

Punjabi, among Canada's Top 10 Languages

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PUNJABI HAS EMERGED AS THE TOP non-official mother tongue in Canada's historic town Abbotsford, while it emerged as one of the top 10 non-official languages of Canada, quoting the 2001 Census report. Abbotsford is where, in September 2002, the ex-Canadian Prime Minister, Jean Chretien had given the national heritage recognition to the country's oldest Sikh Gurdwara. The top five mother tongues in Abbotsford were unchanged from 1996: Punjabi, German, Dutch, Chinese and Spanish.

Interestingly, the Census figures revealed that a majority of the Punjabi-speaking population was young and generally below 14 years of age. Though Chinese and German emerged as other top non-official languages, the number of those speaking Urdu and Tamil also increased substantially. Intriguingly, Hindi did not figure in the list of non-official languages of Canada.

In Abbotsford, there has been a strong increase in Punjabi as the mother tongue. Almost 16,650 persons reported Punjabi as their mother tongue on May 15, 2001, up 51.9 per cent from 10,960 in 1996. This increase was mainly due to an influx of people with Punjabi as their mother tongue. Almost nine out of 10 allophones who joined Abbotsford's population between 1996 and 2001 had Punjabi as their mother tongue. Altogether, allophones accounted for 24.4 per cent of Abbotsford's population, up from 21.5 per cent five years earlier. Of this group of allophones, Punjabi represented 47.0 per cent, up from 37.9 per cent in 1996. German accounted for 21.7 per cent, down from 28.6 per cent.

The population, with Punjabi as the mother tongue, represented 11.4 per cent of Abbotsford's total population in 2001. About 10.1 per cent of Abbotsford's population reported speaking Punjabi most often at home.

In 2001, youngsters aged 14 and under accounted for 26 per cent of Abbotsford's Punjabi population, 21 per cent of the Chinese and 18 per cent of the Spanish. In contrast, they represented only two per cent of the Dutch and the German population.

Toronto:

In Toronto, the number of people with Punjabi as their mother tongue increased from 68,365 in 1996 to 99,600 in 2001. They accounted for 5.3 per cent of the allophone population in 2001, up from 4.2 per cent five years earlier.

The number reporting Tamil as their mother tongue increased 31.9 per cent to 77,060, and the population reporting Urdu far more than doubled to 57,635. Tamil represented 4.1 per cent of the allophone population in 2001, and Urdu 3.0 per cent.

The population with Chinese and Punjabi mother tongues was relatively young, compared with the Italian population. Children aged 14 and under represented about 15 per cent of the Chinese population and 24 per cent of the Punjabi in 2001, as opposed to only 3 per cent of the Italian population.

Ottawa:

In Ottawa, Chinese replaced Arabic as the leading non-official mother tongue. In Winnipeg, German remained the leading non-official mother tongue.

Chinese maintained its number one position as the leading non-official mother tongue, while Punjabi retained its position among the top five here. The other four leading non-official mother tongues in 2001 were German, Punjabi, Tagalog and Spanish. Five years earlier, they were German, Punjabi, Polish and Spanish.

The numbers of those with Punjabi as their mother tongue increased from 8,900 in 1996 to 13,820 in 2001, and Tagalog rose from 7,350 to 10,600. Punjabi accounted for 7.3 per cent of Calgary's allophone population, and Tagalog 5.6 per cent.

Calgary's population with Chinese and Punjabi as their mother tongues was relatively young compared with the German population. In 2001, children aged 14 and under represented about 16 per cent of the Chinese population and 24 per cent of the Punjabi, as opposed to only 2 per cent of the German.

Edmonton:

In Edmonton, Chinese reaffirmed its position as the leading non-official mother tongue. The population with Chinese as the mother tongue represented 3.6 per cent of Edmonton's total population in 2001. About 2.9 per cent of Edmonton's population reported speaking Chinese most often at home.

The five leading non-official languages were unchanged from 1996: Chinese, German, Ukrainian, Polish and Punjabi. However, the number of people with mother tongues from European countries declined, and those with mother tongues from Asian countries increased. The number with Punjabi as their mother tongue rose from 8,260 in 1996 to 9,705 in 2001. They accounted for 5.3 per cent of Edmonton's allophones, up from 4.8 per cent in 1996.

Those with Chinese and Punjabi mother tongues were relatively young, but those with German and Ukrainian were relatively old. About 16 per cent of the Chinese population and 23 per cent of the Punjabi were aged 14 and under in 2001, compared with only 3 per cent of the German and Ukrainian populations.

Vancouver:

In Vancouver, one in six persons has Chinese as the mother tongue. The four other leading non-official mother tongues in Vancouver in 2001 were Punjabi (12.2 per cent of the allophone population), Tagalog (4.9 per cent), German (4.5 per cent) and Korean (3.5 per cent). The five leading languages in 1996 were Chinese, Punjabi, German, Tagalog and Italian.

