



**ETHNIC COUNCIL
OF SHEPPARTON AND DISTRICT Inc.**

Reg. No. A6321

Punjabi Community Profile



August 2016

Punjabis

The Punjabis, also spelt Panjabis, are an ethnic group of Indo-Aryan peoples, originating from the Punjab region, found in Pakistan and northern India. Punjab literally means the land of five waters (Persian: panj ("five") āb ("waters")). The name of the region was introduced by the Turko-Persian conquerors of India and more formally popularized during the Mughal Empire. Punjab is often referred to as the breadbasket in both Pakistan and India.

The coalescence of the various tribes, castes and the inhabitants of the Punjab into a broader common "Punjabi" identity initiated from the onset of the 18th century CE. Prior to that the sense and perception of a common "Punjabi" ethno-cultural identity and community did not exist, even though the majority of the various communities of the Punjab had long shared linguistic, cultural and racial commonalities.

Traditionally, Punjabi identity is primarily linguistic, geographical and cultural. Its identity is independent of historical origin or religion, and refers to those who reside in the Punjab region, or associate with its population, and those who consider the Punjabi language their mother tongue. Integration and assimilation are important parts of Punjabi culture, since Punjabi identity is not based solely on tribal connections. More or less all Punjabis share the same cultural background.

Historically, the Punjabi people were a heterogeneous group and were subdivided into a number of clans called biradari (literally meaning "brotherhood") or tribes, with each person bound to a clan. However, Punjabi identity also included those who did not belong to any of the historical tribes. With the passage of time tribal structures are coming to an end and are being replaced with a more cohesive and holistic society. That is why community building and group cohesiveness form the new pillars of Punjabi society.

History of Punjab

Indigenous population flourished in this region, near the gateways to other continents, leading to a developed civilization in 5th to 4th millennium BC, the ancient Indus Valley Civilization. Also Buddhism remnants have been found like Mankiala which corroborate the Buddhist background of this region as well.

The remains of the ancient Indo-Aryan city of Taxila, and many ornaments that have been found in this region suggests that, one of the centers of Indus Valley Civilization was established at many parts of Punjab most notably were Taxila and Harappa, Punjab became a center of early civilisation from around 3300 BC. According to Historians this region was ruled by many small kingdoms and tribes around 4th and 5th BC. The earliest known notable

local king of this region was known as King Porus and he fought a famous Battle of the Hydaspes against Alexander. His kingdom, known as Pauravas, was situated between Hydaspes (modern Jhelum) and Acesines (modern day Chenab). These kings fought local battles to gain more ground. Taxiles or Omphis another local North Indian king, wanted to defeat his eastern adversary Porus in a turf war and he invited Alexander the Great to defeat Porus. This marked the first intrusion of the West in the Indian subcontinent and North India in general. But such was the valor of Porus and his kingdom forces in Punjab, that despite being defeated, he was appreciated by Alexander the Great for his skill and valor and he was granted further territories in the North. The other Indian kings did not like the fact that Porus was now an ally of Western forces. In less than ten years another Indian king Chandragupta Maurya defeated the forces and conquered the Northern Indian regions up to the Kabul River (in modern-day Afghanistan). Alexander mostly ruled this land with the help of local allies like Porus.

Centuries later, areas of the Punjab region were ruled by local kings followed by the Ghaznavids, Ghurids, Mughals, and others. Islam arrived in Punjab when the Muslim Umayyad army led by Muhammad bin Qasim conquered Sindh in 711 AD, by defeating Raja Dahir. Some of the Muslims are said to have settled in the region and adopted the local culture. Centuries later, the Ghaznavids introduced aspects of foreign Persian and Turkic culture in Punjab.

The earliest written Punjabi dates back to the writing of Sufi Muslim poets of the 11th Century. Its literature spread Punjab's unique voice of peace and spirituality to the entire civilization of the region.

