



Critical Analysis of Khālistān Movement and its Impacts on India-Canada Relations

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Abstract:

This paper discerns the development of the jingoistic emotions among the Sikhs and inspects the elements which give birth to the Khālistān movement. The real motive of this movement is to get a separate homeland for the Sikh community in Indian Punjāb. Indian constitution highlights that all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practice and propagate religion. The government of India paid little heed to the Sikh sentiments which at least become the paramount cause of the emergence of militancy in Punjāb. The present study uses an analytical and descriptive approach. The main focus of this study on the emergence of the Khālistān movement and critically evaluate the impacts of clash on diplomatic ties of Canada and India on the backdrop of Khalistan movement. Moreover, the study also explores the current events fuelled the diplomatic tensions between India and Canada. Additionally, the study also suggests that how to resolve this particular issue for future relations between two countries.

Keywords: Canada, India, Punjab, Sikh community, Khālistān movement, foreign relations, freedom

INTRODUCTION

Sikhism is one of the distinguish religious cults of South Asia ushered in by Gūrū Nānak (b. 1469 d. 1539) spread mostly in Punjab — undivided Punjab. There are almost 30 million Sikh living all around the globe. However, India which recently surpassed China in population have numerous different ethnic groups where the Sikhs comprised almost two percent of Indian population. The Sikh community is widespread in different parts of the globe like Canada, America, Australia, Europe, Malaysia and Africa since partition of India in 1947 (Axel, 2001; Singh, 2023). The Sikh leadership was successfully convinced to join India owing to Jawāhar Lāl Nehrū's postulation of secular India and his promise that Sikhs' right would be fully protected and that they would have an equal share in power instead of Pakistan which proclaimed as Islamic state. However, from the very beginning after partition, the Sikhs were therefore complaining and raising their voices for the partial approach of the government (Mahmood, 2014).

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According to the Indian constitution of 1950, the Sikh community has special rights like the article no. 25 which stipulates the freedom of morals, protest, practices and propagation of religion to all citizens. The Indian parliament as per Indian Constitution can concede autonomous political status to Sikh community within Indian Constitutional framework or without. Although Indian government from the day one paid little attention towards Sikh grievances and violated its constitution in 1984 when it launched Operation Blue Star and launched an attack on Golden Temple which is one of the revered and sacred places of the Sikhs. Even the British administration had shown great respect to Sikh holy places and that was why they passed *Sikh Gurdwara Act 1925* to make sure the safety and esteem of the Sikh holy places (Fareed, 2021).

Just after the partition of India and Pakistan, the Akālī Dal (army of the immortal)⁵ along with Sikh members of the Punjab provincial Assembly demanded fifty percent seats in the Punjab legislature, five percent in the central legislature, and forty percent of the government positions to be reserved for Sikhs. Additionally, the alternative to these demands was declaration of separate province for the Sikhs. However, unfortunately, these demands were not endorsed by the Indian Parliament (Fareed, 2021). It was because Punjab was a border state between India and Pakistan, and Sikhs have great affiliation with Pakistani Punjab, owing to the same language and culture and numerous sacred Sikh shrines. While the Punjabi Muslims from the very beginning have also a profound respect for Gūrū Nānak. Secondly, the creation of a Punjabi-speaking state would have led to the creation of a territorial space with a Sikh majority (Singh, 2014).

Moreover, both census of 1951 and 1961 which declared them minority, therefore, deprived them of the right to introduced Punjabi as provincial language (Fareed, 2021). That's why from the very beginning the Sikhs realized they did not choose right option of joining 'so-called' secular India. The Khālistān movement, which sought to establish an independent Sikh state, is driven by a complex set of socio-religio-political and historical factors. The Sikhs originally hail from the land of five rivers "Punjab" due to their religion, language and script, they demanded their separate homeland known as Khālistān. The Indian government's approach towards Khālistān movement evolved over time and involved various strategies and actions, like political engagement, Operation Blue Star (1984), anti-Sikh riots (1984), counter-insurgency operations and legal measures. The government repression took around twenty thousand of the Sikhs lives during 1984 operation (Hultquist, 2017). Moreover, according to Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, founder of popular Sikh organization named Sikh for Justice (SFJ), claims that one and half million Sikhs have been executed by the Indian government since independence of India (Iqbal, 2024). With the passage of time, the aggressive approach of the government intensified, and internal divisions among the Sikh separatists led to decline of grass-root support within the Sikh community for Khalistan movement in the second half of 1980s and early 1990s.

