

A South Asian Presence: A Study into NACOI and its influence in shaping federal policy
relating to Immigration and Multiculturalism from 1976 to 1993

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Abstract:

This thesis studies the history of the National Association of Canadians of Origins in India (NACOI) and its role in helping to shape and impact federal policy relating to immigration reform and multicultural policy in Canada. Ethnic political associations in Canada have a long and extensive history of impacting federal policy. However, the role of NACOI has been underreported when looking into the history of South Asian political advocacy in Canada. The institutionalization of multicultural policy created a framework for ethnic associations to discuss issues that mattered to them. NACOI's establishment in 1976, five years after multiculturalism became government policy, allowed it to take the helm of these new discussions. Furthermore, NACOI is significant because it represents one of the first attempts to create an organization that aimed to federate all South Asian groups under one umbrella with a solely political goal. This thesis aims to understand whether NACOI was successful in its endeavours to impact federal policy as well as which struggles led to the decline of the organization. Alongside these questions, this thesis also seeks to explore whether NACOI aided in the integration of East Indians in Canada by the mid-1970s to the early 1990s through their efforts as a political advocacy group. Using NACOI's quarterly publications, published material produced by the group, internal reports, and interviews with some of the founding members of the organization, this thesis also attempts to provide a micro-history of the organization by detailing its formation, growth and eventual dissolution by the early 1990s.

Key words: Canadian immigration, Multiculturalism, NACOI, East-Indian, Immigration reform, South Asian, ethnic associations, federal policy

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Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
HISTORICAL CONTEXT	1
CHANGES FROM 1950 TO 1967	6
THE ADVANT OF MULTICULTURAL POLICY AND ITS IMPACT ON SOUTH ASIAN NETWORKS ..9	
A BRIEF DISCUSSION OF THE TERM SOUTH ASIAN AND ITS IMPORTANCE	16
SIKHS AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SIKH COMMUNITY IN CANADA	18
RESEARCH QUESTIONS	19
HISTORIOGRAPHY	21
PRIMARY SOURCES	30
ORGANIZATION	32
CHAPTER 1: THE FORMATIVE YEARS 1976 TO 1980	35
MANDATE + GOALS	37
STRUCTURE	40
MAIN ISSUES TACKLED	45
PLANS FOR GROWTH AND CONCERNS FOR NACOI	51
CONCLUSIONS	54
CHAPTER 2: OBJECTIVES HAMPERED BY INTERNAL STRUGGLES 1980-1986	57
SUCCESSES MADE FOR THE EAST INDIAN COMMUNITY	57
POLITICAL TENSIONS AND INTERNAL STRUGGLE	70
FUNDING	71
POOR SOLIDARITY	74
INTERSECTIONALITY	77
CONCLUSIONS	81
CHAPTER 3: BREAKDOWN AND DEMISE FROM 1985-1993	83
THE PROLIFERATION OF ETHNIC ASSOCIATIONS: NO ONE TRUE REPRESENTATIVE	83
ORGANIZATIONAL DISSOLUTION	90
POLITICAL ADVOCACY AFTER 1985	92
ENVIRONMENT POST-NACOI	95
NACOI'S LEGACY: IS THERE STILL A NEED?	100
FINAL REMARKS	101

<i>CONCLUSION</i>	103
<i>APPENDIX A</i>	110
<i>APPENDIX B</i>	111
<i>APPENDIX C</i>	112
<i>APPENDIX D</i>	113
<i>APPENDIX E</i>	114
<i>BIBLIOGRAPHY</i>	116

INTRODUCTION

A recurring question for Canada since its status as a dominion in 1867 has been to find new methods to balance the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the nation since Confederation, the federal government has recognized the necessity of immigrants to help settle the land and expand markets. Therefore, the state has always been aware of the many ethnic and linguistic groups that have made up the country. However, this focus on celebrating ethnic diversity is a relatively new concept which was the result of changes in Canada's values and identity. It was only with debates both by the government and public that a policy of multiculturalism was formally adopted by the Canadian state in 1971 in hope of creating a "just society."¹ Making multiculturalism and bilingualism official government policy as well as core tenets of Canadian identity helped change societal attitudes towards non-European immigrants. Examining the period right after the implementation of multicultural policy in 1971 provides insight as to how the government responded to the needs of various ethnic communities.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

East Indians have been present in Canada since before the turn of the 20th century. While the exact date is not entirely certain, the first record of East Indians arriving in Canada was between 1896 and 1899. Lal (1976) and Chandrasekhar (1986) cite the cause of migration to North America as primarily due to push and pull factors such as the depressed economic conditions in India, news about agricultural opportunities in Canada and news from Indian soldiers in the British military who had travelled to Canada years prior.² As the 20th century

¹ Pierre Elliott Trudeau, Ron Graham (Ed), *The Essential Trudeau*. Toronto: M&S, 1998, 16-20; The term was first used by Trudeau in 1968 election was a phrase that captured his view that a government in all its policies must aim to create a society that sought equality for all members in its community.

² Brij Lal, "East Indians in British Columbia 1904-1914 : An Historical Study in Growth and Integration" (University of British Columbia, 1976), S Chandrasekhar, *From India to Canada : A Brief History of Immigration :*

progressed, this community began to grow and flourish primarily in British Columbia, however early settlement was not easy. Although the numbers of this group were small, the presence of Asiatic groups (such as East Indians), in British Columbia attracted a considerable amount of negative attention from the premier of British Columbia and organized labour groups in the area. The Premier of British Columbia, Sir Richard MacBride, stated that, “to admit Orientals in large numbers would mean in the end the extinction of the white peoples and we have always in mind the necessity of keeping this a white man’s country.”³ A major concern of British Columbians was that they could not adapt to Canadian life and their general impoverishment made them unsuitable candidates for immigration into Canada and thus they should be barred from entry. To that effect, in 1908 an amendment was added to the *1906 Immigration Act* entitled the “continuous journey regulation” in order to accomplish this goal of barring entry. This regulation prohibited the landing of any immigrant that did not come to Canada by continuous journey from the country of which they were natives or citizens.⁴ As a result of this legislation and others that were implemented subsequently, Indian immigration to Canada declined after 1914 until the introduction of the Points Scheme in 1967 which triggered a new influx of immigrants from Asia. Regarding South Asian immigration, this period from 1912 to 1947 is often dubbed by some scholars as the “quiet years” for the simple fact that there was both a limited growth in the East Indian population in Canada, and little literature on the group produced during this period.

When looking to the demographic makeup of this community prior to the 1950s, the diaspora was fairly homogenous. A gender imbalance heavily affected the development of the

Problems of Discrimination, Admission and Assimilation \ (California: Population Review, 1986), https://uottawa-primo.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/primo_library/libweb/action/dlDisplay.do?vid=UOTTAWA&afterPDS=true&docId=UOTTAWA_IIIb1643998.

³ Brij Lal, “East Indians in British Columbia 1904-1914: An Historical Study in Growth and Integration” (University of British Columbia, 1976), 152.

⁴ Library and Archives Canada. Statutes of Canada. *An Act to Amend the Immigration Act, 1908*. Ottawa: SC 7-8 Edward VII, Chapter 33

East Indian family prior to World War II, as many of the early immigrants who came were primarily single males. With various restrictions in place concerning the immigration of spouses and children for East Indians, the early communities were predominantly male and young, with most immigrants being under the age of thirty.⁵ Even as the government approved some resolutions in the 1920s to allow East Indians to bring spouses and children to Canada, few things changed. Much of this can be attributed to the antagonistic attitude from the government and the opinions held by early East Indians that residence in Canada was not a permanent endeavour.⁶ Early motives for migration often included finding better employment than what had existed in India. Given the demographic composition of this group, the closest resemblance to a family-like structure in Canada were in communal, multi-male households. Groups, from four to twelve individuals, lived together in close quarters and helped to run the household by performing typically female tasks like cooking, household chores, and shopping. This was an economical decision since several of the men could pool resources together for rent, fuel, and food but this arrangement also provided support structures and companionship that many lacked in this new land. As highlighted by this one individual, living together was crucial to surviving in Canada:

Looking back, it's amazing how little we know about household life. But we learned quickly enough! Some men have previously lived in army or worker barracks, and so helped set the pattern. I think we would have wound up living about the same without them. After all, there were no wives, no families. No one thought of living alone.⁷

⁵ Ghosh, R. 1983 "Sarees and the Maple Leaf: Indian Women in Canada." Pp. 90-99 in G. Kurian and R.P. Srivastava (eds.), *Overseas Indians: A Study in Adaptation*. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House.

⁶ The processes of East Indian immigration can be analysed in terms of push and pull factors. A large motive to move to places like Canada was economic. Immigrants wanted to earn enough money abroad so that when they returned to their villages, they could buy more land and consolidate their holdings and improve the social and economic status of their families. In this regard, the move to Canada is seen as more transitory than a permanent settlement. See also: Brij Lal, "East Indians in British Columbia 1904-1914 : An Historical Study in Growth and Integration" (University of British Columbia, 1976), 40-41.

⁷ Norman Buchignani, Doreen M. Indra, and Ram Srivastiva, *Continuous Journey: A Social History of South Asians in Canada* (Toronto, Ontario: John Dyrrell Company, 1985), 34

Part of the reason why this family set-up worked for East Indians was also due to the nature of their occupations. Since immigrating to Canada could only occur under certain acceptable categories, most workers were unskilled labourers that ended up in various agricultural sectors like farming and logging. By law and practice, East Indians were kept out of many areas of employment, including any kind of municipal or provincial government job, any work with a contractor on public works projects, or with timber operators cutting on crown land. They also could not obtain hand-logging licences, were discouraged from obtaining commercial licences, and were excluded from most labour unions that would have fought for their rights in these areas.⁸ Therefore, lumber camps, while often being dangerous, offered acceptable work that provided decent pay that could go towards establishing a steady livelihood in Canada. The 1920s saw many changes in the economic position of South Asians in Canada as a growing entrepreneurial class began to emerge along with a diversification of employment into other industries.⁹ However, by the mid-1930s some Sikhs were beginning to move out of these areas in order to operate their own logging companies. Those that could amass a sizeable fortune were then able to hire more East Indians to help them penetrate into closed off fields in the forestry sector.

Throughout their struggles with obtaining residency and steady employment, East Indians began to rely heavily on various religious and political organizations. These groups were a great source of strength for the East Indian community as they provided a sense of belonging and a unique Indo-Canadian identity. The presence of these organizations helped to unite East Indians on the basis of collective concerns. More importantly however, they created networks across the country that provided essential services to help East Indians establish a permanent home in

⁸ Hugh Johnston, *The East Indians in Canada* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1984). 11.

⁹ Norman Buchignani, Doreen M. Indra, and Ram Srivastava, *Continuous Journey: A Social History of South Asians in Canada* (Toronto, Ontario: John Dyrrell Company, 1985), 77-78.

Canada. In many cases these groups were the only means to promote the interests of the community as well as provide essential resources in the integration process of new immigrants coming to the country. In the case of the East Indian diaspora, social networks and associations converged primarily on religious institutions. Religious activity in diaspora communities is actually a common phenomenon in most North American cities according to Aditya Raj.¹⁰ It is often the case that these religious institutions would serve multiple functions that other non-religious groups might have been responsible for in other communities. Up until the 1950s due to the homogeneity of the East Indian community in Canada the main institution acting as the primary association representing East Indians was the *gurdwara*.

The *gurdwara* is not solely a religious institution in the Sikh faith. As Dusenbery points out, this translation of the term creates an unfortunate understanding as Sikh *gurudwaras* have been and often continue to be a social, political, cultural and social service centre for the local community. Gurudwaras then served as both a place of worship and as a community organization, commonly established by many Sikh immigrant communities upon arrival in a new country. Given the importance of this institution in Punjabi Sikh society, it comes as no surprise that a *gurdwara* was one of the first institutions to form in Vancouver after the arrival of more immigrants to the country. The Khalsa Diwan Society (KDS) was the first group to establish this temple and it served as an all-encompassing centre for the entire South Asian population of the lower mainland. This *gurdwara* offered a space for the people to socialize and discuss issues, air conflicts and reach decisions affecting the community. Given the importance of the institution it was also not uncommon for the Khalsa Diwan Society to engage in political activities affecting the community. For instance, it was this group that took to fighting against exclusionary

¹⁰ Aditya Raj, "The Indian Diaspora in North America: The Role of Networks and Associations," *Diaspora Studies* 5, no. 2 (2012): 115, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09739572.2013.807555>.

Canadian immigration policies and to work towards full civil rights to all South Asian immigrants in British Columbia. Other causes championed by the Khalsa Diwan Society in this period included sending delegations to Ottawa and London, UK to argue for the lifting of “orders-in-council” which continued to hamper Indian immigration from the South Asian continent, offering legal aid to the passengers aboard the *Komagata Maru* and other immigrants facing deportation orders.¹¹ Most significantly, the Khalsa Diwan Society was also the group responsible to granting the right to vote for East Indians in Canada as well as opening the door to previously barred professions. Other *gurdwaras* subsequently built in other areas of British Columbia became legally affiliated branches of the Vancouver Khalsa Diwan Society. Therefore, if one was to pinpoint one association that could speak on behalf of a majority of all South Asian immigrants in British Columbia, throughout most of Canada it would have been the Khalsa Diwan Society.

CHANGES FROM 1950 TO 1967

After the Second World War, several changes took place with regards to Canada’s immigration policy that has an overall positive effect on the immigration of East Indians into the country. The well-known speech by Prime Minister Mackenzie King on May 1, 1947 laid out a comprehensive and strategic framework for the immigration program in Canada, many elements of which continue to remain in effect today. It is within this speech that King addressed the repeal of the *Chinese Immigration Act (1923)* and revocation of Order-in-Council PC 1378

¹¹ Before the 1931 Statute of Westminster, the Canadian government did not have exclusive jurisdiction over foreign affairs, and therefore, petitions to the Parliament of Westminster in the UK were also an avenue that was pursued; Norman Buchignani, Doreen M. Indra, and Ram Srivastava, *Continuous Journey: A Social History of South Asians in Canada* (Toronto, Ontario: John Dyerell Company, 1985); Brij Lal, “East Indians in British Columbia 1904-1914 : An Historical Study in Growth and Integration” (University of British Columbia, 1976), <https://doi.org/10.14288/1.0093725>; This incident was finally redressed in 2016 under the Trudeau government with a formal apology from Prime Minister Trudeau CPAC, “House of Commons Proceedings: Komagata Maru Apology,” Komagata Maru Apology, accessed December 6, 2019, <http://www.cpac.ca/en/programs/house-of-commons/episodes/47658601>.

regarding naturalization. Furthermore, since East Indians were British Subjects at this point, they were considered Canadian citizens and as such, their wives and unmarried children under 18 were now admissible. By 1951, a federal quota system regarding South Asian immigrants was established through discussions with the Canadian High Commissioner to India. The quota was set at 150 Indians, 100 Pakistanis, and 50 Ceylonese per year, which was very little when considering the total number of immigrants admitted to Canada at the time.¹² At this point in time, neither Pakistan nor Ceylon had the infrastructure to process potential applicants as most immigration offices were located in India. As a result, the quota positions for East Indians were filled primarily by Indians in the beginning years of the system being implemented. In 1957, Canada entered into an agreement with India to raise the quota to 300, with one-half subject to a preference quota to give priority to relatives of South Asian citizens.¹³ Looking at statistics, the South Asian population in Canada nearly doubled from 2148 to 6774 in 1951 to 1961 even though they made up less than 1% of the population.¹⁴ This new group of immigrants signified a turning point in Canada's demography. More important to note however is the impact these new immigrants made on their own community in Canada once they landed and also the cities around them.

For the Khalsa Diwan Society in Vancouver, this change in demography resulted in adverse unintended effects as it decreased its legitimacy of their organization to act as the primary representative of Sikhs in Canada. An influx of newcomers resulted in a stratification of the community into other parts of Canada. This new influx also brought up conflicts in the Khalsa

¹²Ceylon is now modern-day Sri Lanka; Library and Archives, *East Indian*, 2016 accessed at: <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/immigration/history-ethnic-cultural/Pages/east-indian.aspx>; also see Norman Buchignani, Doreen M. Indra, and Ram Srivastiva, *Continuous Journey: A Social History of South Asians in Canada* (Toronto, Ontario: John Dyrrell Company, 1985), 105; Ceylon is now modern-day Sri Lanka.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Statistics Canada. *Canada Yearbook: Historical Collection from 1951 to 1961*, https://www66.statcan.gc.ca/acyb_000-eng.htm

Diwan society between “traditionalist” and “modernist” segments of the Sikh community. The division between the two groups was the result of different interpretations of religious practices as well as differences in socio-economic status. With immigration regulations favouring education as opposed to general labour skills, the urban Sikhs as opposed to their rural counterparts began to come in larger numbers. As such the Sikh community itself experienced a growth in diversity with varying sects of the religion as well as the arrival of Sikhs from different regions within Punjab.¹⁵ In 1952, a dispute arose over the requirements for elections to the Khalsa Diwan Society executive committee, with “traditionalists” arguing for the exclusion of clean-shaven and turban less Sikhs from leadership positions. The disagreements eventually led to a schism between the two factions resulting in the creation of a second society of traditionalist Sikhs called the Akali Singh Sikh Society in Vancouver.¹⁶ Given this breakdown of the Khalsa Diwan Society and the increasingly large number of non-Sikh South Asian immigrants now living in British Columbia and elsewhere in the country, the legitimacy of the Vancouver Khalsa Diwan Society as the sole organization speaking to the broader Canadian society on behalf of the entire South Asian immigrant community was removed.

The first ethnic-political organization that attempted to speak on behalf of all East Indians while also not being affiliated with any religious institution was the East Indian Canadian Citizens’ Welfare Association (EICCWA) which was established in 1947.¹⁷ The EICCWA’s development was a logical response to the need for a support group to focus more directly on the community’s political goals. Though it was dominated by a sizeable Sikh population that was

¹⁵ Norman Buchignani, Doreen M. Indra, and Ram Srivastiva, *Continuous Journey: A Social History of South Asians in Canada* (Toronto, Ontario: John Dyrrell Company, 1985). 129.

¹⁶ Verne A. Dusenbery, “Canadian Ideology and Public Policy: The Impact on Vancouver Sikh Ethnic and Religious Adaptation,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies = Etudes Ethniques Au Canada; Calgary* 13, no. 3 (January 1, 1981): 116.

¹⁷ James G. Chadney, “Demography, Ethnic Identity, and Decision-Making: The Case of the Vancouver Sikhs,” *Urban Anthropology* 6, no. 3 (1977): 197.

affiliated with the KDS but the EICCWA was still non-religious since it was not affiliated with any religious institutions. Working on behalf of all East Indians as opposed to one single ethnic or religious group, the EICCWA aimed to work towards highlighting the distinctiveness of the East Indian community in Canada.¹⁸ This group also aimed to increase the political strength of the East Indians, which was seen as a necessary step for full-fledged citizenship and an eventual easing of immigration restrictions.¹⁹ The organization was comprised of more recent and well-educated immigrants alongside some of the westernized second-generation Sikhs who were concerned with activities that would help individuals adjust to Canadian culture.²⁰ Arguing that there existed certain commonalities between various ethnicities within the Indian diaspora, this group began to absorb some of the political functions that were previously undertaken by the Khalsa Diwan Society. The EICCWA was active in the 1950s in negotiating with the government regarding immigration policy but did not last for long period. The continued growth of the South Asian community and greater enfranchisement for the community made, the EICCWA became less politically active. The relative lack of overt hostilities and a more open immigration framework made the initial impetus for the EICCWA go by the wayside by 1970.

THE ADVANT OF MULTICULTURAL POLICY AND ITS IMPACT ON SOUTH ASIAN NETWORKS

Multicultural policy and the concept of multiculturalism in Canada was in many ways an accident. The huge influx of new immigrants from Asia, Africa, and the Middle East coincided with ongoing debates in Québec of French-Canadian culture, identity and language in the 1960s.

¹⁸ Verne A. Dusenbery, "Canadian Ideology and Public Policy: The Impact on Vancouver Sikh Ethnic and Religious Adaptation," *Canadian Ethnic Studies = Etudes Ethniques Au Canada; Calgary* 13, no. 3 (January 1, 1981): 106.

¹⁹ It should be noted that the creation of this group was around the same time as when the right to vote was granted to East Indians living in Canada. As such the EICCWA sought to continue acting as a pressure group to change government policy toward East Indians in Canada.

²⁰ James G. Chadney, "Demography, Ethnic Identity, and Decision-Making: The Case of the Vancouver Sikhs," *Urban Anthropology* 6, no. 3 (1977): 198.

The 1963 Bilingualism and Biculturalism Commission then, were established to look into these concerns with the publication of three volumes which would hopefully provide answers to some of these questions. John Meisel in his work *As I Recall/ Si je me souviens bien*, states that, “the actual situation from the mid-18th century until well after the Second World War was that Canada’s economic and political power was in the hands of the Anglophone elite, who gave the country a British “feel”.²¹ Moreover British institutions, political practices, and a growing postwar immigration from English-speaking countries strengthened the notion that Canada was very much a British country with a francophone component that retained a secondary status. It was quite natural then to understand why there was an apprehension by some French Canadians during this period as to what the future of their culture would be if the number of non-French-speaking inhabitants in Canada increased. What some critics say is xenophobia is rather a fear of losing elements that make their community distinct from others in the country.²²

For French Canada, the aim of the Commission was to figure out a way to strengthen state institutions and the language in order to guarantee the continuity of the French-Canadian language and culture. This aim is corroborated with evidence from early meetings at the beginning of the commission’s inquiry which lists the main questions that the Bilingualism and Biculturalism Commission was to answer. These questions included some of the following:

- (1) Should children everywhere in Canada have the opportunity to be taught in either English or French depending on their family background?
- (2) Do you believe senior federal officials should be able to understand and speak both English and French?
- (3) To what extent should teaching of the other official language be made available in all parts of Canada?

²¹ John Meisel, *As I Recall / Si Je Me Souviens Bien : Historical Perspectives*: (Montreal: Institute for Research on Public Policy, 1999), 153, <https://www-deslibris-ca.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/ID/415367>.

²² Ibid.

(4) In what sense can it be said that there are or that there are not “two distinct nations”?²³

There were several other questions listed which also dealt with bilingualism explicitly, such as looking the use of bilingualism in the capital or in mass media such as the CBC and Canadian Press.²⁴ It is obvious then that the discussion revolving around the concept of Canada as a multicultural society came to be developed later on in the Commission’s inquiry. Much of the shift in this discourse can be attributed to public hearings with several ethnic organizations that voiced opposition to the notion that Canada had only two distinct societies. For instance, the Ukrainian Women’s Association of Canada and the Ukrainian Self- Reliance League of Canada held annual provincial meetings where they sponsored discussions on biculturalism versus multiculturalism led by members of the affiliated youth organization.²⁵ Universities in Western Canada were also holding lectures and conferences where faculty members from various Eastern European backgrounds participated in discussing the merits and drawbacks of a bicultural society.²⁶ These communities, much like French Canadians, worried that they would not be able to perpetuate their cultures and languages without some form of recognition or assistance from the Canadian state.²⁷ The eventual outcome of these discussions, both with the Bi and Bi Commission and those held outside at local churches, universities and through the press, was a conceptual framework of what bilingualism and multiculturalism actually entailed for the country. The “third force”, as they are referred to in Book IV of the Bi and Bi commission,

²³ Library and Archives Canada, *Bilingualism and Biculturalism Commission: Other Ethnic Groups*. RG 6 1986-87/319 28

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ “Multiculturalism is Topic for Ukrainian Women’s Convention,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, November 7, 1963.

²⁶ Lee Blanding, “Re-Branding Canada: The Origins of Canadian Multiculturalism Policy, 1945-1974” (Thesis, 2013), 126, <https://dspace.library.uvic.ca/handle/1828/4736>.

