AN ORAL HISTORY OF THE SIKHS
IN BRITISH COLUMBIA,
1920-1947
by
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B.A., The University of British Columbia, 1972

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We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

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ABSTRACT

This thesis recognizes the value of using a variety of perspectives to study the history of an ethnic minority group. The history of some groups is lacking in insider perspectives. I have attempted to add balance to the existing accounts by using an oral history approach to describe the experiences of the Sikhs living in British Columbia from 1920-1947.

I am an insider, a Sikh whose grandfather was one of the original pioneers who came in the first wave of immigration in the 1904-1908 time period. These people are no longer with us, but some of their wives and children are still available to share their history with future generations. I interviewed and recorded 24 individual histories. From these I have formed a composite picture of the Sikh community in British Columbia from 1920-1947.

Beginning with descriptions of social, political and cultural conditions in India and Canada at the time of arrival, we follow them through the important stages of their lives in their adopted land. They describe the journey over, settling in, adaptations, work, social life, the fight for rights, and the role of their temple and religion. We see the events and circumstances that eventually led to the Sikhs being able to call Canada their home. The many photographs, letters and documents give further insights into the lives of this distinctive group of Canadians.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

When studying the history of any ethnic community it is best to get as many perspectives as possible. The history of the Sikhs in British Columbia has most often been written from an outsider perspective, by individuals outside of the community itself. Insider accounts and perspectives are needed to provide a more balanced account. This thesis attempts to add this balance by using an oral history approach to describe the experiences of the Sikhs in British Columbia from 1920-1947.

Gaining access to the Sikh community in order to write their history is a challenge in itself since the Sikh community has been reluctant to open its doors. This reluctance stems from the early days when immigration officials would gain access through an insider, and very soon afterwards, several deportations would take place. Mistrust and suspicion built up and continue even today. Sikhs are unwilling for good reasons to share their stories.

The Sikhs themselves have not been content with the presentation of their past in this country. The focus has traditionally been on how strange and different they are from the dominant culture. Issues that they do not see as being significant have been emphasized, such as the strangeness of their religion, customs, language, appearance, food, work ethic, marriage practices, lifestyle and extended family unit.
Now it is time to hear from the Sikhs themselves, who are more than able to tell their own story and add some balance to the history that has already been written. This is most easily done by a member of the community talking to the people who started coming in the early 1920s when immigration restrictions on bringing over wives and children from India were lifted. These men and women are "the living links to the past" being the direct descendents of the original Sikh settlers who came in the 1904-1908 time period. Their stories of the struggles and hardships of life in a new and hostile country need to be recorded both to retrieve their history and to make available to future generations the events and circumstances that eventually led to the Sikhs being able to call Canada their home. These insiders' points of view will make possible a fuller and more realistic picture of what actually happened in the past.

This thesis is an attempt to provide a composite picture of the Sikh community in B.C. by using these individuals' oral histories. I am a Sikh whose grandfather was one of the pioneers who came in the first wave of immigration in the 1904-1908 time period. Through my parents and their associates I have access to this select group of people. The original pioneers are no longer with us to tell us their stories but their descendents possess valuable information about the early days in British Columbia and it is time that they shared this information.
Review of Literature:

Norman Buchignani has compiled comprehensive bibliographies on South Asians in Canada, *A Review of the Historical and Sociological Literature on East Indians* (1977), and an updated version called *Research on South Asians in Canada: Retrospect and Prospect* (1987). Buchignani states that there are some 200 articles and books about South Asians in Canada. Much of this literature has been published since the early 1970s when interest in the diversity of cultures increased and government funding promoted such endeavors.

The literature on the Sikhs documenting the times leading up to the 1920s is extensive. The coverage of the Sikhs' arrival and reception, the racial incidents, the challenges to the injustices of the immigration policies are discussed by Chandrasekhar (1986) and Chadney (1984). Ferguson (1975) and Johnston (1989) chronicle the Komagata Maru incident when 376 Sikhs led by Gurdit Singh challenged Canada's continuous passage ruling, and the Ghadrite political movement which fought for India's independence. As well, Kesar Singh, a Sikh, has provided valuable insider views of these times with his newly published *Canadian Sikhs (Part One)* and the *Komagata Maru Massacre* (1989).

The next period of history, 1919-1947, Buchignani calls the "quiet years" because it is largely unrecorded, especially the social history. During this period the Sikh
community closed its doors to outsiders. The main sources available for this period are archival records and newspaper reports. Buchignani and Indra (1985) is a good resource combining some oral histories with mostly archival materials. The only significant work on social history, family and community life from the insider's perspective is by Sadhu Singh Dhami (1980) in novel form.

After 1947, when East Indians received the federal and provincial franchises and subsequently the municipal franchise, their coverage in the media improved and the accompanying literature grew. The community opened its doors somewhat to the larger society. Since they were now accorded full and equal rights their trust of outsiders increased. Many researchers took advantage of this new opportunity, including Mayer (1959), Lowes (1963), Button (1964), Ames and Inglis (1973), and Redway (1984). This resulted in a substantial increase in the literature on East Indians in British Columbia. This work still did little to fill the holes and gaps in their social history from 1920-1947.

After a review of all the literature to date, Buchignani (1987) states that there still is nothing in the way of a sociology of the South Asian Canadian family. According to him, the gaps in the literature on Sikh history exist in several areas: the Sikhs' ingroup and outgroup relations, maintenance of religious, cultural, and ethnic traditions, ties with India, role of the temple as a socio-cultural center and the Sikhs' reasons for coming to Canada.
in the face of so many obstacles. Oral history can fill these gaps. According to Milton Israel (1987):

There is a long agenda for future work. Buchignani emphasizes the significance of oral history projects, in particular among the older generation of immigrants. He notes the lost opportunities among the Sikh pioneers on the west coast who have died without leaving us their personal testimony and perspectives. (p.14)

In lamenting the loss of these original Sikh pioneers, Buchignani (1987) himself states:

However, several important sources of information remain almost untapped: second generation Sikhs and those few men and women who immigrated between 1920-1947 remain a reservoir of oral history data. (p.116)

Methodology:

On May 20, 1989, the India Cultural Society of British Columbia held a dinner at the Pan Pacific Hotel in Vancouver to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Komagata Maru incident. The sons and daughters of British Columbia's original Sikh pioneers from the 1904-1908 period, now in their seventies and eighties, were the guests of honour for the over 2000 people in attendance. It was this group that Norman Buchignani (1987) refers to as "a reservoir of oral history data".

I have included a group photograph, which I took at this occasion, at the end of this chapter. It shows these proud survivors gathered together for the first time as an entire group. This was my population: they had common roots,
religion, experiences, culture, hopes and aspirations. They had a long-awaited and important history to tell.

During this event, the younger people were brought in touch with their elders' pasts and we all realized that everything we have in this rich and abundant country was due to the valiant efforts of these brave survivors who were assembled before us. Their history, and in turn our history, was rich and valuable. It needed to be preserved, documented, and made available to all people. These people were the living link to the past, and because of their age and frailty were slowly fading away.

As stories and memories were exchanged, I realized how oral our culture is and how history is communicated in this way. A history book could never have captured the faltering voices, the emotional expressions and the shifts in pitch and intonation that I experienced that day listening to these men and women reminisce. It was then that I decided to undertake an oral history because it allowed these people to tell their stories in their own words. It adds another dimension to the study of history. As Derek Reimer (1984) states:

Its medium is the recorded human voice which conveys meaning beyond the actual words. This additional meaning includes, information about age, mood, accent, ethnic group, regional and class background, sex of the speaker and personality traits. Each voice has qualities which distinguish it from others giving oral history interviews a personal presence that no written record can match. (p.2)
Time was an important factor and it was vital that these life histories be taped and preserved soon before these pioneers left us forever. These tapes would be a tribute to these men and women's abilities to have survived and thrived against tremendous obstacles. Their stories would live on long after they were gone.

I obtained a list of the pioneers who attended this function as well as the names of those who were not present that evening. This gave me a list of possible interviewees with their addresses and phone numbers. I started my interviews with the people who I had met that evening since I had already heard parts of their personal histories and had established contact. They knew my parents and family and were very cooperative.

I began each interview by explaining the purposes of my study and the importance of the interviewee's contribution. I explained that there were gaps in the history of the Sikhs in B.C. and they could help fill these gaps with their personal history. On most occasions we were in their homes and I was accompanied by my father or mutual acquaintance so they were comfortable and trusting. Before any taping, I explained the Release Form to them (in Appendix). I made it clear how I would use their tape recording and any of their photographs, letters and documents. The form was then signed and witnessed.

At this point I explained that it was important that we should not be disturbed while we were taping our
conversation. It was important that we sit in a quiet space, free of background noise. On many occasions, radios and televisions were turned off, windows and doors closed, telephones unplugged, children told to be quiet. Sometimes we would get up and move to a different room.

Respect and sensitivity to their culture were very important in enhancing communication during the interviews. Being a Sikh, I was aware of the subtle cultural cues to gain their trust. I never called them by their names but referred to them as "auntie" or "uncle". I tried to sit at a lower spot than they did, sometimes at their feet on the carpet. I wanted them to feel that they were in control. These were all ways of showing my respect.

Being a male interviewing females was also a factor that I had to consider. Since I was working with a culture that has defined gender roles, the female interviewees may have been reluctant to share certain information with a male. One way to allow for this would have been to have females interviewed by a female interviewer. This would have raised concerns regarding consistency and brought in another variable to be accounted for in analyzing the data. I did have a mutual friend or relation accompany me on any interview where I felt I might need some help to gain trust and thereby increase conversation. In retrospect, I was amazed by the high level of comfort and communication of each interview.
When we were comfortable, I would begin with the background information in the Question Set (in Appendix). These questions stemmed from discussions with historians, gaps in historical knowledge and my personal and academic curiosity. The intention was to cover the important areas of individual lives and form a clearer picture of the times in which they lived. I sought information about the situation and conditions in India at the time of their emigration, the journey over, and settling into a new life in Canada. I wanted to know about the beginnings and subsequent stages of family life, and the adaptations and adjustments that they had to make. Education and language problems, social networks, hopes and aspirations, fears and failures, housing, employment were all discussed. The role of their religion and the temple (gurdwara) as well as their ties to India were discussed. Most of the questions were open-ended and allowed for personal feelings, observations, anecdotes, and descriptions of the events in their lives.

The interview was a very powerful process. At times, it became very emotional because of the memories being stirred after so long a time. I would conduct the interview in either Punjabi of English, whichever language the individual felt most comfortable using. Most preferred Punjabi. There were some very touching moments, some tears, some silence and meditation, and much humour. Each interview was interesting for its own uniqueness. I would often stop to ask for the spelling of names, and I would write notes as
they were talking. There were many painful moments when they would search their memories for a forgotten name or date. Sometimes their voices were full of emotion as they recalled a fond memory or a difficult time.

Most interviews lasted about an hour. The longest was about two hours. Some people would talk at length about an issue they felt strongly about so I would allow considerable latitude to do so. My main concern was to get them talking and keep the conversation flowing. I would not work through the questions sequentially since many would be answered during the course of covering another subject. Some people tended to ramble off topic but subtly I encouraged them back on course.

At the end of the interview, I would ask for any old documents, letters, or photographs they might have that would clarify some of the things we had discussed. They would go off to their rooms and bring back a cherished picture or some carefully kept papers and put them in a bag for me to take with me. I promised to take good care of them and return them soon. We usually then sat and had tea or refreshments and they would talk about their children, grandchildren or someone we both knew. I would always thank them. They seemed pleased that someone was taking an interest in their lives and history. It made them feel important. Before leaving, I always took a coloured photograph of them as a visual record of the interview.
An important part of each interview was getting referrals for future interviews. Each time, I would ask if they knew of someone else in the community I should be talking to about these things. Some of these people would get on the phone right away to arrange another interview for me. Each interview generated referrals. Corroboration of information was then increased by successive interviews.

This snowball sampling technique worked very well; I felt I had a good sample when people were recommended who I had already interviewed. I realize that the sample was limited to begin with so I took care to include representation from different socio-economic groups, education levels, and parts of the province. Gender was also a consideration since there was an imbalance in the Sikh community in the early days. My sample eventually totalled 24 people, 18 men and 6 women. This included two Canadian born Sikhs.

Considering all the limitations of my sample and my time, resources, and accessibility, I feel confident that this is a fairly representative sample of the Sikhs who lived in British Columbia during the time being studied. Whoever was recommended as someone to interview and could contribute to the study was sought out and included in this sample. Interviewing more Sikhs would have added to the data but would not have altered the themes presented in this study.
As soon as possible after each interview, I made a copy of the tape and stored the original in a safe place. I used the copy to make a summary of the interview. This was not a transcription but a written record of the highlights, main points, features, important quotes, names and dates.

As the interviews progressed many common themes, issues, names and events emerged. I kept track of these and plotted them on a large piece of chart paper. I marked the tape location under each heading for future reference. The headings were:

- The Journey Over
- Settling In (housing and accommodation)
- The role of the temple or religion
- Work and Employment
- Injustice
- Rights and privileges
- Education
- Social Life
- Advice to Newcomers
- Successes

This data analysis phase involved much thought and organization. I colour coded each of the headings and went back to the individual summaries and used colour to mark wherever these topics occurred. This enabled me to organize each person's life and allowed me to see if in fact these aspects were significant. After identifying these headings as being significant, I began looking for other commonalities, keeping in mind that I was trying to form a composite picture of the province's Sikh community.

Many place names were repeatedly mentioned and through further study of the data revealed something interesting.
There were several distinct Sikh communities and clusters in the province, closely associated with place of work. Temples marked the larger ones: 2nd Avenue in Vancouver, Victoria, Fraser Mills, New Westminster, Abbotsford, and Paldi and Hillcrest on Vancouver Island. There had been temples in Ocean Falls and Golden but they had closed down by the time many of these people came on the scene. Many smaller clusters of Sikhs were also identified around mills and places of work. These were mostly male households.

The names of certain community leaders were often mentioned and given special recognition. As the interviews progressed, I tried to improve the quality of the data by inquiring further about certain issues and names. I would ask for more clarification or mention what someone else had said in a previous interview. Some of these events were religious celebrations, sports events, social events, political gatherings and the fight for rights. The people I wanted more information about were: temple committee members, priests, community leaders, important visitors, business leaders, educated people, athletes, travelling companions, and neighbours. The quality of the data improved in this way.

Some of the photographs, documents and letters that are included in this study have never before been seen by anyone other than family members. They are treasured momentos of the past and serve in this study as corroboration and verification of the events that took place. One should look
carefully at these photographs as they reveal many important insights: the composition of the community (males, females, children), degree of Canadianization, and the role of work and the temple. It is also important to note the dates of each photograph to see the changes over time.

I obtained copies of the newsletter India and Canada edited by Kartar Singh, from his nephew, Talminder Hundle. It is another valuable resource that chronicles the social events in the Sikh Community from 1929-1936. This further verifies the events described in the interviews and adds to the validity of the data obtained from the interviews.

It is the insider's perspective that gives the study special significance. Communication, the key to any successful interview, is greatly increased, according to Reimer (1984), when both parties are from the same social, cultural and religious background. Interviewees may be reluctant to speak candidly with an outsider, especially if he or she is from a group which has traditionally looked down upon their group and even persecuted it. Reimer argues that the outsider may not understand the particular forms of social interaction unique to that group and not know the appropriate questions or how to ask the questions. I was able to gain the trust and confidence of the elderly Sikhs since they knew my parents and I spoke their language. I am one of them. I understand the subtle ways of their non-verbal communication system, and consequently may be one of only a few people to whom they would confide their stories.
It is important to remember that memories are selective. Whether consciously or unconsciously these men and women picked and chose what they told me. They could not tell me everything. Then I picked and chose from what they told me. There was selection involved on both levels. The realism and significance of the actual conversations is somewhat lost by writing oral histories and presenting them on paper. This detracts from the full effect. Much of the power and intensity of the spoken word is lost. The thing to remember about reading this history is that one should really be listening to it.