Background of the pre-Partition Sikhs

The origin of Sikhism is rooted in the life and teachings of Gūrū Nānak, who founded Sikhism in the late 15th century A.D. He was the first of the ten Sikh Gūrūs, born in 1469 A.D. spent most of his life

⁵ It is the Sikh-centric and one of the oldest regional political parties established by Master Tārā Singh in December 1920 which espoused the rights and interests of the Sikh community in all over the world. It was the Akālī Dal leadership which successfully established Punjābī province in India in 1966.

traveling across the Indian subcontinent to disseminate message of monotheism, the oneness of God — devotion to one God, and equality of all people regardless of caste or creed, and the importance of living a truthful and honest life (McLeod, 1968). His ideas attracted people who later known as Sikhs, a term derived from the Sanskrit word *shishya* meaning disciple or learner (Jathol, 2019). Owing to the emergence of new religious cult in fertile lands of Punjab, Sikhism faced resistance from Mughal courts and Muslim community. Eventually this led Sikhs community to aspire for their own state.

The Sikhs established a very powerful state in north India under a legendary ruler Maharājā Ranjīt Singh (r. 1801-39), who not only defy Mughal suzerainty but also posed a formidable challenge to the subsequent British rule and its expansion in south Asia. However, after his death Sikh empire fell into internal strife, leading to British intervention and the eventual annexation of the Punjab by the Raj in 1843. This transition was not smooth, the Sikhs resisted and fought wars with the Raj, however they could not withstand against the might of the raj and entered into alliances and agreements (Ahmed, 2017). Later, numerous Sikh served in the British Indian Army, played crucial roles in various military campaigns, including both World Wars and earned a reputation as formidable fighters. British colonial policies introduced land reforms in the Punjab, impacting the Sikh landlords. The introduction of the Permanent Settlement and the auctioning of land led to changes in landownership patterns and economic hardships for Sikh feudal lords. However, overall, the British colonial period, therefore, witnessed a revival of Sikhism (Smith, 2019). Reformist movements like the Singh Sabha was an important Sikh movement of British India which played a vital role in the promotion of Sikh religious and cultural identity (Ahmed, 2017). The Sikhs also played an active role in the freedom struggle of colonial India. Prominent Sikhs including Lāla Lajpat Rāi (d. 1928) and Master Tāra Singh (d. 1967) and Bhagat Singh (d. 1931) are considered as the popular personalities of freedom movement. Moreover, they are deemed distinguish leaders of Indian National Congress and Akālī Dal respectively (Bhalla, 2019).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Khālistān Movement is not a new phenomenon. The Sikhs demanded their sovereign homeland during colonial rule with variously names such as Sikhistān, Azad Punjab, and Khālistān (Axel, 2001). M. A. Jinnah — a popular Muslim political leader of South Asia and president of Muslim League (ML) demanded undivided Punjab and Bengal, but his suggestion was not accorded with. Nehru and All Indian National Congress (AINC) insisted on the partition of Bengal and Punjab on religious lines. Eventually Punjab was divided by the boundary commission in August 1947 into East Punjab and West Punjab becoming part of the new states of India and Pakistan respectively, which brought-forth significant challenges and complexities for the Sikh community. One of the key challenges for Sikhs was their demographic distribution before partition of united India. Sikhs were a significant minority (Krishan, 2004) in the Punjāb region, wide spread in Punjab, but they were not a majority in any of the regions. The province of Punjāb was divided on religious lines, with the majority of Sikhs finding themselves in East Punjāb (India) and a minority in West Punjāb (Pākistān) (Khan, 2017).