Those with Chinese, Punjabi and Tagalog mother tongues were relatively young compared with the German population. Youngsters aged 14 and under accounted for 15 per cent of the Chinese population in 2001, 23 per cent of the Punjabi and 12 per cent of the Tagalog. In contrast, they represented only 2 per cent of the German population.

It may be mentioned here that it was British Columbia which returned in Mr Ujjal Singh Dosanjh, a Punjab-Canadian, as its Premier, besides sending Mr Herb Dhaliwal to the Federal Cabinet as a Revenue Minister.



The Punjabi touch: Indo-Pak Style

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THE VISIT OF PUNJAB CHIEF MINISTER Amarinder Singh to Lahore on the occasion of the 9th World Punjabi Congress added a touch of warmth to the ongoing Indo-Pak peace process. Poetic exuberance, nostalgia for Punjab as it once was, a yearning for a common Punjabi inheritance coupled with an emphasis on common language and culture dominated the conference. What can be the role of Punjab in the context of Indo-Pak relations and a broader South Asian affinity?

Essentially, it was Punjab and Bengal, besides Kashmir, that paid the price for Partition. The unprecedented ethno-religious cleansing that accomplished the partition left such deep scars in the memories of the two sides that it continued to fuel enmity between India and Pakistan for decades. Yet, the Punjabis of the two countries now yearn for friendship.

Given the processes of assimilations that have come into play to set different directions for the Punjabs under the hegemony of two Nations-States - Pakistan and India - the sentiment for communion by erasing the dividing line, argued by Amarinder Singh, and sharply defended by Chaudhary Pervaiz Elahi, chief minister on the Pakistan side, provide food for thought.

Punjab on the Indian side has been further divided into three states. Although the Sikhs, who form the majority of Punjab, felt alienated and an isolated section even raised the banner of 'Khalistan', they have been well integrated into the Indian Union. Producing much of the grain, they are now at the threshold of taking a leap in industrial development and are in search of more accessible markets and cost-effective businesses, such as with Pakistan.

Moreover, Lahore, the historical and cultural capital of undivided Punjab, as well as the ethno-lingual, cultural and psychological routes pull all Punjabis to the Pakistan side. **Most sacred shrines of the Sikh religion, including that of Guru Nanak's, are situated here. In fact, all great Punjabi poets, including Baba Farid Shakarganj, Baba Nanak, Bulleh Shah, Waris Shah and other, belong to Pakistan. And few know that Hazrat Mian Mir (laid to rest in Lahore) laid the foundation stone for the Golden Temple.**

On the Pakistan side, the Punjabis have been the greatest beneficiaries of the Partition. Punjab here is the dominating province by virtue of its size and share in the economy. Unlike their brethren in India, they bartered away their language, in favour of Urdu, and cultural identity, in favour of Pakistani identity, in return for a greater political and economic appropriation beyond their province. By substituting the two-nation theory, with the 'ideology of Pakistan', the Punjabis, along with the Urdu-speaking Mohajirs, formed the axis of power in Pakistan.

They, too, are now looking forward to greater links with India. The Punjabi business community feels mature enough to put the past enmity behind it in favour of greater cooperation without, however, losing sight of the interests of a Nation-State that determine their increasingly rational attitude. Instead of aspiring to revive

what was long shattered (the Punjabi nationhood), which is quite offensive to the integrity of two Nation-States, the Punjabis on both sides can cooperate on countless spheres, including cultural and economic sectors, without causing jitters in New Delhi and Islamabad.

A revival of the Punjabi fraternity, promotion of cultural and linguistic relations, greater economic cooperation, especially in agriculture and power-generation, border trade and tourism are the areas where the two Punjab can provide a lead.

Since, in the Indo-Pak conflict, the Punjabis played a leading role, if they take the front seat in the peace process they can provide a sound edifice for a cooperative relationship between the two countries and help resolve outstanding disputes.

The visa regime will have to be relaxed between the two Punjab. Cultural, youth, sports, educational and media exchanges must be allowed in an easier way. Special posts can be created at Wagah to allow free entry on simple passes stamped at the border for tourism and people-to-people contacts. The Punjabi-Mohajirs should be allowed to visit their ancestral places without any hassle. Punjabi language faculties, scholars, researchers, writers and artists should be allowed to work together. Joint chambers of business and agricultural can be formed. The Lahore-Amritsar bus link needs to be revived with dozens of buses moving between the two cities on a daily basis. Special shuttles should be allowed to run between Amritsar and Nankana Sahib and Hasan Abdal for pilgrimage on a daily or weekly basis. The list for cooperation is infinite.

No doubt, the World Punjabi Congress, besides other literary groups, has kept a window of interaction open among the Punjabi intellectuals during the worst phases of the conflict between the two countries. The meeting of the two chief ministers is a good sign. Let the commonalities between the people form the basis for good neighbourly relations between India and Pakistan. The friendship lies not in erasing borders, but in erasing the communal hate-line dividing the hearts.

[Courtesy: Hindustan Times]