Regions of North India and Punjab were annexed into the Afghan Durrani Empire later on in 1747, being a vulnerable target. But Afghan rule in Punjab was very short lived as many local tribal people like Gakhars fought against Afghan rule and took the lands back. The grandson of Ahmed Shah Durrani (Zaman Shah Durrani), lost it to Ranjit Singh, a Punjabi Sikh. He was born in 1780 to Maha Singh and Raj Kaur in Gujranwala, Punjab. Ranjit took a leading role in organising a Sikh militia and got control of the Punjab region from Zaman Shah Durrani. Ranjit started a Punjabi military expedition to expand his territory. Under his command the Sikh army began invading neighboring territories outside of Punjab. The Jamrud Fort at the entry of Khyber Pass was built by Ranjit Singh. The Sikh Empire slowly began to weaken after the death of Hari Singh Nalwa at the Battle of Jamrud in 1837. Two years later, in 1839, Ranjit Singh died and his son took over control of the empire. By 1850 the British took over control of the Punjab region after defeating the Sikhs in the Anglo-Sikh wars, establishing their rule over the region for around the next 100 years as a part of the British Raj. Many Sikhs and Punjabis later pledged their allegiance to the British, serving as sepoys (native soldiers) within the Raj.¹

Geographic Distribution

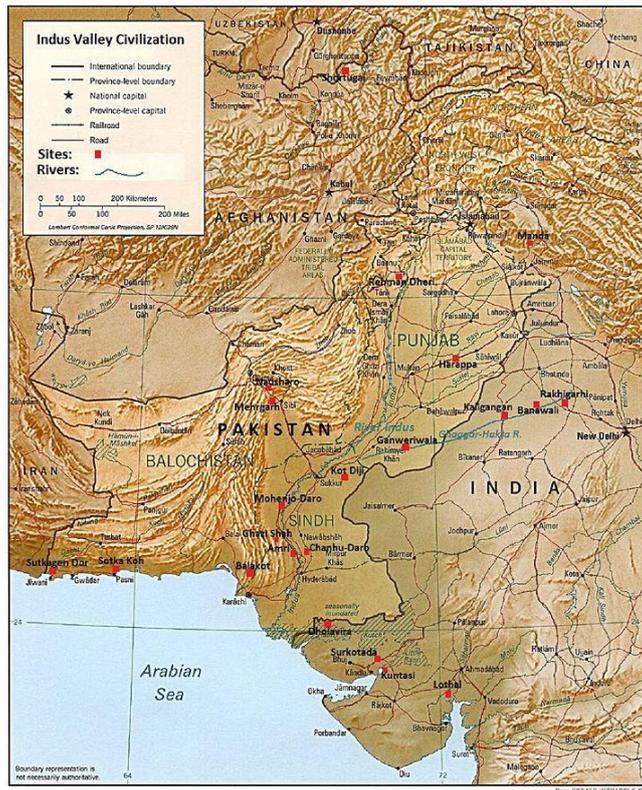
The 1947 independence of India and Pakistan, and the subsequent partition of Punjab, is considered by historians to be the beginning of the end of the British Empire. The UNHCR estimates 14 million Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims were displaced during the partition. To date, this is considered the largest mass migration in human history.

Until 1947, the province of Punjab was ruled by a coalition constituting of the Indian National Congress, the Sikh-led Shiromani Akali Dal and the Unionist Muslim League. However, the growth of Muslim nationalism led to the All India Muslim League becoming the dominant party in the 1946 elections. As Muslim separatism increased, the opposition from Punjabi Hindus and Sikhs increased substantially. Communal violence on the eve of Indian independence led to the dismissal of the coalition government, although the succeeding League ministry was unable to form a majority. Along with the province of Bengal, Punjab was partitioned on religious lines – the Muslim-majority West becoming part of the new Muslim state of Pakistan, and the Hindu and Sikh East remaining in India. Partition was accompanied by massive violence on both sides, claiming the lives of hundreds of thousands of people. West Punjab was virtually cleansed of its Hindu and Sikh populations, who were forced to leave for India, while East Punjab and Delhi were virtually cleansed of the Muslim population.

