

South Asian Reflections

LAKE COUNTRY STORIES



Table of Contents

01

EARLY ARRIVALS

02

LAKHA SINGH

04

DB - A GOOD LIFE

07

TAS - FINDING HOME IN LAKE
COUNTRY

08

PARMJIT- FLYING SOLO

Early Arrivals

South Asian Residents in
Lake Country

1911 Canada Census

According to the 1911 census, the first South Asian in Lake Country was Binam, who came in 1906 followed by Rowan Singh, Newton Singh, and Blaine Singh in 1907. Luka Singh came in 1908. Someone known only as Singh came in 1909. Jambash followed in 1911. The census likely captured only a few of the immigrants who came before World War One. Many went unreported.

1921 Canada Census

According to the 1921 Canada census report, A. Singh, Banta Singh and Brown Singh lived in the Lake Country area. None of them set up roots in the Central Okanagan. What happened to them and where those individuals moved to is still not known. It is difficult to determine the number of transient workers who came and went.

The earliest known settlers of South Asian heritage in Lake Country who are still here today are Gurjit Singh Pabla and Biantha Pabla who arrived in 1977.

Lakha Singh

Lakha Singh (1879–1952) was a prominent farmer and entrepreneur in Ellison, British Columbia, and one of the wealthiest individuals in the Okanagan Valley during his time.

He was known for his large-scale agricultural operations, including a substantial stock farm, extensive vegetable cultivation, and interests in the lumber industry through a local sawmill.

Singh's land holdings were vast, totaling approximately 4,750 acres, and included:

- Home Farm in Ellison – 251 acres
- “North 40” – 40 acres
- Oyama Range – 3,027 acres
- Scotty Creek Range – 1,418 acres
- Residence below Scotty Creek Range – 14 acres

Born in India to Jawar Singh and Jas Kaur, Lakha Singh immigrated to Canada in December 1907 aboard the ship Moana. By 1914, he had settled in the Scotty Creek–Ellison area, where he would remain for the rest of his life.

Lakha Singh had two families. In Canada, his common-law spouse was Marie Louise McInnis, a woman of Syilx Okanagan heritage and a member of the Westbank First Nation. Together, they had two sons: Gordon and George. He also had a wife, Dhan Kaur, in Punjab, India.



Lakha Singh, Ellison, BC. Courtesy Mohini Singh.

SOUTH ASIAN REFLECTIONS

A respected figure in both local and South Asian communities, Singh hosted Dr. Durai Pal Pandia on New Year's Eve in 1947 at his Rutland home. Dr. Pandia (1906–1999), an Oxford-educated lawyer and former secretary to Mahatma Gandhi, was a key advocate for South Asian Canadians, working to secure voting rights and improve immigration policies.

Lakha Singh passed away in 1952, and his traditional cremation ceremony at Scotty Creek was attended by over 800 people. His ashes were returned to India to be scattered in his homeland.

Tragically, his son Gordon died in 1947, age 19, at Tranquille, the King Edward VII tuberculosis sanatorium located near Kamloops Lake.



Dr. D.B. Panda with
Kelowna's Sikh
Community,
Rutland, 1939.
*From Becoming
Canadians, Pioneer
Sikhs in their Own
Words*

DB - A Good Life

DB was born in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh in the early 40s. After the partition of British India into India and Pakistan in 1947 DB's family moved to the Pakistani province of Balochistan when DB was still a small child where he enjoyed a comfortable childhood.

In the mid 60s DB applied for a job with a drilling company in Canada. He received a letter back stating that if he still wished to move to Canada (at his own expense) they would employ him.

For four years, DB worked all over BC, including Vancouver Island, as well as in the Yukon.

DB's passion was cricket, and he had dreams of being a test player, but his work did not allow him opportunities to practice or play. After four years DB took a job in a sawmill which would allow him every weekend off to play cricket. It was while working in the sawmill that DB met his soulmate in Stanley Park Zoo and married the following year. DB's wife would accompany him to cricket matches and even got involved with game scoring. Within a few years of getting married the couple started to raise a family and DB decided that he would prefer to spend his free time with his wife and children rather than playing cricket.

DB continued to work for the same company for 33 years and during that time he and his wife bought their first house in Vancouver for \$20,000!

The family moved from Vancouver to Maple Ridge and then to Chilliwack where the family were able to enjoy horses and pets on their property before DB and his wife settled in Lake Country in 2014.



Now happily retired DB and his wife enjoy spending time with their children and grandchildren as well as travelling all over Canada with their travel trailer. DB says that being able to travel freely all over the country with the opportunity to meet so many interesting people is one of the things he loves most about living in Canada as well as the freedom afforded to Canadians that many people elsewhere in the world are not at liberty to enjoy.

Throughout their travels the couple have enjoyed experiencing the vast multiculturalism that exists in Canada with people of different nationalities, cultures and religions living peacefully and free.

DB's experience in Canada hasn't been entirely positive; in the 70s he experienced racism in the workplace, a trend that thankfully is not acceptable today.

