

Establishment and Evolution of Sikh Shrines in Early 20th Century Canada

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Abstract

The study analyses the formation and historical significance of Sikh shrines (Gurudwaras) in early 20th-century Canada, situated within the broader context of early Punjabi migration. It contends that Gurudwaras were not solely religious establishments but served as key socio-cultural, political, and economic centres for the entire Indian community, extending beyond just Punjabi immigrants. The study employs archival data, newspaper articles, and secondary historical texts to delineate the origins and evolution of significant Gurudwaras in Vancouver, Abbotsford, Victoria, New Westminster, and Paldi. These institutions were crucial in safeguarding Sikh religious identity while concurrently promoting communal cohesion among other Indian migrants, including Hindus and Muslims. Moreover, the document emphasises the function of entities like the Khalsa Diwan Society in establishing a Sikh presence in North America.

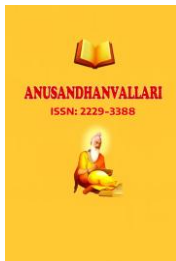
Keywords: Punjab, Migration, Canada, British Columbia, Sikhism, Gurudwaras.

Introduction

The migration of Punjabis to Canada in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries marks a significant chapter in the history of the Punjabi diaspora. The predominant group among these migrants were Sikhs, who brought with them their economic aspirations alongside their religious and cultural traditions. The Sikh community is distinguished by their steadfast dedication to their faith. It is a prevalent belief worldwide that when members of the Sikh community migrate, their foremost objective is to establish a Gurudwara in their new site. A Gurudwara is a hallowed structure that contains the esteemed scripture of the Sikh religion, referred to as the Guru Granth Sahib. Sikhs venerate the Guru Granth Sahib as a living Guru. At the time of his death, Guru Gobind Singh Ji, the final Sikh guru, directed his disciples to regard Guru Granth Sahib as their next guru. Therefore, Sikhs bestow upon the Guru Granth Sahib the designation of the living Guru. The importance of Guru Granth Sahib in Sikh life is illustrated by the British Indian army's provision of a small facsimile (2*2 inches) of the scripture during World War I to uplift the morale of Sikh soldiers.¹ In addition to this, they also permitted the construction of small Gurudwaras within the Sikh regiments.

There were many Gurudwaras in different parts of the Punjab and India which were related to the Sikh Gurus. The inaugural Gurudwara globally was established by Guru Nanak Dev Ji in 1522 in Kartarpur. The characteristics and terminology of Gurudwaras have evolved over time. Initially, these Gurudwaras were referred to as Dharamshala, but they eventually became known as Gurudwara. These Gurudwaras possess significant importance in the Sikh faith. All rites pertaining to a Sikh's life, including birth ceremonies, weddings, and funerals, were conducted in these Gurudwaras. Most Sikhs globally begin their day by visiting a Gurudwara to pay homage to the Guru Granth Sahib. The Gurudwaras function not only as places of worship in Sikhism but also as essential centres for community engagement, education, charity endeavours, and the dissemination of Sikh

¹ Gurinder Singh Mann, *The Making of Sikh Scripture*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2001, p. 125.



principles such as equality, service, and reverence for the Guru Granth Sahib. Hence, they are essential for the maintenance and adherence to the Sikh faith and heritage.

Upon their arrival in Canada, the Sikh community primarily erected Gurudwaras, which became the nucleus of their religious, social, and communal existence in this unfamiliar territory. The creation of these shrines was not solely an expression of religious devotion but a deliberate initiative to maintain identity and cohesion in an alien and frequently antagonistic setting. In the early 20th century, Sikh migrants encountered several obstacles, such as racial prejudice, stringent immigration regulations, and socio-economic difficulties. Under these conditions, Gurudwaras became essential venues for spiritual comfort alongside material and social assistance. They served as hubs for community gatherings, information distribution, and cultural value preservation. Organisations like the Khalsa Diwan Society were crucial in the establishment and administration of these shrines, as well as in advocating for the interests of the Indian population in Canada. This research aims to examine the historical evolution and multifaceted role of Sikh temples in Canada during this crucial period. The study highlights how important Gurudwaras in Vancouver, Abbotsford, Victoria, New Westminster, and Paldi contributed not only to the religious realm but also to community development, political consciousness, and opposition to discriminatory behaviours. Thus, the Gurudwara became a crucial institution that influenced the initial Sikh diaspora experience in Canada.