Organization:

The next chapter sets the scene by describing the social, political and cultural conditions in Canada leading up to, and at the time of, the Sikhs' arrival here. Chapter Three describes the conditions in India when they emigrated and their long journey over to Canada. Chapter Four tells of their settling in and getting established to life in a new environment. This chapter includes information about adaptations, work, housing, community formation, role of the temple, social networking and job mobility. An extensive collection of documents and photographs accompanies this chapter.

Chapter Five addresses the theme of education. Chapter Six is about social life and is accompanied by another set of documents and photographs. The final chapter has the
conclusions. A postscript discusses the educational implications and the significance of the study.

Together, the chapters trace the process by which the Sikhs became established in British Columbia. They also explain how these Sikhs finally were able to call Canada their home after receiving the franchise in 1947, over forty years after the first Sikhs came to this country.
Chapter 2: Setting the Scene

The history of the Sikhs in Canada began with the first wave of immigration in 1904-1908. At this time about 5000 East Indians, virtually all male Sikhs from the province of Punjab, came to British Columbia to do labouring jobs on the railway, in the lumber mills and in forestry (Johnson, 1984, p.8). Even though they were unskilled and uneducated, they were favoured by employers because they were hardworking and reliable and because employers could pay the Sikhs less than white men for the same work.

These pioneer Sikhs did not have the intention of staying long. They came to make money and return to India. They faced many obstacles: racial discrimination and segregation, language problems, poor education, lack of proper housing and health care, and culture shock. They had come to a cold and hostile environment, both literally and figuratively. As Hugh Johnston (1984) states, for these men being apart from their families was especially painful:

Constantly in the company of their own countrymen - at work and in their lodging or bunkhouses - Sikhs were isolated by their pattern of life as well as by language, culture, and the attitude of the host population. Family life, with children going to school and contacts with neighbours, would have reduced that isolation, but this was an adult male population since only nine Indian women immigrated between 1904 and 1920. (p.8)

As British subjects, Sikhs had the right to vote in all elections. This was viewed as posing a threat to the existing government. Then in 1907 British Columbia Premier
Bowser introduced a bill to disenfranchise all "natives of India not of Anglo-Saxon parents" (Buchignani, 1985, p.21). They were denied the municipal, the provincial and the federal right to vote, even though they were British subjects. The implications of these actions were far reaching, as Buchignani (1985) states:

For the next forty years, South Asian Canadians would remain excluded from the political process in British Columbia. They were simultaneously excluded from a host of other things that were dependent on being a provincial voter: they could not vote for or become school trustees or trustees of improvement districts; neither could they be elected to provincial public office nor serve on juries. Although exclusion from the voters' list did not legally restrict them from public service this became a universal practice. Public works contracts specified that they not be employed. The same restriction applied to the sale of Crown timber, and the professions of law and pharmacy were informally closed to them. (p.21)

The loss of the vote and its implications probably did not bother the Sikhs, since most were uneducated and unable to take full advantage of such rights and privileges. But the next move was devastating. In 1908, immigration from India was virtually terminated due to legislated discrimination at the federal level brought on by the strong anti-Asian feelings of organized labour, politicians, and the media. As J. J. Mangalam (1986) explains:

The Government of Canada devised a four-pronged remedy to stop Indian immigration: 1) Prospective immigrants must have travelled on a through ticket purchased before leaving the country of their birth or citizenship and journeying continuously; 2) They must have in their possession $200.00 each; 3) They were subject to medical and sanitary examination upon arrival; 4) Their landing in
Canada was subject to favourable labour conditions prevailing at the time in Canada. (p.49)

Since there was no direct passage from India to Canada at that time, the harshness and the effect of this legislation was dramatic. As shown in Immigration Table 1 (Chadney, 1984, p.26) in the Appendix, from 1908 to 1920 only 118 Indians entered Canada.

In 1908, there was even an effort to deport all those who remained in Canada to British Honduras to effectively rid the province of the "Hindoos" and "keep Canada white" (Muthanna, 1982, p.143). At federal government expense, a delegation was sent to investigate the employment opportunities, economic conditions, and possibilities of settlement for all of British Columbia's Sikhs. This delegation consisted of a federal government official, a Vancouver immigration official and interpreter and two local Sikhs. When the Sikhs returned and reported back to the community about the unsuitability and poor living and economic conditions of that country, the local Sikh community unanimously rejected the proposal and steadfastly declared their intention to stay in Canada. This plan was far too extreme and probably would never have succeeded, but it does give an indication of the intensity of the anti-Asian sentiments of that time and the stance of various levels of government.

Another government scheme to get rid of the Sikhs already in Canada was more subtle. Whenever Sikhs would go back to India to get married or visit their family, they
would face difficulties on their return because they could not prove their previous residence in Canada. The Canadian immigration department did not provide Indians with the proper documentation when they left the country, although they systematically registered out-going Chinese. The policy was deliberate and designed to make return more difficult, (Johnston, 1988, p.307).

What disturbed Sikhs most was the breakup of the traditional family unit. They pleaded with the authorities to allow their families to join them, but met with no success. According to Samuel Raj (1980):

The dominant society wanted to undo the "wrong" that had already been done. By keeping the women out, it hoped to purge Canada of the East Indian element within in a generation. For "the comfort and happiness of the generations that are to succeed us," it was argued, "we must not permit their women to come in at all". The exclusion of the women would induce many men to leave Canada and the ones who refused to leave would be prevented from "defiling the land" with their progeny. (p.72)

Some did go back to India, but many went to the United States in search of better social and economic conditions. Consequently, the Sikh population in British Columbia dropped in 1918 to a low of about 700 people (Johnston, 1988, p.304). These were the survivors who weathered the storm and remained here when the future looked bleakest. Their faith in their religion and in one another kept them strong.

The numerous challenges to the immigration bar, the infamous Komagata Maru incident, the many legal and illegal
manoeuverings had left the Sikhs sad and disillusioned with the injustices they faced on a daily basis. So they banded together and, in turn, became stronger as a community with the temple becoming a substitute for the family life that they were all lacking. As Buchignani (1985) explains:

Sikh pioneers came to Canada with a strong group identity born out of 500 years of struggle (in India). As a result, despite hardship, discrimination, and social isolation, they rarely doubted their self-worth or the correctness of their position. They had also developed a tendency to unite together under threat and go on the defensive. (p.32)

They closed the doors of their community and became a virtual enclave and isolated themselves from the outer world (Ramcharan, 1984, p.34). They focussed their attention on solidarity, religious devotion, and on fighting together against oppression. Buchignani (1985) states:

By 1920, temples existed in Vancouver, New Westminster, Victoria, Nanaimo, Golden, Abbotsford, Fraser Mills, and Paldi. Sikh religious organization quickly provided people with a sense of place, order, continuity, and community pride. Religious institutions also brought people together and provided an organizational focus for collective action on many issues.---Virtually every aspect of the ongoing battle against the immigration ban was planned, supported, and orchestrated through temple management organizations. (p.33)

The collective efforts of British Columbia's Sikh communities eventually paid off when, in 1919, the immigration restrictions on bringing out wives and children under 18 years old were lifted. However, it was not until 1920 that women and children started coming out from India. Family reunification was a very slow process as we see from
Immigration Tables 2 and 3 (Chadney, 1984, p.189 and p.190) in the Appendix. Community growth was taking place, but it did not reach its earlier peak of 5000 until well into the 1950s (Buchignani, 1980, p.124).

Many of the people who came to Canada during these times are still alive and their personal histories form the heart of this study. I have interviewed twenty-four of these people, 18 men and 6 women for their oral histories. They are the direct link to the original Sikh pioneers who came in the 1904-1908 time period. Their stories of the struggles and hardships of life in a new and hostile country must be heard, not only to retrieve their own history, but to retrieve their community's history and to make it available to future generations of Canadians. It is important to know the events and circumstances that finally led to these Sikhs being able to call Canada their home.
Chapter 3: The Journey Over

In the previous chapter I described the scene to which these Sikhs were coming when they arrived in Canada, but it is also important to realize from where they were coming in India. These emigrants came from the northern province of Punjab, from rural farming villages. They were unskilled, uneducated and worked on family-owned farms. All of the respondents say that there was plenty to eat and living conditions were very good. Family fortunes had risen and were at an all time high. This was due to the Sikhs who had come to Canada earlier, sending a good portion of their earnings back to India for the family to acquire more land and to upgrade their housing.

All of India was under British colonial rule and domination, so Indians' rights and freedoms were limited. According to Mr. G. Billan, who emigrated in 1932, "the British were the boss, they ran things, ran everything, even in the villages they picked the head guy." Some opposition existed. Mr. K. Bains describes a political gathering in his village:

There was a big movement going on for independence, everybody was following Ghandi, Nehru and some were even following Subash Chandar Bose, he was a little more radical in the Congress party at that time. I remember in 1937 we had a conference for about a week. There must have been about a hundred thousand people coming from all over, the nearby places. The final speaker was Nehru, I saw Nehru there, there were some of the radicals and the Congress people were all together. Day and night the conference was going for seven days and Nehru came for about half a day there. This was in Mahalpur, it's a big village,
you couldn't accommodate those people in any hall, this was in the open air, in the summer time.

Even though there were concerted efforts for independence, relief was not in sight. Canada represented a chance at a brighter social and economic future.

For most of these people all they had ever known was the land that had been handed down to them for generations and that they had lived and worked upon since they were born. This was their only world; this was the only geography they knew. The only picture they had of Canada was the face of the loved ones from whom they had been apart for so long. They had little understanding of what to expect, expect that the Canadian Sikhs needed them and had fought long and hard for them to join them. They knew that they faced an arduous journey but there would be a place to stay and support for them on their arrival. What further helped sustain them was the realization that they were going to Canada with far more than their predecessors did when they went in the 1904-1908 time period.

The people I interviewed rarely made this journey on their own. They were typically accompanied by their sponsor, a villager or family friend who had gone back to India for the purpose of ensuring their safety along the way. Some Canadian Sikhs had made this journey several times and had become seasoned travellers who knew how to avoid the many problems along the way. They provided not only the social and emotional support needed for the 45-60 day trip but
economic support as well. Many financed the total cost of the trip, $200-$300 per person, in Canadian funds.

The journey to Canada can be divided into four stages: the train from the villages to Calcutta, the boat trip from Calcutta to Hong Kong, the stopover in Hong Kong and the final boat trip from Hong Kong to Canada. Travel began with a prayer at the village temple for a safe journey. Then they would take the train from the village to Calcutta, the port from which they would travel by ship to begin the long voyage to Canada. We must remember that this train journey, from 1000-1500 miles long taking anywhere from two to six days, was itself a traumatic experience for these people who seldom saw strange faces unless they were going to a neighbouring village for a wedding or religious festival. Mr. D. Sihota, who in 1936 at the age of twelve made this journey with his father and brother, tells what happened:

 When we left, we travelled by train for about two days. It was from Jullunder to Calcutta. We travelled third class, as most Indians travelled in those days. I remember getting up to sleep at night, up on the upper luggage compartment, where we would just curl up and go to sleep, otherwise the trains were really packed. It was a very interesting trip for us, for many years afterwards, I could remember the names of all the stations we stopped at along the way because it was something new and exciting.

The train ended its journey at the Howrah train station outside of Calcutta. Here officials from the nearby Sikh Temple often met the weary travellers. Mrs. G. K. Oppal, who made this journey in 1934, describes her experiences:
These people were so caring, the gurdwara people would be standing there waiting at the station, waiting to take us to the nearby temple, so we had a safe place to stay. They did not take any money, they would take us to the temple just to help us. Lots of our people who were going to and fro, travellers, would be met by 2 or 3 people, who would insist that they go with them. The temple there was very nice, clean and comfortable, there were rooms set aside for us to stay. This is where people would stay, eat and rest. We did not eat at the temple, we ate out but stayed three days there. It took us that long to get a boat.

There was often a long wait to get a boat to Hong Kong. This was because there was no established schedule for passengers between these two ports. Several shipping lines did serve this area, including the BA Line, the Jardine Line and the Mackenzie Line. Mr. K. Bains describes the wait for a boat:

We came to Calcutta and we stayed in a place for about two weeks. The ship was a freighter, every day we had to check in with the brokers as to when the ship would sail after loading. We had no idea otherwise. We stayed there for about two weeks. There were no passenger ships at all, even if there had been, I don't think anybody could have afforded it. I remember I went to see the dock, there was someone shipping their car, a white guy. You know how kids are sort of inquisitive? I started looking around the car, feeling the fancy car. In India, in the area we come from, there were buses all right but not fancy cars. Only the rich people had that in the cities, not in the villages. So I touched the car and this white guy he slapped me for touching the car, (laughing) I'll never forget that.

Passenger services and accommodations were poor on these shipping lines as freight was their main concern. The entire journey to Hong Kong could take anywhere from 15 to 20 days depending on the number and length of the stopovers. The fare was about $20-$30 Canadian. Living conditions were
substandard since these ships also carried livestock throughout Asia. Mr. G. Billan states: "They gave you the bottom grade, the basement, that's the only place they had". Mr. J. Uppal, who came in 1926, states: "Third class was the only mode of travel, in those days. Third class, even steerage actually, most of our people who were coming to Canada were travelling third class". Mr. K. Bains describes the conditions:

Before we left, we had to buy some groceries, portable beds, a stove and some coal. We prepared our own meal on the deck, we slept on the deck. There were no state rooms at all. There must have been over a 100 Sikhs staying on the deck. All night long and day long we stayed on the deck. If it rained, we would put a little tent up there. We made our own meals there. There was a small dispensary, I think there was a doctor on board too, he gave me some pills. ...I got sick, I had never seen the ocean in my whole life.

Mr. D. Sihota tells of his first experience on a ship:

We happened to be coming across at the time of the monsoon rains and the typhoon weather. We hit very, very heavy seas, but that didn't keep me away from the deck very often. This would have been September, October, because we got here in December and we spent some time in Hong Kong. It wasn't a very large ship, we were down in the hold of the ship. And we of course had all our bedding, all our food and and all our cooking things. You had to carry all that with you.

In the heavy, heavy seas I can remember the people on one side of the deck just sliding across the flat deck to the other side as the ship rolled. And then when it reversed the roll everybody shifted to the other side of the deck. All your belongings, all your utensils, yourself, all kind of slid from one side to the other. Ever since then I have never seen such heavy seas. The waves must have been 20 to 30 feet high and the ship wasn't that large anyway. As the ship dove into the hollow all you could see all around was water. And when it got to the top all you could
see was the sky, you couldn't see the water at all. That was a very unique experience.

Mr. S. Gill made this trip in 1925 and provides this description:

There were about 30 to 40 Sikhs altogether, 5 or 6 ladies too. On the deck, because it was hot we made shelter in the form of a platform to provide shade. Under this we set our cots. There were lots of Chinese, maybe 300 to 400, I don't know from where they came, maybe Calcutta. Their ladies were with them. Underneath there was a lot of cargo, some sheep and animals. There was a bad smell but we did not go down there. We had brought our groceries from Calcutta and did our own cooking on the deck on small coal stoves. The men did all the cooking, all the old-timers knew how to cook. They had been cooking while they were in Canada. I didn't do any, I did not know how to, I'd always had it all done for me. There were about 20 Canadian Sikhs and about 20 of us newcomers aboard. The women and children were all newcomers.

There were several stops along the way where these freighters would load and unload their cargo, at times taking two to three days to do so. Mr. K. Bains remembers some of these stopovers:

We came to Penang in Malaysia, this was the first port. We stopped here for two days. Right on the boat the money-changer came to exchange for Malaysian money. Then we came to Singapore. We stayed 2 or 3 days, this was the first time we got off the boat. We had a meal there and went back, 2 days after the ship sailed. Some of the people got off here. People were working there, there was quite a settlement of Indian people. At that time there were policemen and guards in big buildings. Every shop had a guard there, a Sikh person. They were in the police force too in Singapore.

