



COUNCIL OF AGENCIES SERVING SOUTH ASIANS (CASSA)

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Brown Canada Project: Documenting and Creating South Asian Histories in Canada

Document on Information and Consent

The Brown Canada Project is a community-led project which seeks to document, explore and create South Asian histories in Canada. Organized by Council of Agencies Serving South Asians (CASSA) and funded by Citizenship and Immigration Canada, this project has several goals, including: the creation of a comprehensive and participatory website on South Asian histories, stories and realities, with contributions from diverse South Asian communities and focusing in part on memorializing the historical Komagata Maru incident; creation of a dvd, resource booklets and a youth-led play on the Komagata Maru; and hosting several creative writing and digital storytelling workshops relevant to South Asians of differing ethnicities, ages, genders, sexualities and class backgrounds.

A group of interested and excited volunteers came together three times during the first phase of the project to brainstorm and share why they thought this project was important. They also discussed what kind of process and content related to documenting South Asian history would be meaningful to themselves, their family, friends, their own communities or a broader South Asian or racialized community. Particularly, the group decided to focus on collecting individual stories as a way of gathering and memorializing history. The rest of this document compiles the questions and themes explored by the group, and clarifies what potential participants are consenting to, should they choose to share their stories or be a part of the project.

Why This Project, and Why Now?

The group spoke of a strong need for a project that documents histories that we as South Asians are a part of, or impacted by, because many of us haven't had adequate access to learning our histories due to experiences of racism, classism, sexism, homophobia, isolation and oppression. Many expressed fears of having important undocumented histories being erased and lost forever. Others said that the loss of collective memory and intergenerational conversations would be catastrophic. Many of us were brought to the project with the promise of creating a space to facilitate consciousness raising about histories that are meaningful to us, to challenge current realities of isolation and divisiveness and to validate and archive our experiences.

What Kinds of South Asian Histories and Perspectives Are Important?

The group emphasized continually that it is important for us to look at historical instances, such as the Komagata Maru, not as an isolated incident, but to study the legacies and themes that emerged from it: what are the similarities between this history and other events during that time, during the whole 20th century, and now? The group was also often drawn to conversations around exclusion, isolation, divisions, especially as how they relate to what we've called, 'the racialization of space': how are South Asians excluded from certain spaces as a function of white supremacy – whether that is on a larger historical level such as passengers aboard the Komagata Maru not allowed entry into Canada, or whether it boils down to personal every-day stories like living outside the subway line and being

excluded from South Asian specific events happening downtown. Other themes were mentioned as important to explore: media and state racism, histories of South Asian women and LGBTQ communities, labour/union history and organizing, and histories of South Asian settlement as part of a process of colonialism on Indigenous land.

How Do We Want to Collect and Document These Histories and Why

The group found the idea of gathering/recording personal and oral narratives significant, not only to look at alongside larger historical events, but also to honour the diversity and complexity of our experiences. The group spoke of the power of listening and telling every-day stories, to give ourselves space to speak for ourselves rather than having someone else speak for us. The group also indicated that this allows us to provide a truthful narrative of history, to bridge gaps between different communities and ages and promote understanding and awareness between multiple individuals and groups. With discretion and consent of interviewer, interviewee and coordinators of Brown Canada project, the collected stories have the opportunity to be displayed on website, dvd, resource booklets, or explored during creative writing and digital storytelling workshops, stage performances or community dialogue. Engaging with this type of documentation also gives participants opportunities to build skills in research, writing, interviewing, media, and art.

What's Next? What Are the Possibilities?

For many of us who choose to participate in the Brown Canada Project, it is a beginning, or entry point, into something more. Bringing together multiple and diverse conversations provides the opportunity for coalition and solidarity building across individual and group differences, to build networks and friendships through dialogue and support, for bridging gaps between generations and sharing knowledge. In this way, sharing collective memory serves as a tool for community development, and giving focus and value to the richness of our histories gives us important lessons on how to make change for the better today.

For more information on the Brown Canada Project contact Anita Khanna at (416) 932 1369 x13 and at anita@cassa.on.ca

Consent to Participate in the Brown Canada Project

I understand the purpose of the Brown Canada Project and consent to sharing my story to be recording in written, audio, or visual format. I understand that my contribution will be used to document, create and share South Asian histories in Canada, in multi-media, online or print mediums. I agree that my contribution may be used in archival and/or promotional material for outreach and educational purposes for the Brown Canada Project. I agree that my contribution may be edited and/or otherwise altered by CASSA with my permission.

Name of Interviewee: _____

Date: _____

Signature: _____

Name of Interviewer: _____

Date: _____

Signature: _____