The Sikhs did not receive substantial international support regarding their demand for a separate Sikh state, which contrasted with the backing received by the Muslim League (Singh & Shani, 2021) and that's why separate Sikh state did not establish. Besides as mentioned earlier Nehrū

successfully dissuaded the Sikhs and majority of their leadership to withdraw their stance to join Pākistān or establish a separate state -- British did not entertain third option of independence, except either to join India or Pākistān, and that's why Abdul Ghaffar Khan boycotted from the referendum in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (the then NWFP). It is important to note that the idea of Khālistān continued to linger and later gave rise to the Khālistān movement in the late 20th century, which sought to revisit the demand for a Sikh homeland.

Before the partition of British India in 1947, Punjāb was administratively organized into several divisions included Lāhōre, Rāwalpindī, Multān, Jalandhar, and Ambāla. Inappropriately, Indian Punjāb was further divided into two parts in 1966 leading to the creation of a new province called Haryāna. This division was a result of linguistic reorganization of states in India. The existing state retained the name Punjāb but become a smaller state, with its capital at Chandīgarh and continued to have a substantial Sikh majority speaking Punjabi. The newly formed state of Haryāna was carved out of the eastern part of Punjāb, with its capital at Chandīgarh as well. Haryāna primarily had a Hindi-speaking population.

After the partition, the Sikhs, like other religious and ethnic communities, had several demands and concerns regarding their political rights, identity, and well-being in the newly born India. They sought the assurance that their religious practices and places of worship, particularly the Golden Temple, would be safeguarded by the Indian government (Jalal, 1998). Sikhs were concerned about the preservation of their distinct religious and cultural identity including the right to wear turbans and maintain their other distinct appearance.⁶ The Sikhs also demanded adequate political representation at both the national and state levels. They wanted a fair share of political power and representation to ensure their interests were adequately addressed in the political system (Judge, 2003). Although the Indian government did not accept all the demands of the Sikhs but one of the major demands of Sikhs was the reorganization of Indian states on linguistic lines was entertained (Ghani, 2010). Additionally, they wanted promotion of Punjābī and primarily establishment of Punjābī-speaking state. This demand eventually led to the creation of Punjāb as a linguistic state in 1966 (Dhillon, 1974).

The Sikhs experienced phases of discrimination and marginalization throughout history after partition. Normally, the Sikhs realized that their religious and cultural rights were not adequately protected by the Indian government leading to demands for greater autonomy and the establishment of a Sikh-majority state (Jetly, 2008). From a non-violent struggle for political, social, and economic rights to the militant-politics of Jarnail Singh Bhindrānwāle and the resultant bloodshed of 1984, there is an enduring history of false promises, exploitations, and injustices by the Indian government which kept on adding to the grievances of the Sikh community (Fareed, 2021). This historical sense of injustice and the desire for self-determination played a significant role in the demand for Khālistān. The Punjāb region is agriculturally rich, its produce has substantial share in national GDP that's why, some Sikhs believed that the economic benefits of the region were not fairly distributed, leading to economic grievances. Some Sikhs believed that were either discriminated and alienated in the political processes of India, particularly during the 1970s and 1980s, because their interests were not adequately represented by the Indian government.

⁶ *karah* (steel bracelet), *kanghā* (comb), *kaccha* (undershorts), and *kirpān* (a knife/sword).

Additionally, the Khālistān movement was, in part, a response to perceived threats to Sikh religious institutions, including the Golden Temple in Amritsar (Burki, 2023).

Due to increasing tension among the Sikhs regarding the assurance of their rights, the Akālī leadership put up efforts to resolve it through negotiations. In order to address Sikh grievances, different rounds of meetings and talks were held between Sikh leadership and government during 1981 to 1983. The Akālīs, put forward a long list of demands before government, it had two purposes to serve to pressurize government to accept some and to appease Sikh populace. These demands included; regular pilgrims to Gurdwaras in Pākistān along with ceremonial daggers, declaring Amritsar as a holy city, the train to be named after the Golden Temple, Punjab state control of rivers water rights, Chandigarh declared as a part of Punjāb, Punjābī should be pronounced second language in bordering states of Punjāb owing to high number of Punjābī speaking peoples, Punjāb's exclusive control on the Bhakra dam. But the central government did not accept these demands except the Chandigarh demand. The negotiation was also not succeeded due to high pressure of Hindus on Prime Minister Indira Gāndhī against these demands. This failure aggravated the situation as Bhindrānwāle demanded the acceptance of all of their demands. Furthermore, Indira Gāndhī dismissed the provincial government and imposed President Rule in Punjāb after the incident of hijacking a bus in 1983 in which six Hindus were killed by the Sikh militants (Hultquist, 2017).

