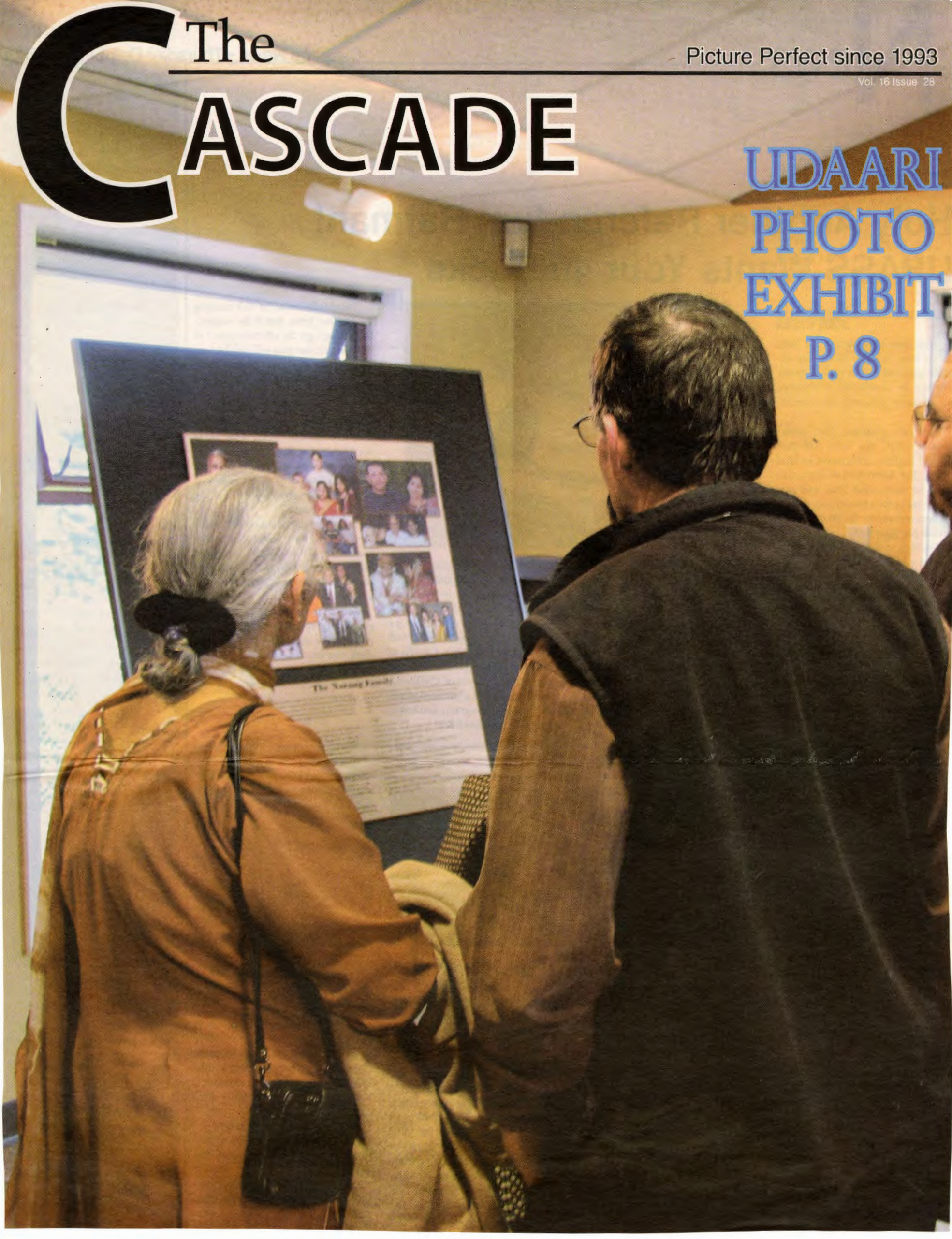


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UDAARI
PHOTO
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CENTRE FOR INDO-CANADIAN STUDIES HOSTS UDAARI PHOTO EXHIBIT

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Indo-Canadian culture in Canada has come a long way since the Komagata Maru, carrying a boatload of potential Sikh immigrants, was turned away at gunpoint when attempting to land in Vancouver. Marking one of the most memorable events in Canadian history, the Komagata Maru incident is now seen as a black mark that mars our past, and has been officially apologized for by both the Provincial and Federal governments.

Today, the Indo-Canadian population is vibrant and flourishing, particularly in the South Fraser region. At the Centre for Indo-Canadian studies the life stories and family connections of the Sikh pioneers who first settled in the Abbotsford area is being celebrated through the Udaari Photo Exhibit which captures the lives of Indo-Canadian families over three generations.

Udaari is a Hindi word that means "to soar" or "to fly," and is used metaphorically to represent the journey of Sikh pioneers as they left their home country and settled in completely foreign surroundings, knowing little if any English, and separated from their families. Udaari signifies Sikhs spreading their wings and seeking new opportunities to provide for their families.

Friday October 25th saw the unveiling of the first stage of student research into the development of the Sikh community in Abbotsford. It was marked by an energetic opening

ceremony at the Centre where members of the families featured in the exhibit personally attended the exhibit. The bustling ceremony featured traditional Indian food and was well attended by the community. Attendees included local councillors and M.P. Mike de Jong, who introduced the Komagata Maru apology motion in the Legislative Assembly in 2003 – 94 years after the event.

The exhibit features many cultural artefacts in addition to family portraits. Artefacts include traditional Indian garb, household items, and various works of craftsmanship. The photograph panels feature many prominent Indo-Canadian families, including the Uppal, Indar Gill, Narang, Gurbaksh Dhaliwal, Banga, and Thandi families. The exhibit also features information on the historic Gur Sikh temple and Sikh customs and beliefs.

"The ceremony was well attended and well supported by the community and UFV; I was especially excited to see how many young people were here, because the intent is to pass the knowledge on to future generations," says Satwinder Bains, director of the Centre for Indo-Canadian studies. "There was good sharing of stories, a sense of pride and people valuing their stories enough to share them with everybody. I was really happy with the turnout."

Though Sikhs represented only a small minority of the Indian population at the time when the most emigration took place, emigrants to Canada were almost exclusively Sikh.

According to Bains, there are several reasons for this.

Contrary to popular perception, poverty was not the driving factor that motivated Sikhs to emigrate to Canada. In fact, most Sikhs were landholders and therefore had access to the means to raise the income necessary to pay the expensive travel costs. Also, Sikhs had been well represented in the British regiments, a fact which meant that many Sikhs had experience with foreign travel. One British regiment from Hong Kong containing Sikhs travelled through Canada on behalf of Queen Victoria, and these Sikhs returned to India and told stories of a country in need of immigrants. Diminishing availability of land also played a role in prodding Sikhs to seek opportunity abroad.

All of these factors drove the Sikh emigration to Canada, where they faced and overcame tremendous adversity, and established a presence that today is both politically and culturally significant.

The exhibit will remain open for viewing until Oct. 31st at the Centre for Indo-Canadian Studies in U- House.

