

The Sikh Diaspora: An Analysis on Rebirth of Khalistan Movement in 21st Century

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the Sikh identity and struggle for peaceful homeland and the relations between the Sikhs and the Government of India, which is becoming more complex every day. Organizations of the Sikh Diaspora could be classified on basis of pre and post-independence. Most of them are the result of operation blue star and Sikh genocide in 1984. Operation blue star was attacked by the Indian Army and partially destroyed the Golden Temple, a sacred temple of Sikhism. The marginalization observed among young Punjab Sikhs led to the emergence of an independent armed wing support movement led by Jar Nail Singh Bhinderawale in the 1970s. The rebirth of Khalistan movement is mainly concerned with the Sikh identity; issues and the Khalistan "The Land of the Khalsa". Today, Sikhs avoid the violent means and demand for separate country through referendum. Diaspora communities influence foreign policymaking of homeland and host land.

Keywords: Sikh Diaspora, Sikh Identity, Khalistan, Operation Blue Star, Rebirth.

Understandings of Diaspora

A Diaspora is an ethnic minority with a migrant background that has sentimental or material relationships with the country of origin. (Esman, 1986). In addition, multinational movements have led to migration groups "whose location has led to multi-ethnic and hybrid cultures in host countries and which have called into question a narrow nationalist rhetoric. These migrant groups, mostly working people, are freed from kinship, territory and origin and are called global Diasporas. These are groups of migrants, largely a by-product of globalization, which share a feature of their challenge to host countries' hegemonic discourse. So there are three parallel notions of Diaspora, each seeking their identification: classical, modern and global". (Cohen, 1997) suggests how migrant societies could achieve Diaspora status by gaining several characteristics:

- Dispersion from an original birthplace, frequently traumatic, to two or added foreign countries.
- The extension of a motherland in search of jobs, in search of a profession or for the realization of colonial determinations.
- A shared memories and myth about the home place, including land, history and attainments.

- A difficult relations with host country: indicating a deficiency of acceptance or the risk that another tragedy might affect the group.
- The possibility of Unique, creative and useful living opportunities in host countries with acceptance for diversity.

Theoretical Framework

The phenomenon of interethnic solidarity, including the support of foreign Sikhs for their ethnic counterparts in Punjab, is just one example of similar cases in the world and raises many questions. First of all, the general question arises as to why members of a foreign ethnic group can continue to maintain links with their country, region or country of origin? Second, why are certain ethnic groups involved in the home problem? Third, how the ethnic community involved in this process? This study emphasis on Sikh migrant groups in Canada, the US and the UK: and focuses primarily on answering the third question, namely why Sikhs keep a close relation with Punjab overseas. However, a few brief comments on the first two questions clarify the basic principles of the analysis. With the help of theory on the various phenomena of human migration, analysts have suggested that the “Diaspora” records the most common travel experiences of migration: homelessness, painful memories and the desire to return. To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicative text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment for recommendation for the item described.

Sikh Scripture, Identity as a Separate Nation

The word Sikh means “disciple or learner” The Sikh religion was founded in the 15th century by Grunak Devji in northern India and is different from Islam and Hinduism. Sikhism is monotheistic and emphasizes the equality of all men and women. Sikhs believe in three basic principles. Pray in the name of God, live a good life, and share your work with others.

Sikhism leads towards the Indian spiritual traditions but its originality and distinctness is unmistakable. Guru Nanak revelation came directly from God. He had a direct vision of the truth and the very first words that he uttered after the revelation were that “I am neither a Hindu nor a Muslim”. Moreover Nanak conveyed his message to the world in the common language of the land this was in contrast to spiritual languages like Sanskrit and Pali. He also introduced the Gurumukhi script to provide a simple medium for the communication of ideas. Sikhism is therefore a distinct religion which has its own scripture, its own sacred city, its founder and its line of Gurus. (Singh, 1978)