²⁷ Lee Blanding, “Re-Branding Canada: The Origins of Canadian Multiculturalism Policy, 1945-1974” (Thesis, 2013), 124, <https://dspace.library.uvic.ca/handle/1828/4736>.

accepted official bilingualism without hesitation but categorically rejected biculturalism. Unlike what Laurendeau and Dunton had envisioned when speaking of the term “biculturalism”, the third force considered Canada to be a country that is officially bilingual but fundamentally multicultural.²⁸ It is from these discussions that the concept of a multicultural country within a bilingual framework took majority approval.

Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau’s speech in 1971 announcing an official governmental policy on multiculturalism highlights the fact that while there are two official languages there is not nor cannot ever be one truly official culture. Much of the government’s understanding of multicultural policy was acquired from reading the recommendations of the Bilingualism and Biculturalism Commission.²⁹ In Trudeau’s speech, he highlighted four specific ways the government would support multicultural endeavours in the country: assistance to cultural groups in their development and growth; assistance to members of cultural groups to overcome barriers to full participation in society; promotion of creative exchanges between cultural groups; and assistance to immigrants in learning French or English.³⁰ For East Indians, the outcomes of these policies offered a mixed bag as far as results in aiding the recognition and integration of this group in Canadian society. In one way, multiculturalism allowed for greater exposure of this group among the Canadian mainstream as a distinct ethno-cultural group in the country. However, at the same time, an understanding of the nuances of this group continued to remain a problem, with many institutions and individuals outside of the community lumping all those of South Asian ancestry into a single category of East Indian. It was an often-confusing back and

²⁸ Public Services and Procurement Canada Government of Canada, *Report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism. Book IV: The Cultural Contribution of the Other Ethnic Groups / A. Davidson Dunton and Jean-Louis Gagnon, Co-Chairmen*. (Ottawa: Queen’s Printer, 1970), 12, <http://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/472354/publication.html>.

²⁹ Canada. Parliament. *House of Commons Debates*, 28th Parliament, 3rd Session, Volume 8 (10 November 2019): 8545-8548, Appendix, 8580-8585.

³⁰ Sarah V. Wayland, “Immigration, Multiculturalism and National Identity in Canada,” *International Journal of Group Rights* 5, no. 1 (1997): 46-47.

forth between members of the South Asian community and those in the mainstream that made communicating concerns of this group difficult to process.

Case in point is the difficulty South Asian groups had in conveying their concerns during the cross-country hearings in 1975 over amendments to the *1952 Immigration Act*. These hearings were established after receiving considerable backlash from the 1974 Green Paper on immigration.³¹ On February 3, 1975, a Special Joint Committee of the Senate and House of Commons on Immigration Policy (SJC) was established to listen to all parties.³² The SJC hearings allowed concerned citizens and organizations to express their views on immigration policy. From the South Asian contingent, there were a total of 29 associations or individuals that appeared before the SJC during its twenty stops across Canada and another 59 who submitted written briefs.³³ The general stance these groups took towards the issue of immigration was to have a policy that remained relatively open, non-discriminatory in legislation, expansive on the question of population, to have incentives for settlement in less-populated areas, to broaden sponsored and nominated categories for applicants, to have an abolition of pre-arranged employment requirements, and to more efficiently process applications for approval.³⁴ The outcome of these hearings for the South Asian community was on the whole marked by heavy criticism, largely due to the makeup of the groups and the large number of associations. The SJC noted that many of the spokesmen were of the “elite type” and that they misunderstood what the committee was after. Furthermore, these organizations seemed to be concentrated on the glories

³¹ Canada. 1974. *Green paper on Immigration: Reports of the Canadian Immigration and Population Study*. Ottawa: Manpower and Immigration.

³² John R. Wood, “East Indians and Canada’s New Immigration Policy,” *Canadian Public Policy / Analyse de Politiques* 4, no. 4 (1978): 555, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3549977>.

³³ John R. Wood, “East Indians and Canada’s New Immigration Policy,” *Canadian Public Policy / Analyse de Politiques* 4, no. 4 (1978): 555, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3549977>.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 555-556.

of Indian cultural tradition.³⁵ Additionally, these organizations, while numerous, did not truly represent the larger voice of South Asians living in Canada. The growing South Asian community in Canada remained divided and the diverse associations, rather than showing the strength of the community with regard to immigration reform in Canada, were instead seen as disconnected from their community, making for an ineffective appeal.³⁶ What came out of these hearings was the need to have some large-scale representation of the community in order to effectively convey concerns to the government. As the hearings came to a close and the *1976 Immigration Act* was put into effect, there remained this question of who would represent broader South Asian community in Canada. The EICCWA, while aiming to serve broader South Asian interests was only sporadically active by the 1970s had been stricken from the British Columbian Provincial register of Societies, making it quite ineffective in garnering change. The only other organization that aimed to represent the entire community was the East Indian Defense Committee, a Maoist group who had organized some action to defend East Indians in Vancouver from physical and verbal harassment. However, again, this group became increasingly detached from South Asian concerns as it became more increasingly affiliated the Albanian-leaning Communist Part of Canada-Marxist-Leninist group.

To fill in this void and create solidarity as exposed by the SJC hearings, an all-Canada “East Indian” organization was established in 1976. Drawings its leadership and support largely from the Indo-Canadian elite and those at the local level with prior experience in dealing with Canadian governmental bureaucracy, the National Association of Canadians of Origins in India

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ishan Ashutosh, “From the Census to the City: Representing South Asians in Canada and Toronto,” *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 17, no. 2 (March 26, 2014): 136.

(NACOI) was created.³⁷ What made NACOI distinct and novel from the other similar associations in the past was its reach and political affiliation. NACOI during its time had established multiple chapters across the entire country along with affiliates that were independent but tied to the organization. It was also the first group to try and federate all South Asian groups under one united umbrella while regularly engaging with the federal government on concerns they had for the South Asian community. Secondly, NACOI differed from the other groups because it was primarily focused on socio-political concerns from the community. Factors such as recurring incidents of overt racism in a number of cities and growing inequalities in employment, education, and social participation stressed the need for a national body. Up until the establishment of NACOI there did not exist any one association that aimed to unify all South Asian communities at this scale while trying to bring attention to these matters up regularly. If attention was given it was either in a haphazard fashion or none at all. Even after NACOI's creation, other groups were established that aimed to provide greater support to South Asians located elsewhere in the country. However, most of these groups only began to arise in the mid to late 1980s such as the Indo-Canadian Community Centre of Ottawa, the Indo-Canadian Women's association, the National Indo-Canadian Council, and the Council of Agencies Serving South Asians. NACOI however, remained the organization that served as the main group speaking on behalf of the community and had the privilege of sitting on the Canadian Consultative Council on Multiculturalism and the Canadian Ethnocultural Council.

Given the long history of this group's existence in Canada, the history of East Indian networks and associations is relatively small. Although the main political, ethnic, and cultural group in the beginning half of the century was primarily cantered around the Sikh immigrant, the

³⁷ Verne A. Dusenbery, "Canadian Ideology and Public Policy: The Impact on Vancouver Sikh Ethnic and Religious Adaptation," *Canadian Ethnic Studies = Etudes Ethniques Au Canada; Calgary* 13, no. 3 (January 1, 1981): 108.

Khalsa Diwan Society was notable for paving the way for early changes in Canadian policies affecting all East Indians. As mentioned previously, the need for a separate political group divorced from religion was not truly necessary as the makeup of the East Indian community up until the 1950s was homogenous in terms of religion, ethnic background, language and location of settlement. It is ironically due to the efforts of the Vancouver Khalsa Diwan Society making it easier for South Asians to immigrate to the country that the group also began to lose legitimacy as the primary representative of the community in Canada. With the influx of new immigrants as a result of changes in immigration legislation in the 1962 and 1967 the community begins to establish more local networks and groups to meet its cultural and integration needs. However, the presence of an association to look at the larger socio-political needs of this group does not exist in any meaningful capacity until the establishment of NACOI. It was the first nationally recognized group that took advantage of various multicultural policies aimed at education and integration efforts makes it a unique group to examine. Several groups that emerged after NACOI have managed to outlive it. The current contemporary landscape somewhat mimics what had existed in the 1960s, with a number of different groups, some cultural, some religious, and some political that all work towards meeting the various needs to the South Asian community in Canada. Nowadays the main group which fills a similar role that NACOI had in the 1970s and 1980s is the Council of Agencies Serving South Asians.

A BRIEF DISCUSSION OF THE TERM SOUTH ASIAN AND ITS IMPORTANCE

In reading the literature on this subject, there exists the underlying presumption by the various authors that a person who reads their work has a solid grasp of the varying terms to denote immigrants from the South Asian subcontinent. It should be understood first off that the term “South Asian” itself is one that is applied to this community by institutions separated from

them. To people who are of South Asian origin, the term “South Asian” has a vague meaning. It encompasses several different countries such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and many more.³⁸ Much like to an individual from France or Germany, the term “European”, while not an incorrect way to describe this group, is not an accurate measure of their identity. The term is often criticized by members from this community as being essentializing and diluting the diversity and depth of the sub-continent. Therefore when trying to study individuals from this community, it can become a tricky task to isolate which South Asian group you are referring to as, the usage of the term makes it difficult to differentiate the varying ethnic groups.

However, the existence of the term in many ways is necessary, especially when discussing the political activity of this community in the latter half of the 20th century. At the state level and political group level, the term South Asian or its alternative, “Indo-Canadian” are utilized when discussing the broader community as a whole. When interacting with the state, the label of South Asian gave members from this group a better way to be identified and recognized. Also the fact that the government chose this term over East Indian, especially after 1980 to refer to the Indo-Canadian population in Canada, there is an additional argument to utilizing this term when looking at the interactions of NACOI and the federal government. Statistics Canada for instance, uses the classification “South Asian” to denote individuals from the Indian subcontinent, irrespective of religion, language or ethnicity. Similarly, the president of NACOI in 1979 explains in the inaugural newsletter, that in order to become identifiable in society and by the government the South Asian community but be unified and active. While the differences in language, religion, customs, art, music and literature are important to members of the community, they cannot retain the same importance and evoke the same meanings to someone

³⁸ Another large component that can also be incorporated under this category and might also be included are South Asians who live in the Caribbean, Fiji, and Mauritius.

who is not from the community.³⁹ Therefore the use of this term while not accurate in highlighting the diversity of this community, it is essential when trying to detail the political activities of NACOI in Canada. From NACOI's perspective, it is quite clear that they meant to represent all Canadian citizens or soon-to-be citizens who have ties back to the Indian subcontinent.

It also is worth mentioning the usage of the term South Asian is also synonymous with the term Indo-Canadian. Indo-Canadians or Indian Canadians are Canadian citizens who ethnically can be linked to the Indian subcontinent. It is a term that has gained increasing popularity in the 21st century. The terms are interchangeably used to describe the same population. As Kavita Sharma describes it, there is an interchangeable nature with the term "South Asian", "East-Indian" and "Indo-Canadian" when referencing the group that lives in Canada.⁴⁰ For NACOI, the focus on incorporating multiple different ethnicities and religions speaks to a focus on the broader Indian community in Canada and therefore the use of the term "South Asian" or "Indo-Canadian" is most apt. Additionally, the word "South Asian" is helpful in describing the distinctions between this particular community and Canadians in the mainstream.

SIKHS AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SIKH COMMUNITY IN CANADA

Given this discussion around the term South Asian, a quite side note needs to be made about the Sikh community in Canada. Out of all the varying South Asian groups that have arrived in Canada, it is the Sikh community that has existed in Canada the longest and therefore were one of the first groups to make headway for East Indian equality in Canada. This early impact is one of the reasons why the Sikh community is unique among South Asian community.

³⁹ *NACOI Forum Newsletters* - 1979 inaugural issue

⁴⁰ Kavita A. Sharma, *The Ongoing Journey: Indian Migration to Canada* (Creative Books, 1997), 16.

The other reasons have revolved around the space they occupy in the politics and history of India. Additionally, for some Sikhs, being associated a solely Indo-Canadian is considered problematic due to the fact that many Sikhs view their community as a distinct, with its own language, history and relationship with the Indian government, that differs from the experiences of other South Asian groups.

While the British Columbia Chapter (also identified as the Vancouver Chapter) of NACOI has always had a large Sikh contingent, there was no consensus as to whether the Sikh community accepted the notion of a pan-Indo-Canadian political organization. This is because for some members, Sikhs are viewed as a “separate people” who should be known as an “East Indians” or “Canadians or origins in India” but rather as Canadian Sikhs. In this way, similar parallels can be made between a Sikh identity and a French-Canadian identity. The discussion around the Sikh identity and the Sikh community are worth discussing at the front of this thesis as the issues around their space within NACOI’s organization and issues that were most pertinent to them come up at various points of this organizations existence, most notably in 1984.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Given this under-explored history, this thesis aims to understand East Indian integration in the mid-1970s to the early 1990s by detailing the efforts of ethnic associations in aiding in the integration process and affecting governmental legislation. Since the East Indian immigrant post-1967 is cut from an entirely different cloth than its predecessor, their needs no doubt change once they arrive in Canada. Ethnic associations become one way the East Indian immigrant learns to integrate into the Canadian mainstream. They serve as essential support structures that not only provide services but act as advocates on behalf of these new immigrants. While there were several ethnic associations which began to take the lead on politically representing the

South Asian community in the latter half of the 20th century, none are as far-reaching and influential as the National Association of Canadians of Origins in India (hereafter identified as NACOI).

In light of the change in settlement structure for the South Asian community, I sought to study how NACOI operated and aided in the integration of South Asians in Canada, from those newly arriving to the country to those who had been present for several decades. In its inaugural issue of its semi-annual newsletter the founders explained that one of the main goals for this group was to overcome the problems of community isolation and fragmentation that so often characterized this community. This organization was focused on helping South Asians truly become a part of the cultural society in Canada and worked to remove the preconception of this community as being apathetic and disjointed. That is why I want to detail the various ways NACOI aimed to improve the perception of East Indian immigrants to the broader public during the duration of its existence. Were there specific programs it funded or publications it produced for broader consumption? How did NACOI aim to send out its message? In doing so, another question that I address in my work is how NACOI was able to differentiate itself from other South Asian associations by looking at what it chose or chose not to highlight in its mandate. Was NACOI concerned with shaping foreign policy pertaining to India? How did it want to foster a sense of community for this ethnic group? Was this different than other groups who preceded it and if so in what ways?

Additionally, I want to answer the question of how NACOI reacted and shaped federal multicultural and immigration policy. Since the organization was founded in Ottawa in 1976, it is in many ways the by-product of the public discussions of immigration and multicultural reform in the early 1960s and 70s'. It was among the first political groups devoid of any religious or

ethnic affiliations which often characterized many South Asian organizations up until that point. Furthermore, its goal was to federate all South Asians under one large umbrella organization and act as the voice for the community was seen as uncharted territory. As such, NACOI during its tenure provided both political and economic services to East Indians across all of Canada through its many chapters. It was involved in helping to reform several pieces of immigration legislation in the latter half of the 20th century making it an invaluable group to study and determine if its efforts were impactful.

Lastly, I would also want an answer to the question of what challenges and struggles this organization faced. Were any of these particular problems potential reasons as to why this group no longer existed by the end of the 1990s? The organization, for its considerable reach and influence does not survive into the 21st century, except for the Montreal Chapter which does not consider itself affiliated with NACOI since 1989. Many works often do not discuss why this is the case and so my work will try to address the potential reasons as to where the decline of this group begins. Furthermore, the lack of study and information on this association despite the fair number of holdings at Library and Archives and other institutions make it an ideal choice of study as it provides new insight on the issues and concerns facing the South Asian community during the mid-1970s onward.

HISTORIOGRAPHY

The literature on South Asians in Canada is often labelled as incomplete and scattered.⁴¹ This is because much of the literature is filled with gaps during certain periods in Canadian history. Therefore, before I discuss my own work on NACOI and its impact on federal immigration policy and East Indian integration, I want to develop a short historiography of the

⁴¹ Norman Buchignani, "A Review of the Historical and Sociological Literature on East Indians in Canada - ProQuest," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 9, no. 1 (1977): 23.

academic literature on East Indians in Canada. While this is not a comprehensive list it will outline the major works, which have contributed to our understanding of this group's presence in Canada.

One of the earliest writers on the topic of East Indians was James Woodsworth, who, in 1908, wrote *Strangers within Our Gates* one year after the race riots in Vancouver.⁴² This source is significant as it is the first effort by a Canadian to understand the situation of immigrants.⁴³ His book captures the widely held opinion at the time that East Indians, and more generally, the Asian presence in Canada as problematic and unnecessary. When he first published *Strangers within our Gates*, Woodsworth explained the concerns he saw with immigration into Canada. Often sympathetic to their plight, he nonetheless saw immigration as too rampant, an issue to be resolved. Since the publication of *Strangers Within Our Gates*, academic study regarding East Indian presence in Canada from 1904 to 1915 has been fruitful. There is also Smillie's work from 1923 that discusses the relationship between Indian immigration in Canada to other similar cases elsewhere in the British Empire. After this, a number of publications appeared in the 1930s that aimed to understand East Indian immigration in this period. Rajani Das' (1923) *Hindustanee Workers on the Pacific Coast* and Tien Cheng's (1931) *Oriental immigration in Canada* are two works that both analyzed the employment, communal makeup and standards of living of East Indians in British Columbia. Das also discusses the East Indian Community in California while Cheng discusses other Asian groups living in British Columbia. In addition to this, Eric Morse's

⁴² The race riots in Vancouver were the second instance of anti-Asian violence in British Columbia. The concern over immigration and over population of "orientals" led many union leaders and small business owners to damage Asian owned businesses and property. The first anti-Asian violence in British Columbia took place in 1887 at Coal Harbour as local residents and business owners became increasingly hostile to the presence of Chinese workers and the fear of increased competition for local employment; Patricia E. Roy, "The Preservation of Peace in Vancouver: The Aftermath of the Anti-Chinese Riot of 1887," *BC Studies: The British Columbian Quarterly*, no. 31 (1976): 44-46, <https://doi.org/10.14288/bcs.v0i31.896>

⁴³ J. S. Woodsworth, *Strangers within Our Gates: Or, Coming Canadians* (Toronto: F.C. Stephenson, 1909).

article from 1935 helps to provide a picture of what political participation within the East Indian community looked like.

Since then, other academics have come along and built upon the earlier research of Cheng, Das and Morse such as F.M Bhatti's (1974) and Brij Lal's (1974) doctoral theses. Lal's work looks at the first ten years of Indian immigration from 1904 to 1914 and focuses on their adjustment to living in Canada and their response to hostility in this period. There is also Muthanna's (1975) work which uses primarily newspaper accounts to learn more about East Indians in this period. While many of these texts do exclusively deal with East Indians as a topic worth studying, there is little or no inclusion of oral history in these works. In this regard, there is a gap in our knowledge of the period due to a lack of first-hand accounts by East Indians themselves.

Another common element in the historiography is how the period from 1909 to 1947 is viewed by academics in the field. In much of the literature, this period is often dubbed "the quiet years". Furthermore, the general consensus held by scholars on "the quiet years" is that there was a significant decline in Indian immigration due to the fact that the Government took the active stance of rejecting immigrant applications from India and other "unacceptable regions". In addition to this, there is a scarcity of written material about East Indians. Furthermore, there is the overarching narrative put forth by academics during these years that the East Indian community is one that was inward-turning and conservative in outlook. Marian Smith's (1944) article "Sikh Settlers in Canada" provides a breakdown of the number of East Indians in the country up until the Second World War. Her work was one of the first rigorous studies that provided the only ethnographic account of this group. Her research provides insight on the number of men versus

women in the country that can provide a greater understanding of why this “inward” characteristic was attributed to the East Indian community.

Part of this view came from the fact that the immigrant population was at an extreme gender imbalance, the workers were concentrated mainly in lumber mills, and living arrangements by members of these groups were seen as odd because they did not live with their wives in a traditional nuclear family setting.⁴⁴ What Smith is highlighting in this instance is the difficulty Indians had in establishing a strong community and permanent residency in Canada. The lack of job opportunities, coupled with the fact that Indian women were simply declined entry, made the formation of a typical communal set up difficult. Parallels can also be seen with early Chinese immigrants who faced much of the same barriers in establishing a community in the ordinary sense. The difference in the type of work each minority group did was a contributing factor as to why Indians often lived in more crowded living arrangements than the Chinese or Japanese in British Columbia. A majority of Sikhs often worked in the forestry and agricultural industry which does not lend itself to establishing small businesses, unlike many Chinese and Japanese Canadians who were more diverse in their occupational fields. Many Chinese Canadians, for instance, often worked in service industries though their employment was limited due to discriminatory provincial laws in British Columbia. H. Mills (1911) echoes a similar opinion that the continual presence of this minority group would pose a threat to Canadian solidarity.

On the other hand, H.F Angus’ work (1947) provides a more sympathetic tone to the treatment of East Indians by Canadian society at large. This publication demonstrates a shift in public opinion regarding the East Indian community and its reputation in Canada. Buchignani (1977) focuses on this period in his literature review, highlighting the lack of academic literature. Discussion about this group did exist in casual magazine articles and a few House of Commons

⁴⁴ Marian, Smith. 1944. Sikh Settlers in Canada. *Asia and the Americas* 44 (8):359-364

debates, but there is little else. S. Dhami's work (1969) is a notable example of an oral history on the quiet years, as it provides reflections on the experiences of growing up in Vancouver during the 1920s, though it was not published during the quiet years themselves. This oral history of sorts introduces the reader to the types of social relations East Indians had with other Canadians and the stigma faced by members of the community. Scholars such as Doreen Indra, Norman Buchignani, and Ram Srivastiva in their work *Continuous Journey: A Social History of South Asians in Canada* (1985) uses the term "quiet years" to mention the lack of new arrivals to the country. Johnston (1982) also explains that the quiet years was a period in which the Sikh community attracted little attention and was barely noticeable in the inter-war period.

From a policy perspective, the years between 1914 and 1930 were very much an expansive period that saw immigration at its most restrictive and exclusionary.⁴⁵ There was also this overarching trend with immigration as it began to be more greatly influenced by union organizations and other economic interests. Of course, economic interests are a concern that is always present in Canadian immigration policy but the "quiet years" were a time where economic considerations tended to be paramount.⁴⁶ Another fundamental aspect to immigration policy in the inter-war period is the concern of selecting the right kind of immigrant. Persons who would contribute to the growth of the country, but more importantly, persons who were to easily assimilate into the rest of Canadian society were preferred. Given the view that race was a characteristic that could determine assimilability, immigration legislation provided the government with enough leeway to prevent admission, prohibit naturalization, and remove

⁴⁵ Ninette Kelley and Michael J. Trebilcock, *the Making of the Mosaic: A History of Canadian Immigration Policy* (University of Toronto Press, 2010).

⁴⁶ Yasmeen Abu-Laban, *Selling Diversity: Immigration, Multiculturalism, Employment Equity, and Globalization* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 39. https://uottawa-primis.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/primis_library/libweb/action/diDisplay.do?vid=UOTTAWA&afterPDS=true&docId=dedupmrg1150005813.

individuals who were perceived as lowering the standards of acceptable citizenry.⁴⁷ Wallace (2017), Chandrasekhar (1986) Trebilcock and Kelley (2000), Walker (2008), and countless other immigration academics and historians in East Indian ethnography look to this period as a contraction in the Canadian state in terms of its immigration policies.

