

# **The 1907 Bellingham Riot and Anti-Asian Hostilities in the Pacific Northwest**

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## **Introduction:**

The forced mass expulsions of Punjabi immigrants by mobs in Bellingham and Everett, Washington in 1907 stand out as some of the earliest challenges that Sikhs faced in North America. Although these events have received far less attention than the more violent and more politically-charged Komagata Maru struggle and Gadar activism, the 1907 riots were significant in influencing the immigration debates and policies in Canada and the U.S., and in serving as a prelude to an extended period of struggle by Sikhs and other South Asians in North America, from farmworkers to Gadar militants. Historians have emphasized various factors and aspects of the 1907 attacks, including labor strife, racial supremacist ideology, fears due to socio-cultural differences, and reaction to nationalism and radicalism. More recently, historians have paid particular attention to the legal and political implications and results on a national level on both sides of the US.-Canadian border.<sup>1</sup> Through my study of Asian immigration in the Northwest region and Bellingham in particular, I have concluded that there was a concerted effort to harass the Punjabi Sikhs and arouse popular animosity that began a full year before the 1907 riot. Considering the focus of this conference on Gadar history, I should make it clear from the outset that racial, xenophobic, and labor (economic) factors fueled this animosity, rather than any pro-colonial or anti-Gadar sympathies or motives.

In this paper, I focus first on the local and historical context going back to the first arrivals and reactions in the community, second, how the Bellingham riot and other attacks were portrayed in the press and how various individuals and groups responded at the local level; and conclude with a brief account of the second wave of immigration and the establishment of the Sikh community more recently in Whatcom County. The basic events of the Bellingham riot of 1907 may be familiar because they have been recounted in many histories of Asian Americans, and especially in accounts of South Asian and Sikh migration. I want to go behind these events and to show how the Bellingham riot was part of a pattern of hostilities against Sikhs and other Punjabi immigrants in the Pacific Northwest of the U.S. and British Columbia. I also want to place the riots in the context of the politics of Asian exclusion and the deprivation of rights of Asian immigrants.

## **Historical Background**

The northernmost port on the Pacific Coast of the lower 48 states, surrounded by salmon-rich waters on to the west and massive old growth timber on the slopes of the Cascade range, Bellingham's location and resources made it ripe for rapid growth at the beginning of the twentieth century. Located just 20 miles south of the Canadian border and approximately 45 miles south of Vancouver and 90 miles north of Seattle, Bellingham was connected to both by both rail and shipping lines. The white settlements that later became the towns of Whatcom, Sehome, Fairhaven, and Bellingham were built on land traditionally inhabited by Coast Salish natives who fished the Puget Sound and tidal waters around the Nooksack estuary and nearby islands. The Lummi Indian and several other tribes were relegated to 15,000 acres of land adjacent to Bellingham and Ferndale by treaty in 1855, and by the early 1900's the Lummi Nation members had decreased to only around 450 individuals.

By 1907 the booming population of the city had reached 35,000, steadily increasing due to immigration due to expanding employment opportunities. Most of this immigration was from other states, and to a lesser extent from Canada and other countries. By the summer of 1907, the Asian population included approximately 300 Japanese, over 200 Punjabis, a number of Filipinos, and on a seasonal basis some large crews of Chinese workers brought in to work at the salmon canneries and housed in segregated Chinese bunkhouses.

On the evening of September 4, 1907 in Bellingham, Washington, a mob attacked and drove out over two hundred immigrant laborers from India, referred to commonly as "Hindus." The goal of the rioters was to force these South Asian workers from the mills and the city, using beatings and the threat of force to round up the men from their beds and mills. By the end of the evening, over a hundred had been herded into the city jail in the basement of the City Hall upon an agreement worked out with the police chief. Within a few days the goals of the mob were fulfilled; all of the South Asian millworkers had either left by train or steamship for points further south along the Pacific coast or on foot to cross back into Canada. Several of the South Asian workers were beaten, and according to spokesmen for the group, many took the threats seriously and were afraid for their lives. Although the local papers downplayed the injuries and mentioned only one of the Sikh men being taken to a hospital briefly, according to a wire dispatch, six were badly beaten and hospitalized.<sup>ii</sup>

The action was the first in a series of attacks on "Hindus" in Washington State and British Columbia, but it was not the first anti-Asian action in the Bellingham area. In October 1885, an anti-Chinese movement incited by the local newspaper and the Knights of Labor drove out over 25 Chinese residents from the towns that would later combine to form Bellingham.

There was a series of warnings and attacks in the days before the riot. After a massive Labor Day parade and gatherings of workers, unnamed speakers issued threats, and several violent incidents against Punjabis broke out.<sup>iii</sup> On the day preceding the riot, workers at one mill had made a plan to attack the South Asians, claiming that white workers had been fired and replaced by Punjabi workers.

Although there have been speculations of the involvement of the Japanese and Korean Exclusion League based in San Francisco and with an office in Seattle, the evidence suggests that the Bellingham action probably caught Seattle Exclusion League Secretary A.E. Fowler by surprise. In fact, Fowler's organization and the president of the Vancouver Canada branch had been jointly planning a mass demonstration in for September 7 in Vancouver BC with delegates "from all points on the Pacific Coast."<sup>iv</sup>

On the very morning of the riot, an editorial suggested that citizens had been unwelcoming toward the "Hindu" workers. Over the previous months, several editorials and local news articles included warnings that conflict and antagonism were escalating. Judging from press accounts, fights and taunts of Sikhs in the mills and on the streets were frequent, and the city records suggest a pattern of police harassment and discriminatory treatment.

The rioters were said to number at least five hundred, but accounts describe a mob that grew and separated into groups through the night, some attacking living quarters and other marching to lumber mills. Their composition was sometimes referred to as "white," but according to newspapers some Filipino and black workers also participated. Some descriptions in the press emphasized participation of boys, but others described the rioters as persons of all ages, with millworkers in the majority. The five persons arrested and jailed were described as working men; police had also handcuffed two others described as boys who were released when an angry mob surrounded the police.

After the riot, press reports identified both immediate and long-standing grievances that were attributed as causes. The most commonly voiced reasons were the economic threats to mill jobs and wages, as the South Asian laborers were believed to be willing to work for lower wages than the prevailing rate for European Americans, therefore taking jobs from others. A further complaint was that the immigrant workers spent little, lived very frugally, and saved much of their pay to send to family in India. Immediate grievances mentioned as triggering the violence were several South Asian men refusing to yield the sidewalk to women, boisterous fighting outside of taverns, and a white female tenant being displaced by "Hindu" men. "Home-made wooden sandals" found in the quarters of the displaced Punjabis were later seen by some as evidence that "the cobbler and the merchant cannot afford to have the foreigners in the country," justifying calls for exclusionist policies.<sup>v</sup> Not everyone placed the blame on

the immigrant workers themselves. The Bellingham City Council, in a controversial resolution, singled out the lumber mill owners as culprits for employing the South Asian workers.<sup>vi</sup>

The reactions of the two local newspapers and most of the western U.S. press were similar. They disapproved of the lawlessness of the method, but celebrated the outcome of the eviction of these “undesirable” immigrants. Widespread public antagonism toward the South Asian population was suggested by the reports of jeering, harassment, and in private correspondence. Following the riot, several ministers spoke out to criticize the lawlessness and lack of tolerance, and one newspaper published sermons excerpts.<sup>vii</sup> The Mayor publicly denounced the riot, called for additional police deputy assistance, and pledged to protect the workers.

The response of organized labor was mixed. Most labor voices were supportive of the aims and outcome of the anti-Asian movement but not necessarily of the tactics. The following week the Central Labor Council of the city issued a resolution condemning the riots. Strong opposition to the riot also came from the IWW (Industrial Workers of the World), which had a very small presence in the Bellingham area. The IWW issued a statement denouncing the riot as injurious to the welfare of workers.

Most of the South Asian immigrants were young male Sikh farmers from the Punjab region of India who arrived by steamship in British Columbia beginning in 1906. Finding that employment opportunities were limited in the Vancouver and Victoria area, and hearing of employment opportunities and higher wages in Washington State, hundreds crossed the border in 1906 and 1907. Bellingham, located only twenty miles south of the border and having some of the largest lumber mills in the world, was the closest destination, and several lumber mills offered jobs to willing immigrants during periods of boom in a very volatile economy. The appearance of these men varied, with some wearing the traditional turban over uncut hair and bearded, and others clean shaven or with trimmed mustache and wearing Western hats covering their short hair. Although there were reports that a few South Asian women were living in Bellingham, these rumors were probably mistaken.