After the failure of aforementioned dialogue, and imposition of President Rule, the Khālistān movement gained further momentum under the leadership of figures like Jarnail Singh Bhindrānwāle, the most popular leader of the Sikh extremist group. The government negligence towards the Sikh cause stirred up aggression in the Sikhs attitude and the militant groups became surfaced and active. The Indian government instead of managing the situation through peaceful dialogue launched a military operation known as Operation Blue Star in 1984 which further escalated the tension and strengthened the demand for Khālistān. The Khālistān movement received support from Sikh diaspora in countries like Canada, United Kingdom, and United States, which provided financial and political backing to the cause (Milewski, 2021; Sengupta, 2023).

Various Sikh militant groups, particularly the Khālistān Commando Force and Babbar Khalsa aspired for the creation of an independent Sikh state. They engaged in acts of violence, including bombings and assassinations (Telford, 1992). Jarnail Singh Bhindrānwāle, took refuge inside the Golden Temple complex and used it as a base for his seditionist activities. Bhindrānwāle's presence at the holiest Sikh shrine became a significant challenge for the Indian government (Britannica, 2023). In this regard, Operation Blue Star was launched primarily against Sikh militants who had fortified themselves inside the Golden Temple complex (Fair & Ganguly, 2008). The operation had noteworthy political, religious, and social ramifications and remains a highly controversial and sensitive episode in Indian history. It seems the operation was an inhumane endeavour as Golden Temple was the most sacred place of Sikhs, and the government might have resolved the issue through dialogue or other peaceful means. The Golden Temple, was not only a religious symbol but also a symbolic center of Sikh culture and identity. In the lead-up to Operation Blue Star, the complex had been fortified by militants, and the government claimed that it was being used to stockpile weapons.

Operation Blue Star resulted in numerous unfortunate casualties. Although exact figures remain disputed, but it is estimated that hundreds of the Sikh separatists, soldiers, and civilians lost their lives during the operation (Kundu, 1994). The military action resulted in damage to the Ākāl Takht (the Sikh temporal seat within the Golden Temple complex) and other parts of the shrine. The operation deeply hurt Sikh sentiments, both in India and abroad. Many Sikhs felt that the operation was an attack on their religious sanctity and cultural identity. It led to widespread outrage and protests within the Sikh community. Operation Blue Star was followed by the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gāndhī by her Sikh bodyguards named Satwant Singh and Beant Singh, in the garden of her residence in New Delhi in October 1984 (Hazarika, 1984). This tragic incident further sparked anti-Sikh riots in various parts of India, resulting in the deaths of thousands of Sikhs and widespread destruction of Sikh homes and businesses. Likewise, the Operation Blue Star did not eliminate Sikh militancy but instead fuelled further radicalization and breakdown trust between the Sikh community and the Indian government. The violent aftermath of the operation and the anti-Sikh riots engendered a new wave of militancy in Punjāb. It also widens the gap between Akālī Dal and the central government. The events surrounding Operation Blue Star continue to influence Sikh politics, identity, and relations with the Indian government (Hazarika, 1984).

Some Sikh leaders believed that the assassination of Indira Gāndhī would further augment their cause and put pressure on the Indian government to address Sikh grievances. The fact that the assassins were Sikh members of Indira Gāndhī's own security highlighted a serious security breach (Sengupta, 2023). The movement did not end but dwindled in the late 1980s and early 1990s and reemerged again and again. Since 2000, it seemed to be dead but recent episodes of death of Hardeep Singh Nijjar and detainment of an Indian intelligence agent (CC-1) in US which amplified tensions between India and Canada and also become a of hope for the Sikhs to have their own dream land (Van Dyke, 2009).