By the 1960s, Indian Punjab underwent reorganisation as Sikh demands for an autonomous state increased. The Hindu-majority areas were formed into the states of Himachal Pradesh and Haryana respectively, making Sikhs the majority in the state of Punjab itself. In the 1980s, Sikh separatism combined with popular anger against the Indian Army's counter-insurgency operations (especially Operation Bluestar) led to violence and disorder in Indian Punjab, which only subsided in the 1990s. Political power in Indian Punjab is contested between the secular Congress Party and the Sikh religious party Akali Dal and its allies, the Bharatiya Janata Party. Indian Punjab remains one of the most prosperous of India's states and is considered the "breadbasket of India."

Subsequent to partition, West Punjabis made up a majority of the Pakistani population, and the Punjab province constituted 40% of Pakistan's total land mass. Today, Punjabis continue to be the largest ethnic group in Pakistan, accounting for half of the country's population. They reside predominantly in the province of Punjab, neighbouring Azad Kashmir in the region of Jammu and Kashmir and in Islamabad Capital Territory. Punjabis are also found in large communities in the largest city of Pakistan, Karachi, located in the Sindh province.

Punjabis in India can be found in the states of Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Delhi and the Union Territory of Chandigarh. Large communities of Punjabis are also found in the Jammu region of Jammu and Kashmir and in Rajasthan, Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh.¹



Population

Total population

Punjabis: [c. 140 million](#)
 Punjabi diaspora: c. 10 million

Regions with significant populations

	Pakistan	93,500,000 (2009)
	India	Approx. 44,000,000 (2011)
	United Kingdom	2,100,000 (1994)
	Punjabi-speaking only:	
	Canada	430,705 (2011)
	United States	250,000 (2009)
	Australia	71,228 (2011)
	New Zealand	19,752 (2013)

Pakistani Punjabis

Punjabis make up about half of the population of Pakistan. The Punjabis found in Pakistan belong to groups known as biradaris. In addition, Punjabi society is divided into two divisions, the zamindar groups or qoums, traditionally associated with farming and the moeens, who are traditionally artisans. Some zamindars are further divided into groups such as the Mughals, Rajputs, Jats, Shaikhs or (Muslim Khatri), Gujjars, Awans, Arains, Malik, Gakhars, Dogars and Mian Rehmani. People from neighbouring regions, such as Kashmiris, Pashtun and Baluch, also form important elements in the Punjabi population. Major Moeen groups include the Lohar, Khateek, Rawal, Chhimba Darzi, Teli, Qassab, Mallaah, Dhobi, Muslim Sunars, Mirasi, who are associated with a particular crafts or occupation.

Punjabi people have traditionally and historically been farmers and soldiers, which has transferred into modern times with their dominance of agriculture and military fields in Pakistan. In addition, Punjabis in Pakistan have been quite prominent politically, having had many elected members of parliament. As the most ardent supporters of a Pakistani state, the Punjabis in Pakistan have shown a strong predilection towards the adoption of the Urdu language but nearly all speak Punjabi, and still identify themselves as ethnic Punjabis. Religious homogeneity remains elusive as a predominant Islamic Sunni-Shia population with Ahmadiyya and Christian minority. A variety of related sub-groups exist in Pakistan and are often considered by many Pakistani Punjabis to be simply regional Punjabis including the Seraikis (who overlap and are often considered transitional with the Sindhis).

The recent definition of Punjabi people, in Pakistani Punjab, is not based on racial classification, common ancestry or endogamy, but based on geographical and cultural basis and thus makes it a unique definition. In Pakistani Punjab, there is not a great emphasis on a single dialect of the language and Pakistani Punjabis speak many distinct dialects, which include Hindko, Seraiki, Potohari or Pahari and still identify themselves as Punjabis. People from a few provinces of Pakistan have made Punjab their home in recent times and now their consecutive generations identify themselves as Punjabis. The largest community to assimilate in Punjabi culture and now identify themselves as Punjabis are Kashmiris which include noted personalities like Nawaz Sharif, Sheikh Rasheed, Hamid Mir and the most noted poet Muhammad Iqbal, to name a few. The second largest community after Kashmiris are people of India, who identify themselves as Punjabis. The other communities to assimilate in Punjabis include Baloch who can be found throughout Punjab, and Baltis. The welcoming nature of Punjab have led to successful integration of almost all ethnic groups in Punjab over time. The Urdu, Punjabi and other language speakers who arrived in Punjab in 1947 have now assimilated and their second and third generations identify themselves as Punjabis even though it is not the same in Sindh Pakistan where they form distinct ethnic groups.¹

