15 Punjabi Migration to Northwestern British Columbia

Labour and the First Nations

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Introduction

Apart from its Indigenous peoples, Canada has largely been, and continues to be, built on the migration and settlement of people from diverse ethnic, cultural, religious, and national backgrounds, most of them seeking greater economic opportunity. While Canada's diversity is built on centuries of immigration, the country has not always welcomed or celebrated ethnic and cultural diversity. In fact, in the late nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, Canada was Nativist and really only permitted non-European ethnic groups into Canada to fill the country's manual labour needs. Of course, Canada's colonial ties with the British Empire played a role in the initial migration of people from India. While "East Indians" – the term used by British colonizers and later by the Canadian government – managed to enter Canada to work, they were, however, not welcomed as citizens and lived largely as a segregated labour group.[1]

The initial wave of "East Indian" immigrants was primarily young Punjabi men who mainly sought work to earn money to send back home. The predominantly Punjabi Sikh – but also Punjabi Hindu and Punjabi Muslim – immigrants initially migrated to British Columbia when the dominion needed manual labour for its growing natural resources industries. At the same time, Canada became known in India as an attractive place for economic advancement. With limited English-language and occupational skills, Punjabis found jobs in logging camps and sawmills, in railway construction, on cattle farms, and in fruit orchards, by and large, the manual labour that non-immigrants did not want to do.[2]

Punjabis typically found employment at sawmills in Greater Vancouver (such as Alberta Lumber Company on False Creek and Fraser Mills in Burquitlam) and on Vancouver Island (like Mayo Company Mill in Paldi and Hillcrest Lumber Company near Duncan). But, by the 1950s, many of these sawmills either had reached a saturation point or were in decline because of changes in British Columbia's forestry industry.[3] As a consequence, Punjabi immigrants were forced to move to more remote areas in the interior or northern regions of the province in order to find work. Even though

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migrating to the remote Skeena region in northwestern British Columbia provided Punjabis employment opportunities,[4] it also led to inevitable interactions with the First Nations, since the region's population largely consisted then, as it does now, of Indigenous peoples. Much to the Punjabis' surprise, they encountered anti-immigrant sentiment from various Indigenous people. However, this resentment seems to have been more the by-product of the First Nations' long-standing conflict with colonial settlers and the Canadian government.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine how Punjabis migrated to, and settled in, small towns of the Skeena region, such as Prince Rupert, Port Edward, and Terrace.[5] More specifically, this chapter delineates the relationship between migration patterns and employment and demonstrates how settlement in small remote towns of the Skeena resulted in complex intercultural dynamics, including various immigrant groups (like the Punjabi one) and Indigenous peoples – a topic that has by and large been overlooked by academics and policymakers.[6] In doing so, the chapter significantly underscores the socio-historical significance of the Punjabi-Indigenous dynamic, since it reveals how Canada's policies created double standards, by giving immigrants greater privilege than what the government had intended for the First Nations.

This study about the Punjabi migration experience in the Skeena region is an extension of a major study of Punjabis in British Columbia, which was carried out between 2006 and 2012.[7] The Punjabi immigrants surveyed for this chapter predominantly migrated from Punjab to northwestern British Columbia during the 1960s up to the 1990s. The research involved over one hundred semi-structured interviews conducted with Punjabi men and women and their adult children. Participants volunteered to be interviewed to discuss the social, economic, cultural, and political issues that they found pertinent to their experiences of the Skeena region. During the interview process, certain trends were observed regarding Punjabis migrating to, and integrating into, the Skeena region. Interviews were also conducted with other members of society. For instance, Indigenous people were interviewed in order to gather corroborative data, especially with regard to their perspectives on intercultural relations apropos the local fishery industries.

This chapter consists of three parts. The first examines Punjabi migration to the remote towns of northwestern British Columbia in search of manual labour in British Columbia's resource industries; the second analyses the specific intercultural dynamic between Punjabis and Indigenous peoples; and the third explores the double standards created by the Canadian government policies intended for immigrants and Indigenous peoples.

In Search of Employment and Working in the Skeena

Since the first wave of Punjabi immigrants arrived in British Columbia in the early 1900s, Punjabis have been associated with lumber labour in the

province.[8] And, like the early Punjabi settlers, the initial migration of Punjabis to Prince Rupert also primarily consisted of "single" men in search of employment so that they could support their families.[9] As aforementioned, by the 1950s, the sawmills in Greater Vancouver and Vancouver Island either had reached a saturation point or were in decline due to both technological advancement and the decrease in logging Douglas fir. Hence, many Punjabi immigrants were forced to move to more isolated areas in the central interior (like Quesnel and Williams Lake) and northern interior (such as Prince George and Mackenzie) of the province to find work. Accordingly, many Punjabis were willing to traverse through the unfamiliar terrain of interior and northern regions under challenging conditions in the hope of finding employment, especially since they had travelled much farther from their homeland in the pursuit of greater economic opportunities.[10] In this spirit, Punjabi men began to settle in the Skeena region during the 1960s, when the region was experiencing steady growth as a result of the booming forestry and fishery industries.

