Tod Inlet and the *Panama Maru:* South Asians in Greater Victoria Between 1906 and 1913

By Tanesha Bhangu

Supervised by Dr. Neilesh Bose

A Graduating Essay Submitted in the Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements in the

Honours Program

For the Degree of

Bachelor of Arts

In the

Department

Of

History

University of Victoria

April 1, 2026

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

As a second-generation settler, I wish to acknowledge the traditional territories of the Lək̓ʷəŋən and W̱SÁNEĆ peoples, on whose lands I am grateful to live, work, and to have written this thesis.

This endeavor would not have been possible without constant encouragement, love, and patience from my parents. I am deeply grateful to have had such a caring and steady support system throughout this journey. I would also like to extend my appreciation to my wonderful circle of family and friends, whose reassurance and warmth made this journey lighter.

I am equally thankful to my supervisor, Dr. Neilesh Bose, for his generous guidance and expertise which greatly enriched this work.

Introduction

On the afternoon of October 17, 1913, the *Panama Maru,* a Japanese steamship, arrived in Victoria with fifty-six South Asian men hoping to enter the Dominion of Canada. While seventeen men were permitted to enter by immigration officials as "they had previously been domiciled in the Dominion," the remaining passengers were refused admission and detained as they "could not meet the requirements of the existing regulations."[1] South Asians in British Columbia challenged this decision in court, and successfully contested exclusionary immigration policies of the early twentieth century.

South Asians first arrived in Canada for Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897. Five years later, a second group of South Asians arrived in British Columbia to celebrate King Edward VII's coronation. These visits sparked conversations among South Asian men about the Dominion's economic opportunities which led to an influx of South Asian migration in the following years.[2] Men, primarily from the Punjab region of British India, migrated to the Dominion of Canada – one British colony to another – with "hopes for economic prosperity, cultural acceptance, and personal fulfilment."[3]

Punjab was conquered and annexed in 1849 by the British East India Company, which later transferred control to the British Crown in 1858 following the Indian Rebellion of 1857.[4]

---

[1] Ruth L. Almy, "'More Hateful Because of Its Hypocrisy': Indians, Britain and Canadian Law in The Komagata Maru Incident of 1914," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 46, no. 2 (2018): 310, doi:10.1080/03086534.2018.1438964.; Brij V. Lal, "East Indians in British Columbia 1904-1914: An Historical Study in Growth and Integration," MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1976, 149.; John Price and Sonia Manak, "Panama Maru Incident Shook Ottawa and BC," *Times Colonist.* October 17, 1913, https://www.timescolonist.com/opinion/comment-panama-maru-incident-shook-ottawa-and-bc-4600747.

[2] "History of South Asians in Canada: Timeline," *South Asian Canadian Heritage.* https://www.southasiancanadianheritage.ca/history-of-south-asians-in-canada/; "Early Migration History," *Canadian Sikh Heritage,* 2018, https://canadiansikhheritage.ca/passage-to-canada/.

[3] Satwinder Kaur Bains, "Century of Indian Migration to Canada," In *India Migration Report 2024*, edited by S. Irudaya Rajan, Taylor & Francis Group, 2024, 1. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003499787-1.

[4] Bhupinder Singh and Bawa Singh, "Punjab Under the British Rule: Historicising the Local Transformations," *Indian Historical Review* 46, no. 2 (2019): 208.

The British Crown strengthened their defense policy by reconstructing the British India army and converted "Punjab into the fertile ground for the British Indian army" as they noted "exceptional qualities of bravery, militancy and loyalty in the Punjabis."[5] As Punjab was an agricultural region, the British also implemented an irrigation system "that brought millions of acres of arable land under production" which granted landowners with disposal income to migrate.[6]

Following the end of trans-Atlantic slavery, the British Empire transported over a million Indians to British colonies in the Caribbean, Pacific Islands, and Southern Africa to work as indentured labourers on sugar plantations in the 1830s.[7] Despite being bound by contracts and regulations, indentured labourers experienced abuse and exploitation. While historians position indentured labour as "an involuntary form of migration," they also argue that it "offered certain labourers, particularly those in socially subordinate positions in colonial India, limited mobility out of a feudal regime of work into a capitalist regime of work…[which] became an important pathway for a broad sector of labourers, especially members of lower caste groups, towards a new system, but definitely not one of slavery."[8] With the rise of the Indian nationalist movement at the turn of the twentieth century, the indentured labour system was pressured to end in 1917.[9]

During the British colonial period, South Asian migrants also established communities in East and Southeast Asia and lived "there in service to the [British] Crown."[10] Those employed as constables in the Straits Settlements upheld "colonial rule and law enforcement against activities of Chinese secret societies aiming to disturb British interests" but concurrently were "chafed at

---

[5] Singh and Singh, "Punjab Under British Rule," 208.
[6] Satwinder Kaur Bains, "Punjabi Economic Migration to Canada: A Success Story," In *The Palgrave Handbook of Indian Migrants to South East Asia,* edited by S. Irudaya Rajan, Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore, 2025, 533-534.
[7] Neilesh Bose, *South Asian Migrations in Global History: Labor, Law, and Wayward Lives* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 9, http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781350163256?locatt=label:secondary_bloomsburyCollections.
[8] Bose, *South Asian Migrations,* 104-105.
[9] Bose, *South Asian Migrations.*
[10] Bains "Punjabi Economic Migration," 534.; Satwinder Kaur Bains, "Transnational Punjabis and the Idea of Home(s)," *Canadian Jewish Studies* 36 (January 2024): 250. https://doi.org/10.25071/1916-0925.40353.

their second-class treatment by the British colonial structures."[11] As the Dominion "supported racialized economic migration" at the turn of the twentieth century, South Asians were attracted to the new settler region of British Columbia.[12] Between 1904 and 1907, approximately 5,000 South Asian men arrived as economic migrants in British Columbia.[13]

A notable event in the history of South Asian migration is the 1914 *Komagata Maru* case when South Asians were denied entry to the Dominion. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's formal apology in 2016 for this incident brought this historic event back into the spotlight. While the *Komagata Maru* incident stands as a pivotal moment in the narrative of South Asian migration, it is not an isolated event. A focus on the pre-1914 presence of South Asians reveals that the laws used to bar the entry of the *Komagata Maru* had been developing for years and were part of a broader effort to restrict South Asian migration.

Brij Lal's 1976 master's thesis: "East Indians in British Columbia 1904-1914: an historical study in growth and integrations" was the first significant historical study on the South Asian community in British Columbia.[14] By focusing on the community's early presence in the region, Lal explores how South Asians navigated social exclusion. Despite extensive study by historians on early South Asian migration and settlement in the province during this period, the *Komagata Maru* incident and the city of Vancouver are often positioned as the centre of interest while Victoria and other areas in the province are briefly mentioned. This paper attempts to understand how white settler's perceptions and exclusionary policies impacted the experiences of South Asians in Greater Victoria with a focus on labour and migration between 1906 and 1913. While South Asian economic migrants arrived in British Columbia in the early twentieth century

[11] Bains "Punjabi Economic Migration," 534.
[12] Bains "Punjabi Economic Migration," 533-534.
[13] Bains, "Transnational Punjabis," 250; Kenny Reilly, "'The Deportation of the Hindus from British Columbia Will Be a Blessing to All Concerned': Intersections of Class and Race in the British Honduras Scheme," *Mount Royal Undergraduate Humanities Review* 5 (2018), 33. doi:10.29173/mruhr460.
[14] Lal, "East Indians."

to create wealth for their families back home, they experienced difficult conditions of labour themselves.

Labour and migration are central to understanding the experiences of South Asian men in the Dominion during the early twentieth century. This thesis builds on existing research and focuses on two important topics in Greater Victoria during this time: the Sikh labourer community at Tod Inlet and the *Panama Maru* incident of 1913. By exploring these two topics, I aim to advance knowledge of South Asian history in Greater Victoria and weave them into the broader story of South Asian migration to the Dominion during the early twentieth century. I combine legal and social history to analyze how immigration laws and regulations impacted South Asian mobility and reveal how early South Asian migrants navigated a society which intended to exclude them between 1906 and 1913. Despite the limited and fragmented sources on these topics, this project spotlights the pre-1914 presence of South Asians in the region to argue that the history of South Asian migration to Canada extends beyond the *Komagata Maru* incident. The first chapter illustrates white settler's perceptions of South Asians through *Victoria Daily Times* articles and highlights exclusionary policies impacting South Asian migration. The second chapter spotlights the experiences of Sikhs at Tod Inlet. The third chapter outlines the arrival of the *Panama Maru* and the court case which followed. The fourth and final chapter briefly presents the *Komagata Maru* event and highlights themes of racial discrimination.

The experiences of South Asian women are absent from British Columbia's formal labour history as many accepted domestic roles in the early twentieth century. Moreover, the Canadian government restricted the entry of South Asian women in the Dominion during this time, which explains why I was unable to locate documentation mentioning the presence of a South Asian woman in Greater Victoria between the years of 1906 and 1913. Additionally, sources on South

Asian men with reference to Tod Inlet and the *Panama Maru* are limited to newspaper coverage, the Canadian census, passenger list archives, and information passed through oral histories. Given the limited information available, I primarily rely on records from white settlers to spotlight the experiences of South Asians. While there are several organizations representing the South Asian community in Greater Victoria, such as the Khalsa Diwan Society, I was unable to consult with them due to the constraints of this project.

While the majority of migrants were Sikhs with a minority being Hindu and Muslim, all South Asians were incorrectly categorized with a misnomer in the early twentieth century: "Hindu" or "Hindoo."[15] In a 1907 "amendment to the Provincial Elections Act," British Columbia's legislative assembly proclaimed that "the expression 'Hindu' shall mean any native of India not born 'Hindu" of Anglo-Saxon parents and shall include any person whether a British subject or not."[16] This paper primarily uses the contemporary term "South Asian" to refer to all colonial Indian migrants as they reflected a diversity of regional cultures, languages, and religions.[17]

---

[15] Rupa Banerjee, "Growing Together: The Evolution of Indian Immigrants in Canada." In *India Migration Report 2024*, edited by S. Irudaya Rajan, *Routledge India*, 2025, 10.
[16] Canada, "An Act to Amend the 'Provincial Elections Act.' 1903-04, c.17," April, 25 1907. https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/hstats/hstats/79142909; David Robert Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters: The History of Tod Inlet*, Royal British Columbia Museum, 2020, 51.
[17] An exception is the Tod Inlet chapter which primarily refers to South Asian labourers as Sikhs as this is the term historians and scholars have used in this area of research.

Chapter One: Perceptions of South Asians and Exclusionary Policies

In the early twentieth-century, the Dominion of Canada encouraged the immigration of white settlers to create "a white dominion of the British Empire."[18] Unsurprisingly, this provoked prejudice toward Asian settlement in the region and South Asians became targets of racial discrimination from European settlers who wanted to reserve the land for a white community.[19]

The Victoria Trades and Labour Council, as noted by Lal, was a "persistent critic of East Indian, and of Oriental immigration generally."[20] As over 2,100 South Asians arrived in British Columbia in 1906, the organization brought forth a protest to W.D. Scott, Superintendent of Immigration, in October of the same year.[21] They expressed support for "white labour sources" and objected to "the introduction of any Asiatic coolie labor" by outlining five reasons for legislation prohibiting migration.[22] Key themes included cultural differences, the risk of disease transmission, and the danger of cheap labour to white settlers. Moreover, they claimed that South Asians "can never assimilate with white people, or perform the duties of desirable citizens of this country."[23] Their opinions did not stand in isolation.

