

## **"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**

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In the fall and winter of 1908, the Canadian Government developed the British Honduras Scheme, a plan to transport all South Asian immigrants from British Columbia to British Honduras. To justify this relocation, the proponents of the plan argued that British Honduras needed cheap labour to maintain sugar plantations and railroads. The Canadian Government suggested that these immigrants could not survive in Canada because they faced unemployment, starvation, and harsh winters they were not suited for. This attempt was well received by many white Canadians of British descent. Many agreed that this transportation would benefit the South Asian community and white Canadians.

Two South Asian representatives Sham Singh, a Hindu, and Hagar Singh, a Sikh, were sent to Honduras in order to get the opinion of who the government believed represented the majority of South Asian immigrants in British Columbia: they reportedly had a high opinion of the place.<sup>1</sup> However, upon returning to Vancouver both representatives rejected the plan. In fact, they accused William Charles Hopkinson, their interpreter and immigration inspector of the Canadian Immigration Branch in Vancouver, B.C, of bribery.<sup>2</sup>

Analyzing newspaper representation of the scheme at the time demonstrates how class and race intersected in popular understandings of South Asian people in Canada. Primary sources also reveal how South Asians resisted the scheme. These sources show that despite popular views of South Asians being hapless, hopeless, and inferior "hindoos" who could not survive in the northern hemisphere, the South Asian community advocated for their own interests while resisting discrimination. These sources depict a community who at times possessed significant agency within British Columbia while challenging attempts to force them out.

Little has been written on the British Honduras Scheme. Historians Andrew Parnaby, Gregory S. Kealey, and Kirk Niergarth have written on the British Honduras Scheme through the lens of policing in Canada; their work focuses on the surveillance of "agitators" who opposed the scheme and other political movements.<sup>3</sup> Hugh Johnston, in his article on Indian nationalists, discusses the British Honduras Scheme briefly.<sup>4</sup> Although it appears in texts concerning Sikh diaspora, a more comprehensive study is merited because of the ways the scheme exemplifies broader historical patterns. Scholars such as Paula Hastings have explored the history of race in Canada within the British Empire through debates about possibly

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<sup>1</sup> Canada, Department of the Interior, "The East Indians in British Columbia: A report regarding the proposal to provide work in British Honduras for the indigent unemployed among them," 11, July 29, 1908, <http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/11114>

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Parnaby and Gregory S. Kealey with Kirk Niergarth, "'High Handed, Impolite and Empire-breaking Actions': Radicalism, Anti Imperialism, and Political Policing in Canada, 1860-1914," in *Canadian State Trials Volume Three*, ed. Barry White and Susan Binnie. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009):493.

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Parnaby and Gregory S. Kealey with Kirk Niergarth, "'High Handed, Impolite and Empire-breaking Actions': Radicalism, Anti Imperialism, and Political Policing in Canada, 1860-1914," in *Canadian State Trials Volume Three*, ed. Barry White and Susan Binnie. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009):493.

<sup>4</sup> Hugh Johnston, "The Surveillance of Indian Nationalists in North America, 1908-1918", *BC Studies*, 78, (1988):6.

annexing the West Indies, examining arguments relating to the weather of Canada in contrast to the tropicity of the West Indies.<sup>5</sup> Arguments concerning the weather appear in numerous newspapers and debates in British Columbia in 1908 when pertaining to South Asians and British Honduras.

The word 'Scheme' was used in certain newspapers to describe this attempt to relocate South Asians, often calling it the "Hindu Deportation Scheme", "The British Honduras emigration scheme", and other similar names, which is why this paper will call the attempt the British Honduras Scheme.<sup>6</sup> This effort to relocate South Asian populations was part of wider attempts to reinstate white male dominance in light of revolts in colonies across the British Empire, which questioned white male authorities.<sup>7</sup> Many newspapers in British Columbia detailed rebellions in India that threatened British control over the area. This coverage possibly influenced anxieties about the presence of South Asians in the province. At the time of the British Honduras Scheme, debates occurred throughout Canada about possibly annexing the West Indies to expand its status as a global power. The framing of the scheme and its popular reception illustrates how class and race intersected to create a perceived hierarchy that defined white British Canadians as superior to South Asians. As we shall see, South Asian populations contested this perception and did not passively accept their subordinate status.

