



Punjabi Canadian Legacy Project

Phase 2: History Across the Regions Project (HARP)

2017-2018

British Columbia Regional Consultation Report

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Acknowledgements

In 2014, the South Asian Studies Institute at the University of the Fraser Valley and the Royal BC Museum embarked on a partnership project with a goal to engage with British Columbia's Punjabi communities, organizations and individuals to create a Punjabi Canadian Legacy Project (PCLP).

This work aims to preserve, explore and share the contributions of Canadians of Punjabi descent to the history of BC and Canada. Since 2014, there have been many accomplishments to date, including:

- The Punjabi Pioneer Food History Project which resulted in a new Royal BC Museum collection and the development of educational material located on the museum's Learning Portal (2014–2015).
- The establishment of the Punjabi Canadian Legacy Project Advisory Committee (in 2015).
- Province-wide community consultations in seven regions including a gallery intervention event at the Royal BC Museum (2015–2016).
- The South Asian Historic Places Project in partnership with the Province of British Columbia (2016–2017).
- The Phase II regional consultations (History Across the Regions Project [HARP] and subsequent [interviews](#) of over 70 Punjabi settlers across BC (2017-2018).
- A digital database of regional community member narratives, archives and videos, based on the Phase II consultation interviews (2017-2018).
- The establishment of a kiosk within the permanent 'Building BC' Gallery at the Royal BC Museum recognizing the contribution of Punjabis within the BC lumber industry (2017).

This work could not have been possible without the dedication and commitment of the Project Team: Janet MacDonald, Head of Learning, and Dr. Tzu-I Chung, Curator, History, from the Royal BC Museum and Satwinder Kaur Bains, Director, and Sharanjit Kaur Sandhra, Coordinator at the South Asian Studies Institute. We are also grateful for the work of Ishpreet Singh Anand, who was the Regional Coordinator for the Phase II project. We were graciously hosted by local organizations/museums/Gurdwaras across BC and we thank them for their support.

In addition, we are grateful to the two Punjabi Canadian Legacy Advisory Committees of 2015 and 2017 who have continued to provide sound advice and support over the years. In particular, we thank Dr. Balbir Gurm who has served two terms as the Chair of the Advisory committee.

The Phase II interview collection was made possible through the awarding of the Canada 150 Grant administered by the BC Museums Association. We are grateful to the BC Museums Association for its support. This report includes the findings based on the Phase II regional consultations. We hope you will take the time to read the narratives of families who reside(d) in the major hubs of Punjabi settlement. All of the interview narratives from across the Province are available for viewing at:

www.southasiancanadianheritage.ca/pclp.

The PCLP Project Team

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BRITISH COLUMBIA'S PUNJABI CANADIAN COMMUNITY

History

We acknowledge that the consultation sites for the Punjabi Canadian Legacy Project's Phase II: History Across the Regions Project were located on unceded First Nations Territories. We are grateful to the First Nations communities who have allowed these consultations and conversations to take place on the land upon which they have resided since time immemorial

Historically the first immigrants to Canada from South Asia were mostly Punjabis from the province of Punjab in northwest India. The term South Asia is a contemporary term encompassing the following countries: Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives and Nepal. South Asian migration to Canada and the United States began in the early 1900s, with the first official census records of Punjabi migrants arriving in Vancouver in the year 1903. Prior to official census records however, it is widely believed that the first visitors from India were Punjabis who travelled to Canada in 1902 as part of a Hong Kong military regiment en route to England to take part in the celebrations on the coronation of King Edward VII. Between 1903 and 1908 and before discriminatory immigration restrictions were placed, 5,000 migrants from India had settled in BC out of which 90% were Sikh by faith from the Punjab region in India, mostly with agricultural backgrounds as farmers and landowners. This early 20th century Punjabi migration involved the movement of men across the province, based on wherever they could find work in various sawmill and forestry industry sectors. The earliest hubs of BC's Punjabi histories was in areas such as Golden, Prince George, Vancouver, the Fraser Valley, Vancouver Island, and the Okanagan. As a result, these regions became rich with settler Punjabi histories and experiences. Commencing in 1903, Punjabi immigration to B.C. generally occurred in several waves:

- 1903 to 1914: The earliest immigrants arrived prior to the full enforcement of exclusionary legislation
- 1914 to 1947: Prohibitory legislation was in place and there was significantly less immigration
- Post-1947: Canadian Citizenship Act. This act allowed residents of Canada to obtain Canadian Citizenship regardless of their country of origin.
- 1960s: Third wave of South Asian immigrants from England and Africa
- 1970s: Introduction of multiculturalism and liberalization of immigration policies

According to *A Continuous Journey: A Social History of South Asians in Canada*, there were 2,342 South Asians in Canada by the year 1911, with 2,292 residing in BC. The immigration restrictions from 1914 onwards changed these statistics quite drastically, with those numbers changing to 1,016 in Canada, and 951 in BC in the year 1921. According to the authors, almost all of these migrants were Sikhs from the Punjab region (Buchignani et al 73). Another wave can be considered the out-migration from more remote areas of B.C. and resettlement in the urban centres of the province. This coincided both with the decline of the forestry and fishing industries in the late 1960s, and the movement of the educated second generation into larger cities such as Vancouver, largely for educational, social and economic reasons.