Newspaper coverage was pivotal in shaping public opinion about South Asians in British Columbia. Articles during this time focused on the province's unsuitable climate for South Asians. In 1906, *Victoria Daily Times* published a summary of the Victoria Development and Tourist Association's meeting where they spotlighted the region's cold climate as unsuited for South Asians. Dr. Carter, a meeting attendee, claimed that South Asians "would not be able to

---

[18] Nicholas XEMTOLTW Claxton, Denise Fong, Fran Morrison, Christine O'Bonsawin, Maryka Omatsu, John Price, and Sharanjit Kaur Sandhra, *Challenging Racist "British Columbia" : 150 Years and Counting*. University of Victoria, 2021, https://dspace.library.uvic.ca/handle/1828/12776.
[19] Bains, "Century of Indian Migration to Canada," 1.
[20] Lal, "East Indians," 105.
[21] "Hindu Question in Parliament," *Victoria Daily Times*, December 5, 1906, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Times Colonist.; Geo. F. Gray, A. Johnson, and J. D. McNiven, "A Protest Against the Immigration of Hindus., Victoria Daily Times, October 19, 1906, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Times Colonist.
[22] Gray, Johnson, and McNiven, "A Protest Against the Immigration of Hindus."
[23] Gray, Johnson, and McNiven, "A Protest Against the Immigration of Hindus."

stand a winter in this climate."[24] Additionally, he stated that South Asians were undesirable immigrants whose habits "were not praiseworthy."[25] Later that year, the steamship *Tartar* arrived in Victoria with 360 South Asian men. One witness of this arrival commented that the men were "well adapted for a tropical climate" and the "turbaned throng looked anything but adapted to the conditions prevailing here."[26] In the same year, a *Victoria Daily Times* article highlighted the Government of India's acknowledgement that "the climate of Canada is not adapted for Hindus unless they have sufficient means to clothe themselves."[27] These claims supported the rationale for discriminatory immigration policies in the following years.

With the influx of South Asian immigration in 1906, the British Columbia's Legislative Assembly voted to disenfranchise all "natives not of Anglo-Saxon parents" to exclude South Asians in the province from political participation and voting.[28] Interior Conservative Minister W.H. Bowser expressed his desire "to keep British Columbia a White man's country" and received support from opposition Liberal Party leader W. MacDonald who claimed that "not one in one hundred among them can speak our language nor are they familiar with our laws and customs."[29] Lal argues that "a white Canada…became the most desirable goal and the most cherished identity" in the country.[30] The vision of a "white Canada" only increased resentment toward Asians in British Columbia. In 1907, a mob of white men from the Asiatic Exclusion

---

[24] "Importation of Hindus Condemned," *Victoria Daily Times,* August 15, 1906, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Times Colonist.
[25] "Importation of Hindus Condemned," *Victoria Daily Times.*
[26] "Hundreds of Hindus Arrived This Morning," *Victoria Daily Times,* November 14, 1906. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Times Colonist.
[27] "The Hindus," Victoria Daily Times, December 29, 1906. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Times Colonist.
[28] Bains, "Punjabi Economic Migration," 534-535.; Bose, *South Asian Migrations,* 161.
[29] Bains, "Punjabi Economic Migration," 535.; "[South Asian Canadians] Are Excluded By Unanimous Decision." March 27, 1907, In *(DIS)Enfranchisement - 1907-1947: The Forty Year Struggle for The Vote Exhibit Collection*, https://sacda.ca/index.php/Detail/objects/603; Proceedings of the B.C. Legislature, 26 March 1907, Quoted in Sukhwant Hundal, and Sadhu Binning, "How Indians Lost and Finally Won Back the Right to Vote in Canada," In *Social History of South Asians in British Columbia*. South Asian Studies Institute, 2022, 259, https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/read/66648630/a-social-history-of-south-asians-in-british-columbia/
[30] Lal, "East Indians," 99-100.

League led Anti-Asian Riots in Bellingham and Vancouver where they chanted "White Canada Forever." Following these events, discriminatory policies to restrict and reduce South Asian immigration increased.

In 1908, South Asians in British Columbia experienced two major issues regarding migration. The first was the Canadian Government's implementation of the Continuous Journey provision. Prime Minister Wilfred Laurier sent William Mackenzie King, the minister for labour at the time, to England with a proposal to enforce a law prohibiting immigrants from entering the country if they do not arrive from the country which they were native to. King argued "that [more] Indian immigrants would 'disturb' conditions in British Columbia" as "they were racially unfit to live in the British Columbian climate.[31] Once enacted, this legislation amended the Immigration Act to prohibit "the landing in Canada of any specified class of immigrants or of any immigrants who have come to Canada otherwise than by continuous journey from the country of which they are natives or citizens and upon through tickets purchased in that country."[32] As a result, only twenty-nine South Asians arrived in Canada between 1909 and 1913 as they were returning residents.[33] In 1910, the government amended the Immigration Act again and passed two orders-in-council, P.C. 920 and P.C. 926 to strengthen restrictions.[34] Joseph Edward Bird, a local lawyer who supported the South Asian community, stated in his memoir:

---

[31] Almy, "More Hateful," 309.
[32] "Immigration Act, 1910," *Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21*, https://pier21.ca/research/immigration-history/immigration-act-1910; Ben Mussett, "The 'Continuous Journey' Law," *K: British Columbia An Untold History,* https://bcanuntoldhistory.knowledge.ca/1900/the-continuous-journey-law
[33] Bose, *South Asian Migrations,* 161.
[34] Canada, Minister of the Interior, *Asiatic Immigrants Must Be In Possession of $200*, RG2, Privy Council Office, Series A-1-a, For Order in Council see volume 993, Access Code 90. P.C. 926, Government of Canada, 1910, https://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.redirect?app=ordincou&id=146073&lang=eng&ecopy=e010720496-v8; Canada, Minister of the Interior, *Immigrants Who Come to Canada Otherwise Than By Continuous Journey Upon Through Tickets Prohibited,* RG2, Privy Council Office, Series A-1-a, For Order in Council see volume 993, Access Code 90. P.C. 920, Government of Canada, 1910, https://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.redirect?app=ordincou&id=146067&lang=eng&ecopy=e010720477-v8

> The Immigration Act was, by the persuasion of the votes of the Labour Unions passed to give the rulers of Canada a right to close the door against the undesired immigrant. The Act defined the rules and regulations that were to be considered before any immigrant should obtain his or her entry to Canada for the purpose of residing and making here a home for themselves.[35]

The second challenge faced by South Asians in 1908 was the British Honduras Scheme: a plan by the Canadian government to deport 2,000 South Asian men to British Honduras for indentured labour.[36] The government intended for South Asians to work in sugar plantations and railway construction.[37] They argued that South Asian "immigrants could not survive in Canada because they faced unemployment, starvation, and harsh winters they were not suited for."[38] Newspaper coverage also highlighted violent rebellions for independence in India at the time which increased "anxieties about the presence of South Asians in the province."[39] As such, white Canadians supported the endeavour to relocate South Asians. Despite the public support of the plan, the scheme was unsuccessful due to opposition from the local South Asian community in Victoria and Vancouver.[40]

In 1908, Canadian officials sent two men, Nagar Singh and Sham Singh, to British Honduras "to report back on labour conditions there to the Indian community in Vancouver."[41] After returning, they opposed relocation plans and claimed that an immigration officer attempted to bribe them to proceed with the scheme. Teja Singh, a Cambridge and Columbia-educated Sikh and trained lawyer, led opposition to the scheme and he rejected claims that South Asians were not suited to the climate of British Columbia.[42] Ultimately, South Asian resistance prevented the

---

[35] Edward Joseph Bird, "Khalsa Diwan Society," In *Memoir of Joseph Edward Bird, 1902- 1939*, 89, https://search.archives.uvic.ca/joseph-edward-bird-fonds
[36] Reilly, "Deportation of the Hindus," 32.
[37] Reilly, "Deportation of the Hindus," 34.
[38] Reilly, "Deportation of the Hindus," 32.
[39] Reilly, "Deportation of the Hindus," 33.
[40] Kenneth Reilly, "'A Hard Strain on Imperialism': South Asian Resistance to the British Honduras Scheme," *Canadian Journal of History* 56, no. 2, 2021, 93, doi:10.3138/cjh-2020-0037
[41] Almy," More Hateful," 309.
[42] Kamala Elizabeth Nayar, "The Making of Sikh Space: The Role of the Gurdwara," In *Asian*

execution of the British Honduras Scheme. Yet this plan represented conceptions of "suitable" and "undesirable" immigrants.[43]

The Dominion of Canada's need for manual labour in the early twentieth century attracted South Asians seeking greater economic opportunities to support their families in India and "to add to existing small land holdings in ancestral villages."[44] In describing the experiences of South Asians in British Columbia, Lal argues:

> Integration and acceptance of the East Indians did not take place as a result of vast differences in the cultures and institutions of their country of origin and the host society, but mere importantly, because the immigrants themselves did not want to integrate. The East Indians were sojourners who hoped to return to India in their old age to enjoy the wealth they had acquired abroad.[45]

South Asians accepted work as labourers for white employers in the "forestry, agriculture, and steel industries and settled primarily in rural and isolated communities."[46] Their agricultural background as farmers gave them the physical endurance they needed as labourers.[47] A *Victoria Daily Times* article from November of 1906 reported that 150 South Asians arrived in Victoria and scattered across the island to Colwood, Gordon Head, and Strawberry Vale to work in the farms while others left the city for Vancouver to find work.[48] Companies across the province employed South Asian workers at low wages, matched to Chinese and Japanese workers, "up to half as much as the wages paid to white workers."[49] The willingness of Asian

---

Religions in British Columbia. ed., Overmyer, Daniel L, Don Baker, and Larry DeVries, UBC Press, 2010, 53, https://doi.org/10.59962/9780774816649.

[43] Reilly, "Hard Strain on Imperialism," 94.

[44] Banerjee, "Growing Together," 10.; Nayer, "Making of Sikh Space," 45.; Bains, "Century of Indian Migration," 4.

[45] Lal, "East Indians," ii-iii.

[46] Reilly, "Deportation of the Hindus," 33.

[47] Bains, "Punjabi Economic Migration," 535.

[48] "Hindus Leave City," *Victoria Daily Times*, November 17, 1906, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Times Colonist.