Forestry

Upon their arrival in British Columbia, Punjabi immigrants immediately looked for work at mills either in Greater Vancouver or on Vancouver Island, depending on the whereabouts of members of their family, clan or village. If in Vancouver during the late 1950s and early 1960s, Punjabi immigrants would typically seek employment at the Punjabi-owned and operated Yukon Lumber Co., often to no avail. Notwithstanding, Punjabis would hear by word of mouth how Sohen Singh Gill (owner of Yukon Lumber Co.) also owned Prince Rupert Sawmills Ltd, which – in contrast to the Vancouver mills – needed labourers.[11] The establishment of a Punjabi-owned sawmill in Prince Rupert (est. 1958) certainly served as the catalyst for the initial migration of Punjabis to the Skeena region.

The initial cohort of Punjabi immigrants hired at Prince Rupert Sawmills arrived in 1960 when the mill began its operations. The men lived at the bunkhouse located on the actual sawmill site. In fact, during the 1960s, the bunkhouse served as the centre of the Punjabi community, with only a handful of families living in rented basement suites in the Prince Rupert community. When the Prince Rupert sawmill ran two shifts at its peak of operations, there were about 75 men living in the bunkhouse. By the early 1970s, however, only about ten men lived in the bunkhouse, as production slowed down and most men moved to the town to establish their families. Even when the sawmill slowed down and permanently shut down in 1975, Punjabis continued to live in the Skeena region, because there were several other sawmills in Terrace with work also becoming available at the Columbia Cellulose pulp and paper mill on Watson Island (est. 1951), only 8 kilometres from Prince Rupert.[12]

Punjabi immigrants were pleased to transfer to the wood room – where logs are debarked and processed into wood chips to feed the mill – on Watson

Island because the work was less physically demanding and the wages were higher. Nevertheless, there was a wage gap between the labour in the wood room and the skilled trade work in the actual pulp and paper mill. Although the work in the former was similar to Prince Rupert Sawmill (albeit with more advanced machinery), the latter required trade certification. While most Punjabis began by working in the wood room, those with secondary education and/or technical training could progress into more skilled labour positions in the actual pulp and paper mill, because they could take advantage of the training programs offered by their employer or the local community college in Prince Rupert and Terrace.[13]

Since the earlier Punjabi migrants mainly came through the family sponsorship program and most arrived with minimal education and English skills, they were usually confined to manual or semi-skilled work in the mills because they lacked the opportunity to upgrade their skills. However, following Canada's institution of the point system (est. 1967) – when the country began to accept independent immigrants with skills and experience – Punjabi immigrants increasingly arrived with higher levels of education and English skills, which gave them better opportunities to work in the trades, acquire a profession, or even venture into business.[14] While opportunities to upgrade did exist, Punjabi men did not always have the time to take advantage of them, since the men were often under tremendous pressure to earn money in order to survive and support their families.

Whether engaged in manual, semi-skilled, or trades work, Punjabi immigrants experienced many economic and social challenges. In attempting to overcome these challenges, Punjabis relied on their cultural heritage as a source of adaptive strength. Coming from an agricultural society, many Punjabis brought with them their strong kinship networks and their value of landownership, both of which proved to be very valuable in fostering resilience in their adaptation and integration into Canadian society. First, Punjabis established a chain of kinship migration to the Skeena region through marriages or by encouraging family members in Punjab to join them. Second, they tended to save and pool resources to buy homes and survive economic hardships. Even when a house had been paid off, Punjabis often expanded their landholdings by purchasing investment properties. For instance, early Punjabi immigrants in Skeena even bought real estate in Greater Vancouver. These investment properties would later be used by their children when in pursuit of their post-secondary education. Not only did this practice help the children, but it also created a buffer during the economic downturn born of the decline in the resource industries in the early 2000s.

Canneries

As Punjabi men settled in the region throughout the 1960s and 1970s, they were gradually joined by their fiancées or wives. Upon their arrival, Punjabi women – out of economic necessity – also began to participate in the paid

workforce. In contrast to Punjabi men, however, Punjabi women mainly found work in the thriving fisheries. Following the pattern of many Indigenous and other immigrant women, Punjabi women began working in the canneries. (Indeed, Indigenous women worked throughout the history of British Columbia's salmon canning industry,[15] while immigrant women from various ethnic backgrounds later followed this work pattern. This was the case especially after the Second World War when there was a boom in both immigration and the resource industries.) Similar to the experiences of some Punjabi men, educated Punjabi women also had to settle for manual or semi-skilled labour in the canneries, since their credentials acquired in India were not transferable or recognized in Canada. Notwithstanding, once educated Punjabi women became more fluent in conversational English, some of them managed to venture into other types of employment (such as running day-cares or working as bank tellers).

Punjabi women primarily did seasonal work in the salmon canneries. More specifically, Punjabi women worked throughout the fishing season, during the spring and summer months (from May to early September), and accumulated enough hours so that they could collect employment insurance (EI) throughout the remaining months of the year. During the fishing season, Punjabi women also took advantage of any opportunities to work overtime, as it enabled them to make extra money and accumulate additional hours for EI. In spite of the economic opportunity, it was difficult for Punjabi women to leave their children with an "outsider" (i.e., a babysitter) when working outside the home. Leaving children with a "stranger" was a practice completely foreign to them.