### **Canadian entry**

In February 1906, the Athenian, a CPR steamer from Hong Kong arrived in Victoria carrying large numbers of steerage passengers from Japan and India. The major news that Canadian passengers brought was of the growing anti-foreign feeling and riots in China. The immigration of “Hindus” was barely noted.<sup>viii</sup> Perhaps it was some of these newly arrived passengers who were described the following month as the “turbaned Hindus who have been haunting the city hall for weeks past hunting for work.”

The *Colonist* reported the total of these Indian immigrants in BC was over 160, and that 40 were being hired by a sawmill in Revelstoke for \$1.35 per day.<sup>ix</sup>

By August 1906 the *Colonist* was referring to the “Hindoo invasion” and discussing the possibility of barring them from entry with the planned investigation by an immigration inspector from Ottawa. The paper focused on several economic and social complaints:

these dark-skinned natives of India threaten to turn the labor market upside down, at least such is the opinion of labor men...More than Japanese or Chinese they enter into competition with whites in the labor market and they are equally unassimilative.... they have, according to police records, cause proportionately more trouble for the police than any other race represented here. Judging from the number of them who have appeared [in various courts] , they are by nature quarrelsome and litigious.<sup>x</sup>

The fears of thousands of additional immigrants from India arriving were reinforced by the regular landing of ships from Asia, such as the *Empress* from China which carried 219 and arrived in Victoria in August, most of whom sailed on to disembark in Vancouver.<sup>xi</sup> Newspaper accounts tended to refer to the immigration in similar terms to those that had been used with other Asian immigrant groups that invoked fear and anxiety. “Sikh invasion”<sup>xii</sup> “hordes of Hindus” and “brown men,”<sup>xiii</sup> “Hindu invasion”<sup>xiv</sup>

At least one BC newspaper, the *Armstrong Advertiser*, began to call for driving the East Asian works out of their cities in late 1906 which provoked a strong critical editorial in the *Victoria Colonist*.<sup>xv</sup> The *Colonist* was by no means welcoming, however, and summed up the official assessment and attitude in the province in quite negative terms. “They are, according to the reports of the Dominion authorities, a very undesirable lass of immigration. The feeling in British Columbia is strong against them on account of their habits and unsanitary methods of living.”<sup>xvi</sup>

A shortage of labor in Washington State and a boom in the lumber industry in the summer of 1907, partly due to rebuilding of San Francisco following the great earthquake and fire, led to an increase in the migration of South Asian workers crossing the border from British Columbia. Attracted by offers of higher wages (\$2.50 to \$2.75 a day) and by hopes of warmer weather, hundred left jobs in mills in the Vancouver area where they had been earning \$2 a day. A report in the *Victoria Colonist* included a rare voice one of the sojourners, a nameless “Hindu,” heading for Tacoma, just south of Seattle, rendered in dialectical spelling reminiscent of American caricatures of “darkeys.”

One of the Hindus was spoken to as he was leaving the city [New Westminster?] last night on the Great Northern train and asked where he was going. “T’come. Mebbe lan of prom. This is not. Too cole ere. Say warmer in T’come.” ...Although they made lots of money in this country they are finding that it is not the promised land and are now taking further steps to find that place.<sup>xvii</sup>

The conditions of work were often dangerous, and risks to health could be quite severe. Workers at a cement plant near Victoria at Tod Inlet became infected with tuberculosis which caused the death of a Sikh immigrant, Tar Gool Singh, on April 11, 1907. His public cremation on a pyre was the first such ceremonies in the region and drew some attention in the news.<sup>xviii</sup>

South Asian immigrants first entered Bellingham the previous year, when two men without immigration documents arrived on foot from Vancouver, BC, and were arrested and turned over to immigration officials. Their appearance was described in detail as strange and curious, and one paper included an artist's drawings of the two men. Their vegetarian customs were also seen as a curiosity when they refused the Bellingham jail food despite having gone for two days without eating.<sup>xix</sup>

By September 1906 at least seventeen "Hindu" workers were reported to be living in Bellingham, and the expected arrival of many more South Asian immigrants became a frequent theme in the local press. One local paper devoted an entire page to the situation with a large banner headline about the "dusky peril" and several artistic depictions of the "Hindu." At the same time, the first organized effort to expel the Asian immigrant workers occurred at one of the lumber mills.<sup>xx</sup>

A year before the riot, an editorial proclaimed "the dusky peril of the Hindus" as "the latest to threaten American labor" commenting on the report of Anglo mill workers protesting the hiring of South Asian workers.<sup>xxi</sup> The editorial was followed two days later by an astonishing full page newspaper article warned Bellingham readers of the "Hindu hordes invading the state" and "floods of Hindus coming." The large banner heading asked "Have we a dusky peril?" with a 6 inch question mark, invoking racial fears, as "dusky" was also sometimes used to describe African Americans. The article surrounded several illustrations of Sanda Singh, one of the 17 East Indian workers in Bellingham, who apparently had posed for Carroll Dibble, a local commercial artist and sign painter known for his caricatures. Dibble's drawing of Sanda Singh in turban and full beard must have seemed quite exotic and likely threatening to the Bellingham readers, and in the middle of the portraits, Dibble added an even more exotic image of a bearded man with turban and flowing robe charming a cobra with a woodwind instrument.<sup>xxii</sup>

Having rapidly expanded during this boom period, the population of Bellingham in 1906 had grown to over 35,000. Why were 17 lumber mill workers from India and the expected influx of dozens more seen as a threat deserving of an entire page and a hired illustrator? After all, several positive qualities were mentioned and attributed to immigration officials – they were "tall, well-formed, and stand erect" and in general were "intelligent, polite, neat, and clean." The article offers some explanations of the foreseen peril. Racial antagonism suggested by the term "dusky" was further intoned with a heading proclaiming, "Whites oppose Hindus." But labor and economic fears were the most prominent – "wages

will be reduced if repressive measures are not taken in the beginning,” and they “will act as a brake on the city’s progress” because these mean “live cheaply and save their little earnings to return to India to spend them.” Mill workers, the article warned, were making efforts “to oust them, and thus discourage further immigration to Bellingham.” The fear of these turbaned strangers was linked to the legacy of the anti-Chinese movement of the late 1800s when mobs drove out many hundreds of Chinese residents from Bellingham, Olympia, Seattle, Tacoma, and many other Northwest cities, and in some cases vigilantes massacred Chinese miners or field laborers. Somehow, although the Punjabis appeared handsome and polite, the editor expressed the “fear that the dusky Asiatics with their turbans will prove a worse menace to the working classes than the ‘Yellow Peril.’”<sup>xxiii</sup> Just as the local papers had played a major role in inciting the anti-Chinese fervor in 1885, it is possible that this struggling paper was attempting to churn up sentiments to fuel a campaign that would increase readership enhance its appeal. It was also championing an anti-vice campaign, pushing the mayor police to crack down on the thriving brothel business. As it was, the *Puget Sound American* went out of business two months later, bought out by the publisher of the *Bellingham Herald*.

