

Simon Fraser University Archives and Records Management Department

Finding Aid - Indo-Canadian oral history collection (Hari Sharma collector) (F-77)

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Indo-Canadian oral history collection (Hari Sharma collector)

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Summary information

Repository:	Simon Fraser University Archives and Records Management Department
Title:	Indo-Canadian oral history collection (Hari Sharma collector)
ID:	F-77
Date:	1984 - 1987 (date of creation)
Physical description:	19 sound recordings
Dates of creation, revision and deletion:	Finding aid prepared by Frances Fournier, Enid Britt (August 1999); revised by Frances Fournier, Enid Britt (October 2003); updated by Enid Britt (June 2006); items numbers re-assigned according to new control system and finding aid updated (September 2012).
Note [generalNote]:	<p>LANGUAGE Many of the interviews are in Punjabi.</p> <p>AVAILABILITY OF OTHER FORMATS The interviews were digitized in 2007 by the SFU Library (with assistance from the BC History Digitization Program of the I.K. Barber Learning Centre, UBC) for the Multicultural Canada digitization project.</p> <p>PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION The collection consists of 19 sound recordings on 71 audio cassettes. Some of the original interviews run over multiple cassettes, and for each interview the Archives subsequently made a back-up copy (also on audio cassette). Audio cassettes were digitized to 19 .wav files.</p>

Administrative history / Biographical sketch

Note

Hari Prakash Sharma (1934-2010) was a sociologist and Marxist scholar who came from the United States, politicized by the anti-war movement and inspired by the politically charged atmosphere at Simon Fraser University in 1968. He joined the Department of Political Science, Sociology, and Anthropology in that year and taught until his retirement in 1999 when he was honoured by the university as Professor Emeritus.

He was born on November 9, 1934 (although some records indicate January 10, 1934 as his date of birth) at Dadri in Uttar Pradesh, India, the second of eight children born to Kundun Lal Sharma and Moharli Devi Sharma. His father was a railway stationmaster, and the family moved frequently.

Sharma earned his BA from Agra University in 1954. After a five-year stint as Lower Division Clerk and Typist for the Government of India in the Central Excise and Customs Department, he earned an MA in Social Work from Delhi University in 1960. He then accepted a post as Lecturer at the Delhi

School of Social Work, where he remained for three years. In 1963, Sharma moved to the US to further his education. He received an MS in Social Work from Case Western Reserve University in 1964 and a PhD in Rural Sociology from Cornell University in 1968. He taught briefly at the University of California, Los Angeles before accepting a position at SFU.

As a faculty member of SFU, Sharma became a champion of the academic rights of colleagues who faced the threat of dismissal for their support of student-led movements to democratize the university. Notably, he supported fellow colleague and friend Kathleen Gough, a British anthropologist with Marxist leanings who was suspended for her political activities. Gough and Sharma co-edited "Imperialism and Revolution in South Asia," which was published in the *Monthly Review*, an independent socialist journal, in 1974. His research areas of special interest included political economy and agrarian social structures, particularly in India; social movements, political mobilization, ethnic and cultural identities; race and class; and nation-building among the aboriginal people of British Columbia. He wrote extensively on those topics and provided guest lectures at over 50 universities and scholarly institutions in Asia, Europe, and North America.

In the spring of 1967, the Naxalbari peasant uprising inspired him to travel to India and several other Asian countries. Upon his return, he became committed to political activism from an anti-imperialist perspective. During 1971-72, Sharma was a founding member of and contributor to the Georgia Straight Collective, which produced a publication for radical and alternative views. In 1973, he went to Amnesty International in London and the Commission of Jurists in Geneva and made a written representation to the UN Human Rights Commission in an effort to publicize the condition of more than 30,000 political prisoners in Indian jails. In 1974, Sharma and his comrade Gautam Appa of the London School of Economics organized a petition of international scholars to protest the treatment of political prisoners in India, which he handed to the Indian Consulate in Vancouver, BC on August 15 of the same year.