Yet despite the fact that the years from 1909 to 1947 constitute what is generally considered a quiet period, this time can also be construed as “loud” in the study of East Indians. Within this period, particularly by the 1920s, there is a rise in ethnic studies to understand how various ethnic groups fit within the Canadian framework. Cheng (1931), Das (1921) and Smith (1944) are three of the first to look at East Indians in the Canadian context with many other studies coming after from the 1950s and onward. Furthermore, the establishment of permanent community fixtures demonstrates a transition in the mindset of the Indian community in Canada from a temporary visitor to a resident. Jacoby (2007) discusses the first half century experience of Sikhs, Hindus, and Muslims in the US and Canada with a considerable focus on the early development and history of the *Ghadhr* party and affiliated organizations.⁴⁸

Established in early 1913 in the US, the Hindustani Ghadhr Party was a group of predominantly Punjabi farmworkers, mill labourers, seamen, and others. They led a revolutionary anti-colonial movement for Indian independence.⁴⁹ The movement developed from a small group of Indian intellectuals based in San Francisco, which became the centre for anti-British sentiment outside of the Indian subcontinent. South Asian workers in Canada soon joined the cause by pledging money to develop national publishing centres in the US. Despite their

⁴⁷ A prevailing theory during the beginning portion of the 20th century was the idea that East Indians along with other “oriental” races were less adaptable to Canadian climate among other factors like culture and values; Brij Lal, “East Indians in British Columbia 1904-1914 : An Historical Study in Growth and Integration” (University of British Columbia, 1976), <https://doi.org/10.14288/1.0093725>.

⁴⁸ Another important element to the party was raising awareness and helping to achieve Indian independence.

⁴⁹ Nishant Upadhyay, “Ghadhr Movement: A Living Legacy,” *Sikh Formations* 10, no. 1 (January 2, 2014): 1.

distance from the independence movement in India, their existence in Canada and the US proved to be troublesome for the British, nonetheless. Creating opposition to the unfair treatment of Indians under the British government, the Ghadhr movement gained traction in areas like British Columbia and San Francisco because of the racist and hostile environment for East Indian immigrants. The impact of the party was in awakening a political consciousness that was closely linked to an escalating immigration battle within Canada. Basran (1976), W.H. McLeod (1976), Bose (1965), Buchignani (1974), Lal (1976) and many scholars from the 1970s onwards make an effort to include Indian political activist organizations and their early developments when trying to understand this period. The mere fact that social and political organizations like the Khalsa Diwan Society and the Ghadhr movement were active voices that sought to remove barriers for East Indians demonstrates that the inter-war period was an eventful one.

During the quiet years, scholars noted that the topic of franchise and voting rights being given to East Indians was a considerable topic of debate. Robert Holland published an article on the question of enfranchisement and the right to vote in 1943, demonstrating that there was a dialogue with relevant organizations and the government on this issue.⁵⁰ Researcher Lal in 2010 also published an article detailing the numerous efforts on the part of social and political organizations which sought the relaxation of racial and discriminatory policy in British Columbia and federally.⁵¹ The existence and popularity of these organizations among East Indians also demonstrates a change in the mindset of Indians that Canada is more of a permanent fixture as a place of residence than a temporary home.

⁵⁰ Robert Holland, "Indian Immigration into Canada: The Question of Franchise," *The Asiatic Review* 31, (1943):167-172

⁵¹ Brij V. Lal, "Political Movement in the Early East Indian Community in Canada," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 2, no. 1 (January 1, 1981): 61–87, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.1981.9963169>.

The end of the Second World War had the unintended effect of changing the way this group and minority groups more broadly, were studied and understood. With immigration standards shifting to focus on taking in skilled individuals due to the introduction of the points system, as well as a larger proportion of Indian women also immigrating to the country, the composition of the Indian population changed significantly. A notable change with the historiography from the 1950s onward is that many articles and secondary literature often used a multidisciplinary approach. The first post-war study was carried out by anthropologist Adrian Mayer in 1959. His study was an ethnographic analysis of the structure of the Vancouver Sikh community. The themes he discusses regarding community structure and kinship networks are elements that have been elaborated upon by other ethnographers. For instance, Ames and Inglis (1973), Srivastava (1975), and McDonough (1978) all work on similar themes of adjusting to Canadian society and family organization. Another noticeable difference in the literature is the diversity studying the various types of Indians living in Canada. Up until the 1950s, the majority group that existed in Canada was Sikh, though they might have been referred to as Hindus by white scholars. With a greater diversity in the place of origin and an understanding of the ethnic diversity of Indians themselves, one begins to see specific studies that deal with Indians of varying nationalities and their adjustment to Canada, economic position, and identity. Buchignani's 1974 thesis on Fijian Indians is one notable example, as is Morah's (1974) work on Ugandan Indians, and Wakil's 1974 work on Indo-Pakistanis. Sandhu's work (1981) which was in collaboration with the International Education Centre in Halifax also shows the demographic shift of the East Indian community in the latter half of the twentieth century by providing interesting data on East Indians living in Nova Scotia by looking at their stances towards marriage, family relationships, and economic conditions in the province.

There is also a greater focus on women and the growing second generation of East Indians (Indo-Canadians) who also had a few works written about them such as Siddique's *Changing Family Patterns: A comparative analysis of Immigrant Indian and Pakistani Families of Saskatoon, Canada*. There is also Naidoo's 2003 work *South Asian Canadian Women: A Contemporary Portrait*. There is also a greater frequency in the past 30 years of articles being published that look at race relations between East Indians and other minority and majority groups. Part of this shift can be attributed to the influence of the subaltern trend in history. More generally also, there was a greater emphasis on having members of the community speak to the issues around growing up with bi-cultural identities, whether they be genders, generational or trans-national. The themes that are frequently brought up include the adjustment of children in school, relationships and marriage, mental health, bicultural identity, and multiculturalism. Milton (1994), Raj (2009), and Guo and Lloyd (2015) are three notable works that deal primarily with the concept of multiculturalism and discuss the presence of East Indians in their analysis when looking to the success rates of immigrants and their children integrating within Canadian society. Ubale Bhausheb in his 1977 work *Equal Opportunity and Public Policy* is another notable example of a publication which dealt with South Asian integration and the prevalence of racial violence between mainstream society and the South Asian community in Toronto. His work provides a comprehensive breakdown of employment, education and other concerns that were unaddressed when looking at this community. Frances 1978 work on the dynamics of racism in Toronto provides useful empirical data on the perceptions of East Indians in the city at the height of racial tensions.

Work after the 1980s also focuses on the issue of identity among the Indian diaspora in North America with works such as Milton's *In the Further Soul: A Social History of Indo-*

Canadians in Ontario, Sunil Basran's *American Karma: Race, Culture and Identity in the Indian Diaspora*, and Joan Jensen's 1988 work *Passage from India: Asian Indian Immigrants in North America*. It is only by the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the early 2000s where more intersectional publications dealing with gender, bicultural identity and research about more specific groups in the South Asian community such as Sikhs becomes more prevalent. Notable works in this category include Darsham Singh's 1998 work *The Sikh Diaspora*, Pavna Sodhi's work on Punjabi Women Living in East Canada (2000) and "Bicultural Identity formation of Second Generation Indo-Canadians" (2008), and Josephine Naidoo's 2003 article in *Psychology and Developing Societies* titled "South Asian Canadian Women: A Contemporary Portrait".

Another interesting tangent that seems to exist within the literature on the East Indian community in Canada is the focus, in the twenty-first century, on the problems that exist around some of the terminology used to discuss the group. The argument by many scholars such as Ashutosh (2008), Ghosh (2013), and Frenz (2013) that there needs to exist a greater diversity in how researchers study the East Indian diaspora outside of the Indian subcontinent. Many researchers call for greater specificity by the government to recognize the various types of East Indians that exist and to find new ways to try to understand the community. These academics also provide valid critiques for the use of the term "South Asian" when studying the community as it tends to homogenize the diversity of the region.

PRIMARY SOURCES

Moving on, I want to have a short explanation of my sources and justification for what I selected. Most of the research and analysis of this thesis is derived from two bodies of sources: semi-annual newsletters, reports and books from NACOI and a series of interviews of notable members belonging to NACOI during its formative years. As NACOI has no formal archives and

none of the newsletters are digitized, most of the archived material was provided to me either by Library and Archives Canada or through various other institutions that house their published material such as the universities or the libraries. Altogether, an analysis of the association's activities is based on thirty-nine newsletters from 1979 to 1991, with the year 1985 and those after 1992 being unavailable for some reason. A potential hypothesis for these missing sources is a lack of effort on part of the organization to maintain their records to deposit at Library and Archives Canada (LAC). As LAC does not require national associations to deposit their institutional documents, it is the organization's responsibility to do so. It is plausible to imagine a scenario where these missing newsletters were not preserved. Given that the organization also had issues with funding resulting in inconsistent publications, it is also plausible that newsletters for these years were not made in the first place.

However the newsletters that are available provide a public perspective of the association and demonstrate NACOI's priorities based on what they communicated to its members. In addition to these sources I also have used annual conference reports produced by NACOI for internal use which detail the financial breakdown, funding updates and communication between the Secretary of State, specifically the Program Liaison Officers under the Multiculturalism directorate and NACOI as it received regular funding from this branch to carry out its activities. These internal sources provide a good chance to evaluate the challenges and successes of the organization over the years, making it incredibly valuable for this thesis. Published material, produced by NACOI (like books) is material produced by NACOI themselves which act as resource books for other organizations to use to provide greater information on the South Asian community in Canada. Many of these works contain statistics, demographic information and activities that would have been utilized in educational settings by schools or local government.

The interviews were a combination of data collected by myself or provided to me courtesy of the Multicultural Historical Society of Ontario and will be used to highlight the beginning and final few years of this organization's existence. As there exists a noticeable gap explaining what took place in the final years of NACOI's existence, interviews by notable members of this organization will be incredibly beneficial in understanding the impacts and challenges of NACOI in the 1990s. In total I used six interviews, four of which I conducted and two of which were supplied to me by the Multicultural Historical Society of Ontario (hereafter referred to as the MHSO). The MHSO serves an invaluable resource as they conducted a series of interviews in the 1970s of members from notable ethnic groups in the Toronto area. As such they have recorded conversations of some notable members of NACOI during its prime that will shed light onto the main concerns of this group and its relationship with the federal government.

ORGANIZATION

To structure my thesis, I will chronologically layout the structure, formation and eventual dissolution of NACOI. While this introduction offers a brief summary of the history of ethnic groups in Canada as well as providing necessary historiographical debates, the first chapter will delve deeper by detailing the development and rise of NACOI from 1976 to 1980. It provides a description of the mandate of NACOI, how it differed from other South Asian groups in terms of reach and concern as well as how NACOI was structured from the development of local chapters in Canada to its liaison with the federal government. The second chapter details NACOI's involvement with federal policy and examines what causes NACOI was most preoccupied with during the height of its organization. This chapter will also delve into NACOI'S continuing struggles and evaluate whether changes were properly. The last chapter begins in 1988 and looks at the decline of NACOI. With a combination of both the internal reports as well as interviews I

will be able to determine the potential causes that led to the dissolution of this organization between the years of 1989 to 1993. Throughout each chapter I will also highlight instances where NACOI deviated from its initial mandate and whether their work as an advocacy group faltered in any sort of way by analysing their effectiveness in changing federal policy specifically relating to multiculturalism, racial equity, and immigration. The impact of NACOI and its accomplishments are still felt to this day. Since there currently does not exist an organization that is comparable to NACOI in its scope and outreach today, a lot can be gained from the work NACOI accomplished during its duration. More specifically a more nuanced understanding of the political gains made by South Asians from can be better understood in order to develop a more comprehensive framework of this ethnic group during the latter half of the 20th century.

Given all this background information, the first chapter of this thesis will begin to layout the foundation of NACOI, taking into account the political environment of the time that created an impetus to form an association based around a common South Asian identity. Indo-Canadians today are active members of Canadian society, with several holding important positions at various levels of government and the judiciary. It is a phenomenon that exists because of political advocacy from groups like NACOI that began in the 1970s. While this thesis focuses solely on one organization, it is also attempting to provide greater clarity on how individuals from this ethnic group best chose to organize themselves politically. An analysis of this association can provide a greater understanding of how the South Asian community in Canada sought to integrate into mainstream Canadian society. More importantly in examining the challenges it faced also allows for a chance to discuss broader issues regarding the multiple identities that makeup this community. Additionally, the discussion of NACOI also brings up

important questions of how government can meaningfully implement multicultural policy within a bilingual framework.

CHAPTER 1: THE FORMATIVE YEARS 1976 TO 1980

The creation of the National Association of Canadians of Origins in India (NACOI) was the result of a political vacuum that existed in the South Asian community in Canada in the early 1970s. Community institutions in and of themselves were not a new concept for this ethnic group, as religious based groups had been in existence since the early 1900s. However, the existence of a purely political association was a new phenomenon that was the result of discussions around reforming Canada's *Immigration Act* in 1976. To understand why NACOI needed to exist one must understand the nature of East Indian political advocacy prior to 1976 through their discussions around immigration reform with the Special Joint Committee on Immigration Policy. Their lack of a unified South Asian voice in the policy-making process caused the Special Joint Committee of the Senate and House of Commons on Immigration Policy (SJC) to not take their unfocused requests seriously, demonstrating the impetus for NACOI's creation in August of 1976.

Special Joint Committees were created for the same reasons as Special Committees: to inquire into a matter to which the House attaches particular importance. Unlike special committees, SJC's are comprised of Members of the House of Commons and Senators. They are established by House and Senate reference orders.⁵² On February 3, 1975, a Special Joint Committee of the Senate and House of Commons on Immigration Policy (SJC) was established to listen to concerns from the public.⁵³ These cross-country hearings have been called by some as

⁵² Marc Bosc and André Gagnon, "Committees - House of Commons Procedure and Practice, Third Edition, 2017," Types of Committees and Mandates, 2017, https://www.ourcommons.ca/About/ProcedureAndPractice3rdEdition/ch_20_2-e.html#footnote-725-backlink.

⁵³ Canada, Parliament, *House of Commons and Senate Special Committee on Immigration Policy*, 30th Parliament, 1st Session, Report

an exercise in participatory democracy.⁵⁴ The SJC hearings allowed concerned citizens and organizations to express their views on immigration policy. Within these discussions the role of South Asian interest groups is particularly interesting to look at because there were so many organizations that both helped and hurt their cause of liberalizing immigration policy. A total of 29 South Asian associations or individuals appeared before the SJC during its twenty stops across Canada, and another 59 submitted written briefs.⁵⁵ The message that members of the East Indian community wanted to communicate to the committee was apprehension over the potential of the government would introducing discriminatory immigration policy that could harm Canadian perceptions of non-European immigrants.⁵⁶ That is why these groups recommended policies that were open, were non-discriminatory, were expansive on the question of population, had incentives for settlement in less-populated areas, broadened sponsored and nominated categories for applicants, abolished pre-arranged employment requirements, and quickened the processing of applications.⁵⁷ While it is commendable that these disorganized groups were able to create a list as comprehensive as what was mentioned above, the government felt that the speakers present were not representative of the larger South Asian community and thus did not take their concerns seriously.

During the hearings, the members of the SJC noted that East Indian speakers seemed to be members of the “elite”. The committee felt that the speakers before them all seemed to come from a similar privileged socio-economic status and were relatively well-integrated into the Canadian mainstream. This perception is highlighted by some of the comments from the SJC

⁵⁴ Peter, Dobell and Susan D'Aquino (1976) the Special Joint Committee on Immigration Policy 19 75: An Exercise in Participatory Democracy (CIIA. Behind The Headlines Series, XXXIV:6)

⁵⁵ John R. Wood, “East Indians and Canada’s New Immigration Policy,” *Canadian Public Policy / Analyse de Politiques* 4, no. 4 (1978): 555, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3549977>.

⁵⁶ Canada, Parliament, *House of Commons and Senate Special Committee on Immigration Policy*, 30th Parliament, 1st Session, Vol.2 , 44:76

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 555-556.

members, that these speakers and the organizations they represented did not truly represent the larger voice of South Asians living in Canada.* The large number of disjointed groups claiming to represent the South Asian community created inconsistencies in the message given to the SJC and thus made it difficult to take their inputs into account. By unifying these different groups into a single organization, NACOI aimed to address this lack of a focused message when it was first established in Ottawa in 1976.

MANDATE + GOALS

NACOI wanted to act as an umbrella organization for all East Indians without having to compromise on the distinctive linguistics, religious, and cultural characteristics that made up the East Indian community in Canada. The hope was that in calling the organization a national association for Canadians of origins in India, the group could be open to other East Indians who may not have directly come from India but had ancestral origins in the country.⁵⁸ As elucidated in the inaugural issue of the NACOI newsletter the *Forum*, overcoming community isolation, fragmentation, and becoming a “united front” was necessary in order for the problems of this group to become recognized by the government. As stated by NACOI president Navin Parekh in 1979,

Let us all recognize the fact that, to the man in the street, we are all East Indians. Differences in language, religion, customs, art, music and literature that are so important to use as sectarian groups do not and cannot mean as much to him. It is in this context that NACOI can play a vital and constructive role in fostering a community spirit and presenting a united front to the Canadian people... Equally important is the need to get involved in and to participate actively in various Canadian institutions. We cannot afford to isolate ourselves any longer, we cannot afford to be perceived simply as immigrants living, working and making the most of the economic opportunities available in this country. We must truly become a part of this cultural society by serving and taking part in the social, political and economic decision making institutions.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Interview with Mr. Nand Tandan. Interview by Yashika Dhall. Audio-recording, December 2, 2019.

⁵⁹ Library and Archives Canada, *Rapport National Association of Canadians of Origins in India* Montreal, 1986-1988, Newsletters, reproduction copy number C-235-2

When looking to the organization's aims and objectives, these sentiments expressed by Mr. Parekh are strongly present. Broadly speaking, NACOI wanted to go beyond the "food, song and dances" that other East Indian organizations were focused on.⁶⁰ While other groups were based around cultural activities and the retention of South Asian heritage, NACOI wanted to fill the need to be active within the socio-economic aspect of living in Canada. There were concerns in the beginning around whether this group could be accepted by the Indian community in Canada. From Vijay Agnew's perspective the diversity and split within the Indian community presented issues from its inception about whether the organization's activities would be taken seriously.⁶¹ However, many of the founding members felt that the necessity of an organization like NACOI could exist because of the important role it could provide for the Indo-Canadian community in Canada. Samir Basu, the secretary of NACOI's Toronto Chapter, also explained that despite concerns about the divisiveness of the community there was supported expressed for the idea by local leaders of various South Asian groups across the country.⁶²

NACOI had seven main objectives which could be categorized under three headings: education, outreach, and recognition. The first category, *education*, revolved around the dissemination of information about the organization itself and more importantly, about the South Asian community and its contributions to Canada. NACOI wanted to continuously produce information that accurately portrayed a positive image of the South Asian community to the broader public. It also wanted to use this positive image to combat negative stereotypes of the South Asian community and use education as a means to increase social harmony in civil society. The second category was *outreach*, which was focused on increasing collaboration with

⁶⁰ Navin Parekh Interview; John Samuel Interview

⁶¹ Interview with Dr. Samir Basu. © Multicultural History Society of Ontario, South East Asian Canadian Collection, 10 June 1977, IND-04113-BAS.

⁶² Interview with Dr. Samir Basu. © Multicultural History Society of Ontario, South East Asian Canadian Collection, 10 June 1977, IND-04113-BAS.

other ethnic associations. NACOI hoped that it could encourage the political participation of South Asians in Canadian society through this collaboration. The hope was that doing so would alleviate issues plaguing the community and result in a better understanding by the government of the South Asian perspective when it came to immigration and multicultural policy. The category of outreach also included goals which were focused on facilitating better communication with the federal government and other groups interested in NACOI's cause. The last category, labeled as *recognition*, speaks to aims which were centered on recognizing the contributions of Canadians of origins in India to Canada. This category also included goals NACOI had in assisting new immigrants towards successfully integrating into the Canadian mainstream as well as voicing concerns from the South Asian community to the government. Many of the objectives often did not fit solely within one category. Rather the more common case was that each objective fulfilled multiple roles. Listed below is a copy of the seven main objectives NACOI had, as listed in its constitution from 1977. Next to each aim I have identified the primary category it falls under:

1. To encourage Canadians of origins in India to fully participate in Canadian Society.
(*outreach*)
2. To provide a national voice to Canadians or origins in India. (*recognition*)
3. To provide a forum for exchange of ideas, issues and common concerns. (*education*)
4. To facilitate communications within and with other organizations. (*outreach*)
5. To assist in the orientation and adaptation of Canadians of origins in India to the Canadian milieu and bring about a better understand of Canada and other Canadians.
(*education*)

6. To formulate guidelines for improving the collective image of Canadians of origins in India. (*outreach*)
7. To assure due recognition of the contributions of Canadians of origins in India to Canada. (*recognition*)⁶³

STRUCTURE

Reviewing NACOI's quarterly publications as well its communications with the federal government seems to show that NACOI was able to carry out its mandate through a number of different ways. Firstly, NACOI was primarily structured through the establishment of local chapters or affiliates that regular members could join. Individual membership was priced at \$10.00, group memberships were rated at \$1.00 per member and the corporate rate was priced at \$100.00 annually.⁶⁴ The chapters were run by their own executive body that would report to the national secretariat, headquartered in Ottawa. The national secretariat was an elected position and a part of the national executive that would be responsible for ensuring the continuity of logistics and operations which were dispersed all over the country. Alongside the secretariat was a national executive body whose members were elected at the national convention held every year in August or September. The national executive would be the primary body that would regularly report to the federal government and apply for grants and funding for the association. Information regarding the ongoing activities and decisions of the organization would be posted in a quarterly publication known as the *Forum*.⁶⁵ This newsletter would contain relevant information on the decisions previously made by the government and the main issues NACOI

⁶³ Library and Archives Canada, MG28, volume 150, "National Association of Canadians of Origins in India: Tenth Annual National Conference"

⁶⁴ Based on Montreal Chapter Membership Application; however this price was applied to all chapters. When adjusted for inflation the prices were: \$45.23 for individuals, group memberships were \$4.52 per member and the corporate rate was priced at 452.28 annually. RG 6 NACOI 1981-1983

⁶⁵ The number of newsletters released yearly changed throughout the existence of NACOI but at the beginning the publication was quarterly, based on the holdings at LAC.

was currently discussing with the federal government. For example, in the December 1984 edition of the *Forum*, NACOI published the federal government's report on Employment Equity which was tabled in the House of Commons as a result of yearlong consultations with NACOI and other concerned groups⁶⁶

The *Forum* also contained news stories and academic articles about issues affecting the Indian community in Canada. For example, in the February 1981 edition of the *Forum*, there was an article written by Manju Aanad on the challenges of growing up in Canada as a visible minority.⁶⁷ The newsletter would also contain a "quarterly round-up" which provided highlights of strides made by local chapters in educating the broader public, supporting integration efforts, successfully outreaching to local associations and governments, and discussion of current events. For example, in the January 1983 edition of the *Forum*, the newsletter highlighted concerns from local chapters in Montreal around comments made by Louis Jalabert, the president of Banque Nationale de Paris, who stated that 'Canada was a prosperous country because it was a white country' and insinuated that it should be kept that way.⁶⁸ This practice continued to take place until 1983 when changes within the organization resulted in a change to the format of the newsletter. This change in the format of the newsletter coincided with internal disputes within the organization culminating in a takeover of the national executive by the Vancouver chapter in 1985. It can be surmised that changes to the format were done to differentiate the organization from its past. It is important to note that these publications did not regularly get sent to general members due to the lack of funds NACOI had and thus was often meant solely for the executive. A shift did take place in the later 1980s in expanding the reach of this publication to the general

⁶⁶ Library and Archives Canada, *NACOI Forum*, National Associations of Canadians of Origins in India, 1979-1992, reproduction copy number C-319-4 - December 1984 edition

⁶⁷ *NACOI Forum Newsletters* – February 1984

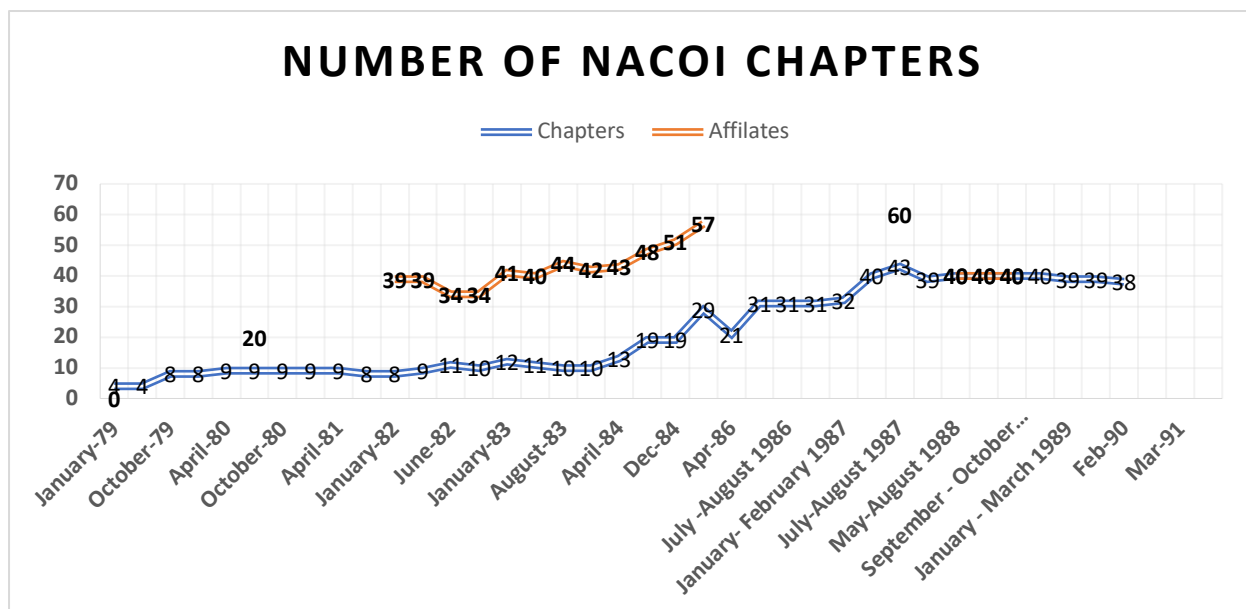
⁶⁸ *NACOI Forum Newsletters* – January 1983

membership but in its early iterations, the *Forum* was mainly meant for members deeply embedded within the organization.