[49] Banerjee, "Growing Together," 10.

workers to accept employment with low wages allowed their employers to make substantial profits and fill the labour gap.[50]

Across the province, many employers were satisfied with the work of South Asian men. In 1906, J.S. Dennis, land commissioner of the Canadian Pacific Railway (C.P.R.), reported "that the C.P.R. Company has a number of [South Asians]….engaged in the mountains and they are giving eminent satisfaction."[51] Further, he claimed that "Hindus would prove valuable workers if the necessary pains were taken to show them how to adapt themselves to the new surroundings."[52] Mill owners also attempted to make "mill colonies more Sikh friendly…to attract Sikh labourers."[53] South Asian labourers built "mill colony gurdwaras," as defined by Kamala Nayer, to create spaces for worship across British Columbia.[54] As such, it became "common for mill owners – both Sikh and Euro-Canadian – to build gurdwaras right on site along with bunker-type housing."[55] Some mill colony gurdwaras were located at Fraser Mills in Burquitlam and Paldi near Duncan.

While employers benefited from cheap labour, some white settlers opposed it for various reasons. In 1906, the Victoria Development and Tourist Association believed "there was not a scarcity of willing [white] workmen, but of men who would not accept less than a living wage."[56] In 1912, one speaker at a Political Equality League meeting argued against the migration of South Asian labourers and blamed capitalists for reducing employment opportunities for white labourers because of their preference for cheap labour.[57]

---

[50] Reilly, "Deportation of the Hindus," 34.
[51] "J. S. Dennis," *Victoria Daily Times*, November 16, 1906, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Times Colonist.
[52] "J.S. Dennis," *Victoria Daily Times.*
[53] Nayar, "Making of Sikh Space," 46.
[54] Nayar, "Making of Sikh Space," 46.
[55] Nayar, "Making of Sikh Space," 45.
[56] "Importation of Hindus Condemned," *Victoria Daily Times.*
[57] "Want Them Kept Out," *Victoria Daily Times,* February 1, 1912, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Times Colonist.

Nevertheless, some white settlers expressed support for Asian economic migration in British Columbia. One notable supporter, T. Mansell Jr., from Ganges in Salt Spring, declared support for South Asian labourers in a *Victoria Daily Times* column published October 25, 1906. Mansell claimed that he preferred "strong, healthy, honest, law-abiding men and women" and he would rather "have the willing worker from India than the people from the slums of London."[58] He encouraged others to also "advocate by voice and with pen the Hindu entry into this country."[59] In response to Mansell's letter, R. Marvin from Nanaimo, responded with concerns about South Asians in the country. Marvin described South Asians as "repulsive people [who] have been characterized as extremely fond of idleness."[60] Further, he claimed that "with their idleness, slovenliness, and diseases, [South Asians] are every day becoming a menace to the lives of the people of this country."[61] In his rejoinder published five days later, Mansell reaffirmed his positive opinion on South Asian migration and argued that "their willingness to come to this country, their fitness for 'some' kinds of labour [and] the small wages which they are content with" made them desirable immigrants.[62]

In October of 1906, a *Victoria Daily Times* article reported the arrival of T.C. Mazoomdar, a man from Bengal, India, in Victoria. In an interview with a *Times* representative, Mazoomdar expressed his plan to report back to Bengal about the economic opportunities in Canada and "if the people of India can make progress here."[63] He also confirmed that South Asian men left Hong Kong for Canada after hearing of a labour shortage in the Dominion.[64] In

---

[58] "The Labour Problem," *Victoria Daily Times,* October 25, 1906, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Times Colonist.
[59] "The Labour Problem," *Victoria Daily Times,* October 25, 1906.
[60] "The Labour Problem," *Victoria Daily Times,* October 31, 1906, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Times Colonist.
[61] "The Labour Problem," *Victoria Daily Times,* October 31, 1906.
[62] "The Hindus," *Victoria Daily Times,* November 5, 1906, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Times Colonist.
[63] "Panama Maru Will Dock on Friday, One Day Late; Little Cargo," *Victoria Daily Times,* October 13, 1913, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Times Colonist.
[64] "Panama Maru Will Dock on Friday, One Day Late; Little Cargo," *Victoria Daily Times.*

contrast, many South Asians in British Columbia were unemployed because of short term employment. This prompted white settlers to perceive South Asians as lazy, unwilling to work, and only "capable of performing…lowly work."[65] Nevertheless, unemployed South Asians were supported by other South Asians. In 1909, Teja Singh formed Guru Nanak Mining & Trust Co Ltd. and purchased land to provide employment for South Asians. Additionally, the Khalsa Diwan Society, a Sikh organization that established local *gurdwaras* for places of worship for Sikhs, provided "safe spaces for any person of South Asian descent, be they Hindu, Muslim, or Sikh."[66] *Gurdwaras* also became "storm centres of political activity."[67] In 1908, Eric J. E. Swayne, Governor of British Honduras, referred to these establishments as "labour unions to keep immigrants off the streets."[68]

While many South Asians intended to eventually return to India, some South Asian men hoped "to settle down in Canada and unite with their families"[69] In 1912, a petition was brought forth to allow South Asian men to bring their wives and families to Canada. In response, Mr. Stevens, the "federal M.P. on the Hindu immigration question," expressed that he did not want to remove existing immigration restrictions and he "was prepared to support measures to make these restrictions even more pronounced."[70] In the same conversation, another man argued that South Asian immigration was not an imperial question, despite South Asians being British

---

[65] Reilly, "Deportation of the Hindus," 33.
[66] Denise Fong, John Endo Greenaway, Fran Morrison, John Price, Carmen Rodriguez de France, Sharanjit Kaur Sandhra, and Timothy J. Stanley. "Challenging Racism." In *1923 Challenging Racisms Past and Present*. Canada-China Focus, 2023, 12. https://challengingracism.ca/print-versions/1923-Challenging-Racism_LR-Singles.pdf
[67] Lal, "East Indians," 54.
[68] Reilly, "Deportation of the Hindus," 42.; Eric J. E. Swayne, "Information as to Hindu Agitators in Vancouver [Confidential Memorandum on Matters Affecting the East Indian Community in Vancouver by Colonel Eric J. E. Swayne, Governor of British Honduras. Original," Library and Archives Canada. RG7-G-21, Vol. 200, File 332, vol. 3 (b), In *Hugh Johnston South Asian Research Collection*, 4, https://sacda.ca/index.php/Detail/objects/9098
[69] Bains, "Punjabi Economic Migration," 534.
[70] Henry Herbert Stevens, "Newsclippings - Victoria Daily Colonist: Against admission of Hindu women; Hindu question is considered; Unfavorable to Hindu women," February, 1912, In *Henry Herbert Stevens Fonds*, 1, https://sacda.ca/index.php/Detail/objects/9452

subjects. He added that "the British working man…was the best working man in the world."[71] In the same year, a white settler insisted that "his standard of living was the evolution of 2,000 years" and "he could not be expected to lower it to that of the Asiatic."[72] The emphasis on race as a method to organize society bolstered the vision of Canada as a "white man's country" and prevented South Asians from permanent settlement in the Dominion.[73]

[71] Stevens, "Newsclippings," 4-5.
[72] Stevens, "Newsclippings," 5.
[73] Bains, "Punjabi Economic Migration," 534.

Chapter Two: Sikhs at Tod Inlet

Nestled twenty kilometres north of Victoria, Tod Inlet stands as a peaceful nature sanctuary carrying profound significance and heritage. Known by the Tsartlip First Nation as SṈIDȻEŁ (pronounced sneek-with), meaning Place of the Blue Grouse, the area served significant spiritual and practical value as a harvest camping site.[74] Europeans first recorded sight of SṈIDȻEŁ in the mid-nineteenth century. In a 1858 survey, Captain George Henry Richards labelled the entire area of what is known as Brentwood Bay today as Tod Creek, after John Tod, a Hudson's Bay Company employee and later member of the Legislative Council for the Vancouver Island Colony.[75] Shortly after, SṈIDȻEŁ transformed into the industrial town of Tod Inlet for limestone production.[76]

In 1890, the Saanich Lime Company was "formed to acquire by purchase, operate, carry on, and extend the lime-kilns on Tod Creek and Highland district."[77] With Joseph Wrigleworth, William Fernie, and Peter Fernie named as trustees, the company's main office was located at 127 Yates Street in Victoria.[78] In December of 1900, the president of the BC Board of Trade "made an announcement…that a new cement works was to be established at Tod Inlet" and the official construction began four years later.[79] The Vancouver Portland Cement Company "purchased the property surrounding the Tod Inlet" in 1904 with the company manager being Robert Pim Butchart.[80] Tod Inlet was ideal for a cement plant because of the inlet's "suitability…for marine transport" as the harbour was "deep enough for large ships to load

---

[74] David Robert Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters: The History of Tod Inlet* (Royal British Columbia Museum, 2020), 16.
[75] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 21.
[76] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 24.
[77] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 27.
[78] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 27.
[79] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 31, 37.
[80] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 81.

cement directly for transport up and down the Pacific coast."[81] The cement plant buildings were ready by the end of March 1905 and cement production began a month later. While local Victoria newspapers did not announce the official completion of the plant, a *Victoria Daily Times* article from April 1905 confirmed the departure of the first cement shipment that month.[82]

While photographs taken in 1904 during building construction confirm the early presence of Chinese labourers at Tod Inlet, the Chinese community was first mentioned five years later in a 1909 *Vancouver Island Directory* which stated: "nearly 200 Orientals located here."[83] In addition to supporting plant construction, Chinese men "built their own buildings, probably with lumber offered by the cement company."[84] They worked long hours in the factory "for low wages" while also "raising livestock, growing vegetables, cooking and doing the laundry" in their "bachelor's village," separate from the homes of white settlers.[85] Nevertheless, information about the lives of Chinese labourers at Tod Inlet is limited. Much of what is known today about them is because of research by historian David R. Gray in recent decades.[86] Gray claims that the endeavor to discover the "personal stories [of Chinese labourers] has been more than difficult."[87]

Robert James Parsell, an engineer who "was hired to help install machinery in the plant," arrived in Tod Inlet in 1905.[88] His wife, Mary Parsell, "was one of the first women to live in the village of Tod Inlet.[89] In 1958, she documented her memories of Tod Inlet and her writing is an "important first-hand source of information on the people and early growth of" the Tod Inlet

---

[81] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 81.
[82] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 46-47.
[83] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 41, 73.; Provincial Publishing Company, "Tod Inlet," *Directory of Vancouver Island and Adjacent Islands For 1909,* In British Columbia City Directories 1860- 1955. https://bccd.vpl.ca/title/1909/Directory_of_Vancouver_Island.html
[84] Gwen Currey, *Tod Inlet: A Healing Place* (Rocky Mountain Books, 2016), 120.
[85] Curry, *Tod Inlet,* 120.
[86] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 75.
[87] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 44.
[88] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 43.
[89] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 43.

community.[90] In her journal, Parsell mentioned that they "often had Chinese friends come to their house in small groups for lessons in English."[91] At Lunar New Year, they also exchanged "gifts of firecrackers, ginger and lychees and always Chinese lilies for Mary, whose friendship they particularly appreciated."[92]

In 1906, 40 Sikh labourers arrived at Tod Inet to work as "stokers and firemen for the plant's furnaces and kilns."[93] A *Nanaimo Free Press* article published September 4, 1906 confirmed their presence: "Hindus are now employed at the cement works at Tod Inlet."[94] Sikh men lived in basic conditions, similar to the Chinese community at Tod Inlet, and they experienced isolation "as no established Sikh community existed for these men in the early years of the plant."[95] On the arrival of Sikh men in the spring of 1906 at Tod Inlet, Mary Parsell wrote:

> A group of 40 Hindus were brought to work in the quarry. To us they were a strange looking company of men with their long beard and their strange head coverings. They used to stare at the women as if we too were something quite different being without veils. In the evenings they used to gather in the field at the back of our house and sing sad and mournful songs.[96]

As labourers at Tod Inlet, Sikh men replaced "the bricks in a kiln [when they] became exhausted" and tossed the "old bricks…into the water."[97] Then, they "entered the still-warm kilns to reline them…[with] pieces of lumber stripped to their feet for protection."[98] On the other hand, Chinese labourers excavated "the raw limestone from the limestone quarry by hand."[99] Both Sikh and Chinese men "loaded cement for export" which included "carrying the 87.5 pound bags of

---

[90] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 43.; Mary Parsell, "Life in Tod Inlet 1900-1923," *Friends of Tod Creek Watershed,* https://www.todcreekwatershed.ca/heritage/heritage-documents
[91] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 75.
[92] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 75.
[93] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 52.
[94] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 52.
[95] Curry, *Tod Inlet,* 124.
[96] Gray notes that the men likely sang kirtan which is a form of Sikh communal and devotional singing.; Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 50-51.; Parsell, "Life in Tod Inlet 1900-1923."
[97] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 55.
[98] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 55.
[99] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 44, 48.

cement onto the barges or ships for export and unloading the various incoming cargoes."[100] As labourers, they "were paid roughly half what Canadian employees were, which was typical of the times."[101] Yet white settlers compared the work of Sikh labourers with Chinese labourers.