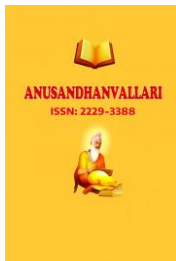
Research Methodology

This study examines the rise and evolution of Sikh shrines in early 20th-century Canada using a qualitative historical research methodology. Examining archival materials, such as contemporary newspaper articles, institutional data, and published historical documents, is the main foundation of the study. Secondary material, including academic publications, journal articles, and earlier works on Sikh migration and diaspora studies, complements these main sources. The data has been interpreted using a descriptive and analytical approach, with an emphasis on the socio-religious and political functions of Gurudwaras in the lives of early Sikh migrants. In order to provide a thorough understanding of the establishment, operation, and historical significance of important Gurudwaras, including those in Vancouver, Abbotsford, Victoria, New Westminster, and Paldi, the study also employs a case study methodology. To guarantee accuracy and dependability, efforts have been made to cross-verify data from several sources. In order to recreate historical narratives and stress the significance of Gurudwaras as organisations that supported community building, cultural preservation, and resistance against discrimination in early 20th-century Canada, the methodology places a strong emphasis on the use of archival material.

Khalsa Diwan Society and the significance of Gurudwaras in early 20th-century Canada

In the last decade of the nineteenth century, Indian immigrants began to arrive in Canada. The predominant group of Indian migrants originated from Punjab and belonged to the Sikh religion. As previously said, whenever members of the Sikh community relocate to a new place, their foremost priority is to construct a Gurudwara promptly, and the historical establishment of the first Gurudwara in Canada also exemplifies this. By 1906, when the number of Sikhs in Canada reached around 2500,² they planned to construct a Gurudwara in Vancouver. The prominent members of the Sikh community in Canada established an institution known as Khalsa Diwan Society on July 12, 1906, which was tasked with managing all affairs pertaining to Sikhs and constructing

² *The Canada Year Book 1936: The official statistical annual of the resources, history, institutions and social and economic condition of the Dominion*, 1936, Ministry of Trade and Commerce, p. 196.



Gurudwaras in Canada.³ The Khalsa Diwan Society holds the distinction of being the earliest historical South-Asian organisation in North America. The Khalsa Diwan Society took up responsibility for the construction of the new gurudwaras in Canada. The society built the first Gurudwara in Vancouver, British Columbia, on Second Avenue Road. The foundation of this Gurudwara was thoroughly discussed in the next section of this paper. The Khalsa Diwan Society's headquarters were established at this Gurudwara. To ensure the smooth operation of this institution, the society was not only in charge of building but also of everyday activities and expenses. Following the completion of the Vancouver Sikh Temple, the Khalsa Diwan Society assisted in the construction of Gurudwaras throughout British Columbia, most notably at Abbotsford, Victoria, and Westminster. The association also provided financial assistance to these newly established Gurudwaras to help them run their everyday operations. The governing committees of these Gurudwaras were directed by the Khalsa Diwan Society of Vancouver.

Although the Khalsa Diwan Society was established to construct the Gurudwara, in this initial period, it acted as a representative body not only for the Sikhs but for the whole Indian community. The Indian immigrants were victims of racial discrimination upon their arrival in Canada. Despite the fact that they had British subject status, they faced hostility ranging from the white Canadian society to the Canadian government. The Khalsa Diwan Society led the Indian community in this critical phase. The Khalsa Diwan Society has fought against discrimination and hardships faced by the Indian community in Canada since its inception. In 1908, when the Canadian government planned for all existing Indian immigrants to transfer to Honduras, the Khalsa Diwan Society rejected its proposal after investigating the deplorable climatic, working, and living conditions there.⁴ The society played a key role in fighting against immigration restrictions imposed upon Indian immigrants by the Continuous Journey Act. It also played a laudable role in 1914 during the Komagata Maru incident, where it also contributed financially to make possible the entry of the ship's passengers into Canada. The Khalsa Diwan Society initiated and relentlessly fought for the enfranchisement until 1947, when the Indian community got their fundamental right to vote.⁵