Indian Punjabis

The Punjabi-speaking people make 2.83% of India's population as of 2001. The total number of Indian Punjabis is unknown due to the fact that ethnicity is not recorded in the Census of India. The Sikhs are largely concentrated in the modern-day state of Punjab forming 58% of the population with Hindus forming 38%. In Haryana, Hindus form 87% of the population with Muslims at 7% and Sikhs at 5%. In Himachal Pradesh, Hindus constitute 95% of the population with Muslims at 2% at Sikhs and Buddhists at 1% each. Ethnic Punjabis are believed to account for at least 35% of Delhi's total population and are predominantly Hindi-speaking Punjabi Hindus. Muslims in Delhi are 13% of the population. In Chandigarh, 80.78% people of the population are Hindus, 13.11% are Sikhs, 4.87% are Muslims and minorities are Christians, Buddhists and Jains.

Like the Punjabi Muslim society, these various castes are associated with particular occupations or crafts.

Indian Punjab is also home to small groups of Muslims and Christian. Most of the East Punjab's Muslims (in today's states of Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Delhi and Chandigarh) left for West Punjab in 1947. However, a small community still exists today, mainly in Malerkotla and Qadian , the only Muslim princely state among the seven that formed the erstwhile Patiala and East Punjab States Union (PEPSU). The other six (mostly Sikh) states were: Patiala, Nabha, Jind, Faridkot, Kapurthala and Kalsia.

The Indian censuses record the native languages, but not the descent of the citizens. Linguistic data cannot accurately predict ethnicity: for example, Punjabis make up a large portion of Delhi's population but many descendants of the Punjabi Hindu refugees who came to Delhi following the partition of India now speak Hindi natively. Thus, there is no concrete official data on the ethnic makeup of Delhi and other Indian states.

The Punjab region within India maintains a strong influence on the perceived culture of India towards the rest of the world. Numerous Bollywood film productions use the Punjabi language in their songs and dialogue as well as traditional dances such as bhangra. Bollywood has been dominated by Punjabi artists including Raj Kapoor, Dev Anand, Vinod Khanna, Dharmendra, Shammi Kapoor, Rishi Kapoor, Shashi Kapoor, Kabir Bedi, Rajesh Khanna, Pran, Prem Chopra, Vinod Mehra, Manoj Kumar, Akshay Kumar Sunny Deol, Anil Kapoor, Poonam Dhillon, Juhi Chawla and Kareena Kapoor. Punjabi Prime Ministers of India include Gulzarilal Nanda, Inder Kumar Gujral and Dr. Manmohan Singh. There are numerous players in the Indian cricket team both past and present including Bishen Singh Bedi, Kapil Dev, Mohinder Amarnath, Navjot Sidhu, Harbhajan Singh, Yuvraj Singh Virat Kohli, and Yograj Singh.¹

Emigration & Diaspora

The Punjabi people have emigrated in large numbers to many parts of the world. In the early 20th century, many Punjabis began settling in the United States, including independence activists who formed the Ghadar Party. The United Kingdom has a significant number of Punjabis from both Pakistan and India as does Canada (specifically Vancouver and Toronto) and the United States, (specifically California's Central Valley). In the 1970s, a large wave of emigration of Punjabis (predominately from Pakistan) began to the Middle East, in places such as the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. There are also large communities in East Africa including the countries of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. Punjabis have also emigrated to Australia, New Zealand and Southeast Asia including Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore and Hong Kong.¹

History of Punjab

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Map showing the sites and extent of the Indus Valley Civilisation. Harappa was the center of one of the core regions of the Indus Valley Civilization, located in central Punjab. The Harappan architecture and Harappan Civilization was one of the most developed in the old Bronze Age.

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Religion

People of Punjab remained tolerant throughout the history and that is why many different religious ideologies were tolerated there despite some uproar by some religious extremists. The region of Punjab is the birthplace of one monotheistic religion that is known as Sikhism. Also many well-known followers of Sufism were born in Punjab.