BC Punjabis Today

The breadth of historical migration of Punjabis across British Columbia created unique hubs of specific regional histories across the province. In response to changes in the forest industry, up until the 1950s families who had lived on Vancouver Island in Paldi, Duncan and Lake Cowichan, over time moved further into the Interior, to places such as Prince George and Williams Lake, and throughout the Kootenay region. Small towns offered economic opportunities and were often considered to be more accepting of South Asian immigrants. In urban areas, such as Vancouver, and later, Surrey, South Asian enclaves were established around gurdwaras, shops, and services. The Punjabi Market on Main Street in Vancouver and Little India in Surrey are examples of South Asian urban enclaves that have drawn residential settlement. (SACHP Context Study, p. 14).

According to the 2011 National Household Survey, Canadians of South Asian heritage are the largest visible minority category in Canada. More than 1.6 million Canadians identified as being of South Asian descent, constituting five percent of the Canadian population and 32 percent of Canada's Asian Canadian population. British Columbia has one of the highest populations of South Asian Canadians in the country (SACHP Context Study, page 12). The 2016 National Household Survey Canadian Census states that the number of those who indicate Punjabi as the language spoken at home was 198,805 - significantly higher than all other categories of 'Indo-Aryan' languages (Statistics Canada, Census Profile 2016).

South Asian Canadians and their descendants have expressed their sense of identity throughout the province in their many contributions to the knowledge and cultural wealth of B.C., including political acumen, intellectual pursuits, labour and industry, artistic and cultural expressions, athletic achievement etc.

Telling the stories of individuals and families, and remembering the sacrifices and contributions of people to South Asian Canadian communities and the province as a whole, is an important aspect of the histories of Punjabi Canadians in British Columbia. Contemporary versions of centuries-old cultural traditions keep communities connected to their culture since Punjabi culture encourages learning and integration between communities on a daily basis (SACHP, Context Study, page 29).

THE PUNJABI CANADIAN LEGACY PROJECT (PCLP)

Phase I

In 2015, the [South Asian Studies Institute](#) at the University of the Fraser Valley in Abbotsford partnered with the Royal BC Museum (RBCM) in Victoria, BC to begin a dialogue and conversation about recording the history of Punjabi Canadians in BC and how best to create a Province wide narrative reflecting its true history. A [community advisory committee](#) was formed made up of a diverse group of members each with invested and shared interest in preserving Punjabi Canadian history.

The first consultation for the PCLP was held at the Royal BC Museum on November 21, 2015. Members of the Punjabi community provided their feedback about inclusion of their collective history in parts of the Modern History gallery at the RBCM. In 2016, seven community consultations were held around the province—two in the Lower Mainland and one each in northern BC, in the Okanagan, in the Kootenays, in the Fraser Valley and on Vancouver Island. The project brought together BC Punjabi community associations and individuals to seek their input on the best approaches to initiating this community legacy project locally and provincially.

At the first phase, communities, local host partners and other organizations and institutions were asked three questions:

- What significant stories best convey the Punjabi legacy in BC?
- What collections are important to future generations?
- How should we make Punjabi history available to the general community?

The reports for this first phase per region can be read by clicking <https://royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/about/explore/centre-arrivals/punjabi-intercultural-history-project/bcpunjabi>.

Phase II History Across the Regions Project (HARP)

HARP built upon the work of the Punjabi Canadian Legacy Project with a recognition that Punjabi Canadian heritage needs to be an integral component of BC's historical records and public presence so that:

- Punjabi Canadians can take pride in historical ancestry and have a stronger sense of belonging.
- All citizens throughout the province can deepen their intercultural understanding of each other.
- Society may evolve in positive ways that are impactful and have a lasting legacy.

The project established informal engagement hubs in communities by building on existing networks. These communities were in six provincial regions that have significant Punjabi roots: Victoria and Duncan (Vancouver Island), Prince George (the North), Golden (the Kootenay), Kelowna (the Okanagan), Abbotsford (Fraser Valley), and Vancouver and Surrey (Lower Mainland).

The objective of these hubs was to bring people together to record family histories, and share and collect Punjabi historical and contemporary perspectives on migration, employment, social organizations, family settlements, integration, political struggles, experiences of racism, discriminatory legislation, inter-generational and intercultural experiences, etc. The project team travelled to and undertook historical research in each of these communities and, along with our project partners, hosted workshops and consultations in each community. The histories and perspectives that were collected are published on the <https://www.southasiancanadianheritage.ca/pclp> and through social media. The overall goal is to create a lasting legacy project that enriches the regional and provincial museum and archives collections and promotes public understanding of the intercultural Punjabi Canadian history regionally, provincially and nationally.

In each of the seven regions as part of HARP Phase II, the attendees were asked to discuss the following five questions:

1. How best to preserve your history?
2. Who should be the community champions of your history and responsible for the preservation and protection of the legacy?
3. Where in the region for greatest accessibility?
4. What are the challenges/opportunities?
5. What stories/objects most regionally and provincially significant?



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Regional Consultation Report

Golden, BC

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THE REGIONS

GOLDEN

The first consultation of Phase II of the Punjabi Canadian Legacy Project (PCLP) was held in Golden, BC on July 30, 2017. This community event was hosted by the Golden Sikh Temple and the Golden Museum and Archives. The community consultation began with a workshop on day one that coincided with an annual Golden Punjabi settler reunion the community arranges yearly. This was followed by four days of extensive collection and recording of stories and artifacts from the South Asian Canadian community in Golden through in-person interviews. There were 30-35 attendees at the Golden Sikh Temple ranging from Punjabi community members with deep roots to Golden, as well as non-Punjabi community members who shared a vested interest in the history of Golden. Below is a summary of the answers from the community members in attendance at the consultation.