In addition to chapters, affiliates were pre-existing groups or organizations that operated independently of NACOI but chose to associate with NACOI when their goals aligned for the added benefit of nationwide representation that went beyond the regional reach they normally had. A perfect example of this was the Ottawa Indo-Canadian Community Centre (ICCC) which joined NACOI as an affiliate in 1978. They were an Ontario non-profit corporation established in 1977 that had similar aims as NACOI but on a much smaller scale. NACOI was able to provide this group a network and greater reach than the city they were established in. Chapters, on the other hand, were the local representation of NACOI in a given city or province. They provided a direct line a communication for the general membership in a given area to the national office and worked to produce content and accomplish local objectives outlined in their individual constitutions. However, it is important to note that these goals were more or less similar iterations of NACOI's broad objectives outlined above just with a slight modification depending location of the specific chapter. For instance, the Montreal chapter stated that it wanted to assure and protect the rights of Canadians of origins in India living in Québec specifically.⁶⁹ From the information provided by its newsletters, NACOI at its peak had about 43 chapters across the country with over 60 affiliates.⁷⁰ However, the numeration of chapters and affiliates was not always done, especially during the later decline of the organization as the editors presumably wanted to hide its decline.

⁶⁹ Library and Archives Canada, RG 6 1990-91/172, "National Association of Canadians of Origins in India"

⁷⁰ Library and Archives Canada, MG28, volume 150, "National Association of Canadians of Origins in India: Tenth Annual National Conference"



71

All affiliates and chapters would regularly meet once a year during the NACOI national conference which was usually held during the end of summer or beginning of autumn in various cities. The location of the conference would regularly rotate between the various chapters to ensure that no one region was shown favouritism over another. These conventions were always centered on a theme that would be discussed through a series of seminars taking place over the course of three days. For instance, the 8th annual conference, which took place in Calgary from September 2nd - the 5th 1983, was titled “Unity in Diversity” and centered on a discussion of creating unity among the Indo-Canadian community, group rights under the new Canadian constitution, and Indo-Canadians’ contribution to Canada in the realm of education and labour.⁷² This conference also hosted the first annual youth conference and 2nd annual women’s conference. General members as well as NACOI affiliates, local chapter executives and invited guest speakers and academics participated in these conferences. The elections for the national executive were also held at these conferences and the main objectives for the upcoming year

⁷¹ Some data points are missing due to a lack of information. Information collected from *Forum* newsletters

⁷² For a list of the itinerary of the event, please refer to Appendix E

were also set. The subsequent edition of the *Forum* would then summarize what took place and publish their highlights in a special edition of the newsletter.

The last way NACOI was able to carry out its mandate was through regular communication with the Secretary of State of Multiculturalism, specifically the Program Liaison Officers under the Multiculturalism directorate all of which were under the Department of the Secretary of State. Through this department, NACOI was able to receive its funding and carry out large projects for the South Asian community. The department would oversee regular budget requirements as well as the annual or semi-annual statement of activities to ensure NACOI was focused on its task. Funding would be provided through the Group Development Program; a subsection of the Multiculturalism Grant Program which was established in 1974 and expanded upon in subsequent years as part of a larger effort to implement multicultural policy in Canada.⁷³ Communication with this department was incredibly important when discussing the structure of the association as the money provided not only aided in large-scale projects such as the production of educational films and research on issues affecting the community such as visa delays, but also helped to increase the organization's membership through the establishment of local chapters. The National Organizations Sector underneath the Program Liaison Office would be in charge of NACOI's annual reports. This sector would provide a yearly report to the Treasury Board which would then review and make amendments to the financing structure of NACOI. The aim of structuring NACOI's activities in this manner was to ensure that this group could develop an effective presence in Canadian society similar to other groups such as the Canadian Jewish Congress, Chinese Canadian National Council, Ukrainian Canadian

⁷³ This program was all situated under the Department of the Secretary of State (SOS). The SOS was in charge of overseeing multicultural policy until the creation of the Department Multiculturalism and Citizenship in 1991.

Committee, and Canadian Polish Congress.⁷⁴ The goal was to ensure that the federal government would serve as a consistent source of operational and strategic support for NACOI in its endeavours.

MAIN ISSUES TACKLED

On the whole, NACOI was relatively successful in its formative years in tackling issues plaguing the South Asian community which involved the federal government. Although lobbying the federal government was NACOI's main objective, it also undertook many projects that either revolved around issues taking place in India or involved local governments or other organizations. For instance, NACOI devoted a significant amount of time to address the issue of representation of visible minorities in the media by creating a sub-committee that would be dedicated to studying the media and its coverage of visible minorities, in particular South Asians, on television. NACOI also took part in the United Nations "Year of the Child", a campaign that was intended to provide a greater spotlight to the problems that affected children throughout the world. For its part, NACOI devoted a special edition of its newsletter solely to this issue and asked for children in Canada to write to their association about what Canada could do to alleviate some of the problems affecting children in other parts of the world.⁷⁵ Locally as well, there were NACOI chapters that sought to better educate the public about the South Asian community and were in the process of conducting studies and producing educational material that could then be distributed to schools in order to foster a greater understanding of the community.

Despite the organization being scant more than two years old, NACOI from its inception had the knowledge and ability to influence some large-scale issues plaguing the East Indian community in Canada. While there is not a direct explanation for how NACOI was able to

⁷⁴ Library and Archives Canada, RG 6 1990-91/172, "National Association of Canadians of Origins in India"

⁷⁵ *NACOI Forum Newsletter* - April to October 1979

mobilize effectively to the degree that the Canadian government noticed its concerns, I speculate that this effectiveness was due to the affluence and well-established positions of its early leaders from the East Indian community. Many of these early leading members were well integrated in the Canadian mainstream, had knowledge of and expertise on dealing with government structure and therefore understood the best way to gain the notice of relevant bureaucrats. While there were many concerns NACOI did want to address, this section will focus solely on the problems that involved discussions with the federal government.

The main issue NACOI wanted to ameliorate during its inception was a “discriminatory problem” as it was phrased by the association involving Revenue Canada (now known as the Canada Revenue Agency). This issue stemmed from the allowance Revenue Canada gave for Canadian citizens in the 1970s whereby individuals could provide tax deductible support payments to dependents. Revenue Canada’s interpretation in determining whether a relative abroad was considered a dependant for income tax purposes had resulted in several Indian applicants having their tax claims denied. This meant that relatives living abroad could not be considered dependants because there was an issue in determining whether these relatives relied solely on immigrants in Canada to provide for them. Revenue Canada also made changes in 1978 whereby the maximum deductible amount was pro-rated to the per-capita income of the recipient’s country of residence.⁷⁶ Complaints to NACOI revealed that the application of this policy resulted in income tax authorities denying claims or demanding refunds for income tax exemptions for an individual’s dependant living in India.⁷⁷ From Revenue Canada’s perspective these remittance payments were not tax deductible because the dependant in question would probably have had income or other resources in the year which would have been sufficient to

⁷⁶ *NACOI Forum Newsletters* – October 1979

⁷⁷ *NACOI Forum Newsletters* – October 1979

provide for the basic necessities in terms of living standards prevailing in their country of residence.

However from NACOI's perspective, the lack of understanding Revenue Canada had towards the issue of remittances to family members in India therefore made the issue one of discrimination and not simply a misunderstanding of language. Furthermore this qualifier of the correct standard of living also created confusion as there was no specification of what standard Revenue Canada was using to measure the livelihood of dependants in India. What metrics would be taken into account to determine what was sufficient? Did Revenue Canada more generally refer to the quality of life rather than a certain standard of living that may have been different to what was expected in Canada? For NACOI, such issues were inadequately addressed and thus NACOI felt that the interpretation of this policy required redress. NACOI wanted to change the existing legislation so that it would better take into account the cultural and societal expectation of remittances to family members in Indian culture. The culture around remittances can be attributed to several factors one of which is a generally collectivist mentality of immigrants from India. Collectivist cultural characteristics include behaviour that models respect for elders, mutual care, group decisions, and most importantly, a value system maintained through the expectation of responsibility to the group, commitment and the avoidance of shame.⁷⁸ It was clearly an instance of differing values that NACOI felt responsibility to explain and hopefully change legislation in favour of Indo-Canadians.

To induce change NACOI provided in its newsletter a three-step plan as well as "encouraging steps forward" to resolve the issue. The first step involved drafting a letter which was distributed across Canada to over 250 organizations to increase notoriety of this issue as

⁷⁸ Pavna Sodhi, "Bicultural Identity Formation of Second Generation Indo-Canadians," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 40, no. 2 (2008): 188

well as urging these groups to meet with local Members of Parliament to highlight the problems with the government's actions. The second step involved television and radio press coverage to let other Canadians know about the policy and its adverse effects. The last step was to draft a letter to the Minister of National Revenue who had defended the department's approach to the tax claim issue. Following these phases, other goals were outlined by NACOI which included submitting a complaint with the Canadian Human Rights Commission, collaborating with other ethnic associations to approach the issue with greater force, further consultation with the Member of Parliament from Mississauga, and lastly, asking for donations from NACOI members for a "test case" that was going to be pursued in the courts and.

In addition to bringing attention to the cause through public outreach and contacting local MPs for support, NACOI also sought out academics who could articulate to the Revenue Minister the cultural significance of remittances to elders. As a result of their efforts, Professor John Kurian helped to develop a research paper on the subject of remittances to dependants in India. The paper was prepared for dissemination to Revenue Canada so that those who were in charge of developing legislation pertaining to tax deductions could better understand the tradition of remittance payments to elders in India and their obligations to family members regardless of whether the family member is located in Canada or in the country of origin.⁷⁹ This paper and the subsequent presentation worked towards helping the Minister understand the significance of this practice and resulted in an update on the rules concerning the dependant status and remittance payments. Based on the 1980 issue of the *Forum* Revenue Canada had issued refunds to those who were affected by the tax deduction issue. The revised interpretation bulletin along with relevant forms (T1-NER) could be obtained at local Revenue Canada centres.⁸⁰ However, the

⁷⁹ René Houle and Grant Schellenberg, "Remittance Behaviours Among Recent Immigrants in Canada," 2008, 41.

⁸⁰ *NACOI Forum Newsletters* – October 1979

issue still remained largely unresolved until later in the 1980s as there were other concerns Revenue Canada had with the language around the dependency issue in the legislation. NACOI continued to push to have Indians allowed deductions on their tax claims throughout this fight. The eventual outcome of this issue was the removal of this allowance from the tax legislation by the late 1980s. On the whole it can be argued that NACOI for its part played a significant role in having the government pay attention to this issue and listen to an alternative perspective. The fact that refunds were even issued out in the first place and amendments to the tax code were also provided demonstrates positive strides in affecting legislation for the benefit of the South Asian community. Looking to their seven main objectives, NACOI was able to accomplish number four and five of its mandate quite effectively.

The second issue NACOI chose to tackle in its formative years was the extremely long delays around obtaining visas for Indian immigrants. This resulted in several complaints to NACOI by concerned Indian immigrants of waiting periods being around about 12 months or longer. In this instance, the main problem rested on a miscommunication of information by the Department of Employment and Immigration and incorrect information being provided by applicants. This issue was solved relatively easily through the dissemination of information packets produced by the Department of Employment and Immigration which provided clearer instructions for applicants to expedite the process. NACOI in this case acted as the mediator of this dispute by communicating to both parties the concerns and needs of each group. NACOI was able to again communicate and bring attention to the relevant minister issues in language that helped the department tailor its response to Indian visa applicants. However, it needs to be mentioned that this particular issue was not solved in its entirety at this juncture. Rather what took place during 1977 was merely the first iteration of ongoing issues with the Department of

Employment and Immigration and its issues of visas being granted to Indian applicants that would resurface at various times during the existence of this organization. More complicated interactions between these two parties will be explored later on in this thesis.

In examining the various causes that NACOI took on during its first few years, three reasons explain why NACOI was, on the whole, successful in bringing about change for its causes. First off, the causes NACOI chose to focus on had small and specific targets. This meant that NACOI, could narrow in on key matters that were a cause of concern for the association and request for an equally specific response. In the issue with Revenue Canada, the main cause of concern was the interpretation of a specific text in the tax deduction clause. Having a discussion with the minister on this specific point would ensure that responses from the government were actually discussing the matter at hand. One could not divert the issue to some other unrelated topic.

Secondly, NACOI made excellent use of both information and dissemination. They not only brought public attention to their issues but also undertook their own research to give greater authority to their arguments when dealing with the federal government. It is quite noticeable with regard to the taxation issue as the research paper by John Kurian was one of the key reasons which led to the Revenue Minister understanding why remittance payments were seen as culturally significant for the Indian community. Having these additional resources and research papers lent credibility to NACOI's claims and made it more likely that other parties would listen to what is being presented. This tactic was repeated in other cases where NACOI asked for funds regarding other projects they wanted to undertake. For instance, some NACOI chapters began longitudinal studies on the socio-economic makeup of the South Asian community in various cities in 1978 which were then used to justify the need for more funding to facilitate heritage

language programs in certain cities. There were also task forces that were developed to conduct research on the presence of South Asians in the media to argue for the justification of hiring more visible minorities for advertisements in Canada. The establishment of local task forces to prepare briefs, studies and reports, which were then presented as committee evidence, allowed NACOI to justify its claims on certain practices and standards as being discriminatory.

Lastly, for NACOI's part, the issues it did choose to address were ones that involved the federal government as the primary actor. NACOI may have been engaged with other issues concerning the South Asian community but it is important to note that the group did not go through the government to resolve those other concerns. This focus on domestic concern was an unspoken policy of the founding members who felt that issues back home should not take up NACOI's resources. NACOI first and foremost wanted to focus on the Indo-Canadian community living in Canada and so while it may have had concern for events back home, NACOI when it first started out made an active effort to pay attention to the concerns of the Indo-Canadian community as a whole.⁸¹ Instead, interactions between both parties were centered on issues that directly involved the federal government and thus were issues that could be remedied by changes the government made. As mentioned previously there were other causes that NACOI took on that did not involve the federal government but these causes were dealt through other means. The next chapter will delve deeper into the other types of concerns NACOI was preoccupied with that did involve foreign governments and other associations.

PLANS FOR GROWTH AND CONCERNS FOR NACOI

The first four years of NACOI's existence saw relatively rapid growth of its association and reach. Based on numbers provided by the organization from their newsletters, NACOI had

⁸¹ Interview with Dr. John Samuel. Interview by Yashika Dhall. Audio-recording, November 22, 2019. Interview with Dr. Prabir Neogi. Interview by Yashika Dhall. Audio-recording, November 25, 2019; Interview with Navin Parekh on NACOI. Interview by Yashika Dhall. Audio-recording, November 15, 2019.

about 10 chapters by 1980 with several more affiliates.⁸² NACOI was able to secure affiliates with long histories in certain parts of the country such as the Khalsa Diwan Society, demonstrating how the group steadily gained credibility through linkages with other ethnic associations in the country. Equally important was the recognition NACOI was given not only from leaders of the official political parties in Canada but also from other national associations who were also focused on the integration of minority groups within the Canadian mainstream. One prominent example is the Canadian Consultative Council on Multiculturalism (CCCM) in 1979. The formation of the CCCM in 1973 was done to establish a body of persons qualified to make recommendations designed to ensure the full participation of all Canadians in the cultural development of this country.⁸³ Appointment to the CCCM was incredibly important for NACOI as it provided a source of consultation to the federal government directly through the Minister of State of Multiculturalism. NACOI was also later included on the Canadian Ethnocultural Council (CEC) which had similar aims to the CCCM but operated differently. While both councils were concerned with heritage retention, communication among other various associations, the removal of barriers and reinforcing equality and inclusiveness, the CEC was non-profit and non-partisan and therefore non-governmental unlike the CCCM.⁸⁴ The CEC provided a forum that was more oriented towards a grassroots approach and the fact that one of its president, Navin Parekh, was also a well-recognized member from NACOI shows that the CEC provided similar aims to NACOI regarding political advocacy for race-relations. Both councils served different functions as the CCCM was more concerned about advising and influencing governmental policy on

⁸² *NACOI Forum Newsletters* –October 1980

⁸³ Jorgen Dahlie, "Ottawa Report: A Note on the Second Biennial Conference of the Canadian Consultative Council on Multiculturalism," *Canadian Ethnic Studies = Etudes Ethniques Au Canada; Calgary* 8, no. 1 (January 1, 1976): 89–93.

⁸⁴ Diane Dragasevich, "The Canadian Ethnocultural Council and Evolving Multiculturalism," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 43, no. 3 (2011): 230.

multiculturalism while the CEC was more focused on advocating for legislation that would aid in the integration process for new immigrants. Having a role on both councils demonstrates that the group was able to make significant growth with regard to their presence in the Canadian scene.

While membership numbers were not provided in any of the textual material I consulted, there is a general perception that membership did grow however that the growth was slow and inconsistent even within the formative years. A perfect example of the conflicting situation NACOI often found itself in regarding its growth was the response from their Year of The Child Project, where only twelve entries were submitted for the cause despite its relatively large membership in comparison. There was also the issue of funding for the association from members with mentions of this particular issue made in several newsletters. Comments about inadequate funding were cited as reasons for the delay in the production and mailing of the January 1982 issue. The issue of meagre financial contributions also came up in articles discussing communications with the Federal Liaison Office under the Multiculturalism Directorate. NACOI provided excerpts of comments made by the Federal Liaison Office in the same January issue of the *Forum*:

these increased costs coupled with government's reluctance of continued funding and the community's lack of concern for producing necessary support pose an immediate threat to our existence as an effective National Organization...Why is this not happening? We urge you to give this matter a serious thought and donate generously.⁸⁵

The fact that these issues come up so early in the organization's existence and continue on despite their outward growth in size and reach demonstrates that there was a disconnect between the general membership and the executive of the organization. As a policy advocacy group, NACOI at this point has succeeded in understanding and changing some legislation that revolved around racial discrimination, immigration and multiculturalism. However, disconnect with

⁸⁵NACOI *Forum Newsletters*- January 1982

general membership speaks to early issues around unity of the organization. Reviewing major events highlighted in their newsletters from these initial years, it seems that some of this issue can be attributed to the lack of discussion and concern around issues pertaining to women and children who make up a decent portion of the South Asian community in many cities.

Additional research has also highlighted that the lack of solidarity also comes from comments made by other ethnic groups who remained skeptical on whether NACOI could truly represent all “East Indians”. As Hugh Johnston points out in his article on the Punjabi community in Vancouver after 1961, the British Columbia Chapter of NACOI was continually plagued by the ongoing struggle between the old Sikh leadership and more outward looking opponents who had varying opinions on the need of NACOI.⁸⁶ Especially for the more traditionalist, the notion that Sikhs could be counted as simply another ethnic group within the South Asian community was incredibly wrong. To these advocates, Sikhs were and continue to remain a distinct and separate group from other East Indians and are not to be seen as one. More concerning is the relationship between the BC chapter and the chapter located in Ottawa after 1979 as changes in the Sikh leadership of the Khalsa Diwan Society made communications between the two branches more tenuous. Thus one can observe that from its inception NACOI was fraught with several difficulties that were only exacerbated in the 1980s. It was a consistent mix of positive growth alongside internal fissures that became more apparent as the organization became larger and more complex.

CONCLUSIONS

The early years of NACOI were ones that saw relatively rapid growth of this association. The impetus for the creation of this association came from the lack of a unified voice that

⁸⁶ Hugh Johnston, “The Development of the Punjabi Community in Vancouver since 1961,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies = Etudes Ethniques Au Canada*; Calgary 20, no. 2 (January 1, 1988): 14.

represented the perspective and concerns of the South Asian community. As multiculturalism became embraced by the federal government, members from the South Asian community saw this as an opportunity to work alongside them and other ethnic groups to have a better understanding of how multicultural policy would be implemented in Canadian society. Broadly speaking NACOI had 7 main objectives that it wanted to accomplish that could be categorized in three ways: support, education and outreach. Alongside these goals, NACOI established local chapters in various cities alongside affiliates who could gain access to the network that NACOI was beginning to establish. Communicating regularly through the publication of a newsletter, NACOI and its local chapters and affiliates took steps to resolve issues plaguing the South Asian community. These involved concerns around Revenue Canada's interpretation around its tax deduction legislation as well as the long delays for visas by Indian applicants. These instances demonstrated the potential NACOI had as a policy advocacy group because of the relative success they had in resolving the issue and making noticeable changes within the legislation. The choice to focus on achievable and specific targets alongside the development of primary data and papers supporting their cause demonstrates to a casual observer the ways in which NACOI was able to exert influence in matters pertaining to immigration. Furthermore the ability to capitalize on the external environment such as the political environment as well as media outlets highlights how NACOI was an extremely effective organization.

The effectiveness of such advocacy resulted in continued outward growth of this organization with NACOI eventually being seated on the Canadian Consultative Council on Multiculturalism in 1979 and the Canadian Ethnocultural Council in 1980. However equally present in this period were the many internal issues with membership, solidarity and lack of intersectionality to tackle other issues faced by the South Asian community. For the purposes of

this thesis then, it will be especially important to examine whether NACOI will manage to establish credibility within the community thereby minimizing the alienation that the group had already been criticized for. Equally important will be to examine how NACOI will attempt to evolve towards catering to a greater diversity of issues, especially those pertaining to women and youth since that also even during its formative years was a criticism lobbied against them. These issues will be particularly interesting to examine as NACOI from this point onward increases in size and complexity which inherently make it more difficult for the group to maintain strong ties.