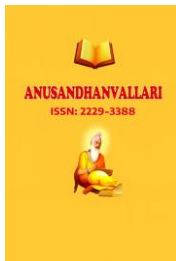
In this entire period of struggle, Gurudwaras in Canada remained a central meeting place for the entire Indian community. The Khalsa Diwan Society utilised Gurudwaras as bases to mobilise the Indian community and articulate their demands. As mentioned earlier, the majority of early Indian immigrants were Sikhs; thus, it was possible only for them at that time to construct their religious institutions. Although they were primarily established as religious institutions centred around the Guru Granth Sahib, Gurudwaras gradually evolved into multifunctional spaces serving the broader Indian population, including Hindus and Muslims. Since almost all early Indian immigrants belonged to Punjab, it was their common practice to participate in each other's festivals and to enter religious shrines.⁶ This religious harmony among Punjabis also played a significant role in the evolution of Gurudwaras in becoming the central hub in the entire Indian community's struggle against the social as well as political issues in Canada. Gurudwaras functioned as platforms for community interaction, where individuals gathered to discuss common problems and share information. It also served as the epicentre of the Ghadar Party's activities in Canada. Moreover, Gurudwaras acted as centres of social support by providing shelter, food through the institution of Langar, and assistance to newly arrived migrants. Thus, Gurudwaras were not

³ Kamala Elizabeth Nayyar, *The Making of Sikh Space: The role of the Gurudwara*, Larry DeVries, Don Baker, and Dan Overmyer (Eds.), *Asian Religions in British Columbia*, UBC Press, Vancouver, 2010, p. 46.

⁴ Rajwinder Singh Raahi, *Komagata Maru Da Asli Sach*, Unistar Books Pvt. Ltd., Mohali, 2016, pp. 156-159.

⁵ Norman Buchignani, Doreen M. Indra, and Ram Srivastava, *Continuous Journey: A Social History of South Asians in Canada*, McClelland and Stewart Ltd. and The Canadian Publishers, Toronto, 1985, p. 96.

⁶ Hugh Johnston, 'Group Identity in an Emigrant Worker Community: The Example of Sikhs in Early Twentieth Century British Columbia', *BC Studies*, no. 33, 1977, p. 14.



merely places of worship but vital institutions that fostered unity, cultural preservation, and political consciousness among the Indian diaspora in the early twentieth century. The subsequent portion of this paper thoroughly discusses the notable Gurudwaras constructed during this period.

Vancouver Sikh Temple

The history of the establishment of the Vancouver Sikh Temple was traced back to Bhai Waryam Singh, who brought the first mini scripture of Guru Granth Sahib to Canada in 1905. The Sikhs of Vancouver placed this mini scripture in a leased residence in Vancouver and built a provisional Gurudwara at that location. Bhai Arjan Singh was designated as the chief priest of this Gurudwara. Later, Bhai Arjan Singh himself transported the whole edition of the Guru Granth Sahib to Canada.⁷ Subsequently, as the Sikh population in Canada grew, the prominent members of the Sikh community decided to establish a permanent Gurudwara in Canada. As mentioned earlier, Khalsa Diwan Society was established in July 1906 and entrusted the task of establishing the first Gurudwara in Canada. Bhai Arjan Singh advocated the establishment of a permanent gurudwara at Port Moody, some 20 km away from Vancouver. However, he finally abandoned his intention to create a Gurudwara in Port Moody owing to its unfavourable location and distance from Vancouver. Thereafter, Khalsa Diwan Society acquired a plot of land in Vancouver to construct a permanent Gurudwara.

