



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

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Punjabi Community Profile



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Punjab Background

The Punjabis 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”) ab (“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 populations 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 – such as Mankiala – which corroborates 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

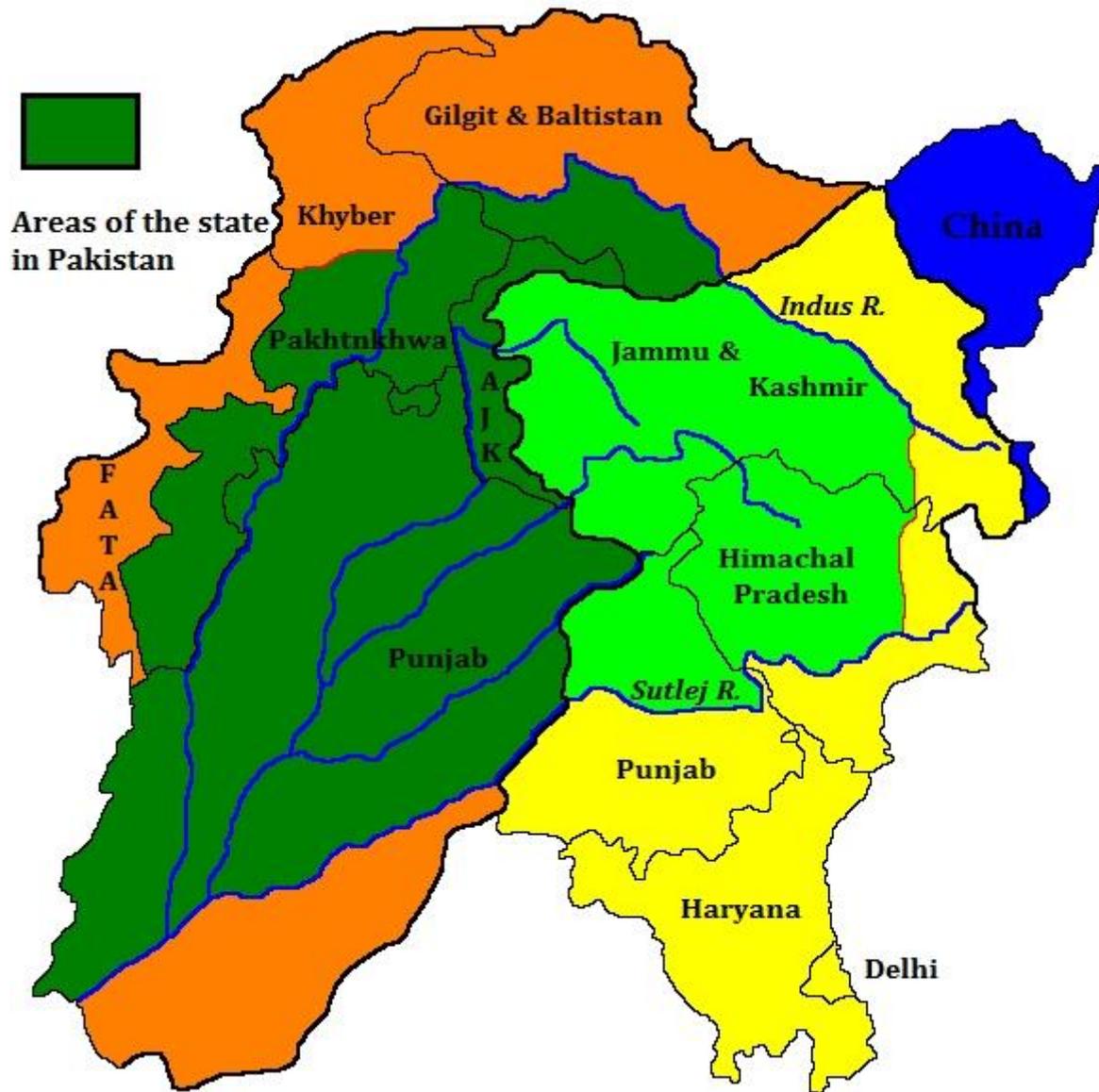
(modern Jhelum and Acesines (modern day Chenab). These kings fought local battles to gain more ground. Taxiles or Omphis another local North Indian king, wanted to defeat his eastern adversary Porus in a turf war and he invited Alexander the great to defeat Porus. This marked the first intrusion of the 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



Map of Punjab after partition

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 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 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."

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.

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)

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 Yagraj Singh.

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.

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.

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*. As a result of partition, both parts of the Punjab are now relatively homogeneous, where religion is concerned.

Culture

Punjabi culture is one of the oldest and richest cultures in world history, dating from ancient antiquity to the modern era. 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.

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 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. In South East Asia, they are the second largest ethnic group after the Bengali People.

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. There is a rich history of Sikhs travelling in the Outback as hawkers.

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 Indian-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 Census of 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 are English (62,862), Hindi (59,055) and Punjabi (57,144).

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. The 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 run-down 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. The local Punjabi community was only 25-30 families strong till late 1990s.



The Gurduara Sahib project (the Sikh Temple in Shepparton) commenced in May 1999, when the 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 (Sikh place of worship) 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 during 2001 on the main Shepparton to Melbourne bypass road. 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.

The first Indian grocery shop in Shepparton was opened in 2002. The Victorian School of Languages started their Punjabi language class in Shepparton during 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 facilitated growth of the Punjabi Sikh community in the Goulburn Valley. Many professionals also found job opportunities in the area and settled permanently. Those Punjabi who had settled earlier found the climate similar to Punjab in India and the 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 is currently thought to be more than 200 families.

Gurduwara Sahib (Sikh Place of Worship)



Gurduwara Sahib Shepparton

The Gurduwara Sahib in Shepparton is the religious centre 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 Gurduwara 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 Gurduwara Sahib facilities for wedding, birthday or death ceremonies and prayer services.

Issues

There are no significant issues identified in the Punjabi community in Shepparton. However, there is an identified need for a crematorium for the Punjabi Sikh community as they have specific burial rites. The community is growing (it is a community of secondary migration) and the closest crematorium is at least 1 hour away.

They have also identified the need for 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 Muslims.

Contacts

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