On a return trip from India in early 1975, Hari Sharma began to travel across North American campuses giving talks and mobilizing people toward the formation of a patriotic organization of Indians living in North America. This effort contributed to the founding of the Indian People's Association in North America (IPANA) on June 25, 1975, the same day on which Indira Gandhi declared a State of Emergency in India. The opposition to what was identified as a "fascist dictatorship" became the urgent task of IPANA along with the defense of the thousands of political prisoners.

IPANA established chapters in several North American cities, with its most active chapters in Montréal, Vancouver, New York, Toronto, and Boston. It had links with patriotic organizations in San Francisco, Chicago, Winnipeg, and Edmonton. In their effort to oppose imperialism and to promote democratic rights and social justice in India, IPANA produced three publications: the quarterly *New India Bulletin*, which came out of Montréal from 1975; *India Now*, a monthly that was produced in New York from 1976; and *Wangar*, a Punjabi paper that was produced from Vancouver every two months from 1977. In addition to its publications, IPANA held numerous public meetings, demonstrations, lectures, films, and cultural programs to highlight the systemic oppression of dalits, peasants, and workers that mocked any concept of democracy and freedom put forth by the existing Government of India. One of IPANA's first public interventions in North America was to sponsor a speaking tour by Mary Tyler, a British writer who had been held in an Indian prison for several years without any formal charge for alleged revolutionary activities in Bihar.

Under Sharma's leadership, IPANA also supported the struggles of minorities and workers in BC. He was a primary force in the founding of the British Columbia Organization to Fight Racism (BCOFR). Through the 1980s, IPANA and BCOFR engaged thousands of people from several communities. Both Sharma and IPANA also helped form the Canadian Farmworkers Union in 1980.

In the 1980s, Sharma focused much of his research and writing on the condition of minorities in India, which came to a crisis with the attack on the Golden Temple and the massacre of Sikhs in Delhi in 1984

following the assassination of Indira Gandhi. He defended the human rights of Sikhs and of Muslims who became the primary targets of the Hindutva movements advocating Hindu nationalism. In 1987, Sharma organized a parallel conference on the centralization of state power and the threat to minorities in India to coincide with the Commonwealth Conference in Vancouver.

In 1989, Sharma united groups of the South Asian community to form the Komagata Maru Historical Society. The event commemorated the 75th anniversary of the Komagata Maru incident in which Indian immigrants traveling to Canada on a chartered ship were turned away from the shores of Vancouver by racist policies of the government. The society united the community, and as a result of its activities, the government installed a commemorative plaque in Vancouver in 1989. In 2004, during a screening of the film *Continuous Journey* (a documentary on the episode by the Toronto filmmaker Ali Kazimi), Mayor of Vancouver Larry Campbell sent a scroll to Sharma on behalf of the Komagata Historical Society declaring the week to be dedicated to the memory of Komagata Maru.

Following the attack on the Babri Masjid mosque in December 1992, Hari Sharma became the prime mover in the formation of a North American organization dedicated to the defence of minority rights in India, also known as Non-Resident Indians for Secularism and Democracy (NRISAD). This organization united people of Indian origin collectively through educational and cultural activities. One of its significant events in Vancouver included the celebration of the 50th anniversary of India's independence from colonial rule. The event united people across the South Asian community to focus on issues that included the urgency for peace between Pakistan and India. In September 1999, Sharma travelled to Montréal to join the founding of the International South Asia Forum (INSAF), a coalition of individuals and organizations dedicated to the promotion of peace and social justice in South Asia. He became its first President and organized the Second Conference in Vancouver in August 2001.