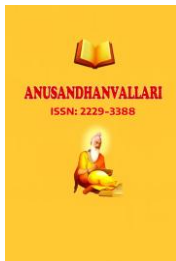
The Khalsa Diwan Society, Vancouver, laid the foundation of Gurudwara during the last week of October 1907, located at 2nd Avenue Road, Vancouver. The funding for this building project was provided by the Sikh community of Canada. William Henry Archer was the architect responsible for designing this Gurudwara. The construction of the new Gurudwara in Vancouver was completed by January 1908. The Vancouver Sikh Temple is the first-ever Gurudwara established in North America. This Gurudwara comprises two floors. A formal ceremony to mark the inauguration of this new Gurudwara took place on January 19, 1908.⁸ During the inaugural ceremony, a procession was organised to transport the Guru Granth Sahib from the provisional Gurudwara to the newly constructed Gurudwara located on 2nd Avenue, Vancouver. The parade traversed the streets and marketplaces of Vancouver. After the opening of the Gurudwara, Bhai Sewa Singh, Bhai Mohinder Singh, and Bhai Arjan Singh were chosen as the president, vice president, and treasurer, respectively. Bhai Bhag Singh and Bhai Balwant Singh were chosen as members. The next day, several newspapers published photographs and information about the parade. Balwant Singh Atwal of village Khurdpur was selected as the first priest of the Sikh temple in Vancouver.⁹ The Khalsa Diwan Society was tasked with procuring sustenance and organising the necessary logistics for the operation of the langar. A large gathering took place every Sunday at the Vancouver Sikh Temple. In addition to this, the Gurupurabs of Sikh Gurus were also commemorated with great reverence, in which Sikhs from many cities in Canada and America assembled at this Gurudwara.

During the 1st half of the 20th century, the Vancouver Gurudwara remained a central hub to all religious and political activities of the Khalsa Diwan Society. It holds immense historical significance as the first Gurudwara in North America. The temple was the nerve centre for the 40-year struggle for South Asian enfranchisement in Canada and provided the legal and financial "Shore Committee" support for the passengers of the Komagata Maru in 1914. Additionally, it acted as a revolutionary hub for the Ghadar Movement, hosting

⁷ Bhagat Singh, *Canadian Sikh through a century (1897-1997)*, Gyan Sagar Publications, Delhi, 2001, p. 331.

⁸ S. Chandrasekhar, *From India to Canada: A Brief History of Immigration; Problems of Discrimination; admission and assimilation*, A Population Review Book, California, 1986, p. 62.

⁹ Sohan Surinder Singh Sangha Schrulvi, *Canadian Sikh Da Itihaas (1880-2000)*, Khalsa Diwan Society, Vancouver, 1999, p.218.



global figures like Rabindranath Tagore¹⁰ and Jawaharlal Nehru, while providing essential services like free food and housing for labourers working in local sawmills. During the latter part of the 20th century, as the Sikh population in Canada grew, the Sikh community made the decision to build a new Gurudwara on Ross Street in Vancouver. The construction of the new Gurudwara was completed in 1970, and the previous Gurudwara was subsequently sold.

Gursikh Temple, Abbotsford

Abbotsford is located on the Trans-Canada Highway, about 75 kilometres (47 miles) east of Vancouver, right on the international border with the United States of America. This area had a substantial quantity of sawmills. Around 1905, a group of Sikhs migrated to this town in search of employment opportunities. After securing employment at the nearby sawmills, they finally relocated to Abbotsford. In 1909, the Sikh community in Abbotsford decided to establish a Gurudwara. A local Sikh, Sardar Singh, generously donated one acre of land for this purpose. The construction of the Gurudwara began in 1909, and it was ultimately finished in 1911.¹¹ The Gurudwara received free timber from a mill proprietor called O.J. Trimbvey, who generously contributed to the construction of the Gurudwara. The Gurudwara was constructed with the assistance of voluntary work from the local Sikh community. A ceremony was held on February 25, 1912, to commemorate the inauguration. The ceremony was not only attended by Sikhs but also by people from a variety of religious backgrounds. Professor Teja Singh, an esteemed Sikh scholar of the 20th century, was also present at this event. The Khalsa Diwan Society, Abbotsford, a subsidiary of the Khalsa Diwan Society, Vancouver, was made responsible for overseeing the day-to-day operations of the Gurudwara. Bhai Daya Singh, hailing from Chananwal village in Sangrur, has been appointed as the head priest of Gursikh Temple in Abbotsford.