In the same issue it was also reported that workers at one of the lumber mills were circulating a petition demanding the firing of the Sikh workers, and that three representatives of the Sikh workers met with the local immigration inspector to complain of threats and harassment over their wearing of turbans.<sup>xxiv</sup>

In contrast to the fear-mongering tone of the *Puget Sound American*, the *Bellingham Reveille* (Sept. 11, 1906), adopted a more balanced tone, several days earlier, reporting that the alarm was “all too premature” and that the fear was “judged as being without proper cause” from by employers and “other kindred observers.” The major fear was identified as that a future “Asiatic invasion” could bring down wages of “the average American laborer.” The *Reveille*, however, had also stirred up fears of the Sikhs with a story about a struggle in the brothel district which was described as “an attempt on the part of a dozen Hindus to capture the quarters by storm.”<sup>xxv</sup> In reprinting an editorial from the Anacortes Citizen titled “Hindus, Chinks, and Dagos” the *Reveille* also appeared to endorse a strong antagonistic stance toward the immigrant workers.<sup>xxvi</sup>

The following month, a third daily newspaper in town carried a Canadian report about the hundreds of South Asians arriving in British Columbia and the alarm voice by the Canadian government, with a fear-arousing headline “Hindoo Invasion is Menacing Northwest – Two Thousand Orientals Already Enroute for America.”<sup>xxvii</sup> In November a Saturday night fight between Sikhs and others who were reportedly taunting them over their turbans resulted in “the Hindus being knocked senseless” with

some 200 spectators encircling the fighters. Despite the provocation and the beating they received, it was the Sikhs whom the police arrested.<sup>xxviii</sup>

Police arrests were part of the harassment that Sikhs encountered in Bellingham. For several months before the riot, police arrested Sikhs for drunkenness, and after being held overnight, instead of the typical treatment for whites arrested, release “per order of the police chief,” the Sikhs were fined from \$12 to \$29. (As further evidence of racial profiling, when blacks were arrested to drunkenness or disorderly behavior, they were “fired out of town” the next day, a practice that continued in Bellingham at least into the 1960’s.)<sup>xxix</sup>

In May 1907 another kind of opposition to the South Asians in Bellingham developed. The newspaper appeared to be the instigator, proclaiming that the “Hindus of Bellingham” were a “public nuisance,” a “menace,” a “pestilence,” and that residents were in “mortal fear for their lives.” By this time their numbers had increased to fifty or sixty, and the press repeated diatribes about them being dirty, offensive, and belligerent. Charges against the “brown intruders” and “dark skinned sons of India” included indecent exposure, stealing neighbors’ chickens, and dumping refuse around their housing, resulting in some calling for the deportation of the immigrants as “undesirable citizens,” a view repeated in subsequent editorials. The strident tone of the article warned the “indignant citizens” would “rise up and deal with the brown intruders in their own way.”<sup>xxx</sup>

### **Press and public opinion**

The most extensive sources on the riot and the surrounding issues, events, and opinions, of course, are the newspapers of the day. Readership was quite high, and in 1906 Bellingham supported three daily newspapers (consolidated into two in 1907) and also a Norwegian language weekly. I have searched and collected approximately 40 articles from the Bellingham press published between January 1906 and Sept 4, 1907 pertaining to the Punjabi immigrations and workers, and over 90 published from Sept 4, 1907 through the end of the year. The press likely exerted a strong influence on public opinion. At the same time, clearly the opinions in the papers also reflected the views of segments of the public. Analysis of the tone, language, and content of the press coverage would require a separate study. Overall Wolf’s characterization of the press coverage seems quite accurate:

[Both newspapers] “used their articles to further dehumanize the riot victims,.. [T]he newspapers both mixed and matched imagery seemingly at whim...The local newspapers provide a key element in discussing the racial attributes assigned to Hindus. These newspapers manipulated racial images of unassimilable Orientals held by the people of Bellingham and in turn helped to modify these images to justify the violence of the riot.”<sup>xxxi</sup>



The influence of the media is always a challenge to evaluate, and after 100 years it is impossible to assess the impact which the press may have had in shaping public opinion about the Punjabi immigrants and in inciting the mob actions. However, the congruence between the press accounts of the Punjabi immigrants and the views of the public can be examined with the example of the private correspondence of A.W. Mangum (1876-1924), a 31-year-old soil scientist who was living and working in the area in 1907. In writing to his mother in North Carolina, Mangum tried to explain the riot and the antipathy felt toward the South Asian workers. His explanation and description was strikingly similar to the views in the press.

We had a riot here about a week ago, the people ran out the Hindos [sic], who have come here in great numbers and have been working in the lumber mills. These Hindos came here from India and are British subjects so the English gov. may investigate the riots and make the people here pay for what they did. These Hindos are very undesirable citizens. They are dirty and mean and will work for wages that a white man can't live on. I am not in sympathy with the laboring men who started this riot, because they ought to mob the mill men who hire these laborers rather than mob the Hindos themselves. If the mill owners did not hire them, they would not come here in such crowds. They are worse than the Japs and China men and have caused trouble ever since they began to be numerous. The Japans and China-men have flooded this county and it begins to look like they intend to take possession of everything out here. There is going to be a race war out here pretty soon if this government don't [sic] keep them out, and when it comes, they are going to clean out the Japs and China-men, and we will have war with Japan. The people in the east cant realize what these people are up against with these Orientals. They will live in crowds, in one house and as nobody can live near them, people begin to move out of the neighborhood, and soon they will practically own a whole section of a town, and the value of property in that section will take a drop, to about ½ of what it was before they came. They can live on "nothing per day" and it looks like they will eventually crowd out the American workman. I believe if you could see and become personally acquainted with this out-fit, you would get the Keely-Cure, on the missionary question for you would see what kind of an out-fit you were working for, and would be ready to say you 'had enough.'<sup>xxxii</sup>

Although following the riot, the press and the city leaders denied that race was a motive and focused on the perceived threats to workers jobs and wages as well as charges of immoral behavior, the language and tone in many of the newspaper accounts and editorials suggests that race and xenophobia were indeed major factors.

### **Business community**

The *Bellingham Herald* editorial on the first day following the riot supported the mills in hiring the immigrant workers in order meet the demands of the market: "In doing so they are contributing to the prosperity of the community."The editorial then went further in pointing out the positive role that the Punjabi workers played, though couched in a negative hypothetical construction: "If no Hindus had been set to work the community would have been poorer by the amount of wealth their labor has created."<sup>xxxiii</sup>

However, the overall sentiments of the *Bellingham Herald* editor were to strongly deplore the lawlessness, rather than to fault the outcome of the removal of the Punjabi workers. “But such exhibition of man’s inhumanity to man as that of last night should not be tolerated. Such lawlessness is an outrage upon American decency.”<sup>xxxiv</sup>

Evidence of the outlook of the business community suggests that business leaders were more concerned with the lawlessness than with the plight of the Sikhs and other immigrant workers. G.C. Hyatt, the land agent for the Bellingham Bay Improvement Co., in a letter to the company president in San Francisco, saw the militancy of workers in driving out the Punjabi workers as a sign of the strength of organized labor:

I do not think that this would have been classified as a riot in San Francisco. There was not bloodshed and the crowd was composed to a large extent of boys, although most every branch of organized labor was represented and the movement has doubtless their full approval. This is in all probability the first step toward Unionizing the mills and is the end which I feared last summer and is the reason that prompted me to refuse to Unionize my small force of builders. This condition will soon effect business in all lines and is a diversion to be regretted.<sup>xxxv</sup>

The sympathies of the city council majority, at least one of whom was an avowed socialist, were with the workers rather than management, and they passed a resolution condemning the mill owners for employing the immigrants from India. Due to the controversy surrounding this issue, the press published the responses of several mill owners. Most were highly critical of the city council’s resolution and all denied hiring any contract laborers. One mill owner claimed that the Punjabi workers had received the same pay as the white workers.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

The business community in Bellingham seems to have responded to vigilante-ism, the city council’s censure, and labor’s hue and cry, despite the apparent shortage of labor with the departure not only of the entire Punjabi work force, but also a portion of the 300 Japanese residents. Later that month when four Punjabis arrived in the city looking for employment, they were unable to find any work and the Herald proclaimed on page one that “they “are now notifying their compatriots to ‘pass up’ this city” and were heading across the border to New Westminster.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

### **Race and ethnic divides**

Skin color featured prominently in nearly most news stories and editorials of the period in the west coast press. Sikhs and other Punjabi immigrants were described as “dusky,” “brown,” “dark-skinned” and occasionally as “black,” [note “ African Americans were described in the NW press in this period as “negro,” “colored” and sometimes as “black” or “dusky”<sup>xxxviii</sup>] Stories also commonly described them as

aliens and emphasized otherness especially referring to the turban worn by many of the Sikhs with terms such as “turbaned,” “foreign,” “Asiatic,” “Orientals,” “sons of India,” and “from India’s coral strands.”