Over time, NRISAD recognized a need to widen the focus of the organization to include the whole of South Asia because its membership in Vancouver comprised people from the entire subcontinent of India and the diaspora in East Africa and other countries. Under Sharma's leadership, NRISAD evolved into the South Asian Network for Secularism and Democracy (SANSAD) in 2000. It pursued the same quest as its predecessors for peace and democracy based secularism, human rights, and social justice. Some activities included condemning the massacre of Muslims in Gujarat in 2002 (for which Sharma was denied a visa to visit India), championing the human rights of Kashmiris, condemning violence against journalists and academics in Bangladesh, supporting the movement for democracy and social justice in Nepal, and defending the human rights of Tamils under the attack of the Sri Lankan state.

Throughout the years, Hari Sharma developed close ties and contacts with various political groups and communities. He worked with the First Nations in the Interior of BC, and as co-chair (along with Dr. Ronald Ignace, the elected Chief of the Skeetchestn Band from 1982 to 2003 and between 2007 and 2009), he helped to promote and to defend the merit of the SFU Kamloops First Nations program (then the SCES/SFU Program). In addition to his regular workload at SFU, Sharma taught courses such as *Violence and War*, *Marxist Theory*, and *Third World issues* on different occasions in Kamloops. Although the 16-year partnership between SFU and the Secwepemc Cultural Education Society of the Shuswap Nation (SCES) was dissolved by mutual agreement in 2004, over 400 students graduated from the program.

In addition to his academic work and political activism, Hari Sharma was an accomplished literary writer and self-taught photographer. He wrote and published short stories in Hindi. Many of his works also were also translated into Bengali, Punjabi, and English. *Vapsi*, one of his stories, was made into a Doordarshan (Indian public service broadcaster) film. Sharma attributed his interest in photography to a Japanese camera that had been "gifted" to him as a bribe by an importer while pushing files as a government worker. The camera became something that Sharma frequently took with him on trips to India to capture

snippets of everyday life. Over the years, his photographs were published in academic journals and art magazines. His works were also publicly displayed in galleries in North America, Europe, and India. After more than 50 years of political activity, Hari Sharma developed contacts and friendships with many who supported revolutionary movements. He married twice. After a prolonged battle with cancer, Hari Sharma died in his Burnaby home surrounded by his closest comrades on March 16, 2010.

Scope and content

The Indo-Canadian Oral History Collection documents the histories of immigrants from the Punjab Province of India who came to Canada between 1912 and 1938. The project was initiated by Hari Sharma, Professor of Sociology at SFU, who conducted the interviews with the assistance of a graduate student. The interview subjects, primarily Sikhs, discuss such topics as why they came to Canada, the journey to Canada, adjustment to Canadian society upon arrival, employment in Canada, family life, and their ongoing links with their country of origin. Appendices include an interview guide prepared by Hari Sharma and an article about the project.

Notes

Title notes

- **Source of title proper:** Title of the collection is based on the contents.

Immediate source of acquisition

The audio interviews were donated by Hari Sharma. Material in the appendices was added by the archivist.

Arrangement

The materials were arranged by the Archivist.

Restrictions on access

There are no privacy access restrictions, however for preservation reasons access to the audio cassettes is restricted due to the fragility of the storage medium.

Finding aids

Lists of the audio recordings are available. An interview guide and an article relating to East Indian immigration are available in the hard copy version of the finding aid maintained in the Archives Reading Room.

Related material

The interviews were digitized by the SFU Library as part of the Multicultural Canada digitization project. See the Indo-Canadian Oral History Collection on the SFU Library website at: <http://digital.lib.sfu.ca/icohc-collection>.

For other material in the SFU Archives relating to the Indo-Canadian Community in B.C, see F-145, the SFU Archives Indo-Canadian Collection.

In 2011 the Archives acquired the personal papers of Hari Sharma (who organized the interviews in this collection); see fonds F-251.

Accruals

All accessions have been processed as of September 2002. No further accruals are expected.

Other notes

- **Publication status:** published
- **Level of detail:** Full
- **Status description:** Revised

Access points

- Sharma, Hari
- Sound recording (documentary form)
- Textual record (documentary form)
- Records in electronic form (digitized) (documentary form)
- Cultural groups (subject)
- Community life (subject)
- Land, settlement and immigration (subject)

Series descriptions

Series F-77-1: Audio recordings

Date: 1984 - 1987 (date of creation)

Scope and content:

Series consists of audio recordings arising from the interviews.

