



NEWS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

New Exhibition at The Reach Recognizes Abbotsford's South Asian Canadian Community

Abbotsford, BC – The history, culture, and contemporary character of the South Asian Canadian community in Abbotsford is the subject of the ambitious forthcoming exhibition organized by The Reach Gallery Museum. *Des Pardes* opens on Saturday, October 14 from 12-3pm with a family friendly event featuring hands on activities and entertainment.

The exhibition title is borrowed from the Hindi/Punjabi phrase which can translate to “home and abroad” or “Motherland/Other Land” which is commonly used to describe the South Asian Canadian experience, where families have deep ties in Canada and abroad. The project showcases the unique and major contributions of the ethnically, culturally, and religiously diverse South Asian diaspora to the social, economic, and cultural fabric of Abbotsford and beyond.

Des Pardes is one of the most significant projects ever presented by The Reach and includes contributions from hundreds of participants and collaborators from the community. Many contributors are featured in interviews on flat screen displays, and several families loaned heirlooms and other artifacts that are on view. The large-scale, multi-sensory experience uses historical photographs, oral histories, contemporary interviews, historical objects, and newly commissioned works of art to illustrate six themes: Migration, Faith, Family, Business & Livelihoods, Oppression & Opposition, and Contemporary Culture.

At the heart of the project has been a major initiative to digitize and make accessible to the wider public a vast array of South Asian heritage resources, generously funded by a Digital Access to Heritage grant from Canadian Heritage, with support from the Irving K. Barber Learning Centre's British Columbia History Digitization Program at the University of British Columbia, and the South Asian Studies Institute at the University of the Fraser Valley. The exhibition makes visible a vast array of personal histories, images, and documents that represent three years of community-based research and many more of collecting.

Amongst the newly digitized materials is the *Punjabi Patrika* archive. This significant local newspaper is one of only two bi-lingual newspapers in Canada and offers a unique insight into the history of Abbotsford and the surrounding region. The Reach has digitized the entire hardcopy archive spanning from October 1996 to 2014, inclusive. Another interactive kiosk features the Baltej Dhillon Archive which documents the challenges faced by Dhillon in his quest to secure the right to wear the dastār or Sikh turban with his RCMP uniform.

“This project is important to our community, and to the broader historical narrative of the region,” says Laura Schneider, Executive Director of The Reach. “The Reach has featured exhibitions about various aspects of South Asian-Canadian history in the past, but the scope of community involvement that was undertaken to develop this project better represents the diversity of experience that exists in our community and makes it truly special.”

Des Pardes will be on view from October 14, 2023, through May 18, 2024. For the full schedule of public and educational programs that will accompany the exhibition, please visit www.thereach.ca. For exclusive behind-the-scenes content related to the project, follow @despardes.exhibition on Instagram and Tik Tok.

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Baltej Singh Dhillon in 1991. Dhillon was instrumental in removing the ban on beards and turbans in the RCMP. Photo courtesy of the Baltej Dhillon Archive.



Sunder Singh Thandi ("Joe"), left, and Jassa Singh on the right standing in front of a flatdeck truck. Taken on Main Street, Vancouver, when Sunder purchased a new threshing machine, 1939. Photo courtesy of The Reach Archives.