Racial prejudice was acknowledged at times in the press. For example, an editorial about Italian immigrants commented that “As there are no race prejudices against the Italians a few thousand of them might be imported, with advantage to Whatcom county to develop the industry of market gardening on logged-off lands.”<sup>xxxix</sup> Another editorial on the failure of police in arresting an alleged attacker

<sup>.x1</sup> A sports article entitled “White Athletes Must Wake Up” deplored that “Negroes, Indians, Japs and Chinese are winning athletic honors and palefaces are not given even a look-in, and after citing several examples, concluded, “It’s up to the white athletes to get busy, for the reds, yellows, browns, and blacks are copping all the honors.”<sup>xli</sup>

Although racial terms and general racial stereotypes were frequently used, more nuanced and complex perceptions and responses of ethnic difference were also demonstrated. There had been fears that mob actions would target Japanese and Filipino residents of Bellingham following the movement against the Punjabis, and the attacks on Chinese and Japanese in Vancouver, Canada that ensued, and the Japanese community demanded protection from the city and began to arm in preparation. The *Reveille* explained, however, that Filipinos were considered to be “good citizens,” and “nothing but praise of the Filipinos is now heard in the city.” It was reported that some Filipinos had actually taken part in the riot “along with the Americans.” Although the Japanese were not similarly praised, the paper explained that due to their employment in areas not competing with white workers, they were “not disliked strongly enough by any class in the city to make it possible to stir up rabid sentiment against them.”<sup>xlii</sup> In fact, the following day the *Reveille* published what it called “A Word of Solemn Warning” against a similar attack on Japanese residents of Bellingham. It speculated that a riot against Japanese could precipitate a war with Japan and rioters would be severely prosecuted. The editors concluded, “we warn the mob to keep its hands off the Japanese” and instead join with the Exclusion League in pushing for restrictive immigration legislation. Several days later the editors worried, along with the manager of the Pacific American Fisheries Company, that if Chinese and Japanese workers were also driven away in fear of anti-Asian mobs, the canneries that depended so heavily on their seasonal labor might have to close because few white workers could replace them.<sup>xliv</sup>

Commentators in national publications also discussed the racial element quite openly. Agnes Buchanan contrasted the immigrants from India with those from China and Japan, and reminded readers

that “this last is a brother of our own race – a full-blooded Aryan, men of like progenitors with us.” However, despite that recognition, Buchanan joined the prevailing racial discourse: “The Hindus and the Hindu Invasion is the latest racial problem with which we of the West have to deal with.”<sup>xlv</sup> Buchanan revealed the complexities of ethnic and religious acceptance in the U.S. with the story of Bingha Singh, a Sikh working in the boiler room of an iron factory, who described himself to her as a Brahmin who had lived for years in Hong Kong. Bingha Singh told her that he had applied for U.S. citizenship but was unable to take the oath because the judge demanded that her remove his turban, which he refused to do.<sup>xlvi</sup>

Similarly, poet and translator Herman Scheffauer (1878-1927) writing in 1910, also acknowledged common “ancient Aryan stock” but explained that Americans “find it difficult to accept the Hindoo as a brother of the blood. Between him and this dark, mystic race lies a pit almost as profound as that which he has dug between himself and the negro.”<sup>xlvii</sup>

During this time, some South Asians without turbans were also first making applications for citizenship. A Muslim from Punjab, Mohammed Akbar, applied for citizenship in Butte County, California in 1908.<sup>xlviii</sup> By 1913 A.K. Mozumdar, a resident of Spokane, Washington, became the first South Asian to obtain American citizenship, convincing a federal judge that by virtue of his “high-caste Hindu” status as a Brahmin he met the criterion of being “white.” Ironically, Mozumdar, a Hindu mystic, had polished his English during a term of study in 1905 at the State Normal School in Bellingham on the hill overlooking the same mills where 200 or more Punjabis were to be forcibly evicted two years later.<sup>xlix</sup> Taraknath Das, who had studied at the University of Washington, also took out citizenship papers in Seattle in 1911 and was finally granted citizenship in San Francisco in 1914.<sup>1</sup> [Following the U.S. Supreme Court’s 1923 decision in the *Thind* case, Mozumdar, Das, and over sixty others of Indian origin has their U.S. citizenship revoked.]

## **Gender**

Rumors of “Hindu women disguised as men”, allegedly from Canadian sources, caused the immigration inspector in Bellingham to investigate, but apparently none were found. The report that “fully one third of the immigrants coming to Canada are women disguised as men,” seems likely to have been fabricated.<sup>li</sup> In Bellingham, similar rumors of females living among the Sikh workers appeared in the press and were presented as fact but without substantiation. “The Hindu colony contains a few women, who, as they dress like the men in trousers and coats, are not to be distinguished from them on the streets. These women sleep in the same crowded apartments with the men.”<sup>lii</sup> Shah interprets such reports as white gender anxieties about the turban and the hidden long black hair of the Sikh men.<sup>liii</sup> Earlier historians

such as Hallberg, Melendy, and Wynne tended to treat newspaper accounts as fact and thus rumors or questionable reports have been accepted uncritically and repeated in other sources. Hallberg stated, ““The Hindu colony contained a few women...” and repeated almost verbatim the Reveille’s claim.<sup>liv</sup> According to Saint Nihal Singh, in 1909 there was only “Hindu woman” in North America, married to an Indian doctor in Vancouver. Singh believed himself to be the only man from India with an American wife.<sup>lv</sup> In 1910 a few Sikh leaders in British Columbia made plans to bring their wives from India, but the report indicated that this would be unprecedented.<sup>lvi</sup>

[note: Melendy and Wynne also accepted the questionable *New York Times* reports, stating that, “six East Indians were hospitalized, 410 gained protective custody, in the Bellingham jail, and 750 fled northward...to the Canadian border.”<sup>lvii</sup>]

### **Social Class and Caste: Two “High Caste Hindus” in Bellingham**

How was it that during the period when “Hindu” was a term of revulsion and extreme prejudice in Bellingham and elsewhere in the Pacific Northwest, a young man from India lived as a family member with a prominent Bellingham family and was treated with much kindness by them? Was it a matter of social class, as the Bellingham Herald suggested on its editorial page the morning before the riot broke out? The pithy editorial is worth quoting in full:

There will probably not be the same race prejudice against the prominent Hindu who is to attend the normal as against his fellow countrymen who are working in the mills. And yet there is no such thing as caste in this democratic country of our! [sic]<sup>lviii</sup>

Was this young man considered a “Prince of India,” as the Reveille referred to him? Or were school principal Dr. Edward Mathes and his family unusual in their warmth, hospitality, and open-mindedness?<sup>lix</sup> Mathes was certainly unique in Bellingham in his support and generosity toward students from India. In 1905 the first international student at the Normal School, A.K. Mozumdar was enrolled as a special student, and two years later the much younger Nabhi Ram Joshi became the second. The first issue of the nationalist *Free Hindustan* newspaper, published in Vancouver BC by Taraknath Das, proclaimed Dr. Mathes as “a good friend of India” who had “expressed his desire to and capacity to help a few more Hindu students in different institutions.”<sup>lx</sup>

Nabhi Ram Joshi was 19 when he enrolled at the State Normal School in Bellingham in the fall of 1907, one of the few male students there. He spoke English and several other languages, and had first attended a university in India. He had worked at a mill across the border in New Westminster, British Columbia where his older brother worked as foreman, and apparently his enrolment was arranged by the

mill superintendent, W.P. Fowle, who had previously been superintendent of the Bellingham Bay Lumber Co. mill in Bellingham.<sup>lxi</sup>

Nabhi Ram's arrival as a student in Bellingham was unusual enough to warrant the attention of the city's two newspapers. Both news stories made special note of his status in India as "representing the highest caste," and "a member of the Brahmin class." He was described in glowing language, in stark contrast to the way that "Hindu" immigrants were commonly described in these papers. He was "good looking," "well educated," "able to converse in several languages," and "well supplied with money."<sup>lxii</sup> Mathes grew concerned when the riot broke out and spoke with some labor leaders who gave him assurances that they would not harm the student from India. He later spoke about the issue of racial conflict and the Bellingham events during lectures to other educators, but no records of the contents have been found.

Over many years of correspondence with the Mathes family, Nabhi Ram continued to express his affection for the family and fond memories of his year in Bellingham. Because of the strong relationship, Edward Mathes' daughter-in-law Miriam Snow Mathes created a scholarship for Indian students at Western Washington University in Nabhi Ram's name, one of the few such privately funded scholarships in the U.S. expressly for students from India. As the *Bellingham Herald* editor had predicted, the hospitable reception of both A.K. Mozumdar and Nabhi Ram Joshi stood in sharp contrast to Bellingham's harsh attack on the working class Punjabis, "in this democratic country."

Certainly there were those who opposed the mob action and like the Mathes family may have been sympathetic to those from other lands and of other ethnicities and religions. The press accounts described the general public as generally supporting the mob, and street-corner agitators urged others to "help drive out the cheap labor." However one woman witness was reported as walking "boldly through the thickest of the mob" declaring that it was "a shame."<sup>lxiii</sup> However, the major voices that were recorded as opposing of the expulsion and in some sympathy with the Punjabis were from the clergy.