- **How best to preserve your history?**

Throughout the consultation the attendees reiterated the need for Punjabi settler stories to be sustained across time so that they would continue to be shared and commemorated across generations. Much of the conversation also centred on the second Golden Sikh Temple as a critical site for preserving Punjabi Canadian history locally, provincially and nationally. Many of the community members were dedicated to preserving the site so it would continue to be a testament to the stories of Punjabi Canadians. Others reflected on the original site of the very first Golden Sikh Temple (potentially in all of North America) as a potential tourism spot for people wishing to visit the historically significant site.

- **Who should be the community champions of your history and responsible for the preservation and protection of the legacy?**

Consultation attendees provided specific names within the Golden community who they consider the bearers of their histories; for example, naming local community champions such as: Gurmit Singh Minhas, Shiv Singh Jaswal, Pakkar Singh Khunkhun, etc.

- **Where in the region for greatest accessibility?**

Many reiterated that greatest way towards regional accessibility is through the local archives, including: hand written wills/estates, hospital patient files, police diaries, census, fire insurance maps, and wedding pictures.

- **What are the challenges/opportunities?**

A challenge that was addressed by some community members included a cultural shift of young Punjabis no longer feeling connection to, and the need for preserving, their histories: a way around the problem was suggested through school curriculum and empathic lesson plans. On the other hand, the attendees suggested many opportunities of the project through online resources, the creation of a foundation of South Asian history in BC, the physical preservation of the current Golden Sikh Temple, the opportunities for upcoming celebrations such as a travelling sangat, Vaisakhi or potential fundraising opportunities.

- **What stories/objects most regionally and provincially significant?**

The conversations at the Golden Sikh Temple were rich and multifaceted. The key stories of significance identified in the process included the 1926 Golden forest fire which first disbanded the large Punjabi population, as well as the later growth of Golden's Punjabi community to 40 families by the 1970's, and the families who have deep roots in the nearby community of Donald which is now a ghost town. Overall, the attendees shared a passion to preserving the current Golden gurdwara and raising awareness that the current standing gurdwara is in itself a historical site of significance as well. Attendees also agreed that the smaller towns share unique stories of solidarity, togetherness and vibrancy.

GOLDEN INTERVIEWS

Over the course of the week, the regional coordinator interviewed local Punjabi community members in Golden to gain a breadth and understanding of how individual stories shaped their experiences of Golden, BC. The interviewees all had very unique stories to share; for example, the story of being the first couple to be married in the Golden Sikh Temple. Others shared stories of community closeness and connectedness such as when families would gather every weekend at Emerald Park to make and share pakoras. Many shared their stories of Donald, BC, now a forgotten ghost town. Many recalled the experiences of living in bunk houses and taking turns making the meals and rotis. Traumatic experiences of discrimination were also expressed; for example, with one person recounting being coerced to cut his hair and beard, although in the end, he refused to do so. Stories of innovation, enterprise and resiliency were also apparent through the interviews and stories, with the hotel industry being a success through Punjabi leadership. The Golden interviews can be accessed by visiting: <https://www.southasiancanadianheritage.ca/pclp/golden/>.



Prince George Gurdwara (Sikh Temple).
Image Courtesy of Shamsheer Singh Buttar

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Regional Consultation Report

Prince George, BC

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PRINCE GEORGE

The Prince George Consultation of Phase II of the PCLP was held at and in partnership with The Exploration Place in Prince George. The consultation, held on September 11, 2017 had 10 attendees, with many being non-Punjabis from the local municipality, the library, community archives, etc. Below is a summary of the answers from the community members in attendance at the consultation:

- **How best to preserve your history?**

The community members suggested documentary film making, community events, online exhibits and podcasts each as valuable ways to preserve and showcase Punjabi Canadian histories. Others suggested strategic initiatives which would include succession planning working alongside the city-heritage registry and the recognition of historic sites of significance in Prince George prior to the 1950's. Other suggested the power of word of mouth as a significant indicator of people sharing and preserving histories.

- **Who should be the community champions of your history and responsible for the preservation and protection of the legacy?**

Community champions suggested the galvanization of student unions at local colleges and universities around the Prince George area (i.e. UNBC and CNC Prince George) along with international students who are very keen advocates of local community histories and stories. Others also suggested that community champions are younger generation Punjabi Canadians who can add elements of social media and multi-media sophistication. The attendees also suggested the inculcation of young thinkers earlier on in the legacy-building process. Their innovative ideas would create their own legacy framework. Specific groups such as the IMCC, the Punjabi Canadian Seniors Society or the Chamber of Commerce were named as potential community advocates and champions.

- **Where in the region for greatest accessibility**

Attendees provided specific names of communities with deep Punjabi Canadian roots; for example, Quesnel, Williams Lake, Mackenzie, McBride, Valmont, etc. Others suggested that doing an environmental scan of various Punjabi Canadians and their occupations across sectors (i.e. health, transportation, construction, etc.), would also broaden the scope of the PCLP project.