This Gurudwara also had a profound connection with the Ghadrites. This Gurudwara is located on the border with the United States, making it a sanctuary for several Ghadrites who arrive from the United States. Notable Ghadrites such as Kartar Singh Sarabha, Bhai Mewa Singh, and Bhai Balwant Singh paid a visit to this Gurudwara.¹² This Gurudwara is now the oldest surviving Gurudwara located in Canada. It was officially recognised as a national historic monument by the Government of Canada on July 31, 2003.¹³ Additionally, it holds the distinction of being the first Sikh temple located outside of India and Pakistan to receive the classification as a national historic monument.

Gurudwara Khalsa Diwan Society, Victoria

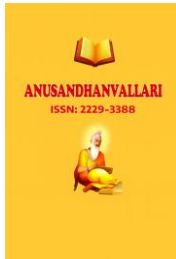
Victoria is situated on Vancouver Island, approximately 108 kilometres southwest of Vancouver. Victoria serves as the capital of the province of British Columbia. During the early stage of Indian migration to Canada, a significant number of Sikhs established their residence in this city. In 1908, Prof. Teja Singh visited this city and encouraged the Sikh community of Victoria to construct a Gurudwara in the capital of British Columbia. In addition, he founded a branch of the Khalsa Diwan Society, Vancouver, Victoria. In 1908, Kartar Singh

¹⁰ Probat Kumar Mukherji, *Life of Tagore*, Indian Book Company, New Delhi, 1975, p. 183.

¹¹ M. S. Dhillon, *A History Book of the Sikhs in Canada and California*, Shiromani Akali Dal Association of Canada, Vancouver, 1981, p.256.

¹² Dr. Harbhajan Singh Sekhon, *Canada da Sikh Bhaichara ate Komagata Maru Saka*, Foil Prints, Ludhiana, 2014, p. 109.

¹³ Canada's Historical places, *Abbotsford Sikh Temple National Historic Site of Canada*, Retrieved from <https://www.historicplaces.ca/en/rep-reg/place-lieu.aspx?id=9358&pid=0>. on 28-12-2021 at 10:56.



Dheenshaw, a pioneer Sikh in Victoria, brought the holy book of Guru Granth Sahib with him to Victoria. The prominent members of the Victoria Sikh community decided to rent a room at 623 Herald Street and made a temporary Gurudwara. Thereafter, Guru Granth Sahib was shifted to Kartar Singh Dheenshaw's house, upstairs room. The site for Gurudwara had been purchased in 1909 at 1210 Topaz Avenue. The Victoria Gurudwara was established on May 12, 1912, with the laying of its foundation stone by Prof. Teja Singh, which remains in place to this day.¹⁴ The Khalsa Diwan Society, Victoria, undertook the construction of a Gurudwara. The funding for the building of Gurudwara was borne by the financial contributions made by the Sikh community of Victoria. Along with this, an appeal was made through the *Khalsa Samachar* to collect funds from the Sikhs residing in Far-Eastern countries.¹⁵ This appeal was published on August 25, 1910, by Hira Singh. The report also stated that British Columbia Sikhs had paid \$1400 for the purchase of land. H.S. Griffith was the architect entrusted with designing the Gurudwara. Therefore, throughout the next five months, the construction of the Gurudwara was completed. Bhai Bachan Singh Dhillon, Bhai Ishar Singh, Bhai Ashhar Singh, Bhai Sardara Singh, and Bhai Arjan Singh, who are important members of the Sikh community in Victoria, made significant contributions to the construction of this Gurudwara. An inauguration ceremony took place on October 6, 1912, following the completion of the building of Gurudwara. The Sikhs residing throughout Canada were invited to this ceremony. Approximately 1200 Sikhs were present at this occasion. A procession took place around the city of Victoria on the day of the inauguration. Following the march, Professor Teja Singh presented a lecture on Sikhism. Piara Singh Langeri assumed the role of the head priest of the Gurudwara.¹⁶

This Gurudwara is the third one to be founded in Canada, following the Sikh Temple in Vancouver and the Gursikh Temple in Abbotsford. The Gurudwara was overseen by the Khalsa Diwan Society of Victoria. The Victoria Society maintained its affiliation with the Khalsa Diwan Society, Vancouver till 1963. Subsequently, the Khalsa Diwan Society in Victoria separated from the Khalsa Diwan Society in Vancouver and formed its own independent constitution.¹⁷ Over time, as the Sikh population in Victoria increased, the Khalsa Diwan Society, Victoria, made the decision to demolish the existing Gurudwara building and replace it with a larger and newer one in 1969. The Sikh community of Victoria commemorated the centennial festivities of Victoria Gurudwara in 2012.