The Honduras Scheme needs to be understood in the social context of its historical moment. This paper will begin by explaining societal conditions that gave rise to views of South Asian immigrants as a burden on the province. Press coverage of the scheme featuring the reoccurring theme of paternalism towards South Asian Immigrants will then be analyzed. Finally, the paper shifts its focus to document South Asian resistance to the scheme. At the outset, a brief note on terminology: in the press and official documents of the day, the term "Hindoo" was used to describe Sikh, Hindu, and Muslim immigrants, which is why the term "South Asian" will be used to better represent the people affected by this scheme.

Between 1904 and 1907 an estimated 5,000 South Asian men immigrated to British Columbia.<sup>8</sup> While some worked in sawmills, railway construction, or on farms, between 700 and 1,000 of these immigrants faced unemployment.<sup>9</sup> Labour was often short term, and many of these men worked odd jobs with no stable income.<sup>10</sup> Most of their employers were white men of British descent who generally did not keep South Asians as employees for an extended period of time.

As a result, many South Asian men were seen as people capable of performing only lowly work. Many white Canadians believed that these immigrants did not even deserve to earn normal wages, which would not have amounted to much for most South Asians. In addition to becoming the brunt of many Canadians' prejudices, South Asian men also faced job instability and low wages. These conditions might

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<sup>5</sup> Paula Hastings, "Rounding off the Confederation: Geopolitics, tropicity, and Canada's "destiny" in the West Indies in the early twentieth century," *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, 14, no.2, (2013).

<sup>6</sup> Unknown. 1908. "The Daily News." N. Newspapers - New Westminster Daily News. December 14. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.031677> and Unknown, 1908, "The Golden Times," Newspapers- The Golden Times., vol.3, no.35, December 16.

<sup>7</sup> Marlyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality*, (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2008), 6.

<sup>8</sup> Isabel Wallace, "Komagata Maru Revisited: 'Hindus,' Hookworm, and the Guise of Public Health Protection," *BC Studies* 178, no.1, (2013): 35.

<sup>9</sup> Canada, Department of the Interior, "The East Indians in British Columbia: A report regarding the proposal to provide work in British Honduras for the indigent unemployed among them," 6, July 29, 1908.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

have led to these immigrants being seen by many as a group of people that did not belong in Canada and could not hope to compete with white labour.

The white working class of Vancouver viewed South Asians as a weak race that would become a burden.<sup>11</sup> Most white men in British Columbia held anxieties about other Asian immigrants taking their jobs, expressing concerns that companies like the Canadian Pacific Railway had beaten "its Canadian employees into submission by the use of Japs" and that it would "have a hard time in making people believe that it cannot afford a decent wage to white employees without employing any Japanese or Hindoo."<sup>12</sup> Many major companies employed Japanese and South Asian labourers because of their willingness to work for low wages, which enabled them to generate large profits.

Anxiety about the so-called "yellow peril" was widespread. An article from *The Prospector* asked how long it would be "before western Canada will be dominated by the yellow races?"<sup>13</sup> *Boundary Creek Times* urged Martin Burrell, a farmer, to stop using "Hindoos on his property to the detriment of the white man."<sup>14</sup> Anxieties about South Asian immigrants became known as the "Hindoo Problem" to be debated by white populations. One measure taken against the South Asian population was the Continuous Journey Legislation initiated in January 1908, which prohibited entry of immigrants who were believed not to have come from their country of birth by a continuous journey.<sup>15</sup> Its aim was to prevent "this class of people from coming to Canada."<sup>16</sup> This made immigration difficult for people coming to Canada from India, and the blatant discrimination against them was made even more apparent after the refusal to allow the passengers on the Komagata Maru to enter Vancouver in 1914. When continuous journey legislation was passed, revolts occurred in several colonies around the world, with colonized populations rebelling against colonizers. This resulted in fears about white populations losing control of territories over which they believed they had control.<sup>17</sup> These fears influenced measures to control immigration, which became an important "expression of masculine sovereignty of 'self-governing communities.'"<sup>18</sup>

After restricting the number of South Asian immigrants allowed into the province, the government decided that it might deal with the ones who had already arrived by transporting them to British Honduras. There they would work in sugar plantations or build railways because they were "of a class suitable" for such work.<sup>19</sup> Anxieties about "strong opposition" in the Yale-Cariboo and Kootenay regions might have also inspired the decision to try to remove South Asians from the province.<sup>20</sup> *The Daily News* claimed that the government offered to cover the travel costs required to take the South Asians to British Honduras,

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<sup>11</sup> Peter W. Ward, *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy Toward Orientals in British Columbia*, 3rd edition, (Montreal: McGill University Press: 2002):56.

<sup>12</sup> Unknown, 1908, "Omineca Herald," *Omineca Herald*, Hazelton, B.C.: DeVoin and Coyle, September 19, doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.0082748>.