- **What are the challenges/opportunities?**

Funding was immediately addressed as a challenge as well as ideas around succession planning for the longevity and scope of the history preservation and legacy building. Potential opportunities included the opportunity to digitize precious archives and materials which would in turn result in greater dissemination of the work.

- **What stories/objects most regionally and provincially significant?**

The Punjabi Canadians who attended the consultation spoke of the power of social services in the small Prince George community and their roles in terms of advocacy and building on community resilience. Others mentioned the power of talking circles and how Punjabi women used to get together to share stories. A resurgence of this practice would benefit community today - to empower and strengthen their resolve during times of difficulty as in the past.

PRINCE GEORGE INTERVIEWS

The interviews with local Punjabi Canadians in Prince George provided a rich foray into the unique make-up of smaller British Columbian communities and their histories. Interviewees shared intense experiences of racism and adversity. Such incidents occurred while in school, in the work place, and in social settings). Others spoke of the extreme working conditions in Prince George, with some recalling having to live in bunkhouses during the -40 degrees weather conditions. The intensity of work life and the ongoing need to build a safe and secure environment for one's family were shared by a number of interviewees, with one person indicating they'd worked in 28 different jobs over the course of their life. Sport played a great part in Punjabi Canadian life in Prince George, with local kabaddi and wrestling tournaments becoming quite famous. The Prince George narratives can be viewed by visiting: <https://www.southasiancanadianheritage.ca/pclp/prince-george/>.



*Punjabi community standing on the steps of the Hillcrest Sikh Temple.
Image Courtesy of the South Asian Studies Institute*

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VANCOUVER ISLAND

The Vancouver Island consultation was hosted at the Paldi Sikh Temple in partnership with Cowichan Valley Museum and Archives on October 16, 2017. The 40 attendees all have deep connections to their community, and they shared evocative stories of their experiences living in Paldi. Punjabi and non-Punjabi community members each attended and shared their experiences, stories and their hopes for the project moving forward. Below are is a summary of the answers from the community members in attendance at the consultation.

- **How best to preserve your history?**

Attendees believe that story-telling is an important part of the process of best preserving the Punjabi Canadian legacy and that the loss of the Punjabi language was a crucial part of disrupting that process. Some recalled that community members used to gather together weekly (i.e. a knitting group) and share stories, updates, experiences; however, these sorts of gatherings are no longer occurring. Others in the audience felt there was a generational differences in terms of migration experiences. Early Punjabi settlers needed each other's support. Contemporary migrants are unaware of the stories of close knit communities and no longer feel the need for each other's support in similar ways. The uniqueness of the historic community of Paldi was reiterated throughout the consultation, with phrases such as "mini United Nations," "no racism/discrimination," "open door," "big family," being expressed. Others were proud to share that people from around the world come to visit the Paldi Sikh Temple with an awareness of its unique history.

- **Who should be the community champions of your history and responsible for the preservation and protection of the legacy?**

The community champions, according to attendees, are the natural story tellers and the knowledge keepers who have a deep awareness of their histories. Some suggestions made by attendees included asking family members to choose an advocate in each family who can then be the keeper of the family stories to be passed down. "Critically important and urgently needed is the record of our history".

- **Where can the history be reflected in the region for greatest accessibility?**

Guests suggested that the stories collected about Paldi, and other Punjabi Canadian experiences should be presented in provincial institutions. The Paldi Sikh Temple was also suggested as a site for greatest accessibility and hence, the need to continue to draw people to the site. Others also suggested that there needs to be interpretive signage on site and around the Paldi Sikh Temple (ie. the site of the burners where cremations took place) in order to increase visibility and awareness.

- **What are the challenges/opportunities?**

The aging population of the elders in the Paldi community was cited as an impending challenge. Others also suggested that there is a gap in how to teach younger generations about Punjabi culture, history, etc., and which stories to highlight without excluding others. Others also mentioned that when many of the local mills closed down, many Lake Cowichan Punjabi communities moved away and so there is a sense of scattered stories and narratives. A recognizable opportunity is for Punjabi Canadians to work with a diversity of communities to broaden the exposure of the Punjabi Canadian experience in British Columbia.

- **What stories/objects are most regionally and provincially significant?**

The group listed many stories of Provincial significance, including: the charitable spirit of Mayo Singh Minhas who was known to offer jobs to anybody in need, the broad and unique makeup of the Paldi community (such as Japanese Canadians and their tragically forced departure), the stories of Rajinder Minhas picking up newly arrived Punjabi migrants from the now nonexistent Paldi airport, stories of the Japanese barbers in the community, the role of Paldi women as the pillars of strength in the community, the Paldi Sikh Temple rotis as being famously renowned and the overwhelming feeling of being a part a diverse community as one family.

VANCOUVER ISLAND INTERVIEWS

The interviews of former Paldi and Vancouver Island Punjabi families provided a broad spectrum of experiences and narratives. Some interviews revealed stories of the first women to do kirtan and prayers and others revealed explicit moments of racism. Many interviews highlighted the breadth of Punjabi's involvement in different sectors, including farming, dairy and business. The Paldi *for mela* festival was

cited on a number of occasions as being a memorable moment within the community. Paldi in particular provoked sentiments in interviewees who recalled the sense of united community across racial lines. Others spoke about their deep-rooted connections to the Island and their fathers and grandfathers fighting for social justice causes including the right for South Asians to vote. All of the interviews for the Vancouver Island region can be viewed online by visiting: <https://www.southasiancanadianheritage.ca/pclp/duncan/>.