Mrs. G. K. Oppal liked these stopovers because she enjoyed touring these strange and exotic cities:

When we knew that the boat was about to dock, we would all get dressed up, and get in line to go on shore. We toured the whole city, we only went
back on board when the boat was going to leave. We
did the same at every port, first came Rangoon,
then Penang and Singapore and finally Hong Kong.

Hong Kong was a vital stop for all emigrants to Canada
for it was here they received their immigration clearance to
proceed on to Canada. At this time there was no Canadian
Immigration Office in India, so all immigration matters were
handled here. This included the medical examination,
documentation and interviewing. It was for this reason that
there was a sizeable Sikh population and a Sikh temple
(gurdwara) had been established. Mr. K. Bains explains:

They have a Sikh temple and they have
designated a Chinese man and his wife to welcome
newcomers. He had proper credentials from the
temple. The ship would dock on the Kowloon side,
and as soon as the ship docks, he would go on
board and introduce himself in Punjabi. You leave
your luggage with him and come across the channel
with the other people. Your luggage will
automatically be transferred to the temple. The
Canadian Sikhs had raised money for some rooms
with beds on the lower floor of the temple for the
exclusive use of travellers going between India
and Canada. They had already sent a huge cooking
stove for cooking food as well. You could cook 20–
25 rotis at a time, it was always busy, especially
in a place like Hong Kong, people are travelling
through transit. Nobody stayed in hotels in those
days, I stayed about 2 months here, I had some
problem with my passport and took a long time to
clear this up. When you left you made a
contribution to the gurdwara, $10 or $15, whatever
you could afford. I could even speak a bit of
Chinese and do my own shopping (laughs).
Fortunately, I received my clearance just in time,
I caught the boat and arrived in Canada just two
days before my 18th birthday. I came on the 9th of
September and the 11th was my birthday. If I had
been delayed for any reason, I would have been
sent back to India.

Mrs. G. K. Oppal tells of two Sikh women having to stay
in Hong Kong for over a year because they had failed their
medical examination due to eye problems. Their husbands went from Canada to help them gain medical clearance and accompany them to Canada at considerable personal expense. There were many incidents of unscrupulous officials. She explains:

First they passed me for my medical, but once we got on board ready to leave, they failed me. They would not let me go any further, and all of our luggage was on the boat. They said that my eyes were not good. So my husband said that his time would run out for being out of Canada too long. He could not re-enter if he stayed out for over a year. They knew all this of course, so we paid $10 to the ship's doctor and some Chinese money to the Chinese official. So they let us go and I put medicine in my eyes all the way. We were afraid all the way that we would get caught and be sent back, but we made it over with any further problems.

Mr. D. Sihota cites another instance of an immigration problem and explains why these types of problems were occurring:

We stayed at the Sikh temple for 15 to 20 days while arrangements were made to go on to Vancouver. We had some difficulty with Canadian Immigration. Although my dad had been here since 1907, there was some problem with documentation. The immigration people in Canada were saying that his permit to return to Canada had run out. The time, ten years or whatever, had expired. We managed to get the passage booked in time to arrive in Victoria prior to this date. There was some question as to whether the ship would get here on time. In those days they were trying everything they could to exclude our people from entering, so any little technicality or anything like that was used to keep us out. Even though he had been here since 1907 and had travelled back and forth numerous times, maybe 5 or 6 times.

The gurdwara in Hong Kong was a refuge, a safe haven for Sikhs travelling through Asia. It made their environment
less threatening. They could be with their own people in a land of people whose customs, language and laws were unfamiliar. The gurdwara not only provided food and accommodation but trust, security, and fellowship. There were temple officials whose sole function was to expedite and ensure safe travel through the port for all Sikhs. They knew how to handle the multitude of problems that inevitably arose. They handled immigration and financial matters, health and medical concerns and assisted in booking passage for the final leg of the journey.

At this time the Canadian Pacific Railway operated an Empress Passenger Line that left Hong Kong every 15 days. Most travellers took this line. It cost $100-$200 in Canadian funds depending on the type of service and accommodation required. Mr. S. Gill explains:

We travelled on the Empress of Asia (in 1925), at this time there were four CPR boats that travelled this route to Canada: the Empress of Asia, the Empress of Japan, the Empress of Canada and the Empress of Russia. Every 15 days one was leaving or arriving in Hong Kong or Vancouver. I think we paid about $100 Canadian. Our first stop was Japan, Tokyo and Nagasaki, then on to Honolulu. The journey was very rough leaving Japan, I could not eat much, I got sick. From Honolulu on it was better. Then we landed in Victoria and on to Vancouver.

Accommodations and services improved on this part of the journey since now they were travelling on passenger ships rather than on freighters as they had on the first leg of the ocean voyage. At extra cost, passengers could get
We left Hong Kong on the Empress of Canada. We had better accommodations, the compartments were small. We were in the lower berths, maybe 15 to 20 people in a room. The food was served, we didn't have to prepare our own food. The Sikhs all stayed together and even the arrangements to feed us were of that type. We never had the occasion to sit in the dining room with the Europeans. It was the Asiatic people together, we might sit with the Chinese. The Chinese in the same dining room would be off by themselves and the people from India would be eating in another section of the dining room by themselves, segregated.

The food, of course, was on that particular ship, was Canadian. I was not use to eating meat or eggs and it felt very strange. When the food was brought I found very little that I could actually eat, potatoes, rice and vegetables. Occasionally, I would take an egg, but it was not in my religion to eat that and I found it rather difficult to deal with that.

I do remember going up on the deck, as the ship was travelling, watching the flying fish and watching the other fish swimming by the boat. That journey took about a month, and we came through Kobe, Japan and Yokohama. Then from Honolulu on to Victoria.

Because of dietary restrictions many Sikhs chose to do their own cooking. This option was available to them and, when there were sufficient numbers of them on board, the Sikhs favoured this method of travel. Mr. M. Jagpal, at the age of 15, travelled in this manner in 1930:

From Hong Kong, we caught the Empress of Canada, there were about 10 of us, including two women and a four year old boy. We had been together since Calcutta. It was a much larger ship. We cooked ourselves, turn by turn we got the kitchen. The Chinese, Japanese, and us all took turns using the cooking facilities, they all made their own food. There was a place where we could eat prepared food, but we didn't eat that food. It was a restaurant. We each had our own separate small beds, all located in a large room for the
Sikhs. The women and the child were all here, and they had a tent-like purdah to ensure their privacy.

The entire journey took about 20 days. At times it was very scary, for 3 or 4 days we could not see a thing because it was so stormy. When we went up on deck all we could see was darkness. The water was going all over the deck as if it was raining. We were frightened, having never seen this much water. Sometimes the boat was completely covered with walls of water. We thought we would never arrive at our destination (laughing). One day I cried because I slipped on the stairs, they were wet and I hurt my leg. Then Hookma Singh and Jagir Tawana, two oldtimers, told me to stay downstairs and not to go out on deck. I would get nervous and think about the village and get lonesome. It wasn't the hurt leg as much as being homesick that made me cry.

The old timers, who had made this journey several times before, comforted us and said that everything would be fine. They said that this was a big ship, in the old days they had travelled on smaller, poorer ships and got through okay. There were four of them with us and they'd seen all this before. There was one oldtimer from Malawa and he was very sharp, he also did all the cooking. I can't remember his name but he had gone back to India three times.

The Sikhs all stuck together and socialized only with one another. We stopped in Tokyo, and one other place and then to Victoria. It took 18 days from Tokyo to here. The journey went fairly well because we supported one another. The food was good, we ate whatever we pleased, we made it and they served it. The groceries were all on board. We had told them at the beginning what sorts of things we needed, how much butter, milk, flour, etc.. This was included in the fare.

The Sikhs almost always travelled together, but at times this was not possible and some had to make the boat trip alone. Mr. K. Bains describes his ordeal:

When I got on the ship, it was the Empress of Canada, I was the only Indian guy. There was a big room, up and down, just like the army, lots of bunks. There must have been 35 to 40 beds in there, all occupied except one, which I took. They were all Filipinos.
In Hong Kong, they used to tell stories about the Filipinos, how they were bad and vicious. I did not get a good impression about the people from the Philippines. I lay there but I could not sleep all night. You have this fear instilled in you. This was the first time I came in contact with foreigners, living with them day and night. You see them on the street, it's a different story. I was scared like hell.

Gradually, you would chum around with them, actually they were very nice to me. They were to get off in Honolulu, and the night before getting there, nobody slept in the ship. We were partying, talking and everything. They all got off. I saw them getting off the gangplank and then the ship sailed. I came back to my empty room. I never cried when I left home, or in Calcutta, or anywhere else along the way. This is the first time I cried, when I was left alone in that big room there. I was all by myself, I was really scared.

Mrs. B. Johal came over in 1927, with her son, who was not quite three years old at the time:

I came over with my baby boy. We had a private room, where all the white people stayed. We weren't with the other Asians. It didn't cost us that much more. We ate Canadian food, no problem. On the first day I missed breakfast. Someone knocked on our door early in the morning, but I did not answer, thinking that they had done it by mistake. The steward went to the other Sikhs and told Ralla Singh that the lady did not come for her breakfast. So he came to me and explained the procedure for coming to the dining room for the meals. The meals were very good, we had no problems with the food or the arrangements. We stopped in Japan and stayed for 20 days to visit my two brothers. Sham and Ram Singh, one was a guard in a goldsmith's shop and the other was a policeman.

Finally, after being in transit for several months, the Sikhs saw Canada for the first time. Mr. M. Jagpal describes his initial impressions of his new homeland, as seen from the ship as it approached land:
When our boat was still out in the harbour and we approached the city of Victoria, I thought what kind of a place is this? I didn't see any farms or crops, just forest, like a jungle. Where do they get their food? What am I going to do in such a poor country? All I saw were trees, I couldn't see any big buildings yet, just tiny little shacks. Can this be Canada?
IMMIGRATION IDENTIFICATION CARD

THIRD CLASS

THIS CARD MUST BE SHOWN TO THE EXAMINING OFFICER AT PORT OF ARRIVAL

Name of passenger: Hari Singh

Name of ship: Empress of Japan

Name appears on Return sheet:

Medical Examination Stamp

Canadian Immigration

Vancouver, B.C.

Dec 4, 1934

(See back)

CANADIAN PACIFIC STEAMSHIPS, LIMITED

R.M.S. No. 1663

Voyage No. 193

The Bearer: Hari Singh

having surrendered a Passage Ticket from Hong Kong to Vancouver, is entitled to Open Third Class Passage in this ship, and for this voyage only. The holder of this card will be required to present it at the gangway both upon leaving and coming on board at intermediate ports, and to surrender it to the proper officers at destination.

HK 330-1000W/33

Purser

IMMIGRATION IDENTIFICATION CARD

THIRD CLASS

THIS CARD MUST BE SHOWN TO THE EXAMINING OFFICER AT PORT OF ARRIVAL

Name of passenger: Gurdial Kour

Name of ship: Empress of Japan

Name appears on Return sheet:

Medical Examination Stamp

Canadian Immigration

Vancouver, B.C.

Dec 4, 1934

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We, Freeman, Viscount Willingdon, G.C.S.I., G.C.M.G., G.C.I.E., G.B.E., Governor-General and Commander-in-Chief of the Dominion of Canada, Request, in the name of His Britannic Majesty, all those whom it may concern to allow the bearer to pass freely within his dominion and to accord him all the help and protection of which he may stand in need.

Given under our hand and seal-at-arms at Ottawa this 1st day of September 1930.

This passport contains 32 pages.

Nous, Freeman, Vicomte Willingdon, G.C.S.I., G.C.M.G., G.C.I.E., G.B.E., Gouverneur général et Commandant en chef du Dominion du Canada, Demandons, au nom de Sa Majesté britannique, à tous ceux que les présentes peuvent concerner de permettre au porteur de lui accorder tout le secours et toute la protection dont il pourrait avoir besoin.

Donné sous Notre seing et scellé de Nos armes à Ottawa ce 1er septembre 1930.

Ce passeport contient 32 pages.

PASSEPORT

CANAĐA

No. of passport 110898
Name of bearer

Accompanied by his wife

and children

and enfants

NATIONAL STATUS

British Subject

NATIONALITÉ

britannique
PERSONAL DESCRIPTION

SIGNALEMENT

Wife - Femme

Profession

Place and date of birth

Canada

Lieu et date de naissance

Domicile

Domicile

Face

Visage

Colour of eyes

Brown

Couleur des yeux

Colour of hair

Black with gray

Couleur des cheveux

Visible distinguishing marks or peculiarities

Marques distinctives visibles ou autres particularités

CHILDREN

Name

Age

Sex

ENFANTS

Name

Age

Sexe

Signature of wife - Et de sa femme.
These are to request and require in the Name of the Viceroy and Governor-General of India all those whom it may concern to allow the bearer to pass freely without let or hindrance, and to afford him every assistance and protection of which he may stand in need.

Given at Lahore

the 16th day of July 1923

By order of the Viceroy and Governor-General of India

Governor General,

Panjab States.
### Description

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### Children - Enfants

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**Wife - Femme**

[Photograph of bearer]

[Photograph of wife]
Chapter 4: Getting Established:

This was Canada, the end of their long journey. The newcomers would land in either Victoria or Vancouver and join their loved ones. Sikh communities existed in both ports by this time. The Victoria Sikh Temple had been built in 1912 and the Vancouver Temple was built in 1908 by the original pioneers. A small Sikh temple had also been established in Paldi, on Vancouver Island, in 1918 by the Mayo Lumber Company. On the mainland, in Abbotsford and New Westminster two temples were built in 1912 by the Sikh community (Buchignani, 1985, p.43). In Fraser Mills, there was a company built temple. Temples also existed in Nanaimo and Golden. The total Sikh population in British Columbia in the early 1920s was just over 1000, but there was an imbalance in this community, as Buchignani (1985) states:

By 1925 about 90 percent of the population was made up of men over forty or older; because most adult children could not immigrate there were only a handful of young men in the community. There were no more than forty women, all of whom were married to immigrant men. On average, one man lived with his family for every thirty men who did not. (p.74)

These were the survivors, the brave ones who had weathered the storm, resisted the pressures to leave, and considered Canada their home.

The infusion of the new Sikhs was very welcome. British Columbia's Sikh community saw them as their future. The age and gender imbalance would soon be corrected with the arrival of their women and children. This would ensure the growth of their community.
The temple played an important role in helping these newcomers connect with their relations and friends. It also assisted in finding housing and work. On landing, the temple was usually their first stop. Here they could seek spiritual strength and renewal. They would thank God for their safe journey, offer a donation, eat a meal and check in with the temple officials. Accommodations were also available until such time as the newcomers could establish themselves. Mr. D. Sihota describes his welcome:

On arrival at Victoria, we were met by some of our own local people. With their assistance we cleared customs. There was quite a close knit group of people, our Sikh people, and they helped each other a great deal. We were welcomed into their homes until such time as my Dad could find a job and we could go out and establish ourselves.

Soon after landing, there was a routine that was usually followed. It was the "Canadianization" of these new immigrants. The women would go out with their husbands to shop for new clothes. It was the custom then to dress Western style in public, saving their Indian dress for inside the home. This was strictly upheld in those days, as Mrs. P. Sangha explains:

On the day that I arrived in 1932, my husband took me to the shop to get new clothes right away. I pleaded with him that I hadn't had anything to eat and that I was starving, but he did not listen. First, we got the new dresses then later we got something to eat. It was the rule then to dress like the white ladies and keep our hair covered with a scarf at all times.

This was one of the sacrifices that had to be made. It was the need to conform, as close as possible, to the mode
of dress common to Canada. All of the women respondents agreed that the situation was not like today when Indian women can be seen in ethnic dress in public. This was unheard of in the old days. Mrs. P. Johl adopted western dress enroute:

When we stopped in Hong Kong I bought some dresses. Everybody said that we couldn't land unless we dressed properly. The pioneers insisted that we dress like the other Canadian people. They would not let anyone dress differently, we had to show that we could fit in and be just like the white people.