<sup>13</sup> Unknown, 1908, "The Prospector," *The Prospector*, Cranbrook, B.C., A.B. Grace, October 3, doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.0304729>.

<sup>14</sup> Unknown, 1908, "Boundary Creek Times," *The Boundary Creek Times*, Greenwood, B.C., Boundary Creek Printing and Publishing Company, October 30. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.0171197>.

<sup>15</sup> Harold A. Gould, *Sikhs, Swamis, Students, and Spies: The India Lobby in the United States 1900-1946*, (New York: Sage Publications, 2006) 101.

<sup>16</sup> Unknown, 1908, "The Golden Times," *Golden Times*, Golden, B.C.: T.H. Conner, November 11, doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.0081674>.

<sup>17</sup> Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing The Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality*. 3

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

<sup>19</sup> Unknown, 1908, "The Daily News," *Newspapers, New Westminster Daily News*, November 16, doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.0316653>.

<sup>20</sup> Unknown, 1908, "The Evening Sun," *Newspaper no.3*, Grand Forks, B.C..

and that "ninety five percent of the East Indian resident in British Columbia will accept the liberal terms..."<sup>21</sup>

In the fall and winter of 1908, newspapers depicted South Asians in a pitiful light with one article saying that "The country had been misrepresented to these poor unfortunates, and had they known the severe climate they would have to contend with, and the sufferings...owing to the severe winters...they would not have come."<sup>22</sup> Many newspapers claimed South Asians could not survive winter to justify taking them to British Honduras. *Boundary Creek Times* expressed anger at "sections of the B.C. press" for putting obstacles in the way of taking the "Hindoo coolies to a more congenial climate for them."<sup>23</sup> These articles depicted these immigrants as ignorant of their own best interest. By claiming to look after the interests of the South Asian populations, the government and its white citizens could deny potential accusations of prejudice.

These newspaper articles reveal interesting trends in early 20<sup>th</sup> century attitudes. First, the decision to transport South Asians to British Honduras was depicted as beneficial, not only for white Canadians but for "Hindoos" as well. To justify the Honduras Scheme, press coverage framed this transportation in the context of a hierarchy that depicted white British Canadians as superior to the "Hindoos". This hierarchy suggested that "Hindoos" were better suited for railway construction or sugar plantation where white landowners could look after them. There was a shift from describing South Asian immigrants as a burden to people who needed to be looked after. These papers also argued that South Asians were ill suited for the Canadian winter and could therefore adapt better to the weather in Honduras.

Nativist arguments are present in these newspapers. In 1908 people still wanted Canada to be a white man's country as evidenced by the Vancouver Riots in 1907, in which Chinese, Japanese, and other Asian immigrants experienced violence and destruction of their homes.<sup>24</sup> Arguments about the climate suggested that South Asian immigrants had no knowledge of Canadian weather conditions before arriving and thus could not hope to survive the winter. Numerous papers inspired by scientific racism said that their skin color doomed South Asians when winter came, rendering them biologically unsuitable for the country from birth. These arguments about weather also appeared in Senate debates in March 1908 when senators claimed that when they "came from a semi-tropical environment like theirs for working with a shovel in a snowstorm, they were of very little use..."<sup>25</sup>

Meanwhile, the proposed destination for Canadian South Asians was perceived to be, in terms of class and race, a more hospitable environment. The economy of British Honduras underwent drastic changes when American families arrived in the colony after the US Civil War, and introduced large scale sugar production that British Honduras relied on heavily in the early twentieth century.<sup>26</sup> Sugar imports from the West Indies to Canada increased from 11,000 tons to 185,000 tons between 1897 and 1908; debates also emerged among numerous politicians, businessmen, and other individuals about Canada

<sup>21</sup> Unknown., 1908, November 12, *The Daily News*, doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.0316595>

<sup>22</sup> Unknown, 1908, "The Golden Times," *Golden Times*, Golden, B.C., T.H. Conner, November 11, doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.0081674>.

<sup>23</sup> Unknown, 1908, "Boundary Creek Times," *The Boundary Creek Times*, Greenwood, B.C.: Boundary Creek Printing and Publishing Company, December 4, doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.0172259>.

<sup>24</sup> Peter W. Ward, *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy Toward Orientals in British Columbia*, 3rd edition, 64.

<sup>25</sup> *Senate Debates*, 10th Parliament, 4th Session, 1908, Vol. 1, 483. Those who want to explore how arguments around tropicality and hot weather were used to justify British expansion into India should read Thomas R. Metcalf's *Ideologies of the Raj*. Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1994.