Gursikh Temple – Sukh Sagar, New Westminster

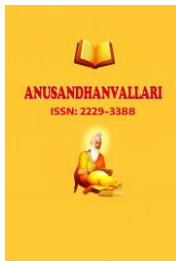
New Westminster is located about 20 miles away from Vancouver. New Westminster had many timber mills throughout the first decade of the 20th century. Many Sikh migrants arrived in this city in pursuit of work opportunities. Like other Canadian cities, the branch of the Khalsa Diwan Society, Vancouver, was founded in New Westminster in 1911. The establishment of Gursikh Temple - Sukh Sagar, New Westminster, may be traced back to Bishan Singh, a devout Sikh. He migrated to New Westminster, along with other Sikh migrants, to work in lumber mills. He was unmarried and lived in a house at 344 Boyne Street, New Westminster. He had placed the sacred scripture of Guru Granth Sahib in his residence and conducted religious gatherings on Sundays. In the beginning, Bishan Singh's residence functioned as a Gurudwara for the local Sikhs, who would frequently attend

¹⁴ Manmohan Singh Wirk, *A History of the Sikhs of Victoria B.C.*, First Choice Books, Victoria, 2005, pp. 7, 106.

¹⁵ Darshan Singh Tatla, *Sikh Diaspora Philanthropy in Punjab: Origins, Growth, and Contemporary Trends*, in *Sikh Diaspora Philanthropy in Punjab: Global Giving for Local Good*, eds., Verne A. Dusenbery and Darshan Singh Tatla, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2009, p. 40.

¹⁶ *Victoria Daily Colonist*, Dedicated Hindu Temple, October 6, 1912.

¹⁷ Sohan Surinder Singh Sangha Schrulvi, *Canadian Sikh Da Itihaas (1880-2000)*, Khalsa Diwan Society, Vancouver, 1999, p.258.



for prayer. In 1919, Bishan Singh purchased an adjacent plot of property near his residence and gifted it to the Khalsa Diwan Society in Vancouver. Subsequently, he generously contributed his residence to the Khalsa Diwan Society.¹⁸ There was a fascinating account of the establishment of a permanent Gurudwara in New Westminster. Bishan Singh became ill. Before being admitted to the hospital, he contacted his friend Sunder Singh and entrusted him with his whole life savings amounting to \$900. He asked him to hold onto his money and give it back to him if he came back in good health. Additionally, he directed him to use the money to build a Gurudwara in New Westminster if he died. Nevertheless, he made a full recovery and upon his arrival, he directed Sunder Singh to utilise his savings towards the establishment of Gurudwara. Thus, Bishan Singh made a significant and enthusiastic contribution to the construction of the Gurudwara in New Westminster. The Gurudwara was associated with the Khalsa Diwan Society until 1974. Subsequently, the Khalsa Diwan Society in New Westminster officially registered as an independent society.

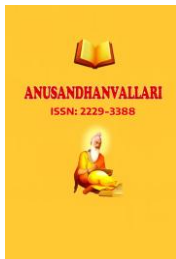
Sikh Temple, Paldi

In addition to the prominent Gurudwaras built in the towns, mostly under the patronage of the Khalsa Diwan Society, Vancouver, there were also other smaller Gurudwaras referred to as Mill Colony Gurudwaras. These Gurudwaras were founded within lumber mills by the proprietors of the mills. The main purpose of erecting these Gurudwaras is to entice Sikh labourers to these factories. During the early 1900s, several Gurudwaras were founded in the province of British Columbia, primarily in mills. The very first Sikh mill colony Gurudwara, founded in Canada, was at Fraser Mills in Burnaby. Although the Gurudwara no longer exists, its historical relics are preserved at Simon Fraser University in Burnaby.¹⁹ Although all of these mill colony Gurudwaras have disappeared, the Paldi Sikh Temple near Duncan still survives.