Image Courtesy of Gurmit Kaur Saran

Punjabi Canadian Legacy Project

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Regional Consultation Report

Kelowna, BC

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KELOWNA

The Kelowna Consultation of Phase II of the PCLP was held at and in partnership with the Okanagan Sikh Temple. The consultation, held on November 6, 2017 had 20 attendees, with many being non-Punjabis from the local municipality, the library, local archives, etc. Below are a summary of the answers from the community members in attendance at the consultation.

- **How best to preserve your history?**

The attendees stressed the need for Punjabi community histories and stories to be taught and shared by Punjabi families themselves. The attendees believed in the power of storytelling within families. Families need to talk to one another about their elders (grandparents' experiences) so that second and third generation children gain a stronger sense of their communities. Many attendees highlighted specific books as well as local Okanagan Punjabi settler success stories as important venues to convey these experiences.

- **Who should be the community champions of your history and responsible for the preservation and protection of the legacy?**

Attendees suggested local historians, scholars, community writers be their community champions as they are already embedded within a process of preserving and sharing Punjabi Canadian histories across BC. Others suggested strategies to bring in potential community champions by inviting members from the Punjabi community to become a part of the project through newspaper articles, notices in local Punjabi language media outlets, etc.

- **Where in the region for greatest accessibility?**

The two main gurdwaras in the Kelowna area were mentioned as source for access to local Punjabi settler families. Others named specific Kelowna/Okanagan-based Punjabi families as being crucial to the legacy building because of their business and entrepreneurship successes and/or their long histories in the community.

- **What are the challenges/opportunities?**

One challenge cited by some was the lack of connection between earlier Punjabi settlers and newer Punjabi immigrants. Many suggested that it is up to prominent families to showcase the histories of Punjabis in the region to newcomers to the area. The disconnect between younger and older Punjabi

generations was also cited as a challenge because younger Punjabi children were seen as not being aware of their own histories.

- **What stories/objects most regionally and provincially significant?**

The story of the Okanagan is unique because it's built upon local agriculture such as the fruit and wine industries, etc. As such, some suggested the need to shape the stories of the Okanagan Punjabi settlers through these industries. In addition, others stressed the need to create a trajectory from the older to the newer by including the stories of the most recent Punjabi settler immigrants who are as important to the Okanagan as those early Punjabi settlers.

KELOWNA INTERVIEWS

Over the course of the week, the regional coordinator interviewed thirteen community members in Kelowna to record their stories and experiences in the local area. Many stories revolved around innovation, including the story of one man's grandfather who became the largest grape grower in the Okanagan area in the 1990's. Others showcased pride in opening their first winery in the 2000's. Some women shared stories of great resiliency including one interviewee who used to climb a twelve foot ladder for her job, even though she had an extreme fear of heights. Another Punjabi woman shared a story about being unable to afford bread, and instead making rotis for her children at school. Her children were so "embarrassed" about having to eat the roti in front of their school mates of European descent who made fun of their food. Other interviewees spoke about the intergenerational stories of resilience by their parents and grandparents, working long hours and with lower pay, etc. These stories of resilience were cited by the interviewees as reasons for their continued success. The Kelowna interviews can be accessed online at: <https://www.southasiancanadianheritage.ca/pclp/kelowna/>.



Exterior of the West 2nd Avenue Gurdwara (Sikh Temple) in 1943.
Image Courtesy of the Vancouver Archives

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Vancouver, BC

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VANCOUVER

The Vancouver Consultation of Phase II of the PCLP/HARP was hosted in the Komagata Maru Exhibit Hall located at the Ross Street Temple, in partnership with the Khalsa Diwan Society, Vancouver. The consultation, held on November 19, 2017 had an attendance of 30 people. This group represented a wide range of diverse experience and had deep connections with the community and the project. The attendees were split into six groups, each led by an Advisory Committee member serving as facilitator, with the Advisory Committee Chair moderating the overall discussions. Below are a summary of the answers from the community members in attendance at the consultation:

- **How best to preserve your history?**

Some of the most reiterated comments expressed by attendees was the need to preserve the Punjabi language – it being the connector to historical preservation. Attendees offered a number of suggestions on possible approaches, including the gurdwara hosting a Punjabi language fair which would build networks. The teaching of the Punjabi language and Punjabi Canadian history also needs to be synchronized/communicated through social media and multimedia. A youth advisory committee would be extremely beneficial.

Others suggested that the Komagata Maru Museum space itself was ideal as a virtual space or lab for youth, school groups, etc., to preserve language and resources. The need to find ‘teacher champions’ was suggested by others in addition to the need to embed these stories and narratives within local school curriculums and disseminated in public/university libraries.

The urgency to interview aging Punjabi Canadians and collect precious archival materials was suggested by others. Punjabi Canadian women’s experiences and voices as well as Punjabi-Canadians across different professional sectors (i.e. educators, lawyers, and doctors) were mentioned as a crucial component of the historical preservation.

- **Who should be the community champions of your history and responsible for the preservation and protection of the legacy?**

Specific names were mentioned by attendees, which were duly noted for further exploration. Others spoke generally suggesting that multi-generational community advocates include: historians, museum professionals, artists, government/non-profit sector representatives, educators, and different

community/cultural advocates. Connecting with and through younger people was a key conversation piece addressed by many, as youth could interview their family elders, etc. to forge connections and a sense of belonging. In addition, each of the workshop participants were named as community champions and advocates.