In keeping with this philosophy of conforming to the Canadian ways, most young men would get their hair cut and get new clothes. Almost all of them came wearing turbans and had never cut their hair because of their strict religious upbringing. Devout Sikhs never cut their hair, so this decision was very difficult for some men. It was both a personal choice influence by the strength of their own religious convictions and pressure from outside social forces to conform. These forces included family, friends and the dominant society. For Mr. M. Mangat it was very traumatic:

My dad made me cut my hair. Right after I got off the ship he took me to the Japanese barber at Fraser Mills. I cried all the way through it, I couldn't sleep for a couple of nights. I'll never forget that.

Mr. K. Bains had a similiar experience:

My two brothers were working at Sooke Lake in the sawmill. They came to see me the day after I landed in Victoria. First thing in the morning, Bunt said, "Let's go to town." We went to town to a Japanese barber. They made me sit down and get a
haircut. He said, "I don't want you to wear this turban around here." He then took me to buy some new clothes, thicker clothes for winter.

White barbers would not cut the hair of Asian people, so Sikhs had to go to a Japanese or Chinese barber. This practice persisted well into the 1940s as Mr. D. Sihota explains:

The barbers in Duncan did not cut the hair of East Indian people. We used to go to the Chinese barber as a consequence. I went to the Canadian barber at one point. I sat and they kept taking other people and ignoring me. I said I want a haircut. He said, "Sorry, we don't cut your hair". They would not cut the hair of any Chinese, Japanese or East Indian. This was in 1943.

These concessions that the Sikhs made were done in order to fit in with the other Canadians. They would always stand out because of their skin colour, but at least an attempt was made to assimilate. Most Sikhs felt that these were simply surface changes and that they had not changed in any fundamental way. "Canadianization" was the price they had to pay for acceptance, an offering given to make Canadian life a little easier for them.

Now the newcomers were prepared to get on with their lives. All these people had a place to go since their sponsors, the original pioneers, had a foothold here. Many went to live in their own homes or rented homes; some moved into company-owned bunkhouses. The pioneers had already established small communities around the temples and places of work.

The largest community was in Vancouver, centered around the Sikh Temple at 1866 West 2nd Avenue, in Kitsilano. It
had its roots in the 1904-1908 time period when most men found employment in the many lumber mills located in the False Creek area. They either lived in their own homes or lived communally in rented homes. Brothers Chanan, Bawa and Nand Singh Johl, who came to Canada in 1905 and 1906, were among the first to establish themselves in this area. After working in the lumber mills for many years, they started a lumber cartage business in 1918 at Cedar Cove Sawmill (see the photograph at the end of the chapter). Nand Singh Johl's son Karnail describes his family's experiences:

My family bought our first house in 1911, at 1785 West 2nd Avenue. It was about half a block from the temple. They paid $275 at that time. Then they bought another house across the street, it was 1768 West 2nd Avenue, in 1914. They used to tell us they paid around $475 for that one. Wages at that time when they first came out were about 10 cents an hour. Then later they said wages went down when the war was on, then they were getting 50 cents a day. They bought the house on those wages, so that was alot of money at that time.

They got their first contract at the Cedar Cove Sawmill, (see photo). This was on West 6th Avenue. This was for hauling wood. They had their own trucks and their own horses and buggies. They acquired the trucks in 1918, but first they hauled the wood with the horse and buggy. They were the only ones, of our people, who had a big contract with the sawmills. They used to get the wood from the sawmill and go from house to house to sell it for firewood because everybody used to burn wood. Then lots of our people got into the wood business after us.

About twelve of our people worked in this particular mill in the early days. But they also worked in Hemby Sawmills and Giroday Sawmills which were both close by and Alberta Sawmills which was right there too. Quite a few of them used to work at Robertson and Hackett. These mills were around the Granville Bridge. Girodays and Hemby were on one side. Robertson and Hackett was on the other side of the bridge, this was where most of our people worked. Quite a few of them
worked at Alberta Sawmills which was just a little further down from Cedar Cove. They used to have a cookhouse and bunkhouse there for our people. They used to also have a cookhouse/bunkhouse at Robertson and Hackett, there were about 30 to 40 people living there. There were actually small mills all along there but these were the big ones.

Giani Harnam Singh, the priest at the 2nd Avenue temple, was one of the original pioneers who came to Canada in 1906. He arrived from India educated in English and Sanskrit enabling him to read and write letters for his Sikh neighbours on 2nd Avenue. This kept him in touch with events in the villages and in Canada. He lectured at the temple about politics, religion and social affairs. He was the first Sikh priest in Canada and the first Sikh to be involved in the wood business. He owned several properties in the temple area which he rented to fellow Sikhs. At 47 years old, he returned to India to marry and in 1929 returned with his wife, Jagdish Kaur. She describes the 2nd Avenue community at this time:

When we arrived here everything was already set for us. My husband owned three houses and several wood trucks and horses and buggies for hauling wood. He had parked the trucks and left everything in the hands of Chanan and Nand Singh. They looked after all the houses and rents, they paid all the taxes and bills while my husband was away. We lived at 1847 West 2nd Avenue and the other houses were on 3rd Avenue, rented to our people. I was lucky, everything was all set, no problem. Next to the house, on half an acre there was a large wood storage lot and a large barn where the trucks and horses and buggies were stored. Our business was all set on my arrival, I was too lucky.

Many of our people at this time sold wood. They picked up wood from the mills and went door to door and sold it for a profit. Most still had horses and buggies and some, if they could afford it, had trucks. Trucks were very expensive. We had
several trucks, made of metal, even the wheels were metal. There were no doors though. He kept two drivers, Saran Singh and Tarlochan Singh. They made about $4 to $5 a day. They were very good people, all of our people were good, very trustworthy. Everybody got along well then. They helped one another and respected each other, no fighting at all.

I spent most of my time at the temple, praying, cleaning and cooking in the kitchen. There were about 20 families in the temple area and the temple was the center. Evenings and weekends were spent at the temple. We all socialized here, there was nowhere else to go. We rarely mixed with white people, unless they came to the house to order wood.

Prior to the arrival of the women and children, the men who lived on 2nd Avenue spent most of their time working and saving their money. The hours were long and the work was hard physical labour. They had lived a frugal life up till this time, but with the arrival of their families there was cause for joy and celebration. Many of the pioneers spent some of their hard earned money for the betterment of their families. Instead of renting homes and living communally, most men bought homes for their wives and children and purchased furniture and household goods to make life easier.

One pioneer, on the arrival of his daughter-in-law and grandson, bought a family car, a 1927 Buick (see the photograph at the end of the chapter). There was only one other car in the Sikh community at this time and it was bought for the same reason. Prior to this time, such extravagance was considered foolish. Now things had changed; they had a reason to celebrate. Their families had finally joined them.
The closeness and caring in the 2nd Avenue community was constantly referred to by the people I interviewed. It was like a large family according to Mrs. B. Johal, whose extended family lived near the temple:

We lived in a three story house with my in-laws and husband's cousin and his family. Whoever came to town stayed with us as well, it seemed that there was always someone staying with us, but that was the way it was in those days. Nobody minded, first they would come see us and then go wherever else they had to go. Everybody on 2nd Avenue was good, when the whitemen passed by they would tip their hats to us. There was a lot of respect then.

Not far from the temple, a few miles away, another group of Sikhs lived and worked at the Alberta Sawmills on 6th Avenue. During the thirties, there was always one bunkhouse for the Sikhs, so there must have been about 20 to 25 men working there during this time. They lived in a bunkhouse and ate in a communal cookhouse provided by the company for the use of its workers. This was a very common form of accommodation in the early days and most mills had a cookhouse/bunkhouse set up for their employees.

Mr. S. Gill describes the Alberta Sawmill's bunkhouse as being a long wooden structure divided into 10 or 12 small rooms with two beds in each room. A long hall divided the bunkhouse. The rooms were on either side of this hall. A small sitting area with a wood-burning stove was at one end of the hall. This was the only source of heat. There was an outhouse a short distance away. There might be several of these bunkhouses at any one mill, depending on the size of
the workforce. These bunkhouses were divided along racial lines and each group lived in a separate bunkhouse.

The cookhouse was a separate building with a central kitchen where supplies and groceries were stored and food was prepared. These were managed and run by elder Sikhs or men who were not otherwise employed. They would prepare the food for the workers and in turn be supported by the men who earned wages. All the men would eat together and shared the costs. At some stage in their lives, virtually all Sikh men would have lived in a bunkhouse and eaten in a cookhouse.

Another mill community was located along the Fraser River. Mr. G. Johl, who came to Canada in 1921, joined his father who was working at Dominion Sawmills. This mill was located at the corner of Boundary Road and Marine Drive, the present location of the Canadian White Pine Lumber mill. About forty Sikhs were working here at this time, living in three bunkhouses and eating in a large cookhouse. There was even a Sikh foreman in the mill named Sundar Singh, who helped Mr. Johl get a job when he was 15 years old.

The largest mill community was located at Fraser Mills in New Westminster, close to Maillardville. The Sikhs called it "Millside". According to Mr. M. Mangat, who came to Canada in 1925, "there were only two families here then, the rest were all single men". The company even built a temple for its workers. According to Mr. S. Gill, who came to join his father to live and work here, this temple was
constructed around 1908, when his father first came to Canada. He describes this scene when he arrived in 1925:

There were between 200 to 300 Sikhs. They had 4 or 5 cookhouses and different sized bunkhouses, some had 30, 40 or 50 people living in them. That's how they lived then. We had our own temple, a small one built by the mill at their own expense. It was a very good company, but for wages there was a five cent difference between us and white people. We got 25 cents an hour and the whites got 30 cents for the same job.

My dad was pulling lumber on the greenchain, it was hard work. We'd start at 8 o'clock and finish at 5 o'clock. Sometimes I did 5 hours overtime, 13 hours a day. Most Saturdays and Sundays I worked as well, so 7 days a week. We did not get paid overtime in those days. We got a little extra for working on Sunday, we'd work 8 hours and they'd pay us for 10 hours.

My first job was on the resaw. When they first took me to my job they introduced me to a Sikh foreman named Ranj, He said that if he showed me how to do a job could I do it? I said that I could. So I watched the other men do their jobs on the resaw and that's how I learned how to do it. He was a good man, several times I would leave and go elsewhere for better pay, he always took me back. I would go wherever there was better pay. There was better money on Vancouver Island, so I would go work at Mayo or Kapoor. They paid 35 cents an hour. We all did that, we'd move to better paying jobs.

Small clusters of Sikhs lived around several small lumber mills and lumber yards in different parts of the Lower Mainland. They were on Main Street, Marine Drive and Fraser Street in Vancouver, on Mitchell Island in Richmond, and Dollarton in North Vancouver. Some Sikhs also lived in the Cedar Cottage area because of its central location for the wood truck business and the availability of lots for wood storage. These were all just clusters of four or five
households, but are worth mentioning since they did come up in the interviews.

From the beginning, the Sikhs were respected as being very hard workers, reliable and trustworthy (see the letters of reference at the end of the chapter). This is why the mills would hire them. As time went on, Sikhs sought better wages and better working and living conditions. Within their group, they had a strong communication network. They knew what type of work and what wages were available throughout the province. They were enterprising and extremely mobile. They would travel great distances for better working conditions or to make more money.

Several other avenues of employment that were related to mill work started to open up. One that has already been mentioned is the independent wood truck business based in Vancouver and Victoria. Sikhs started getting labour contracts in the mills: on the greenchain, loading boxcars, in the dry kiln, hauling wood or sawdust or cutting poles. Some even had their own lumber mills, usually located out of town. This greatly increased their financial opportunities and gave them greater economic freedom and autonomy.

The major Sikh mill owners were Mayo Singh and Kapoor Singh. Mayo Singh came from India in 1906 with little education. He first started working in the farms in Chilliwack and later in the lumber mills (Muthanna, 1982, P.717). Kapoor Singh on the other hand was educated. After graduating from high school in India he went to San
Francisco in 1906 (Redway, 1984, p.16). He travelled up and down the Pacific coast and later to Toronto. His interest in the lumber industry brought him in contact with Mayo Singh. According to Brian Redway, their first joint business venture began as partners with other Sikhs when they bought out a failing lumber mill in New Westminster in 1914. They had all been employees there and knew the work. The lumber market was poor due to the war, but with some luck and plenty of hard work the business became profitable. A few years later, Mayo and Kapoor expanded their business by moving their base of operations to Vancouver Island.

In 1918, these two men established the Mayo Lumber Company, a much larger mill near Duncan. A small mill town, called Paldi after Mayo's village in India, developed around this mill. Several hundred people worked here and Mayo built a small Sikh Temple for this community in 1918 and a much larger temple in 1928 (Johal and Sundher, 1977, p.45) [see the photo at the end of the chapter]. In the mid thirties several women and children were living in Paldi, as can be seen in the photograph at the end of the chapter.

Another mill was started at Sooke Lake in the late twenties called the Kapoor Lumber Company. This mill also had a logging camp at Shawnigan Lake. It employed about 300 men. This work force was divided into four groups: whitemen, Sikhs, Chinese, and Japanese. In the late thirties, according to Mr. K. Bains, only two Sikh families resided there. The rest were single men. A separate camp existed for
each of the racial groups working at the mill. A one room school house served the whole community. Mr. D. Sihota describes his experiences:

Going to the mill was quite an experience. It took practically a whole day from Victoria, to go by a rickety old vehicle, over logging roads, up and down, twisting, with big boulders in the way, before you could arrive at the mill. It was very isolated but there was a community right there. A lot of our people, Punjabis working in the mill, some Canadian people, some Chinese. There was a store, a little one room school and in the school they had grades one to ten.

We moved into a bunkhouse, about three of us in one small room. Two of us boys would be in a bed. The rooms would be 12 ft. by 12 ft. in the bunkhouses. In a long bunkhouse there might be 8 or 10 such rooms, with a central area with a drum stove would keep the place warm in the winter time. The washrooms, they'd be detached, away from the main bunkhouse. There would be a cookhouse nearby where all the food was prepared. There was a cook, who prepared all the food and looked after purchasing and so on. The cost to each individual was shared, it was sort of a democratic household, run on that basis.

There were a few women: Kapoor Singh's wife, two daughters, his brother's wife. There were some Canadian engineers and their families, as well.

Mayo and Kapoor Singh used their wealth for the benefit of their community. They provided jobs for the men, led the fight for equal rights, and financed many delegations to Ottawa to explain their problems to government officials. Speakers were sometimes invited to inform and inspire the men. Mr. K. Bains explains:

Once in a while, in the cookhouse they'd have speeches about politics and all that, what's happening in India and who's right and what the Congress party and the British are doing. Sadhu Singh Dhami used to come there and people from the Victoria and Vancouver gurdwaras would come as well. Sometimes to collect money. We'd give one or two dollars, it was a big deal in those days. If
anything came up in India, some disaster, they'd raise money in this way.

These were two community leaders who cared for their workers and would later be instrumental in getting the franchise for the East Indians in Canada.

Another very important Vancouver Island Sikh community was Hillcrest situated about four miles from Duncan. Located here was a large mill owned by Carlton Stone called the Hillcrest Lumber Company. This mill had its beginning in 1912, when the first Sikhs started working here for Mr. Stone (Singh, 1936, p.7). He recognized the value of employing Sikhs and encouraged them to work in his forestry operations. In the early thirties, Tara Singh was his Sikh foreman and Lakha Singh and Magar Singh were his assistants.

Mr. Magar Singh tells this story:

There were about 40 of our people there in 1929 when I first arrived in Hillcrest. They stayed in a bunkhouse, there was a Chinese bunkhouse, a Japanese bunkhouse, and our people's bunkhouse. There were three separate bunkhouses. There were four men who had their wives with them at this time: Kishan Singh, Inder Singh Akhara, Ralla Jhan, and Nama. They had no children at this time. After, they started their families. A little later Bhan Singh Gill came with his wife.