Paldi is a historical township located near Duncan on Vancouver Island in the province of British Columbia, Canada. The town was founded in 1917 by Mayo Singh Minhas, a native of the village of Paldi in Hoshiarpur. He was among the first settlers from Punjab to immigrate to Canada. During the early stage of Punjabi migration to Canada, the majority of migrants settled in the urban areas of Vancouver and Victoria. The majority of these migrants were engaged in the timber mills located near the aforementioned cities, while a few found work in the construction of railway lines. Through their unwavering resolve and diligent efforts, certain individuals managed to successfully establish their own mills. Mayo Singh Minhas was one among these individuals. He entered into a cooperative leasing agreement with 35 other stockholders to operate a timber mill in Rosedale, Chilliwack. After operating the mill for a brief duration, Mayo Singh and his 35 associates relocated to Duncan due to a scarcity of lumber in the Vancouver region. In the vicinity of Duncan, they found a settlement named after the leader of the gang, Mayo Singh Minhas, and proceeded to develop a timber mill there. The town was originally named Mayo when it was established, but in 1936, the municipality asked to change its name to Paldi. A significant influx of individuals from various regions of British Columbia migrated to Mayo Mill in pursuit of job opportunities. These individuals comprised not just Indian individuals but also those from Japanese and Chinese communities. These individuals began residing close to the mill. A multitude of individuals had accompanied their families. Within a brief period, it underwent a transformation into a settlement characterised by a diverse population of Indians, Japanese, and Chinese. In response to the request of the Sikh residents of Paldi,

¹⁸ CBC, New Westminster Sikh temple celebrates 100-year anniversary, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/new-westminster-sikh-temple-celebrates-100-year-anniversary-1.5041082>. Retrieved on 4-12-2021 at 11:20.

¹⁹ Kamala Elizabeth Nayar, *The Making of Sikh Space: The Role of the Gurudwara, Asian Religions in British Columbia*, Larry DeVries, Don Baker, and Dan Overmyer (eds.), UBC Press, Vancouver, 2010, pp. 45-46.



the Mayo timber company was commissioned in 1918 to build a small Sikh temple in Paldi.²⁰ The Mayo Mill Gurudwara was constructed with funds provided by the corporation, although other Gurudwaras in Canada were mostly funded via the contributions of Sikh immigrants.²¹ The inauguration of this Gurudwara took place on July 1, 1919, as an official event. Bacint Singh was appointed as the inaugural priest of the Paldi Sikh Temple. Subsequently, the Sikh residents of Paldi began commemorating *Jor Mela* every year on July 1, establishing it as a significant religious event for the early Sikh immigrants in Canada.

The initial wave of Indian migrants predominantly comprised males. Subsequent to the adoption of a resolution during the Imperial War Conference in 1918, the families of Indian migrants were granted permission to reunite with them, resulting in the movement of Indian migrant families to Canada.²² Due to the increase in population, the old Gurudwara was unable to meet its expectations. Therefore, in 1928, the structure underwent extension, and a women's cookhouse was added to the building.²³ At this point, the population of this community had reached around 1500 individuals. Nevertheless, the depletion of timber resources in this area compelled the residents to go elsewhere. In 1942, amidst the Second World War, the Japanese inhabitants of this town were compelled to relocate to internment camps. The majority of these Japanese individuals were not repatriated following the conclusion of the war. Currently, the entirety of Paldi village is deserted, with the exception of the Paldi Sikh Temple, which remains intact. In 2019, individuals from many countries convened to commemorate the centennial festivities of the Paldi Sikh Temple. During a time characterised by racial animosity and prejudice, the village of Paldi served as an exemplary model of a multicultural community, where individuals from Indian, Japanese, Chinese, European, and indigenous backgrounds coexisted harmoniously.