- **Where can the history be reflected in the region for greatest accessibility?**

The community attendees highlighted the following physical spaces for championing community work:

- gurdwaras across BC
- schools
- libraries
- Vancouver Punjabi Market
- regional museums
- the Sikh Heritage Museum in Abbotsford.
- the Sikh Heritage Museum in Toronto
- Sunset Community Centre
- high schools in Vancouver (ie. Moberly High School, David Thomson, John Oliver, Sexsmith Elementary)
- South Vancouver Neighbourhood House
- Parks
- Coal Harbour Komagata Maru memorial

Others suggested that the greatest accessibility can be achieved online, citing that the digitization of all the work done would allow for ease of access by students, educators, interested community members, etc., all across the Province. Such digital platforms would also allow people/students, etc., to access the content by using their ipads or other technological devices.

- **What are the challenges/opportunities?**

Funding was a major challenge cited by attendees, with additional questions around transparency and the need for neutrality. Another challenge was the need to inspire youth to be engaged in their history. Social media, technology, innovation, YouTube, etc were the best outreach avenues for this demographic. Yet another challenge was the need to ensure proper representation from within each of the hub communities, for the creation of a pan-provincial advisory committee. All agreed on the crucial need to 'spread the word,' possibly through social media channels, announcements in newspapers, local media, community posting boards, etc. Overall and consistent exposure of the project was cited as an opportunity

which would then in turn pique the interest of potential funders. Many also encouraged the Khalsa Diwan Society in Vancouver to use the Komagata Maru Museum space as a community hub and tourist destination in order to reach the full capacity of its impact.

- **What stories/objects are most regionally and provincially significant?**

The urgency to collect the stories of ‘dying’ Punjabi Canadians along with a tally of their artifacts and collections was suggested as being most significant. A breadth of significant stories, sites and objects were listed by attendees, including:

- the ‘firsts,’ ie. lawyer, doctor, Punjabi restaurant, business
- letters, diaries, passports
- cook house/bunk house stories
- the right to vote
- missing women’s voices
- Paldi, Vancouver Island, Okanagan being of Provincial significance
- Komagata Maru
- industries such as: transportation and farming
- 6th Street (New Westminster), Fraser Street (Vancouver), the Fraser Mills crematorium, Riverside crematorium, Punjabi market, wedding halls
- the intersections and interactions between the First Nations/Punjabis/Chinese-Canadians and other diverse communities
- clothing
- celebrations (ie. Vaisakhi)
- community fundraising (ie. for the Surrey Memorial hospital)
- East India Carpet Company in Vancouver
- Paldi
- Artifacts from smaller towns, such as from the Khalsa Diwan Societies in different communities
- Store signs
- Stores even older than the Punjabi market, ie. the Punjabi community in Commercial Drive in Vancouver

Broad thematic ideas addressed by attendees included: the overall generosity and spirit of the Punjabi Canadian community, the physical building of some of the earliest gurdwaras in BC and the resiliency of the community to succeed despite so many social and political barriers and challenges .

VANCOUVER INTERVIEWS

The interviews of Punjabi Canadian settlers living in Vancouver showcased the diversity of their experiences, passions, interests and memories. Stories of powerful resiliency, resistance to conform, difficulty in getting jobs, and maintenance of individual religious and spiritual faith were significant. Many interviewees shared their experiences of being one of the first teachers to wear a turban in a Vancouver school - something unheard of before that, and the subsequent discrimination that followed. Others spoke of their successes in the business sectors, with successful restaurant chains and some of the earliest Punjabi and Hindi language radio broadcast programming. Others shared their experiences of marrying outside their community.

Many shared stories of being young and their parents maintaining strong bonds with India through remittance for families there, or women who took on leadership roles by performing kirtan prayers, teaching language classes and serving and preserving their communities in BC. Others spoke fondly about the closeness of South Asian communities across different religions and when there was a deep sense of community belonging and building. Many interviewees expressed pride in the memory of purchasing their first vehicle, often after saving hard earned monies for years. All the Vancouver interviews can be viewed by visiting: <https://www.southasiancanadianheritage.ca/pclp/vancouver/>



Punjabi Canadian Legacy Project

Phase 2: History Across the Regions Project (HARP)

2017-2018

Regional Consultation Report

Abbotsford, BC

ufv.ca/sasil/research

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ABBOTSFORD

The Abbotsford consultation of Phase II of the PCLP was held in the Sikh Heritage Museum, National Historic Site and Gur Sikh Temple in partnership with the Reach Gallery Museum Abbotsford on November 21, 2017. The 25 attendees at the Abbotsford consultation were divided into five groups led by a facilitator and moderated by the Advisory Committee Chair. Below is a summary of the answers from the community members in attendance at the consultation:

- **How best to preserve your history?**

The attendees suggested a pressing need for the Punjabi community histories and stories to be embedded within the K-12 school curriculum, supported by the development of field trips that are inclusive of the Punjabi Canadian experiences to museums and historical sites. Other attendees reiterated the need to preserve, learn and speak the Punjabi language at home and with the younger generations. Another theme addressed by attendees was to incorporate Punjabi Canadian experiences in media resources on national platforms, such as the Heritage Minute clips, via social media, YouTube, etc. The concept of 'history' itself was also questioned, with some participants suggesting that there is a need to digitize historical moments from contemporary times – including the 1980's onwards in addition to looking back 100 plus years as the source of historical data. The need to maintain and sustain the physical space and site of the Sikh Heritage Museum was explicitly emphasized by several attendees, who advocated that the Gur Sikh Temple has always been a driving force of people, energies and stories.