The Goras (white people) had their bunkhouse on the other side of the office, there were just a few. They were mostly married people: the Stone family, the manager's family, and someone else. There weren't very many Gora people only four or five, mostly Asian people worked there.

Our people worked mostly on the greenchain, pulled the carts, and piled lumber in the yard. They made big piles to dry the lumber, they didn't have a dry kiln then, they built it later. When I first came, I started on the greenchain, then I went on the jump-roller. That's where I cut my damn finger off, (he shows me his hand with a missing finger). Then I went to feeding the resaw and then I became the charge hand of the
greenchain. My duties were to keep everything going. Our head man was Tara Singh Kauni, he assisted in hiring our people, you can consider him our foreman. I was in charge of the dry kiln and Lakha Singh was in charge of the greenchain.

Hillcrest was a very close community. Mr. Stone relied on his Sikh workers so much that he built a gurdwara for the Sikhs and their families in 1935 (Singh, 1936, p.8). The photographs at the end of the chapter show the interior and exterior of the Hillcrest Sikh temple. There was also a community hall built for the use of all the workers. The Canadian families lived in about 30 homes built around the perimeter of the mill. There was a school building where two teachers taught all the workers' children. At times, they taught over 50 students in this one room school house.

Over half of the people I interviewed had at one time worked at Hillcrest because it was a place where one could always get a job. Mr. D. Sihota gives this description in 1937:

I can remember a line up of people waiting at the office of the mill, waiting for any odd job that might open up. We lived in the bunkhouse and ate at the cookhouse. I had about a mile and a half walk to school, the mill school in a mill town. There, I started in grade three and my brother, who is older, hadn't acquired as much English as I had so he started in grade two. It was a blow to him and he was not interested in school. So it wasn't too long after that, he quit school outright and went to work in the mill.

The wages were 29 to 32 cents an hour, you worked six days a week. Sometimes you would get a Saturday afternoon off, so you'd go downtown and do your business or buy groceries or whatever. The work was hard. Most of our people worked in the mill or on the greenchain or out in the yard. Few worked in the logging camp itself.

Of our people, there were about 60 single people and four families. There was Dalip Singh's family, the (future)Judge's brother and mother,
Mrs. Oppal. Then there was the Doman family. Herbie was a little fellow I used to ride him on my bicycle to Duncan. Mr. Doman was the man in charge, not Herbie's father but a relative, an uncle, he was in charge of the contract with the mill. He would get workers. Herb's dad used to operate the trucks which took the wood to Duncan, firewood which they sold to the people.

At that time there was a Japanese settlement and a Chinese settlement. These were segregated, each by themselves. East Indians and Europeans were by themselves, as well, in separate locations.

I think too that the jobs that were offered to these ethnic communities were somewhat different. The labouring groups were the Chinese and the Punjabis. The Japanese managed to get the better jobs that involved more technical training. The best jobs, the engineers and people who were the bosses at the mill, went to the Europeans.

I operated a resaw on my summer holidays. There were very few of our people who were allowed to operate a machine. When he would go off to the washroom or to have his smoke, I would operate the machine and I could do it just as well as he could, but he was very conscious of the fact that he better not relinquish the machine to me for too long, because then he might have to relinquish it to me outright somewhere down the road. You sort of understood that there was a level at which you could function, beyond that it was out of your reach.

Victoria was the other Vancouver Island Sikh community. Its temple was built in 1912. This community was centered around Market Street with the gurdwara located at 1210 Topaz Street. Most Sikhs worked in the six or seven lumber mills in town or had their own wood trucks and sold wood door to door. Mrs. P. Sangha's husband Ajaib had several wood trucks. At one time, he also owned a grocery store that sold spices and other specialty items to his people. Mrs. Sangha says that in 1934 to 1935 about 20 to 25 families were living in Victoria. According to Mr. T. S. Tiwana this number grew to about 30 to 40 families in the mid forties.
Agriculture was the enterprise, other than lumbering, that the Sikhs engaged in to any great extent. They had come from a farming background in the Punjab so they came here knowing how to farm and how to live off the land. They usually began by working on rented land until they could afford to buy their own farm. Their first farm was usually a partnership or a cooperative venture. Some places mentioned where people worked on vegetable farms are Ladner, Abbotsford, Agassi, Kamloops, Saanich, and Pitt Meadows.

Mr. Manga Jagpal got his start in farming by working as a gardener for Colonel Victor Spencer in 1930:

After landing, all of us were taken to the gurdwara by the temple people. They contacted our relatives and then my uncle came and took me to the Spencer home at 1750 Trimble Street. He had been their gardener for the last 13 years and I lived with him in the separate gardener's quarters. It was a little lonely at first, being only 15 years old, and away from home for the first time.

We worked for very good people. Sometimes whitemen would make fun of my turban as they passed by on the road. They would make weird noises and I got into a few fights, until Mr. Spencer had a talk with them. He had been in India in World War I and knew the meaning of the turban to the Sikhs. He told the neighbourhood people to treat us with respect and they did after that. He was a very powerful man. He even told his own children to be careful when playing with me so as not to touch my turban. His children were about the same age as me and we often played together.

When I started working there I got paid $45 a month, with no living costs. This was good money, these were depression times, and some millworkers only made a dollar a day then. The work was very easy, we worked according to our own schedule. He had a ten acre estate and we looked after all the gardening. He also had his own carpenter and greenhouse man.

I worked there for three years, then Mrs. Spencer got me a job at the Jericho Golf and
Country Club, at my request. The wages were better there, 35 cents an hour, nine hours a day. I worked there from 1933 to 1941. We had our own on-site housing here as well. Many of our oldtimers worked here, my villagers. Harnam Singh was the boss of 13 or 14 people there, it was a huge golf course, our people were the ones that originally built it. In 1936, I got the foreman's job from Harnam Singh, the others were all getting too old and I was younger and could do all the work.

In 1941, this golf course sold out and moved to the British Properties. That was too far for me to go so I tried to get a job with the Parks Board as a gardener. I remember going to their office in Stanley Park and asking for a job. When I told the fellow at the front desk about my experiences working for the Spencer family and the golf course, he was astonished. He said, "How did you get such good work?" I answered that I got the good jobs because I was capable and could do the work. He said that he'd never hire me there because I was a foreigner. So I started looking for work in a sawmill.

Mr. Jagpal later owned farms in Chilliwack, Mission and Pitt Meadows.

There was a sizeable Sikh community in Kelowna which engaged in some mixed vegetable farming, but mostly fruit farming. The Sikhs had family owned and operated orchards beginning in 1924. According to Mrs. A. K. Singh, the first Sikhs who owned their own farms here were her father Mr. Mehar Singh Sangha, Bagu Basran, Banta Singh Sangra and Lachman Singh. These people cleared portions of their land and owned from 30 to 100 acres.

In the thirties, another ten Sikhs joined them and by 1934 the Sikh population was about 100, not including the children. She named ten families with children at this time, the rest being single men. Since these were Depression years, many Sikhs would go there to work during harvest time
and the population would grow considerably. Some even rented or half-shared farms during these difficult times. When the economy improved these people would go back to work in the mills. They never had a temple but had their social gatherings at the Rutland Community Hall, as seen in the photograph at the end of the chapter.

Mrs. Singh went on to say that Kamloops had about 60 permanent Sikhs in the mid thirties. Sher Singh and his sons, Sucha and Hardev owned 100 acres of land. They grew mostly tomatoes and some mixed vegetables. On their land they also operated a small mill where they made railway ties. Chanan Singh and his son Banta owned a 60 acre farm on the Thompson River where they grew mixed vegetables. Pakher Singh Mann rented 50 acres for mixed vegetable farming.

For the Sikhs in British Columbia the twenties and thirties was also a time for family renunification and community building with the arrival of the wives and children. During this period the first Sikhs were born in Canada and the imbalance in the gender and age makeup of the community began to change. The Sikhs had to battle hard economic times, prejudice in the job market, and poor working conditions. The quest for better jobs, pay and accommodations was made possible by having a strong family and community network. The Sikhs were highly mobile and sensitive to the fluctuations in the job market. They worked hard, lived within their means, saved their money and cooperated with one another.
As always, the temple played an important role during these years. It was the base of operations, their headquarters for whatever action would take place. All communications with India, within the province and with Ottawa went through the temple committee, the Khalsa Diwan Society. Housing, employment, health and welfare could all be taken care of at the gurdwara.

Beginning in 1939, the Sikh community's economic fortune began to change for the better. The community really started to establish itself. This was mainly due to the efforts of temple committees.

In 1942 under The National War Services Regulations, any single men and childless widowers of the ages 20-40 (inclusive), who were British subjects, and who had been in Canada for at least one year, were being called for compulsory military service. Many Sikhs were included in this group and got notices to report for basic training. But the temple intervened on their behalf. This was the perfect time to take a stand and fight for the franchise. So they engaged the legal services of Bird and Bird, a Vancouver law firm, and refused to go to war until they were granted full franchise rights (see the letter at the end of the chapter).

Consequently, Sikhs were not obligated to join the armed forces and go to war. Mr. P. Gill came very close though, as he explains:

I got called to go into the Army, alot of us got called but they didn't want to go. I got my basic training in Vernon. Then I went to Halifax
for advanced training. Three days before going overseas, I hurt my finger training on the anti-aircraft gun. They sent me to the hospital and while I was there my unit left for Europe. I was thirty days in the hospital, I think. Then I came back to a new unit, mostly Ukrainians. My finger would still not work properly so they lowered my category and sent me back here. I wasn't fit to go overseas.

I was stationed at Exhibition Park where they had the Japanese locked up. They didn't treat them too good, they lost everything. They wasn't no troublemakers, no, no, not one case. We had alot of Japanese neighbours on 2nd Avenue. For two blocks there was only one white house, the rest were Japanese and East Indians. They didn't lock up Germans or Italians. I guess they made a mistake.

Then I got moved to Port Alberni. I lived in a tent in a big camp for six months. They had alot of soldiers over there between Alberni and Port Alberni. They were scared that the Japanese might come along the water there. Then they sent me back to Shaughnessy for some sort of check up. While I was there my unit left for the Aleutian Islands. I missed that too. Then I asked for a discharge and they gave it to me.

Mr. P. Gill is mentioned by several Sikhs as the only member of the Sikh community actually to have gone into the Armed Forces. Several of the men that I interviewed did get the call but did not go because of the furor raised by the temple committees. Although the government relented and did not pursue this matter of compulsory military service for the Sikhs, the franchise was not granted until some years later.

The poor fortune of the Japanese was deeply felt by the Sikhs. There are many references to how unfairly they were treated by the authorities. Mrs. J. K. Singh, who lived on 2nd Avenue, describes her feelings:

They got kicked out by the government. They had to leave their homes, they couldn't take
anything with them, only what they were wearing. They had to leave everything else, their furniture, belongings, clothes, possessions all behind. They just told them to get out and they did. These were our neighbours and they went empty-handed. It made me feel pretty bad seeing all this. They told us at the temple that if we didn't stay good, this could happen to us as well. They stood up in the gurdwara and told us these things. We were scared.

These fears were widespread throughout the Sikh community. They felt uneasy not only because of the fate of their neighbours, but because of the Canadian government's past treatment of the Sikhs and the uncertainty of their present status. The common feeling was that today it was the Japanese and tomorrow it may be us. Mr. D. Sihota, who was living in Hillcrest, describes his feelings:

I went to school with some of the Japanese kids and of course had an opportunity to visit them occasionally in their homes. They were very fine people and it came as a surprise to me when the war broke out in 1941, after Pearl Harbour, all of a sudden they were told very quickly (snaps his finger) to leave. Those kids had become friends. I couldn't see any reason why they should be uprooted in that way and sent away.

It seemed to me that this was another way to get at the Asiatics. I had heard our people say don't count on permanency in Canada. They were always fearful that they'd be deported. Even during the war they were fearful that they'd be deported. I was of the impression that no, they can't do that. Young idealism, I guess, but when I saw what happened to the Japanese I became a bit more philosophical about it. If it could happen to them it could happen to anybody.

The mills experienced a shortage of labour. Because the Sikhs did not have to go war, they took the better jobs. Jobs were plentiful and employers could not find good workers. Sikhs had a solid reputation as good reliable labourers so their services were in demand. Everyone had a
good job. They took over many labour contracts and their trucking businesses prospered.

Sikhs' businesses flourished and their contracts became more lucrative, and their traditional investments in real estate grew. Many of the Japanese sold their properties at discount prices to their Sikh neighbours. Mr. K. Johl describes these events on 2nd Avenue, near the temple:

I can really remember the Japanese getting kicked out because I was older then. We used to have a lot of Japanese kids for friends. Some of the Japanese used to work for my dad, they used to pick wood out of the bunkers, on the chains. They worked for him for quite a while. They used to work in the same sawmills.

So when they were going to be moved out because of the war, they came up to my dad. I was there sitting in the livingroom at the same time listening to them. They wanted to sell him their houses. Whoever had some property, they said, "How about taking our property off our hands?" We have some papers here and we'll sign it over to you. My dad told them, "I just can't take it over, I just don't have that much money." It was the wartime then and things were tough, so the good friends' houses he did buy. I remember he gave them $200. Some of them just begged him. They said, "Give me $100 for my house!" So he bought 1633 West 2nd and 1635 West 2nd off the Japanese. The reason I remember the address is because we had them for a long time after that. One he bought for $200 and the other for $150. Then he bought four houses on the corner of 4th Avenue and Fir Street, right on the corner. The total of all four houses was $400, that was around 1940. Then, my uncle bought an apartment, a 10 suite apartment on 1600 block West 5th Avenue for $1100 from the Japanese. Our people bought about 35 houses down there from the Japanese. They were just begging them saying, "Please take our building, they're going to move us out tomorrow, today is our last day."

The 1940s were indeed a boom time for Sikhs living in the province. It was sad and unfortunate that it was at the
expense of their old neighbours, the Japanese. A survey was done in the late forties by the Khalsa Diwan Society and sent to Ottawa. Its purpose was to show the extent to which the Sikhs were an integral part of the Canadian economy. Their involvement in lumbering and agriculture had not changed. Out of an East Indian population in Canada of 1394, "approximately 80% of the men are engaged in lumbering, either as workers, distributors, or owners, the remaining 20% are for the most part farmers" (Pandia, 1948, p.1). There were 335 independently-owned businesses, classified as follows (Buchignani, 1985, p.99):

- Fuel Merchants -------------------------------130
- Sawmill Owners ----------------------------- 29
- Logging Operators --------------------------- 10
- Miscellaneous ------------------------------ 91
- Farming (dairy, truck, gardening, greenhouses and general farming) --------------- 75

Total=335

The survey counted 200 family owned and occupied homes and 102 rented homes. According to this survey, the fortunes of the Sikh community had grown considerably during the War years and into the late forties.

The community had prospered economically through hard work, extensive social networking and better employment opportunities. The Sikhs had become established by investing in their businesses, farms, homes and properties. The events of the war years assisted. Their numbers were growing slowly and becoming more balanced in terms of age and gender. However, this new found prosperity did little to change
their legal standing as Canadians. At this time they were still unable to call Canada their home.
To WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

This is to certify that the bearer Jaswant Singh has been in our employ for about three months and we have found him to be an honest and painstaking worker.

We recommend him to any one requiring his services.

The Rat Portage Lumber Co. Limited

Local Manager
Red Fir Lumber Co. Ltd.

MANUFACTURERS OF ALL KINDS OF
ROUGH AND DRESSED CEDAR AND FIR LUMBER
Laths, Shingles, Sash, Doors, Turnings, Etc.

Nanaimo, B. C., Feb. 27, 1909.