When Sikh men first arrived at Tod Inlet, local newspapers commented that if South Asian "immigration is allowed to proceed with, it will not be long before they [Sikh men] become as serious a competitor as the Chinaman."[102] In 1907, G.L. Milne, medical inspector and immigration agent, contacted Vancouver Portland Cement Company and reported that the company "spoke rather favourable of them [Sikh men] as they were a competitor with the Chinese who were inclined to strike for higher wages at times, and by their presence kept the wages at the usual rate of $1.50 per day."[103] Sikh and Chinese men lived in separate bunkhouses, distant from the homes of white settlers, and they used their own kitchens. In 1907, a Sikh dwelling was described as "a small one-storey bunk house, some seventy feet by forty."[104]

Gray captured many stories of Sikh labourers at Tod Inlet through interviews with the children of former labourers. In conversation with Gray, Jeet Dheenshaw, the son of former Tod Inlet labourer Hardit Singh, shared that Sikhs lived "in shacks with dirt floors" and they used "cardboard for insulation and flour sacks as blankets" with "four or five men" sharing a room.[105] Since the men "did not want to spend their wages on new clothing," they tolerated the rainy environment and "preferred to use 'old stuff' left behind by others over spending money on new things."[106] In another conversation, Max Pallan, the son of former labourer Gurditta Mal Pallan, shared that Sikh men collected money from each man to purchase necessities and they walked

[100] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 49.
[101] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 49.
[102] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 52.
[103] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 55.
[104] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 77.
[105] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 77.
[106] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 77.

"six kilometres up to the Prospect Lake Store to buy groceries."[107] They assigned one man "to do the communal cooking…and each worker gave one day's wages to the cook each month."[108] Sikh men brought with them their "tradition of using two cooking fires side by side: one for cooking lentils and vegetables, the other for cooking chapati (flatbread) on a steel plate griddle."[109] Pallan shares:

> They ate mostly beans, *dal*, or *roti*, though they also made pancakes and drank tea. They used lids from food cans as cups, and made serving utensils from a can on a stick. At that time a 50-pound sack of flour cost one dollar, butter was 25 cents a pound, and beans 5 cents a pound. The men chewed the ends of willow tree branches to make improvised brushes for cleaning their teeth.[110]

Normal Parsell, the son of Mary and Robert Parsell, "often watched the Sikhs cooking their *chapati* on an iron plate over an outdoor fire and were often invited to join the meal."[111] In the early years of the plant, Jennie Butchart, Robert Butchart's wife, invited the cement plant workers to their home every Sunday and she served them tea.[112] Pallan shares that his "dad and other friends who came from India were very excited that a rich lady like that was giving that much time to the workers and to the foreigners."[113]

Nevertheless, Sikh labourers at Tod Inlet were subject to criticism from white settlers. In 1906, Milne commented on the divisions of Sikh men "into numberless 'Casts'" which was "a great hindrance to their being employed in numbers."[114] In the same year, fifteen Sikh men left Tod Inlet for Victoria. A *Victoria Daily Times* titled "Hindus Are In Great Distress" reported their arrival in Victoria:

---

[107] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 79.
[108] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 78.
[109] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 78.
[110] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 79.
[111] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 78.
[112] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 79-80.
[113] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 79-80.
[114] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 55.

> They wandered around aimlessly all day finally camping on the street line of Fourth street. Without tents, blankets, or food they presented a miserable appearance. Finally, on Saturday evening one of them went downtown and purchased some lemons, salad, and a bag of rice. They were about to light a fire for cooking purposes on the street, but nearby residents objected, and accordingly salad and lemons composed the evening meal….A message was sent to the Mayor asking what could be done to aid them. A couple of constables were sent to the camp and the Hindus taken to the back of the patrol shed at the city hall, where they still remain.[115]

This article added that while the men "come to this province with every intention to earn an honest living," the "conditions are so different that their efforts meet with ill-success.[116] Another article published the following day titled "The Hindus Worry Civic Authorities" reported that "thirty or forty able-bodied native of Hindostan, who are in a practically destitute condition" made "their headquarters in the old fire hall next to the city hall, and at other temporary places of abode" and "quite a number of the Hindus employed at the factory of the Portland Cement Co., Tod Inlet, had left there complaining that the dust made them ill and unable to perform the tasks imposed upon them."[117] This article also mentioned a rumour that some men who resigned from the Company did so "for the sake of preserving their caste" as they previously worked alongside "some of their countrymen of a lower social denomination."[118]

While the cement plant at Tod Inlet looked prosperous from the outside, "on the inside… the workers were unhappy."[119] Many workers "could not stand the dust" and complained "of bronchitis and throat troubles" which appeared to be one reason why some men previously resigned.[120] Additionally, "there was a very serious outbreak of typhoid fever" which came from Tod Creek, the community's source of "drinking water [which] flowed through miles of open

---

[115] "Hindus Are In Great Distress," *Victoria Daily Times,* August 13, 1906, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Times Colonist.
[116] "Hindus Are In Great Distress," *Victoria Daily Times.*
[117] "The Hindus Worry Civic Authorities," *Victoria Daily Times*, August 14, 1906, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Times Colonist.
[118] "The Hindus Worry Civic Authorities," *Victoria Daily Times*.
[119] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 97.
[120] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 62.

ditch on its way from Prospect Lake, and during the summer became seriously polluted."[121] This water was also "used for the cement plant and for irrigation."[122] At the same time there was "an outbreak of pulmonary tuberculosis which turned Tod Inlet into a 'place of breeding death.'"[123]

In April of 1907, Sikh labourer Tar Gool Singh caught a cold which was exacerbated by unhealthy working conditions in the cement plant. When the plant owners "offered to pay for his stay at St. Joseph's Hospital" he refused as he did not want to eat "from the plates of white people."[124] As his illness progressed, he was taken to hospital, but passed away shortly after and his compatriots brought his body back to Tod Inlet.[125] The Sikh men mourned Singh's death that night and cremated his body on a traditional wooden funeral pyre in Tod Inlet's forest the next day. After the cremation, the Sikh men collected Singh's ashes, scattered them in the waters of Tod Inlet, and arranged for the transportation of an arm bone to Singh's family in India.[126] While Singh's cremation was not the first in the Dominion, "it was certainly the best documented at the time." and "sparked much interest among the residents of Tod Inlet and Victoria."[127] A *Victoria Daily Times* article published after the cremation titled "Weird Ceremony at Tod Inlet" described the event:

> At 9:45 the torch was applied to the funeral pyre by the brother of the deceased and the blazes which are consuming the body to ashes are still burning brightly. Tar Gool Singh had fallen prey to the 'white scourge.'[128]...Early this morning, under the leadership of Sindah, the Orientals formed up in funeral procession. In the midst, on the shoulders of four of the men, was raised the rough coffin containing the remains. The cortege started up a hill, and after a journey of about a quarter of a mile reached the top. Here the coffin was placed on a rough bier, three feet by four. Underneath around and above it, was piled stacks of wood, and over this was poured gallons of paraffin oil. In solemn guise the

---

[121] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 80.
[122] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 80; Curry, *Tod Inlet,* 120.
[123] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 98.
[124] Curry, *Tod Inlet,* 127.
[125] "Weird Ceremony At Tod Inlet," *Victoria Daily Times,* April 12, 1907, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Times Colonist.
[126] Weird Ceremony At Tod Inlet," *Victoria Daily Times.*
[127] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters.* 87-88.
[128] "White scourge" is a historical term describing tuberculosis.

> inscrutable mourners stood around. The priest then approached and chanting a doleful prayer poured holy water on the funeral pyre…The scene was a strangely said and impressive one. As the morning wore on the mourners departed, some lingering longer than others in paying the last tribute of respect to their dead companion. The pyre will be left untouched until to-morrow when it is thought that it will be burned down.[129]

Robert Butchart "decided to temporarily close the Tod Inlet plant in 1908 because of oversupply and stagnant market."[130] Two years later, many Sikh men left Tod Inlet after witnessing the increasing deaths of Chinese men from tuberculosis and typhus. In August of 1911, a man named Inda Singh died a week after losing "his position at the Tod Inlet cement works."[131] Gray states that "one wonders if he was unable to work because of poor health brought on by the working conditions."[132] While Singh "was given an antidote," he passed away shortly after in the Jubilee Hospital.[133]

During his research, Gray located documents at the local Sikh *gurdwara* on Topaz Avenue confirming all Sikh men had left Tod Inlet around 1910; yet, the 1911 *Census of Canada* proves otherwise.[134] This census was recorded in late June by George Slugget, "a local man who would have known many of the people at Tod Inlet."[135] The census "lists 368 employees of the plant" with 239 workers in the "Chinese Camp" and 63 in the "Hindu Camp."[136] The surname of all Sikhs in the census was listed as "Singh."[137] While "over half were between 20 and 30 years old,…only 10 were between 40 and 60, with 60 being the oldest."[138] Over half of them "arrived

---

[129] Weird Ceremony At Tod Inlet," *Victoria Daily Times.*
[130] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 92.
[131] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 98.
[132] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 98.
[133] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 98.
[134] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 98.
[135] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 95.
[136] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 74, 95.; Government of Canada, "Census of Canada, 1911," *Library and Archives Canada,* https://www.canada.ca/en/library-archives/collection/research-help/genealogy-family-history/censuses/dominion-canada/1911.html
[137] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 96.
[138] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 96.

in Canada in 1907,... 20 arrived in 1905 and 1906, and 10 in 1908."[139] Additionally, the census states that "89 people of 'Hindu' origin" lived in Saanich and "85 in the city of Victoria."[140] In the Nanaimo District of the island, which included Tod Inlet, "there were 192 men and 37 women who were born in India, but there is no indication of how many of these people were actually of British descent."[141] In British Columbia there were "1,730 people…whose religion was classified as Sikh or Hindu."[142] Additionally, Sluggett recorded 56 white men "in the company bunkhouse, and 10 families in the 'white' company village" at Tod Inlet with "10 men, 11 women (one a 'domestic') and 17 children."[143] While the jobs of white men were specified, the Chinese and Sikh men were simply listed as labourers.[144] According to the census, Tod Inlet's population was 396 in 1911.[145]

While the census lists members of the Tsartlip community at Tod Inlet, they were not described as "working at the cement plant.[146] Rather, their occupations were "listed as either farming or fishing.[147] A report from the same year by W.R. Robertson, an Indian Agent from the Cowichan Agency, indicated that people from the Saanich nations "chiefly engaged in farming, fishing, hop-picking, and working in the cement works and mines."[148] In describing the presence of the Tsartlip community at Tod Inlet, Tsartlip Elder Manny Cooper established that the "Tsartlip people were pretty 'strict with the cement'" and they avoided "it because the cement dust would stick in the windpipe."[149]

---

[139] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 96.
[140] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 97.
[141] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 97.
[142] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 97.
[143] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 95- 96.
[144] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 96.
[145] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 96.
[146] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 96.
[147] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 96.
[148] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 96.
[149] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 96.

