

The Sikh Foundation of Canada

25th Anniversary: 1999 – 2024

In this, the 25th year of the Sikh Foundation, it may be useful to mark the milestone with an account of the founding of the organization, its accomplishments and its future potential.

The genesis of the Foundation was an initiative spearheaded by Suresh Bhalla in 1999, to stage the V&A's London exhibition – "*The Arts of the Sikh Kingdoms*" – at the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto. Supported by funds raised by the Foundation, the exhibition was staged at the ROM, May-August 2000. Described as among the most successful in the ROM's history, the exhibition was also unique in that it was augmented by works of art from private collections in Canada, and subsequently published in ROM's supplemental catalogue: "*The Arts of the Sikh Kingdoms – the Canadian Collections*".

In the years that followed, the Foundation's Board was refreshed, and its scope enlarged to encompass Sikh art and culture – a mandate subsequently formalized in revised By-Laws.

A lecture series was initiated with eminent scholars from UK, France, India and Singapore. These were followed by a series of exhibitions, staged by the Foundation itself, on aspects of Sikh art and history. An annual Gala, a flagship event of the Foundation, served as a forum for the recognition of remarkable individuals, Sikhs and non-Sikhs alike, for their achievements and contributions to society.

A strategic initiative of far-reaching significance was a scholarship program established in partnership with Scotiabank. Another, a Sikh studies pilot at the University of Toronto, opened a door to future possibilities yet to be explored.

Of the several exhibitions, "*The Komagata Maru*", re-staged at PAMA as part of Canada's 150th Centenary, was cited in Parliament and showcased at the Stratford Theatre Festival. "*Maharaja Ranjit Singh & the Court of Lahore*", was followed by on-site lectures at Khalsa College and at the Art Gallery, Amritsar. "*Phulkaris*" drew the attention of the Smithsonian, Washington. Amardeep Singh's vast project, "*Lost Heritage – the Sikh Legacy in Pakistan*" was recognized with a special edition of the title publication, and its author honoured by the Foundation. The bi-lingual "*Coins of the Sikhs*" continues to attract attention in various institutions and is being republished in France.

Other initiatives undertaken by the Foundation included a Sikh film festival and the sponsorship of humanitarian programs, feminist seminars and art projects noted in the attached **SFC Initiatives** file (compiled to enable charitable status for the Foundation).

After a quarter of a century, the Foundation enters a new phase with the invigorating prospect of a permanent gallery of Sikh art at the ROM; and the opportunity to establish itself as an enduring Sikh institution.