To Whom It May Concern,

The Bearer, Jaswant Singh, was in my employ while I was at Harrison River Mills and found him very capable in piling lumber and etc., and can recommend him as a good worker.
To Whom it may concern;-

The Bearer Jaswant Singh was in our employ as Hindoo Foreman for about two months, and we found him a good worker, and very reliable.

THE SOVEREIGN LUMBER CO. LTD.

Manager.
To Thomas N. Cameron:

I have to certify that Mr. Learner, a native of India, has been in our employ for the last year as Security Foreman during which time we have always found him obliging, strictly watchful, sober, and intelligent, filling any position in which we required his services very satisfactorily.

THE MONARCH LUMBER COMPANY

ACCOUNTANT & Cost Mgr.
The following letter to be forwarded to the following newspapers:

The Editor,
Vancouver Daily Province.
Vancouver Sun.
Victoria Daily Times.
Victoria Colonist.
Federationist, Vancouver.
Labour Statesman.
Congress News, Holden Bldg.
Columbian, New Westminster.
Trail News, Trail.
Canadian Press, Vancouver.
News-Herald.
President, American Federation of Labour, Ottawa.
President, Canadian Congress of Labour, Ottawa.

Dear Sir:

We are instructed by the Khalsa Diwan Society, which body represents all "East Indians" resident in British Columbia, to forward you the enclosed Petition.

"East Indians" of British Columbia are disqualified from voting at any election. This is the only Province in Canada where "East Indians" are deprived of the franchise. Nevertheless, they are liable to be called for military service. Thus they suffer the same obligations as other British subjects, without being able to enjoy the like privileges.

It is with the object of remedying this situation that the Petition, a copy of which is enclosed, has been forwarded to the proper Dominion Government and Provincial Authorities. Concurrently with the forwarding of the Petition, our clients are sending to the Minister
of National Defence a communication protesting against the imposition upon them of compulsory military service.

Should the Petition be allowed and our clients be granted the franchise they will no longer have any objection to military service, but on the contrary, they will most gladly do their part to further the war effort.

Our clients seek your assistance in making public the situation referred to above. They hope that the granting to them of the franchise will have a soothing effect upon the political unrest in India. Consequently, any favourable publicity you may choose to give to this matter will be appreciated.

Yours very truly,

BIRD & BIRD
VANCOUVER, B.C.
Chapter 5: Getting an Education

One of the advantages of coming to Canada was the opportunity for the children to get an education. Many Sikh parents realized the importance of learning English and sent their children to school for this reason.

The Sikhs' school experiences were mixed. On 2nd Avenue, the children went to Henry Hudson school on the corner of Cypress and Cornwall streets. It was a traumatic experience for the ones who knew little English, since they would have to start in grade one. Mr. G. Billan was 14 years old when he was put in a grade one class. Consequently he did not stay in school long and quit to sell wood with his uncle. This was the case with many of the older children.

About a dozen children were born and brought up on 2nd Avenue during the early 1930s. They had more positive school experiences, since they went to school knowing the language and the culture. Mr. J. Sangara, a Canadian born Sikh, describes his experiences at Moberly School in South Vancouver in 1930:

I was always speaking English. This one time, Dad came to school to talk to me and I said to him not to come to school to see me because the other kids might think I'm an East Indian (laughs). I was the only East Indian kid at Moberly in those days.

Mr. P. Bains had a similar experience in Dollarton, in North Vancouver:

I went to school in Deep Cove from 1927-1929. At that time there were mostly Japanese living there and I was the only East Indian kid at that time. I learned Japanese as well as English.
Most young Sikhs would gain a functional knowledge of English at school and, as soon as an opportunity for work presented itself, they would quit school to begin working. Work had an immediate return in the form of wages and money. Education, on the other hand, was dependent on the future. The Sikhs' future in British Columbia was never secure, so education was too much of a gamble; it was time and effort spent on uncertainty.

What further lessened the importance of education was that the Sikhs lacked the provincial, municipal and federal franchise. As a consequence, many jobs and professions were not open to them. Norman Buchignani (1985) explains:

They were simultaneously excluded from a host of other things that were dependent on being a provincial voter: they could not vote for or become school trustees or trustees of improvement districts; neither could they be elected to provincial public office nor serve on juries. Although exclusion from the voters' list did not legally restrict them from public service this became a universal practice. Public works contracts specified that they not be employed. The same restriction applied to the sale of Crown timber, and the professions of law and pharmacy were informally closed to them. (p.21)

What further compounded this problem was that most businesses and private firms would not hire them because of their marginal status; they believed them to be foreigners and not real Canadians. To support this notion of being unable to find suitable employment interviewees would mention the names of highly educated Sikhs who were victims of the discriminatory hiring practices and therefore ended up working in the sawmills. They strongly believed that
education was a dead end as a means of getting a job in the dominant society.

Despite these factors, a few Sikhs still went to great lengths to further their education. Mr. R. Hall had a difficult time even in high school. He would have to milk ten cows each morning before walking seven miles to his high school in Pitt Meadows. He would get to school late each day, usually after 11:00 o'clock. After half a day of school, he would then walk the seven miles back home. These were only some of the difficulties that he encountered. Mr. Hall explains what happened as he continued his education:

Every summer I would work at Hillcrest to pay for my education. It was hard physical work. Sometimes, I think that I should never have gone to university because it was blood, sweat and tears. In my last year, I worked nine hours night shift at Barnet, Kapoor's mill. Walked from there to Burnaby, where the streetcar began, took the streetcar to get to U.B.C., changed my clothes and tried to get to my first lecture at 8:30 a.m. each day. I wonder why I didn't get the Governor General's Medal (laughs). I finally graduated in 1946.

I'm an idealist, I wanted an education for education's sake. I knew that I wouldn't get a better job. When I was working at Hillcrest, the young guys would laugh and say that, "If you go to school, you'll be the most highly qualified lumber worker in the country so why are you going to school? The white people aren't going to give you a job in the offices." I'd say you guys just drink your booze, and have your parties, sing your songs and whatever else you like to do, just let me live my life. I prefer to spend my money over here. I may never become a worker in this place or get this type of position, but if an opportunity ever came up, it wouldn't be you, it might be me. They made fun of me all the time.

Those were the younger guys, the older guys, including my father, were always telling me, "Get the most education you can, it's the only thing that will stay with you." That was good advice,
that was real good advice. I was beholding to those old guys because I was able to stay on course and away from all the things that our young guys were getting into then.

After 1947, when jobs opened up somewhat, Mr. Hall got a job with the federal government. He worked for the Citizenship and Immigration Department and the Secretary of State - Multiculturalism. He was instrumental in setting up the Human Rights Program and NACIO (National Association of Canadians whose Origins are in India). His last duties with the government had been addressing the settlement problems of refugees. He is now retired and living in Ottawa.

Another Sikh who achieved success through education was Mr. D. Sihota. His teachers were instrumental in encouraging him to go on with his education. His own people were not so encouraging:

Very few people went on and got an education. By the time they were 14 or 15 they just left school to find a job in the mill. I remember when I was about 14, the question came up. I had just finished elementary school and wanted to go to high school in Duncan. The advice from numerous people was, "You are wasting your time, Why go on? You can earn more money in a mill than you'll ever get with your education."

They would talk about other people who had got their degrees and couldn't get a job. There's one who had a degree in Agriculture. I think he got the degree in Eastern Canada but lived here, Hazara Singh Garcha, was his name. There were no professionals from the Sikh community being employed or hired by anybody in Vancouver or B.C. at that time. So he was unable to secure a position and consequently people were advising me not to go on. I'd probably end up getting a degree and still having to work in a mill. I'd waste all that time.

I asked my friends in school and I decided I'd better keep going, in spite of the opposition from our own community and lack of encouragement from some people. There were others at the same time who said, "Education is the only way to go, get as
much education as you possibly can get, come what may, it will be a benefit to you."

Before entering high school, Mr. Sihota got his hair cut and took off his turban and changed his ways. He thought that this would be a good time to make these types of changes since he was going into a new situation. He tried to be more "easy-going and free" to better fit in with the other students.

Mr. Sihota's elementary school teacher, Mr. Yard at Hillcrest, was instrumental in motivating him to pursue his education and go on to high school. His interest in education stems from this special teacher's influence and instruction. He was not only a good teacher and encouraged him to become involved in many school activities but showed him much personal respect. Mr. Sihota explains:

My teacher was a good teacher. I liked him very much, he gave me all the opportunities to progress at my own speed. He'd give me extra books to look at and read. He kept me involved in other school activities. He got other kids to help me. I was fairly good in sports so, he'd put me in charge of looking after the games. So through that kind of encouragement I remained in the educational field.

He even invited me to his house for dinner. This must have been in June, when I was finishing elementary school. This to me was kind of unheard of, a Canadian inviting an East Indian Sikh to his house and offer a meal. To my knowledge it wasn't being done. So that was quite an experience to go to this strange environment, where the table is set and all the knives, forks and cutlery are there. It was a very nicely appointed house. I'd never seen anything like that in the bunkhouses and cookhouses of our own community.

Mr. Sihota went on and did well in high school in Duncan. His strong subjects were Math and Science. His only
problem was French, which he found difficult, even though he already knew Punjabi, Urdu, and English. His success in high school gave him recognition from his teachers and peers. He felt that he was one of them:

In the Duncan high school, I went up to grade eleven. At the end of the eleventh year, they were picking somebody to be president of the Council for grade 12, and my name was suggested. I nearly got it, apparently there was some opposition from some of the parents in the community, that an East Indian should become the president of the Student Council in Duncan. My science teacher told me later that if that hadn't entered into it, that I would have been elected.

Another thing happened at that time, the war was on and I was in Army Cadets. It was part of the school program. You had to belong to them as part of the P.E. program. I was a Sargeant there, and taking the platoon out to do their regular march I'd be the officer and I'd be giving the commands and they'd be obeying them. To me it didn't matter and to the students it didn't matter but it mattered to the community, that I was in charge. There were some complaints to the school about that.

After finishing high school in Victoria, Mr. Sihota took a year off to work at the Hillcrest in order to finance his education at U.B.C.. The Sikh community's negative attitude toward education was still strong in the 1940s. Nevertheless, more people were going on to get a university education. He mentions Jerry Hundal, Ranjit Hall, Pritam Sangha, the two Kapoor daughters and Ranjit Mattu. They all attended U.B.C. while he was there from 1945-1949. He found no discrimination at university. His professors treated him fairly and he was well accepted. He graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree, majoring in Economics and Psychology, in 1949.
Mr. Sihota tried unsuccessfully to get a job in business, for at this time it was still difficult for East Indians to break into the professions. As had been predicted, he ended up working in a mill, only now operating a machine, the resaw. On the advice of a friend, he went to Normal School and got his teaching degree. He was the first Sikh teacher in Vancouver, at Renfrew School. His career in education included elementary and high school teaching, counselling, vice principal, principal and administrative duties at the district level. In his own words, getting an education had been worthwhile, with "never a dull moment".

Mr. Hall and Mr. Sihota were the only ones out of the 24 interviewees who chose to go to university and get a degree. They had a dream and realized it by pursuing their education at great personal sacrifice and expense. These two personal histories serve to teach a valuable lesson in how certain individuals are capable of overcoming great obstacles by perseverance and dedication to their goals.
Chapter 6: Social Life

The Sikhs' social circle was very restricted since work took up much of their time and energy. Any time that was not occupied by work was spent in the company of their family or fellow Sikhs at their homes or at the temple. They seldom ventured far from these three venues: work, home, and temple.

After work during the week the Sikhs would socialize amongst themselves in their homes or bunkhouses. They seldom went out since they were too tired and had little time and money to spend on entertainment. On most occasions they would talk about conditions here or in the villages or about politics, drink tea and find ways to amuse themselves, Mr. R. Hall recalls his situation at Fraser Mills in 1924, when he was seven years old:

We played 'ghuli-dhanda' (Punjabi game), and we played all these other kinds of games there with the grown ups. They included me, I was the only kid around, the rest were all adults. I have a fond memory of Fraser Mills. Even at that age I could read Gurmukhi quite well. These fellows, older men would sit around in the yard and take their enamel mugs of tea and sit in the sun, in the evening. They would sit there and just sort of rest for they'd done a hard day's work. Sometimes on the weekend they'd be resting after washing their clothes and so on. They somehow got to know that I could read Gurmukhi, somebody gave me a Banda Bahadur, a classical Indian tale of a brave person. I used to sit there and read this to them. They would say "Ah ha, Ah ha." I don't know if they were saying that for my reading or if they were just enjoying their cups of tea, (laughs). It was enjoyable for me and for them.

The strong bond that existed among the Sikhs is constantly referred to by all of the interviewees. Lamenting
the loss of that closeness with the growth of the community is very typical of the people I interviewed. Mr. Amar Mattu describes the camaraderie of the early days:

We were so close then. One way or another we always tried to get together. We'd go visiting to one another's houses. Where your daddy used to work at Spencer's house, we'd go visit him there. We were all guys, one or two years apart in age. We got together whenever we could.

On weekends most socializing occurred at the temple. The temple or gurdwara served the Sikhs in many ways. Its prime function was as a religious and social center but it did much more than that. It fed them literally, spiritually, and figuratively. The temple committee and their religious leaders were in touch with every aspect of an individual's life here and in India. They handled all births, deaths, marriages, engagements, celebrations, partnerships, and petty squabbles. Their role involved counselling, mediating, advising, translating, housing, employment, health, communications, and the fight for justice and equality. Any action that was planned and any fight that was fought had its beginning at the temple.

By 1925, the Khalsa Diwan Society had autonomous branches in Vancouver, Abbotsford, New Westminster, Golden, Duncan, Coombs, and Ocean Falls - virtually everywhere that Sikhs lived in any number (Buchignani, 1985, p.84). This was a province wide organization, led by locally elected committee members whose duties were to manage each temple.
and to maintain constant communication with each of the individual temples.

To guarantee the economic survival of each of the different temples, special religious celebrations were shared. In this way, all of the province's Sikhs would gather in Victoria for Baisakhi celebrations, in Vancouver for Guru Gobind's Birthday, in another location for Guru Nanak's Birthday and so on. They would stay at one another's houses or at the temples overnight. Mrs. P. K. Johl explains:

Everyone from all over the province would come to these functions. They would even stop work on the farms to attend the Akand Path. It was so important to see one another and keep in touch. We stayed at people's house, sleeping wherever, no one cared then as long as we were together. No one stayed in hotels.

There were many stories of loading up the wood truck with people and driving to Abbotsford or New Westminster for these special religious services. This was common practice since most people did not have cars and there were plenty of wood trucks in the community. This sharing of religious days kept the province's Sikhs in touch with one another and promoted the welfare of each community.

Going to the temple was especially important for the women, since they seldom left the confines of their own homes. Their social lives were very restricted. They mainly looked after their husbands, children, and relatives, spending their time doing domestic and household duties. Mrs. P. K. Johl explains:
We all had small children to care for but still gave a lot of time to the temple. In those days the gurdwara was everything to us. We never went to shows, clubs or anywhere else like that. We met our friends at the temple and we were real close then. We had alot of love for one another in those days. Most people did not have their own immediate families here then, so friendships were very strong and the gurdwara was our home.

Most of the women never had the opportunity to learn English and those who did learned much later from their children. Whatever time they spent away from their homes was at the temple. They would pray, socialize, cook, clean, babysit, arrange marriages, and gossip.

The Sikhs were very proud of their gurdwara and they showed their pride by having special functions and guests. Whenever special guests would come everyone would attend. In 1929, the Khalsa Diwan Society invited two very important people to Vancouver and Victoria. Reverand Charles F. Andrews, a friend and colleague of Mahatma Ghandi, and the famous poet Rabindranath Tagore were invited to see first hand the plight of the East Indians in Canada. There are photographs of these special visitors at the end of the chapter.