In addition to the other Gurudwaras built in Canada at that time, such as New Westminster, Victoria, and Abbotsford, which operated as subsidiaries of the Second Avenue Temple in Vancouver, the Paldi Sikh Temple remained an independent organisation until the beginning of the second half of the 20th Century. Sikhs typically gather at these Gurudwaras on Sundays and the anniversaries of the Gurus' births. The commitment made by the initial settlers to participate in the yearly festivities of all five temples persisted when other immigrants came. The Vancouver temple, which is the inaugural Gurudwara in Canada, was constructed in 1906 on 2nd Avenue in Vancouver. Their wonderful day was celebrated on the occasion of the Christmas holiday. Victoria's Basakhi is a spring celebration that is often observed over Canada's Easter weekend. The New Westminster celebration took place on New Year's Day, while the Abbotsford *Jor Mela* was observed on May 24.²⁴

Conclusion

The Gurudwara occupies a significant position in the life of a devout Sikh. A majority of Sikhs worldwide begin their day by visiting a neighbouring Gurudwara and offering reverence to Guru Granth Sahib, the sacred text of the Sikh faith. All significant events in a Sikh's life, ranging from birth to death, are conducted within the premises of a Gurudwara. Punjab had several Gurudwaras associated with Sikh Gurus. The Sikh community establishes Gurudwaras in every corner of the globe they move to. Consequently, upon migrating to Canada, members of the

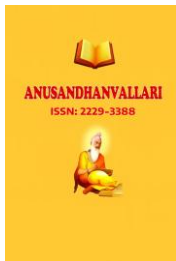
²⁰ Bhagat Singh, *Canadian Sikh through a century (1897-1997)*, Gyan Sagar Publications, Delhi, 2001, p. 243.

²¹ Archana B. Verma, *The Making of Little Punjab in Canada: Patterns of Immigration*, Sage publications, New Delhi, 2002, p. 154.

²² Bhagat Singh, *Canadian Sikh through a century (1897-1997)*, Gyan Sagar Publications, Delhi, 2001, p. 163.

²³ Sarjeet Singh Jagpal, *Becoming Canadians: Pioneer Sikhs in their own words*, Harbour Publishing, Vancouver, 1994, p. 67.

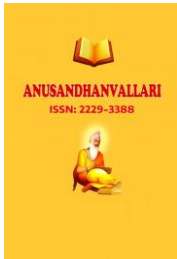
²⁴ Joan Mayo, *Paldi remembered: 50 years in the life of a Vancouver Island Logging Town*, Mail Boxes Etc., Duncan, 1997, p. 132.



Sikh community also established several Gurudwaras in the first half of the twentieth century. The prominent Gurudwaras established in this period were Vancouver's Sikh Temple, Abbotsford's Gursikh Temple, Victoria's Gurudwara Khalsa Diwan Society, New Westminster's Gursikh Temple-Sukh Sagar, and Paldi's Sikh Temple. The function of Gurudwaras in Canada was distinct from that of those in Punjab. Gurudwaras in Canada serve as more than just the site of devotion. During the initial phase of the Indian migration to Canada, immigrants frequently sought refuge in Gurudwaras. Regardless of their religious affiliation, they received assistance in the form of langar (free food), social support, and assistance in job placement. The Gurudwara has transformed into a central location for a diverse array of events, such as religious, social, and political gatherings. The Indian community, which includes Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs, convenes in Gurudwaras on Sundays to address their grievances and concerns with the entire community. Thus, Gurudwaras, which were generally associated with only the Sikh religion; however, served a secular purpose in Canada by advocating for the entire Indian community. The Vancouver Sikh Temple was instrumental in advocating for the Indian community as a whole against the Canadian government's social injustices. This included the transportation of all Indians to British Honduras in 1908 and the opposition to the contentious Continuous Journey Act of 1908. The fight for the enfranchisement of the Indian community was also taken up by the Khalsa Diwan Society, Vancouver, in which they ultimately succeeded in 1947. Therefore, the Indian community in Canada utilised the Gurudwaras as a platform to combat the injustice perpetrated by the Canadian and British governments. Hence, Gurudwaras in Canada were crucial to the welfare of the entire Indian community, not just Sikhs, during the first half of the 20th century.

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