It was into an Indian climate of war, political decadence and spiritual revival that Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh religion, was born in 1469 AD in Talwandi, a village in Lahore in Panjab. (Ahmed, 1996) Nanak's followers came to be known as Sikhs from the Sanskrit word shishya or Panjabi sic, meaning disciple. Accounts of Guru Nanak's life known as JanamSakhis (life-evidences) were written down by his

followers at least two generations after his death in 1539. The four JanamSakhis are hagiographic accounts of Nanak's life and contain a collection of stories of important incidents in his life. According to the JanamSakhis the life of Nanak may be divided into three distinct periods. The first period lasted thirty years and was characterized by religious uncertainty and frustration. The third period of his life, from about 1520 until his death, was spent at Kartarpur, Narowal. He settled on land provided by a wealthy disciple. Many of his followers joined him and a community appeared that lived according to the principles of the teachings of Guru Nanak. Before his death, Guru Nanak had selected one of his immediate followers, Angad, as his successor. (Sooklal,1991).

The Sikh Gurus In all there were ten Sikh Gurus covered a period of about two hundred years. The inheritors of Guru Nanak were:

- Guru Angad (1504-1552)
- Guru Amar Das (1479-1574)
- Guru Ram Das (1534-1581)
- Guru Arjan (1563-1606)
- Guru Hargobind (1595-1644)
- Guru Har Rai (1630-1661)
- Guru Har Kishen (1656—1664)
- Guru Tegh Bahadur (1652-1675)
- Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708).

In 1708, the 10th Guru, Gobind Singh, brought the line to an end by conferring guru ship on the Adi Granth, which was given the name Guru Granth Sahib, though the two titles of the book are used synonymously. The “Adi Granth”, the sacred scripture of the Sikhs, comprises an anthology of Guru Nanak's hymns. The Sikh community or Panth believes that the period of Sikhism formation ended in 1708 with the death of Guru Gobind Singh. Its doctrines, organizations and institutions are regarded as having attained their final form by this date.

Operation Blue Star / Golden Temple and Deliberate Humiliation

In June 1984, around 70,000 members of, “the armed forces cut off the Punjab from the outside world. As the tanks rolled into the Golden Temple, the entire Sikh community rose to protest this deliberate humiliation while the rest of the country was relieved. Thousands of Sikhs tried to March to the Golden Temple, a number of Sikh regiments mutated, the Sikh MPS resigned, the honor was returned and a Sikh diplomat resigned. The attack of the Indian army on Harimandir, the holiest shrine according to Sikh, was a desecration, an attack on the dignity and integrity of a nation, an act of genocide. The Harimandir, literally the house of God, represents a unity. The buildings were built and inhabited by various gurus; His holy pond has washed away the sins of a devotee. In the middle Guru Granth was a personification of their gurus” (Madanjit Kaur 1983).

In developing countries, territorial states and ethnic cultures are radically different, and almost all states have minorities, but they have religious tolerance for each other. India has a hegemonic purpose against minorities such as Sikhism, Muslims and Christians. As a result of the conflicts between the dominant nation states and their minorities, wars and uprisings arose. The human rights violation has been increased in India, mainly due to the “religious intolerance” from extremist parties.

Violation of Human Rights

Amnesty International, “the Punjab Human Rights Organization and several other human rights organizations have repeatedly reported on these brutal incidents in their reports. Nevertheless, the Indian government continues its inhumane and brutal actions against innocent Sikhs. On this day, all nations that love freedom to boycott India economically until the Indian government ends its inhuman treatment and allows international human rights organizations to respect and punish human rights. Independent Investigations In addition to official broadcasters, India's concerns have been voiced in parliament, in the media and in many publications. In a debate sparked by a conference on the human rights situation in Punjab, the Indian government accused Britain, Canada and the United States of being the main centers of Sikh extremism”. (World, 1991).