Physical description: 19 sound recordings

Publication status:

published				
File / item list				
Ref code	Title	Dates	Access status	Container
F-77-1-0-0-0-1	Item - Punjabi elders; Karta Singh Ghag (Surrey)	24 June 1984	Open	OBJ-3171 OBJ-3207
F-77-1-0-0-0-2	Item - Lakham Singh Sandhan	5 July 1984	Open	OBJ-3172 OBJ-3208
F-77-1-0-0-0-3	Item - Dr. D.P. Pandia	10 July 1984	Open	OBJ-3173 OBJ-3209
F-77-1-0-0-0-4	Item - Jag Singh Uppal	11 July 1984	Open	OBJ-3174 OBJ-3210
F-77-1-0-0-0-5	Item - Imanat Ali Khan	19 July 1984	Open	OBJ-3175 OBJ-3176 OBJ-3211 OBJ-3212 OBJ-3213 OBJ-3214
F-77-1-0-0-0-6	Item - Bhan Kaur Johan	20 July 1984	Open	OBJ-3177 OBJ-3215
F-77-1-0-0-0-7	Item - Ranjit Mattu	27 July 1984	Open	OBJ-3178 OBJ-3179 OBJ-3216 OBJ-3217
F-77-1-0-0-0-8	Item - Ranjit Hall (Ottawa)	13 August 1984	Open	OBJ-3180 OBJ-3181 OBJ-3218 OBJ-3219 OBJ-3220
F-77-1-0-0-0-9	Item - Pritam Kour Johal (Vancouver)	9 September 1984	Open	OBJ-3182 OBJ-3221
F-77-1-0-0-0-10	Item - Gurbachan Singh Johal (Vancouver)	12 September 1984	Open	OBJ-3183 OBJ-3222
F-77-1-0-0-0-11	Item - Hari S. Manhas (Vancouver)	20 September 1984	Open	OBJ-3184 OBJ-3185 OBJ-3223 OBJ-3224 OBJ-3225 OBJ-3226
F-77-1-0-0-0-12	Item - Dhan Kaur Johal (Vancouver)	23 September 1984	Open	OBJ-3186 OBJ-3227
F-77-1-0-0-0-13	Item - Tara Singh Kot (Vancouver)	11 October 1984	Open	OBJ-3187 OBJ-3188 OBJ-3228 OBJ-3229
F-77-1-0-0-0-14	Item - Sardara Gill (Vancouver)	15 October 1984	Open	OBJ-3189 OBJ-3190 OBJ-3230 OBJ-3231
F-77-1-0-0-0-15	Item - Kuldip S. Bains (Vancouver)	30 October 1984	Open	OBJ-3191 OBJ-3232

F-77-1-0-0-0-16	Item - Kehar Singh Kailey, V. Tusa (Vancouver)	5 December 1984	Open	OBJ-3192 OBJ-3233 OBJ-3234
F-77-1-0-0-0-17	Item - Jagar Singh Mahal (Vancouver)	7 February 1985	Open	OBJ-3193 OBJ-3235
F-77-1-0-0-0-18	Item - Darshan Singh Sangha (Vancouver)	11 March 1985 - 26 March 1985	Open	OBJ-3194 OBJ-3195 OBJ-3196 OBJ-3197 OBJ-3198 OBJ-3236 OBJ-3237 OBJ-3238 OBJ-3239 OBJ-3240
F-77-1-0-0-0-19	Item - Ratan Kaur Thauli, Gyan Singh	14 May 1987 - 10 June 1987	Open	OBJ-3199 OBJ-3200 OBJ-3201 OBJ-3202 OBJ-3203 OBJ-3204 OBJ-3205 OBJ-3206 OBJ-3241