The cannery not only provided Punjabi women the opportunity to earn money and experience economic independence; it also provided them a platform for social networking, which was especially beneficial during the 1960s and 1970s when a consolidated Punjabi community did not exist.[16] While Punjabi women acquired economic and social benefits in entering the workforce, they also had to contend with anti-immigrant sentiment while working on the canning lines.

The First Nations and Anti-Immigrant Sentiment

The local experience of Punjabi immigrants in the Skeena region has certainly been a dynamic one. Since the region's population largely consists of Indigenous peoples, interaction with them was inevitable. In contrast to Punjabi immigrants living in Greater Vancouver, Punjabis residing in the Skeena region found themselves on a regular basis interacting with Indigenous peoples, a population Punjabis knew very little about. In fact, many Punjabi immigrants merely and unassumingly thought of Indigenous peoples as tribal (*jungalee*). Ironically, it was common for Punjabis to be mistaken for Indigenous.

While British colonial settlers categorized people from India as "East Indian" in order to distinguish them from the "Native Indian," when talking

among themselves Punjabis preferred referring to Indigenous peoples as *taike*. The Punjabi word *taike* literally means "[family] from my father's eldest brother (*taia*)." Based on the Punjabi family structure, the term is an expression of respect for those who came first. Given the history of the First Nations, *taike* is an appropriate term because it is both respectful and relational. However, Punjabis, from the 1960s through to the early 1990s, used the word in a derogatory manner by attaching negative stereotypes of Indigenous peoples to the word. Since Punjabis had limited knowledge of the First Nations, they learned many of these stereotypes at the workplace.

Indeed, upon joining the Skeena region's workforce, Punjabis found that their Anglo-Canadian supervisors attributed to them the same negative stereotypes that the supervisors held about Indigenous peoples. One of those common stereotypes was that Indigenous peoples were "lazy" and "unreliable."[17] Subsequently, Punjabis found themselves having to contend with these prejudices and often felt compelled to show their supervisors that – in contrast to Indigenous workers – they were in fact "hardworking," "dependable," and willing to work overtime. In their efforts to prove that they were immigrants that company managers could count on, Punjabi immigrants inadvertently reinforced the negative stereotypes often used against Indigenous peoples.

While Punjabis recognized that they shared with Indigenous people similar physical features (like brown skin colour, and dark eyes and hair) and cultural values (such as a collective orientation and religious worldview), they did not completely know the First Nations' experience of land dispossession and cultural devastation. More specifically, they did not understand the exact nature of what had happened to Indigenous peoples, including the abuses endured in the Indian residential school system.[18] Hence, Punjabis were perplexed when they experienced anti-immigrant sentiment from Indigenous peoples, especially since Punjabis belong to a visible minority group that had experienced colonization under the British Crown. In fact, a Punjabi man remembered bringing up this matter with an Indigenous man: "I went to a beer parlour with two other Punjabis. A Native Indian man wanted to fight us. I told him, 'Why don't you fight the white people? It was the white man who took your land.' He didn't say anything. He did not know how to answer the question. He just took off."[19]

Simultaneously, Indigenous peoples felt insecure and threatened by the Punjabis they saw arriving in the Skeena region because Punjabis were seemingly taking their jobs and purchasing homes on First Nations ancestral and unceded territory. There are many Punjabi accounts of Indigenous people shouting "Hey, you . . . Hindoo, get off our land" or "Hey, you . . . Hindoo, go back to your country."[20] The term "Hindoo" – regardless of whether one is Hindu, Sikh, or Muslim – was used by Anglo-Canadians to refer to "East Indian" in a derogatory manner in British Columbia at that time, which some Indigenous people also attached to Punjabis. This anti-immigrant sentiment was often in the form of overt verbal, and sometimes physical, aggression from some of the Indigenous people at the workplace or in the town.

It is important to mention here that Punjabis were actually not the first immigrants to experience such resentment. Rather, throughout the decades, Indigenous peoples feared that various foreigners were coming to steal their jobs in the canneries and purchase property on their ancestral territory. A woman of the Ts'msyen Nation explained the long-standing threat that Indigenous people felt about foreigners:

> When there are newcomers, we [First Nations] see them as 'strangers.' We feared they were coming to take our jobs. When the Chinese came to build the railways, there was tension. When the Japanese came to fish, there was tension. When the Portuguese came to work in the canneries, we didn't like it. [First Nations] women feared the Punjabis [would take] their jobs and overtime work, especially when they saw how they brought in their relatives to work.[21]

This response to newcomers is understandable, given the long-standing conflict between the First Nations and colonial settlers over cultural devastation, unresolved land claims, and regulation over resource extraction. Indeed, colonial settlers forced Indigenous peoples to live on reserves and regulated their lives, while the settlers profited from natural resource industries and individual land ownership.[22]