More than 20,000 Sikhs killed in action between “militants and security forces, the central government restored democracy after dubious elections in February 1992”, which were boycotted by all major parties. While the general protest against human rights violations became unbearable, mainly because of the efforts for the “Sikh Diaspora”, in September 1993, government of India established a National Human Rights Commission on Justice. In 1995, the Supreme Court ruled on cases of human rights violations, punished certain police officers, and evaluated the authorities' statements.(Tatla, 2005).

Assassination of Indira Gandhi

In September, 1965, Indian government impressed by the contribution of Sikhs to the Indians, the government agreed to the restructuring of Punjab in 1966. The Akali leaders' determination to attain a culturally similar region was achieved. “For the first time in history, Sikhs formed a majority in the new Punjab. The Akalis have exploited these contradictions by turning it into a communal issue, identifying central government or the Hindu bourgeoisie as the real culprit. The federal state thesis attributes the Punjabi crisis to increasing centralization of power in New Delhi, and manipulation by the Congress Party of regional elite for its electoral base. Thus the central government of the Congress Party led by Indira Gandhi maximized its poll returns by depicting the Sikh demands as antinational. A third explanation finds Sikh ethno nationalism responsible for the troubled Punjab”. (Ahmed, 1996)

After the death of Tara Singh in 1967, the separatist movement continued through Jagjit Singh Chauhan who founded the National Council of Khalistan in Anandpur Sahib, and became its president with Balbir Singh Sandhur as secretary general. Chauhan announced free Khalistan and Balbir Singh issued its tickets and

currency in India. Meantime, Chahuan contacted SantGernail Singh Bhandranwal who decided to augment the movement with and armed struggle. on June 3, 1984 the Indian Army carried out the ruthless operation Blue Star and attacked the Goldern Temple, Amritsar and killed SantJarnail Singh along with five thousands Sikhs including women and children. The Sikh decided to take revenge and killed the main planners of the operation Blue Star including then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, the then Army Chief General ArwanSharaidharWadiya, IG police Mr. Paraira etc.(Tamimi, 1992).

Sikh Emigration towards Canada and the West

Like the United States, Canadian government also liberalized its migration policy in the 1960s. Additionally, allowed to quota for Indian migrants, former Sikh migrants, which were only in hundreds till 1940s;were able to invite their parents. This change has been created a chain migration procedure. Since the 1980s, Punjab has experienced extraordinary political deployment and an increasing number of violent incidents. In response to the action of the army in the Golden Temple, several militant groups appeared and fought for the independence of the Sikh. The bloody clashes between militants and security forces have claimed many lives among civilians. From 1987, when the security forces passed a "bullet for bullet" policy, almost all legal channels were closed for seeking justice. The radical forces of the security forces have led to arbitrary killings, "including hundreds of civilians suspected of supporting terrorism. This term is interpreted very generously. Uncertainty was also caused by the anti-Sikh riots following the assassination of the Indian Prime Minister on October 31, 1984": When many Sikhs in New Delhi and northern cities were violently attacked (Shani, 2007).

Some families tried to flee abroad. In general, many countries have provided protection for refugee Sikhs in refugee legislation, but few Sikhs have refugee status in a given country. Due in part to the strict refugee policyin European countries and the insight of Sikh applicants, they were treated as economic immigrants.

A third phase of Sikh migration started in the mid-1980s with the result of political disturbances in India. The 1980s was saying the movement among Punjabi Sikhs to create the separate state of Khalistan (Land of the Khalsa). The Indian government responded in June 1984 with an attack on the Darbar Sahib ("the honorable court," sometimes called the "Golden Temple");in Amritsar, which has been the most sacred Sikh site since its founding in the 1580s. That attack in turn led towards the Indira Gandhi' s assassination, the PM of India, and to riots in the capital city of Delhi and other Indian cities. Thousands of Sikhs died in the fighting, which began a period of bloodshed in the Punjab. To control the situation, the Indian government declared martial law in the Punjab. Sikh youths living in villages, many of whom had obtained college educations, were regularly subjected to brutal intimidation. As a result, many families of escaped to various Western countries; some as legal immigrants, some illegally. Their arrival added still another element to the American Sikh community. (Mann, Numrich ,& Williams, 2007).