**Religion** [Much of the following section was contributed by Adam Raas]

In terms of religion, Bellingham in 1907 had a strong Protestant dominance, typical in the Pacific Northwest region. The listing of Sunday services in 1907 included some 25 churches. A door-to-door census of approximately 4,500 families and households conducted by the YMCA and 200 church volunteers counted 3,430 Protestants of various denominations, 447 Catholics, 26 Jews. 562 declared "no preference, and 5 marked "unbelievers."<sup>lxiv</sup> Otherness in terms of religion was mostly identified in terms of the wearing of the turban and by jailed Punjabis refusing to eat meat. The term "Hindu" or "Hindoo"

was most commonly used, “East Indian” was less common, and only occasionally were they referred to as Sikhs. The term “heathen” appeared, but it was much less frequently applied to the Sikhs than it had been used in describing the Chinese during the anti-Chinese hysteria of 1885-1886.<sup>lxv</sup>

In the account of one criminal court case in 1907, the claim was made that the Sikh defendants were unfamiliar with the term “God,” and when the oath was translated for them, so the interpreter “made them swear by the god of the jungle.” The judge allowed Sikh witnesses to wear their turbans in the courtroom after an interpreter explained that it was required by their religion.<sup>lxvi</sup>

Four days after the riots occurred, residents of Bellingham woke up on Sunday morning, September 8, 1907, and went to church. The local religious leaders had not forgotten the riot, and several of them sermonized on the actions of the rioters and the reaction of the police. Initially, the clergy responded vehemently to the rioters and the officials that allowed the riots to happen. One minister in particular, Reverend William Orr Wark, responded most passionately to the riots. He was a Congregationalist minister of the same denomination that supported the Chinese immigrants in 1885. The Monday following the riots, the *Bellingham Herald* printed excerpts of several sermons from obtained from several local churches.<sup>lxvii</sup> These sermons touched upon the general themes of workers’ greed, immigration in general, and criticism of the police. The four religious leaders whose sermons were published were Reverend Wark, Reverend Cheatham of St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, Reverend Thomas Cornish of the First Baptist Church, and Reverend John W. Flesher of the First Methodist. Of the four sermons excerpted by the Herald, Reverend Wark’s stands out as the most scathing.

All four religious leaders were critical of the greed and material motives of the rioting workers. Reverend Flesher argued that those who rioted did not represent the majority of the workers.<sup>lxviii</sup> In continued agreement, Reverend Wark asked his congregation rhetorically, “Must we...refuse these outsiders because they...do not ask the same wages?”<sup>lxix</sup> All four sermons expressed shame for the mob actions taken in the name of greed and intolerance.

The sermons also touched upon the problem of immigration in general. In discussing immigration from Punjab, Reverend Cornish told of the many advances made in India in terms of education, communication, and infrastructure noting the number of universities, the amount of trade and the miles of railroad built in India. He argued that rather than spurn their entrance into the country and assault those who have come to work in the United States, they should be accepted and taught to become Christian, “The Hindu people, as well as showing a capacity for western learning and western enterprise, are very susceptible to the teachings of Christianity.”<sup>lxx</sup> Reverend Wark again asked, “Must we admit to

the world that we do not know how to deal with the Hindu and are simply keeping them out by brute force until we solve the problem? This is no way to solve it. We face the problem, and it must be settled sooner or later. The world must not believe we settle our differences in cowboy style.”<sup>lxxi</sup>

Both ministers Cheatham and Wark publicly criticized the police for allowing the lawlessness. Reverend Wark’s solution was simple, that “Instead of organizing exclusion leagues, let us inaugurate an era of education.”<sup>lxxii</sup> Specifically, the minister looked to religious teachings to help “fortify our race and our nation while affording less favored peoples our aid in their struggle.”<sup>lxxiii</sup> In fact, Wark himself turned to education and international work when he left the ministry in 1909, guiding Europe tours, and during World War I, working in France for the YWCA.

However, Reverend Wark was not the last religious leader in Bellingham in 1907 to be heard on the topic of immigration. From late October through November, the *Bellingham Herald* published a series of four full-length sermons by Reverend J.R. Macartney of the First Presbyterian Church titled, “The Alien Invasion” which raised fears of immigrants from Asia as well as from European countries. Macartney advocated strict controls on the numbers of immigrants allowed to enter the country, as well as the radical step of moving port of entry sites to Europe so that the potential immigrants could be screened before crossing the ocean. Macartney also addressed the issue of immigrants already in the U.S. , calling for an evangelical crusade to convert immigrants already in America to Protestant Americans.<sup>lxxiv</sup> “God has set Protestant Christianity a gigantic task, nothing less than the assimilation of all these foreign people...into one common Americanism, so that they shall form a united free Christian people.”<sup>lxxv</sup> For Reverend Macartney, the problem was not just immigration, but also assimilation and conversion.

Thus, the Bellingham press provided a platform from which religious leaders initially reacted to the lawless riots by condemning the participants and those who aided them, but also lent even more public space for a series of sermons that flamed anti-immigrant sentiment.

### **Threats, Harassment, and Planning**

The day before the riot, a plan had been made “to drive out the cheap labor” according to one press account after the riot. The previous Sunday night some of the immigrant workers were “congregating on the sidewalk” and a struggle with police ensued. The paper also reported that with the crowd of union members parading through the city on Labor Day, some of the Punjabis were attacked, and there had been at least five incidents of violence Tuesday night, though none of this had been reported in the paper until after the riot occurred. Several explanations were given of the immediate trigger of the riot. One trigger was the angry reaction of millworkers at the Whatcom Falls Mill Company when allegedly some white workers were discharged and replaced by Sikhs.<sup>lxxvi</sup> Other accounts attributed the start of the riot to



taunting by “a gang of young rowdies” or a dispute over several Punjabis renting of a shack and displacing a woman who had been living there.<sup>lxxvii</sup> The police chief reported that the riot was not spontaneous, but had been planned in advance.<sup>lxxviii</sup> However following criticisms about how the police handled the riot and accusations that they had received warnings, Chief Thomas denied that he had any advance notice.<sup>lxxix</sup>

Bellingham’s weekly Norwegian paper, *Nya Varlden*, issued a strong criticism of the mob and the city for not taking stronger action to quell the lawlessness, comparing Bellingham to “the darkest of Russia.” However, the editor made it clear that he was not a “friend of the Hindus” and blamed the mill owners for employing them.<sup>lxxx</sup>

The only critical analysis of the racial character of the riot was provided by the editor and publisher of the *Seattle Republican*, Horace Cayton under a column titled, “Always ready to riot.” Cayton (1859-1940), an African American and former slave who was born in Mississippi, lived in Seattle for most of his life.

Whether it be North, South, East, or West in the United States, it is always a safe bet that the white man is ever ready to do violence to some class of human beings if they happen to have a darker skin than their own. But a few days ago the white folk of Shelbyville, Ind. were driving a number of Negroes out of the town... so common to the Southern states that comment is unnecessary. Another day the report comes that the citizens of Bellingham are mobbing a lot of Hindu people because they not only wanted to work, but were actually working and the Lord only knows what would have been the result if the British flag had not been displayed, the Hindus being British subjects, which alarmed the whites.<sup>lxxxi</sup>

Describing the rioters as “white” was, however, problematic, because, as Wolf has discussed both local newspapers identified Filipinos and at least one African American among the rioters.<sup>lxxxii</sup>

The liberal *Nation* offered only passing ridicule in its comment on the riots. “On the Pacific Coast no form of Saturday night and Sunday afternoon diversion can compare in popularity with the baiting of Asiatic Laborers.”<sup>lxxxiii</sup> Referring to the agitation by American exclusion league leaders in Vancouver, that *Nation* noted that, “White supremacy, like love and justice, knows no boundaries.”<sup>lxxxiv</sup>

*Colliers* magazine had dispatched writer Will Irwin to investigate the Japanese labor situation on the Pacific coast, and shortly after the Bellingham riot occurred, Irwin arranged a visit to interview city officials and others. In the second part of his series of four articles on “The Japanese and the Pacific Coast” Irwin reviewed several anti-Japanese incidents in the region, including threats against a Japanese owned shingle mill in Bellingham, which led to closure, and then Irwin described the Bellingham “anti-Hindu riot” as “a screaming farce.”<sup>lxxxv</sup> Irwin’s almost comical telling of the story portrayed the police,

and in particular, police chief Thomas as being in sympathy with the mob and not up to the task of maintaining the law. If Irwin's account is at all accurate, the Chief Thomas offered to aid and abet the rioters.