Because there were few Indigenous workers in the sawmills, and pulp and paper mills, it was more common for Punjabi men to experience anti-immigrant attitudes in the towns. On the contrary, Punjabi women experienced more anti-immigrant sentiment in the canneries when they began participating in the fishery industry in the 1970s. This sentiment undoubtedly stemmed from Indigenous peoples wanting to protect their place in the industry, especially since coastal Indigenous peoples took great pride in their cultural knowledge and skills of harvesting the sea. Moreover, while Indigenous fishermen and cannery workers were familiar with foreigners arriving and working in the industry, the timing of the arrival of Punjabis coincided with unionization, which resulted in higher wages and better working conditions.[23] Indigenous peoples also felt more dispensable due to the decreasing demand for their traditional knowledge and skills as a result of cannery technological advancement.[24]

In the face of the anti-immigrant sentiment in the canneries, Punjabi immigrant workers began turning to unions for support. While union representatives mostly listened to Punjabi complaints about anti-immigrant sentiment, three concrete intercultural-labour issues emerged in the fisheries, which the United Fishermen and Allied Workers' Union (UFAWU) representatives could effectively mediate[25]: (1) Punjabi women not being promoted to better types of cannery work as per seniority; (2) the lack of Punjabi representation at the level of floor supervision; and (3) a petition against Punjabis speaking in their mother tongue on the Prince Rupert – Port Edward bus as well as in the lunchrooms.[26] Indeed, some Punjabi women took to the union their complaints

about how they were kept at the lower job of washing the fish or not promoted to floor supervisor, despite their seniority. As these issues fit within the framework of labour management relations, the union could address them by assessing the informal work-based networks that were responsible for hiring, job assignment, and promotion.[27]

Along with the fear of Punjabi immigrants advancing in various cannery positions, Indigenous peoples largely voiced dismay at Punjabis' tendency to speak among themselves in their own language, especially when in the presence of non-Punjabi workers. Punjabi immigrants speaking in their own language struck many Indigenous peoples as both disrespectful and unfair – disrespectful because it evoked in non-Punjabi workers insecure feelings of being mocked, and unfair due to First Nations' experience of cultural devastation in general and, more specifically, of Indigenous peoples being punished for speaking their traditional language in the Indian residential schools.[28]

As mentioned previously, in the late 1970s some Indigenous fishery workers circulated a petition requesting that no one on the Prince Rupert-Port Edward bus or in cannery lunchrooms should be allowed to speak "East Indian." After the union determined that the petition could pass if it presented an English-only policy, the Indigenous petitioners dropped their request, since it would have had to be applied to everyone, including themselves. In addressing these issues, the union unintentionally emerged as an "intercultural mediator" for Punjabis in the workplace.[29] That said, not all Punjabi women felt comfortable approaching the union or management with their concerns. Their reluctance can be explained by the women lacking conversational English skills, experiencing cultural barriers (e.g., asserting themselves with their supervisors), and feeling insecure as new immigrants often do in a new milieu.

When Punjabi men encountered Indigenous verbal and physical aggression, they responded by sticking up for themselves and creating cultural, religious, and social space for their community. In contrast, Punjabi women varied in their responses: from "speaking up" to "sucking it in." Significantly, some Punjabi women, who were more fluent in conversational English and therefore more easily able to overcome communication and cultural barriers, had friendly interactions with Indigenous peoples.[30] In fact, all the Punjabis interviewed were initially very reluctant to speak in retrospect of the resentment that they had experienced from Indigenous people. This hesitancy to talk about that resentment was directly related to the fact that these experiences had been something of the past, with the Punjabis having since developed a sense of camaraderie with the people in the Skeena region, as well as their now being much more cognizant of the plight of the First Nations in Canada.

From a First Nations perspective, Indigenous peoples generally felt insecure in the workplace and towns of the Skeena region, especially if they had pronounced Indigenous physical features. This feeling of insecurity was easily evoked in Indigenous peoples because they were treated – in their own words – as "third-class

citizens." Being called "dirty Indians" by Anglo-Canadians was a common occurrence. A woman from the Haida Nation explained her Indigenous perspective on the intercultural dynamic in the Skeena:

> First Nations with darker skin experienced a lot of racism. If in a store, the storeowners would watch them for stealing. In the Chinese restaurant, they would serve the Chinese people or anyone else before the First Nations. You don't notice too much when you are young; you just take what is there. The darker Indians experienced a lot of racism from the whites. . . . So many years ago, Europeans came to take their life, their kids. We were to be made "more human" and our land was taken away. The people who came used up the resources; we did not waste. First Nations were and have been wary of people coming, including the East Indians. First Nations did not know who were the East Indians and did not trust them. We interacted with each other but we did not know each other's history. There was no understanding because we did not know the histories.[31]

Indeed, the limited understanding and acknowledgement of the "Other's" story became a source of intercultural tension. Over time, Punjabis began to realize the differences in their colonial experiences, especially with regard to the cultural devastation of the First Nations communities (such as the latter's loss of language and its broken family system as a result of the Indian residential school system).

The Punjabi-Indigenous dynamic that emerged in the Skeena region is very significant as it reflects both the tension that existed between the "third-class" Indigenous peoples and the "second-class" Punjabis, and the mutual feelings of insecurity in an environment where both Indigenous peoples and Punjabis were perceived as inferior by the Anglo establishment in the Skeena region.