- **Who should be the community champions of your history and responsible for the preservation and protection of the legacy?**

People connected to Punjabi language (authors/poets/scholars) were named as some key champions within the community, with specific names being mentioned. Others suggested strategies to bring in potential community champions by inviting members from the Punjabi community to become a part of the project through newspaper articles, notices in local Punjabi language media outlets, etc. Others cited younger generations, youth, etc., as key resources in the present and future legacy building work. Institutional partnerships/relationships were also cited, such as: entrepreneurs, museum societies, BC ferries, tourism agencies, municipalities, sports and recreation, ministries of education, etc., as well as prominent families with public personas who could be drawn into the project and work.

- **Where can the history be reflected in the region for greatest accessibility?**

The gurdwaras were mentioned as sources for accessibility and dissemination of the work of the PCLP. Others suggested using neutral spaces such as businesses, public libraries, shopping malls, sports arenas, parks, recreation centres, community centres, etc., to showcase Punjabi Canadian stories and exhibits. A three-way walking tour between the Reach, The Sikh Heritage Museum and Trethewey House was also suggested as a means to access a breadth of narratives and stories which are inclusive of many experiences.

- **What are the challenges/opportunities?**

A key challenge mentioned was that some of the earliest Punjabi settlers and/or even their children are aging, leading to the imminent fear of the loss of stories, archives, narratives and voices in the Valley. The loss of language was also cited, as many attendees felt that Punjabi is not being nurtured and taught within the home. Thus, without home language, the attendees argued that an attachment to culture and history was also not being articulated across generations. Others also felt that the Anglicization of Punjabi names added a layer of loss to the Punjabi language. Inadequate funding to support agencies doing important historical work was also mentioned as part of the ongoing challenge of the work.

Some opportunities for engagement included interviewing elderly Punjabi community members in seniors' homes. Funding opportunities was also mentioned through community beautification grants and fundraising campaigns, and through BC Ferries and the BC Sports Hall of Fame, etc.

- **What stories/objects most regionally and provincially significant?**

Specific people's names were mentioned by the attendees including some significant 'firsts' within the Punjabi community (i.e. the first Punjabi physician in Vancouver, the first Punjabi judge, the first Punjabi mayor, the first Punjabi descent instructor at UFV). Others named specific industries/themes as stories of significance in terms of Punjabis' involvement, i.e. agriculture, logging, fishing, stories of arrival, access to farmland and generational histories over time.

ABBOTSFORD INTERVIEWS

Over the course of twenty plus years, many of the stories and experiences had been collected by the MSA Museum, The Reach Gallery Museum and the South Asian Studies Institute. The stories are rich and full

of unique experiences of those who helped to build the Gur Sikh Temple in Abbotsford, served on the Khalsa Diwan Society Abbotsford committees, owned farms and fuel companies in the Valley, worked for the Trethewey Lumber Company, etc. Attendees reflected on such stories that are unique to the Abbotsford experience, but also on the nature of the Punjabi experience in the early 20th century during which many of the (predominantly) Punjabi men moved from place to place in search of work in the forestry industry. Other stories and characters are particularly special; for example, the story of Gurbaksh Singh Dhaliwal and Paul Singh Dhaliwal, who enjoyed short stints as professional wrestlers. The powerful role of women is also a significant Abbotsford theme, exemplified in, the story of Mohinder Kaur Thandi who was the first woman committee member on the Khalsa Diwan Society, Abbotsford. There are stories of tenderness and love, which can be seen through the letters between a husband and wife and in their son's narrative. All of these stories have been collected and preserved by the South Asian Studies Institute and can be seen by clicking: <http://canadiansikhheritage.ca/community-interviews>. The interviews conducted as part of the Phase II PCLP (HARP) can be found by visiting: <https://www.southasiancanadianheritage.ca/abbotsford/>.



Image Courtesy of Google Images

Punjabi Canadian Legacy Project

Phase 2: History Across the Regions Project (HARP)

2017-2018

Regional Consultation Report

Surrey, BC

ufv.ca/sasi/research

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SURREY

The Surrey Consultation of Phase II of the PCLP was held at the Surrey City Centre Public Library, in partnership with the Museum of Surrey. The consultation, held on November 22, 2017 had 25 attendees with diverse experiences and connections to the community of Surrey. Those in attendance provided significant context about the history and Punjabi Canadian community in Surrey. Below is a summary of the answers from the community members in attendance at the consultation:

- **How best to preserve your history?**

Those in attendance suggested that writing memoirs or even recording stories using traditional and oral histories was one way to capture and preserve Punjabi Canadian histories. The need for elders and ‘family champions’ to pass down knowledge in order to bridge the gap between generations was also suggested. Others suggested the need for media partnerships, and to work more closely with organizations such as OMNI media to focus on the positive community living as well as the challenges facing the community. Others also indicated that the Museum of Surrey has a potential role in this preservation and this could be done by hosting an Open House and engaging with the communities.

