

Joshua Project South Asia People Groups Policy

Revised - September 2021

What This Policy Addresses

This policy addresses how South Asia groups are handled on the Joshua Project people group list. It provides the definition, criteria, and cutoffs for South Asia people groups. In the Joshua Project context, South Asia means India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Bhutan.

1. How South Asia people groups are defined

South Asia people group data is not ethno-linguistic i.e., it is not a list of language groups and subdivisions of language groups. In South Asia the approach is to define people groups consistent with the strongly held sense of “community” pervasive in that region. The term community does not refer to a physical location, but rather caste or social grouping within a structured hierarchy. The Indian term is *jati*.

Barriers between communities/castes determine who one can associate with, share a meal with, marry, what homes one might enter, what occupation one might have, religious tradition and much more. This has profound impact on defining people groups and on church-planting. South Asian communities are the largest practical identity in which the gospel can take root and spread through relational pathways and means. Self-identification rather than language is the key determinant in defining South Asian people groups.

2. Source of South Asia people group data

Joshua Project data for India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Bhutan comes from a dedicated researcher who has gathered and compiled South people group, language, and religion data over the last four decades. The data is taken primarily from census data and historical research. General updates are roughly two to three times per year. Major updates depend on the frequency of updates to national census data.

3. Scope of South Asia people group data

South Asia people group data is complete to the district level. “Complete” means each people group in each district is identified, and all languages spoken by each people group are included, and all religions adhered to by each people group are included all at the district level. Populations are included for each of these segments. State and country-level data shown on the Joshua Project website are summations from district-level data.

4. South Asian people group minimum populations

The South Asia researcher's full set of people group data includes many very small South Asia people groups, some with just a few hundred individuals. However, Joshua Project does not add groups less than 1,000 in size to the Joshua Project database. While not presented on the Joshua Project website, data for South Asia peoples smaller than 1,000 in population is available upon request. There are a number of groups smaller than 1,000 that have been grandfathered in. Very small people groups in South Asia typically do not live in isolation or have a unique language. They must interface with the surrounding culture. To function, they must know one or more of the major South Asian languages e.g.

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Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, Telugu, Gujarati etc. Christian resources exist in these major South Asian languages. Some have questioned if groups of a few thousand can actually be found in the midst of nearly two billion South Asians.

5. Self-identification increases data granularity

Joshua Project and South Asia people group researchers seek to identify people groups consistent with how individuals identify themselves. If individuals have identified themselves to the Indian census as “Bania Agarwal” as opposed to “Bania Jaiswal” Joshua Project also identify them this way. In addition to these Bania subdivisions, there is a large people group who have identified themselves only as “Bania”. Bania are being used here as an example of the practice followed for many South Asian people groups.

This self-identification produces a much more granular list with many more people group entries for South Asia. Outsiders may only see broad classifications such as Jat, Rajput, Brahmin or Pashtun and not see the distinctions and barriers between self-identified communities. It might take years of humble observation for an outsider to truly understand the difference between, for example, the Bania Chetti and the Bania, Srimali.

6. How subgroups are handled

The South Asia researcher’s data comes to Joshua Project with some entries identified as subgroups. These are entered into the subgroups data table in the Joshua Project database. The names of these subgroups are included within the profiles displayed for their parent people group. It is likely that a church planting movement in the parent people group will not encounter significant barriers and will spread to all subgroups.

7. Limitations in the South Asia people group data

Limitations of the South Asia data include, a) census data is always a few years old and, in some cases, may be many years old, b) census data does not include values for numbers of Evangelicals, and c) it is difficult to incorporate input from other sources into the existing South Asia data as the latter is a unified whole and carried on the district level. Data from other sources is often a single data point and rarely available at the district level.