'But say, if you fellows keep 'em in them shacks, some bad man may start a riot. Why don't you take 'em down to the police station? They'll be safer there, and in the morning we'll all chuck 'em out together.' The mob shouted approval of Chief Thomas, swept into the shacks and herded the Hindus forthwith to the station. So the chief made two thousand volunteer deputies out of a mob. But there were one hundred more Hindus still at large. How should he protect them? The chief was equal to producing the idea: 'Now boys, let's make a clean sweep of it. You done a good job with these fellows, go out and get the rest.'<sup>lxxxvi</sup>

The *Bellingham Herald* editor also faulted the police chief and some of the officers.

"...probably...several of the officers on duty were strongly in sympathy with the anti-Hindu movement and did not object to the clamorous method pursued by the crown, since it was not violent."<sup>lxxxvii</sup>

We have *Collier's* magazine to thank for the printing of the best quality photographs of the riot that have been preserved, as Irwin must have obtained negatives from the *Bellingham Herald* or its photographer. In a previous issue of *Colliers* (Sept. 28), two photographs of the Bellingham incident to accompanying the first part of Irwin's series were printed on glossy paper in a montage along with photographs of Japanese on the coast. The photographs show the Punjabis in the city hall basement jail area and another outside the city hall the next day. Similar photographs from the Bellingham riot were also reprinted with a magazine article by *Bellingham Herald* editor Werter Dodd, along with photographs of Sikhs at the Bellingham rail station, posing on the sidewalk in front of a restaurant, and at a lumber mill.<sup>lxxxviii</sup>

**Police and Justice** (portions of this section were contributed by Adam Raas)

On one hand, the Bellingham Police, led by Chief of Police Thomas, were hailed as heroes for their role in the anti-Hindu riots in facilitating the bloodless expulsion. On the other hand, others viewed the police as failing to act even though they were informed of the riot ahead of time and standing by while lawless mobs ruled the night in the city in which the police had been tasked to uphold the law. These two different versions of the actions of the police during the riots provide insight into the riots themselves and serve as a useful lens through which the race relations in Whatcom County in the early 20th Century can be viewed. Also, it may be possible to speculate about the intentions of the police and Chief Thomas by examining the actions that they took when trying to protect the Japanese community in Bellingham during a potentially violent situation that took place shortly after the riots.

On the night of September 4, 1907, the police were alerted when neighbors of the immigrant community heard “the crashing of window panes and...loud yells.”<sup>lxxxix</sup> There were a total of five incidents of violence reported to the police that night, yet only a handful of officers responded to the disturbances. First to arrive at the homes where the immigrant laborers were being dragged out of their beds into the street were Chief Thomas and a patrolman. Initially, according to some reports, the patrolman arrested two youths throwing rocks at one of the Indian men. However, after the mob heard of these arrests, they forced the police to let the offenders rejoin the mob as it forced more of its targets out of their homes. Although the police tried to stop the mob, they were only able to protect themselves and prevent further violence. After another immigrant lodging home had been raided by the crowd, and the arrival of two more officers, were the police able to get control over the situation. The five members of the Bellingham police who were now on the scene guided the immigrants to the basement of city hall under their protection. This protection was that the crowd was only allowed to follow and jeer the immigrants as they were escorted by the police. Over the course of the night, smaller groups brought more immigrants from other parts of town to the city hall where they were kept under guard of the police until the morning when they were forced out of town.<sup>xc</sup> The police were seen by some as heroes. They had reestablished order without serious injury or loss of life in a volatile situation.

Alternatively, the police may have allowed the riot to occur and acted only when it became necessary to prevent serious violence. Blame for the riot immediately fell on Chief Thomas’ shoulders. The criticism that stands out the strongest was that the police knew the riots were going to occur and did nothing to stop them. The *Bellingham Herald* printed a commonly held belief that “the officers were secretly in sympathy with the rioters and...they knew the trouble was to occur.”<sup>xcii</sup>

Yet, whether the police had foreknowledge will never be known. Chief Thomas argued that the response of his men was prudent and prevented further violence. Thomas “considered it folly for only four or five men to endeavor to stay the will of a howling mob.”<sup>xciii</sup> In looking back, it is hard to determine whether he took the correct actions: he prevented violence, but at the cost of driving an immigrant community and an entire cultural group out of town.

Chief Thomas left the meeting of the City Council the morning after the riots and began deputizing citizens. Of those fifty that Chief Thomas was ordered to deputize, only twenty-eight were actually sworn in to prevent further violence. In their day of duty, these extra officers conducted patrols of the areas where rioting had occurred the previous night and escorted the Punjabi immigrants to receive payment for their work in the mills before leaving town on trains bound for Canada, to the south, and on foot.<sup>xciii</sup> The Punjabi immigrants that remained relied on these officers for protection the day after the

riots, especially the next night. Officers also guarded a group of Punjabis living in south Bellingham throughout the day and into the night after the riots.

On the day after the evening riots, Chief Thomas issued arrest warrants for five men involved in the riots: Fred Knowlton, E.H. Anderson, William Wankworth, Fred Nolan and J. Brickbealer. These men were arrested by the County Sheriff that night and booked into the county jail.<sup>xciv</sup> According to the jail registry, the men arrested for rioting were released either on September 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> after they were able to post bail. As with scores of lawless actions against Chinese immigrants in the 1880's which in some cases included cold-blooded murder, no one was prosecuted in the end because "no witnesses could be found to swear against the defendants." The prosecutor claimed that "the officers were unable to find a single person in the city who would swear that he could identify the defendants as participants in the outbreak against the Orientals," and the defendants were released.<sup>xcv</sup>

Once the case was dismissed and the last of the Sikhs had left Bellingham, there was little reference to the matter, and there seemed to be a deliberate attempt to forget the embarrassing lawlessness. One of the few official acknowledgements of the riot in subsequent years was in the *Souvenir Album* printed in 1916 as a form of publicity for the Bellingham police force. According to this retelling of "The Hindu Riots," as a great accomplishment, the police, led by Chief Thomas, enabled "some two thousand Hindus" to be "expelled from the city" following three days of "the so-called 'riots'" during which "no single man was hurt." The police chief "recognized the universal demand of the whites that the brown men be expelled, and while not aiding in rounding up the Hindus, the police were simply watchful to see that no violence was offered the aliens." The pamphlet concluded in a congratulatory tone, that "like the Chinamen, who have never returned to Tacoma, the Hindu has given Bellingham a wide berth since."<sup>xcvi</sup> In just a few years some of the basic facts of the event were distorted, but pride and approval remained for both the expulsion and for the admitted complicity of the police.

### **Aftermath Exodus to Canada, Oregon, and California**

Little is known about the Punjabi men who were driven out of Bellingham. The names of approximately 35 have been gleaned from various records, and many were believed to have returned to Canada or travelled south to Oregon and California in pursuit of work. The only documented story of the Bellingham exodus from the Punjabi perspective is that of Thakar (Tuly) Singh Johl, who was interviewed in Yuba City by Joan Jensen in 1975 for her book *Passage from India*. Tuly, the youngest of four sons, was born in 1878. He married and after their first baby was born in 1903, he left his wife and baby son to find work in Canada in 1904 or 1905. According to Tuly's two sons, Gulzar and Kartar, whom I interviewed in 2008, Tuly traveled to Canada with six other men from his village of Jundiala, and then

crossed the border to the U.S. with five of them. Tuly and five of the group were Sikh farmers. The sixth, Gurditta Mal, who was a Hindu, stayed in Victoria where he worked in labor and trucking jobs and had close ties to the Sikh community. The Bellingham lumber mill where Tuly and his friends worked was at some distance from the mills and residences attacked by the mob. But all the Sikh workers left town within days out of fear. According to his sons, Tuly said little about the experience in Bellingham except to marvel at the gigantic size of the logs that were milled.