While most Sikh men worked in the cement mill for about five years, "a few of the Sikh men stayed on at Tod Inlet and continued to work for the Butcharts as their gardens were developing."[150] Gray shares that "the short time for which the Sikhs were at Tod Inlet, and the relative poverty of their lives there, helps to explain why no artifacts of obvious Indian origin, except the brick ovens, have yet been found or identified at the site."[151] Though most former labourers of the Vancouver Portland Cement Company found employment in other regions of British Columbia, many South Asians returned to India during this time and some intended to come back to the Dominion. One such example was Nama Moran, an older Sikh man who returned to the Dominion in 1910 after previous employment at Tod Inlet. Moran successfully "prove[d] previous domicile in Canada" as H.A. Ross, treasurer of the cement company, confirmed Moran's previous employment, and he was permitted to re-enter.[152]

While I reviewed and compared the names of South Asian men in the 1911 *Census of Canada* and the *Panama Maru's* passenger list, I did not find a name listed in both documents.[153] Nevertheless, it is possible that a passenger who worked at Tod Inlet before 1911 returned to Canada on the *Panama Maru*, but I could not locate a source that confirms this. Even so, the stories of Tod Inlet and *Panama Maru* are connected as they represent the central themes of South Asian history in early twentieth-century Canada: labour and migration. While South Asians arrived to the Dominion seeking greater economic opportunities, they simultaneously navigated exclusionary immigration policies that intended to prevent further immigration from India.

---

[150] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 98.
[151] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 99.
[152] Gray, *Deep and Sheltered Waters,* 97.
[153] Canada, PANAMA MARU - Voyage From 1913-09 to 1913-10-17, Genealogy / Immigrants & Citizenship / Passenger lists of voyages, 23246, Government of Canada, 1913, https://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.redirect?app=voypaslis&id=23246&lang=eng&ecopy=CANIMM1913PLIST_0000408368-00201; Government of Canada, "Census of Canada, 1911."

Chapter Three: The *Panama Maru* Case

A *Victoria Daily Times* article published four days before the arrival of the *Panama Maru* in Victoria included a message from Captain Kanao "that on board his ship were 89 steerage passengers and 209 tons of freight for the port of Victoria."[154] Osaka Shosen Kaisha, the Japanese company that operated the ship, sent a wireless message to Victoria shipping agency R.P. Rithet & Co. announcing that "56 Hindus [were] on board the inbound Japanese steamship" and it was unknown "whether these subjects of India are newcomers or whether they are coming here on their first visit."[155] A *Times* article published one day before the arrival remarks:

> During the past 18 months a great many departed from this country with their pockets laden with money they have earned in British Columbia to spread the news of what a grand place is this Dominion. It is thought likely that the Hindus are now starting to return. The immigration authorities of this port will have to decide in the morning as to whether the men are eligible to land in Victoria.[156]

Chinese and Japanese men and women were also aboard the ship. A *Victoria Daily Times* article reporting the arrival of the *Panama Maru* confirmed "there were "13 Chinese [and] 20 Japanese" passengers.[157] On their journey to North America, *Panama Maru* passengers experienced a "violent typhoon in the China Sea" and "had a narrow escape from being washed overboard."[158]

A *Victoria Daily Times* article noted that "this is the largest number of Hindus arriving for some time at this port."[159] Upon their arrival, an interpreter from Vancouver facilitated communication between the passengers and immigration officials during examination.[160] South

---

[154] "Panama Maru Will Dock on Friday, One Day Late; Little Cargo," *Victoria Daily Times.*
[155] "Many Hindus Coming In On Panama Maru," *Victoria Daily Times,* October 16, 1913, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Times Colonist.
[156] "Many Hindus Coming In On Panama Maru," *Victoria Daily Times.*
[157] "Many Hindus Coming In On Panama Maru," *Victoria Daily Times.*; "Sea Knocks Captain Over During Typhoon," *Victoria Daily Times,* October 17, 1913, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Times Colonist.
[158] "Sea Knocks Captain Over During Typhoon," *Victoria Daily Times.*
[159] "Sea Knocks Captain Over During Typhoon," *Victoria Daily Times.*
[160] "Sea Knocks Captain Over During Typhoon," *Victoria Daily Times.*

Asian passengers were "examined by a special board of inquiry" to enforce the Immigration Act and most South Asian passengers "were refused entry to the Dominion."[161] After hearing this, some "climbed on board" the ship "and declined to leave the wharf when requested" which brought police patrol to the site who detained the men.[162] Another *Victoria Daily Times* article published a week after the ship's arrival titled "Ordered Deported" reported that "the Hindus colony has lodged a protest with Ottawa against the deportations ordered by the board of inquiry, and pending the receipt of a reply the men are being detained at the sheds."[163] South Asians previously domiciled in Victoria frequently "gather[ed] on the Dallas road" to visit those detained and "converse with their fellow countrymen through the bars."[164]

On October 26, 1913, South Asian men met at the local *gurdwara* on Topaz Avenue "to protest against the decision regarding the party and to consider further steps to resist their deportation."[165] The Khalsa Diwan Society, a company incorporated under the Benevolent Societies Act of B.C which established local *gurdwaras* and supported South Asians in need, hired Joseph Edward Bird, a Canadian lawyer, to represent their case.[166] As their solicitor, Bird argued for "the landing in B.C. of their fellow countrymen from India who sought entry in Canada."[167] In his memoir, Bird recounted the situation:

> These men had already arrived in Victoria on Vancouver Island when I was consulted and were awaiting admission or landing in B.C., claiming as a right, as British Subjects, the residence they sought here. The subject of Immigration has caused much legislation to be passed in the Canadian Parliament. At the time of the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway…[Chinese men] and other foreigners were freely landed here, for their labor

---

[161] "Habeas Corpus For Hindus Asked For," *Victoria Daily Times,* November 1, 1913, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Times Colonist.
[162] "Sea Knocks Captain Over During Typhoon," *Victoria Daily Times*.
[163] "Ordered Deported," *Victoria Daily Times*, October 25, 1913, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Times Colonist.
[164] "Ordered Deported," *Victoria Daily Times*.
[165] "Ordered Deported," *Victoria Daily Times*.
[166] Bird, "Khalsa Diwan Society," 88.
[167] Bird, "Khalsa Diwan Society," 88.

> power was required. Later the Trades Unions of Canada felt that they needed protection against alien labourers and their free right of entry to Canada.[168]

A *Victoria Daily Times* article published one day after the meeting at the *gurdwara* reported that "it was resolved to resist to the legal limit the deportation of the 39 Hindus brought in on the *Panama Maru*, who have been ordered by the board of inquiry to be returned to their native country."[169] While South Asian men "appealed to the minister of the Interior" in Ottawa regarding the deportation, immigration officials expected that he would "follow the precedent set in previous cases and uphold" their decision.[170] An article published on November 1, 1913 article titled "Habeas Corpus For Hindus Asked For" proclaimed that the detained South Asians were "undesirable immigrants for one reason or another" and they were "making a determined effort to remain in the country, with the assistance of their friends here and in Vancouver."[171] In their "first attempt to obtain a writ of habeas corpus," Judge Murphy dismissed their case and "ruled that section twenty-three of the *Immigration Act*…prohibited him from hearing their application."[172] Section twenty-three stated:

> No court, and no judge or officer thereof, shall have jurisdiction to review, quash, reverse, restrain or otherwise interfere with any proceeding, decision or order of the Minister of of any board of Inquiry, or officer in charge, had, made or given under the authority and in accordance with the provisions of this Act relating to the detention or deportation of any rejected immigrant, passenger or other person, upon any ground whatsoever, unless such person is a Canadian citizen or has Canadian domicile.[173]

Nevertheless, South Asians worked on a new application to prevent the deportation of their fellow countrymen.

---

[168] Bird, "Khalsa Diwan Society," 88-89.
[169] "Hindus Unite in Protest Meeting," *Victoria Daily Times,* October 27, 1913, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Times Colonist.
[170] "Habeas Corpus For Hindus Asked For," *Victoria Daily Times.*
[171] "Habeas Corpus For Hindus Asked For," *Victoria Daily Times.*
[172] Lal, "East Indians," 149-150.
[173] "Immigration Act, 1910," *Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21.*

On November 24, 1913, a crowd of South Asian men gathered outside the law courts "in anticipation of the hearing of the argument."[174] Once the detained South Asian men were brought to the court house "under a strong guard of immigration officials and police," the other men "looked and acted in a rather menacing manner and the police had to move them back from their positions, the mounted men being kept on duty outside the building throughout the afternoon."[175] As one detained man had escaped, only thirty-eight men "were placed in…the witness rooms and held there for production before the court."[176] Additionally, the article noted that one South Asian man was frightened by the elevator in the court house and he "made a break towards the door in his fright…[refusing] to return that way."[177]

Bird defended the *Panama Maru* passengers who were represented by one man, Ishor Singh. On the other hand, the Dominion Government was represented by W.J. Taylor, K.C.[178] Taylor began the hearing "by stating that the Department of the Crown at Ottawa… advised him that he should consider and ascertain whether the Local Immigration Department could" consider deporting the men "without any submission of the matter to the Supreme Court of B.C."[179] In response Chief Justice Gordon Hunter said: "you cannot really moan that the Dominion Government can suggest such a thing" and then asked Taylor if "he thought that his clients could abrogate the law in British Columbia altogether."[180]

Bird made a habeas corpus application "on the ground that immigration officers had falsely imprisoned the migrants in the Immigration Detention Centre."[181] Bird argued:

---

[174] "Thirty-Five Hindus Released By Court," *Victoria Daily Times,* November 25, 1913, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Times Colonist.
[175] "Thirty-Five Hindus Released By Court," *Victoria Daily Times.*
[176] "Thirty-Five Hindus Released By Court," *Victoria Daily Times.*
[177] "Thirty-Five Hindus Released By Court," *Victoria Daily Times.*
[178] Bird, "Khalsa Diwan Society," 89.
[179] Bird, "Khalsa Diwan Society," 89.
[180] Bird, "Khalsa Diwan Society," 89.
[181] Almy, "More Hateful," 310.

