

The History Across the Regions Project

South Asian Studies Institute, UFV

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Supported by funds from the B.C.-Canada 150 grant, the History across the Regions Project (HARP) has created an extensive record of oral testimony from Punjabi communities across the province in an effort to address the historical erasure of South Asian experiences from the historical record. As Canada marked the sesquicentennial of Canadian confederation, HARP embarked upon an unprecedented journey across seven regions of the province to hear and record the personal histories of Punjabi communities and their members. This is a critical step forward for justice making in both provincial history and the provincial museum industry, as these communities had not been previously accessed in a purposeful manner by mainstream archival organizations. The project's goal was to address the history of neglect, omission, and erasure of these experiences due to the structural, historic, and systemic racial inequalities in both the museum in-

dustry and Canada at large. With the support of the grant, these personal stories were heard and preserved, building a foundation for community empowerment, connection, and advocacy. The legacy of the Punjabi community was given a platform to reach a wider audience through both a publicly accessible webpage, and an ongoing collaboration in collections management and exhibition with the Royal British Columbia Museum.

In total, the B.C./Canada 150 grant allowed HARP to interview 93 people in municipalities as diverse as Abbotsford, Golden, Kelowna, Prince George, Surrey, Vancouver, and Vancouver Island. The goal of including so many regions was to develop an inclusive opportunity for regionally diverse Punjabi communities to (re)write and (re)construct histories and collections together. This was the first time that inter-regional linkages between Punjabi communities were purposefully developed to address the erasure of South Asian heritage from the historical record. The goal was to inspire and empower community members to move forward into a continuous dialogue that will continue beyond the scope of HARP. This is particularly important as these communities have an expressed need to mature into their own voices, particularly towards their responses to personal histories, cultural artifacts, historic sites and the preservation of archival material. This project



Consultation with Punjabi community members in Vancouver
 Photo credit: The South Asian Studies Institute, University of the Fraser Valley

While the Lower Mainland may have a largely maturing understanding of heritage within the Punjabi Canadian community, in other parts of the province this is a new introduction and is still in its infancy.

Buncy and Raj Pagely of Victoria with
Ishpreet Anand and Satwinder Bains
*Photo credit: The South Asian Studies Institute,
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has provided a platform for meaning-making and identity building within these communities in our provincial context.

The work of the project has been fulfilling, creative, and deeply challenging. The collection of oral testimony is a task that needs to be urgently undertaken as community elders age. While the Lower Mainland may have a largely maturing understanding of heritage within the Punjabi Canadian community, in other parts of the province this is a new introduction and is still in its infancy. Travelling across the province to engage in face-to-face dialogue in regional and provincial

museums, archives, and libraries generated conversation and community building among the people the project touched.

HARP has also been able to reach out digitally through social media sharing, digital collections, and online learning tools, fostering connections with communities beyond the initial scope of the interviews.

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