The Paradox of Canada's Multiculturalism Policy

The tension that emerged between "second-class" Punjabi and "third-class" Indigenous peoples in the Skeena region also significantly underscores the double standards created by Canadian government policies meant for immigrants and Indigenous peoples. The initial period of Punjabi migration to the Skeena region significantly occurred when Canada was instituting the immigration point system and Canada's practice of multiculturalism was in its early stages. In need of semi-skilled labour and professionals, Canada began to shift away from the quota system[32] and move towards the points system, which widened the doors for "East Indian" migration.[33] With the introduction of the point system (est. 1967), "East Indians," increasingly arrived equipped with some educational and language skills, which enabled them to upgrade their credentials in Canada so that they could move to a more skilled job.[34]

Besides the changes to Canadian immigration law, the country's introduction of its Multiculturalism Policy in 1971 provided better opportunities for "East Indian" immigrants to maintain their cultural and religious traditions. This multicultural orientation was in contrast to the earlier practice of assimilation, during which immigrants felt immense pressure to assimilate into Canada's dominant Anglo society.[35] While the government attempted to effect change through its Multiculturalism Policy, many visible ethnic minority groups still encountered a great deal of hostility, prejudice, and racial stereotyping. In its interest to advance social equality, Canada adopted the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (est. 1982), the *Employment Equity Act* (est. 1986), and the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* (est. 1988).

As the Canadian government was widening its doors to the immigration of non-European ethnic groups (est. 1967) and establishing the Multiculturalism Policy (est. 1971) to both accommodate immigrants and promote a more positive attitude towards ethnic and cultural diversity, these initiatives were instituted when the government was paradoxically also pushing for the assimilation of Indigenous peoples. More specifically, in 1969 the Liberal government – under the leadership of Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau and his Minister of Indian Affairs, Jean Chrétien – issued a white paper on Indian policy that proposed to abolish the *Indian Act* in order to eliminate special status for Canada's Indigenous peoples and to press forward instead a policy of cultural assimilation.[36] Did the Canadian government not foresee or envision Indigenous peoples interacting with immigrants during the era of the Multiculturalism Policy?

By granting immigrants – whether naturalized or not – greater privileges than it intended to give to Indigenous peoples, the Liberal government created double standards with its policy of multiculturalism. These double standards were a sensitive and, at times, a contentious issue. As aforementioned, the fact that immigrants were allowed to speak their own language and keep their culture struck many Indigenous peoples as both unfair and disrespectful.

Although the *Indian Act* (est. 1876) led to Indigenous peoples being viewed and rendered as separate from Canadian society, they had not existed as if in a "silo." Throughout the twentieth century, and especially after the Second World War, the separation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous spaces (including those inhabited by colonial settlers and twentieth-century immigrants) was undermined. As a result of the growth and concentration of the Skeena region's resource industries, Indigenous peoples often migrated from their ancestral villages or reserves to the region's multiethnic towns, such as Prince Rupert. While the industrialization of British Columbia provided Indigenous peoples with wage-labour in the resource industries, it was largely made possible through earlier government initiatives that devastated the First Nations' traditional way of life. For example, the federal government enforced conservation laws and regulations aimed to acquire control over land and water, imposed the policy of "civilization and assimilation" on Indigenous peoples, and criminalized the potlatch.[37]

When Punjabis began migrating in the 1960s and 1970s to the Skeena region and were in the process of establishing themselves and their community, Indigenous peoples had their own struggle; it was one embedded in a long-standing history of colonial oppression and trauma that, at that time, Canadian society remained oblivious to or even deliberately overlooked. Indeed, Indigenous peoples had their own issues, such as seeking acknowledgement and reparations for the harms caused by the government and striving for self-determination.[38] While the Punjabi-Indigenous dynamic reflects the insecurity both groups felt in the Skeena resource towns, it also significantly sheds light on the paradox of Multiculturalism Policy as the policy relates to the double standards felt by Indigenous peoples, providing them with yet another reason to mistrust government policy.[39]

Epilogue

During the mid-1990s, a steady decline in the resource industries in the Skeena region resulted in employment uncertainty and loss. The eventual bust in the lumber industry (2000–2003) and fisheries (2010–2015) forced many Punjabis to either look for other employment or leave the region and resettle in larger urban centres or other provinces. In the case of the Punjabi men who chose to remain in the Skeena, they tended to find jobs in retail, as longshoremen at the expanding Prince Rupert port, as taxi drivers, or as small business owners. Punjabi women, on the other hand, typically found jobs in retail or the hospitality industry, while others received training to work in other sectors like health or education. Ironically, the gradual decline and bust in the resource industries created comradeship and solidarity among the workers, irrespective of ethnicity, religion, or culture.