<sup>26</sup> Donald C. Simmons, *Confederate Settlements in British Honduras*, (Jefferson: McFarland and Company Publishers, 2001): 44.

possibly annexing the West Indies to help establish Canada as a major global power.<sup>27</sup> Throughout these debates about annexing the West Indies, arguments emerged stating that Canada was destined to take over the West Indies due to its geographic position directly above the West Indies.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, it was believed that the cold winters of the north gave Canadian men the strength to dominate these tropical regions with potential that native populations could not exploit because the hot weather had dulled their capabilities.<sup>29</sup> Transportation of South Asians was presented as being beneficial to the economy of British Honduras. Newspapers suggested that British Honduras desperately needed the labour, saying that "plantation owners in Honduras, who have promised employment to these people if they are not sent thither, are anxious to have matters closed up..."<sup>30</sup> All of these newspapers conveyed the image that British Honduras needed the immigrants and the immigrants needed British Honduras.

Other primary sources such as an official communique concerning proposals to work in British Honduras used many similar arguments to justify relocating South Asians: "Prospect for winter for Hindus very unfavorable. Consensus opinion Hindus physically and mentally unfit to compete successfully in Canada."<sup>31</sup> Class and labour also appeared to be a concern for British officials: "though a private employer picks and chooses those he considers most likely to make good, the replies on the whole indicated that while the Hindu might in most cases earn the comparatively low wage paid him, he could not class with white labour."<sup>32</sup> Senate Debates also had concerns about "Hindoos" being unable to "work with other classes of labourers on account of the question of caste."<sup>33</sup> Whoever drafted these proposals believed these immigrants stood no chance in succeeding in British Columbia. However, the debates also highlight how religion factored into how they were viewed as being unsuitable for the country as evidenced by the comments about the caste system. The tropical weather of British Honduras was believed to be better suited for South Asians because of their dark skin, while railway construction and work in the sugar fields was considered labour that they could succeed in.

This shows the belief that white British Canadians were superior to the immigrants through their ability to earn more money than these immigrants. South Asian immigrants would find themselves working as indentured labour for up to three years in British Honduras, working nine hour days, fifty hours of work a week, and eight dollars per month with rations.<sup>34</sup> The evidence shows that South Asian people would not be able to earn much money if they were sent to British Honduras, ensuring that the economic class structure of British Colombia would remain the same.

Fears of white British males losing control over colonized spaces became apparent when rumors of a "Hindu Training School directed by Anarchists" in Fraser Mills, a municipality in British Columbia,

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<sup>27</sup> Paula Hastings, "Rounding off the Confederation: Geopolitics, tropicality and Canada's "destiny" in the West Indies in the early twentieth century," *Journal of Colonialism & Colonial History*.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*,29.

<sup>30</sup> Unknown, 1908, "Keremeos Trumpet," Newspapers, *Keremeos Chronicle*, Keremeos, B.C. : J.A. Brown, November 20.

doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.0310045>.

<sup>31</sup> Canada, Department of the Interior, "The East Indians in British Columbia: A report regarding the proposal to provide work in British Honduras for the indigent unemployed among them,"4, July 29, 1908. <http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/11133>

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>33</sup> Senate Debates, 10th Parliament, 4th Session, Vol. 1

<sup>34</sup> Canada, Department of the Interior, "The East Indians in British Columbia: A report regarding the proposal to provide work in British Honduras for the indigent unemployed among them,"12, July 29, 1908. <http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/11133>

began to spread.<sup>35</sup> According to reports, the "Hindus" had received training in bomb making and also paid visits to other Indian groups in Seattle with their main objective being to invoke the "overthrow of the yoke of the British in India."<sup>36</sup> Young "Hindus" who were talented at making bombs were reportedly sent to other places to teach other men how to overthrow the government.<sup>37</sup> The motivation for these feelings was argued to be a publication called *The Free Hindustan*, a newspaper produced in Seattle and Vancouver written by South Asians for a South Asian audience. Although reports of training centers in Fraser Mills were mere speculation, they might have encourage attempts to relocate them. An newspaper published in early December 1908 detailed an attempt to overthrow the British Empire in India and replace it with a Sikh ruler.<sup>38</sup> This plot was uncovered by Indian spies working for white officers who discovered groups along the Pacific coast of North America in Seattle, Oakland, and Vancouver who were aimed at liberating India from British rule.<sup>39</sup> These sources suggest this attempted relocation was about preserving white male sovereignty by removing certain populations.

