



# Not Just Immigrants

South Asian Canadian Legacy Project aims at preserving the community's heritage.

Written by Aadya Arora – Posted June 15, 2022

# Saffron Threads

EXPLORING SOUTH ASIAN CANADIAN  
HISTORY, CULTURE, AND HERITAGE



Saffron Threads is a set of educational resources for K-12 students developed in collaboration with Open School BC.

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Since the beginning of the twentieth century when South Asians first arrived in British Columbia, their population has grown to over three hundred thousand. However, until recently, there was not much done to preserve the community's history.

South Asian Canadian Legacy Project (SACLP) seeks to fill the gap with a set of six independent projects that each has a different goal and audience. The six projects include a collection of educational resources, a South-Asian history book, a travelling museum, a labour history exhibit, a digital archive, and a guidebook tour of historic sites in British Columbia. SACLP is a build-up from the Punjabi Canadian Legacy project that started ten years ago and was shortlisted for the 2020 Governor General's History Award for Excellence in Community Programming.

The project is based in the South Asian Studies Institute, which was established in 2006 at the University of the Fraser Valley in B.C. SACLP started in 2020 after waiting for two years to receive government funding.

SACLP received funding of \$1.14 million dollars in March 2020 from the Province of British Columbia and from the Abbotsford Community Foundation. The project partners with the Royal BC Museum, the BC Labour Heritage Centre and Open School BC.



**Jagmeet Singh, leader of the NDP Party, spoke at the SACLP launch event.**





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The first project of the six, called Saffron Threads, is a set of educational resources about South Asian history, art, and culture for K-12 students, developed using the B.C. curriculum and in collaboration with Open School BC . The project was launched in April 2022 and continues to grow as more resources are added.

The book, *A Social History of South Asians in British Columbia*, is the first of its kind, as it includes histories not only of Indians, the largest South-Asian community in Canada, but also of other groups such as Fijians, Sri Lankans, Afghans, Bhutanese, Bangladeshis and Pakistanis.



Dr. Satwinder Kaur Bains (centre) is the director of the South Asian Studies Institute, photographed here with Dr. Balbir Gurm (left) and Dr. Kanwal Neel (right).

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“It’s well-referenced; people could use it in the classroom, but it’s really for people to have it [on] their coffee table and read and look at photographs. And we spent a lot of time creating a very beautiful, emotional book for people,” said Satwinder Kaur Bains, director of the South Asian Studies Institute.

The *Haq and History* travelling exhibit and outreach kit by SACLP aims to tour to sixteen sites across B.C. At each of the sixteen stops, local community members will be asked to build on to the exhibition by adding their own histories.



*Haq and History* travelling exhibit can be viewed at the Surrey Centre Library until June 30, 2022.

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Another project called Union Zindabad! includes an eBook, an exhibit and an archive of images, all of which document the role of South Asians in the labour movement. There is a separate digital archive that documents family histories. It started with ten families donating their archival photographs, home videos and records. Bains said that it was not difficult to find people who were willing to share their family histories, but rather the difficulty lay in making people believe that their histories were important.



Union Zindabad!, an eBook that archives South-Asian labour history, can be accessed online for free.

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“They haven’t given history the kind of analysis that maybe other settler communities give, or heritage has not seemed important to them because they’re in survival mode. It’s something that’s a luxury to study yourself,” Bains added.



The last project is a guidebook to help visitors tour fifteen Canadian-South-Asian historic sites in B.C.



