

“The Log that Built BC”
A Punjabi Community Outreach and Consultation Report
21 November 2015

Working with the RBCM Punjabi Intercultural History Advisory Committee, in partnership with the CICS at UFV and DLC at SFU, the Royal BC Museum invited members of the Punjabi communities from the Lower Mainland, the Fraser Valley and Vancouver Island to stage an “intervention” in the Logging Exhibit in the Modern History Gallery to reframe the historical record to include their poignant narratives of logging and forestry in British Columbia.

During this event, the Royal BC Museum featured the oral history from our oral history collections in the logging exhibition and theatre on the third floor. Punjabi communities inserted presence and stories into the gallery, and suggested changes of how to best integrate their story into the current exhibit.

- A. The intervention began with a welcome by Dr. Scott Cooper and an introduction of institutional partners, Dr. Paul Crowe and Satwinder Kaur Bains.
- B. Dr. Paul Crowe, Director of David Lam Centre & Associate Professor in the Department of Humanities & Asia-Canada Program at Simon Fraser University, gave a brief address.
- C. Satwinder Kaur Bains, Director of the Centre for Indo Canadian Studies and Associate Professor at the University of the Fraser Valley then spoke.
- D. Dr. Cooper then introduced the Indo Canadian Intercultural history project team: Satwinder Bains, Dr. Paul Crowe, Janet Macdonald (Head of Learning at RBCM), and Dr. Tzu-I Chung (Curator of History at RBCM). Then there was an introduction of the BC Punjabi Intercultural History Advisory Committee Chair and Vice Chair, Dr. Balbir Gurm (Admission and Progressions Committees Chair for the Bachelor of Science in Nursing Program at Kwantlen Polytechnic University) and Mr. Mo Dhaliwal (creator of Vancouver International Bhangra Celebration Society), who were instrumental leading up to this event.
- E. Dr. Balbir Gurm gave a short address to introduce the rest of the advisory committee and spoke on behalf of the advisory committee.
- F. Dr. Cooper thanked Dr. Gurm, and introduced Janet Macdonald to start the event. The room was invited to join the various facilitated round table discussions along throughout the gallery and to answer prepared questions.

Below is a summary of the discussions:

Logging

1 - If you were doing the display, what would you choose to include?

- Participants brought up the need to include a depiction of what life was like for a logger, including aspects such as living conditions.
- A portrayal of Sikh's and their impact on the logging industry.
- Sawmill stories, such as Sooke Maasachi Lake and Kapoor's Mills in particular.
- Inclusion of personal family stories of life of sawmill workers. For example S. Slobodian shared a story: "Prairie boys come to the woods for work "my father 'caught' the train from Edmonton in 1947 to work as a logger. He was a faller for over 30 years"
- Important to discuss segregation on the logging mills, as they segregated white and South Asian workers and also within South Asian community along caste lines.
- Needs to include logging pictures from 1906 onwards to get a greater understanding of life for Indo-Canadians on the mills.

Food Traditions

2 What are some examples of food traditions in your culture?

- Foods remained an important tradition and were maintained even though it appears local ingredients, such as wieners, were used as early as the 1950's in recipes. (Wieners: inexpensive meat that is quick and easy to make. Men would make it when coming home from the Mill.)
- It would appear that in early settlements, like the town of Paldi, a culture of shared cooking and equality developed around lumber mills. Discrimination is reported as a lesser problem in an enclave like Paldi, BC compared to lumber mills in Northern BC.
- Many discussed the struggle of grocery shopping, as there was no Indian food in grocery stores. It was common to go to Chinatown for foods. Chinese corner stores in Victoria, Vancouver, and the Peace River area were important as they carried spices and ingredients used by Indo-Canadian immigrants to make their foods.
- Farming stories: Tell the stories of those who went from berry-pickers to farmland owners.
- Suggestion of including artifacts such as the milk churning machine or lunch kits.
- Possibly include stories of early restaurants.

- Discussion of food traditions such as cornbread (Indian style), spinach saag, kheer (rice pudding), and “Soor De Mass?” (Pork curry).
- Apples and oranges of Gurdwara given out as Parshad (offering)
- Importance of food intercultural history – addition of western foods in diet.

Family History

3 - How can my own family history make an impact on this exhibit?

- Further and deeper conversations including Family stories, stories of arrival to Victoria, and treatment of Indo-Canadians needed.
- Participants discussed the possibility of oral histories created by elders and the importance of language (not just English, but Punjabi, Hindi and Urdu) is identified in this conversation. Participants discussed the idea of including a translation and possibly a digitization of these oral histories.
- Personal stories of Victoria during the 1980’s from Hillcrest and Paldi include: Right to vote and discrimination as a part of daily life (experienced at theatres and restaurants. Also discussed differences between races, such as education differences) [reminds one of video transcript conversations regarding Chinese Canadians and discrimination/segregation]
- Other stories include “connections to international movements, the 2nd Ave. Gurdwara and religious festivals (Jor Melas, Victoria Vaisakhi).
- Sports played a vital role in the life of Indo-Canadian immigrants. They participated in field hockey, men’s and women’s volleyball, and youth baseball.
- Vaisakhi dances occurred at halls and these were places to meet future husbands and wives, and transnational marriages (going from Canada to India to marry).
- The Depression Era: Often used the thread from sacks of flour to sew clothes
- Personal experiences of racism and Caste discrimination include racial profiling and gangs. Caste issues are always there and participants stress the importance of talking about caste with nuance and thoughtfulness. Further information on the existence of Caste awareness is not complete.
- Participants feel women’s stories should be included as some noticed that women’s stories are missing from the exhibit. Importance of tackling issue of gender in a way that doesn’t reify racist discourses. Women present in meat and fish factory plants and in labour history too, not just lumber mills.
- Many had to tackle discrimination starting at an early age.
- Family stories need to be shared, for example stories of arrivals to Victoria, 1906 boats turned away, and 1932 arrival moments. (Look for court cases and legislations.)
- Stories of colonial authority/respect/deference and how perspectives change over time; military tradition in Sikh and Punjabis.
- Interest in the creation of family trees and maps of settlement and migration movement. Sites/locations/temporary gurdwaras.

- Mention the gap between 1940's to today that is not present in the current logging exhibit. Suggestion of depicting the struggle for the right to vote and reactions to civil rights movement. Pro-nationalist movements in the west coast of North America (Ghadhar Movement 1913-1922).
- Important to share family stories for future generations so grandchildren know the hardships of their parents.
- Participants mentioned that they no longer use "East Indian" as a term.
- Panama Maru should be included in the exhibit. Include what the Sikhs on shore felt when they were unable to help and how they were treated. For Komagata Maru information in Century Hall, include how intolerance against Non-British immigrants was wrong, as 376 passengers were British Subjects.

The "intervention" closed with an address by Mo Dhaliwal, and remarks by Mr Vishnu Prakash, High Commissioner of India to Canada, and Mr Rajiv K. Chander, Consul General of India in Vancouver, in the *Our Living Languages* Theatre.