Problems with the scheme emerged when popular perceptions were put to the test and actual South Asian immigrants needed to be convinced that deportation served their best interests. When Sham Singh and Hagar Singh came back from their reconnaissance trip, they changed their opinion of British Honduras. They accused their interpreter of trying to bribe them.<sup>40</sup> The two men had also reached out to a number of prominent individuals such as Teja Singh, who the press described as a "Hindoo Leader" who "cast suspicion on the good faith of the government commissions...it is not likely that many will take advantage of the generous offer of the Dominion Government to take them to Honduras..."<sup>41</sup> Born in west Punjab, Teja Singh developed animosity towards the British Empire.<sup>42</sup> After attending Khalsa College, he became deeply religious and immigrated to Canada where he became known as an "agitator" against the British Empire.<sup>43</sup> After hearing of this attempt to relocate South Asians to British Honduras, Teja Singh led the opposition to this effort in 1908.

A diary of the Vancouver Khalsa Diwan Society's activities contains more in-depth information on Sham Singh and Hagar Singh's opinion of the colony. This diary was written by Arjan Singh Brar, an active member of the South Asian Canadian community, and contains two volumes' worth of information concerning the activities of the South Asian community from 1906 to 1924. It also shows South Asian perspectives on the British Honduras Scheme and other events that have been overlooked in previous accounts. Arjan Singh Brar's diary also highlights how the South Asian community challenged the British Honduras Scheme.

This diary is valuable for a number of reasons. It provides a voice to the people affected by the British Honduras Scheme. Much of what Canadian historians know about minority experiences comes

<sup>35</sup> Unknown, 1908, *The Daily News*, nov 7, volume 3, number 272, New Westminster, B.C.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>38</sup> Unknown, 1908, "The Niccola Herald," Vol. 4, No. 47, Merrit B.C., December 4, 1908.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>40</sup> Arjan Brar Singh, *Khalsa Diwan Society Diary Volume 1 English Translation*, (Vancouver, B.C.): 25," <http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/15901>

<sup>41</sup> Unknown, 1908, "Boundary Creek Times," *The Boundary Creek Times*, Greenwood, B.C. : Boundary Creek Printing and Publishing Company, December 18, doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.0171257>.

<sup>42</sup> Hugh Johnston, "The Surveillance of Indian Nationalists in North America," *BC Studies*, no. 78, (1988): 9.

<sup>43</sup> Unknown, 1908, "Boundary Creek Times," *The Boundary Creek Times*, Greenwood, B.C. : Boundary Creek Printing and Publishing Company, December 18, doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.0171257>.

from what those in power, who were often white and British, wrote about the period. As a result, there is not much written on how groups such as Sikhs, Muslims, and Hindus, perceived events and acted during these periods of Canadian history. Sources such as this diary provide minorities a voice often denied by white Canadian newspapers. These sources complicate the study of South Asian experiences in early Canadian history and they stop historians from relying on one-sided accounts of these events.

Sham Singh and Hagar Singh visited the Gurdwara, a place of worship for Sikhs, and the evidence suggests that the "entire Khalsa community, Hindu, Muslim brethren" gathered adding up to between 500 and 600 people.<sup>44</sup> This implies that the community was highly aware of the proposal to transport them to British Honduras and the opinions of Sham Singh and Hagar Singh. The two men told everyone at the Gurdwara that in British Honduras "labour jobs are available on a contract basis..." with little personal freedom, and of that "fresh milk or butter is not available at all."<sup>45</sup> Wages were also very low ranging "from eight dollars to a maximum of twelve dollars, which is not enough to buy food."<sup>46</sup> There was also only salt water, not an ideal condition for Sikh men who washed their hair every day, and several diseases that mosquitos carried in the area.<sup>47</sup> The conditions of the colony did not meet the expectations of Sham and Hagar Singh, since they would have found themselves working indentured labour in harsh conditions. Another significant detail in this diary is how religion factored into opposition to this plan: lack of fresh water for Sikh men to wash their hair, and no fresh milk or butter being available were, and continue to be, important aspects for the personal lives of Sikhs, so this diary also shows how their private and religious values influenced their opposition.<sup>48</sup>

Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims, and other groups opposed this relocation. It is mentioned in the diary that the "entire congregation...expressed the opinion that we would not go to British Honduras and would organize to make arrangements for our brethren who are jobless by seeking help from brethren from Japan, Hong Kong, Shanghai, and India as many of our brethren who have jobs."<sup>49</sup> Clearly, the South Asian community opposed the scheme and was willing to engage a wide network in order to combat it, showing that they were highly organized and motivated to resist this effort.