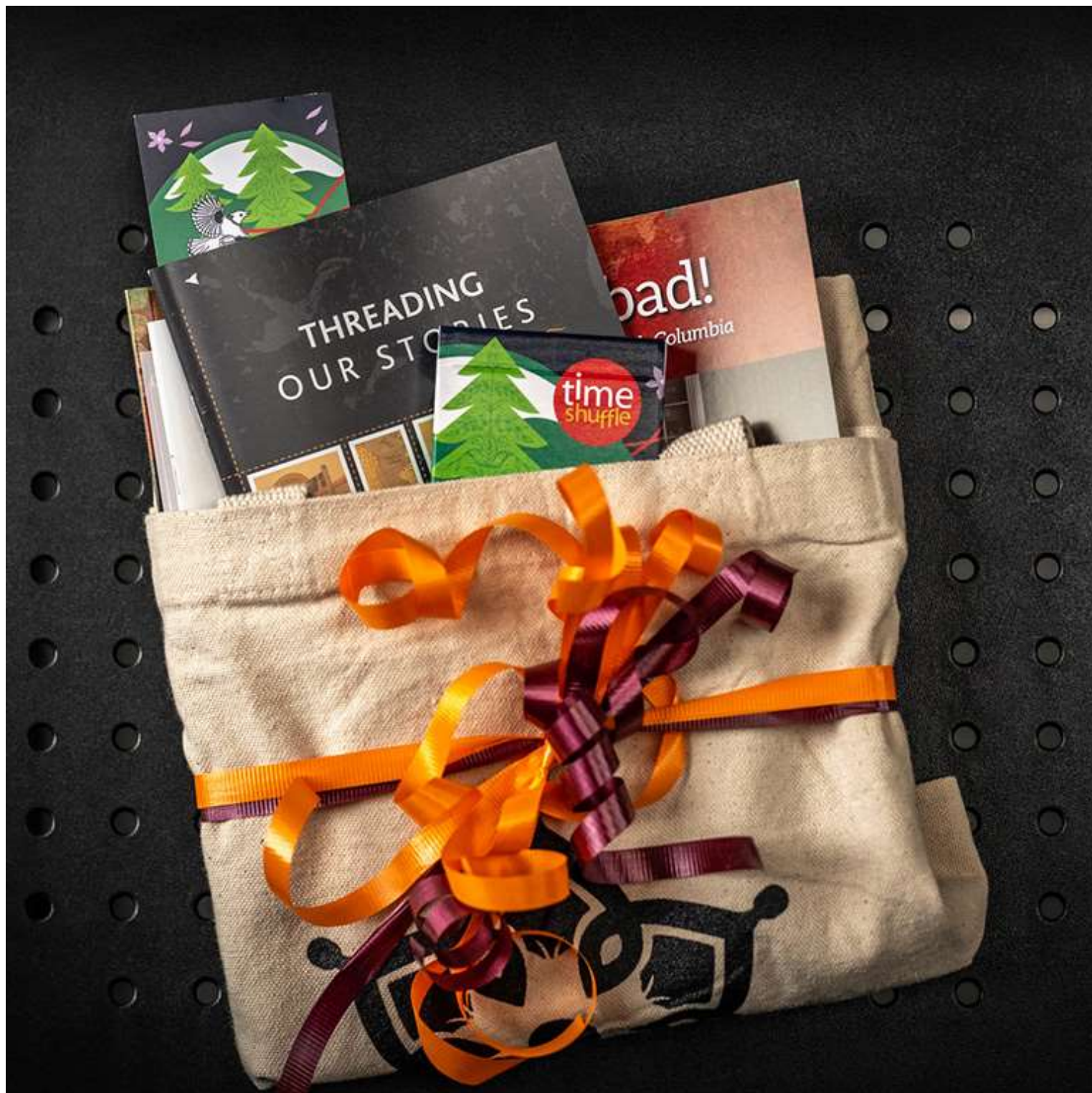
SACLP launched in May 2022 after two years of work by the South Asian Studies Institute.

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“We’re not just immigrants,” said Bains, when asked about what she hopes people will take from SACLP “but we also build this nation. We’re also part of the machinery of this country, and our heritage has room and has space within the Canadian record. We should all strive to ensure that

our kids and all our generations know their history.”

To learn more about the project, visit [ThreadingOurStories.ca](http://ThreadingOurStories.ca) .



The books include in-depth research on different themes that is made available to the readers in lucid language and prose.

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