

Transnational Identity and Political Mobilization: The Sikh Diaspora and the Khalistan Movement

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Abstract:

This piece considers the current dynamics of the politics of Sikh diaspora in connection to the Khalistan movement. The thesis explores the role of transnational identity based on historical grievances and contemporary socio political factors of the participants contributing to political mobilization amongst Sikh communities worldwide. This study explores the means, platforms, and types of activism that the diaspora utilize in advocating for Khalistan, as well as the state non-state actors' response and contributions. The methodology used in the research is qualitative and makes use of case studies and existing literature in an attempt to study the complex interaction of politics, transnationalism, and identification in the Sikh diaspora. Findings depict how the diaspora came to play a changing role in homeland politics amidst tension over a tension to assimilate while remaining politically autonomous.

Keywords: Sikh Diaspora, Khalistan Movement, Diaspora Politics, Sikh Identity, Political Mobilization

Introduction:

The preponderance of the Sikh diaspora among the Sikh population which is dispersed to different parts of the globe has established the diasporic Sikh community as a remarkable force in the process of generating political narrations on the Khalistan movement, i.e. a campaign for a separate Sikh state (Tatla, further). This article examines the dynamics of current Sikh diaspora politics based on historical grievances, transnational identity, and social and political factors which play pivotal role in their political mobilization. The Khalistan movement, born in India, has been quite active in diaspora communities, where it gets to intertwine with religion, identity, human rights and geopolitics. Therefore, it is important to understand the complexities of Sikh diaspora politics in order to understand the changing face of ethnic nationalism, international migration and political mobilization in 21st century (Vertovec, 2002). Analyzing the relationship between diaspora communities and their political ambitions, the article focuses on the interplay of resentments past and present in the movement's narrative and mobilization strategies (Brubaker, 2005).

On behalf of the Sikh diaspora involvement with the Khalistan movement goes deep down the community's historical experiences and collective memory. India was partitioned in 1947 with

widespread displacement and violence, and this greatly affected the Sikh community, causing feeling of marginalization and injustice (Gilmartin, 2005). The forced migration and violence during Partition also has a lasting trauma associated with it, that still shapes Sikh identity and forms of political consciousness (Butalia, 2000). These grievances were further exacerbated in the events of the 1980s, particularly the Operation Blue Star in which the Indian military attacked the Golden Temple, Sikhism's holiest shrine and subsequent anti Sikh riots in 1984 (Brass, 2003). Framed as state outright violence against Sikhs, they lead a narrative of oppression and the need for self-determination.

The Sikh diaspora's involvement in the Khalistan movement and globalization and transnationalism have also been a part in contributing to the Sikh diaspora. Over the time, as the Sikh communities have been linked in many borders, they have better reached to mobilize their resources, share their information, and coordinate their advocacy efforts together (Appadurai, 1996). Sikh activists have developed transnational networks, which have permitted them to build alliances with other marginalized groups to lobby international organizations and to lobby governments (Kaldor, 2003). As the process has been facilitated by diaspora activists using social media and other digital technologies, they disseminate their messages to a wider audience and challenge the dominant narratives (Castells 2012). Similarly, the creation and use of digital platforms has enabled the formation of virtual communities for Sikhs to share their experiential knowledge, articulation of political views and organizing collective action (Rheingold, 2000). In addition, the manner through which Sikh diaspora engages with the Khalistan movement is conditioned by the particular socio political contexts of each host countries. Sikh activists have been able to operate relatively freely and to advocate for their cause in some countries without fear that they will be repressed. In some other countries, they have encountered severe challenges, ranging from surveillance, censorship to legal restrictions (Price, 2002). Taking into account the fact that there are various degrees of support for multiculturalism and minority rights in different host countries, Sikh diaspora activists employ different tactics and strategies.

This article attempts to approach the meanings that can be construed with regards to the contemporary Sikh diaspora politics through an analysis of this interplay of such historical, socio political and transnational conditions. It attempts to bring to light how the role of Sikh diaspora who are trying to shape Khalistan movement is evolving and the tough job of mixing dual identities in the narrative while trying to negotiate complex political land. The article analyzes the strategies, the platforms, and the type of activism used by the Sikh diaspora and contributes to the field of ethnic nationalism, diaspora politics, and transnational social movements.