In an increasingly globalizing world since the 2000s, Canada has been adapting to global economic forces that have had an inevitable impact on immigration policy. For instance, due to the saturation of Canada's metropolises, there have been government initiatives encouraging immigrants to settle in the smaller urban centres or towns, including bringing professionals (such as educators, health care professionals, accountants, chefs) to work in the Skeena region where housing and the cost of living tend to be less than in the metropolises. More recently, there has been a rapid increase in South Asians immigrating through the international student program and foreign workers' program. In fact, more than 200 international students have arrived in Prince Rupert over the last several years (since 2020). This newer wave of South Asians is arriving at a time when the Punjabi community is well-established and Punjabis are known to be active contributors to the Skeena communities even as intercultural relations have been and continue to be, evolving with Indigenous peoples. For example, Indigenous and new immigrant youth are collaborating on creating a "multicultural" garden, with which they are learning to work and feast together on common ground.[40]

Over the past several decades, individual efforts and community-building initiatives (like the annual Sea Festival or seasonal sporting events) have certainly enhanced intercultural relations in the Skeena region.[41] In addition, better recognition of, and initiatives for, Indigenous peoples, along with acknowledgement of the trauma inflicted on the First Nations through government programs like the Indian Residential School System – especially since the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada report in 2015[42] – have also been critical contributing factors in improving intercultural relations in the Skeena region.

As for the newer immigrants, they are more effectively learning about Indigenous peoples, in comparison to what was available back in the 1960s up to the early 1990s. And, while Punjabis continue to refer to Indigenous peoples as *taike*, they are for the most part using the term as an expression of respect for those who came first. Even so, while initial steps have been taken to help Indigenous families and communities both heal and reclaim their culture and language, there is still much more collaborative and concerted effort that needs to be done.

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Notes

1 Kamala Elizabeth Nayar, "Religion, Resiliency and Citizenship: The Journey of a Vancouver Sikh Pioneer," in *Sikh Diaspora: Theory, Agency, and Experience* (Numen Book Series, vol. 144), ed. Michael Hawley (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2013), 105; Hugh Johnston, "Group Identity in an Emigrant Worker Community: The Example of Sikhs in Early Twentieth Century British Columbia," *BC Studies* 148 (Winter 2005/06): 3–23.

2 Nayar, "Religion, Resiliency and Citizenship," 105–113; Kamala Elizabeth Nayar, *Punjabis in British Columbia: Location, Labour, First Nations and Multiculturalism* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012), 26; Kamala Elizabeth Nayar, *The Sikh Diaspora in Vancouver: Three Generations amid Tradition, Modernity, and Multiculturalism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 16; James Gaylord Chadney, "The Formation of Ethnic Communities, Lessons from Vancouver Sikhs," in *Sikh History and Religion in the 20th Century*, ed. Joseph T. O'Connell, Milton Israel and Willard Oxtoby (Toronto: Centre for South Asian Studies, University of Toronto, 1988), 185–199; Peter W. Ward, *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy toward Orientals in British Columbia* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 80–81; Paramjit S. Judge, *Punjabis in Canada: A Study of Formation of an Ethnic Community* (Delhi: Chanakya Publications, 1994), 1–17.

3 Nayar, *Punjabis in British Columbia*, 26–27.

4 The Skeena region comprises the area surrounding the Skeena River, which is the second-longest river in British Columbia. The Skeena River has been a critical transportation route for the Coast Ts'msyen, who migrated to the lower region of the Skeena. Ts'msyen ("inside the Skeena River") is a broad category of people of the Pacific North Coast linked by language and culture: (1) the Coast Ts'msyen; (2) the Southern Ts'msyen, who live on the coast and islands to the south of

the Skeena River; (3) the Nisga'a, who live on the Nass River; and (4) the Gitxsan, who live on the upper Skeena beyond the canyon and Kitselas. See Marjorie M. Halpin and Margaret Seguin, "Tsimshian Peoples: Southern Tsimshian, Coast Tsimshian, Nishga, and Gitksan," in *Handbook of North American Indians*, vol. 7, ed. Wayne Suttles (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institute, 1990), 267–269, 267–285, 282.

5 While the small towns of the Skeena region are located on traditional Ts'msyen territory, there are Indigenous peoples from other surrounding nations, including the Nisga'a, Haida, Haisla, and Gitxsan. Apart from the local Indigenous peoples, many waves of ethnic migration arrived in the region during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The early migrants to the Skeena region were primarily British, arriving either directly from the United Kingdom or from eastern Canada, southern British Columbia, or the United States. The region also drew people from other parts of the world, including northern Europe (Norway), Eastern Europe (Poland, Ukraine, the old Yugoslavia), southern Europe (Italy, Portugal), and Asia (China, Japan). Nayar, *The Punjabis in British Columbia*, 179; Dr. Richard Geddes Large, *Prince Rupert: A Gateway to Alaska and the Pacific*, vol. 2 (Vancouver: Mitchell Press, 1983), 35.

