

Linkages between the Ethnic Diaspora and the Sikh Ethno-National Movement in India

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Exile is the nursery of [ethno-] nationalism.

– Lord Acton¹

The Sikh Diaspora is... integrally tied to the question of homeland. It is difficult to foresee if overseas Sikhs can remain aloof from the situation of Sikhs in India.

– Darshan S. Tatla²

States are neither the only, nor necessarily the most important, sponsors of ethno-national insurgent movements. Diasporas – immigrant communities established in other countries – frequently support kindred ethnic uprisings in their homeland, which has been controlled or colonized by the state dominated by a particularly majority group or community. Despite being separated by thousands of miles, homeland struggles are often keenly felt among immigrant communities. Indeed, ethnic fighters receive various and important forms of support from their

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¹ As quoted in Athena S. Leoussi, ed., *Encyclopaedia of Nationalism*, New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2001, p. 213.

² Darshan S. Tatla “Sikhs in Multicultural Societies,” *International Journal of Multicultural Societies*, Vol. 5, No. 2, 2003, p. 195.

respective migrant communities. Significant Diaspora support has occurred in the every region of the globe. Migrant communities have sent money, arms and recruits back to their countries, which have proven pivotal in sustaining ethno-national campaigns. This support has, at times significantly, increased insurgents' capabilities and enabled them to withstand Government counter-insurgency efforts.³ In fact, reliance on Diasporas to wage an insurgency has become an increasingly common phenomenon in recent years.

The Sikhs provide a particularly illuminating case study of attracting sympathy and support from their co-ethnics living abroad in Diaspora, for the ethno-national struggle against the Indian state. The Sikhs are a dispersed people. Although their origins are in the Punjab, there are probably no major countries or cities in the world where a Sikh community will not be found.⁴ The presence of Sikhs outside India is probably as old as the Sikh faith itself, shaped by the ten Gurus between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries. Indeed, early Sikh traders developed small colonies in Afghanistan, Persia and Sri Lanka. Yet, the rise of Sikh mass migration outside South Asia did not occur before the enlistment of the Sikhs in the British colonial army, after the annexation of the Sikh homeland – Punjab – in 1849, and the Mutiny of the Sepoys in 1857.⁵ The Sikhs were then declared a 'martial race' by the Britishers and many Sikh soldiers were subsequently posted to places in British-held South-East Asian

³ For the theoretical understanding of Diaspora-homeland Relationship, See Robin Cohen, "Diasporas and the Nation-State: From Victims to Challenges," *International Affairs*, Vol. 72, No.3, 1996, pp.507-20; Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*, London: UCL Press, 1997; Gabriel Sheffer, *Diaspora Politics: At Home Abroad*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003; William Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return," *Diaspora*, Vol. 1, No.1, 1991, pp.83-99; James Clifford, "Diasporas", in Montserrat Guibernau and John Rex, Eds., *The Ethnicity Reader: Nationalism, Multiculturalism and Migration*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997, pp. 283-290 and; Kachig Tololian, "The Nation State and Others", *Diaspora*, Vol. 1, No.1, 1991 pp.3-7 and ; Machael Dahan and Gabriel Sheffer, "Ethnic Groups and Distance Shrinking Communication Technologies", *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, Vol. 7, No.1, 2001, p. 94.

⁴ Arthur W. Helweg, "The Gurdwara and The Sikh Diaspora," *Journal of Sikh Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 1, 2003, p. 117.

⁵ Sangat Singh, *The Sikhs in History*, Amritsar: Singh Brothers, 2002, pp. 539-73.

countries, including Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong. From there, early pioneers ventured to Australia and America. The first decade of the 20th century saw the rise of Sikh communities on the western coast of North America, but Canada started controlling the migratory flows in 1908. In the US, South Asian immigrants were denied entry by the immigration Act of 1924. After the Second World War, Sikhs also started moving in large groups to North America where a change of immigration policy was implemented in 1962 in Canada and in 1965 in the United States.⁶ After the attack by the Indian Army on the Golden Temple complex in 1984, the massive repression of separatist guerrillas and the massacre of Sikh civilians following the murder of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, a flow of Sikh refugees also started arriving in Western Europe and North America; around 10,000 in Germany, 800 in the US, 6,000 in Canada and the UK, 5,000 in Belgium and 4,000 in France.⁷ Today, the global Sikh Diaspora numbers one million individuals, three-quarters of whom have settled in the United Kingdom, Canada and United States. In 1998, in the United Kingdom, the Sikh Diaspora numbered between 400,000 and 500,000 individuals; in Canada 147,440; and in the United States 125,000.⁸ These figures have, subsequently, increased substantially.