METHODOLOGY

This study employed analytical and descriptive research methodology. The data is collected by using both primary and secondary sources. The primary methods mainly include interviews with experts on Sikhism, the Khālistān movement, and India-Canada relations. We have additionally used secondary sources for data analysis. These include research articles, books, newspaper articles, and electronic media sources.

THE KHĀLISTĀN MOVEMENT AND INDIA-CANADA BILATERAL RELATIONS

Canada recognized India soon after its creation in 1947 and established diplomatic relations. The diplomatic ties between the two countries have evolved over the years, and the relationship covers a wide range of areas, including political, economic, cultural, and people-to-people exchanges. Both India and Canada are members of the Commonwealth, and this shared membership has provided a platform for cooperation and collaboration on various international issues. Economic ties between India and Canada have grown, both countries engaged in mutual trade and investment (Anshul, 2024).

Efforts have been made to further the economic collaboration in energy, technology, and education sectors. Both countries have conducted political dialogues at various levels, official visits and interactions between leaders have frequently been made to strengthen bilateral relations. Indian

and Canadian universities have established partnerships, and students from both countries pursue educational opportunities. The Indian diaspora in Canada is a vibrant and influential community. In 2010, Canada lifted restrictions on nuclear cooperation of India, opening up opportunities for collaboration in the field of civil nuclear energy. Defense and security cooperation have gained prominence in recent years, with discussions on regional and global security issues (Gill, 2023). Both India and Canada started a hydroelectric power project in Madrās. Canada is willing to pay \$20 million for this project ("Agreement on the Canada-India," 1956).

Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chrétien led a diplomatic mission to India in January 1996. The delegation included two cabinet ministers and 300 business figures. Such visits often aim to enhance political, economic, and cultural ties between nations. Similarly, India's external affairs minister Inder Kumār Gujrāl paid an official visit to Canada in September 1996. Canadian foreign affairs minister Lloyd Ax Worthy reciprocated a visit to India in January 1997. During this visit, he inaugurated the Office of the Canadian High Commission in Chandīgarh. In 1997, the Canada-India Working Group on Counterterrorism was established.

This initiative reflected both countries' commitment to addressing shared concerns related to counterterrorism. Former Governor General Roméo LeBlanc undertook a state visit to India in March 1998. Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper took an official visit to India in November 2009. Official visits of heads of states invariably play a crucial role in strengthening diplomatic relations and collaboration. The Canada-India Foundation, established in 2007, has been active in fostering support for stronger bilateral relations between Canada and India (Mansi, 2019). Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit to Canada in June 2010 was primarily centered on his participation in the G-20 Summit held in Toronto. In addition to the multilateral engagements at the G-20 Summit, Mr. Singh had meetings with Stephen Harper. Overall, Singh's visit to Canada was a part of India's active engagement in global economic and diplomatic affairs (Nafey & Gopal, 2018).

Beside the Indian nuclear tests 1974 & 1998, the relations between the two countries disturbed because of pro- Khālistān Canadian Sikh political leaders. The issue of Khālistān has been a source of tension between India and Canada for several decades, primarily due to Canada's sizable Sikh diaspora and their political and social implications. Canada is a home to a significant Sikh community, with a large number of Sikhs having immigrated to Canada over the years. This diaspora has been playing an impactful role in the Canadian politics and society (Pitischen, 2023). This has occasionally been strained diplomatic relations between India and Canada. For the very simple reason, India wants that Sikh dual nationals living abroad in Canada should refrain themselves in engaging anti-government activities inside India and on the other hand Canada has been trying to safeguard its citizens and their interests in-and-out side Canada. In this context, in 2017, the Canadian government's decision to revoke the allegations as 'Sikh extremism' and 'their involvement in terrorism' escalated tensions with India. On the other hand, India accused Canada for not taking satisfactory action to counter anti-Indian activities of the Canadian Sikhs ("Khalistan: Why are," 2023). India has frequently expressed its concerns about what it sees as interference in its internal affairs (Scherer, 2023). India views the advocacy for Khālistān as a threat to its sovereignty and territorial integrity ("60,000 Australian Sikhs," 2023).

