

Remembering the Komagata Maru episode ... a century later

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It is our past that informs us about the present that shapes our future. No single event in Canadian history better characterizes or symbolizes the Indo-Canadian experience of exclusion than the *Komagata Maru* Incident of 1914. It is a reminder to Canadians that we need to commit to an open society in which mutual respect and understanding are honoured, differences are respected, and traditions are cherished.

In 1989, to commemorate the 75th Anniversary of the *Komagata Maru* Incident, I had the pleasure of coordinating a number of events on behalf of Khalsa Diwan Society at 8000 Ross Street, Vancouver. These events included a photo exhibition, food bank drive, unveiling of plaques at the Gurdwara and Portal Park at 1099 W Hastings Street in Vancouver. All levels of Government released proclamations to acknowledge and commemorate the Incident. Since then, there have been many events held annually by different organizations to remember the Incident.

The 1914 incident of the *Komagata Maru* (*Guru Nanak Jahaz*) ship is one of the most tragic and shameful events in Canadian history. Bhai Gurdit Singh had chartered a Japanese freighter (*Komagata Maru*) to fulfill the Canadian Government requirements of a "continuous voyage" and "\$200 per head". On May 23, 1914 the ship arrived in Vancouver. Obsessed with racial bigotry, determined to keep Canada all white, the government flouted every norm of social justice and kept the ship-load of 376 Indian immigrants (12 Hindus, 24 Muslims and 340 Sikhs) from landing. These immigrants, though they were British subjects, they were denied entry into Canada. For two full months the ship stood in the Burrard Inlet, its passengers suffering from hunger, thirst and humiliation. On the morning of July 23, *Komagata Maru* with 353 passengers

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