‘People of the same blood attract!’ is a fact of an unconscious, non-rational and emotional side of mankind.⁹ ‘Blood and soil,’ as Bismarck had said, can’t be bartered.¹⁰ Thus the Sikhs living abroad, like other immigrant communities, also adapted to the circumstances within which they found themselves, but even then, never did de-link themselves from their ethnic kin and the soil of their ethnic homeland, Punjab. From time to time, they involved themselves in socio-economic and political

⁶ Laurent Gayer, “The Globalization of Identity Politics: The Sikh Experience”, *International Journal of Punjab Studies*, Vol.7, No. 2, 2000.

⁷ Ibid, p. 226.

⁸ Darshan S. Tatla, *The Sikh Diaspora: The Search for Statehood*, London: UCL Press, 1999, p. 41.

⁹ Martin Bulmer, “Ethnicity”, in Leoussi, *Encyclopaedia of Nationalism*, p. 71.

¹⁰ Walker Connor, “The Impact of Homelands Upon Diasporas,” in Gabriel Sheffer, ed. *Modern Diasporas in International Politics*, London: Croom Helm, 1986, p. 17.

activities in Punjab. The early Sikh Diaspora remitted a great part of their income to their kin in Punjab. Through these remittances, they intended to promote the *izzat* or prestige of their extended families.¹¹ Since, they planned to return to their homeland, they expected these contributions to ensure them a 'comfortable family life.'¹² Most of the Sikh Diaspora's remittances, then, went to buying land and expanding farms, in accordance with the ethos of Sikh farmers, who favour land as a source of social prestige and social security.¹³ Further, inspired by the organizations or political parties like the Chief Khalsa Diwan of Amritsar and Singh Sabhas, overseas Sikhs also founded certain Diaspora organizations such as the Khalsa Diwan Society in 1907 at Vancouver, and later in California. Similarly, the Sikh Diaspora set up Singh Sabhas and provided funding and advertising to Punjabi causes.¹⁴ Due to the political mobilization of Sikh Diaspora by the political activists of Punjab in the early part of the 20th Century, Sikhs overseas started taking interest in homeland politics. Two intellectuals – Lala Hardayal and Taraknath Das – mobilized the Sikhs in United States and Canada respectively. They advocated the liberation of India through armed struggle. In 1914, when Hardayal tried to convince his militants to return to India and embrace the fight for independence, 3200 Indians, a majority of who were Sikhs, answered his call and attempted to start an uprising in the homeland against the British Empire.¹⁵ Though, due to the Sikh peasants' loyalty towards colonial empire and in the absence of local political and public support, they did not succeed, this event had an important outcome, with the Sikh Diaspora starting to develop its own politics. Again, albeit symbolically, overseas Sikh got involved in homeland affairs during the Gurdwara Reforms Movement. One Canadian Sikh delegation, which was joined by several Sikhs from Shanghai, Hong Kong, Singapore and Penang, took part in the Jaito Da Morcha of 1923-25. The

¹¹ See Deepak Nayyar, *Migration, Remittances and Capital Flows: The Indian Experience*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994.

¹² Tatla, *The Sikh Diaspora*, p. 64.

¹³ Gayer, *The Globalization of Identity Politics*, p.230.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Jatha started from Vancouver on July 13, 1924, and reached at Jaito in Punjab, in February 1925.