The relations between the two countries deteriorated when Indian passenger plane Kanishka was exploded in 1985 destined to India from Canada (Nafey & Gopal, 2018), and all 329 passengers

were died. The Canadian investigation team maintains that Sikh separatists were involved in the incident, and that the blast was the reaction of Operation Blue Star (Hrishikesh, 2023). The concept of a "Khālistān Referendum 2021" was associated with a campaign led by certain Sikh zealots groups advocating for an independent Sikh state particularly the Sikhs for Justice (SFJ)--SFF was banned in India in 2019. These groups sought to conduct a non-binding referendum to gauge support for the creation of Khālistān among the Sikh people/ Community. The referendum was organized by Sikh diaspora groups, particularly those based in countries like Canada, United Kingdom, United States, and other nations with significant Sikh populations. Supporters of the Khālistān movement believe that a separate Sikh state would better represent the interests of the Sikh community (Fareed, 2021).

The Indian government has consistently opposed any moves toward an independent Khālistān. It constantly maintained that Punjāb is an integral part of India and has rejected any calls for secession. The government views such a referendum as illegitimate and without legal standing. The Khālistān Referendum 2021 and related advocacy efforts have garnered attention globally, with varying reactions. Some countries have expressed concerns about the potential for these activities which effects Indian diplomatic relations. However, the Indian government is persistence on its viewpoint and further taken legal and diplomatic measures to counter the Khālistān Referendum and declared the referendum mere propaganda (Khan & Muhammad, 2023).

Canada's commitment to multiculturalism and freedom of expression has sometimes led to a complex balancing act in addressing concerns raised by India while respecting the rights and freedoms of its citizens and residents. The issue of Khālistān remains a sensitive and occasionally contentious topic in bilateral relations between the two countries. Canada had stopped its trade with India in October 2023 due to political change in Canada and unfriendly relations with India. The trade minister of Canada himself said that there would be no trade between India and Canada. On the spot, the trade team from Canada stopped to go for further trade ties. However, in the same year, the trade ministers of both countries tried to engage in economic activity, but due to the political differences on the Khalistan issue it could not materialize (Scherer, 2023).

Shubhdeep Singh Sidhū popularly known as Sidhū Moose Wālā (b.1993 d. 2022) most popular singer of Indian Punjab was also executed. He was the supporter of Khālistān movement as well as Sikh separation. In his music, he discussed the Khālistān movement and leaders of Khālistān movement like Jarnail Singh Bhindrānwāle, Sant Harchand Singh Longōwāl. In an interview he explained Khālistān means a 'pure place' like under the rule of Maharājāh Ranjīt Singh, where all are equal and living in tuneful way ("Sidhu moose wala," 2022). He joined Congress in December 2021, to contest the Punjab Legislative Assembly election but lost the election. He was executed on May 29, 2022. In July 2022, there was held referendum in Rome and Italy for the favor of Khālistān movement and event was dedicated to Sidhū Moose Wālā for his work for Khālistān movement. The leadership of Sikhs for Justice (SFJ) requested to Indian Punjābī Singers to support the Khālistān movement as Sidhū Moose Wālā supported us (Shah, 2022).

The murder of Hardeep Singh Nijjar (b.1977 d. 2023), who was executed June 18, 2023, a popular Sikh Canadian citizen become the subject of media attention. He was blamed by Indian government of rendering support to the Sikhs of Khālistān movement and the Babbar Khalsa International. Allegations related to Canadian Sikh individuals advocating Khālistān have starkly worsened the