Sikh Diaspora

The Sikh Diaspora is based on the painful drive or “separation of people from their country of origin. Sikh migrant communities clearly do not meet this essential criterion. However, this must apply to migrants after 1984; they were forced to leave their homes due to the political situation in Punjab. However, on an alternative definition, which emphasizes migrants' relationships with their homeland, overseas Sikhs constitute a diaspora. The Sikh Diaspora is in many ways a microcosm of the Sikh society of Punjab”. (Society, 1995)

The Leaders of the Khalistan Council began organizing meetings in various Gurdwara areas across the country, where freedom issues and information about the khalistan were discussed by the participating Sikhs under the cries of KhalistanZindabad. The Council has tried some projects, including the “Voice of Sikhs” radio program launched in May 1985. This program was no longer broadcast from India after several months under pressure. The Council also tried to contact various governments. He once said that Ecuador was ready to recognize the government, but this gesture proved empty.

Khalistan: A Discourse on the Sikh homeland

“God gave the Sikhs their land, a rich and fertile land blessed with much sun and irrigation, the land of five rivers, the Punjab¼ Maharajah Ranjit Singh gave the Sikhs their state, later handed in trust, first to the British then to the Hindu raj but the Sikhs never surrendered their ultimate sovereignty to any power other than their own. Today after forty years abuse of their trust, the Sikhs are ready to create again their independent, sovereign state” (Sihra 1985).

The emergence of a strong secessionist movement in Punjab in the 1980s marked an unprecedented development in India after independence. The independent Indian state has never experienced a political crisis of legitimacy as serious as in the treatment of Sikh fighters. Although Punjab was a border state, it was a very well integrated part of the country. There was no doubt about the nationalist references of the Sikhs. Not only did they enthusiastically participate in the nationalist freedom movement, but the Punjab and Bengal residents were hardest hit during the independence period of 1947. No other region of India pays this price for release under colonial rule.

In the decades that followed, the Akali Dal, a Sikh political party whose membership requirements and programs have a distinctly religious character, found itself in conflict with the central government of India in Delhi. The party sought to create a state where Sikhs would be in the majority and Punjabi would be the official language. Its efforts resulted in the founding of the present-day Indian state of Punjab. In the 1980s some Sikhs went further, supporting a movement to create an independent nation called Khalistan. This movement led to much violence in the Punjab from which the Sikh community is still recovering (Mann, Numrich , & Williams, 2007).

An analysis of the Sikh diasporic literature since 1984 reveals how the central event of the Golden Temple has changed the prospects for a secure ethnic group in search of a home. Fear was interpreted into a call to the Sikh's home place and the need for independence was developed; Ganga Singh Dhillon appealed:

We are not looking just for a piece of land. We are looking for a territory where Sikhs can protect their women and children. Where a Sikh can become a master of his own destiny, where our religious shrines are not allowed to be run over by army tanks. You can call it an independent Punjab, a sovereign state or Khalistan. What we are asking for is a homeland for the Sikh nation (Dhillon 1985).

The center focuses on advocating Khalistan and raising awareness of state atrocities against Sikhs. The KAC continues to defend the interests of the Sikh's homeland and take care of the martyrs who selflessly gave their lives for their founding. The Indian state has killed more than 200,000 Sikhs in the last 20 years without hope for predictable justice. Accurate figures are not possible because no independent group such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International or KAC in Punjab is allowed to document the worldwide hidden slaughter. Khalistan is the only way to stop future atrocities against Sikhs and end the current colonial policy of the Indian government.

The Sikhs can only survive by creating a viable and honest alternative to the existing sociopolitical system and stage a peaceful agitation for the liberation of Punjab, Khalistan, under the occupation of Hindu Indian Empire since 19th August, 1947 (Aulakh, 1999).