6 Even the literature on decolonizing urban spaces focus on the relations between Indigenous and colonial settlers. For instance, see Sarah de Leeuw and Sarah Hunt, "Unsettling Decolonizing Geographies," *Geography Compass* 12, no. 7 (2018): e12376-n/a. That said, some work has been done on intercultural relations between urban Indigenous peoples and newcomers as they live side-by-side in the inner city, such as John Gyepi-Garbrah, Ryab Walker and Joseph Garcea, "Indigeneity, Immigrant Newcomers and Interculturalism in Winnipeg, Canada," *Urban Studies* 51, no. 9 (2014): 1795–1811; Parvin Ghorayshi, "Diversity and Interculturalism: Learning from Winnipeg's Inner City," *Canadian Journal of Urban Research* 19, no. 1 (2010): 89–104.

7 Nayar, *The Punjabis in British Columbia*.

8 Nayar, "Religion, Resiliency and Citizenship," 103–113; Johnston, "Group Identity in an Emigrant Worker Community," 3–23; Archana B. Verma, *The Making of Little Punjab in Canada* (New Delhi: Sage, 2002).

9 Some of the Punjabi male immigrants were, in fact, married but lived like non-family men. However, in contrast to the early 1900s when Punjabi men were unable to bring over their wives and children, in the 1960s Punjabis would sponsor family members once they could afford to. Nayar, "Religion, Resiliency and Citizenship," 105; Johnston, "Group Identity in an Emigrant Worker Community," 3–4.

10 For instance, Punjabi Male 1.12, interview, 18 May 2006, Prince Rupert, BC; Punjabi Male 1.27, interview, 3 August 2009, Surrey, BC. See also, Nayar, *Punjabis in British Columbia*, 36–38.

11 Sohen Singh Gill (1911–1971) was born in the Punjab and arrived in Canada in 1931 at the age of 21. He had no formal education and began working at a wood-fuel company called Dryland Fuels. After one and a half years, Sohen Gill decided to quit working for Dryland Fuels and start his own family fuel trucking business under the firm name of Sohen Brothers Co. From 1931 to 1940, the company gradually acquired more contracts and eventually increased its operation by adding a fleet of trucks to the business. The company was profitable and was regarded as the largest dry wood-fuel company in Vancouver. Later, Sohen Gill ventured into the forestry industry with the building a sawmill in 1946, under the firm name of Yukon Lumber Co. Following his success with Yukon Lumber Co., Sohen Gill decided to pursue only the sawmill business by establishing two more sawmills in British Columbia. That is, he built a second sawmill called Pine Lake Lumber (est. 1954) in Spuzzum and a third sawmill called Prince Rupert Sawmills (est. 1958) in Prince Rupert. Nayar, *Punjabis in British Columbia*, 31–32.

12 Nayar, *Punjabis of British Columbia*, 38–45.
13 Ibid., 43–45.
14 Ravi Pendakur, *Immigrants and the Labour Force: Policy, Regulation, and Impact* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), 78–82.
15 The first cannery on the Skeena River was built in 1877 and the first one on the Nass River began operations in 1881. During the 1870s, Indigenous peoples had to adjust to the colonial imposed capitalist economy, when the fish-canning industry was established in British Columbia. As a consequence, the Indigenous peoples lost control over their traditional livelihood of fishing. That is, the dominion set aside a small portion of fisheries for the First Nations while it opened up the resource to large-scale production and an increasingly complex distribution system for Anglo-Canadians. Rolf Knight, *Indians at Work: An Informal History of Native Indian Labour in British Columbia 1858–1930* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1978), 179–184, 20; Douglas C. Harris, *Landing Native Fisheries: Indian Reserves and Fishing Rights in British Columbia 1849–1925* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2008), 189; Diane Newell, *Tangled Webs of History: Indians and the Law in Canada's Pacific Coast Fisheries* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 46–65.
16 Nayar, *Punjabis of British Columbia*, 93–108.
17 For a critical analysis of the various negative stereotypes that Anglo-Canadians have held about Indigenous peoples, see John S. Lutz, *Makuk: A New History of Aboriginal-White Relations* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2008).
18 Indian residential school system (IRSS) refers to the many Christian missionary operated schools that the Canadian government administered as part of its larger aim to assimilate Indigenous peoples into Canadian society. Indigenous children were forcibly removed from families and often endured physical, mental, psychological, and sexual abuses while attending the schools. While no single date marks the institution of the system (though such schools existed prior to Confederation), Native education policy was backed by the *Indian Act* (est. 1887) and its assimilationist policies. For more information on the IRRS, see James R. Miller, *Shingwaulk's Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).
19 Punjabi Male 1.21, interview, 16 January 2009, Surrey, BC. Cited in Nayar, *Punjabis in British Columbia*, 154.
20 For example, Punjabi Male 1.12, interview, 18 May 2006, Prince Rupert, BC; Punjabi Male 1.22, interview, 9 May 2009, Surrey, BC; Punjabi Male 2.8, interview, 15 August 2009, Surrey BC; Punjabi Female 1.8, interview, 14 September 2009, Surrey, BC; Punjabi Female 1.3, interview, 6 September 2008, Langley, BC.
21 Ts'msyen 3, interview, 12 June 2009, Prince Rupert, BC. Cited in Nayar, *Punjabis in British Columbia*, 152.
22 Brenna Bhandar, *Colonial Lives of Property: Law, Land, and Racial Regimes of Ownership* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 60.
23 It was only in 1956 when Indigenous peoples as workers were extended equal treatment in the fisheries and allowed to join the labour union. Alicja Muszynski, *Cheap Wage Labour: Race and Gender in the Fisheries of British Columbia* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 202–207.
24 Nayar, *Punjabis in British Columbia*, 154.
25 The United Fishermen Allied Workers' Union (UFAWU) was established in 1945 and has been the main labour organization in the fisheries. In contrast to the early part of the twentieth century, when unions excluded visible minorities joining their ranks, UFAWU allowed women and Chinese labourers to sign up. In fact, following the Second World War, unions in general had come to realize that they needed both female and ethnic support in order to build their bargaining