Teja Singh believed Sham and Hagar Singh's claim of bribery. An article of the *Vancouver Daily Province* discussing the alleged bribery wrote that "three thousand dollars in greenbacks is the amount alleged to have been offered..."<sup>50</sup> Teja Singh said that "this talk of the numbers unemployed is unfounded. Most of my people are at work and doing well. They are fast adapting themselves to local conditions."<sup>51</sup> Evidence suggests the immigrants did not want to leave Canada and had put together \$7,000 to build a temple, which "ought to indicate they are here to stay."<sup>52</sup> This illustrates how immigrants

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<sup>44</sup> Arjan Brar Singh, *Khalsa Diwan Society Diary Volume 1 English Translation*, (Vancouver, B.C.): 25," <http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/15901>

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> In fact, scholars may be interested in studying how the religious beliefs and institutions of Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims, and other religious groups factored into their opposition to attempts at deportation and other forms of discrimination in the early twentieth century.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.,26.

<sup>50</sup> *Vancouver Daily Province*, "Bribes were offered to Hindus to go to Honduras," November 23, 1908. <http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/13921>

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

challenged popular perceptions of South Asians as being an unemployed and starving burden. Teja Singh's statements also refute the claims that these immigrants struggled to adapt to the climate of British Columbia. As a result, the claims that many of these newspapers made about "Hindoos" being doomed to die in Canada appear to be based less on fact and more on prejudice.

Unemployed South Asian immigrants did live in BC, but Teja Singh said that other members of the community looked after them and they were not a hindrance to British Columbia.<sup>53</sup> Newspapers such as *The District Ledger* claimed that Teja Singh had dealt the "death blow to the British Honduras Scheme" by negotiating the purchase of 250 acres of property near North Vancouver where unemployed South Asian labourers could live, so they "in one respect benefitted white labourers."<sup>54</sup> *The Golden Times* also agreed that this signaled the "death blow" to the scheme.<sup>55</sup>

Another article from *The District Ledger* provides evidence of the South Asian immigrants not being interested in moving to British Honduras.<sup>56</sup> Discussing the visit to Vancouver by the governor of the British Central American colony, the paper wrote that many immigrants reported recent improvement in the job market, suggesting that they had no interest in leaving Canada: that even the unemployed had enough to survive.<sup>57</sup> This raises questions pertaining to the general wealth of South Asian immigrants and the actual aims of this scheme. If they were a burden, then how could the South Asian community raise seven thousand dollars to build a temple in Vancouver while looking after unemployed people of their own community? Did the government believe that British Honduras benefitted South Asians, or were they afraid of the possibility of these immigrants rising in economic status in Canada?

An article in *The Free Hindusthan* suggested that the British Honduras Scheme was about keeping South Asian populations suppressed, writing that officials of the Canadian government must have been anxious about "having such a large number of retired Sikh soldiers..." inside a democratic country, "lest they might be inspired with the idea of freedom...the reason for sending the Sikhs to British Honduras is to put them under a system of contract labour that they will lose their idea of free-will and independent labour."<sup>58</sup>

Other newspapers still insisted that the British Honduras Scheme benefitted South Asians. *The Orchard City Record* wrote that these people had been "misled by agitators anxious to ferment trouble for the imperial and Canadian Governments" and they suggest that "seditious hindoo organizations in Chicago and Seattle" backed them.<sup>59</sup> The newspaper claimed that continued opposition to the scheme would lead to "many more... deported to India."<sup>60</sup> This newspaper article supports earlier claims that the South Asian community engaged a wide network in opposing the British Honduras, suggesting that knowledge of the British Honduras Scheme might have reached other parts of the British Empire.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Unknown, 1908, "The District Ledger," *The District Ledger*, Fernie, B.C. : W. S. Stanley, December 19, doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.0182737>.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Unknown, 1908, "The District Ledger," *The District Ledger*, Fernie, B.C. : W. S. Stanley, December 5, doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.0182721>.

<sup>57</sup> Unknown, 1908, "The District Ledger," *The District Ledger*, Fernie, B.C. : W. S. Stanley, December 26, doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.0182729>.

<sup>58</sup> Unknown, *The Free Hindusthan*, Vol 1, No. 8, 1908, <https://www.saada.org/item/20120827-1080>

<sup>59</sup> Unknown, 1908, "The Orchard City Record," *Kelowna Record and The Orchard City Record*, Kelowna, B.C., Chas H. Leathley, December 17. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.0184689>.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.