CHAPTER 2: OBJECTIVES HAMPERED BY INTERNAL STRUGGLES 1980-1986

The second period of NACOI's existence was significant in a number of ways with strides being made on domestic legislation contrasted with large blowbacks of political events both at home and in India. Domestically, NACOI's political advocacy resulted in a number of positive outcomes for ethnic minorities in Canada through their work during the Abella Commission in 1984. This landmark inquiry became the basis for the *Employment Equity Act of 1986* and provided a means to address instances of employment discrimination in an effective manner for minority groups. NACOI also provided consultation on the new Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms which would be a part of the *1982 Canadian Constitution*. This group also worked to address issues around immigration regulations that resulted in a number of delays to entry for members of the East Indian community. However, towards the mid-1980s several political events in domestic and international relations resulted in significant pressures for the organization so much so that by the end of the decade the funding for the association was nearly exhausted. Québec sovereignty, Operation Blue Star, the assassination of Indira Gandhi as well as the Air India plane crash exacerbated the existing tensions within NACOI resulting in two local chapters separating themselves from the main body of NACOI. The tension from this middle period would set up the inevitable decline of NACOI in the 1990s. Therefore, the main goal of this chapter will be to lay out both accomplishments NACOI had in the beginning of the 1980s and delve deeper into how NACOI began to lose control of its chapters and authority by the mid-1980s.

SUCCESSSES MADE FOR THE EAST INDIAN COMMUNITY

The 1970s was a turbulent decade for various minority groups in Canada. Despite the numerous strides that were made for women, visible minorities, indigenous groups, and disabled

people, these groups were still experiencing instances of discrimination. One area where this was most noticeable was in the workplace, both in government departments and in the private sector. While there was legislation in place by the late 1970s that prohibited discrimination on the basis of race, sex, nation or ethnic origin as well as other grounds, there was a greater effort made at the end of the decade to combat what some groups termed as “systemic discrimination” in the workplace. The concept of systematic discrimination was based on the idea that workplace diversity was not just a matter of individual behaviour but rather a matter of systemic inequalities as well as institutional and workplace cultures that described certain types of people and behaviours as normative and thus the standard.⁸⁷ To remedy this concern, the government began implementing special programs for women, Aboriginal peoples, and people with disabilities and visible minorities to strengthen the important aspect of representativeness in the merit principle.⁸⁸ The Public Service Commission (PSC), for instance, established new training programs to help women in support categories gain new skills that could be transferrable to higher positions within the federal government.

In 1975, PSC, on behalf of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND), also began to administer the Northern Careers Program, which was aimed at promoting job opportunities for aboriginals living in the Yukon and Northwest Territories.⁸⁹ There was also an initiative for Black employment in Halifax through the launch of the Black Employment Program (BEP) in May 1973 that collaborated with the local community, to provide

⁸⁷ John Grundy and Miriam Smith, “Evidence and Equity: Struggles over Federal Employment Equity Policy in Canada, 1984–95,” *Canadian Public Administration* 54, no. 3 (2011): 338, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1754-7121.2011.00179.x>.

⁸⁸ *History of Employment Equity in the Public Service and the Public Service Commission of Canada* (Public Service Commission, 2011), 15 <http://deslibris.ca/ID/232333>; It should be noted that the terms “aboriginal” and “visible minorities” are more de rigueur for the period that I am discussing i.e. the 1970s, however more current terminology would use the terms “indigenous persons” and “racialized persons” respectively.

⁸⁹ Public Service Commission of Canada, *History of Employment Equity in the Public Service and the Public Service Commission of Canada* (Public Service Commission, 2011), 11-12 <http://deslibris.ca/ID/232333>.

quantifiable data on the educational trends in high school, university and other learning institutions. In 1979, a new affirmative action policy was implemented by the federal government. Under this initiative, Canada Employment and Immigration Commission staff worked to encourage employers to develop information on their employment processes, identify potential sources of under-representation and discriminatory practices, and establish equity-enhancing targets. This voluntary initiative, however, had low turnout rates and in general did quite poorly in tackling the main issue.⁹⁰ The initial thought process was that by having more members of affected groups in positions of power, that the public service would in turn become more representative and alleviate issues of discrimination in the workplace however in practice the increase in numbers did not actually alleviate concerns around barriers to promotion and hiring practices.

In light of these ineffective federal policies, the 1980s marked a shift in the approach of equality rights in the workplace and groups like NACOI sent forth a number of recommendations to the federal government to enhance their affirmative action policies. In response to these calls to action, the federal government appointed the Royal Commission on Equality in Employment to examine the issue of systemic discrimination in the workplace, headed by Judge Rosalie Abella (hereafter referred to as the Abella Commission). In these consultations NACOI was present to provide statistical information on the situation of the East Indian community in various cities and specific experiences members from the community had in the realm of employment discrimination with the federal government.⁹¹ Through these case studies NACOI advocated for

⁹⁰ John Grundy and Miriam Smith, "Evidence and Equity: Struggles over Federal Employment Equity Policy in Canada, 1984–95," *Canadian Public Administration* 54, no. 3 (2011): 335–57, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1754-7121.2011.00179.x>.

⁹¹ September 1984 newsletter; Statistical information for the briefs that were presented to the Abella commission were collected from cross-sectional or diachronic studies. The funding for these projects was provided by the Program Liaison Office or through other grants NACOI received. These reports were often small case studies of specific cities in Canada that had a large Indo-Canadian population such as Montreal and Vancouver.

greater transparency in knowledge and training and engagement in decision-making to combat racist assumptions towards East Indians and to prevent restrictive employment and promotions.⁹² From these reports made by NACOI and other organizations, the Abella Commission then examined the employment practices of 11 designated crown and government-owned corporations which represented a broad range of Canadian enterprises. From its yearlong study the Abella Commission recommended three enforcement solutions that would be aimed at altering the employment environment in Canada at the federal level.

The first option expanded the jurisdiction of the Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC) to make it responsible for employment equity -- which included issuing guidelines , collecting, reviewing and analyzing data as well as enforcing employment equality—and contract compliance. Secondary to this first element was the addition of a new independent agency whose function would be to provide expertise confidentially to employers on how to best implement employment equity.⁹³ The second option proposed a new independent agency that would be independent of the CHRC and would accomplish what was listed above. The last option (which was similar to the first option) would incorporate the Canadian Labour Market and Productivity Centre to assist the CHRC in the development of employment equity guidelines.⁹⁴ For NACOI's part, it was one of the players in the creation of a new standard of employment equity in Canada. The larger chapters of Vancouver, the Atlantic and Ottawa all spoke to the commission on three separate occasions to help isolate issues affecting visible minorities. For NACOI, taking part in these discussions was important because it provided something which

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Judge Rosalie Silberman Abella, "Equality in Employment: A Royal Commission Report -" (Ottawa: Commission on Equality in Employment, October 1984), 258- 159 <http://equalpaycoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Equality-in-Employment-A-Royal-Commission-Report-Abella-Complete-Report.pdf>.

⁹⁴ Judge Rosalie Silberman Abella, "Equality in Employment: A Royal Commission Report -" (Ottawa: Commission on Equality in Employment, October 1984), 258- 159 <http://equalpaycoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Equality-in-Employment-A-Royal-Commission-Report-Abella-Complete-Report.pdf>.

was more practical than the rights enshrined in section 27 of the Charter. NACOI as such felt a responsibility to help guide such legislation because it would result in tangible goods for the South Asian community. As Navin Parekh explained during the interview I conducted with him:

Because the thing is that it looked at the issue of Charter of Rights and Freedoms – it was there, section 27, but it did not have any practical meaning... [it was] theoretical and nobody even thought about it too much. The Abella Commission was very good because it was practical. But then there was the issue of various federal governments and commissions and how are they doing with multiculturalism so that was one of the main thrusts of why we [NACOI] also went for the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act*.⁹⁵

Section 27 of the Canadian charter specifically dealt with how rights would be interpreted and applied under the law. The section reads, “This Charter shall be interpreted in a manner consistent with the preservation and enhancement of the multicultural heritage of Canadians.”⁹⁶ Its incorporation into the Constitution can be seen as an official recognition by the Canadian state of multiculturalism as a Canadian value, though its practical applications are more limited. Broadly speaking, this provision was used to describe certain aspects of existing equality rights, such as freedom of conscience and religion under section 2(a) or section 14 of the Charter? Or Constitution, which deals with the right to an interpreter for people who do not understand the language in which the proceedings are conducted.⁹⁷ However because its purpose seems to be more theoretical than practical as it does not state that Canadians have a right to multiculturalism, the significance of section 27 lies mainly in its message more so than in action. Nonetheless, NACOI’s effort alongside other groups to have this provision included highlights the important work they did in having the Canadian state agree to recognizing the importance of multicultural policy. Much like other issues, NACOI’s success lay with its ability to cooperate

⁹⁵ Navin Parekh, Interview; bracketed words were added to provide greater clarity of the conversation at hand.

⁹⁶ *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, s 27, Part 1 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*, being Schedule B to the *Canada Act 1982 (UK)*, 1982, c 11

⁹⁷ Department of Justice Government of Canada, “Charterpedia - Section 27 – Multicultural Heritage,” November 9, 1999, <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/csj-sjc/rfc-dlc/ccrf-ccdl/check/art27.html>.

and collaborate with other concerned groups. The interview with Mr. Parekh also revealed how NACOI was also involved in the development of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Similarly to the Abella Commission which took place a few years after. NACOI, due to its collaborative nature with other groups concerned about the same issue, was able to put forth the argument that a multicultural framework needed to be incorporated alongside the new constitution for it to truly represent Canadian values. For their part, NACOI articulated that the protection of minority groups on various legal, social, cultural and education matters needed to be enshrined in a document like the Canadian Constitution. As he described it:

Navin Parekh: that was that. So we --I appeared before the committee also to make really big presentations saying that multiculturalism must be part and parcel of Canadian constitutional framework.

Yashika Dhall: Right.

Navin Parekh: Originally that was not there but we got together with other ethnic groups as well as with women's groups and others. And as a result in the Charter of Rights, there is a Section 27.

Yashika Dhall: Yes

Navin Parekh: And that got into because of a lot of pressure that we people put in. Not we [as in solely NACOI] but --.

Yashika Dhall: As a collective?

Navin Parekh: Yes, as a collective. And then in 1988, the Multiculturalism Act was passed. The Canadian Act, you probably have [heard of it].

The practical nature of this commission made it effective in dealing with complaints of discrimination in the workplace. The discussions of the report eventually had consequences far beyond the federal government as its recommendations were subsequently used to formulate and develop the *Employment Equity Act* in 1986 which would influence employment practices in the private sector as well. Embracing the nature of multicultural policy, the *Employment Equity Act* would provide meaningful ways to ensure that no one was denied job opportunities or benefits

for reasons unrelated to ability, and that systemic barriers faced by designated groups could be more easily identifiable. Part of the reason NACOI succeeded in shaping these laws was due to the number of groups who consulted with the government as well as the general attitude within the mainstream society that these issues had to be addressed. The previous decade had emphasized the importance of greater equity and as a result NACOI was able to be heard with receptive ears to their concerns.

The issue of delays in immigrant visas was another problem that NACOI tackled during the 1980s. The 1980s saw several cases of inordinate delays and claims of unreasonable and indecent interrogation of applicants who were applying for immigrant visas to Canada from India. NACOI's perception of the situation was another instance of a discriminatory attitude on the part of immigration authorities at the Canadian High Commission in Delhi.⁹⁸ To combat this concern, the president of the British Columbia Chapter and the national president John Kurien, alongside academics such as Dr. Pandya, who had specialized knowledge of immigration law, worked together to prepare several papers which focused on the drawbacks and loopholes that were present in the rules and regulations of the immigration process.⁹⁹ Special attention was paid to how the interview process may have had pitfalls pertaining to how immigration authorities handled case files. There was an emphasis by some NACOI chapters that the issue lay in the standards and practices of immigration officials overseas and the unequal treatment the Indian immigrants seemed to be receiving. Additional statistics and papers in the following years from 1981 to 1983 were also developed to provide concrete numbers on how long wait times were for

⁹⁸ *NACOI Forum Newsletters* - October 1980; wait times for parents: 200 days; spouses: 400 days; assisted relative: 464 days; other categories: 476 days. It should also be noted that Canadian High Commissions were often located in the capital cities of countries. There are Consulate General offices in other major Indian cities such as Bengaluru (formerly Bangalore), Chandigarh, Kolkata (formerly Calcutta) and, Mumbai (formerly Bombay)

⁹⁹ As pertaining to its application in India.

applicants at the Canadian Immigration Offices located in Delhi.¹⁰⁰ These efforts were then brought to the attention of the government in hopes that the research NACOI provided on shortcomings of existing immigration regulation and implementation would be taken under consideration.

Analysis of the correspondence between the organization and the contemporary Minister of Employment and Immigration, Lloyd Axworthy, from NACOI's newsletters and private fonds detail some successes made for the East Indian community in the realm of visa applications and settlement in the country. On the whole, NACOI was not successful in overturning legislation that seemed to create difficulty in obtaining visas in India. However, they did succeed in having the department re-open some individual case files that had may have been overlooked. NACOI in these instances worked to provide a strong line of communication between the department responsible for immigration and the East Indian community. For example, one of the issues NACOI was able to provide clarity to immigration officials surrounding mistakes made by the applicants on their immigration form because of customs in some communities where the name of the mother was not mentioned in birth, school or marriage certificates. The outcome of these talks between NACOI and the federal government made for a greater level of understanding resulting in the re-opening of several case files.

The lack of success regarding amending legislation pertaining to visa application was in part due to two elements. Firstly, specific focus on the East Indian cases made for a weaker argument of a large-scale overhaul of the visa application process, particularly in connection with the standards and practices of immigration officers. If there had been greater collaboration on this issue with other ethnic groups or large organizations such as the Canadian Ethnocultural Council CEC, perhaps there may have been greater incentive for the government to provide a

¹⁰⁰*NACOI Forum Newsletters* - February 1981

more adequate response as to why delays of this nature occurred. Secondly, while NACOI did focus on specific aspects of the immigration process that may have causing the backlog and delay experienced by applicants, these reasons were not agreed upon by the organization itself. For instance, articles by the *Forum* point to differences that various chapters had with the root cause of the issue. The Ottawa chapter saw the inconsistency of standards and practices of immigration officers as the root cause. However, the British Columbian Chapter, held the opinion that the issue revolved primarily around the quantity of resources and staff allocated for Indian immigration in comparison with other regions in the world.¹⁰¹ These regional tensions further weakened the organization's argument since it showed a lack of solidarity on the issue. As this chapter will explain further on, regional interests of various Chapters made for challenges in promoting one idea to the federal government.

It is not to be forgotten that coming to the end of this period, NACOI had two more major causes that demonstrated the success of the organization in acting out its 1976 mandate: the launch of a large-scale youth cultural exchange program to fight prejudice and racism, and the establishment of funds and legal aid to assist the victims' families from the 1985 Air India crash. In 1982, the Vancouver and Ottawa chapters embarked on developing a cross-cultural exchange between Indo-Canadian and non-Indo Canadian youths to combat racism. The motivation to create this exchange was to expose Canadian youths to Indo-Canadian culture and religions, and in turn show the diversity that exists between the two cultures but also to emphasize the similarities between them as well. The hope was that in providing greater integration of non-Indian and Indo-Canadian children, stereotypes and other preconceived notions of East Indians could be eliminated in future generations. The program was approved by the Department of

¹⁰¹ Canada, Parliament, *House of Commons Sub-Committee on Equality Rights*, 33rd Parliament, 1st Session, Vol 2 no.15-22

Multiculturalism under Minister under Jim Fleming with over 80% of the initiative being funded by the federal government.¹⁰² Over 40 students were involved in the project from Ottawa and Vancouver, and students were billeted in homes in both cities so that they could immerse themselves in each other's home environment and culture.¹⁰³ Students and parents would both participate in various activities designed to educate and introduce diverse aspects of Canadian and Indo-Canadian life. Local organizations in each city also helped to facilitate the events and once completed, each student was asked to submit a summary of their experiences and what they had learned.

Of the various projects taken on by NACOI, the Youth Project to Combat Racism as significant for two reasons. Firstly, it was one of the large scale projects that incorporated more than one chapter in accomplishing its goals. This is important to note because most of the projects that NACOI undertook pertaining to integration and combatting prejudice were usually quite localized, which made sense given the fact that most youths often stay in one geographic region growing up. Moreover, the size of the country re-enforced the often-localized programs that NACOI chapters usually engaged in. However, in this instance, the effort made for a cross-country exchange demonstrates NACOI chapters' efforts to overcome some of their issues concerning solidarity for a larger goal. Secondly, this project was also one of the first large scale initiatives that was aimed at the integration of East Indian youth in the mainstream. This is important because most of NACOI's efforts up until this point were initiatives that were targeted primarily to older members of the South Asians community, with a focus generally geared towards first-generation immigrants. The inclusion of Indo-Canadian youths as well as non-Indo-Canadians youths made the event quite successful with great turnout and responses afterwards.

¹⁰² Library and Archives Canada, RG 6 1990-91/172, "National Association of Canadians of Origins in India"

¹⁰³ This program was executed in 1982.

Their efforts were commendable and signified a good start to addressing the criticisms around the lack of attention given to issues affecting women and youth.

Pivoting from the issue around youth integration, NACOI also demonstrated how important and useful it could be in representing East Indian concerns through their efforts during the Air India plane crash in 1985. Air India Flight 182 represented a significant moment for East Indians and Canadians alike as the incident remains Canada's deadliest terrorist attack. On June 23, 1984 Air India flight 182 left Toronto, and then Montreal bound for India. The six hours into its trip a suitcase bomb detonated in the rear cargo hold which blew a hole in the fuselage forcing the aircraft the split open from the front to the back of the plane killing all 329 people on board. The wreckage was soon discovered by a merchant vessel off the coast of Ireland.¹⁰⁴ The incident also caused a great deal of tension within the East Indian community, particularly within the Sikh community in Canada as the perpetrators were Sikh separatists. The ramifications of the event will be discussed in greater detail a little later on in the chapter as this incident among other political events placed immense stress on the existence of the organization.

When the incident initially took place, the Canadian government for the most part did not consider the tragedy to be a Canadian one. For instance, John Kurien the President of NACOI in 1985 discussed with the House of Commons Sub-committee on Equality Rights on the lack of response from political leadership in Ottawa pertaining to the plane crash, stating that:

With the political leadership, I think the problem has been... If I may say so, the numbers of Members of Parliament who have expressed their condolences to community organisations are remarkably small, from all parties. When relatives out in Cork were screaming about the treatment received by next of kin in Cork, with four Canadian consulate officer taking turns over the day, with one person to receive all those families trained in nothing but issuing visas... They were screaming about the quality of service which was received. I have not heard any Member of Parliament anywhere in this

¹⁰⁴ Kim Bolan, "Air India Flight 182 Bombing," in *Air India Flight 182 Bombing*, March 31, 2017, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/air-india-flight-182-bombing>.

country who raise any voice and said hey, this is had; we would like to see a little better treatment.¹⁰⁵

What NACOI set out to change through their discussions with the government was the latter's attitude with regard to the crash. NACOI urged the government to formally recognize this event as a terror attack perpetrated against Canadians and sought to bring to light how the lack of recognition deeply upset members of the South Asian community. The passengers who were killed were Canadians as much as they were Indian. Through his appearance at committee meetings, NACOI president, John Kurien was able to demonstrate to the federal government that recognition of the crash was a way to show not only empathy but that the government sympathized with the South Asian community because they were very much a part of Canadian society. He was able to present convincing testimony through personal accounts of those affected to back up his claim that the Canadian government was doing a disservice by not seeing the incident as a Canadian tragedy. As NACOI worked to integrate Indo-Canadian people into the larger fabric of Canadian society, this crash provided a clear moment where the government could respond in kind. As a result, the Air India bombing is now remembered as a Canadian disaster through the efforts of the NACOI and its local chapter. It provides a good example of how NACOI was able to distinguish wisely at what level they wanted the federal government involved and what they could do on their own.

What is interesting to note regarding the aftermath of this event is how NACOI went about supporting the community by itself rather than asking the federal government to intervene. While NACOI worked hard to have the both federal and provincial governments recognize the tragedy and provide condolences, most, if not all of the work to help victims emotionally, legally, and financially was done by them. For their part, NACOI chapters provided several

¹⁰⁵ Canada, Parliament, *House of Commons Sub-Committee on Equality Rights*, 33rd Parliament, 1st Session, Vol 2 no.15-22

means of support for the families who had been affected by the tragedy in addition to lobbying the government to condemn the incident. In its 10th annual conference, President Kurien identified the five strategies NACOI was enacting to recover from the disaster:

1. NACOI assisted in identifying the next of kin, in keeping families and friends abreast of facts, in helping with finding medical and dental records, in providing help for families that went to Cork, Ireland, and in finding answers to the multitude of questions on wills, estates, death certificates, bank accounts and other documentation.¹⁰⁶
2. Various chapters also organized counselling services for families. NACOI additionally worked with the Multiculturalism Directorate to set up information hotlines in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver so that anyone with additional information for the investigation could come forward confidentially.
3. Additionally, NACOI helped to monitor government action on the event and provided volunteers to help coordinate legal action.
4. There were also efforts to collect funds to help facilitate travel to Cork, Ireland for families of the victims to help perform last rites and aid the grieving process.
5. Lastly, NACOI worked to find law firms to coordinate actions on the determination of cause and liability of the crash.¹⁰⁷

These steps were all executed, with the *Forum* providing updates to members on the ongoing legal situation and provisions for travel to Cork, Ireland. The organization was able to pool together money to pay lawyers elsewhere so that litigation could be available to families of the

¹⁰⁶ Library and Archives Canada, MG28, volume 150, “National Association of Canadians of Origins in India: Tenth Annual National Conference”

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

victims in other parts of Canada.¹⁰⁸ This allowed affected families to pursue compensation without worrying about the financial stresses. Overall, these steps were much needed to help the community heal after the Air India crash but they did not help mend the polarization between Montreal chapter and the national organization. The events of 1985 helped to reinforce a growing alienation of the Indo-Canadian community with the Sikh contingency that now held power of the national organization.

POLITICAL TENSIONS AND INTERNAL STRUGGLE

The role of NACOI as the main body representing East Indians across Canada was made extremely difficult by the mid-1980s due to a number of domestic and international political events that compounded the organization's existing issues around having effective leadership, solidarity within the organization, and an inclusive organization that catered to Indo-Canadian women and youth. The succession of events in India regarding the Sikh community from Operation Blue Star to the assassination of Indira Gandhi and the Air India plane crash in 1985 heightened the fragmentation between local chapters in NACOI. Additional events such as the Québec sovereignty movement and internal issues such as the changing generational gap as well as a changeover in the leadership of NACOI kick-started the eventual demise of NACOI. This last section will evaluate the three main issues NACOI continued to struggle with from 1980 to 1985 alongside key domestic and international events that resulted in a downturn in the authority and effectiveness of the organization.

¹⁰⁸ The firm selected was located in Montreal and so work with the Montreal chapter helped to alleviate financial strain on victims located elsewhere in the country.

FUNDING

The struggles of NACOI both at the national level and local level were largely the result of money, or lack thereof. Without financial resources, basic organizational duties and goals were difficult to accomplish. Adding further stress was the fact that the majority of the money NACOI did receive was in the form of grants from the federal government thereby resulting in fluctuations in the spending capacity of the group each year. There are several mentions in the newsletters in 1982, 1983 and 1986 of the declining membership rate.¹⁰⁹ An excerpt in the January 1982 edition of the *Forum* notes that the poor increase in membership numbers resulted in concerns among some members of the executive regarding the effectiveness of NACOI: “These increased costs coupled with government’s reluctance of continued funding and the community’s lack of concern for production necessary support pose an immediate threat to our existence as an effective national organization.”¹¹⁰ Dwindling funds eventually resulted in a decrease in the number of newsletters published each year. Common complaints, by executive members in the newsletters around the lack of funds were consistent features in the *Forum* from this period, with various appeals to members for increased donations. An article from the May-June publication from 1986 even included a bizarre, passive-aggressive, meta-critique about the frustrations in NACOI:

This is a story about four people whose names were EVERYBODY, SOMEBODY, ANYBODY and NOBODY. There was an important job to be done, and EVERYBODY was asked to do it. EVERYBODY was sure that SOMEBODY would do it. ANYBODY could have done it, but NOBODY did it. SOMEBODY got angry about it because it was EVERYBODY’S job. EVERYBODY thought ANYBODY could do it, but NOBODY realized that EVERYBODY blamed somebody, but NOBODY accused ANYBODY.¹¹¹[sic]

¹⁰⁹ *NACOI Forum Newsletters* –January 1982, May 1983, May-June 1986

¹¹⁰ *NACOI Forum Newsletters* –January 1982

¹¹¹ *NACOI Forum Newsletters* –May-June 1986

The strange thing was that such urgent appeals were made during a time of relatively large growth in the size and reach of the organization with the numbers of affiliates and chapters increasing. The newsletters after 1982 had even begun to include Air Canada's and Air India's ads in its publications, creating an unusual scenario. However, despite these examples which show the organization doing relatively well, the constant presence of mini articles on the lack of funding which seemingly blamed its members highlighted the problems NACOI was facing throughout this period.

