

**Academic Publications, First & second era**

**Sikh Settlement in the lower Mainland of B.C.  
(1904-1964)**

**“Komagata Maru Crisis”**



Although this was the last effort that the Canadian government made to remove the Sikhs from Canada, the situation did not remain quiet for long. The Sikhs were still determined that their wives and families be allowed to immigrate. In 1913, the "continuous journey" law was declared ultra vires by a Vancouver magistrate. Because of a technicality in the wording of the law, forty Sikhs were allowed to enter Canada. Although this technicality was soon rectified by the government, the Sikh leaders saw this as a signal to bring over more immigrants. This decision resulted in one of the most dramatic episodes in Sikh history in Vancouver.

Three hundred seventy-six Sikhs from India, Singapore and Hong Kong chartered a ship, the Komegata Maru, which arrived here in April, 1914. For three months the ship sat in Vancouver harbor while a battle was waged in the court to permit entry of the passengers. At one point, the captain of the Komegata Maru decided to set sail for Japan. A riot ensued and two hundred police were called on board to quell it. When attempting to board the ship, they were repulsed by a barrage of debris. Finally, the courts ruled against letting the Sikhs into Canada. Again, a riot broke out on board the ship; this time the Canadian navy vessel "Rainbow" was called in to escort the ship to the straits.



Although the Komogata Maru at last departed from Vancouver, the trouble did not end there. Three local Sikhs had been informers for the Department of Immigration while the Sikhs were fighting for entry of the ship's passengers. As a result, the Sikh community was enraged. Two of the informers were murdered in Vancouver by fellow Sikhs. The third informer afraid for his life, shot his way out of the Sikh temple, killing a Sikh as well as wounding the priest. This informer was found murdered later on in India. Finally, a Sikh murdered the immigration official who had been the confidant of the informers. This Sikh was sentenced to death by a Vancouver court and executed. These deaths widened even further the breach between the Sikhs and whites in Vancouver. The Sikhs claimed that the whites had caused their misery, while the whites discarded the Sikhs as a blood-thirsty lot.

In this chapter, we have seen that the majority of the Sikhs had assimilated economically into Canadian society. However, it must be stressed that they continued to live apart from Canadians, culturally speaking. Canadian treatment of the Sikhs had discouraged the latter from accepting Canadian customs. Instead the Sikhs remained close to the one thing that had always kept them alive as a minority, their religion. With their religion, they kept their traditional dress and customs, preserving their way of life and seldom coming in contact with the

white society except for economic reasons. The majority of Sikhs in Vancouver remained working in the lumber mills as they had always done.

After 1915, there was little change in the Vancouver Sikh community until 1947. For this reason, attention will now be focussed mainly on the Fraser Valley where changes in Sikh activity took place.