“The concept of the home of the Sikh, which appeared only in the imagination, has now taken a real turn that will surely be achieved over time. Khalistan, the dream of many and the dream of many, has now become the question of all Sikhs. The voice of the people is the voice of God” (Dharam 1986).

Sikh for Justice

Sikhs for Justice (SFJ), founded in 2007, is a US-based group that wants to found its own homeland for Sikhs - a "Khalistan" in Punjab. Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, a graduate of Punjab University and currently a lawyer in the US, is the face of SFJ and its legal counsel. The secession campaign titled "Referendum 2020" aims to "liberate the Punjab from the Indian occupation." According to Pannun, the SFJ announced in its London Declaration [in August 2018] the first non-binding referendum of the Sikh global community on the separation of India and the rebuilding of Punjab as an independent country. The SFJ announced it would hold a referendum in Punjab in November 2020, along with major cities in North America, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Kenya and the Middle East (Gopal, 2019, July 12).

“The UN Charter recognises every nation’s right of self-determination. On the basis of this recognition of the fundamental human rights of liberty and freedom by the world body, Sikhs living in occupied Khalistan have the right of self-determination in their homeland. We the American Sikhs support their just and

legitimate demand for self-determination and renew our solemn pledge to continue to support their just and legitimate demand by all legal means so that our brothers and sisters living in occupied Khalistan can also enjoy the same glow of freedom as we enjoy in our great nation of the United States of America” (Tatla, n.d.).

A Way Forward

All these political issues in Punjab, such as the “Naxalite movement”, the Indian emergency situation and the campaign for autonomy, have shown an energetic mobilization of various parts of the “Sikh diaspora”. Three main wars in which India participated with its neighbors have seen much nationalistic zeal. While wages issues, discrimination and migration pertained to left-wing groups, issues of ethnic identity, language and autonomy of the Punjab were imposed on the minds of traditional communities. The role of the Gurdwaras as important mobilization centers was common to all organizations. “When the Indian security forces attacked the Golden Temple, the Sikh Diaspora response was highly volatile and the demand for an independent homeland became a rallying point for much of the community” (Tatla, 2005).

This discussion on the advocacy activities clearly indicates changing political discourses Sikhs in the post-Khalistan period and also success of these groups to raise the awareness both national and international levels. Whilst may overtly support the goal of a separate the overwhelming majority has embraced rights discourse as their main platform for whether in their host land or homeland. Qualitatively different from the earlier are more mature and professional in their members and supporters are drawn diverse overseas Sikh population. More significantly, overseas-born Sikhs who may have never doctors and professional women, some of important leaders and have established new own right.

In the world of rapid globalization, the "home" has become easily accessible to the Diaspora. The economic mobility of some members of the working class of Punjabi has helped them to send their children to schools and universities. The riots in the "homeland" have clearly aroused the passion and interest of many of them. After establishing themselves economically, they naturally began to rethink their cultural identity.

Conclusion

The Khalistan movement endured during the 1980s, the centralizing policies of the state had already sown the seeds of discontent among the Sikhs that led to a deep sense of alienation among the Sikhs. The support for the cause of Khalistan by the Sikh people, outraged by the attack on the Golden Temple in June 1984 and the massacres of the Sikhs that followed the assassination of Mrs. Gandhi later that year, was almost inevitable in the given circumstances.

While many Sikhs will continue of Operation Blue star, delivering justice victims may well kick-start the process of reconciliation. The historical Sikh community's involvement in homeland mobilization differs in terms of historical have demonstrated the manner in which recent Sikh mobilization undergoes a fundamental

change. For a small section of overseas Sikhs, a movement seeking a separate homeland of Khalistan has largely transformed into a movement which fights for human rights.

The Sikh today are trying to realize and re-establish of their original identity which they had lost through by the Hindus through the double dealing game and the misused of their own leaders who in the guise of sympathizers had harmed their own Sikhs community. Thus it can be concluded that the Sikh survival is only possible by turning to their original spiritual model and establishing their true identity as a separate nation from the Hindus and then a separate homeland.

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