

Exploring a dark moment in B.C. history

Sikh Heritage museum hosts exhibit on Komagata Maru tragedy

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This year marks 100 years since one of Canada's dark moments in history — the Komagata Maru tragedy.

In honour of its centennial, Abbotsford's Sikh Heritage Museum is launching a yearlong exhibit that takes an extensive look at the infamous event.

"It's a dark moment in the history of South Asian migration to British Columbia," said Sharanjit Kaur Sandhra, co-ordinator at the University of Fraser Valley's Centre for Indo-Canadian Studies.

"So much has changed (since then) — we're successful, we're a part of so many different fields and professional institutions."

"But at the same time ... ignorance still exists and our kind of goal, always with the Sikh Heritage Museum, is to fight ignorance."

The Komagata Maru Centennial Exhibition takes an extensive look at the Japanese chartered ship led by a Sikh entrepreneur who hoped to bring 376 Punjabi immigrants to Canada in 1914, the majority of whom were denied entry by Canada's exclusion law once it reached Vancouver. The ship was docked in Vancouver's harbour for more than two months and is now known as one of the most infamous events in the early history of the city.

Only about 20 passengers were eventually able to prove residency and allowed to disembark before the ship was forced out of Vancouver



and back to India on July 23, 1914.

The exhibit highlights the stories of the boat's passengers and other South Asian immigrants to B.C. and Canada, as well as the story of Gurdit Singh, who chartered the Komagata Maru.

"It's about learning history through different methods, through different means and what better way than a museum," Sandhra said of the upcoming exhibit.

"It highlights a dark moment in Canadian history, it highlights an injustice that happened to our community."

The exhibit officially opens on Sunday from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. There will be a keynote address from Nsibe Kaur, a descendant of one of the community members who helped raise \$60,000 in 1914 to pay off the Japanese ship owners to keep the boat docked in Canada.

The Sikh Heritage Museum, located at 33094 South Fraser Way in Abbotsford directly across from the Khalsa Diwan Society, is also open seven days a week and will feature the exhibit for the remainder of the year.

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