These events reflect that, from 1915 onwards, political actors and issues of Punjab mobilized the Sikh Diaspora, benefiting from its funding and advertising and, retroactively, the overseas Sikhs started developing their own politics, influencing the Punjab polity and supporting the homeland cause in return.¹⁶

In the post-independence period, the green revolution strategy in Punjab was financed partly by immigrants' remittances. The financial clout provided by relatives abroad helped many Sikh farmers to take the risks with the newly introduced hybrid varieties of wheat. In Jalandhar and Hoshiarpur, where water logging constituted a major hindrance to farm productivity, overseas funds provided for many preventive measures.¹⁷ Similarly, investments in new agricultural machinery, seeds, harvesters and tube wells were made possible by overseas contributions. Between 1953 and 1966, during the Punjabi Suba movement, the Vancouver-based Khalsa Diwan Society provided volunteers and funds for the movement. Further, between 1981 and 1984, during the Dharam Yudh Morcha, the Babbar Khalsa and Khalsa Diwan Society provided volunteers and funds to their community.¹⁸

Tracing the origin and development of the demand for Khalistan among the overseas Sikhs, in the present paper, efforts have been made to analyze how the Sikh Diaspora got involved in the Sikh ethnic uprising in India. What was the nature and *modus operandi* of its involvement? Further, what was the response of the Indian as well as host states, especially United Kingdom, Canada and the United States, on the issue, and what measures were adopted by the Indian state to prevent the Sikh Diaspora's involvement in the ethnic homeland imbroglio?

The demand for a separate Sikh State called 'Khalistan' came from the Sikhs within Punjab. However, the history of a demand for Khalistan among the Sikh Diaspora can be traced from the arrival of Davinder Singh Parmar in London in late 1954. He

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 231.

¹⁷ Tatla, *The Sikh Diaspora*, p. 65.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 94.

began promulgating the view that Sikhs required an independent Khalistan in order to ensure their survival as a community. Only one person supported Parmar during the early stages of the movement, but he, nevertheless, contributed to newspapers, distributed pamphlets and debated with his fellow Sikhs regarding the question of Sikh separatism. Parmar's idea of Khalistan was validated, however, during his 1970 meeting in London with Jagjit Singh Chauhan, who shared the former's unrelenting commitment to Khalistan. In 1970, the Khalistan movement was formally launched in London at a Press Conference in Aldwych, located just opposite India House, where the Indian High Commission offices are situated.

During this early stage, membership of the movement consisted of three individuals: Parmar, Chauhan and Mangat Singh. All these years, support for the movement within the Sikh Diaspora community was negligible and many Sikhs, including the 'devout', viewed them as 'madmen'.¹⁹ Chauhan continued to single-handedly disseminate his message to a largely unresponsive audience. He unfurled a Khalistani flag at an event in Birmingham where hundreds of Sikhs were in attendance. In 1971, he organized a demonstration in Hyde Park in which demonstrators displayed several slogans proclaiming Sikh sovereignty. Chauhan's blatant anti-India display was a continuous source of embarrassment to most of the Sikhs who regarded India with deep affection at the time. Issuing formal edicts against what they termed 'unpatriotic' behaviour, numerous Gurdwaras (Sikh place of worship) imposed sanctions against Chauhan and barred him from attending their services.²⁰ In September 1971, Chauhan held a Press Conference in London and made allegations of the oppression of Sikhs in India. On October 13, 1971, he sponsored a half-page advertisement in *The New York Times* explaining why he wanted Khalistan.²¹ In October

¹⁹ Therese Sue Gunawardena, "The Daisporisation of Ethno Nationalism: British Sikhs and the Punjab," *Ethnic Studies Report*, Vol. 18, No. 1, 2000, p. 58.

²⁰ Tatla, *The Sikh Diaspora*, p. 104.

²¹ Arthur W. Helweg, "Sikh Politics in India: The Emigrant Factor," in N. Gerald Barrier and Verne A. Dusenbery, eds., *The Sikh Diaspora: Migration and Experience beyond Punjab*, New Delhi: Chanakya Publications, 1989, p. 314.

1971, prior to the start of the India-Pakistan war over Bangladesh, Chauhan attended the birth anniversary celebrations of Guru Nanak's birthplace in Nankana Sahib in Pakistan and announced his intention to establish a 'Rebel Sikh Government' at Nankana Sahib.²² The Pakistan media immediately seized upon his statements about an independent Khalistan, and the ensuing publicity resulted in most Indians hearing about Khalistan for the first time.²³ However, Chauhan had negligible support from the community and most of the Sikhs in Britain, Canada and United States viewed his separatist position as extreme. The Akali Dal in Britain and Akali leaders in India, including Sant Fateh Singh, publicly condemned his statements and expelled him from the party.