> Order-in-council [P.C.] 926, passed at Ottawa on May 9, 1910, under the authority of section 37 of the *Immigration Act*, was ultra vires because the statute only authorized the governor-in-council to require as a condition of landing that the immigrant should have a certain amount of money 'in his own right,' while the order-in-council had added that the immigrant must have 'in actual and personal possession in his own right' the amount of money specified.[182]

Further, Bird argued that the order-in-council conflicted with the Imperial Act of Parliament from 1858, British law, which granted Indians "all the rights of British citizenship" and "was operative in Canada."[183] Bird added that the order-in-council used the term "immigrant of Asiatic origin" whereas the statute simply stated "race."[184]

Next, Bird highlighted order-in-council P.C. 920, "passed under section 38 of the *Immigration Act*, which required immigrants to travel to the Dominion through a continuous journey," was invalid because a continuous journey from India to Canada was impossible, as was the purchasing of a "through ticket from India to this country."[185] Additionally, he pointed out inconsistent terminology between the order-in-council and the statute as the latter used the term "native or naturalized citizen" whereas the former stated "natives or citizens."[186]

In response, Taylor argued that section 37 of the Immigration Act mandated that "immigrants and tourists shall possess in their own right money to a prescribed minimum amount, which amount may vary according to the race, occupation, or destination of such immigrant or tourist, and otherwise according to the circumstances," and the order-in-council set the $200 requirement for "all immigrants of Asiatic origin."[187] As such, "grouping all races in

---

[182] "Thirty-Five Hindus Released By Court," *Victoria Daily Times.*; Canada, *Asiatic Immigrants Must Be In Possession of $200.*
[183] "Thirty-Five Hindus Released By Court," *Victoria Daily Times.*
[184] "Thirty-Five Hindus Released By Court," *Victoria Daily Times.*
[185] "Thirty-Five Hindus Released By Court," *Victoria Daily Times.*; Isabel Wallace, "Komagata Maru Revisited: 'Hindus,' Hookworm, and the Guise of Public Health Protection," *BC Studies* (Vancouver), no. 178 (June 2013).; Canada, *Immigrants Who Come to Canada Otherwise Than By Continuous Journey Upon Through Tickets Prohibited.*
[186] "Thirty-Five Hindus Released By Court," *Victoria Daily Times.;* Wallace, "Komagata Maru."
[187] "Immigration Act, 1910," *Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21.*

Asia was as well within the powers as if it had enumerated all the races originating in Asia."[188] Addressing the argument that Indians were British citizens, Taylor claimed that the exception in the Immigration Act applied to Canadian statutory regulations and by approving the Immigration Act, the British Parliament "had approved of one of the dependencies of the empire, possessing autonomous government, passing the regulations in question."[189] Taylor also referred to section 38 to argue that immigrants must arrive by a continuous journey "from the place of his origin, and in such place he must be either a native or a naturalized citizen" and immigrants who violated this should be prohibited from landing.[190] Regarding the fact that a direct ticket from India to Canada was not possible, Taylor said this "might be cited as an argument of hardship, but not of law."[191]

Upon their arrival in Victoria, some South Asian *Panama Maru* passengers claimed that they were returning residents, but later admitted that this was a false claim.[192] One particular documented case was that of Gurdit Singh, son of Pertab Singh, who claimed that he was returning to Canada and previously worked at Fraser Mills. His case was noted as doubtful by the Board of Inquiry. Singh was interviewed a second time by Dr. G. L. Milne. During this interview, Singh admitted that he was not a returning resident and was instructed by another man to falsify his statements before he boarded the *Panama Maru*. Considering his false claims during the preliminary examination, section 33 of the *Immigration Act,* and orders-in-council P.C. 920 and P.C. 926, the Board ordered that Singh be deported.[193]

---

[188] "Thirty-Five Hindus Released By Court," *Victoria Daily Times.*
[189] "Thirty-Five Hindus Released By Court," *Victoria Daily Times.*
[190] "Thirty-Five Hindus Released By Court," *Victoria Daily Times.*
[191] "Thirty-Five Hindus Released By Court," *Victoria Daily Times.*
[192] Steve Schwinghamer, "'The Immigration Act a Weapon': Panama Maru and the Exclusion of Immigrants, 1913," *Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21,* https://pier21.ca/blog/immigration-act-a-weapon-panama-maru-and-exclusion-immigrants-1913
[193] Canada, Department of Immigration, "Minutes of a Board of Inquiry held this 22nd day of October, 1913, at the Dominion Immigration Hall, Victoria, B.C, In the matter of the Immigration Act & Gurdit Singh, son of Pertab Singh, alleged returning Hindu," Library and Archives Canada. RG76, Vol. 385, File 536999,

During the case, Taylor pointed out the false statements by *Panama Maru* passengers "and that under the second subsection of section 33, 'every passenger or other person seeking to land in Canada shall answer truly all questions put to him by any officer when examined under the authority of this act.'"[194] Additionally, Taylor highlighted the power of the immigration officials under sections 13 to 23 and the Minister of the Interior in Ottawa who was provided with all "appeals from the decision of the board."[195] He emphasized section 23:

> No court and no judge or officer thereof shall have jurisdiction to review, quash, reverse, restrain or otherwise interfere with any proceeding, decision or other of the minister or of any board of inquiry or office in charge had made or given under the authority and in accordance with the provisions of this act, relating to the detention or deportation of any rejected immigrant, passenger, or other person upon any ground whatsoever, unless such person is a Canadian citizen or has Canadian domicile.[196]

Nevertheless, Chief Justice Hunter "ruled in favour of the *Panama Maru* passengers" and thirty-five South Asian men were permitted to enter.[197] Justice Hunter "ordered the release of the men on habeas corpus" because the orders-in-council, passed to prevent South Asian migration under the *Immigration Act*, were ultra vires.[198] He claimed that both P.C. 926 and P.C. 920 were invalid "because it exceeded the power conferred by section 37" due to inconsistent terminology.[199] Additionally, he clarified "that the term 'special statutory regulations,' being an exception in favor of certain immigrants, was intended to refer to Canadian statutory regulations."[200] In response to Taylor's claim on section 23, Chief Justice declared "that these orders-in-council, not being in conformity with the powers conferred upon the board of inquiry, had really no jurisdiction to prohibit the court from interfering, and as the court, therefore, had

---

pt. 7. October 22, 1913, In *Hugh Johnston South Asian Research Collection,* https://sacda.ca/index.php/Detail/objects/9189

[194] "Thirty-Five Hindus Released By Court," *Victoria Daily Times.*
[195] "Thirty-Five Hindus Released By Court," *Victoria Daily Times.*
[196] "Thirty-Five Hindus Released By Court," *Victoria Daily Times.*
[197] Almy, "More Hateful," 310.
[198] "Thirty-Five Hindus Released By Court," *Victoria Daily Times.*
[199] "Thirty-Five Hindus Released By Court," *Victoria Daily Times.*
[200] "Thirty-Five Hindus Released By Court," *Victoria Daily Times.*

the authority to interfere it would direct the issue of writs of habeas corpus in the case of thirty-five men and order their discharge."[201] Four *Panama Maru* passengers were ordered deported, despite the release of other passengers, for medical reasons: Thakur Singh, Narain Singh, Thapoora Singh, and Baba Singh.[202] Yet they escaped shortly after they were brought to the immigration shed.[203] Ultimately, Justice Hunter's decision resulted from the "wording of the law…[being] too unclear to justify enforcing the regulation" rather than the discriminatory nature of the law.[204] Once the decision was announced that thirty-five men were free, "there was great rejoicing among the waiting Hindus…and there were jubilations in the north end of the city last night in honor of the new-comers, which became more boisterous during the evening when it was learned that the four who had been ordered to be taken back on the *Mexico Maru*…had broken out of the detention shed."[205]

In his memoir, Bird noted that "Immigration officers and the Governor-in-council…were wide-awake" after the *Panama Maru* victory "and did not intend to have in B.C. or Canada swamped by Orientals, even if they were British Subjects, and of Aryan stock."[206] As such, "both the [Immigration] Department and the Dominion governments were fully prepared to withstand any challenges that might arise."[207] On December 9, 1913, they passed P.C. 2642 which restricted the entry of "artisans, or labourers, skilled or unskilled" at "any port of entry in British Columbia" until March 31, 1914 because of an overcrowded labour market.[208] The following

---

[201] "Thirty-Five Hindus Released By Court," *Victoria Daily Times.*; Lal, "East Indians," 149-150.
[202] "Thirty-Five Hindus Released By Court," *Victoria Daily Times.*
[203] "Thirty-Five Hindus Released By Court," *Victoria Daily Times.*
[204] Almy, "More Hateful," 310.
[205] "Thirty-Five Hindus Released By Court," *Victoria Daily Times.*
[206] Bird, "Khalsa Diwan Society," 90.
[207] Lal, "East Indians," 150.
[208] Canada, Minister of the Interior. *Prohibition Immigration of Artisans and Labourers Into British Columbia at Certain Specified Ports*, RG2, Privy Council Office, Series A-1-a, For Order in Council see volume 1077, Access Code 90, P.C. 2642, Government of Canada, 1913. https://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.redirect?app=ordincou&id=309254&lang=eng&ecopy=e010913378-v8; Lal, "East Indians," 150.

month, the government replaced P.C. 920 and P.C. 926 with P.C. 23 and P.C. 24 to eliminate inconsistent terminology.[209]

Despite the intent to exclude and discourage South Asian immigration to the Dominion, South Asians successfully contested exclusionary immigrations laws. Yet their success was short-lived. After hearing about the *Panama Maru,* South Asians in East Asia believed they could challenge immigration restrictions once again.[210] Gurdit Singh, a Sikh Punjabi businessman in Hong Kong, chartered his own ship five months after the *Panama Maru* victory: the *Komagata Maru.*[211]

---

[209] Canada, Minister of the Interior, *Prohibition Immigrants Other Than By Continuous Journey From Native Country. RG2, Privy Council Office,* Series A-1-a. For Order in Council see volume 1079, Access Code 90, P.C. 23, Government of Canada, 1914. https://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.redirect?app=ordincou&id=310023&lang=eng&ecopy=e010869832-v8; Canada, Minister of the Interior, *Immigrants of Asiatic Races Must Have at Least $200 Upon Landing in Canada,* RG2, Privy Council Office, Series A-1-a, For Order in Council see volume 1079, Access Code 90, P.C. 24, Government of Canada, 1914, https://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.redirect?app=ordincou&id=310024&lang=eng&ecopy=e010869833-v8

[210] Almy, "More Hateful," 310.; Renisa Mawani, "Specters of Indigeneity in British-Indian Migration, 1914." *Law & Society Review* 46, no. 2, 2012, 370.

[211] Almy, "More Hateful," 310; Mawani, "Specters of Indigeneity," 370.