- **Who should be the community champions of your history and responsible for the preservation and protection of the legacy?**

Many people at the consultation named specific high-profile Punjabi Canadians of immense influence. Community champions were defined by attendees as those who would go above and beyond their immediate careers with a larger call to action to showcase the otherwise neglected histories and stories. Others suggested that each person in the consultation could write down their own community champions for sharing in a potential list serve database. A need to connect with, and include, youth as potential community champions was also discussed. Others also noted that everyone has the potential to be a community champion, and is a community champion in their own distinct way.

- **Where can the history be reflected in the region for greatest accessibility?**

The importance of digital preservation and digital platforms should be a priority. These digital platforms were cited as some of the greatest accessibility potentials to showcase the work that has been so painstakingly undertaken. This includes digital spaces for online exhibits to be shared across the country (i.e. Museum of Anthropology, Mumbai, Immigration Museum, etc). Others suggested that it’s important

to pick up from important commemorative events related to heritage, i.e. Asian Heritage Month, in terms of attaching these days to the work of the PCLP. Others suggested cross experiential collaborations, i.e. collaborating with the Black communities in Salt Spring Island. Connecting the work of the PCLP to other larger museums like the Museum of Migration would help amplify the work and breadth of the PCLP work and project.

- **What are the challenges/opportunities?**

The lack of outreach to spread the message on the PCLP work was cited as a challenge, where some suggested that a degree of sophistication is required and many pockets of the Punjabi community are still focused on basic survival and making a living. Others suggested the need to broaden the scope through integration of South Asian visual artists. The community recognizes the need for a heritage preservation plan, with some suggesting the inclusion of specific sites including the very first Punjabi store on Main Street in Vancouver. Another challenge was the generalized nature of the work and research being undertaken, some suggested that creating themes (such as forestry industry and small business) and asking for community support would be more effective rather than a broad based approach.

Opportunities for growth included expanding the Komagata Maru exhibit at the Khalsa Diwan Society, Vancouver gurdwara, as well as the Coal Harbour exhibition. Others suggested that there are opportunities for philanthropic/funding support through exhibits that are theme-based. The need to decolonize the minds of mainstream institutions and Anglo-centric viewpoints was also mentioned by those in the consultation.

- **What stories/objects most regionally and provincially significant?**

Many themes and stories were shared by those in the consultation including:

- sawmills and mill towns
- the 'firsts' i.e. grocery stores, cinemas, clothing shops, etc.
- business/entrepreneurship
- ranching/horses
- contemporary businesses and innovation
- sports
- worship and religion
- role of women
- key milestones by theme

- racism encountered
- the intergenerational 'sandwich' generation (1st, 2nd, 3rd, generations) and how their experiences of their culture differed than others
- Jamia Masjid in Vancouver
- Patel's grocery store and Patel's cinema

SURREY INTERVIEWS

The interviews completed during phase II of the PCLP project in Surrey each showcased the uniqueness of the community of Surrey and the various Punjabi Canadian experiences. Interviewees shared their nostalgia for the earlier communities' sense of closeness. Others spoke about the range of their work experience, with some having worked in the health care sector for more than thirty years and saying that even though their English skills were not strong, their "hard work" made up for it. Other interviewees spoke of complications in daily lives, where they faced racism and were called 'Pakis' in the 60's and 70's, and gender discrimination within their own cultural experiences. Others spoke about personal connections to historical roots of 'freedom fighters' within their familial lineage, which would in turn add to their fighting spirit to maintain their unshorn hair, keep their turbans in the face of racism, as well as facing adversity and the pressure to cut their hair. Others spoke passionately about the Canadian historical roots and the political rights that were attained by Punjabis, including the right to the vote, and the right to join labour unions in certain sectors. Others spoke in contemporary contexts about the struggles of obtaining jobs with their high levels of education from India, and being demoted in Canada, or having to start anew. All the Surrey interviews can be viewed by visiting: <https://www.southasiancanadianheritage.ca/pclp/surrey/>.

NEXT STEPS

The tangible results of the two phases of the Punjabi Canadian Legacy Project - the consultations, final reports and collected interviews have been digitized, preserved and made accessible to all by visiting: www.southasiancanadianheritage.ca/pclp. These resources, narratives, and interviews are thus instantly accessible for educators and community members to share and showcase these important and regionally significant stories.

Future funding prospects are being explored in order to meet the project goals in terms of additional outputs as expressed by community members, including: school resources, digital software, travelling exhibits, graphic novels for youth, etc.

Thank You-Regional Partners

The work of the Punjabi Canadian Legacy Project, Phase II (History Across the Regions Project) would not have been possible without our regional partners. We are grateful to our partners across BC who support our work and our vision to include a Punjabi Canadian narrative into our collective Provincial, and Canadian history.

- Abbotsford: The Khalsa Diwan Society, Abbotsford and the Reach Gallery Museum Abbotsford
- Vancouver Island: The Paldi Sikh Temple and Cowichan Valley Museum & Archives
- Golden: The Golden Sikh Temple and the Golden Museum and Archives
- Kelowna: The Okanagan Sikh Temple
- Prince George: The Exploration Place Museum and Science Centre
- Surrey: Museum of Surrey
- Vancouver: The Khalsa Diwan Society, Vancouver and Komagata Maru Museum