In 1977, Chauhan came to India and stayed for three years and later returned to Britain in 1980. On June 1, 1980, Chauhan distributed a press release of the International Council of the Sikhs to the British media, which stated that it would institute consulates in the United Kingdom, Germany and other Western European countries. In the vision of Chauhan and his supporters, Khalistan was to be 850 miles long, stretching from Porbander on the Arabian Sea to Chamba in Himachal Pradesh. The map stated that the creation of Khalistan was approved by the All Parties Sikhs Conference of London. Another goal was to obtain counsellor status in the United Nations, but their bid was subsequently denied in 1987. Their plans also included setting up a government-in-exile in the U.S.A. and organizing an army of 10,000 there, and printing Khalistan passports, currency, and other 'state' documents that would serve to legitimize the movement.²⁴ The Government of India did pressure the American, British and Canadian Governments to curb the political activities of Chauhan and other Khalistan activists. Host Governments, however, maintained that they could not press charges against Khalistani sympathizers as no laws were being violated in their respective countries.

²² Ibid.

²³ M. J. Akbar, *India: The Siege Within*, Auckland: Penguin Books, 1985, pp. 173-4.

²⁴ Helweg, *Sikh Politics in India*, p.315.

Chauhan was not the only early promoter of the Khalistan movement among the overseas Sikhs. Ganga Singh Dhillon, a naturalized American Sikh and the President of Nankana Sahib Foundation, also committed himself to the promotion of Khalistan since the beginning of the 1980s. In March 1981, he visited India and was elected the President of the Sikh Educational Conference organized in Chandigarh by the Chief Khalsa Diwan. The main outcome of the Conference was the adoption of a resolution which authorized the pursuit of associate membership in the United Nations for the Sikhs. Chauhan and Ganga Singh Dhillon were also in contact with Pakistani officials through General Daniel Graham, Co-Chairman of the American Security Council. He had arranged a meeting between Chauhan and Agha Shahi, Pakistan's Foreign Minister. Dhillon claimed Senator Mark Hatfield and Representative James C. Corman as patrons of his Foundation and Chauhan maintained contact with Hatfield, Senator Jesse Helms, Senator Sam Nunn, Charles Percy and Alexander Haig.

Due to his anti-Indian activities, the Indian Government cancelled Chauhan's passport in April 1982. However, when he was denied a visa to enter the United States, Senator Helms helped circumvent the barrier by inviting Chauhan to testify before the U.S. Senate Agriculture Committee. He travelled to the United States under a British Certificate of Identity. While in the U.S., he led 200 Sikhs representing about 10 organizations in Canada and the United States in a demonstration outside the United Nations (UN) asking for UN intervention for persecuted Sikhs in India.²⁵ Anti-India feelings were noticeable in Canada by May 1982 when the Indian High Commissioner, Dr. Gurdial Singh Dhillon, himself a Sikh, was pelted with eggs and rotten tomatoes during a visit to Vancouver.²⁶ Although, the idea of Khalistan was advocated early on by some individuals like Chauhan and Ganga Singh Dhillon in the Diaspora, and was discussed and designed in the UK, the US and Canada since 1970s, it did not receive much popular support either within the

²⁵ Ibid, p. 316.

²⁶ For details see, Suresh Jain, "Pro-Khalistan Sikhs Plet Envoy," *India Abroad*, Vol.12, No. 33, 1982.

Diaspora or in Punjab before the attack on the Golden Temple by Indian security forces.

The events of 1984 were to drastically change the Khalistan movement, which had been, until then, considered by most overseas Sikhs as unworthy of serious attention. The events that occurred in the Punjab in 1984, created a deep sense of insecurity among the Sikhs in India as well as abroad. The actions taken by the Indian Government helped to expand and popularize the separatist movement among the common masses. When the overseas Sikh heard the news of the Indian Army's assault on the Golden Temple, they reacted with extreme anger and grief and ensured that the feelings of their community were publicly known. The assault was perceived by many Sikhs as a premeditated act of brutal sacrilege, a gesture of contempt, the manifestation of a conspiratorial plan to annihilate the Sikh traditions and humiliate the Sikh nation.²⁷ The desecration of the Golden Temple resulted in moderate Sikhs reassessing their earlier loyalties towards India and reasserting their collective ethnic identity. Many Sikhs, who had, prior to 1984, regarded themselves as moderate, became increasingly sympathetic to the separatist position of the hardliners.²⁸