Chapter Four: The *Komagata Maru* and Racial Discrimination

The *Komagata Maru*, a Japanese steamship with 376 passengers, arrived in Vancouver on May 23, 1914.[212] Due to the "series of newly passed orders-in-council," the ship was refused entry.[213] Hugh Johnston explains that immigration officials' "deep mistrust began with their assumption that the passengers had no regard for Canadian law and would do whatever they could to get into the country, legally or illegally."[214] *Komagata Maru* passengers claimed that they were imperial citizens and "they drew comparisons between them and white Britons" to demand "the same rights of mobility and residence across the empire."[215] Husain Rahim, a South Asian activist in Vancouver, recruited Bird once again, along with K.C. Cassidy, to legally represent the South Asian community and their claim was "heard by a board of inquiry on June 25, 1914."[216] They identified one ship passenger, Munshi Singh, a Punjabi farmer, "as the most suitable litigant."[217] Yet the court ruled against him and ordered him to be deported. They decided that Singh was not a Canadian citizen, rather he belonged to a prohibited class according to section 3 of the *Immigration Act*."[218] Further, he failed to meet the $200 requirement as he had only $20 in his possession and was labelled as "an unskilled labourer" along with "many of his Indian counterparts."[219] Singh also failed to comply with the continuous journey provision as he stopped at multiple ports before arriving in the Dominion.[220]

---

[212] Pamela Hickman, *The Komagata Maru and Canada's Anti-Indian Immigration Policies in the Twentieth Century,* James Lorimer & Company Ltd, 2015.; Mawani, "Specters of Indigeneity," 370.
[213] Mawani, "Specters of Indigeneity," 370.
[214] Hugh J. M. Johnston, "The Komagata Maru And The Ghadr Party: Past and Present Aspects of a Historic Challenge to Canada's Exclusion of Immigrants from India," *BC Studies* no. 178 (2013): 7.
[215] Mawani, "Specters of Indigeneity," 380.
[216] Mawani, "Specters of Indigeneity," 383.
[217] Mawani, "Specters of Indigeneity," 383.
[218] Mawani, "Specters of Indigeneity," 383.
[219] Mawani, "Specters of Indigeneity," 383.
[220] Mawani, "Specters of Indigeneity," 383.

After this decision, "Bird and Cassidy immediately filed a writ of habeas corpus…but the writ was denied.[221] Next, they "appealed to the British Columbia Court of Appeal...to question the Dominion's sovereignty by placing the Immigration Act within a wider Imperial context" as they believed the Canadian parliament could "exclude aliens but could not" order their deportation.[222] After two days, "the five appellate court judges reached a unanimous decision" and "rejected Munshi Singh's appeal on the grounds that the Immigration Act was neither unconstitutional nor discriminatory; the three orders-in-council were well within the Dominion's jurisdiction, and Canada could rightfully exclude Asiatics."[223] In response, Bird and Cassidy argued that "South Asians were of the Aryan race," not Asiatic.[224] Once again, "the court rejected this claim."[225]

Justice Martin argued that Asiatic was "a 'common sense' term comparable to European and Latin-American," and that it was "used in everyday conversations with shared consensus."[226] As such, he believed there was no need to define the term further and it was obvious that South Asians did not fit into the category. While Justice McPhillips agreed with this, he drew upon examples "from British European sources" to explain "that belonging to the 'Asiatic' race was 'in no way crucial' to the case at hand, as the Dominion had 'the right to deport under the provisions of the Immigration Act and the orders in council irrespective of race,' and 'irrespective of nationality.'"[227] Further, Justice McPhillips grounded the term in its historical context and asserted that the "'Hindu race, as well as the Asiatic race,'" was vastly different from "Anglo-Saxon and Celtic races, and European races in general."[228] Justice McPhillips concluded

[221] Mawani, "Specters of Indigeneity," 384.
[222] Mawani, "Specters of Indigeneity," 384.
[223] Mawani, "Specters of Indigeneity," 384.
[224] Mawani, "Specters of Indigeneity," 384.
[225] Mawani, "Specters of Indigeneity," 386.
[226] Mawani, "Specters of Indigeneity," 386.
[227] Mawani, "Specters of Indigeneity," 386.
[228] Mawani, "Specters of Indigeneity," 387.

that South Asians "'who become immigrants are…undesirable in Canada, where a very different civilization exists'" and "'their ways and ideas may well be a menace to the well-being of the Canadian people.'"[229]

The argument that South Asians were "Aryans, a subset of Caucasians," and thus shared heritage with white settlers was not uncommon. In 1923, Bhagat Singh Thind, an Indian Sikh and World War I veteran, argued for his right to obtain citizenship in the United States and claimed that as an "Aryan," he was "Caucasian, and therefore White" in the Supreme Court.[230] Justice George Sutherland claimed that despite being part of the Aryan "race," "Hindus…unlike the many peoples of Europe, would never assimilate in America but would instead 'retain indefinitely the clear evidence of their ancestry."[231] Ultimately, the court rejected Thind's argument and deemed that he was ineligible for naturalized citizenship.

Renisa Mawani argues that "racial differentiations between white Britons and 'colored' British subjects were not solely aimed at marking out and excluding bodies and populations but were embedded in and productive of shifting regimes of inclusion and exclusion of superiority and inferiority that assigned rights and privileges accordingly."[232] Further, "Indians were perceived as threats to white labor and thus to white futures" in settler colonies.[233] As such, the Dominion of Canada "subsumed and incorporated indigeneity to assert its own sovereignty"[234] While initial objections to South Asian migration focused "on the unsuitability of climate," white settlers emphasized the distinctiveness of South Asian culture and customs by 1914 to argue

---

[229] Mawani, "Specters of Indigeneity," 387- 388.
[230] Johanna Ogden, "The Telling Case of Doctor Bhagat Singh Thind: Indian Nationalist, Citizen, and Spiritual Teacher," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 124, no. 1, 2023, 16.
[231] Ogden, "Case of Doctor Bhagat Singh Thind," 18.
[232] Mawani, "Specters of Indigeneity," 392.
[233] Renisa Mawani, "Law As Temporality: Colonial Politics and Indian Settlers," *UC Irvine Law Review* 4, no. 1, 2014, 66.
[234] Mawani, "Specters of Indigeneity," 399-400.

against further immigration.[235] Mawani explains that "it was their historical, cultural, and religious beliefs and practices that rendered British Indians racially undesirable, unsuitable, and incompatible to Canadian ways."[236]

In response to the arrival of the *Komagata Maru,* Sir Richard McBride, Premier of British Columbia at the time, "repeated the widely held belief that the 'Oriental civilizations are so different that there never could be an amalgamation of the two, nor could the Asiatics conform to our ways and ideals.'"[237] Further, McBride expressed his desire "'to conserve the province of B.C. for the white man and the Dominion of Canada for our own [white] race.'"[238] Patricia Roy explains "that the Asian question evolved from being primarily an economic one with racial overtones to one that was mainly racial with economic underpinnings."[239] Additionally, Ruth Almy highlights that "barring the *Komagata Maru* migrants involved an interpretation of Canadian immigration law that carefully excluded some 'British subjects' and not others…to prevent an influx of a population that was seen as racially undesirable for a white colony."[240] Mawani adds that "race" "cannot be conceptualized solely as difference through naturally occurring traits, existing histories, linguistic differentiations, and/or disparate geographies."[241] Instead "race" must be understood "as a modern strategy of power that produced, instituted, and gave meaning to somatic, psychic, historical, and cultural differentiations, often through coercion and violent effect."[242] Essentially, the *Komagata Maru* incident illustrated how racial discrimination was embedded in the Dominion's immigration system.

---

[235] Mawani, "Specters of Indigeneity," 388.
[236] Mawani, "Specters of Indigeneity," 388.
[237] Patricia Roy, *The Oriental Question: Consolidating a White Man's Province, 1914-41,* 1st ed., (UBC Press, 2003), 14.
[238] Roy, *The Oriental Question, 14.*
[239] Roy, *The Oriental Question, 7.*
[240] Almy, "More Hateful," 306.
[241] Mawani, "Specters of Indigeneity," 392.
[242] Mawani, "Specters of Indigeneity," 392.

Conclusion

Records on labour and migration history illuminate the experiences of individuals from marginalized communities in British Columbia. The stories of South Asians in Greater Victoria in relation to labour and migration is reflected in the experiences of Sikhs at Tod Inlet and the *Panama Maru* case. Despite experiencing discrimination, South Asians actively contested and navigated exclusionary policies of the early twentieth century. By presenting white settlers' perceptions, exclusionary policies, the labourer community at Tod Inlet, the *Panama Maru* case, and the *Komagata Maru* incident, I have connected the experiences of South Asians in Greater Victoria to the broader picture of South Asian economic migration in the Dominion of Canada in the early twentieth century. The focus on the pre-1914 presence of South Asians in the province gives insight to South Asian migration history beyond the *Komagata Maru* event.

While examining how the immigration policy of the early twentieth century reflected Canada's intent to become a "white man's country, I sought to humanize the experiences of South Asian men. This project traced immigration restrictions imposed by the Dominion of Canada and captured how South Asian migrants adapted to and challenged those constraints. By focusing on a pre-*Komagata Maru* context, I demonstrated that the laws that restricted the entry of the ship were not sudden, rather they emerged in response to fears about the increasing South Asian population in the region. Additionally, I illustrated the complex and multifaceted experience of South Asians as economic migrants. Nevertheless, a fulsome history of South Asians in Greater Victoria is yet to be written.

Bibliography

Almy, Ruth L. "'More Hateful Because of Its Hypocrisy': Indians, Britain and Canadian Law in the Komagata Maru Incident of 1914." *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 46, no. 2 (2018): 304–22. doi:10.1080/03086534.2018.1438964.

Bains, Satwinder Kaur. "Century of Indian Migration to Canada." In *India Migration Report 2024,* edited by S. Irudaya Rajan, 1-8. *Taylor & Francis Group,* 2024. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003499787-1.

Bains, Satwinder Kaur. "Punjabi Economic Migration to Canada: A Success Story." In *The Palgrave Handbook of Indian Migrants to South East Asia*, edited by S. Irudaya Rajan, 531-545. Singapore: *Springer Nature Singapore,* 2025.

Bains, Satwinder Kaur. "Transnational Punjabis and the Idea of Home(s)." *Canadian Jewish Studies* 36 (January 2024): 246–54. https://doi.org/10.25071/1916-0925.40353.

Banerjee, Rupa. "Growing Together: The Evolution of Indian Immigrants in Canada." In *India Migration Report 2024*, edited by S. Irudaya Rajan, 9-25. Routledge India, 2025.

Bird, Edward Joseph. "Khalsa Diwan Society." In *Memoir of Joseph Edward Bird, 1902- 1939.* 88-95. https://search.archives.uvic.ca/joseph-edward-bird-fonds

Bose, Neilesh. *South Asian Migrations in Global History: Labor, Law, and Wayward Lives.* Bloomsbury Academic, 2020. http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781350163256?locatt=label:secondary_bloomsburyCollections.