Sometimes musicians, athletes, politicians, or visitors from India would come to the temple. Locally educated Sikhs like Sadhu Singh Dhami and Darshan Singh Sangha would discuss the union movement or local politics. Mrs. J. K. Singh, whose husband Harnam Singh was the priest of the 2nd Avenue temple, recalls these days:
People would talk about the problems in the villages, the lack of freedom because of the British Raj, the lack of education for the children, the poor social and political conditions. They were so helpless in those days. We felt sorry for them so we'd take a collection and send money back to the villages. Some of the men who would lecture were: my husband, Mit Singh, Geevan Singh Braich from Mission, Sundar Singh from Abbotsford and other men of respect.

The Sikhs contributed their time and money generously to their gurdwara. By their own accounts, the Vancouver Khalsa Diwan Society had contributed $295,463 to various social and political causes before 1921 (Lowes, 1952, p.40):

1. to sufferers from massacres.............. $4,330
2. to families of political prisoners...... $2,100
3. to sufferers from political causes...... $30,700
4. to Congress Tilak Swaraj fund........... $3,333
5. to religious and educational causes....$148,000
6. to Komagata Maru case................... $50,000
7. to immigration cases..................... $30,000
8. to deputations to Cdn. and Br. gov'ts.. $12,000
9. to Hindustani Press in Canada.......... $15,000

Total $295,463

The financial reports of the 2nd Avenue temple, included at the end of the chapter, show total assets as of January 31, 1940 to be:

Land ------------------------------- $800.00
Buildings ----------------------------- $6,000.00
Furniture ------------------------------- $2,000.00
Cash in the bank ---------------------- $5,135.96

Total Assets $13,935.96

During the war years the temple collected $37,382.73 (Pandia, 1947, p.5):

Carried over from 1940 ------------------ $5,189.22
Total Receipts in 1941 ------------------ $4,908.37
" " in 1942 -------------------------- $7,974.55
" " from 1943-1945 ------------------ $16,110.59
Loan from Naginder Gill ------------------ $3,200.00

Total $37,382.73
Without these funds the community knew that the fight for their rights would never be possible. So they donated whatever they could. It was an investment in their future. This was a considerable sum of money given the size and composition of the Sikh community. The 1941 Census, included in Tables 4-6 in the Appendix, shows that there were only 888 men in the province then. Only a portion of them contributed wages since many of these men were too old (18% over 60) or too young to work (25% under 15).

Sikhs seldom ventured out of their own ethnic community for a number of reasons: racial prejudice, lack of facility with English, fear and lack of social opportunity. Some men would go to the theatres downtown or restaurants for a meal but they would go with one another, not mixing with white people. Some establishments would not serve Sikhs. Mr. K. Johl explains:

There was Scott's Cafe on Granville Street and the Beacon Theatre and the Strand Theatre, nobody was allowed in there with a beard and turban. There was a sign there saying that you are not allowed in if you had a beard and turban. There were some big hotels, like the Vancouver Hotel, that would not allow Sikhs in either.

Mr. N. Mahal, a turbanned Sikh, tells of going to the Ivanhoe Hotel on Main Street in Vancouver with two other Sikhs who both had their hair cut. They got served but the waiter refused to serve him, since he had a beard and turban. Mr. Magar Singh describes a similar situation in Duncan:
When we used to go to the beer parlour we had to sit in a separate room in the corner, this was for anyone with a turban and beard. This was in 1934 to 1936, then I shaved in 1938 and I could sit with the white people. Same thing in the cinema they used to make us sit upstairs. There was only one theatre in Duncan then.

Mr. P. Bains knew English very well and socialized with white people. He would challenge these establishments about the unfair treatment of their Sikh customers:

I took my uncle Didar Singh to the Rex Theatre on Hastings. We used to call it Beacon, that's where the tram used to come in. This was in 1943. There was a good movie he wanted to see and they would not let him in because of the turban. I said that if the turban was going to hinder someone's view, we would buy the large seat. It was higher up and no one was behind us. I paid extra money for it. He had no excuse then so he let us in.

Then, I saw ladies sitting with great big hats on in front of us. So I called over the manager and told him to sit down in our seats and see how these ladies' hats were hindering our views. So then that opened the gates right there.

Sports were a good way to widen the social circle. A sports league was established between the Sikh millworkers on Vancouver Island. This mill league was a recreation league more for social purposes than for competition. The players from the Hillcrest mill are shown in a team photograph at the end of the chapter. Mr. R. Hall was the league organizer and he explains how it worked:

This was the first volleyball league for young Sikhs. We played amongst ourselves. Then we had the idea that we would set up a cup. So we went to Tara Singh (the foreman at Hillcrest) and said would he set up a cup. We bought a cup and had it inscribed. We (Hillcrest) played with Youbou, Alberni, Victoria and so on with different sawmill teams made up of our people. They used to all come to Hillcrest for a tournament. We used to
put up notices in the cookhouses and everyone would come. It was a big deal.

Sports were also a means for a group of Vancouver Sikhs to socialize with and gain the respect of the dominant culture. Some sports-minded men began the India Grass Hockey Club in 1933. The club joined the Mainland Grass Hockey League. The men would work in the lumber mills or drive wood trucks during the day and practice grass hockey in the evenings and compete on the weekends. They played against four established teams: The Vancouver Club, The Cricketier's Club, the Varsity Club, and the University of B.C. Club (Singh, 1936, p.5). In 1934, they were the league champions winning the Mainland League Cup and the O. B. Allan Cup. They are shown in a photograph at the end of the chapter.

Mr. S. Gill played on this team:

In our free time we played grass hockey, on Sunday and Saturday. Five or six of us came from India being able to play the game. We thought that we were free on the weekends, why not play grass hockey, so we formed a team. In 1934, 1935 and 1936 we were the best in Vancouver. We consistently beat all the other four teams in the league during these years. Three of our players got chosen on the Allstar team which was made of the best players from all five teams. One of them was me, also Jagir Singh and Magar Singh Gill. We were three of the eleven members on the Allstar team to go to Victoria. We went there and won as well, no one had done that before. We got a lot of respect from the white people. It was mentioned in the newspaper, my name used to come up quite often.

One of the most influential of all the Sikh leaders and someone who encouraged socializing with the other Canadian people was Mr. Kartar Singh. He recognized the importance of the "Canadianization" of East Indians. He came to Canada
in 1912 and lived apart from any East Indian people in Toronto until 1929 when he was called to Vancouver by the Khalsa Diwan Society. They wanted him to help in the fight for their rights for he had a very good knowledge of the English language as well as the Canadian culture.

Kartar Singh edited a newspaper called India and Canada - A Journal of Interpretation and Information. Three front pages of this paper are at the end of this chapter. It was written in English and Gurmukhi and had two purposes (Singh, 1929, p.3):

For its immediate usefulness, this publication will endeavour to place before the Canadian public the truth and nothing but the truth, about the people of North India, now resident in Canada. After giving examples and facts, its appeal will be to invite Canada to scientifically examine now - when sufficient practical results are available - the fitness or unfitness, the merits and demerits, of the Sikh settlers in Canada.

The other aspect of the work of this journal will be to inform, through its Punjabee section, the people of North India here and at home, about the life, institutions, problems, requirements, standards and ideals of Canada.

This journal was published periodically from June 1929 to September 1936. It was very well written and informed both the Sikh and non-Sikh community of significant events here and in India. Since many Sikhs did not socialize beyond their own family or neighbourhood, this journal added another dimension to their social lives. It helped give them some legitimacy. Seeing their affairs appear in print made the Sikhs feel more a part of the Canadian social setting.
Throughout the Sikhs' years in Canada but especially after World War II, much of the community's time and energy was focused on gaining the franchise. Whenever and wherever Sikhs would gather, they would put aside their petty differences and concentrate their efforts on gaining the franchise. Mr. J. Uppal explains:

We began a fight to get our rights, to get the franchise, so that we could vote and be first class citizens just like everybody else. Which up till this time we weren't. To that end, we held numerous meetings and campaigns demanding that we be given our rights. The people at the forefront were the committee of the Sikh temple, Naginder Singh Gill was the secretary, Dr. Pandia and others. There was a youth group, of which I was a part, The East Indian Youth Association. In that capacity we held mass meetings at the various theatres in town. We worked for our rights by trying to tell the people that there was an injustice being done to us. We had a parade with banners stating that we wanted our rights to vote. They had waited long enough. Much of what the Sikhs wanted and needed now was tied to their right to vote. So this one issue dominated all others and became the community's major goal.

The Sikhs who led this campaign were Naginder Singh Gill, Gurdit Singh, Kapoor Singh, Mayo Singh, Kartar Singh, and Dr. D. P. Pandia. Some of them are seen in a photograph at the end of the chapter. They would send correspondence to Ottawa or send delegations there to meet with government officials to explain their special situation. Dr. Pandia, a Hindu lawyer who came to Canada in 1939, was credited with single-handedly convincing the federal government to grant amnesty to about 218 illegally arrived Sikh immigrants then
living in the province. He challenged the Federal government and he won, so he had a great following amongst the Sikhs.

With the end of the war in 1945 there was generally a greater concern for human rights and fair play. The C.C.F. party and the International Woodworkers of America both sided with the East Indians in their fight for the franchise. Dr. Pandia headed the group that presented a brief to the Election Act Committee in 1946 (Kohaly, 1971, p.29). This brief was accepted and this committee recommended the necessary changes in the Act to give the franchise to the East Indians. It was enacted into law April 2, 1947, and a few months later Sikhs were granted the municipal franchise. Sikhs finally had the rights of other Canadians. Samuel Raj, (1980), explains the irony of this struggle:

The day India became politically free, East Indians ceased to become second-class citizens in Canada. The tragedy of the East Indian experience in Canada is that the rights and privileges for which they struggled for so long, came to them only when the basis of their claims became obsolete: British rights and privileges were theirs only when they ceased to be British subjects and citizens. (p.75)

The Sikhs had finally become Canadians. They could now call Canada their home.
ANNUAL REPORT OF KHALSA DIWAN SOCIETY AS OF JANUARY 31ST, 1940.

 Assets. | Liabilities.
---|---
Land................. 800.00 | --- nil ---
Buildings............ 6000.00 | 
Furniture............ 2000.00 | 
Cash in Bank......... 5135.96 | 
**Total Assets** | **Total Liabilities**
$13935.96 |

REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE:
Income................. $5033.47 | Expenses............ $4750.37

LIST OF DIRECTORS:
---|---|---
Sowarn Singh (Secy) | | Mill Worker.
Bhola Singh (Pres) | | Wood Dealer.
Natara Singh (Treas.) | | Mill Worker.
Banta Singh. | | Mill Worker.
Ghaniya Singh. | | Wood Dealer.

DATED this 24th day of June, A.D. 1941.

CERTIFIED CORRECT.

__________________________ Director.

__________________________ Director.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We are happy to note that the presence of a delegate from the commercial organization of the Punjab province, will give impetus to the ambitions and desires of the commercially minded among them to devote attention and time to the developing of trade between Canada and India and specially as they are near one of the finest ports of contact with India on the Pacific—Vancouver. Every attempt to develop trade should be encouraged. We have just been informed by Mr. Dalip Singh, a director of the American Hindustani Trading Co. of California, a corporation chartered by the state and organized by the East Indians there, to develop trade with India, that he applied to the Canadian Immigration Department to allow him to visit Canada in the interests of his company and received a reply dated June 11th from Divisional Commissioner, Vancouver, regretting that no action could be taken with a view to facilitate his movement to Canada. If a broad view of the commercial activities of the East Indians is taken, that would help and encourage mutually desired trade.

* * *

THE SAYINGS OF "Labor will do no more than any other British Government has done to overcome conditions in India, perhaps, even less and until the vast population has been educated, self-government can never come," said Sir James Simpson, representative of Associated Chambers of Commerce of India and Ceylon in the Indian Legislative Assembly, in Toronto and all through his Dominion wide tour in June and he was quoted in every large city in Canada wherever he went. We know that he is the mouth-piece of the British Commercial Interests in India. And here is what Rt. Hon. J. Ramsay MacDonald, present Prime Minister of Britain said, presiding at the British Commonwealth Labor Conference at London, on July 2, 1927:

"I hope that, within a period of months rather than years, there will be a new Dominion added to the Commonwealth of our nations, a Dominion of another race, a Dominion that will find self-respect as an equal within this Commonwealth."

Which one of the two Scotchmen is telling the truth?
HERE WE ARE AGAIN!

OUR STEADY EFFORTS, during the last thirteen months, for the purpose of establishing some sort of an informative and interpretive medium, through which to bring the people of India and Canada closer together, on every plane of endeavour, where they happened to contact each other, or wherever their interests came to an end, with the close of January, 1930. During these months we succeeded in laying the foundation of this work, as far as it was possible for one man with the small resources at his disposal. With the very limited resources within the scope of our work, the satisfaction of the present issue of "India & Canada" a further and progressive stage of our work begins.

After carrying on this work, until the middle of October, we had to leave for Eastern Canada on an important trip, which took us right up to the Atlantic coast. We returned to Vancouver, on Christmas Eve, after an absence of ninety-eight days, with a renewed inspiration and enthusiasm for our work, as the result of our contact with so many beautiful souls, wherever we went. The kindness and courtesy which it was our fortune to experience, from those whom we visited and the staunch friends of both India and Canada whom we discovered, in so many important places, was inspiring indeed. This sounds paradoxical when we know as a matter of fact that our countrymen in Canada are receiving anything but fair play, in many ways, in the name of Canada, and a part of us is involved in bringing to light those things which need mending and where education on the both sides is sorely needed. And, here is the work that we must do, without any thought of success or failure, with hope and charity as our motto, in the interests of things that endure rather than those that perish and destroy.

The sun was shining, as it only shines on the Pacific Coast, as we nearly Vancouver. The happy day of Christmas over, our immediate concern became to find somewhat larger quarters than the partitioned small room at the back of a store, where this publication had its birth in June, 1929. Now, here is our new place, both ample and comfortable, for the present time, and far better suited to carry on this work more progressively than it was possible to do in the old place. Here, we are not only having the fun of writing copy in two languages, the root of both of which go back to the common origin, Sanskrit, but have also to find time to set the Indian type on our own hands, as no one else in this country knows how to do it. We want to tell you frankly that this setting of the Indian type is a mighty slow job, for the present time at any rate.

The snapshot below was taken in front of the Hart House, Toronto, at the time of Mr. Andrews's recent visit there. From left to right: (1) Karfar Nick; (2) Mr. C. F. Andrews; (3) Mr. F. J. Moore of Hart House.

A Journal of Interpretation and Information

India & Canada

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Golden Jubilee and The Sikh Temple

The Vancouver Golden Jubilee which fell due this year has given impetus to much decorative work done by way of beautifying the city. The Sikh Community here seem to have been moved by the same Jubilee spirit. The local Sikh Temple building which was built about thirty years ago has been remodelled to give it a more distinctive appearance. The interior as well as exterior decorations have been carried out to give it beauty and Eastern atmosphere.

The symbolic mosaic panels together with a considerable amount of decorative tile work, executed by Messrs. Darlington & Haskin, has transformed the appearance of the building entirely. The most interesting piece of work which is unique in Western Canada is the mosaic picture of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism in the fifteenth century, which makes up part of the front decorations. This mosaic picture, the cost of which is borne by Mr. Kanoon Singh, is made of Venetian glass material, on background of French enamel.

The Sikhs first arrived in Vancouver when the city was only about twenty years old, and thick timbers covered the lands where beautiful homes and gardens now spread in the suburban areas. We are glad that in this year of the city's Golden Jubilee, the Sikhs have made their old Temple building a place of artistic beauty.

A Welcome Visit

Mr. Kodanda Rao's visit to British Columbia, during this summer, was an event of more than passing interest to the Indian Community here. Although, we are always glad to welcome visitors from India to this Dominion, but Mr. Rao's visit had national as well as international significance. He spent a year, as a Carnegie Scholar, in the Department of Races Relations, in the Yale University, U.S.A., and incorporated the results of his studies in a book, entitled, EASTERN VS. WESTERN CIVILIZATION, which is now in the hands of the publishers. While thus engaged, he found time to visit Eastern Canada and delivered lectures in the important centres there. A publicist, with the experience of a decade behind him, and one who has consistently taken special interest in the problems of the Indians overseas, Mr. Kodanda Rao, M.A., has been posted at first hand as to the condition of the Indians in Canada.

