



FEATURES

B.C. man collects thousands of rare books, artifacts documenting Sikh history



By [Jay Durant](#) · Global News

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A Surrey man has amassed thousands of rare books and artifacts documenting Sikh history. As Jay Durant reports in This is BC, Raj Singh Bhandall dreams of one day opening the doors of his personal museum to the public.

It's a collection that has taken almost three decades to build: rare medals, maps, artifacts and volumes of many types of books, some dating as far back as 1696.

Raj Singh Bhandall, the man behind [Surrey](#), B.C.'s [Wanjara Nomad Collections](#), estimates he has more than 2,000 items in his personal mini museum from all over the world, including India and Afghanistan.

"When anyone asks me, 'What do you have?' I always say, 'Some books,' but when they slide this door and they enter, they say, 'This is not what you told us,'" Bhandall told Global News.

"They're like living objects. There is a story behind them. Every single item has a story."

[On its website](#), Wanjara Nomad Collections bills itself as having a "collection in excess of 1,230 rare books pertaining to the Sikh rule, East India Company, and the British empire."

"Despite the ill-advised and unsuccessful attempts to racially cleanse the Sikhs from history, Wanjara Nomad Collections has compiled a bespoke array of antiquities to gather and piece together the history of the Sikhs to preserve, learn and share," the website reads.

Bhandall said he was driven by a desire to learn about his history. He started scouring antique stores, flea markets and yard sales, while keeping an eye on online auctions around the world as part of his ongoing treasure hunt.

“It makes me feel like a kid too,” he explained. “I used to collect marbles, fly kites — it’s not the same thing but it’s similar in a way.”

It’s a hobby and passion that has taken up a lot of his free time.

“At home and with my friends, I’m driving them nuts,” he said with a smile. “So they are asking, ‘Can you do something else?’”

Now a large part of the collection is being transferred online so others can learn. Wanjara Nomad Collections doesn’t take donations and is free for anyone to use.

“If they want to read about it, they can, and that’s where the readers are like, ‘Oh, I didn’t know,’” said Sunny Khroud, researcher and cataloger for Wanjara Nomad Collections.

“There are questions and comments coming in, we have a phone line.”

One day, Bhandall said he plans to find a public space and open the doors to anyone who wants to browse his collection — a legacy to leave behind so this history will always live on.

“I see myself just as a caretaker. I’m not an intellectual or a very learned person, but I’m taking care of these things. Preserve, learn, and share,” he said.