal varieties of dal include मूँग की दाल ‘green lentils’ (मूँग की दाल खानेवाला ‘a wimp, a weakling’ — usually applied to a baniya); अरहर की दाल ‘pigeon pea’. Other idioms include: दाल में (कुछ) काला होना ‘something fishy to be going on, something to be amiss’; दाल गलना ‘a trick to succeed, a move to come off’ (literally ‘dal to soften’). [Skt दाल ]

नमक<sup>m</sup> ‘salt’. (किसी का) नमक खाना ‘to eat (someone’s) salt’, i.e. to receive patronage or sustenance from someone, and consequently to be indebted to that person; hence नमक-हराम ‘unfaithful, disloyal, ungrateful’ (to those who provide one’s subsistence). नमकीन (as adj.) ‘salty, savoury, pretty, good-looking’ (this sense has a parallel in Skt/Hindi लावण्य ‘loveliness’, from Skt लवण ‘salt’.); (as noun) savoury snack. घाव पर नमक छिड़कना ‘to pour salt on the wounds’. [Persian *namak* ]

नान<sup>f</sup> ‘nan, thick unleavened bread cooked on the side of a *tandūr* (earthenware oven)’. Cf. नानवाइ<sup>m</sup> ‘baker, nan-seller’. [Persian *nān* ]

नारंगी<sup>f</sup> ‘an orange’. The word is cognate with English ‘orange’, Italian ‘arancia’, Spanish ‘naranja’ etc: loss of initial ‘n-’ in some of these forms is probably due to confusion with the indefinite article, on the lines of ‘a norange > an orange’ (this is a reverse case to that of ‘algebra’ (Arabic *al-jabr*) and ‘alchemy’ (Arabic *al-kīmīyā*) where the definite article *al-* has become agglutinated to the noun in the borrowed form of the word). [Skt नारंग; Persian *nāranj*]

पापड़<sup>m</sup> ‘poppadum, a thin round fried crispbread’. (The English form is from Tamil *poppatam*.) पापड़ बेलना to be in dire straits, to have a very difficult task (literally ‘to roll poppadums’). [?]

प्याला<sup>m</sup> ‘cup’. Associated with the imagery of the ‘drinking cup’ in Persian poetry; in everyday use, the English loanwords कप or गिलास are often preferred. [Persian *pyāla* ]

भाजी<sup>f</sup> ‘vegetables (especially fried)’. [Skt भर्जित ]

मसाला<sup>m</sup> ‘spice’. मसालेदार ‘spicy, seasoned’. मसाला फ़िल्म ‘a formula film lavishly spiced with sex and violence’ . [Arabic *maṣāleḥ* ]

मूली<sup>f</sup> ‘radish; anything worthless’; (किसी को) मूली-गाजर समझना ‘to regard (someone) as worthless’ (literally ‘to regard as a radish or a carrot’). The range of senses

- of मूल is parallel to that of English ‘root’, Latin ‘radix’: hence adj. ‘radical’ etc.)  
[Skt मूल]
- मेवा<sup>m</sup> ‘dry fruit’. कर सेवा खा मेवा ‘service entitles one to reward’. [Persian *mewa* ]
- रस<sup>m</sup> ‘juice, essence’. The word is used very widely in a range of metaphorical senses, including the extended meaning ‘aesthetic relish, flavour, enjoyment’, often with erotic and/or metaphysical overtones. [Skt]
- रसभरी<sup>f</sup> ‘raspberry’. Literally ‘full of juice’ — probably used in the specific sense of ‘raspberry’ through the irresistible parallel of the English word. [Skt]
- राई<sup>f</sup> ‘mustard, mustard seed’; an image of something infinitely small, as in राई भर ‘a very small quantity’, राई का पर्वत बनाना ‘to make a mountain out of a molehill’. [Skt राजिका ]
- रायता<sup>m</sup> ‘raita, a mixture of yoghurt with vegetable’. Note from the etymology that the word is related to राई, which was once an ingredient. [Skt \*राजिकातिकक ]
- रोटी<sup>f</sup> the generic name for bread of all kinds. रोजी रोटी ‘daily bread’; रोटी कपड़ा ‘means of subsistence, the necessities of life’; रोटी कमाना ‘to earn one’s livelihood’; रोटी-दाल चलाना ‘to make ends meet, to manage somehow’. Cf. डबल रोटी ‘English loaf, western-style bread’ (with डबल ‘double’ here meaning ‘fat, swollen’). [Skt \*रोट्ट ]
- लड्डू<sup>m</sup> ‘a heavy spherical sweetmeat’ (of which Ganesh was/is particularly fond). दोनों हाथ लड्डू होना ‘to be winning on all fronts, to be doing really well’; मन के लड्डू खाना ‘to be lost in false hopes, to build castles in the air’; लड्डू खिलाना ‘to give a feast, to treat’. [Skt लड्डु ]
- शाकाहारी<sup>m/adj.</sup> ‘vegetarian’. [Skt, शाक ‘vegetable’ + अहार ‘food’; cf. साग ]
- साग<sup>m</sup> ‘vegetables, greens, spinach’. [Skt शाक ]
- सब्ज़ी<sup>f</sup> ‘vegetable’ [Persian *sabz* ‘green, fresh’].
- सूप<sup>m</sup> ‘soup’. Though the word appears in the very same form in Vedic Sanskrit, its usage in modern Hindi is as a loan from English.
- हल्दी<sup>f</sup> ‘turmeric’. हल्दी लगना ‘a wedding to take place’ (from the tradition of smearing bride and groom with turmeric); हल्दी लगाकर बैठना ‘to sit pretty, to sit idle’. [Skt हरिः]

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हलवा<sup>m</sup> ‘halwa’, a generic name for numerous varieties of sweetmeat or pudding. हलवा निकालना ‘to beat severely, make mincemeat of’ (cf. क्रीमा करना). [Arabic *ḥalwā*].