Statement of the Problem:

Engagement of the Sikh diaspora with the Khalistan movement is a complex phenomenon dependent upon historical events, the socio political conditions of the time and the Trans national connections (Bhattacharyya, 2021). The aim of this research is to fill the need to analyze how contemporary trends of Sikh diaspora politics influence a united identity formation and political activism. The Khalistan movement of the Sikh people abroad needs to be understood because it deals with the issues of survival of a culture, a trans-national identity and the political and religious relations. This paper investigates the impact of political factors and religion on Sikh diaspora movements, along with their influence on Indian and Western political domains. It endeavors to add to an overall comprehension of Sikh political activity through to today.

Research Questions:

1. What the following questions are answered by this research?
2. How has the Khalistan movement politically impacted Sikhs living in diaspora throughout the world?
3. What social and political strategies, platforms, and forms they are using, and on which they are employing them in their advocacy for Khalistan?
4. Consequently, how do state and non-state actors in both India as well as the host nations respond to the claims of advocacy for Khalistan put forth by the Sikh diaspora and what are the implications of these responses on bilateral relations?

Research Objectives:

1. In order to examine the historical evolution of the Khalistan movement and its politicization of Sikh diaspora in different spatial contexts.
2. The research aimed to examine the socio political engagement of Sikh diaspora with advocacy for Khalistan through their strategies, platforms and forms of activism.
3. The responses of state and non-state actors in the host countries as well as in India towards the Sikh diaspora's advocacy for Khalistan and the underling implications for the bilateral relations, will be assessed.

Research Methodology and Conceptual Framework:

The research methodology used in this is qualitative and is based on existing literature, case studies, secondary data sources and analysis of the Sikh diaspora political dynamics. The theory upon which the study is based are constructivism and transnationalism. According to Berger and Luckmann (1966) considered one of the major approaches to the study of constructivism, ethnic groups create group identities and also collective memory formation. This point of view focuses on the formation of collective identities based on the membership of shareholders in a common experience, common symbols and connections with other members of this group. As per Smith and Guarnizo (1998), transnationalism is engaged in the study of interlinked international communities. The framework is used to explore both the ways in which diasporic Sikh identities are constructed as well as how these identities influence Khalistan movement political action. The research assesses such frameworks in order to demonstrate how processes of identity development and political activation are carried out within today's global networks by each. The study will further seek to use comparative analysis of Sikh diaspora communities in different geographical locations, to admit for the provision of different experiences and political engagement of the Sikh diaspora (Levitt, 2001). By using a comparative approach, it will permit a more intricate handling of the elements that fashion Sikh diaspora politics and the misfortunes they confront in various conditions.

Literature Review:

The origins of Khalistan movement lie in the socio-political developments of late twentieth century in Indian state of Punjab (Barrier, 1996). The movement emerged because of a combination of factors: the Indian governmental power was concentrated in the hands of a small few, the economic situation between rich and poor was growing more unequal, and the Sikh identity was being suppressed. The demands for self-determination for the Sikh community also received significant impetus as a result of a number of events in the 1980's, namely, Operation Blue Star and the 1984 anti-Sikh riots, and mobilized diaspora groups across the world (Mahmood, 1996). According to Talbot (1996), the Khalistan movement similarly was manifest through harsh feelings of relative deprivation amongst Sikhs, who believed they were getting a raw deal when it came to economics and political power in India.

Dislocated from their ancestral land, the Sikh diaspora located in many countries has been strongly involved in fashioning the political discourse on the Khalistan movement (Fenton 1988; Khalsa and Holmes 1996). Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of transnationalism and postcolonial theory, this study analyzes the intricacies of how historical grievances and current concerns intersect in the movement's narrative and mobilization strategies.

