

Why Include Religion When Defining South Asia Peoples

People group identification in South Asia taking into account majority religion

In South Asia, Joshua Project data sometimes defines people groups in the following manner:

- Arain (Hindu traditions)
- Arain (Muslim traditions)
- Arain (Sikh traditions)
- Arain (Christian traditions)

The question may be asked, "Why is this approach used in South Asia, and not in other parts of the world?" The following bullet points may help explain:

- In South Asia, the majority religion of a group of people is an important factor in establishing their identity as a distinct people group. Their religion helps establish their place and identity in society, to themselves and to others. It may influence the availability of government benefits. The internal culture of the group strongly reflects their perception of themselves and their religious identity. People are born into a community and its religious identity and most often retain those identities for a lifetime.
- The Hindus within the Arain community have a very different self-identity than the Muslims and Sikhs, which have their own self-identity. They may all be called Arains, but there are deep cultural and religious divisions between them causing them to function and identify as different communities.
- Occasionally, there is a multi-generational subdivision of Christians within the broader community that warrants its separate identification as a people group. This subdivision has its own culture, its own self-identity as Christians. Most individuals in the Christian group probably have inherited their Christian identification.
- The gospel is not likely to flow freely between these religious groupings. Separate evangelistic and church planting projects are likely to be needed.
- It is not supposed that each individual in the Sikh group (as an example) is a practicing Sikh, although the great majority will be practicing Sikhs. Rather, each individual in that group is part of the Sikh culture and identity. They will identify themselves as Sikhs when applying for government services. The same will be true for the Hindus, Muslims, and Christians.
- It is also not supposed that if an individual in the Muslim group becomes a practicing Sikh (as an example) he will immediately be considered to be a part of the Sikh group. His culture and place in society have not changed simply because he became a practicing Sikh.
- The points stated here are, of course, generalizations. Field workers will often encounter the need to redefine our groupings according to what they discover as they interact with the communities. Sometimes our groupings can be combined and other times our groups may need to be split. It is hoped this will be done in light of these important religious, cultural and societal divisions in South Asia.