relations between Canada and India (Chughtai & Dhingra, 2023). It has been revealed that he was killed in Canada by Indian intelligence which intensified the tension between India and Canada. The Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau took the murder of Nijjar very seriously. Although India rejected its involvement in the murder and declared Mr. Trudeau's response as "absurd". However, Nijjar murder increases the tension between India and Canada ("Is Canada trying," 2023). Besides, Canada and other countries like US, UK and Australia showed concerns towards India over Hardeep Singh Nijjar's murder ("What UK, Australia, US," 2023). Moreover, some countries had closed their foreign offices in India. Similarly, in September 2023, FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) a law enforcement agency of US warned prominent US Sikh citizen that their lives could be in danger after the death of Nijjar (Kirchgaessner, 2023). Likewise, in November 2023 the US administration accuses India on its involvement in a plot to execute Gurpatwant Singh Pannun — popular Sikh US national and lawyer. US Department of Justice further told that Indian intelligence agent ordered the execution of Nijjar which endorsed Justin Trudeau's claim against Indian terrorism. Additionally, the Department of Justice has not mentioned the name of Indian government official – refers him as CC-1– involve in the murder attempt of Gurpatwant Singh Pannun. The Department further maintains that CC-1 previously served in India's Central Reserve Police Force. He (CC-1) hired another Indian named Nikhil Gupta in this murder plot. Gupta was charged of international drug and weapons trafficking. He was arrested and detained in the Czech Republic and was extradited to the US under a bilateral extradition treaty (Kirchgaessner et al., 2023).

Similarly, when the Indian police arrested Amritpal Singh on April 23, 2023, people started protest outside Indian High Commission in Canada, San Francisco and London and demanded a separate homeland of Khālistān which become a cause of serious diplomatic problem for India as the Secretary of State of US and British High Commissioner to India condemned the state violence against the Sikh (Shah, 2022).

The Canadian Prime Minister Jastin Trudeau participated in the Khalsa Day held in Toronto Canada, on April 28, 2024. During his speech while addressing the Sikhs he explicitly maintains that "the Canadian government is always there to protect their rights and freedoms at all costs and that the Sikh values are the Canadian values. To the nearly, 800,000 Canadians of Sikh heritage across this country, we will always defend your community against hatred and discrimination. The government is improving security and infrastructure by adding more security to community centers and places of worship, like *gurdwaras*" (Anshul, 2024). However, the Indian government as usual severely criticized the stance of Canadian government.

CONCLUSION

In the end it is evident that the history of Sikhism is in fact a history of continual struggle and fight for socio-political and religious identity. After the demise of Maharājā Ranjīt Singh the Sikhs failed to maintain their rule in Punjab. Moreover, the great division of 1947 and the compromise of Akālīs with Nehrū deprived them to make an independent Sikh state. However, the time revealed that Sikhs were not granted their due rights and eventually they demanded a separate state owing to protection and promotion of their religion, language, and culture. The movement has not been succeeded till now owing to disunity of the Sikhs, gap and dissimilar approach of the Akālī leadership and the popular separatists' leaders such as Jarnail Singh Bhindrānwāle. Furthermore, the non-seriousness of Congress and the dominance of extremist Hindus and the 'Hindutva'

approach could not technically handle the Sikh issue that eventually led to inhumane Operation Blue Star.

Although India and Canada enjoyed a cordial relation. However, the Khālistān movement and India's unjust treatment of the Sikhs community is continuously remains the key cause of mutilation of bilateral relations. Canada like other developed countries always espouses multiculturalism, the right of self-determination, self-expression, and freedom of thoughts. India on the other hand a country of multiple ethnic groups and religions failed to provide satisfactory constitutional rights in practice and that's why different groups especially Sikhs and Muslims are by and large not satisfied with Indian government particularly with BJP which is overpowered by extremist Hindu leadership.

The issue of Khālistān is a complex and sensitive matter that has historical, political, and social dimensions. Resolving this issue would require a comprehensive and multi-faceted approach. The most crucial step is engaging in a meaningful and inclusive dialogue with all stakeholders, including representatives of the Sikh community, to understand their concerns and aspirations. This dialogue should be conducted with sincerity and openness to find common ground. Focusing on economic development in Punjāb can help to alleviate grievances. Investments in infrastructure, agriculture, and industry can create opportunities for growth and prosperity. Ensuring the protection of minority rights, including religious and cultural freedoms, is essential to resolve the issue. This includes safeguarding Sikh religious sites, promoting Punjābī language and culture, and upholding Sikh traditions.

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