Canada. "An Act to Amend the 'Provincial Elections Act.' 1903-04, c.17." April 25, 1907. https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/hstats/hstats/79142909

Canada. Department of Immigration. "Minutes of a Board of Inquiry held this 22nd day of October, 1913, at the Dominion Immigration Hall, Victoria, B.C. In the matter of the Immigration Act & Gurdit Singh, son of Pertab Singh, alleged returning Hindu." Library and Archives Canada. RG76, Vol. 385, File 536999, pt. 7. October 22, 1913. In *Hugh Johnston South Asian Research Collection.* https://sacda.ca/index.php/Detail/objects/9189

Canada. Minister of the Interior. *Asiatic Immigrants Must Be In Possession of $200.* RG2, Privy Council Office, Series A-1-a. For Order in Council see volume 993, Access Code 90. P.C. 926. Government of Canada, 1910. https://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.redirect?app=ordincou&id=146073&lang=eng&ecopy=e010720496-v8

Canada. Minister of the Interior. *Immigrants Who Come to Canada Otherwise Than By*

Continuous Journey Upon Through Tickets Prohibited. RG2, Privy Council Office, Series A-1-a. For Order in Council see volume 993, Access Code 90. P.C. 920. Government of Canada, 1910. https://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.redirect?app=ordincou&id=146067&lang=eng&ecopy=e010720477-v8

Canada. Minister of the Interior. Prohibition Immigration of Artisans and Labourers Into British Columbia at Certain Specified Ports. RG2, Privy Council Office, Series A-1-a. For Order in Council see volume 1077, Access Code 90. P.C. 2642. Government of Canada, 1913. https://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.redirect?app=ordincou&id=309254&lang=eng&ecopy=e010913378-v8

Canada. Minister of the Interior. *Prohibition Immigrants Other Than By Continuous Journey From Native Country.* RG2, Privy Council Office, Series A-1-a. For Order in Council see volume 1079, Access Code 90. P.C. 23. Government of Canada, 1914. https://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.redirect?app=ordincou&id=310023&lang=eng&ecopy=e010869832-v8

Canada. Minister of the Interior. *Immigrants of Asiatic Races Must Have at Least $200 Upon Landing in Canada.* RG2, Privy Council Office, Series A-1-a. For Order in Council see volume 1079, Access Code 90. P.C. 24. Government of Canada, 1914. https://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.redirect?app=ordincou&id=310024&lang=eng&ecopy=e010869833-v8

Canada. *PANAMA MARU - Voyage From 1913-09 to 1913-10-17.* Genealogy / Immigrants & Citizenship / Passenger lists of voyages. 23246. Government of Canada, 1913. https://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.redirect?app=voypaslis&id=23246&lang=eng&ecopy=CANIMM1913PLIST_0000408368-00201

Claxton, Nicholas XEMTOLTW, Denise Fong, Fran Morrison, et al. *Challenging Racist "British Columbia": 150 Years and Counting*. University of Victoria, 2022. https://dspace.library.uvic.ca/handle/1828/12776.

Currey, Gwen. *Tod Inlet: A Healing Place.* Rocky Mountain Books, 2016.

"Early Migration History." *Canadian Sikh Heritage,* 2018. https://canadiansikhheritage.ca/passage-to-canada/

Fong, Denise, John Endo Greenaway, Fran Morrison, John Price, Carmen Rodriguez de France, Sharanjit Kaur Sandhra, and Timothy J. Stanley. "Challenging Racism." In *1923 Challenging Racisms Past and Present.* Canada-China Focus, 2023. https://challengingracism.ca/print-versions/1923-Challenging-Racism_LR-Singles.pdf

Government of Canada. "Census of Canada, 1911." *Library and Archives Canada.* https://www.canada.ca/en/library-archives/collection/research-help/genealogy-family-history/censuses/dominion-canada/1911.html

Gray, David Robert. *Deep and Sheltered Waters: The History of Tod Inlet.* Royal British Columbia Museum, 2020.

Gray, Geo. F., A. Johnson, and J. D. McNiven. "A Protest Against the Immigration of Hindus." *Victoria Daily Times.* October 19, 1906. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Times Colonist.

"Habeas Corpus For Hindus Asked For." *Victoria Daily Times.* November 1, 1913. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Times Colonist.

Hickman, Pamela. *The Komagata Maru and Canada's Anti-Indian Immigration Policies in the Twentieth Century*. James Lorimer & Company Ltd, 2015.

"Hindu Question in Parliament." *Victoria Daily Times.* December 5, 1906. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Times Colonist.

"[South Asian Canadians] Are Excluded By Unanimous Decision." March 27, 1907. In *(DIS)Enfranchisement - 1907-1947: The Forty Year Struggle for The Vote Exhibit Collection.* https://sacda.ca/index.php/Detail/objects/603

"Hindus Are In Great Distress." *Victoria Daily Times.* August 13, 1906. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Times Colonist.

"Hindus Leave City." *Victoria Daily Times.* November 17, 1906. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Times Colonist.

"Hindus Unite in Protest Meeting." *Victoria Daily Times.* October 27, 1913. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Times Colonist.

"History of South Asians in Canada: Timeline." *South Asian Canadian Heritage.* https://www.southasiancanadianheritage.ca/history-of-south-asians-in-canada/

Hundal, Sukhwant and Sadhu Binning. "How Indians Lost and Finally Won Back the Right to Vote in Canada." In *Social History of South Asians in British Columbia*. South Asian Studies Institute. 2022. https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/read/66648630/a-social-history-of-south-asians-in-british-columbia/259.

"Hundreds of Hindus Arrived This Morning." *Victoria Daily Times.* November 14, 1906. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Times Colonist.

"Immigration Act, 1910." *Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21.* https://pier21.ca/research/immigration-history/immigration-act-1910.

"Importation of Hindus Condemned." *Victoria Daily Times.* August 15, 1906. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Times Colonist.

Johnston, Hugh J. M. "The Komagata Maru And The Ghadr Party: Past and Present Aspects of a Historic Challenge to Canada's Exclusion of Immigrants from India." *BC Studies* no. 178 (2013): 9-31.

"J. S. Dennis." *Victoria Daily Times.* November 16, 1906. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Times Colonist.

Lal, Brij V. "East Indians in British Columbia 1904-1914: An Historical Study in Growth and Integration." MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1976.

"Many Hindus Coming In On Panama Maru." *Victoria Daily Times.* October 16, 1913. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Times Colonist.

Mawani, Renisa. "Law As Temporality: Colonial Politics and Indian Settlers." *UC Irvine Law Review* 4, no. 1 (2014): 65-96.

Mawani, Renisa. "Specters of Indigeneity in British-Indian Migration, 1914." *Law & Society Review* 46, no. 2 (2012): 369-403.

Mussett, Ben. "The 'Continuous Journey' Law." *K: British Columbia An Untold History.* https://bcanuntoldhistory.knowledge.ca/1900/the-continuous-journey-law

Nayar, Kamala Elizabeth. "The Making of Sikh Space: The Role of the Gurdwara." In *Asian Religions in British Columbia.* ed., Overmyer, Daniel L, Don Baker, and Larry DeVries. UBC Press, 2010. https://doi.org/10.59962/9780774816649.

Ogden, Johanna. "The Telling Case of Doctor Bhagat Singh Thind: Indian Nationalist, Citizen, ' and Spiritual Teacher." *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 124, no. 1 (2023): 6–41. https://doi.org/10.1353/ohq.2023.0016.

"Ordered Deported." *Victoria Daily Times.* October 25, 1913. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Times Colonist.

"Panama Maru Will Dock on Friday, One Day Late; Little Cargo." *Victoria Daily Times.* October 13, 1913. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Times Colonist.

Parsell, Mary. "Life in Tod Inlet 1900-1923." *Friends of Tod Creek Watershed.* https://www.todcreekwatershed.ca/heritage/heritage-documents

Price, John and Sonia Manak. "Panama Maru Incident Shook Ottawa and BC." *Times Colonist.* October 17, 1913. https://www.timescolonist.com/opinion/comment-panama-maru-incident-shook-ottawa-and-bc-4600747

Provincial Publishing Company. "Tod Inlet." *Directory of Vancouver Island and Adjacent*

Islands For 1909. In British Columbia City Directories 1860- 1955. https://bccd.vpl.ca/title/1909/Directory_of_Vancouver_Island.html

Reilly, Kenneth. "'A Hard Strain on Imperialism': South Asian Resistance to the British Honduras Scheme." *Canadian Journal of History* 56, no. 2 (2021): 92–109. doi:10.3138/cjh-2020-0037

Reilly, Kenny. "'The Deportation of the Hindus from British Columbia Will Be a Blessing to All Concerned': Intersections of Class and Race in the British Honduras Scheme." *Mount Royal Undergraduate Humanities Review* 5 (2018). doi:10.29173/mruhr460.

Roy, Patricia. *The Oriental Question: Consolidating a White Man's Province,* 1914-41. 1st ed. UBC Press, 2003.

Schwinghamer, Steve. "'The Immigration Act a Weapon': Panama Maru and the Exclusion of Immigrants, 1913." *Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21.* https://pier21.ca/blog/immigration-act-a-weapon-panama-maru-and-exclusion-immigrants-1913

"Sea Knocks Captain Over During Typhoon." *Victoria Daily Times.* October 17, 1913. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Times Colonist.

Singh, Bhupinder and Bawa Singh. "Punjab Under the British Rule: Historicising the Local Transformations." *Indian Historical Review* 46, no. 2 (2019): 207–26. https://doi.org/10.1177/0376983619889520.

Stevens, Henry Herbert. "Newsclippings - Victoria Daily Colonist: Against admission of Hindu Women; Hindu Question is Considered; Unfavorable to Hindu Women." February, 1912. In *Henry Herbert Stevens Fonds. https://sacda.ca/index.php/Detail/objects/9452*

Swayne, Eric J. E. "Information as to Hindu Agitators in Vancouver [Confidential Memorandum on Matters Affecting the East Indian Community in Vancouver by Colonel Eric J. E. Swayne, Governor of British Honduras. Original." Library and Archives Canada. RG7-G-21, Vol. 200, File 332, vol. 3 (b). In *Hugh Johnston South Asian Research Collection.* https://sacda.ca/index.php/Detail/objects/9098

"The Hindus." *Victoria Daily Times.* November 5, 1906. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Times Colonist.

"The Hindus." *Victoria Daily Times.* December 29, 1906. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Times Colonist.

"The Hindus Worry Civic Authorities." *Victoria Daily Times.* August 14, 1906. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Times Colonist.

"The Labour Problem." *Victoria Daily Times.* October 25, 1906. ProQuest Historical

Newspapers: Times Colonist.

"The Labour Problem." *Victoria Daily Times*. October 31, 1906. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Times Colonist.

"Thirty-Five Hindus Released By Court." *Victoria Daily Times.* November 25, 1913. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Times Colonist.

Wallace, Isabel. "Komagata Maru Revisited: 'Hindus,' Hookworm, and the Guise of Public Health Protection." *BC Studies* (Vancouver), no. 178 (June 2013): 33- 50.

"Want Them Kept Out." *Victoria Daily Times.* February 1, 1912. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Times Colonist.

"Weird Ceremony At Tod Inlet." *Victoria Daily Times*. April 12, 1907. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Times Colonist.