DB has not been back to India or Pakistan since he left for work in the 60s. He was the first of his family to leave Pakistan but was able to sponsor his siblings and parents to live in Canada and reunite his family. This process was much easier back then than it is today.

Although he no longer has family back in Pakistan or India, he says he would like to go back and visit his place of birth. DB said the part of Pakistan he grew up in was beautiful at the time but its proximity to the border of Afghanistan means that today it is a dangerous area which has been heavily damaged by war.

When asked what he thinks his life would be like if he never left Pakistan, DB's answer was 'unpleasant', mainly due to living in a highly volatile part of the world close to Taliban-controlled areas.

One thing DB likes people to know about his life is that he's grateful to have a good life here in Canada.

DB's airline ticket. Quetta, Pakistan to Vancouver, Canada

Tas - Finding Home

Tas was born and raised in a farming family in Pakistan in the 1970s. In the early 1990s Tas's brother moved to Canada and the year after he arrived, he applied to have his family join him. It took five years for Tas to receive an interview with the Canadian Immigration department, but he and his family were approved, and the following year Tas and his parents moved to Canada.

Tas and his family settled in Vernon with Tas travelling to Lake Country every day where he worked full time.

Before Tas moved to Canada he met his future wife and in early 2003 he returned to Pakistan to get married before returning to Canada. The following year the couple's first child was born and in early 2005, when their baby was only four months old, Tas's wife came to Canada with their child. By the time Tas got married he had received Canadian citizenship, so his child was automatically a Canadian citizen.

Tas and his wife had a second child who was born in Canada in 2012.

In 2009 Tas and his family moved to Lake Country, partially so that Tas could be closer to work, and because of Lake Country's bigger farming community.

It was here that he set up an orchard and farm. Tas said he's seen Lake Country grow considerably bigger and busier in the time he's been working and living here.

After 10 years of working full time for a company in Lake Country, Tas cut his time down to the winter months only when there was little to no work to do in the orchard or on the farm. Tas still has extended family back in Pakistan and does go back to visit - he last went back in 2017. His family, including his parents and himself, still own farmland in Pakistan.

With his family settled here, and his appreciation of Canada's equal opportunities, good environment and safety, Tas says he will not move back to Pakistan, and given his life all over again, he would still choose to move to Canada.

When asked what he thinks he would be doing if he hadn't moved to Canada, he says he would most likely be farming or possibly working with his wife's parents in their business in one of the major cities in Pakistan.

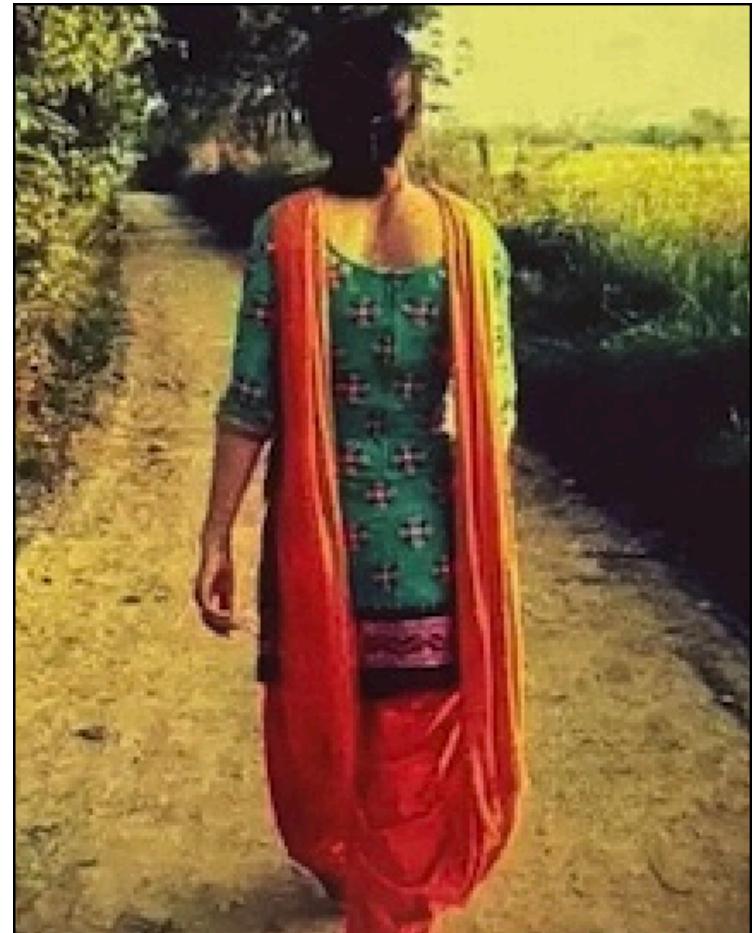
Parmjit - Flying Solo

Parmjit was born in the Punjab region of India. Despite having no family or job in Canada, Parmjit made the decision to travel to Canada in search of better life opportunities. Aged just 18, Parmjit made the brave step and travelled to Winnipeg, Manitoba on her own. Parmjit made contact with a man who owned a clothing manufacturing company. Despite having no tailoring experience, Parmjit spent two months learning everything she needed to know before being employed at the factory.