The decline in funding was the result of two key issues: the de-emphasis of multicultural policy from the federal government and the regionality of the chapters which made it difficult to maintain communication between all the chapters. The de-emphasis of multiculturalism by the federal government was the result of political events taking place in the country during the 1980s. The Québec referendum, which took place in 1980, brought about grave concern from the federal government in connection with the regional disparity of the country. Politically speaking, the frustration in Québec over the lack of recognition of French-Canadian identity presented challenges for the Trudeau government during constitutional talks at the beginning of the decade. The referendum left many Quebecers upset and questioning whether the Trudeau government could properly address Québec's issues. As the Progressive Conservatives took power in 1984, further discussions with Québec over its status as a *distinct society* were constant topics of discussion at the federal level.¹¹² Therefore politically-speaking, Québec, and the power it held, in many ways influenced where the government's priorities lied.

For Québec, the issue of multiculturalism was a policy that undermined the importance of French-Canadian identity in Québec. This issue, as articulated by Premier Robert Bourassa, is

¹¹² The term which came about during the Meech Lake Accord discussions refers to the idea that Québec has a certain uniqueness that differentiates it from the other provinces in Québec.

the notion that one's language and culture can be separated from one another; a possibility that could not exist if Québec was to be its own distinct nation.¹¹³ The assumption implicit in multiculturalism is that "we are all immigrants", a sentiment, as Julien Harvey argues, that has less impact in Québec, where the emphasis is on the history of enduring French culture since the 17th century.¹¹⁴ For many, the underlying assumption in multicultural policies that one should treat all ethnicities and cultures alike is a notion that is not compatible with the province. Therefore, this tense political period between Québec and Ottawa made it difficult for multicultural policies to exist as they had previously. It is why the federal government started de-emphasizing multiculturalism by decreasing the amount of funding given to the Multiculturalism Directorate in the early 1980s. Since NACOI relied substantially on the funds provided by this department, the reversal of such a policy placed added pressure on the viability of the organization as large portions of the money had been eliminated.¹¹⁵ As Navin Parekh succinctly explained it, "as long as you depend on government funding, one of these days when the government cuts it off, it's done."¹¹⁶

In addition to the de-emphasis of multicultural policy, NACOI, like Canada, was facing its own regional divisions and increased fragmentation of the East Indian community.¹¹⁷ It was an issue that had been present since the inception of NACOI regarding whether it could truly represent all South Asians living in Canada. This is because of the vast diversity and sectarian elements of the South Asian community in Canada. There is still a greater level of sympathy and

¹¹³ Howard Palmer, ed., *Immigration and the Rise of Multiculturalism* (Toronto: Coop Clark Publishing, 1975), 152.

¹¹⁴ Yasmeen Abu-Laban and Daiva Stasiulis, "Ethnic Pluralism under Siege: Popular and Partisan Opposition to Multiculturalism," *Canadian Public Policy / Analyse de Politiques* 18, no. 4 (1992): 365–86, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3551654>; see also Julien Harvey's, 1985, "Une impasse, le multiculturalisme?" presented at the Federal-Provincial Conference on Multiculturalism, Winnipeg.

¹¹⁵ Leslie A. Pal, *Interests of State the Politics of Language, Multiculturalism and Feminism in Canada*, Canadian Electronic Library. Books Collection (Montreal, Québec, Montréal, Québec: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), 214 <https://login.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/login?url=http://www.deslibris.ca/ID/400333>.

¹¹⁶ Navin Parekh Interview

¹¹⁷ Much like how Canada was reeling from the effects of the first referendum in 1980

adherence to one's own cultural group over to the place of origin that East Indians come from.¹¹⁸ The main reason for this is because the Indian subcontinent is incredibly large which creates a greater sense of regionalism and adherence to the cultural groups from that region. This sentiment unfortunately makes it difficult for organizations like NACOI to thrive as effectively since they have to combat these ethnic or cultural divisions in addition to discussing political issues affecting the South Asian community. This middle period marks a similar shift in mentality of some chapters of NACOI feeling that the differences between their association and the national secretariat were more different than similar. Certain chapters such as the ones located in Winnipeg, British Columbia, and Montreal begin distancing themselves from the national secretariat because of a belief that the national secretariat could not adequately address the particular concerns in different regions within Canada.

POOR SOLIDARITY

The difficulty in maintaining strong lines of communication between all the various chapters and the national secretariat, located in Ottawa, highlights the second issue NACOI had during its middle period. A combination of interviews that were collected for this thesis and newsletters that NACOI was publishing at the time speak to tense relations between the chapters in British Columbia and Montreal around 1985. The reasons behind this contact breakdown stem from two distinct causes that fed into each other more or less, producing a toxic cycle. The first factor had to do with leadership that could not effectively unify the various chapters and alleviate differences. As mentioned above, as NACOI continued to grow in size, it became increasingly difficult to listen and address everyone's concerns at the national level¹¹⁹. Furthermore, these local chapters began to view the national secretariat as being inadequate in effectively dealing

¹¹⁸ Navin Parekh Interview

¹¹⁹ Navin Parekh Interview

with specific regional issues. Reading the newsletters, it becomes very apparent that the national headquarters had difficulty with having the Montreal chapter come to the table to have discussions around reconciliation.

British Columbia, due to the high proportion of Sikhs in the region, felt that the issues most pertinent to them at the time were not going to be properly addressed by those in Ottawa. That is why in 1985 the Khalsa Diwan Society took over the Vancouver chapter to champion political causes that pertained to that specific community. Similarly, the Montreal chapter felt frustrations with the Anglo-centric issues taking precedence within NACOI and felt that it needed to champion causes that were pertinent to the East Indians living in Montreal. As the Montreal Chapter felt increasingly under-represented, talks began around the idea of creating their own organization called the National Indo-Canadian Council (NICC).¹²⁰ As Navin Parekh explained it, the process of decline for NACOI as a whole was relatively gradual but more or less began around this period in 1984-1985. Efforts were made throughout 1985 to 1988 to set a meeting between NICC and NACOI however due to political tensions, the general atmosphere and rapport between the two groups was quite low. The beginnings of NICC in my view, mark this beginning period of decline for the organization.

In addition to regional division, the leadership from 1985 onward had increased difficulty in maintaining solidarity within its organization due to a number of political events in India that exacerbated the sectarian nature of the East Indian community. The notion of a Sikh homeland, *Khalistan* and group consciousness around Sikh identity in the 1970s resulted in a period of hostility between Non-Sikhs and the Sikh population both in India and abroad. While originally beginning in the early 1940s, the notion of an independent state for Sikhs was renewed

¹²⁰ Library and Archives Canada, *Rapport* National Association of Canadians of Origins in India Montreal, 1986-1988, Newsletters, reproduction copy number C-235-2

under the leadership of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale of the Damdami Taksal organization who wanted to take more concrete steps to securing this notion of a homeland.¹²¹ In retaliation, the Indian government led by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi carried out *Operation Blue Star* from June 1 to 8, 1984. The aim of the operation was to remove what the government considered to be militant religious leaders who were considered dangerous to the Indian state. Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, leader of the Damdami Taksal organization, took refuge in Golden Temple to avoid arrest.¹²² This controversial military operation horrified Sikh ethnic communities scattered across the world and Blue Star served as a major catalyst in turning Sikhs against the Indian State. This is because of the immense religious significance the Golden Temple holds as it is a site of holy pilgrimage for members of the Sikh faith.

As a result of the attack, the Prime Minister was assassinated by her Sikh body guard four months after the operation. The communal rioting that ensued after Gandhi's death, in which Hindu mobs targeted and killed thousands of Sikhs, left the entire Sikh population around the world disillusioned with the Indian state. Sikhs would come to see the attack as an unforgivable act of sacrilege by the Indian government, and it would lead to unprecedented levels of chaos in India.¹²³ In Canada, these concerns were felt most greatly by the Sikhs living in British Columbia who urged the federal and provincial governments to take action on the issues taking place in India. The final culmination of events that deeply impacted Sikhs and Non-Sikhs alike was the Air India plane crash which took place a year after these events by Sikh extremists no doubt impacted by the events which took place months earlier.

¹²¹ Christopher P. Cunningham, "Diasporas, Ethnic Conflict, and Traumatic Events" (Ph.D., Northeastern University, 2013), <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1353193124/abstract/92A0499A97CF4830PQ/1>.

¹²² Ibid, 111.

¹²³ Christopher P. Cunningham, "Diasporas, Ethnic Conflict, and Traumatic Events" (Ph.D., Northeastern University, 2013), 110 <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1353193124/abstract/92A0499A97CF4830PQ/1>.

A succession of events from Operation Blue Star to the assassination of Indira Gandhi and the Air India Crash divided South Asians as the Sikh contingent gained precedence within NACOI around this period. Each event in and of itself was a hot-button issue and stances around who was at fault created deep divides among members of the South Asian diaspora in Canada. For the BC chapter, which was taken over the KDS in 1985, this meant distancing itself from the headquarters in Ottawa so that they could focus on issues most affecting East Indians living in the province. It is easy to understand how a more critical stance on these political events from some chapters would have resulted in issues around unity for NACOI as an organization. Sadly the leadership at the time was a victim of circumstance regarding these issues since they had no control over the sentiments of the South Asian community. The result was a fragmented situation for NACOI and the South Asian community as a whole.

INTERSECTIONALITY

There was a genuine effort put forth to try and address some of the criticisms around the lack of intersectionality within the organization. However, the split of interests and generational gap made effectively executing such endeavours difficult. From the archival material it seems that prior to the first Indo-Canadian women conference, women had not occupied a lot of space in NACOI. Interviews also corroborated this theory as one founder of the organization stated that the women were only there either as direct members of NACOI or unfortunately spouses.¹²⁴ The reasons as to why this is the case can only be surmised as a focus on the centrality of family and importance of work that may have led to less of a focus on joining political organizations such as NACOI. Even as late as the 1990s, Indo-Canadian women who were of the first-generation spoke about the importance their families held in their world.

¹²⁴ Prabir Neogi Interview

It is quite evident that the centrality of children, husbands, and extended families were the most important aspect of life for many Indo-Canadian women. A study of Indo-Canadian women from Halifax revealed that it was often common to have female relatives look after children and elderly members of their family.¹²⁵ The set-up of a multi-generational household was extremely important for new immigrant families and particularly the women in them. While these women would often be responsible for this private sphere, the existence of this multi-generational framework also benefitted them as it allowed women to work outside of the home without having to pay for a baby-sitter or daycare. The additional benefit of this system was companionship and social support in times of need.

On the topic of work, Indo-Canadian women were also more likely to also have jobs outside of the home that may have contributed to less time for political activities. Such women worked outside the home to satisfy their own appetite for competition and contribute to their family's well-being. Living in Canada also provided some women with a greater variety of choice as far as careers were concerned. Given these first two elements, the notion of having time for oneself or having time for activities one would want to do on their own occupied the lowest rung on the "ladder of importance". From the study, Indo-Canadian women were more unfamiliar with the concept and often felt it to be selfish. As described by the authors, "the women had little regard for private space and time for themselves."¹²⁶ Therefore in this regard, while the notions of responsibility for child-rearing and one's occupation are similar to the lives of most Canadian women, the concept of time away from families for personal leisure was not a fully accepted idea. While it is not a definite explanation, it is a highly plausible that this may

¹²⁵ Susan C. Tirone and Susan M. Shaw, "At the Center of Their Lives: Indo Canadian Women, Their Families and Leisure," *Journal of Leisure Research; Urbana* 29, no. 2 (Second Quarter 1997): 232, <http://dx.doi.org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/10.1080/00222216.1997.11949795>.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, 239.

have been the case as to why so few women participated in NACOI at the executive level. Given that most of the organization was also predominantly run by first-generation immigrants, it is highly likely that these beliefs around leisure and independent free-time may have been believed by the spouses of members in the organization.

The first conference on Indo-Canadian women was held in 1982 at NACOI's annual convention. It was to be a one-day event secondary to the main events taking place. The theme of the conference focused on jobs and training opportunities in the labour force for Indo-Canadian women. Other issues such as approaches to self-development, dual identity of Indo-Canadian women and the challenges around child-rearing in Canada were also listed on the itinerary for the conference.¹²⁷ Reports and summaries of these conferences were discussed and published in subsequent editions of the *Forum* but issues continued to remain around attracting members interested in these specific causes. There was a general perception that these issues were given secondary consideration as most of NACOI's efforts were devoted to lobbying and other matters going on at the time.¹²⁸ As the president of the Women's sub-committee in 1985, Pushpa Chandra reports, the women's convention was not done every year and in addition to this, the fact that it was added as a secondary element made it less likely that other members of the committee would attend the talks.¹²⁹ So in this respect, the women's committee did not go far enough in its mandate to create a space for a genuine conversation about women's issues particular to this ethnic group.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Library and Archives Canada, MG28, volume 150, "National Association of Canadians of Origins in India: Tenth Annual National Conference"

¹²⁹ Ibid.

Similarly the first true discussion of Indo-Canadian youths also took place in 1983 at this convention but was one panel focused on children-parent relationships.¹³⁰ The National Youth Sub-Committee annual report from 1985 showed a general outline of what it hoped to accomplish but provided few tangible results. Unlike the women's sub-committee, the youth sub-committee was not run by the members from this particular group, but rather elders within the organization who had an interest in promoting the aspirations and interests of Indo-Canadian youth the Canadian society. On the whole the mandate seemed more rooted in long-term goals than tangible plans of action.

Both groups suffered from a lack of attention and an executive that did not give enough space for each group to accomplish their mandate. Furthermore there was the additional matter of having policies and programs that were not controlled by the individuals affected but rather being imposed top-down from the executive. As Navin Parekh explains:

What happened was that right from the start, NACOI was basically dominated or ruled or whatever word you use by people of first-generation. People of my generation and you know, and this is, again, true even today that it becomes so difficult to attack young people. It's like women, for example. And most of the people who ruled NACOI that time, by and large, happen to be men... Yes, it wasn't [intentional] but that's the way it was you see. Now, there were some moves I think a woman's committee and youth programs. But they did not go too far because one of the things is that if you want youth to be involved, you have to give them full, full freedom to do whatever they want rather than us older people telling them, "you do that and you have to be responsible to us. You have to tell us --" . And those kinds of controls were thought out... to having young people in leadership positions... and not only that, giving them full freedom. You know give them full authority and responsibility¹³¹. [Brackets added by me]

Allowing each group to have the authority and responsibility to carry out its goals however it saw fit was the main issue for both the women's and especially the youth sub-committees. There was a constant push from the executive to control the agenda resulting in discussions that may not have represented the actual issues plaguing each group. Secondary to this element was the

¹³⁰ *NACOI Forum Newsletters* - June 1982

¹³¹ Navin Parekh Interview

issue of the a generational gap between the members of the older and younger community which Mr. Parekh also points out as being weak points in the organization's effectiveness in championing such issues. Since NACOI was run and founded by members of an older generation, it created difficulty in identifying goals that related to the current issues of the day for certain groups. Buchignani for instance, highlights this difference in his work as he notes that the ever-increasing proportion of South Asian Canadians will result in issues vastly different than their predecessors. Issues around settlement and integration do not hold as much relevance as they did to their parents. Furthermore, the fact that most of them will be either born here or will have grown up in Canada will result in a value system and identity that will be more similar to their non-Indian counterparts. Taking a look at the general goals of the youth sub-committee from 1985, it becomes clear that this perspective is not present in their discussions. What relevance does "promoting peace and development in Canada through youth activity" have for Indo-Canadian youths who are focused on issues around bi-cultural identity and heritage retention?¹³² Examining the textual material that does exist, it seems that there is a fair amount of legitimacy to what was discussed in the interviews.

CONCLUSIONS

As NACOI grew, so did their policy advocacy work on behalf of East Indians across Canada. Through newsletters and personal testimony, NACOI is highlighted as a prominent organization that helped in the creation of legislation that provided tangible means of enacting multicultural policy in Canada. Its unique focus on policy advocacy made it stand out from other South Asian groups that were focused primarily on food, song and dance. Furthermore, it is NACOI's ability to collaborate on large scale issues such as employment equity that made it so

¹³² Library and Archives Canada, MG28, volume 150, "National Association of Canadians of Origins in India: Tenth Annual National Conference"

successful in helping to produce laws that positively benefited the community it was trying to serve. NACOI's role as a mouthpiece for the loss and trauma of the South Asian community during the Air India crash during 1985 also highlight how this organization for the most part continued to act out its mandate in an effective manner that the community itself felt. However, as much as NACOI succeeded within this period, there were also concerns around its ability to be united during times of political turmoil. The events of 1984 and 1985 would create a difference of opinions within the executive body of what NACOI's priorities should be in the future. Regional tensions would come to a head in the last period of NACOI's existence resulting in deep cleavages in how the organization would operation. Annual reports as well as direct quotes from founding members speak to several concerns around funding and this consistent issue of solidarity that seemingly grew more pervasive towards the end of this period. Overall, between 1980 and 1985, NACOI continued to work for the East Indian community fairly successfully but its successes were constantly marked with concerns around the stability of the organization. With the decline of NACOI already set in motion, the final chapter will examine just how the organization began to fall apart as it transitioned into the 1990s and what the environment post-NACOI looked like with reference to representation for South Asians on political issues.

CHAPTER 3: BREAKDOWN AND DEMISE FROM 1985-1993

Reduction is the best word to capture the last period of NACOI's existence as a national forum for South Asian issues. While one could say that the organization came to a halt by the end of the 1980s it did not completely die out. Rather, what took place in the 1990s was a continual breakdown of the organization into smaller parts. Alongside this breakdown NACOI continued towards its goal to act as a mouthpiece for South Asians during the Meech Lake and Charlottetown Accords as well as other reforms affecting ethnic groups. However, its efforts and the space it occupied during these talks was vastly different than what took place at the beginning of the 1980s. While organizations like NACOI were few and far between then, now they proliferated in most major cities where a sizeable South Asian population existed. Given the increased competition and stagnancy of NACOI's efforts on allowing for greater intersectionality within the group to occur, they begin witnessing their authority and credibility wane. Therefore, the purpose of this last chapter is to bring light to the eventual demise of NACOI by detailing their political advocacy towards the end of their lifespan and parsing out reasons as to why this association could no longer act as a representative of Indo-Canadians. An account of the political climate during and post-NACOI, detailing the changing nature of the South Asian community and the nature of NACOI's advocacy by the mid-1990s needs to be highlighted in order to make sense of how this organization ceased to exist – at least nationally.

THE PROLIFERATION OF ETHNIC ASSOCIATIONS: NO ONE TRUE REPRESENTATIVE

The theme of the 15th annual NACOI conference in 1990 was “NACOI and the Challenges of the 1990s”. In its special conference edition of the *Forum*, Roger Nadarajan, a member of the national secretariat of NACOI, referenced the past 15 years as an existence that, “mainly revolved around the experiences of an immigrant community with schizophrenic

personality whose heart and mind was in the “mother country” and the “body existed in the country of Canada.”¹³³ The organization needed to focus on present day contexts and future needs in the Canadian environment in order to continue surviving. For its part, NACOI had several steps to continue its overarching mandate of working towards the betterment of Indo-Canadians. These included: a review and amendment of its constitution, the publication of new educational material for Canadian society about NACOI’s values, an increased attempt to network with other ethno-cultural groups, renewed efforts to continue acting as an umbrella organization focused on liaising and encouraging participation of Indo-Canadians into mainstream society, and workshops on race-relations and promoting programs for co-existence.¹³⁴ While NACOI would go on in the 1990s to advocate for Indo-Canadians at the federal level, its credibility would be continually undermined by the existence of the equivalent organization the National Indo-Canadian Council (NICC) by 1988.

To understand the shift in the organization’s activities one needs to take a look at the efforts of NACOI just prior to 1985. The publication of the Special Parliamentary Committee on Visible Minorities’ report *Equality Now* altered the relationship between the federal government and ethnic groups with regard to race relations. The report had six objectives, which could broadly be described as constructive approaches to ameliorating race relations in Canada and advocating for the removal of barriers for minorities in all phases of life.¹³⁵ NACOI for its part

¹³³ NACOI Forum Newsletters- August 1990

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Canada, Parliament, *House of Commons Special Committee on Participation of Visible Minorities in Canadian Society*, 32nd Parliament, 2nd Session, Report; The six objectives are : (1) to seek positive and constructive ideas and models pertaining to ameliorating relations between visible minorities and other Canadians (2) to identify and investigate positive example and models of the promotion of harmonious relations between visible minority Canadians and other Canadians (3) to seek the views that contribute constructively and positively to the promotion of racial intolerance, understanding and harmony of concern groups and organization (4) within a general view to consider the Federal Government policies and programs in the area of race relations (5) to recommend the development of positive programs that the Committee finds necessary to promote racial understanding, tolerance

also took place in this discussion around the changes to race relations between Canada's ethnic minorities and the government alongside 130 other groups. Through written briefs as well as in person meetings, the chapters in Vancouver, Montreal, Winnipeg and the national executive met on four separate occasions to explain the issues around social integration, employment, portrayal by the media as well as other issues hampering full integration of visible minorities within the Canadian mainstream.¹³⁶ In addition to the submission of briefs, NACOI, as an entity alongside several active members from the organization, took part as committee witnesses and aided in five of the proposed recommendations in the report.¹³⁷ The outcomes of the report were well-received by members of NACOI, with the responses being published months after the publication of *Equality Now*. In the report there were specific answers given to each recommendation but by far the biggest change the government planned to make was the creation of a new department to deal solely with multicultural issues in the government.¹³⁸ While the federal government was beginning to shy away from providing grants to ethnic and cultural groups promoting multicultural initiatives in Canada, it was instead focusing on creating watchdog entities that would be a part of the government to institutionalize the idea even more so. The House of Commons Standing Committee on Multiculturalism was established in 1985 to begin analyzing multiculturalism policy. This would result in the increasing institutionalization of this concept in the everyday proceedings of the federal government.

and harmony in Canadian society (6) to encourage the continuation of the dialogue that will be initiated, in a climate that is open and constructive.

¹³⁶ Canada, Parliament, *House of Commons Special Committee on Participation of Visible Minorities in Canadian Society*, 32nd Parliament, 2nd Session, Report.

¹³⁷ A Canada, Parliament, *House of Commons Special Committee on Participation of Visible Minorities in Canadian Society*, 32nd Parliament, 2nd Session, Report

¹³⁸ Canada. Parlement. Chambre des communes. Comité spécial sur la participation des minorités visibles dans la société canadienne, *Response of the Government of Canada to: Equality Now! : The Report of the Special Parliamentary Committee on Visible Minorities in Canadian Society*, (Ottawa: Supply and Services Canada, 1984).

From the House of Commons Standing Committee on Multiculturalism, a report was produced, which called for the enactment of a new policy on multiculturalism and the creation of a department for these specific concerns.¹³⁹ The outcome of these recommendations was the creation of the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* in 1988 which provided a legislative framework for the official policy of multiculturalism adopted by the government in 1971. While the discussions around the merits of the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* have been discussed at lengths, what I want to examine at this juncture is how the situation for NACOI was altered after 1989 with regard to its role at these standing committees. The bread and butter of NACOI had been its policy work and ability to exert influence in the matters of racial discrimination, multiculturalism and immigration both in the workplace and more important in the formulation of governmental policy. Part of the reason NACOI had been successful in these matters was because it was often the primary group lobbying for changes on behalf of the Indo-Canadian community. This can be seen in the outcomes of the 1984 report on employment equality and 1988 Act. NACOI was so strongly a part of these discussions aided in the creating practical ways of executing of multicultural policy within the federal government.