They worked together on the railroad grading in Marysville and then became a crew on a fruit orchard. According to Verma, this pattern of several men from the same village forming a crew or team was typical of Punjabis who emigrated to Canada at that time.<sup>xcvii</sup> Often they would live and work together with men learning to cook for the team as the women would do for the family in India. Tuly's family and the local Punjabi Heritage Association introduced me to descendants of some of the other members of his crew who had worked with him in Canada and Bellingham, and then settled in the Yuba City, California area. I also later met and interviewed two of Gurditta Mal's sons in Victoria, BC.

Tuly never attended school, and like most of the Punjabis he was illiterate when he arrived in Canada; however, he was quite intelligent and somehow he taught himself English and kept written records for his crew. One report estimated that between 50% to three-fifth of the East Indian immigrants were illiterate.<sup>xcviii</sup> Tuly returned home to India where he was placed under house arrest for many years for his sympathies with and support of the nationalist Gadar movement. . He returned to Yuba City in 1924 with some difficulty via Mexico. Two of Tuly's sons, Kartar and Gulzar, who grew up in India, eventually were brought to California by their father, who encouraged them to study and supported them. Gulzar, his second son, studied agriculture and earned a masters degree and farmed like his father. Gulzar joined his father in Yuba City in 1948, studied medicine and became an ophthalmologist. He was the first Sikh in the region to earn an MD. He expressed some regret at not learning more about his father's experiences as one of the early immigrants and supporters of the nationalist movement'

Things were simple at that time. I wish I had known that some day I would want my children and grandchildren to know everything about my father and the others. And it would have been so easy if I just, all the stories that I heard I wrote down. But I thought they were just like you know, just like we talk about I played this game or played that game and didn't pay any attention. And now all of a sudden - it would have been very important. At first I wasn't interested in those things. All I was interested in was working and first going to school and then being a doctor. I had nothing else that I wanted to do.<sup>xcix</sup>

Tuly lived to nearly 100, and as of 2003 his son wrote that Tuly had 19 grandchildren, 53 great-grandchildren, and 36 great-great grand children. Tuly's descendants mostly stayed in the Sacramento Valley area and contributed to the community in farming, profession occupations, education, business,

and law enforcement. Through the single lens of Tuly's life and his descendants, one can imagine the collective contributions that the 200-300 Sikhs might have made to Bellingham and the Puget Sound region. Seen from this vantage, the 1907 vigilante action fueled by ethnic fears and wage competition in most likely resulted in a tremendous sustained human and material loss to the local community.

Unlike the neighboring communities across the border of Abbotsford, Vancouver, Victoria, and various smaller communities in the Fraser Valley of British Columbia, Whatcom County had no Punjabi presence until the mid 1980s – a hiatus of about 75 years. Now there are approximately 2,000 Sikh and other South Asians in the County, double the number from the 2000 census. A Gurdwara was established in 2000, as the center of a Sikh community of over 450 families. Before the commemoration of the riot that was organized for the centennial in 2007, few in the community were aware of the history of these early pioneers and how they were driven out.

### **Spreading actions and responses**

Several days following the riot in Bellingham, a larger race riot broke out in Vancouver BC in which a mob attacked Chinese, Japanese and East Indian residents that seemed to have been triggered by the Bellingham events and agitation by the Asiatic Exclusion League in Vancouver and in the U.S. Exclusion League secretary A.E. Fowler visited Bellingham from Seattle only after the Bellingham riot had occurred and publically expressed disapproval of the action, favoring pushing for national exclusion policies to bar Asian laborers from entering. Immediately following the riot in Bellingham the Exclusion League in Seattle issued a letter to President Roosevelt calling for halting Asian immigration to the Northwest, ominously warning that “if something were not done soon the agitation started in Bellingham would spread all over the Sound country and massacres of the Eastern aliens was likely to result.”<sup>c</sup> Fowler was one of the speakers in Vancouver and some blamed him and League organizers from the U.S. for setting off the riot in Canada.

In months following the riots in Bellingham and Vancouver, anti-Punjabi hostilities occurred in other locations in the Puget Sound region of Washington State including Everett and Aberdeen, causing many more South Asian immigrants to flee the region. Fathe Mohammed, a Punjabi Muslim working at a mill in Aberdeen left in fear following threats of violence. After relocating to Marysville, California he became a successful rice farmer along with a group of other Punjabi Muslims in the Sacramento Valley.<sup>ci</sup>

Several days after the Bellingham riot, the dwelling of several Punjabis in Everett was stoned and they appealed for police protection. On October 2, an Everett labor leader issued a veiled threat to Punjabi workers advising them to leave, and on November 2, 1907 an armed mob of 500 rounded up all

of the South Asian residents, who feared they might be shot. The police having been warned in advance, used the Bellingham method of sheltering the immigrants in the jail to prevent bloodshed, releasing them the next day for a swift departure.<sup>cii</sup> As in Bellingham, the local editor expressed disapproval of the means, but applauded the outcome:

While everyone who believes in fairplay condemns Saturday night's anti-Hindu demonstration, there cannot but be a feeling of general satisfaction over the departure of the Hindus from the city as a result. One dislikes to see them driven out in that manner, but once it is done, perhaps we should be thankful that nothing worse occurred.<sup>ciii</sup>

In August 1908 a riot occurred between striking Italian workers and Punjabis at a railroad yard, and although shots were fired and rocks were hurled, no serious injuries were reported. This was the first incident in which Punjabis were reported to be armed for self-protection.

No one was prosecuted in any of these mob actions in Washington State, but when a similar outbreak occurred in St. John, Oregon in 1908 several rioters were indicted and brought to trial. Apparently, however, like the anti-Chinese terror and the case of the massacre of 34 Chinese miners in Hells Canyon, Oregon in the 1880's, no one arrested was ever convicted and sentenced.<sup>civ</sup>

## **Conclusion: Sikhs Return to Whatcom County (Satpal Sidhu contributed to this section)**

After the 1907 riots it took almost 75 years before Sikhs would again call Whatcom County their home. The first Sikh temple in the northwest was built in Abbotsford, BC by the Khalsa Diwan society in 1908. In the early 1980's a few Sikh families started to arrive in Whatcom County, and these newcomers found an uneasy silence or amnesia about the past. These newcomers were mainly farmers migrating from California, attracted by opportunities of inexpensive agricultural land and prime conditions for berry cultivation. By the early 1990s, a community has developed of 30-35 Sikh families in Whatcom County, and in 1994, the community decided to purchase land to build a Gurdwara, and first gathering in the new temple building was celebrated on January 1, 2000. Today there are more than 450 Sikh families, living in Whatcom and Skagit County and the 2010 Census found 1,922 Asian Indians in Whatcom County compared with 980 in 2000. Sikh farmers and their many employees produce 50 million pounds of raspberries and blueberries annually. Production accounts for over half of the total of 95 million pounds of the berry crop grown in Whatcom County, the largest in the U.S. In addition to agriculture, Sikh families own or are engaged in a variety of businesses and professional services and provide jobs for hundreds of employees.

In 2007 upon the hundredth anniversary of the events, the Human Rights Commemorative Project was organized in the Bellingham area, led by John McGarrity, Satpal Sidhu, myself (Paul Englesberg), and several other members of the local Sikh community, with the intent of raising public awareness of the events of the past. The group worked with local government officials, media, and non-profit organizations to organize a series of events and including a Day of Healing and Remembrance with a public gathering at the County Courthouse and educational displays at the public library and Western Washington University [WWU] Library. The Sikh Gurdwara in nearby Lynden also held an open house and a commemorative event. Mary Anne Gallagher, a *Bellingham Herald* reporter, wrote a series of in-depth articles about the history of the intolerance against the Punjabi residents and the development of the Sikh community in Whatcom County since the 1980's.<sup>cv</sup> *Bellingham Herald* published an apology for the paper's role in the hostilities against the South Asian immigrants, and the Mayor of Bellingham and the Whatcom County Executive declared a day of remembrance and healing.<sup>cvi</sup>

A panel discussion was also held at Fairhaven College, WWU with several scholarly presentations related to the 1907 riot and immigration issues, including the showing of the trailer of a documentary video made by two WWU students, Ian Morgan and Andrew Hedden, The complete documentary, "Present in All that We Do" can now be viewed online through the South Asian Digital Archive [SAADA] project at <http://www.saadigitalarchive.org/item/20111122-470> .