Fear of these immigrants as being "unpatriotic" was reflected in a newspaper written for the *B.C. Trades Unionist* where the author claimed that "Hindoos" were not only lazy workers, but they "evidenced a desire to throw the yoke off of the British Capital in India."<sup>61</sup> Another article suggested that once the "Hindoos" became "unprofitable" that there was a "sudden change of front. The 'poor' Hindoo is climatically unfit; the government must at once become paternal and 'assist' the Hindoo to Honduras- or any other place...peculiar are the workings of working class rule."<sup>62</sup> This evidence shows that people began growing more aware of the paternalism used by the government towards South Asian populations. It also appears that opinions of this attempt to transport South Asian immigrants began to be seen in a less flattering light by many British Columbians.

Once the British Honduras Scheme failed, newspapers became more critical of it: "Neither 'Sentimental rubbish' nor 'sympathetic piffle' will fittingly describe the Victoria Colonist's allusions to the endeavors of the dominion government to remove the turbaned Hindoo to Honduras."<sup>63</sup> It seems that people began realizing that this attempt at relocation would be unlikely to be put into practice. A newspaper article discussing the opposition to the scheme describes an event on December 6<sup>th</sup>, 1908, when Teja Singh refused to accept the report on the conditions of Honduras from James B. Harkin, private secretary to the Minister of the Interior, "unless he would deliver it in the inner, sacred recess of their temple..."<sup>64</sup>

The Khalsa Diwan Society diary provides more detail on Harkin's attempt to give a report on the conditions of British Honduras. The week before December 6<sup>th</sup>, James B. Harkin promised to visit the Gurdwara to ask the people their thoughts on British Honduras.<sup>65</sup> A week later, Harkin arrived at the Gurdwara, but refused to go to the prayer hall to speak to Teja Singh while he was with other people, wishing only to speak to him alone.<sup>66</sup> Harkin told a person at the entrance of the Gurdwara to explain to Teja Singh that he wanted to meet in private; this person went to Teja Singh and explained Harkin's demands, to which Teja replied, "Brother! I am sitting in the august presence of Guru Sahib...the instructions of Guru Maharaj for someone who is sitting in the congregation is also that he should not leave the congregation. So what they should do is...come up here and decide whatever they want because it was they who had written about gathering the people."<sup>67</sup> Harkin did not meet Teja Singh. This is another account that directly refutes the claims made by newspapers suggesting that Teja Singh was luring him into the temple, and demonstrates the importance of finding alternative sources from these periods to develop a more complicated understanding of this event. The author of this diary wrote that they recorded what Hagar and Sham Singh said about British Honduras and sent the information "to Punjab to Bhai Diwan Singh Jallapurkherha, district Amritsar..."<sup>68</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Unknown, 1909, "The B.C. Trades Unionist," *BC Trades Unionist* Vancouver, B.C., Vancouver Trades and Labour Council, January 1. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.0309345>.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Unknown, 1908, "Boundary Creek Times," *The Boundary Creek Times*, Greenwood, B.C., Boundary Creek Printing and Publishing Company, December 18, doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.0171257>.

<sup>64</sup> Unknown, 1908, "Keremeos Trumpet." N. Newspapers - Keremeos Chronicle. Keremeos, B.C.: J.A. Brown, December 11, doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.0310013>.

<sup>65</sup> Arjan Brar Singh, *Khalsa Diwan Society Diary Volume 1 English Translation*, 27.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 30.

Other newspapers suggest that Harkin entering the temple was a controversial move. Teja Singh urged him to enter the temple; according to *The District Ledger*, Harkin's advisors told him not to enter the temple because "such actions would lead to reports in India that Canadian officials had entered the holy precincts to force the Hindus to emigrate."<sup>69</sup> *The Mail Herald* reported that the immigrants "had a telegram sent to the Secretary of State of India and a copy to Sir Wilfrid Laurier in which they say that the Sikhs in Victoria protest against possible removal."<sup>70</sup> Contrary to claims of unemployment, Teja Singh started a business called the Guru Nanak Mining and Trust Company, while other wealthy South Asian immigrants created labour unions to keep immigrants off the streets.<sup>71</sup> Such efforts encourage a cautious reading of newspapers describing South Asian immigrants as a largely jobless drain of economic resources.