However after 1988 NACOI began to have a diminished role in the discussions around institutionalizing multicultural policy. This can be seen through the discussions around Bill C-18 *an Act to Establish the Department of Multiculturalism and Citizenship and to amend Certain Acts in Relation Thereto*. The discussions around Bill C-18 now included the National Indo-Canadian Council rather than NACOI. In these talks NICC describes itself as the true organization representing due to the takeover by NACOI by the Sikh community. As stated by C.J Pretros, president of NICC,

¹³⁹ Ibid.

They [NACOI] might be claiming to speak for the entire community, but we have all the indications that the majority of the community does not feel represented by them. At the national conference last year in Montreal we had community leaders represented from across the country. ... We looked at various issues involving race relations and our ability to participate in the evolving government policies of multiculturalism and immigration. We found that our voice was not being heard at all there was as a voice that was audible. The organization was not speaking for what the community wanted... the community almost unanimously decided that we had no option but to form the National Indo-Canadian Council. That is how NICC came into being.¹⁴⁰

In these discussions NICC articulated to the legislative committee on Bill C-18 what it felt the responsibilities of the multiculturalism ministry should be which was being a watchdog for other departments with regard to the impact of proposed and actual policies on the well-being of minorities. Additionally, this ministry, aside from being a regulator, needed to have an explicit focus on improving race-relations in addition to the monitoring of programs and policies. Furthermore, they suggested the appointment of a representative to the ministry of multiculturalism who would be an expert on evaluating the relevance of specific policies as they would impact visible minorities; just as there is a commissioner overseeing official languages.¹⁴¹ For NACOI however, there is little mention of their work as a national body at these hearings. Rather what took place was lobbying from individual chapters who had disassociated themselves from the larger NACOI body who came to these hearings to speak on behalf of smaller East Indian communities in Canada, whether it be in Winnipeg, Ottawa or Montreal.¹⁴² As a larger institution, NACOI at this point had lost its hold on some of its local chapters in the country.

This loss of authority was the result of a number of reasons, some of which were out of NACOI's control but some of which were the direct result of political disagreements within the organization. By the late 1980s the situation for South Asian ethnic associations varied

¹⁴⁰ Canada, Parliament, *House of Commons Legislative Committee on Bill C-18, an Act to Establish the Department of Multiculturalism and Citizenship and Amend Certain Acts in Relation Thereto*, 34th Parliament, 2nd Session, Vol. 1, no 1-11; brackets added by me

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

considerably from what existed in 1976. In Metro Toronto alone there were at least sixty different South Asian organizations.¹⁴³ Montreal, Winnipeg, Vancouver and Alberta were also experiencing growth at a rate previously unseen, with new associations establishing themselves at a relatively fast pace.¹⁴⁴ Much of this information is corroborated with NACOI affiliate data, which listed an excessively long affiliate list from 1988 onward.¹⁴⁵ The prevalence of these groups stems from a number of factors. One factor may be due to what can be described as a sectarian element that made it easier for South Asians to view associations along ethnic terms. This made broad allegiance to pan-South Asian organizations like NACOI difficult because South Asians have always given more support to local ethnic-specific associations as the better serve their interests.¹⁴⁶ The diversity of the community by this point in time, as far geographic distances, made it difficult for NACOI to speak to these broader ideals of a communal South Asian identity as smaller ethnic groups and associations were better able to address the issues affecting local communities more so than a larger organization.

The loss of authority also stemmed from the increase in the number of South Asian associations that were funded by the same provincial and federal programs and grants, which NACOI also benefitted from. These programs, which aided NACOI greatly in providing funds to carry out their various initiatives, also supported several new groups that were seeking to achieve the same aim, albeit along specific ethnic or religious lines. Since the prevalence of smaller local ethnic populations arose in cities that previously had few East Indians, these immigrant groups

¹⁴³ These organizations were focused on a variety of different functions. Many were religious institutions, while others were community and cultural associations aimed at celebrating different ethnic groups in the city. Some groups were. Buchignani notes that by 1984 there were at least 250 organizations in the country, with more being founded all the time; Norman Buchignani, Doreen M. Indra, and Ram Srivastava, *Continuous Journey: A Social History of South Asians in Canada* (Toronto, Ontario: John Dyrrell Company, 1985), 184.

¹⁴⁴ Norman Buchignani, Doreen M. Indra, and Ram Srivastava, *Continuous Journey: A Social History of South Asians in Canada* (Toronto, Ontario: John Dyrrell Company, 1985) 184.

¹⁴⁵ Please see the Appendix at the end.

¹⁴⁶ Norman Buchignani, Doreen M. Indra, and Ram Srivastava, *Continuous Journey: A Social History of South Asians in Canada* (Toronto, Ontario: John Dyrrell Company, 1985) 184.

looked to more local organizations rather than to NACOI as a way of preserving their heritage and culture while championing certain political objectives. The challenge of the 1990s for NACOI then is not with accomplishing its mandate but rather with remaining relevant and representative of the South Asian community as a whole.

Regarding the other reason for the decline in the association's credibility by the late 1980s and early 1990s, one needs to understand the events that took place at the 1985 annual general meeting in Moncton, New Brunswick. Several interviews that I conducted all point to this event as being the pivotal moment when NACOI's outlook and solidarity changed. Prior to this meeting, NACOI was already dealing with several issues regarding its solidarity and leadership however the election of a new executive was the point at which NACOI's solidarity officially fell away. Recall that in year 1984 NACOI had faced blowback by the events taking place in India with Operation Blue Star, the assassination of Indira Gandhi and the riots against Sikhs living in India. Thus, this election came at the apex of a period of great strife among members of the Indo-Canadian community. For the community of Sikhs in particular, these incidents brought forth a need to have NACOI focus more greatly on these concerns than other issues which were also of a concern for other members of the community. Therefore in 1985, a group of members from the Vancouver chapter, who were also affiliated with the Khalsa Diwan Society managed to gain control of NACOI's executive through the election of members from its chapter during the 1985 election.¹⁴⁷ From this takeover of the executive, several chapters soon after began to disassociate themselves from NACOI at the national level and began to work for its members on a smaller scale. Winnipeg, Montreal, Ottawa as well as some chapters in the Atlantic Provinces for instance joined NICC, with Montreal being one of the first to de-register

¹⁴⁷ Navin Parekh Interview; Prabir Neogi Interview

as a NACOI chapter in 1988.¹⁴⁸ The removal of the Montreal Chapter was deeply felt within the organization as NACOI for years prior had multiple attempts at reconcile differences with the organization. The departure of the Montreal Chapter coincided with an article in the *Forum* on why NACOI should exist which undoubtedly emphasized how impactful this move was for the organization.

ORGANIZATIONAL DISSOLUTION

NACOI officially ceased operations sometime in 1993 though the exact date cannot be ascertained. Given the lack of clarity with regard to NACOI's existence in the 1990s makes it difficult to discern whether there was ever a date of when the organization officially ceased to exist. That is why parsing out a specific year is tricky if not impossible in this instance. There are a few different dates that one could point to as being the official date of dissolution for NACOI. For some this date would be 1989. Although the organization continued on into the mid-1990s, funding for the national secretariat stopped in 1989. The fact that NACOI could no longer afford to have a national office, which was seen as integral to the survival of the organization at the beginning, for some would make the end of the organization's relevancy.

However the *Forum* continued to publish quarterly newsletters until 1992 though it is not certain whether or not the publications stopped after 1992 or continued. I specify 1992 as that is what Library and Archives has within its holdings. When asking during the interview, several of the founding members stated that they themselves were not sure when NACOI ceased publication of the newsletters. Therefore to some, 1992 or specifically when the *Forum* ceased production would be a more accurate date of when NACOI ceased operations. Looking to information on the organization, it seems that the House of Commons does not mention the

¹⁴⁸ *NACOI Forum Newsletters* - August 1989, John Samuel Interview

organization after 1993 in its records of proceedings for any committee or House debates. However, it should be noted that NACOI is still listed as an affiliate organization on the Canadian Ethnocultural Council website as of 2019. A final avenue of investigation was to take a look at was the national name database, Newly Updated Automated Name Search (NUANS). The service is operated under Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada however the actual software is owned by a private company. In order to federally incorporate a company in Canada, owners must ensure that their name does not infringe on other intellectual property holders. As such, NUANS searches the records of corporation names, trademarks and business names and acts as a pre-search tool to help corporations and businesses determine whether there are other companies that exist with the same title.¹⁴⁹ For my own purposes, this database allowed me to look into whether NACOI was still listed as an active organization in any capacity. After conducting a quick search, I found that the National Association of Canadians of Origins in India is still currently listed as an active entity in Ontario while its counterparts in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Canada (at the federal level) were listed as inactive. This could lead one to believe that NACOI still exists today as its registration in Ontario has not expired.

All this being mentioned, the best plausible date for NACOI's dissolution is sometime in 1993. Debates from the House of Commons from 1992, the Standing Committee on Labour, Employment and Immigration from 1991 as well as the articles from the *Forum* in 1992 point to work still being undertaken regarding the redress of past injustices, based on several letters of correspondence from 1988 to 1990 between the Minister of Multiculturalism and Citizenship, Gerry Weiner, and NACOI. However, there is no correspondence that I found with the minister who succeeded him, Michel Dupuy. This would narrow the date to sometime before November

¹⁴⁹ Government of Canada, Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada. "Nuans - Home." December 4, 2018. <https://www.nuans.com/eic/site/075.nsf/eng/home>.

1993. For all intents and purposes, NACOI's functions and mandate that it established in 1976 to act as a unified mouthpiece for the entire South Asian community could not exist by 1993, especially with the breakdown of chapters after 1985 and the presence of NICC who had claimed that NACOI no longer represented the larger South Asian community as a whole. The fact that various members of the 34th session of parliament such as Tom Wappel, the Member of Parliament from Scarborough-West and Gavin Stewart, the Assistant Deputy Minister, of the Immigration and Passport Affairs Branch both mention this fact during committee proceedings leads me to believe that NACOI at this juncture ceased to exist as a national organisation that could confidently state it was representing South Asians in Canada.¹⁵⁰

POLITICAL ADVOCACY AFTER 1985

An understanding of what NACOI took part in as far as political advocacy after 1985 becomes unclear. As very few textual records exist, much of the organization's activities from this point onward are difficult to discern and can only be corroborated from the minutes of various standing committees and House of Commons Debates regarding issues around immigration and multiculturalism, articles from the *Forum* and the opinions of some members who were active in competing organizations to NACOI from this period. The general sentiments of past presidents, from Professor John Kurien who was the national president, to Dr. Petros the past president of the Montreal Chapter as well as Mr. Parekh the past president of the Ottawa chapter and national body, point to the fact that NACOI no longer represented the total community as its primary focus was tackling issues that impacted a particular section of the

¹⁵⁰ Canada, Parliament, *House of Commons Standing Committee on Labour, Employment and Immigration*, 34th Parliament, 3rd Session, vol 1.

Indo-Canadian community i.e. the Sikhs.¹⁵¹ What lends credence to this argument is the fact that, as mentioned above, several of the chapters disassociated themselves from the main body of NACOI, though it is unclear if they also de-registered after 1988 just as Montreal had. While some members of NACOI felt that the organization was exclusively focused on issues affecting the Sikh community alone, the organization continued to devote some of its efforts to issues affecting the broader South Asian community. Though there was a considerable focus in 1986 and 1987 on the Air India Crash as well as coverage of the Indian government's behaviour after the incident, the organization did devote some efforts to other issues which had implications for the broader South Asian community.

For instance, NACOI was included in discussions around the Meech Lake Accord in 1987 alongside other ethnocultural groups to develop strategies and participate in provincial hearings on phrasing in the accord. NACOI in particular wanted to see an equal support to all communities in Canada and had issue with the large emphasis of Québec and its push for a distinct society clause in the new amendments.¹⁵² From NACOI's perspective it was understandable why Québec would feel the need to enshrine a clause that aimed to protect its identity however it argued that Quebecers already have incorporated safety values to protect their identity and culture. In other words, the Canadian constitution should regard all persons, regardless of their cultural, linguistic, racial or political background as "The Canadians" and other definitions should be discarded.¹⁵³ It was a claim articulated by other minority groups concerned about the perceived weak wording and subordinate location of Section 27 compared to English / French bilingualism as well as the impact of Québec's recognition as a distinct

¹⁵¹ Canada, Parliament, *House of Commons Legislative Committee on Bill C-18, an Act to Establish the Department of Multiculturalism and Citizenship and Amend Certain Acts in Relation Thereto*, 34th Parliament, 2nd Session, Vol. 1, no 1-11; Navin Parekh Interview

¹⁵² *NACOI Forum Newsletters* - July-August 1987

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

society in the Meech Lake Accord. For example, in an address presented to the 12th annual meeting of NACOI in Edmonton, Anthony Parel argued that the Accord would create two issues, more than any other, which would be a concern to Indo-Canadians. The first was the emerging definition of a “fundamental characteristic of Canada” as belonging to two speech communities; and the second was the subordinate position that multiculturalism may play vis-à-vis biculturalism.¹⁵⁴ Parcel argued that adopting Meech Lake would be antithetical to the aims of a multicultural Canada:

To put the matter slightly differently, if before Meech Lake ethnic groups like Indo-Canadians ended to see Canada as one fatherland, officially bilingual and multicultural, after Meech Lake they are very likely to see Canada as eleven, more or less equal government, bicultural rather than bilingual... For Meech Lake gives a clearer picture of the relationship between culture and Canadian identity and Québec identity. Canada is now presented as fundamentally a country of two speech communities, existing in two territories. Meech Lake has not killed multiculturalism; it merely makes it subordinate to biculturalism.¹⁵⁵

Similarly, NACOI also objected to the report released by the Citizens' Forum on Canada's Future, which argued for the reduction of federal government funding for multiculturalism activities (other than those serving immigration orientation), reduction of racial discrimination and the promotion of equality.¹⁵⁶ When Prime Minister Mulroney released a set of proposals to govern constitutional amendments titled *Shaping Canada's Future Together*, NACOI along with the Canadian Ethnocultural Council (CEC) were worried about the absence of multiculturalism in the new “Canada Clause” listed in the amendment.¹⁵⁷ The CEC's final brief mentioned a

¹⁵⁴ It is not clear what Mr. Parel's position in NACOI was exactly. Anthony Parel, “The Meech Lake Accord and Indo-Canadians,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies = Etudes Ethniques Au Canada; Calgary* 20, no. 1 (January 1, 1988): 129–137.

¹⁵⁵ Anthony Parel, “The Meech Lake Accord and Indo-Canadians,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies = Etudes Ethniques Au Canada; Calgary* 20, no. 1 (January 1, 1988): 129–137.

¹⁵⁶ Canada, Citizens' Forum on Canada's Future, Report to the People and Government of Canada (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 370)

¹⁵⁷ Canadian Ethnocultural Council, *Canada for all Canadians: Building a Strong Canada Through Respect for Diversity*, Submission to the House of Commons and Senate Special Joint Committee on a Renewed Canada (February 1992).

support for the notion but a more tightened version that would explicitly mention multiculturalism or multicultural heritage.

NACOI also lobbied for several changes regarding foreign policy but only pertaining to issues affecting South Asians in Canada. For instance, NACOI submitted a letter to Mulroney on the refugee determining process of an Indian applicant – Santokh Singh Bagga. From NACOI’s perspective, decisions undertaken by Joe Clark, the Minister of External Affairs, and Lucien Bouchard, the Minister of Employment and Immigration on the refugee determining process were highly egregious. While specifics were not given, it seems that the issue revolved around “errors in judgement” and an apparent racial bias in dealing with a quasi-judicial body and their problematic deliberations by setting aside the recommendations of the Refugee Status Advisory Committees for granting Mr. Singh refugee status under UN conventions.¹⁵⁸ Aside from this individual case, NACOI also had broad goals during its last period from 1987 to 1993 that could be categorized as amendments to Canada’s immigration procedure. There were also attempts to lobby the federal government to give further attention to family reunification of immigrants in the country, to alleviating time delays in processing immigrant and visa applications and to deal more directly with what NACOI alleged as incompetence on the part of High Commission to India staff.¹⁵⁹ However change to these issues was for the most part ineffectual as the situation was approached on a more ad-hoc basis.

ENVIRONMENT POST-NACOI

While the dissolution of NACOI was not an immediate event, the general political environment in the mid to late 1990s had changed quite drastically from what took place in the

¹⁵⁸ *NACOI Forum Newsletters* – September and October 1988

¹⁵⁹ Newsletters and Roy Brent Norton, “Domestic Determinants of Foreign Policy: Newly Immigrated Ethnic Communities and the Canadian Foreign Policy-Making Process, 1984-1993” (Ph.D., The Johns Hopkins University, 1999), 237 <https://search.proquest.com/docview/304508751/abstract/F34742F37E764AEAPQ/1>.

1970s. As mentioned already, the number of South Asian organizations grew dramatically after the federal grants program instituted by the multiculturalism directorate in the 1980s. With the organization being less prominent in the political sphere, several groups that were based locally in cities like Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto took over the space NACOI held. In Ottawa, while the functionality of NACOI came away, associations such as the Indo-Canadian Community Council (ICCC) and the India Canada Association (ICA) took on the role of representing South Asians more locally from the area. This transfer of responsibilities from NACOI to local groups again varied depending on the structure of the local NACOI chapter at the time of dissolution. Since the Ottawa chapter decided to have representatives from the various Indo-Canadian associations from the region, their transition was much more seamless than the Toronto chapter.¹⁶⁰ Toronto had one of the largest densities of South Asian groups co-existing with one another with around 100 or so different ethno-cultural groups that catered to the South Asian diaspora. Moreover the Toronto chapter did not have the same systems in place as the chapters located in Ottawa and Montreal thereby making for a much more disorganized handover of responsibilities. Montreal fell somewhere in-between in the post-NACOI period with an overall smooth transition, though perhaps not as organized as Ottawa. This of course makes sense given the larger population of Indo-Canadians resulting in a larger number of ethno-cultural groups as well. There were no groups that attempted to fill the void of NACOI at the national level. While the NICC was the direct competitor of NACOI, it did not operate on the same scale as its predecessor and was confined to the Eastern part of the country.

As of 2019 there is no single organization that claims to serve the entire South Asian community in Canada. The closest parallel to NACOI in the current day is the Council of Agencies Serving South Asians (CASSA) who labels themselves as an umbrella organization of

¹⁶⁰ Prabir Neogi Interview

agencies, groups and individuals that provide services to the South Asian community.¹⁶¹ They engage in various projects around the protection of South Asian heritage, conducting research on employment Equity of South Asians in Toronto, and race-relations like NACOI but they do not have chapters that represent the organization in various cities. Rather this group allows local existing groups to join CASSA to help facilitate the economic, social, political and cultural empowerment of South Asians.

The situation as it currently stands is of South Asian groups existing which fulfill specific functions for the South Asian community. There are religious institutions such as temples, churches, gurdwaras, and mandirs as well as socio-cultural organizations, which seek to contribute to the maintenance of ethnic cultures and languages, as well as economic institutions such as the South Asian Bar Association of Toronto and the South Asian Chamber of Commerce to help shed light on the difficulties of practicing entrepreneurs in these particular fields. A more recent emergence of function-based groups are South Asian associations dedicated towards women's issues and youth. The South Asian Women's Centre located in the Greater Toronto Area for instance has been around since 1982 and is a voluntary non-profit that is dedicated to increasing the self-awareness of South Asian women and to have a place for South Asian women to access various programs and services dedicated to their well-being.¹⁶² A more recent example is the South Asian Women's Rights Organization (SAWRO) which was established in 2007 that has focused on education, advocacy and service programs for the neighbourhood of Oakridge and Crescent Town, located in downtown Toronto.¹⁶³ For most of these groups the primary basis

¹⁶¹Council of Agencies Serving South Asians. "Homepage." Accessed December 2, 2019. <http://cassa.on.ca/>.

¹⁶² South Asian Women's Centre. "About Us." Accessed December 2, 2019. <http://www.sawc.org/about-us/>.

¹⁶³ The South Asian Women's Rights Organization. "Who We Are." SAWRO, July 8, 2014. <https://sawro.wordpress.com/who-we-are/>.

of their success lies in the voluntary nature of the associations and the fact that incentive for the existence of these groups comes from the bottom-up as opposed to the other way around.

When asked why NACOI faltered towards the end, each of the interviewees had a similar opinion on the matter. Aside from the drawbacks of the organization, the need for political advocacy of Indo-Canadians could be more adequately addressed by joining larger federal parties. The situation of the Indo-Canadian in Canada is vastly different than the 1970s or 1980s as members of this community have had greater levels of political participation than before. Dr. Samuel for instance, when asked whether there was a need for a political organization like NACOI in the contemporary scene stated,

I don't think we need any party, any groups like that now because of the various reasons I have stated. You know less discrimination. They are doing well economically and have membership in other parties. And therefore, they can try to show what their power is.¹⁶⁴

Similarly, Dr. Neogi also mentioned that the Indo-Canadian community increasingly became involved with mainstream political activities, especially so in lower mainland British Columbia and the Greater Toronto Area, where the numbers were concentrated so as to make a difference.¹⁶⁵ This shift to joining existing political parties to articulate political goals is not a surprising phenomenon. Research on political participation and particularly the participation of immigrants has been researched since the 1990s and has shown that on average that racialized persons have become more an active presence among the ranks of candidates and MPs.

The duration of residency in Canada is important in determining where immigrant groups are more or less politically active. One study conducted on the electoral participation of ethnocultural communities confirmed that newcomer status rather than immigrant status is associated with lower rates of turnout. An understanding of the electoral process, the differences

¹⁶⁴ John Samuel Interview

¹⁶⁵ Prabir Neogi Interview

between federal and provincial election and learning the importance of voting is knowledge that is gained once an immigrant becomes more settled in a new country.¹⁶⁶ For the parties themselves the late 1990s witnessed candidates from the New Democratic Party as well as Conservative party candidates working assiduously to sign up new members from the Sikh community in British Columbia.¹⁶⁷ The results of these efforts were seen with the appointment of the first Indo-Canadian cabinet minister under the Chrétien government in 1997, as well as the first Indo-Canadian premier (Premier of British Columbia) in 2000.¹⁶⁸ In the decade following NACOI's departure, the South Asian community, at least politically, has made the transition from being completely under-represented in federal political to achieving a level of representation in the House of Commons proportional to their numbers in the general population.¹⁶⁹ To provide a visual image to this transition, I have provided a table below to breakdown the visible-minority representation in the House of Commons during the 39th Parliament, x session. It is then not only the result of loss of financial backing and solidarity within the organization but also the loss of initial aims of having East Indians represented politically that makes the dissolution of NACOI made sense for the 1990s. The community at this point in time, in this post-NACOI environment, has enough political strength to take its issues and interests and become active participants in the mainstream political process by either running as members of parliament or electing others on their behalf

¹⁶⁶ Livianna S Tossutti and Elections Canada, *The Electoral Participation of Ethnocultural Communities* (Ottawa: Elections Canada, 2007), <https://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.item?id=SE3-71-2007E&op=pdf&app=Library>.

¹⁶⁷ Terry O'Neill, "Have Vote, Will Travel," *The Report Newsmagazine, Alberta Edition; Edmonton*, October 25, 1999.

