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.


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

### Hindi Terms

- आटा (àta) — *wholemeal flour*. आटे दान 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 *ात्]

- क्रीमा (kriama) — *fork* (also ‘thorn, spike’). [Skt कणट ‘thorn’]

- क्रीमा (kriama) — *minced meat*. क्रीमा करना ‘to make mincemeat of’ (either literally or metaphorically). [Persian qîma]
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कुकुरमुत्ता m ‘mushroom’ (literally ‘dog’s piss’). [Skt मृत्]

खिचड़ी f ‘a dish of boiled rice and dal cooked together, especially as the diet for a sick person’. (‘Kedgeree’, 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 किच्का]

खीर m ‘milk and rice pudding’. टेस्टी खीर ‘a difficult task, a tough nut to crack’. [Skt कीर ‘milk’]

गिलास m ‘a glass, cup — anything to drink from’. [Eng. ‘glass’]

घी m ‘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 दोपहर जलाना ‘to celebrate’ (literally ‘to light ghee lamps’); पांचौं उगली घी में होना ‘to be enjoying good times, to be in clover’ (literally ‘to have all five fingers in the ghee’).

चटनी f ‘chutney’ — a loan from Hindi to English. चटनी करना ‘to mash, to reduce to a pulp’. [Skt *चट- ‘to lick, taste’]

चना m ‘chickpea, gram’. लोहे के चने चबाना ‘to do an arduous task’ (literally ‘to chew iron chickpeas’). [Skt चण]

चमचा m ‘spoon’. Cf. चमचा ‘a sycophant, yes-man’. [Skt चमस ‘sacrificial ladle’?]

चाय f ‘tea’. [See Hobson-Jobson, ‘tea’, for etymology of both ‘tea’ and चाय / चा]

चावल m ‘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’.

छूटी f ‘knife’. बगल में छूटी मूंह 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’).

तबा m ‘griddle, convex metal plate on which roti etc is baked’। तबा की बूढ़ी something which lasts only a very short time, a flash in the pan (literally ‘a drop [of water] on the griddle’). [Skt तापक]

दाल f ‘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
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‘split’ sense. Principal varieties of dal include मूंग की दाल ‘green lentils’ (मूंग 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 ‘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 लवण ‘loveliness’, from Skt लवण ‘salt’); (as noun) savoury snack. याच पर नमक फिडकना ‘to pour salt on the wounds’. [Persian namak]

नान ‘nan, thick unleavened bread cooked on the side of a tandūr (earthenware oven’). Cf. नानवाई ‘baker, nan-seller’. [Persian nān]

नारंगी ‘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-jebr) 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]

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

प्याला ‘cup’. Associated with the imagery of the ‘drinking cup’ in Persian poetry; in everyday use, the English loanwords जप or जिलास are often preferred. [Persian pyāla]

भाजी ‘vegetables (especially fried’). [Skt भज्जि]

मसाला ‘spice’. मसालेदार ‘spicy, seasoned’. मसाला फिल्म ‘a formula film lavishly spiced with sex and violence’. [Arabic mašāleh]

मूंटी ‘radish; anything worthless’; (किसी को) मूंटी-गाजर समझना ‘to regard (someone) as worthless’ (literally ‘to regard as a radish or a carrot’). The range of senses
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of मूल is parallel to that of English ‘root’, Latin ‘radix’: hence adj. ‘radical’ etc.) [Skt मूल]

मेवा m  ‘dry fruit’. कर सेवा बा मेवा ‘service entitles one to reward’. [Persian mewa]

रस m  ‘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 f  ‘raspberry’. Literally ‘full of juice’ — probably used in the specific sense of ‘raspberry’ through the irresistible parallel of the English word. [Skt]

राइ f  ‘mustard, mustard seed’; an image of something infinitely small, as in राइ भर ‘a very small quantity’, राइ का पर्वत बनाना ‘to make a mountain out of a molehill’. [Skt राजिका]

रायता m  ‘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 f  the generic name for bread of all kinds. रोटी रोटी ‘daily bread’; रोटी कपड़ा ‘means of subsistence, the necessities of life’; रोटी कमाना ‘to earn one’s livelihood’; रोटी-धाल चलाना ‘to make ends meet, to manage somehow’. Cf. दबल रोटी ‘English loaf, western-style bread’ (with दबल ‘double’ here meaning ‘fat, swollen’). [Skt रोटू]

लड़ू m  ‘a heavy spherical sweetmeat’ (of which Ganesh was/is particularly fond). रोनों हाथ लड़ू होना ‘to be winning on all fronts, to be doing really well’; मन के लड़ू खाना ‘to be lost in false hopes, to build castles in the air’; लड़ू खिलाना ‘to give a feast, to treat’. [Skt लडू]

शाकाहारी m/adj. ‘vegetarian’. [Skt, शाक ‘vegetable’ + अहार ‘food’; cf. साग]

साग m  ‘vegetables, greens, spinach’. [Skt शाक]

सबजी f  ‘vegetable’ [Persian sabz ‘green, fresh’].

सूप m  ‘soup’. Though the word appears in the very same form in Vedic Sanskrit, its usage in modern Hindi is as a loan from English.

हरिय f  ‘turmeric’. हरिय लगाना ‘a wedding to take place’ (from the tradition of smearing bride and groom with turmeric); हरिय लगाकर बैठना ‘to sit pretty, to sit idle’. [Skt हरिया]
‘halwa’, a generic name for numerous varieties of sweetmeat or pudding. निकालना ‘to beat severely, make mincemeat of’ (cf. कोमा करना). [Arabic halwā].