Eric John Eagles Swayne, Governor of British Honduras, visited Ontario on January 3rd in 1909 to discuss if the British Honduras Scheme was still possible. He spoke to the Canadian Club in Toronto, where prominent figures in law, politics, business, and the arts gave speeches on various subjects, to explain the "Hindu problem." He claimed that in Vancouver "work started in the mills and that nearly all were employed, while those without work were looked after by wealthy Hindus and Mohammedans who feared forcible deportation to Honduras."<sup>72</sup> Resentment against Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims, and other religious minorities began to diminish according to Swayne, who wrote that "now that the numbers coming in have decreased and labour conditions have improved, the feeling against Hindus has died down. It is however strong against the Japanese, who are considered to be the real competitors of white labour..."<sup>73</sup> Despite the attempt to relocate all South Asians not being carried away, some speculated that some unemployed "East Indians now in the Okanagan may take advantage of the British Honduras emigration scheme."<sup>74</sup>

Swayne claimed that the opposition to the British Honduras Scheme united South Asians, writing that they "have coalesced from the common need of protection against the hostility of white labour, and Punjabi Mohamedans, Sikhs, and Hindus from the Punjab, and Brahmins from the N.W. and from lower Bengal, have been brought together in a way that could not have happened in India."<sup>75</sup> This shows that the people the scheme targeted were not just Sikhs, but came from a wide variety of faiths. It also illustrates connections created in British Columbia because of the diaspora.

Swayne still desired to regulate immigration from India, stating that "the terms of close familiarity, which competition with white labour has brought about, do not make for British Prestige."<sup>76</sup> He claimed South Asians had no desire to stay in Canada and that their primary goal was to "accumulate

<sup>69</sup> Unknown, 1908, "The District Ledger," *The District Ledger*, Fernie, B.C. : W. S. Stanley, December 12, doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.0182727>.

<sup>70</sup> Unknown, 1908, "The Mail Herald," *Mail Herald*, Revelstoke, B.C. : The Interior Publishing Co, Ltd, October 21, doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.0310837>.

<sup>71</sup> 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, Page 4," *Komagata Maru Journey*, December 1, 1908, <http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/1250>

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*,3.

<sup>73</sup> 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, Page 7," *Komagata Maru Journey*, December 1, 1908, <http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/12522>

<sup>74</sup> Unknown, 1908, "The Golden Times," *Newspapers- The Golden Times.*, vol.3, no.35, December 16.

<sup>75</sup> Eric J. E. Swayne, "Information as to Hindu Agitators in Vancouver, page 7..

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*,9.

money and return to India to free their farms from mortgages, or to purchase others."<sup>77</sup> Many of these immigrants were men banned from bringing their wives or families and the government feared that they would have no incentive to stay in Canada. Officials did not want these immigrants going back to India and telling others about labour conditions in Canada, which "would be exploited."<sup>78</sup> This could suggest is that the British Honduras Scheme was a way of ensuring these people would never go back to India, since information concerning how they had been treated could have led to instability in that colony. Despite these efforts at concealment, the evidence suggests that this scheme reached people in various parts of the British Empire and that people actively opposed it.

By analyzing the British Honduras Scheme, historians can see how race and class intersected in the construction of arguments for transporting South Asian immigrants. Conditions prior to this attempt were not ideal towards South Asian immigrants, with measures such as the Continuous Journey Legislation taken to restrict immigration to Canada, as well as a desire among many white Canadians to drive those who had moved here out of the country. This paper has shown that newspapers justified relocating immigrants to British Honduras by claiming that their dark skin prevented them from surviving the winter in Canada and that they could not hope to earn as much as white, Anglo-Saxon men. Similar justifications were used in the proposals for British Honduras. Therefore, ideas surrounding class and race intersected in the claims that these immigrants were unsuitable for Canada.

However, there is another reason why this subject deserves more attention. In terms of writing Canadian history, the British Honduras Scheme forces historians to consider how archives come to function as a "terrain of colonial control history... rather than a window into it."<sup>79</sup> This paper shows how much of what historians know comes from one-sided, caricatured portrayals created by white, British Canadians. Archives and primary sources produced by non-white populations in Canada provide an often-neglected insight. The Khalsa Diwan Society diary, interviews with Teja Singh, and other sources produced by South Asians contradict popular narratives which depicted the "hindoos" as a poor, starving people doomed to die, and instead present a people who engaged a wide network across the British Empire to fight back against this attempt at removal. Their resistance foiled this scheme. These sources complicate historians' understanding of this period and they provide the victims of nativism an agency often denied in other accounts.

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>79</sup> Adele Perry, *Colonial Relations: The Douglas-Connolly Family and the Nineteenth Century Imperial World*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.), 1.

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