Due to religious tensions, emigration between Punjabi people started far before the partition and dependable records. Shortly prior to the Partition of British India, Punjab had a slight majority Muslim population at about 53.2% in 1941, which was an increase from the previous years. With the division of Punjab and the subsequent independence of Pakistan and later India, mass migrations of Muslims from Indian Punjab to Pakistan, and those of Sikhs and Hindus from Pakistan to Indian Punjab occurred. Today, the majority of Pakistani Punjabis follow Islam with a small Christian minority, while the majority of Indian Punjabis are either Sikhs or Hindus with a Muslim minority. Punjab is also the birthplace of Sikhism and the Islamic reform movement Ahmadiyya.

Following the independence of Pakistan and the subsequent partition of British India, a process of population exchange took place in 1947 as Muslims began to leave India and headed to the newly created Pakistan and Hindus and Sikhs left Pakistan for the newly created state of India. As a result of these population exchanges, both parts are now relatively homogeneous, where religion is concerned. ¹

Culture

Punjabi culture is the culture of the Punjab region. It is one of the oldest and richest cultures in world history, dating from ancient antiquity to the modern era. The Punjabi culture is the culture of the Punjabi people, who are now distributed throughout the world. The scope, history, sophistication and complexity of the culture are vast. Some of the main areas include Punjabi poetry, philosophy, spirituality, artistry, dance, music, cuisine, military weaponry, architecture, languages, traditions, values and history. Historically, the Punjab/Punjabis, in addition to their rural-agrarian lands and culture, have also enjoyed a unique urban cultural development in two great cities, Lahore and Amritsar. ¹

Language

Punjabi is the most spoken language in Pakistan and eleventh most spoken language in India. According to the Ethnologue 2005 estimate, there are 130 million native speakers of the Punjabi language, which makes it the ninth most widely spoken language in the world. According to the 2008 Census of Pakistan, there are approximately 76,335,300 native speakers of Punjabi in Pakistan, and according to the Census of India, there are over 29,102,477 Punjabi speakers in India. Punjabi is also spoken as a minority language in several other countries where Punjabis have emigrated in large numbers, such as the United Kingdom (where it is the second most commonly used language) and Canada, in which Punjabi has now become the fourth most spoken language after English, French and Chinese, due to the rapid growth of immigrants from Pakistan and India. There are also sizeable communities in the United States, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Persian Gulf countries, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, Australia and New Zealand.

Punjabis are linguistically and culturally related to the other Indo-Aryan peoples of South Asia. There are an estimated 102 million Punjabi speakers around the world. If regarded as an ethnic group, they are among the world's largest. In South Asia, they are the second largest ethnic group after the Bengali People.

The main language of the Punjabi people is Punjabi and its associated dialects, which differ depending on the region of Punjab the speaker is from; there are notable differences in the Lahnda languages, spoken in the Pakistani Punjab. In the Pakistani Punjab, the vast majority still speak Punjabi, even though the language has no governmental support. In the Indian Punjab, most people speak Punjabi. English is sometimes used, and older people who lived in the undivided Punjab may be able to speak and write in Urdu. The Punjabi languages have always absorbed numerous loanwords from surrounding areas and provinces (and from English).

Indian Community in Australia

Between 1800 and 1860, Indians were brought to Australia to work as labourers and domestic workers.

Between 1860 and 1901 many arrived to work as agricultural labourers and hawkers, particularly in country towns. A number also worked in the goldfields.

They were mainly Sikhs and Muslims from the Punjab region in northwest India with many settling in Woolgoolga on the New South Wales north central coast. Today, the Sikh settlement in Woolgoolga is one of the largest rurally based Indian communities in Australia.

Migration from India was curtailed after immigration restrictions were introduced in 1901. Following India's independence from Britain in 1947, the number of Anglo-Indians and India-born British citizens immigrating to Australia increased.

The easing of immigration restrictions in the late 1960s saw an increase in non-European Indians migrating to Australia. By 1981, the India-born population reached 41 657 and the new arrivals included professionals such as doctors, teachers, computer programmers and engineers.