power. Muszynski, *Cheap Wage Labour*, 180–182; Stuart Jamieson and Percy Gladstone, "Unionism in the Fishing Industry of British Columbia," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* 16, no. 1 (1950): 9–11.

26 Organized Labour 2, interview, 29 May 2007, Prince Rupert, BC. Nayar, *Punjabis in British Columbia*, 169.

27 Nayar, *Punjabis in British Columbia*, 168–170.

28 Kamala Elizabeth Nayar and 'Liyaa'mlaxha, "The Journey of a Ts'msyen Residential School Survivor: Resiliency and Healing in Multi-Ethnic Milieus," *BC Studies*, no. 183 (Autumn 2014): 87.

29 See Nayar, *Punjabis in British Columbia*, 171.

30 For instance, Punjabi Female 1.14, interview, 23 January 2009, Delta, BC; Punjabi Female 1.16, interview, 27 February 2009, Surrey, BC. See Nayar, *Punjabis in British Columbia*, 187–188.

31 Haida 1, interview, 30 May 2009, Prince Rupert, BC. Cited in Nayar, *Punjabis in British Columbia*, 189.

32 With the federal government's institution of the *Canadian Citizenship Act* on 1 January 1947, all legal residents became recognized as Canadian citizens (i.e., there was no legal recognition of Canadian citizens prior to the *Canadian Citizenship Act of 1947*). With the introduction of the family sponsorship system in 1951, immediate family members were also permitted to migrate to Canada. For "East Indians," there was a quota of merely 50 "East Indian" immigrants a year; in 1957 the quota was increased to three hundred, which remained in force until 1962.

33 Ravi Pendakur, *Immigrants and the Labour Force: Policy, Regulation, and Impact* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), 78–82.

34 While "East Indians" benefited from the point system, transferability of their credentials, which gave Punjabis points to migrate, emerged as a contentious; that is, an education and/or employment experience from a developing country (such as India) did not translate to Canadian employment in their chosen field. Pendakur, *Immigrants and the Labour Force*, 67, 156; Nayar, *Punjabis in British Columbia*, 97–99.

35 In the 1950s, "East Indian" immigrants still felt pressure to adopt the Western lifestyle if they wished to be accepted as members of mainstream Canadian society. Assimilation, with the resulting disconnectedness from their heritage, was a great challenge for many "East Indian" immigrants and their children. Such children of immigrants often experienced confusion and anxiety in the face of having to reject or deny their background in order to "fit in" or to be accepted, even as they encountered racial and cultural discrimination.

36 Weaver provides an excellent analysis of the development of the White Paper. Sally M. Weaver, *Making Canadian Indian Policy: The Hidden Agenda, 1968–70* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981). Currently, Indigenous peoples hold different views on whether or not to dismantle the *Indian Act*. For a critical analysis of the *Indian Act*'s impact on Indigenous peoples, see Mary-Ellen Kelm and Keith D. Smith, *Talking Back to the Indian Act: Critical Reading in Settler Colonial Histories* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018).

37 The potlatch is a gift-giving feast practice by Indigenous peoples of the Pacific Northwest. The practice gave authority to names and positions through public declaration and conferred upon the house chief the authority to govern resource use, succession, alliances, marriages, and other important matters that affected the power and prestige of the house. For an in-depth analysis of the spiritual and social significance of receiving an immortal name, see Christopher F. Roth, *Becoming Tsimshian: The Social Life of Names* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008).

38 It was only in 1951, after the federal government lifted the ban on soliciting funds for First Nations legal land claims, when Indigenous peoples could legally

mobilize and lobby to achieve self-determination through land claims and self-governance. Subsequently, since the 1960s various First Nation groups have been working towards self-determination. For instance, the Nisga'a people of the Nass Valley have mobilized for land claims and self-governance. See Terry Fenge and Jim Aldridge, *Keeping Promises: The Royal Proclamation of 1763, Aboriginal Rights and Treaties in Canada* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015); Daniel Raunet, *Without Surrender, without Consent: A History of the Nishga Land Claims* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1984).

39 Nayar and 'Liyaa'mlaxha, "The Journey of a Ts'msyen Residential School Survivor," 87.

40 Kimberley Millar, "New Immigrants and Indigenous Youth Plant Garden of Flavor and Commonality," *Prince Rupert Northern View*, Thursday, 25 August 2022, p. A5.

41 For instance, see Nayar, *Punjabis in British Columbia*.

42 See Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), *The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, 6 vols. (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015).

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