The establishment by the Indian National Congress of a Foreign Department headed by Mr. S. M. Lohia, we believe, is a step in the right direction. The Congress aims at keeping in touch and co-operating with the Indians abroad.
Chapter 7: Conclusions

After more than forty years in this country, the Sikhs were granted full franchise rights in 1947. It was not until then that the people I interviewed felt that they were truly Canadians. Some of them had been born here, or came as infants and knew no other country, but it was only in 1947 that their efforts for equality were rewarded with full and equal status. Now all that remained was for the Canadian people to recognize the Sikhs as their equals.

The people I interviewed felt uncomfortable discussing the topics of racism and discrimination. They would rather not talk about these things because they felt nothing was to be gained by bringing up the unpleasant aspects of the past. They simply said that things were better now and that laws protected all people from suffering such indignities. Some people stated that racism and discrimination had brought them closer together as a group and strengthened their resolve. Many interviewees said that they were not the only ones treated unfairly in the past. "Look what happened to the Japanese."

In the previous chapters we have seen some of the events and circumstances that led to the Sikhs being able to call Canada their home. During the early years they struggled. They worked hard, saved, paid taxes, bought property, invested wisely, sent delegations, engaged legal services, prayed and waited for things to change. If they
encountered an obstacle they never gave up, but merely tried a different road going in the same direction.

In the interviews, when I asked each person why the Sikhs were successful and ultimately overcame all the difficulties they faced, there was only one answer. It was because "they are hard workers". The work ethic is credited for the Sikhs' success in Canada. For them economic activities are located within a religious and socio-cultural context. Thus the work an individual does is closely linked to the concept of "being a good Sikh" (Joy, 1984, p.88). By doing hard honest labour the Sikhs became stronger physically, financially and spiritually.

The interviewees said that Sikhs are not afraid of hard physical work and will take whatever job they can get, until they can get a better job. Mr. K. Bains explains:

The oldtimers say that there are two things that helped us get established: the strength of our arms and the strength of our money. Firstly, with our physical power we can work in the hardest jobs, physically we can endure much more than other people. Others will say, "The hell with it and pack it in". We don't do that. Secondly, If they could not fight their battle because of lack of knowledge or education, they could collect money like nobody's business. With this money they could hire some people who could do the job. That's how we got established here, with muscles and money.

The men and women I interviewed also attributed their success to their strong sense of community and their social and religious network. This helped ease the pain and suffering during the bad times. It was the key to their survival. They always supported one another and developed a
system of mutual aid. Mr. R. Hall says that wherever you went, "all you had to do was look up a Singh and they would help". Mrs. P. K. Johl explains:

In the early days we stuck together through thick and thin. We shared with one another. If someone did not have something then we got together and shared what we had with them. If a newcomer came here we set them up with a place to stay and a job. It was our duty, someone did it for us.

The extent of this communal strength and reliance is illustrated by a story told by Mr. M. Jagpal:

The oldtimers really stuck together. They were always there for one another. If someone got a bad letter from India, everyone laid their paychecks on the table. If they were in trouble and needed money or someone in their family got hurt or damage to crops happened back home, we all helped. We'd say pay us back when you can, just send the money now.

Two Sikh families suffered tragedies in the thirties. Both parents died in these families and the community looked after the children. The oldtimers took these kids as their own. There was one girl and two boys. The boys were looked after by the men in one bunkhouse and the girl went to a childless woman who took the girl as her own.

Another question I asked was what advice would they give a new immigrant from India, in light of their own experiences in Canada. Their responses had a common theme. Newcomers should try to fit in with the other Canadian people, in terms of dress, fashion, hairstyles and attitudes. They should adapt to Canadian ways like other Canadians and leave the problems of India behind them. Mrs. Jagdish Kaur Singh cautions, "but never forget India, you can't, I'll never forget my India".
All the interviewees advise working hard and saving money, being honest and helping members of the community, like they did in the early days. The value of learning the English language is stressed and getting a good education is encouraged by most people. Socializing outside of their own group is mentioned by some people as being very important since that will help them gain greater acceptance. Activities such as going to night school, joining teams, community centers, and going to the Y.M.C.A. are suggested. Overall, immigrants should try to adopt a more flexible lifestyle, avoid living in isolation and mix with other Canadian people.

This advice given to newcomers today is very similar to that given to newcomers in 1929 by Kartar Singh in the first issue of *India and Canada*. Many of the Sikhs I interviewed had the opportunity to have read it and must have lived by his words. The timelessness of this message is uncanny:

> It is a great joy to me to find that here in this distant land you still keep up your own religious faith and do not neglect your Sikh religion. That is the right thing to do if you want to remain in a distant country with moral character and good social and family traditions such as those which still remain in India itself.

> I am so glad to find that the Khalsa Diwan Society is the centre of your own life in British Columbia. That is quite right and proper and good. For without that binding link you are bound to fall to pieces. But if you keep this binding force of your own pure religious faith intact, then you will preserve your character also and your family life will be good and pure. You must cling together and help one another. Do not let any
member of your community come to grief and ruin through your neglect.

Secondly, you must remember that you are guests in a new country and you have to observe the first law of hospitality, which is to accommodate yourselves as far as possible and pay every consideration to the manners and customs of this new country where your children are being born and where you yourselves have elected to live. This is a necessity in every country where people emigrate if good will and friendly feeling are to be observed. This does not mean that you are to alter all your own good customs and manners of living, but rather that you are to seek at every point to find a common meeting place where your own life and the Canadian life coincide. To put what I wish to say in two words, you should do your best to prove yourselves "Good Canadians".

If you do this and become proud of the ideals for which Canada stands you may be certain that in no distant period you will gain your citizenship. Therefore, as one who has a deep affection for you, I urge you to follow your Gurus who lived a pure life according to the spirit. Guru Nanak sought to identify himself with everything that was good in Islam. He tried to unite the ideals of the two religions. So it is necessary for you to learn to unite the two ideals of Canada and India, and I am sure you will do it.

The main reason for doing this study was to get another historical perspective, this one from the people who lived the history. I also did this study to fill the void in the social history of the Sikhs as mentioned by both Norman Buchignani (1985) and Milton Israel (1987). It is important to keep in mind why there are gaps in the history of some groups. Derek Reimer (1984) states:

The reasons for these gaps in the historical record are many but a common theme is that some groups in society had neither the means or occasion to represent themselves by written records and hence our knowledge of them came through impersonal statistics or the observations of a detached and unsympathetic elite. (p.1)
This study has filled some of these gaps by using an oral history approach. Oral history can give back to the people who make and experienced history, through their words, a central place (Thompson, 1988). These people deserve to occupy that central place since it is their personal experiences that helps to give a more balanced and realistic picture of Canadian history and in turn give them the self-respect and dignity they deserve.

These Sikhs came to Canada to join the original pioneers. As newcomers they made the necessary adaptations in order to become established in their adopted country and make Canada their home. Yet, according to the men and women I interviewed, this never really happened until 1947 when they finally received the right to vote and became real Canadians. These Sikhs consider this to be the first time that they actually felt that Canada, rather than India was their home.
Personal Postscript - Educational Implications:

As Canadians, we need to ask ourselves whether attitudes towards Sikhs and other Asians have really changed since they first came here in significant numbers. When we look at the newspaper articles from the past and from the present, why are some Canadians still threatened by Asian immigration? Are immigration policies fair?

Studies such as this should provoke thought and encourage the search for answers to some critical questions. What can we as educators do about strengthening the Canadian identity? What can the education system do to change attitudes towards immigrants to Canada? What is multiculturalism and is it working? Which works better, the mosaic or the melting pot?

As an educator, who now teaches in a school serving a large Sikh community, I am puzzled by the lack of support and faith that the Sikh community has in education and the education system. As I found in this study, in the past Sikhs did not value education because educated Sikhs were not getting jobs due to discrimination in hiring. Education was seen as a waste of time since it did not help one to get a better job which paid more money. For the Sikhs there had to be a return on their investment and this had to be in terms of money and power, not in intellectual growth or personal development. Baljeet Dhaliwal (1985) did a
historical study of Canadian Sikhs' views of education and she had similar findings:

Education to a Sikh has always been important but not always for its own sake. Instead, it has been viewed as a means to a better life. Education was seldom encouraged as an academic pursuit or for the sake of wisdom, but instead was encouraged for the sake of social progress, prestige and social independence.

This attitude has not changed over time. Many Sikhs still feel that education does very little to advance them socially and help them gain acceptance with the dominant culture.

The Sikhs' disillusionment with education is increased when they see their highly educated and qualified doctors, teachers and other professionals come to Canada and not be allowed to practice their professions. Their qualifications and training are put into question. They must get retraining at their own expense with no guarantee of a job. This devaluation of South Asian educational degrees is routine (Buchignani, 1980 p.164).

From my teaching experiences, most Sikhs do not believe there is equality of educational opportunity. They do not feel that there is fairness in the education system. They feel that their culture is at risk. Therefore many of them are sending their children to Khalsa School and other Heritage Language Programs. They argue that their culture, language, arts, music, dance and history are ignored in the curriculum. They are not valued. The new Year 2000 Program is attempting to address these issues and incorporate
locally developed curriculum. Perhaps studies of this type will be of some use in developing curricula which better reflects the historical experiences of the Sikhs.

This study can serve as a curriculum resource for elementary and secondary Social Studies courses on Canadian History or Ethnic Studies. It provides the social history of a minority group, the fight for rights, and valuable insider views on racial discrimination. It looks at history from the perspective of the people who lived it. Through the 24 personal histories, we are able to get a composite picture of British Columbia's Sikh community from 1920 to 1947. We gain another perspective and get a clearer picture of the past. The photographs, letters and documents add corroboration and provide more insight into the lives of this distinctive group of Canadians.
LOOKING AHEAD.

HOMO ALBUS (WHITE MAN)
AT ONE TIME VERY NUMEROUS
IN THIS PROVINCE MAY STILL
BE FOUND EAST OF THE
ROCKY MOUNTAINS

WE HAVE HERE
GENTLEMEN POSITIVELY
THE LAST SPECIMEN
OF A WHITE MAN
KNOWN TO EXIST IN
B.C. IT WAS CAPTURED
AFTER GREAT TROUBLE
AND EXPENSE IN THE
INTERIOR OF THE
PROVINCE. IF YOU WILL
LISTEN GENTLEMEN
IT WILL NOW SING A
COMIC SONG....

RULE BRITANNIA

ME SEE HEAP
PLENTY WHITE
MAN MAYBE
TWENTY YEAR
AGO

What it may come to if the Oriental invasion is not stopped.

Vancouver Daily Province
March 6, 1908.
CALGARY — Sales of a lapel pin that has been branded racist and redneck are going so well that another 5,000 have been ordered and there are plans for keychains, coffee mugs, baseball caps, and T-shirts.

The pins, designed by Calgary businessman Peter Kouda, depict a barefoot black man, a turbanned Sikh, and an Oriental wearing a Chinese coolie hat staring down at a white man. The caption asks, "Who is the minority in Canada?"

Kouda said Wednesday he decided to expand the business because he has received nothing but positive comments about the pins.

"People told me the pin was cute not racist," said Kouba, who immigrated to Canada from Czechoslovakia 20 years ago.

The reason he designed the pin was because so many people have complained to him that visible minorities are taking their jobs away, he said.

"It's really offensive to me when people call the pins racist. I get customers who are black, Chinese, or East Indian who are buying the pin and they don't feel it's racial."

Members of a Calgary-based group say they are so outraged by the pin they are filing a complaint with the Alberta Human Rights Commission.

Marsha Haug, spokesman for Citizens Against Racial and Religious Discrimination, said the pin is selling well because of misinformation about immigration.

She added the publicity surrounding the lapel pin reinforces Alberta's redneck image across Canada.

"It reinforces stereotypes," she said. "By virtue of the current immigration policies, most of the immigrants coming here are wealthier, or higher educated, or both, than the average native Canadian no matter where they came from, otherwise they are not let in."

In Winnipeg, the leader of a Manitoba human rights group vowed Wednesday to prevent a Winnipeg wholesaler from distributing the pin.

Errol Lewis, president of the Manitoba Association For Rights and Liberties, said he was shocked that a local distributor would order the pin.
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September, 1936.


Toronto: Butterworths, 1980.

Appendix

1. Release Form

2. Two page Interview Schedule

3. Complete list of 24 Interviewees

4. Table 1 - Total Immigration by Year (Chadney, 1984,p.26)

5. Table 2 - East Indian Immigration to Canada by Sex: Adult Female (Chadney, 1984, p.189)

6. Table 3 - East Indian Immigration to Canada by Sex: Children (Chadney, 1984, p.190)

7. Table 4 - Population of Hindu Racial Origin and Sex, Canada, Provinces and Territories, 1941, Census

8. Table 5 - Location of Population of Hindu Racial Origin in British Columbia, 1941 Census

9. Table 6 - Population of Hindu Racial Origin, By Five Year Age Groups and Sex, Canada, 1941, Census
PROJECT NAME:

An Oral History of the Sikhs in British Columbia (1920-1947)

I give my permission for Sarjeet Singh to use the information gathered in this taped interview and other related documents for his Master of Arts Thesis at the University of B.C. and any possible publications. I understand that this information about my recollections and personal history may at a future time be part of the following:

The Public Archives of Canada
The Provincial Archives of B.C.
Asian Studies Department, U.B.C.
Special Collections, U.B.C.
Simon Fraser University Archives

I further give permission to use my real name:

________________________________________________________________________

or a name of my choosing: _______________________________________________________________________

in this my personal history.

Signed _______________________________________________________________________________________

Date _______________________________________________________________________________________

Witnessed by ________________________________________________________________________________

Date _______________________________________________________________________________________
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Name__________________________________________

Address________________________________________

Telephone_______________________________________

Interview- Date_________________________________
  - Time_______________________________________
  - Place_______________________________________

1. Date and place of birth______________________________________

2. In what year did you come to Canada?

3. How old were you then?

4. Describe what it was like in India at this time.

5. Describe the journey over to Canada-
   -duration
   -finances
   -companions
   -possessions
   -means of travel
   -departure info.
   -arrival info.
   -problems or concerns
   -accommodation

6. Why did you decide to come to Canada and in particular B.C.?
   What did Canada mean to you then?
   What did you hope to find here?

7. Describe your initial impressions of Canada?
   -physical landscape
   -the Canadian people
   -climate
   -reception

8. What adjustments did you have to make when you first came here?
   -language
   -culture
9. How did you spend most of your time?  What did you do with your spare time?  Who did you spend most of your time with?  Who were your closest friends?

10. Did you at any time go back to India? Why? At what cost? ($ and time, etc.) Describe your trip or trips back to India.

11. Outline some vivid memories, important events, turning points, in your life in Canada?
   - successes
   - failures
   - disappointments
   - joys
   - highlights
   - trips
   - children
   - ceremonies (citizenship, marriage, births, deaths)

12. What can you tell me about the earlier Sikh immigrants who came to B.C. before you?

13. If you were to give advice to a new immigrant to Canada, what would you tell them in light of your own experiences?

14. As you reflect on your personal history, what does Canada mean to you now? What are the good and bad points about living here?

15. Do you have any photographs, papers, letters, or documents that may explain or show more clearly some of the things we have just talked about?
Complete list of 24 Interviewees: 18 men and 6 women:

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PROVINCES AND TERRITORIES, 1941 CENSUS

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IN BRITISH COLUMBIA 1941 CENSUS

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<tr>
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Table 6
POPULATION OF HINDU RACIAL ORIGIN, BY FIVE YEAR AGE GROUPS, CANADA, 1941 CENSUS

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<th>Total</th>
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<th>Female</th>
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<td>48</td>
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