

## Backgrounder

### South Asian Canadians

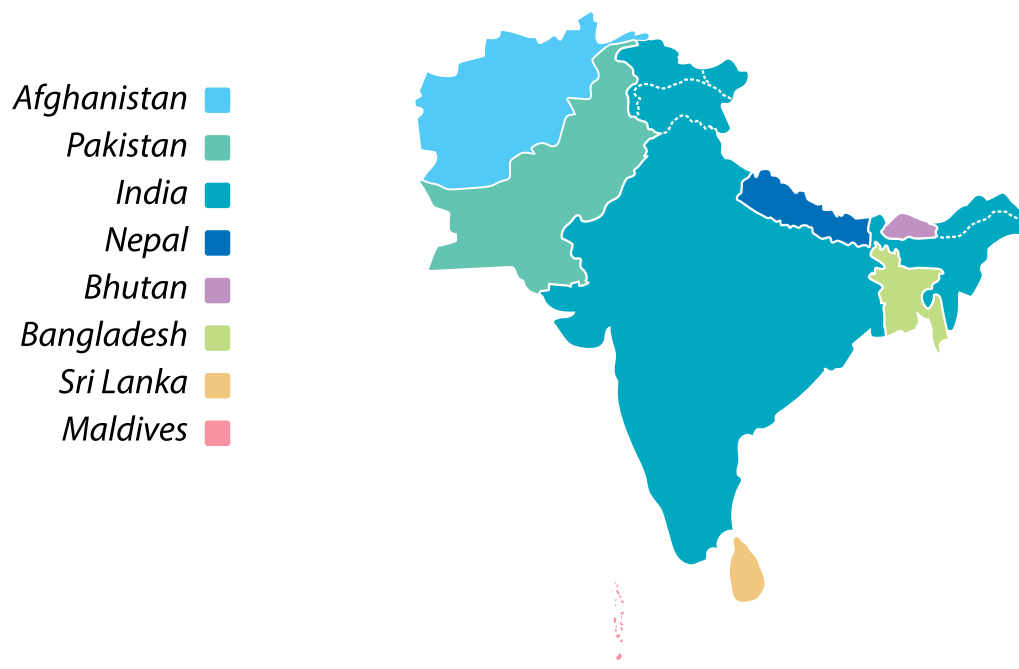


Image: iStock ID:64006046, credit: negoworks

Most South Asian Canadians' families originally came from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, or Sri Lanka. A few came from Afghanistan, Bhutan or Nepal.

People from South Asia have immigrated to different parts of the world including the Caribbean, South East Asia, East Africa, Great Britain and Canada.

South Asian Canadians are the second-largest visible minority group in Canada. (Chinese Canadians are the first.) In the 2016 census, almost 2 million Canadians reported South Asian heritage.

## Ethnic Backgrounds

South Asians come from many different backgrounds.

These include:

- Afghani
- Bangladeshi
- Bengali
- Bhutanese
- Goan
- Gujarati
- Hindu
- Ismaili
- Kashmiri
- Nepali
- Pakistani
- Punjabi
- Sikh
- Sinhalese
- Sri Lankan
- Tamil

## Languages

South Asia has one of the most language groups in the world. More than 650 languages are spoken there. In Canada, South Asians speak more than 75 different languages. Punjabi is the most common, followed by Hindi, Tamil, Urdu, Gujarati, and Bengali.

## Religions

Religion is important to many South Asians. Most South Asian Canadians are Sikh, Hindu, or Muslim. Others are Buddhists or Christians. South Asians of different religions have settled in different parts of Canada. Most South Asians living in BC are Sikh.

## Importance of Family and Community

South Asians have a wide variety of cultural backgrounds. A strong sense of family belonging is common among most. Many South Asian Canadian families live in households with grandparents, parents, siblings, and other relatives. More elderly South Asians live in homes with their families than most other seniors in Canada.

A sense of community is also important to South Asian Canadians. Customs and traditions of South Asia are enthusiastically celebrated.

These include:

- Cultural and religious holidays
- Traditional foods
- Eclectic music
- Many art forms





Image: University of Washington, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

Sikh men at the Vancouver train station.

## The First South Asian Canadians

In 1903, the first South Asian immigrants arrived in BC. Five men from India settled in Vancouver and five in Victoria. Thirty more South Asian men came to Canada between 1903 and 1904. They came to find work in Canada. Most worked on farms, in construction, or in lumber mills.

By the end of 1908, over 5000 South Asians have settled in BC. Most are Sikh from the Punjab region of India.

The 1920s brought many positive economic changes for South Asians in Canada. 609 out of 680 South Asians in BC were employed in lumber mills. Many of these are owned and operated by South Asian businessmen.