Every day, even in the depths of winter, Parmjit travelled by bus to the factory to work long days for minimum wage.

A year and a half after arriving in Canada, Parmjit travelled back to India to get married. Instead of returning to Winnipeg, Parmjit and her husband instead moved to Abbotsford, BC where they lived with her husband's brother and his family who were already settled there. Upon their return to Canada, they decided to start a family and had two children.

Two years later Parmjit and her family moved to Osoyoos to farm their own land. Due to issues with her husband's health Parmjit often worked 18-hour days, and 7 days a week to support her husband and children.



Parmjit on the family farm.

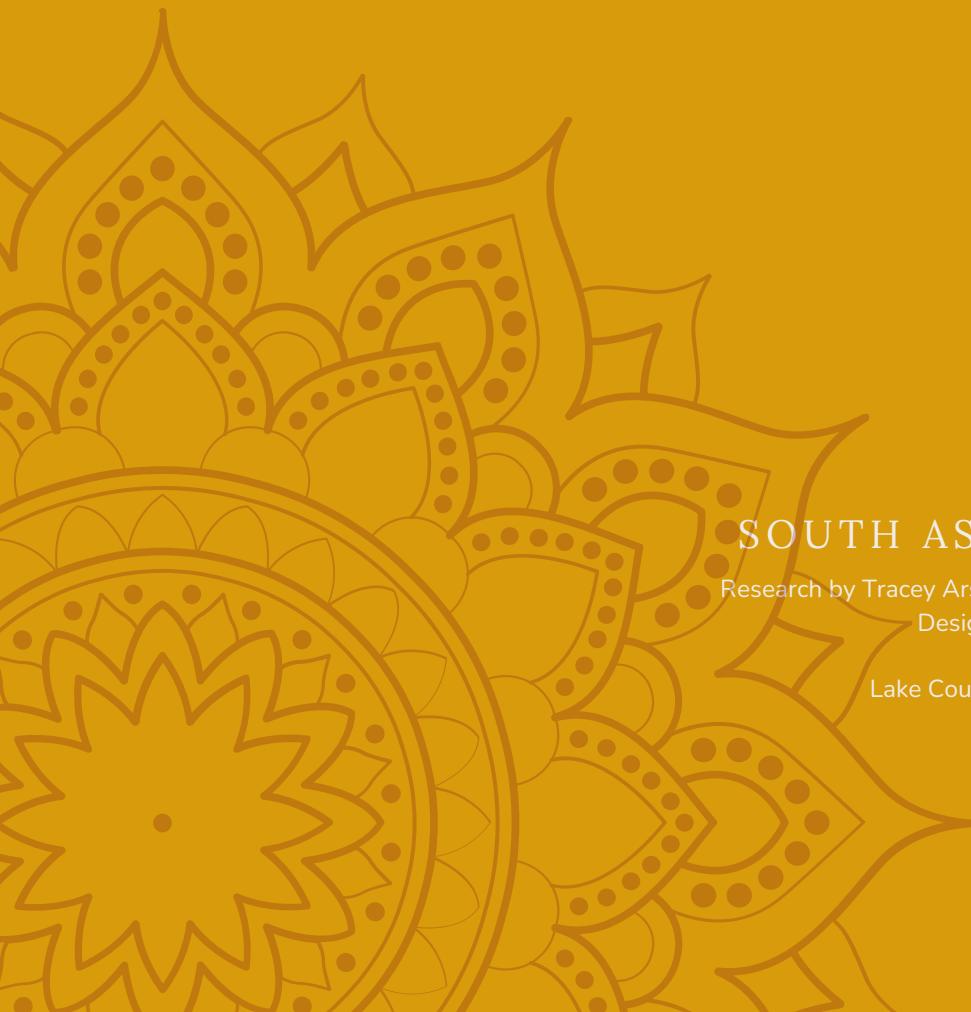
SOUTH ASIAN REFLECTIONS

After 16 years in Osoyoos, Parmjit and her family moved to Lake Country where they run a small fruit and vegetable farm and farm store.

Despite many years of hard work and financial struggles to support her family, Parmjit says she is settled and happy. Her hard work has paid off, and she says that she no longer feels the pressure she was under when previously trying to make ends meet and lives a comfortable lifestyle.

Although Parmjit's parents are still living in India, she has found it difficult to return to visit with having school-aged children and a demanding business to run, so she hasn't been back for many years. Parmjit's brother also left India and is now living and working in the Philippines, so it has been a long time since she has seen him, too. With her children being born and raised in Canada she says that this is where she will stay and has no plans to return to India to live.

Despite the struggles she has faced over the years, Parmjit says she has no regrets about moving to Canada.



SOUTH ASIAN REFLECTIONS

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