One of the main topics of the literature review is the demographic distribution of the Sikh diaspora and the factors that determine their migration pattern. Historical data suggest that Sikh migrants had mostly headed for Canada, United Kingdom and USA (Uberoi, 2008). The economic opportunities, political factors but also social networks have influenced these migration patterns. As Ballard (1994) remark, the earlier Sikh migrants were discriminated and socially excluded, which led to the development of a very close ethnic enclaves and a heightened sense of collective identity. The ethnic enclaves were a space for the Sikhs to keep cultural tradition, practice of their religion and political organizing.

Historical evolution of the Khalistan movement is also being reviewed in order to show how the struggle for regional autonomy can transform into a global issue with its own implications. Due to this, the evolution of the movement in terms of its ideology, strategies and organizational structures has been affected (Jacobsen, 2007). The internal and external movements of the Khalistan movement were developed by a layer of complex interrelations as Kapur (2005) argues and the dynamics of the Sikhs, actions of the Indian, and diaspora communities have molded the Khalistan movement. Also, the movement has evolved over time ideologically from a religious nationalism to rights of humans and social justice. In addition, the major actors and organizations associated with the Khalistan movement are identified in the literature, outlining their programmes, platforms and forms of activism. This covers an analysis of the function of social media and transnational networks to put forward the movement's visibility and win over support at transnational levels (Appadurai, 1996). According to Tambiah (1996), the Khalistan movement has depended very heavily on transnational diaspora communities to supply financial resources, political advocacy, and logistical support. They have also been central to the narrative and in attracting international audiences to the cause of the movement.

Furthermore, the review extends to analyze current dynamics of Sikh diaspora politics in relation to sustaining the Khalistan movement and how younger generations are rewriting the Khalistan narrative. It also assesses the response of India and the host countries' state and non state actors to the advocacy of the Sikh diaspora for Khalistan and the resultant impact on the bilateral relationship. As Shain (1999) points out, diaspora communities are usually faced with a dilemma involving loyalties between one's homeland and one's hosts. Sikh diaspora activists especially have a particularly acute dilemma, lying as they must between sharp political positions and the often competing local and transnational identities.

Findings:

This research finds the following to be the main aspects of Sikh diaspora politics:

- The movement of Khalistan has continued to develop from its root in late 20th century to the contemporary diaspora of Khalistan movement.
- Within Sikh diaspora engage in various strategies in advocating for Khalistan such as political lobbying, grassroots activism and social media campaigns.
- Responses of state and non-state actors toward the diaspora's advocacy for Khalistan have differed from one country to the other with some governments allowing the freedom of expression to their activities while looking at them as a threat to national security.

- Sikh diaspora in the host countries have a nuanced impact on the relations between India and the host countries in the context of the Khalistan movement.

Historical grievances and contemporary socio political factors contribute to the formation of Sikh diaspora's transnational identity and hence, political mobilization in the sense of association with Khalistan movement.

Conclusion:

Engagement of the Sikh diaspora in the Khalistan movement is characterized by complex interaction of historical legacies, transnational identity and socio political factors. As a force concocting political stories concerning Khalistan, the diaspora has used different systems and stages to champion their cause. Issues related to assimilation versus autonomy, state versus non state responses to Sikhs, and intra diaspora unity are still important to understand contemporary Sikh diaspora politics. What we have in the ongoing dialogue between Sikhism and democratic rights of the modern era is a dedication for justice through diasporic political activism.

Recommendations:

Having proved the research findings, the recommendations are as follows.

1. Divert the dialogue and understanding among the Sikh diaspora and the Indian government in order to tackle the historical grievances and create a reconciliation.
2. To support initiatives that preserve and cultivate cultural identity for the Sikhs worldwide.
3. Support the creation of educational programs which offer a correct and nuanced depiction of the history, context, and facts of the Khalistan movement.
4. Encourages a collaboration between the Sikh diaspora with other marginalized communities to solve common challenges and advance social justice.
5. To gain the support for research on the dynamics of Sikh diaspora politics in order to inform policy decisions and increase understanding of ethnic nationalism, international migration, and political mobilization.

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