Unlike the early settlers, those arriving after the 1960s came from many parts of India belonging to various religious, linguistic and cultural groups. Today, India is one of the top three source countries of migrants to Australia.

The latest Census in 2011 recorded 295,362 India-born people in Australia, an increase of 100.8 per cent from the 2006 Census. The 2011 distribution by state and territory showed Victoria had the largest number with 111 787 followed by New South Wales (95 387), Queensland (30 259) and Western Australia (29,915).

The main languages spoken at home by India-born people in Australia were English (62,862), Hindi (59,055) and Punjabi (57,144).²

Punjabi Sikh Community in the Goulburn Valley

Punjabi Sikhs started settling in the Goulburn Valley region in early 1980s. Most Punjabis are settled in and around Shepparton, which is the main city in the Goulburn Valley. Sikhs started settling here attracted by availability of work in fruit orchards. First Punjabi Sikhs to settle here were farm hands who could find plenty of work in the form of pruning fruit trees and fruit picking in orchards. After working as farm workers for a few years they started buying rundown small orchards in partnership with their friends or relatives. About 15 Punjabi Sikh families now own orchards, vegetable farms or cropping farms varying in size from 50 to 250 acres. Punjabi professionals started settling here in early 1990s. Community was only 25-30 families strong till late 1990s.

Gurduara Sahib project was stated in May 1999, when its idea was raised at the end of a Punjabi Sikh growers meeting at Shepparton. After this meeting The Punjabi Cultural Association was registered. The Association started raising funds for buying land for building a Gurduara in the area. Sikh community donated with open hearts for this cause and some money was raised from other Sikh population areas in Australia. A two acre piece of land was bought in year 2001 on the main Shepparton to Melbourne bypass. In the same year, Sikh religious services were started from a small two bed room rented unit and parkash of *Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji* was done. A regular priest was appointed in 2006. Work for the new building for Gurduara Sahib started in 2005 and finished in 2008.

First Indian grocery shop was opened in 2002. The Victorian School of Language stated their Punjabi language class in Shepparton in year 2003.

In the meantime many Punjabi Sikhs migrated from New Zealand to settle in Shepparton and surrounding small towns. Many students came to the area in search of temporary work and settled here after getting permanent residency. These two events helped in quick growth of Punjabi Sikh community in the Goulburn Valley. Many professionals also found job opportunities in the area and settled permanently. The already settled Punjabi population, climate similar to Punjab and presence of *Gurduara Sahib* also attracted many more Punjabis to settle in the area. The number of Punjabi Sikh families living in Greater Shepparton District has now crossed the 200 mark.³

Frist Punjabis settled in the area were mostly working in the Horticulture industry as casual workers, however many of whom bought their own orchards later on. Now Punjabis are working in various professions and there are doctors, engineers, teachers, accountants, social workers and drivers etc.

Website: <http://www.gnssshepparton.org.au>

Gurdwara Sahib (Sikh Place of Worship)

Gurduara Sahib in Shepparton is the main religious center of the Sikh community settled in the Goulburn Valley region. It serves the needs of Sikhs in a radius of about 60 kilometers. Three main Diwans (prayer services) are held in the Gurduara Sahib every week i.e. Wednesday evening, Saturday very early morning (Assa Di Vaar) and Sunday morning to midday. Special Diwans are also held on auspicious occasions to celebrate Gurburabs (birth/martyrdom days of Sikh Gurus) and to listen to Ragis, Dhadis or Kathakaars (Sikh religious preachers) who are on a preaching visit to Australia. Apart from this Sikh Sangat uses Gurduara Sahib facilities for wedding, birthday or death ceremonies and prayer services.³

Issues

There are no significant issues identified in the Punjabi community in Shepparton.

However, there is a need of a crematory for the Punjabi Sikh community since their community is growing and the closest crematory is at least 1 hour away.

They also identified a need of a community hall. At this stage the community meets at the Sikh Gurudwara.

The community is also concerned about their identity since many Sikhs have been mistaken for Muslim people.

Contacts

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1 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Punjabis>

2 https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/02_2014/india.pdf

3 <http://www.gnssshepparton.org.au/about-us>