¹⁶⁸ Herbal Daliwal and Ujjal Dosanjh respectively. Notably the first Indo-Canadian ever elected in Canada was in British Columbia with the mayoral election in 1956. Narnjan Singh Grewal was the first Indo-Canadians to be elected to public office. Herb Daliwal was the first Indo-Canadian to be appointed to a federal cabinet

¹⁶⁹ Based on data supplied from population statistics from the 2001 census

Visible-Minority Representation in House of Commons

Minority community	MPs in 39th Parliament	% of seats in Parliament	% of general population
South Asian	10	3.3	3.1
Chinese	5	1.6	3.7
Black	4	1.3	2.2
Arab	3	1.0	0.7
Latin	1	0.3	0.7
Japanese	1	0.3	0.3
Filipino	0	0.0	1.0

Data on MPs supplied by *Andrew Matheson*; population statistics from 2001 Census, Statistics Canada¹⁷⁰

NACOI'S LEGACY: IS THERE STILL A NEED?

Looking at what NACOI accomplished during its existence, it is clear that the organization accomplished some of its goal of creating a space for Indo-Canadians politically. In its time it worked to help formulate essential pieces of legislation that have enshrined multiculturalism within the federal government. Moreover, their work, alongside other like-minded groups helped to create systems that integrate visible minorities into mainstream society while at the same time preserving their heritage. In addition to their work in aiding the integration of South Asians in Canada and helping to shape multicultural policy, NACOI's existence is indicative of a much large shift in the political consciousness of the Indo-Canadian community. Organizations like NACOI which were solely dedicated to political advocacy become more common through the decade and in turn help to provide individuals from this community with experience to tackle political concerns. NACOI has also left a mark, albeit

¹⁷⁰ Andrew Matheson, "Seeking Inclusion: South Asian Political Representation in Suburban Canada," Elections Canada, Electoral Insight – Electoral Participation of Ethnocultural Communities, October 16, 2019, <https://www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=res&dir=eim/issue19&document=p5&lang=e>.

through its mistakes, of showing others the potential pitfalls that can arise in forming an association of individuals rather than an association of like-minded associations under one primary purpose. The problems NACOI faced serve as valuable lessons of how failing to cater to all aspects of one's base can lead to in-fighting and disharmony. The last impact that can be felt by NACOI is demonstrating, again through its struggles, the difficulty that arises in trying to unify all South Asians in Canada. Rather than seeing this inability to unify all South Asians, NACOI's efforts demonstrate to those within and outside the community of just how diverse and large this segment of the Canadian population is. The variances in language, culture, religion as well as political goals highlights the strong presence South Asian identity has in impacting these various aspects of civic engagement.

FINAL REMARKS

Over the course of this chapter, I went forth to detail the last few years of NACOI's existence. I wanted to highlight the shift within the South Asian community regarding the prevalence of South Asian associations. In doing so, I could properly place the political events taking hold of NACOI around 1985 and begin to explain why NACOI could no longer represent the South Asian community. Not only was the organization increasingly made up of Sikhs and their interests, but there were in general a larger number of local South Asian organizations that could better serve the needs of the community than NACOI could in any reasonable capacity. Added to this fact were the constant issues around funding, which more or less stopped around 1989, with the funding for the national secretariat being no more. From this point onward NACOI began a slow decline in its political advocacy, which for the majority of this organization's existence had been its bread and butter. Together with the presence of NICC and the concerns of federal government members who felt that NACOI could no longer act as a

mouthpiece for the entire South Asian community, the association ceased to exist sometime around 1993, although the specific date is not certain. A lack of textual records as well as little other archival material makes it difficult to discern the exact date.

From this point onward, I aimed to explain the environment post-NACOI by detailing what happened to the remaining chapters and their status today. This section also allowed for the opportunity to discuss the political participation of South Asians more generally as well as the political landscape in Canada pertaining to ethnic organizations. There are in general a greater number of South Asian ethnic and cultural organizations than there were at the time of NACOI's dissolution. These organizations are varied in function and cater to more specific segments of the South Asian community such as certain occupational classes, women, seniors, youth and many more. Within the political realm you also begin to witness a larger number of Indo-Canadians who begin to make their presence known by joining major political parties. The greater representation of visible minorities in the House of Commons speaks to a shift by not only political parties in increasing their membership of members from visible minority groups but also speaks to the higher levels of civic engagement from these groups themselves. General takeaways show that NACOI's successes and struggles have helped to better understand the development of political participation from the South Asian community.

CONCLUSION

The creation of official governmental policy on multiculturalism in 1971 by the Trudeau government began a series of changes to the way in which the South Asian community chose to represent itself. Up until the 1970s political advocacy for this community centered mostly on small organizations that were primarily religious. Sikh religious organizations had existed for at least sixty years in Vancouver, Toronto, Montreal and other cities. With the implementation of this policy, a number of different South Asian associations began to emerge with the goal to advocate specifically for various issues affecting South Asians living in Canada. From this organizational growth, a pan-south Asian organization was established in 1976 to try and federate these smaller emerging associations under one network. Its name was the National Association of Canadians of Origins in India (NACOI) and its goal was to try and unite the Indo-Canadian community under one group without having to compromise the distinctive linguistic, religious and cultural heritage that made up this community.

What made NACOI unique from other associations was that it was a purely political group that looked to have a wider reach than any other group before. Over the course of its existence, NACOI had established over forty chapters across the country alongside its network of affiliates which has made it one of the largest ethnic associations in Canada to date. Furthermore NACOI differed from other groups catering to South Asian interests because it was primarily focused on the socio-political concerns from the community. While other groups were focused on food, song and dance, which was a worthwhile endeavour, NACOI's aim was situated in playing a pivotal role in helping the Indo-Canadian community to get involved in and participate actively with various Canadian institutions. In this way, NACOI aimed to integrate the Indo-

Canadian community by working to change the perception that this community was apathetic to Canadian politics.

Despite its unique character, the mention of NACOI in the academic literature was short and brief. This organization was often mentioned as a small aside to larger topics and as such a true understanding of this association and its impacts were never understood. This always came across as strange since NACOI was so heavily involved in helping formulate a number of equity policies that have benefitted visible minorities in Canada since its founding. It was so large and definitely had important yet, an in-depth discussion of this group does not exist in any large capacity in the literature. Given also that the textual material on the association was quite small and that most of the founding members were aging, I felt it was necessary to provide not only a brief history of the organization's existence but also to detail its impacts on Canadian federal policy and its struggles in uniting the South Asian community. Questions I set out to answer included: How did NACOI react and shaped federal multicultural and immigration policy? How successful were its projects? How did NACOI aid in the integration of South Asians in Canada, those newly arriving to the country and those who had been present for several decades? What were its particular challenges and struggles that this organization faced which may have contributed to its dissolution in 1993? What does legacy does it carry in the contemporary scene?

Over the course of three chapters, this thesis provided a history of the organization from its inception to its downfall and gave greater insight into how the association functioned from the inside. Based on a review of its model it can be surmised that NACOI function primarily as an association of individual members rather than a focus on creating a strong network of equal associations. Affiliates who joined NACOI did not necessarily have much of a say to how NACOI was run still and operated on their own. The fact that the organization was primarily

membership based meant that it was more difficult to have a consistent level of funding, making NACOI heavily reliant on funding from the Multiculturalism Directorate. The funding it was given alongside membership fees allowed for several functions of the organization to take place from the publication of its quarterly newspaper the *Forum*, to its annual general meetings, its research projects and lobbying efforts.

The main issues NACOI tackled revolved primarily around multicultural policy, race-relations and immigration legislation. It regularly met with MPs, Ministers from the immigration and multiculturalism department as well as with various standing committees throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Issues such as concerns over tax claim denials from Revenue Canada, representation in advertising and the media, and discussions around the delays in immigration visas and educational/ occupational credibility of new immigrants were a few of the many issues NACOI took on during its time. With regard to impacting federal legislation, the big issues NACOI was involved with that had successful outcomes was the inclusion of Section 27 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in the amended Canadian Constitution in 1982, the *Equality Now!* report from 1984 and subsequent Abella Commission, the formulation of the *Employment Equity Act* in 1986 and the creation of a new department solely focused on ensuring multicultural policy was executed effectively within the federal government.

The reasons for NACOI's success in these endeavours are the result of four primary reasons. Firstly, the causes NACOI chose to focus on, whether intentional or not, were small and specific targets. This meant that NACOI, for its part, could narrow in on key matters that were a cause of concern for the association and request for an equally specific response. Secondly, NACOI's ability to capitalize external resources such as the political environment allowed for the effective marketing of issues around broader topics that affected a larger segment of

Canadians. Thirdly, NACOI had an excellent pool of affluent and smart individuals who were capable of meeting with the right people and producing various academics studies backing their claims. The executive committee throughout most of its lifespan had individuals who understood how government worked and how to tailor their demands for their audience. Lastly, NACOI benefitted in large part to being associated with other like-minded groups such as the Canadian Ethnocultural Council as well and the Canadian Consultative Council on Multiculturalism which gave NACOI a stronger voice to push for legislation that benefitted its community. After analyzing a majority of their projects from 1976 to 1991, this last factor was especially important in having the government pay attention to concerns around inclusion and race-relations. It is this successful advocacy that NACOI had around creating legislation that would improve employment equity and media representation that aided in the integration of South Asians within the Canadian mainstream. In this way, NACOI did achieve its overarching goal of acting as a mouthpiece around issues affecting the South Asian community in Canada.

When looking to the struggles and challenges NACOI faced throughout its time, there was broadly five problems that ultimately aided in the downfall of NACOI as a pan-South Asian association. Some of these problems were internal and could have been addressed by NACOI however some were out of NACOI's control and in some ways the organization could be seen as the victim of circumstance. Internally there were two key concerns: poor solidarity and poor intersectionality. NACOI from its inception had concerns from some members of the community as to whether this organization could effectively meet and address the concerns of an ethnic group as large and diverse as the South Asian community. As the association began to grow concerns around equal representation of the various chapters and various communities within NACOI began to arise.

A particular issue, which any large association had to overcome in Canada is the large geographic stretch of the country which in several ways enforces a certain level of regionality to each chapter. The most evident example of this was visible in the divisive issues which arose between the Vancouver chapter and other chapters around 1985 as political events had altered concerns from some segments in the South Asian community. The result was a takeover of the national executive by this chapter and a shift in the leadership which tended to devote more attention to issues affecting the Sikh community in Canada. Alongside regional differences, solidarity within the organization was also hampered by poor funding from the general membership. It is clear that NACO I was heavily reliant on grants from the federal government to keep itself afloat. This overall made the association fluctuate in its spending capacity, a fact which impacted communications at times. For instance, its newsletters, aside from the annual general meeting, were one of the key ways to communicate with other chapters and the lack of funding at points resulted in delays of the publication of this newsletter.

In the same vein, the concerns around the lack of intersectionality also made it difficult for NACO I to enlarge its member base. While there was a genuine effort put forth to try and address some of the criticisms around this issue, NACO I did not succeed in alleviating the problem. Both women and the youth suffered from a general lack of attention to their issues and particular problems. Allowing each group to have the authority and responsibility to carry out its goals however it saw fit was the main solution for both the women's and especially the youth sub-committees. There was a constant push from the executive to control the agenda resulting in discussions that may not have represented the actual issues plaguing each group. Furthermore the prevalence of first-generation immigrants who were largely male made effectively executing such endeavours difficult.

Externally there were three concerns which affected the organizations performance: Québec separatism, the blowback of events in India, and the growing diversity of the South Asian community. The issues around French identity and the space Québec had in relation to the burgeoning multicultural policy made for a tense period for NACOI. The central question around the debates and Québec referendum in 1980 was how the federal government would balance its aims for greater multicultural policy in Canada all the while addressing the concerns from Québec of having recognition as a distinct society. For NACOI, an association very much in favour of the former, they were caught up in these political discussions and ultimately impacted by the strong sway Québec had at the federal level. The result was a de-emphasis of multiculturalism by the federal government resulting in the decline of NACOI's funding. . Since NACOI relied substantially on these funds provided by this department, the de-emphasis of such a policy placed added pressure on the viability of the organization as large portions of the money had been reduced.¹⁷¹

Alongside the tensions within Canada, NACOI also had to deal with issues stemming from politics in India. In the 1970s, Sikh identity culminated in a time of violence in both India and abroad between non-Sikhs and the Sikh community. The attack on the Golden Temple in June of 1984 set forth a series of events that would fracture the Indo-Canadian community in Canada. Following the attack, the assassination of the Prime Minister of India, communal violence resulting in the persecution of Sikhs in India and ultimately the Air India plane crash resulted in the British Columbia chapter of NACOI taking over the executive after 1985.

Lastly, the continued growth of South Asian associations who better catered to the needs of their local community alongside an ever-growing South Asian community speaks ultimately

¹⁷¹ Leslie A. Pal, *Interests of State the Politics of Language, Multiculturalism and Feminism in Canada*, Canadian Electronic Library. Books Collection (Montreal, Québec, Montréal, Québec: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), 214 <https://login.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/login?url=http://www.deslibris.ca/ID/400333>.

to the criticism that NACOI was given when it was first founded albeit slightly altered. While the issue in 1976 was whether NACOI could effectively serve as an organization for all South Asians living in Canada, the issue in 1993 was whether NACOI could effectively serve as a political advocacy organization for all South Asians living in Canada. At least politically, Indo-Canadians have made the transition from being completely underrepresented in federal politics to achieving a level of representation in the Chamber proportional to their numbers in the general population. Federally, most political parties have made attempts to have individuals representing various ethnic communities more actively participating within federal politics. In this post-NACOI era, South Asians at this point in time has sufficient political strength to take on its issues and interests and become active participants in the mainstream political system by either running as parliamentary candidates or nominating others on their behalf.

The conclusions of this thesis provide greater insights into the workings of one South Asian organization by providing a micro-history of their activities. The collapse of this organization and the prevalence of a number of other groups which claim to cater to the needs of the community, in my view, speak to the heterogeneity of South Asians in Canada. An understanding of how this ethnic group participates politically can be expanded upon through works like these which aim to provide an insight into a vastly complex network of groups. Of particular interest is the growing number of organizations that address more specific segments of the South Asian community, such as certain occupational classes, women, the elderly, youth and many others. While many are relatively new, there are several which began around the 1980s as NACOI was in decline. There is a growing field of modern history that focuses on this period and an evaluation of the differences in structure, goals and outreach of these groups can provide new insights in how Indo-Canadians are participating in the contemporary scene today.

APPENDIX A

Questions for the Research and Ethics Board:

1. Can you tell me a little bit about how you learned about NACOI?
2. What was your involvement with NACOI?
3. If you were not involved with NACOI, can you explain as best as you can how you were affiliated or interacted with the organization?
4. What notable causes or events do you remember NACOI being involved in?
5. What was NACOI's goal when it was first introduced in Ottawa?
6. What were their goals during the late 1980s?
7. In your view what was the biggest drawback, NACOI suffered from?
 - a. What was the general perception to these challenges? Did the executive feel like it was more of an issue of the general membership or of the organization itself?
8. At what point in your opinion did you notice a decline in the authority of the organization?
9. What do you think made NACOI distinct from other East Indian political organizations? Why was it necessary to do this?
10. Do you know or remember how the organization ceased to exist? Is there a specific date?
 - a. What was the environment post-NACOI?
11. Do you think that an organization like NACOI can exist today? Is there a need for something like NACOI today?

APPENDIX B

Recruitment Email: Archival Inquiry Request

Dates: September 22, 2019

Good afternoon,

My name is Yashika Dhall and I am currently a graduate student at the University of Ottawa in the History MA program. I am writing a thesis on East Indian community in Canada from 1945 till about 1993 and was wondering if I could consult your organization's archives to look at activity from the 1970s onward.

Please let me know if there is any textual material that I can consult.

Thank you

Yashika Dhall

Recruitment Email: Interview Request Initiated by the ICCC (Indo-Canadian Community Centre)

Date: September 25, 2019

Greetings John & Navin,

Yashika Dhall contacted ICCC through our website recently. She is pursuing a M.A degree (history) at U of Ottawa and working on a thesis pertaining to East Indian Community settlement in Ottawa during the period 1945 to 1993. From a brief chat, I understood that the focus of her research is in regard to immigration issues, NGO interfaces with federal government on such issues, etc... I suggested that though NACOI & NICC are long gone, she could search on the Net to collect some info. I also asked her to look at Canadian Ethno Cultural Council & OCISO for more pointers. I thought that you both may be able to offer her some good insights of the past. If you like to assist her, please contact her at the above mentioned email address.

Thanks for your kind attention.

Best Regards

Chan

APPENDIX C

Image 1: Newsletter August Edition Volume 5, issue 3

Report from National Secretariat**The Eighth Annual National Conference**

Venue: Hospitality Inn,
135, Southland Drive, SE, Calgary, Alta.

Final detailed program

Friday, September 2nd

8:00 a.m. Registration
9:00 a.m. Excursion trip to Banff and Lake Louise (Group rates are available to contingent on delegate interest)
6:00 p.m. Registration
6:00 p.m. Reception, Wine and Cheese.
7:00 Host: NACOI. Followed by Multilingual poetry session, conducted by Stephen Gill, Courtesy Canada Council.

Saturday, September 3rd

8:30 a.m. Registration
9:00 Inaugural Session
Key Note Address
10:15 Coffee
10:30 Workshop 1: Unity of Indo-Canadians in a Multi-Cultural Society
10:30 Workshop 2: Group Rights under the new Canadian Constitution
10:30 Workshop 3: Development of Heritage Languages
12:30 p.m. Luncheon: Key Note Speaker
Host: NACOI
2:00 Workshop 4: Recognition of Indo-Canadians Contribution
2:00 Workshop 5: Future of NACOI
3:30 Coffee
3:45 Annual General Meeting, Session 1
7:00 Bus departs for Jubilee Auditorium
7:30 Multi-Cultural show. Host: India Canada Association and Punjabi Cultural Association

Sunday, September 4th

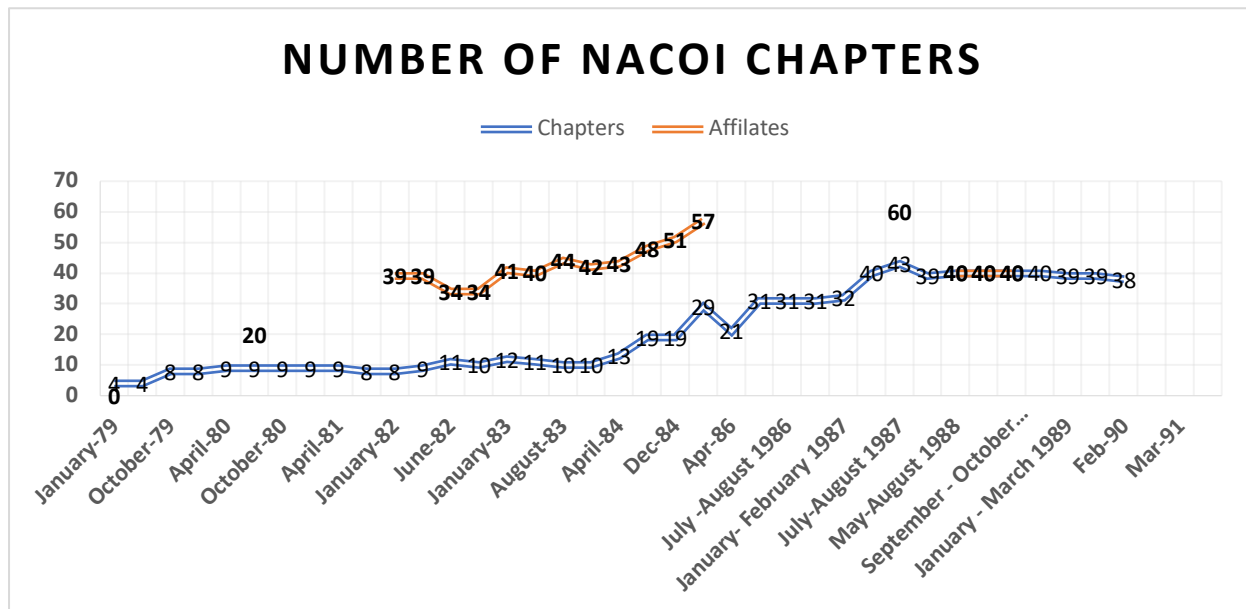
9:00 a.m. Registration
9:00 Second Annual Womens Convention
Key Note Speakers
10:00 Coffee
10:15 First Annual Youth Convention
Key Note Speakers
11:00 Workshop 6: Indo-Canadian Women—Self Enhancement, Family Attitude
Workshop 7: Indo-Canadian Youth Identity and Development
12:30 p.m. Luncheon
1:30 Plenary Session
3:30 Coffee
3:45 Annual General Meeting, Session 2
6:30 Banquet (Hospitality Inn), Reception, Dinner, Social, Dancing

Monday, September 5th

9:00 a.m. Annual General Meeting, Session 3
Election of new Executive
12:00 noon Conference Adjourns

APPENDIX D

Figure 1: A graph detailing the number of chapters and affiliates for NACOI from 1976 to 1991*



*Data was collected from the *Forum* newsletters. As such some information was missing. There were inconsistencies from the numbers presented in these forums and those presented in internal documents. However, I tried to the best of my abilities to have a complete listing. Data after 1991 is missing as I did not have access to newsletters after this point.

APPENDIX E

Timeline of major events in NACOI's history alongside major events + list of past presidents

June-August 1976	<u>Founding of NACOI in Ottawa with Ranjit Hall as first president</u>
October 1979	<u>NACOI added as a member of the Canadian Consultative Council of Multiculturalism</u>
May 1980	Québec independence Referendum
April 1982	Canada Act otherwise known as the <i>Constitution Act of 1982</i> proclaimed by Queen Elizabeth II - <u>NACOI engages in various discussions with federal government of inclusion of Section 27 enshrining multiculturalism into Canada's framework</u>
June 1984	Operation Blue Star executed
October 1984	Assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi
October-November 1984	Anti-Sikh riots alternatively known as the 1984 Sikh Massacre
1984	Publication of <i>Equality Now!</i> report
October 1984	Report from the Abella Commission
June 1985	Air India Flight 182 plane crash
August 1985	<u>NACOI National elections resulting in a takeover of the organization by the Vancouver Chapter</u>
1986	Introduction of the <i>Employment Equity Act</i>
May 1986 - February 1987	<u>Internal disputes and breakdown</u>
June 1987	Meech Lake Accord discussion - NACOI and NICC both present written briefs during these discussions
June 1988	<u>Montreal Chapter breaks off from NACOI main body and begins the National Indo-Canadian Council (NICC)</u>
July 1988	<i>Canadian Multiculturalism Act</i> passed

August 1989	<u>Montreal officially de-registering as a NACOI chapter</u>
1989	<u>Funding for the National secretariat no longer exists</u>
June 1990	Failure to ratify Meech Lake Accord

Underline: Events pertaining to NACOI

Normal text: larger events taking place that impacted NACOI

Image 2: List of Past Presidents of NACOI

NATIONAL PRESIDENTS OF NACOI

I	MR. RANJIT S. HALL	Ottawa	1976/77
II	MR. GURDEV S. GILL	Vancouver	1977/78
III	MR. NAVIN PAREKH	Ottawa	1978/79
IV	MR. NIRMAL DIAL	Vancouver	1979/80
V	MR. GIRDHARI KHETERPAL	Montreal	1980/81
VI	MR. SHADI KHANNA	Vancouver	1981/82
VII	MR. KRISHEN SONI	Vancouver	1982/83
VIII	MR. ROBINSON KOILPILLAI	Edmonton	1983/84
IX	MR. JOHN KURIEN	Montreal	1984/85

NATIONAL EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS

I	MS. MAZLIN DARSI	Toronto	1980/81
II	MS. VASANTHI SRINIVASIN	Ottawa	1982
III	MS. BLANCHE G. DILLON	Vancouver	1983/84/85

	ASSISTANT TO EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR		
	MR. SUGUMAL BHANEJA	Ottawa	1980/82/83

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Interview with Mr. Nand Tandan. Interview by Yashika Dhall. Audio-recording, December 2, 2019.

Interview with Navin Parekh on NACOI. Interview by Yashika Dhall. Audio-recording, November 15, 2019.

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