Following the tragic attack on the Sikh temple in Wisconsin, the Whatcom County Sikh community organized a prayer meeting and open house at the Lynden Gurdwara on August 12, 2012. Many civic leaders spoke at the event and expressed their condolences and support for the Sikh community. The legacy in Bellingham and Whatcom County of intolerance and hostility toward native people, Chinese, Japanese, African Americans, Sikhs and other South Asians is slowly being replaced with such actions large and small that demonstrate respect, cooperation, and solidarity.

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<sup>i</sup> Sohi, S., *Echoes of Mutiny*, 2008; Chang, K. *Pacific Connections*, 2012; Lee, E. “Hemispheric Orientalism and the 1907 Pacific Coast Race Riot” 2007.

<sup>ii</sup> *New York Times*, Sept. 5, 1907.

<sup>iii</sup> *Bellingham Reveille* [abbrev. BR.] Sept. 6, 1907, p. 1

<sup>iv</sup> *Vancouver World*, Aug. 26, 1907, cited in Chang, 2012, p. 106.

<sup>v</sup> *Bellingham Herald* [abbrev. BH] Sept. 13, 1907

<sup>vi</sup> BH Sept. 10, 1907

<sup>vii</sup> BH Sept. 9, 1907, p. 1

<sup>viii</sup> *Victoria Daily Colonist* [abbrev. VDC] Feb. 20, 1906 p. 8

<sup>ix</sup> VDC March 16, 1906 p. 2

<sup>x</sup> VDC Aug. 11, 1906, p. 6

<sup>xi</sup> VDC Aug. 22, 1906, p. 7.

<sup>xii</sup> VDC Oct. 11, 1906, p. 2

<sup>xiii</sup> VDC Nov. 14, 1906, p. 9

<sup>xiv</sup> VDC Nov. 15, 1907, p. 4.

<sup>xv</sup> VDC Nov. 27, 1906, p. 4.

<sup>xvi</sup> VDC Dec. 30, 1906, p. 1.

<sup>xvii</sup> VDC July 6, 1907, p. 15.

<sup>xviii</sup> VDC April 12, 1907 p. 10.

<sup>xix</sup> BR Jan. 13, 1906, p.6

<sup>xx</sup> *Puget Sound American* [abbrev. PSA] Sept. 16, 1906)

<sup>xxi</sup> PSA Sept. 14, 1906 pp. 1; 4

<sup>xxii</sup> PSA Sept. 16, 1906 p. 16.

<sup>xxiii</sup> PSA Sept. 16, 1906 p. 16

<sup>xxiv</sup> PSA, Sept. 16, 1906 p. 2

<sup>xxv</sup> BR Aug. 28, 1906. p.2

<sup>xxvi</sup> BR Sept. 28, 1906, p. 4.

<sup>xxvii</sup> BH, Oct. 11, 1906

<sup>xxviii</sup> BH, Nov. 5, 1906

<sup>xxix</sup> Bellingham Arrest Log; Tut Asmundson, 2004 Interview, Bellingham Centennial Oral History Project, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies)

<sup>xxx</sup> BR May 21, 1907, p. 4

<sup>xxxi</sup> Wolf, Christopher. *Casting the “Hindu” in the Crucible of Nationhood*. University of Oregon, Masters thesis, 2001, pp. 22-23)

<sup>xxxii</sup> Adolphus W. Mangum Jr., letter. September 8, 1907. From Mangum Family Papers #483, folder #11, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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- xxxiii BH Sept. 5, 1907, p.4
- xxxiv BH Sept. 5, 1907, p.4
- xxxv Hyatt, Sept. 5, 1907, Bellingham Bay Improvement Company collection, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies.
- xxxvi BR Sept. 11, 1907
- xxxvii BH Sept. 26, 1907 p.1
- xxxviii BH Dec. 26, 1906 p.1
- xxxix BH April 25, 1907 p.4
- xl BH April 2, 1907 p. 4
- xli BR May 2, 1907 p.2
- xl ii BR Sept 7, 1907 p.1).
- xl iii BR Sept 8, 1907
- xl iv BR Sept. 2, 1907 p.4
- xl v Buchanan, 1908, p. 309.
- xl vi Buchanan, p. 312; Scheffauer, 1910, p. 618).
- xl vii Scheffauer, 1910, p. 616
- xl viii *Daily Appeal*, Jan. 30, 1908, p. 6
- xl ix U.S. District Court, Eastern District of Washington, Jan. 6, 1913, no. 992 Order; *The Messenger, State Normal School*, 1905).
- l Shah, p. 241.
- li BH Dec. 14, 1906
- li i BR Sept. 6, 1907, p. 3
- li ii Shah, p. 39.
- li v Hallberg, "Bellingham, Washington's Anti-Hindu Riot." *Journal of the West*, vol. 12, 1973, p. 169
- li vi Singh, S.N. "The Picturesque Immigrant from India's Coral Strand." *Outwest*, 1909, p. 45.
- li vi i BH Jan. 1, 1910, p. 7.
- li vi ii Melendy, 1977, p. 192; similar in Wynne, *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* vol. 57 n.4., Oct. 1966, p. 174.
- li vi iii BH Sept 4, 1907 p. 4
- li x BH 9/5/1907 p. 4; AR 9/4/1907 p. 2.
- li x i *Free Hindustan* v1 no1 April 2908, p.3
- li x ii BH 9/3/1907, p. 5; AR 9/4/1907 p. 2.
- li x iii BH 9/3/1907, p. 5; AR 9/4/1907 p. 2.
- li x iv BR. Sept 5, 1907, p.3
- li x v BR June 12, 1907
- li x vi BR Sept. 6, 1907 p.4
- li x vi i BH Feb 28, 1907 p.3; BH May 2, 1907 p.10
- li x vi ii BH Sept 8, 1907, 1,5. "Denunciations Hurlled From Pulpits" [(This section relies heavily on this article,]
- li x vi iii Ibid., "Local Pastor Gets Flattering Offers," *Bellingham Herald*, Aug. 31, 1907, p.12.
- li x ix "Denunciations Hurlled From Pulpits."
- li x x Ibid.
- li x xi Ibid.
- li x x ii Ibid.
- li x x iii Ibid.
- li x x iv Macartney, "Alien Invasion, pt. 4," *Bellingham Herald*, Nov. 16, 1907, p. 12.
- li x x v Ibid.
- li x x vi BR Sept. 5, 1907 p.1
- li x x vi i BH Sept. 5, 1907, p.1.
- li x x vi ii Ibid..
- li x x ix BR Sept. 10, 1907 p. 3
- li x x x NV Sept. 13, 1907
- li x x xi SR Sept. 13, 1907
- li x x x ii Wolf, pp. 25-27.
- li x x x iii *Nation*, Sept. 12, 1907, p. 220

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- <sup>lxxxiv</sup> *Nation*, Sept. 19, 1907.
- <sup>lxxxv</sup> Irwin, Will. "The Japanese and the Pacific Coast" *Colliers*, Oct. 12, 1907.
- <sup>lxxxvi</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>lxxxvii</sup> *BH* Sept. 6, 1907, p.4
- <sup>lxxxviii</sup> Dodd, Werter, "The Hindu in the Northwest." *World Today* v13 Oct. 1907, pp. 1157-1160.
- <sup>lxxxix</sup> *BR* Sept. 5, 1907 pp. 1, 3.
- <sup>xc</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>xc1</sup> *BH* Sept. 5, 1907, pp. 1-2
- <sup>xcii</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>xciii</sup> *BH* Sept. 6, 1907, p. 1
- <sup>xciv</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>xcv</sup> *BH* Sept. 21, 1907 p.8
- <sup>xcvi</sup> Bellingham Police, Souvenir Album, 1916.
- <sup>xcvii</sup> Verma, 2002
- <sup>xcviii</sup> Immigration Commission report, "Japanese and Other Immigrant Races in the Pacific Coast and Rocky Mountain States, 1911, p. 67.
- <sup>xcix</sup> Gulzar S. Johl, author's interview, Feb. 2008.
- <sup>c</sup> *BR* Sept, 6, 1907, p.1
- <sup>ci</sup> Robert Mohammed, author's interview, Feb. 2008.
- <sup>cii</sup> *EDH*, Nov. 4, 1907 p 1.
- <sup>ciii</sup> *EDH*, Nov. 5, 1907 p.5
- <sup>civ</sup> Nokes, Greg *Massacred for Gold*, 2009
- <sup>cv</sup> *BH* Sept. 2, 2007; Sept. 3, 1907.
- <sup>cvi</sup> *BH* Sept. 2, 2007.

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