In the United Kingdom, frenzied activities followed *Operation Blue Star*, with British Sikhs turning out *en masse* on June 10, 1984, at a London demonstration protesting the desecration of the holiest shrine. Over 25,000 Sikhs from diverse backgrounds took part in the march that began in Hyde Park and ended outside the Indian High Commission office. They proclaimed 'Khalistan Zindabad!' (Long live Khalistan!) and unequivocally denounced the actions of the Indian state. Similar demonstrations were organized by Gurdwaras in Birmingham, Bristol, Coventry and other cities with large Sikh populations.²⁹ The Sikh outrage over the Army action in the Golden Temple was expressed in numerous forms. Several young British Sikh volunteers offered their services in response to a call in the

²⁷ Tatla, *The Sikh Diaspora*.

²⁸ Bidisha Biswas, "Nationalism By Proxy: A Comparison of Social Movements Among Diaspora Sikhs And Hindus," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, Vol. 10, No.2, 2004, p. 281.

²⁹ Gunawardena, "The Daisporisation of Ethno Nationalism," p. 59.

Punjabi media to 'liberate the Golden Temple.' However, plans to return to Punjab were swiftly aborted by the introduction of stringent visa regulations by the Indian Government designed to curb Sikh extremism from abroad.³⁰ Punjabi newspapers continued to be filled with vitriolic editorials, articles and readers' correspondence denouncing the action of the Indian Government. Photographs of Bhindranwale, Shahbeg Singh, Amrik Singh and other Sikh militants killed during the attack were displayed prominently next to the ubiquitous portraits of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh in the Sikh homes and Gurdwaras.³¹ Moderate and respected Sikh leaders, especially Sardar Sampuran Singh Chima, Giani Amolak Singh and Gurcharan Singh, were upset over the way the armed action was conducted. They perceived the invasion of Golden Temple as an attack on Guru Ram Das, Guru Arjun Dev and Guru Gobind Singh and on the Sikhdom as a whole.³² Earlier, moderate Sikhs were of the view that any solution to the Punjab problem will have to be resolved by the Sikh leaders within India and a Punjab out of India, in the long run, would be injurious to the very interests of the Sikh community. Besides, in Britain, there was a common opinion among the moderate Sikh leaders that unless the whole Sikh community of India and especially of Punjab would not stand for separate Sikh state, i.e., Khalistan, their demand for such a state would be a mockery of the whole concept of Khalistan. However, the armed action brought a radical change in their opinion. Following *Operation Blue Star*, they decided to support the Sikh uprising in India and also to make efforts for Khalistan, on their own part, using diverse methods.³³ On June 21, 1984, a group of top Sikh community leaders in London asked the then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher for an interview to clarify the misunderstanding that had been created in her mind as a result of Indira Gandhi's communication with her on the Punjab situation. The Sikh leaders said that they were also approaching Amnesty International, the International Red Cross and the UN to ask them

³⁰ Ibid, p. 60.

³¹ Ibid.

³² B. K. Tiwari, "Sikhs in UK Having Second Thoughts," *The Indian Express*, Delhi, June 28, 1984.

³³ Ibid.

to investigate what they called was a ‘crime against humanity’, which Mrs. Gandhi had committed on the Sikhs.³⁴ They added:

We want a list of the dead, wounded and the missing persons, men, women and children, from the Red Cross and we hope that Mrs. Gandhi will co-operate with them.³⁵

Giani Amolak Singh, President of the Shiromani Akali Dal in London, said that three organizations, i.e., Amnesty International, the International Red Cross and the UN, could find out the truth about the arms, weapons and drugs that were allegedly found in the Golden Temple complex. He said that the Sikhs would abide by their verdict. At the spot, a group of Sikh leaders decided to go on a world tour to explain the cause of the Sikhs to various Governments. They also decided that after the completion of their tour they would hold a World Conference of the Sikh community in Vancouver, which would be attended by Sikh representatives from Singapore, Hong Kong, Thailand, Malaysia, and all over Western Europe. It was also decided that they would bring unity among the diverse Sikh factions and a united front would be formed to fight against the Indian Government.³⁶ During the preparations to mobilize a worldwide public opinion against the armed operation in the Golden Temple, the interview of Mrs. Indira Gandhi on *BBC TV* became a subject of debate among the community leaders. They concluded that, from all accounts, Mrs. Gandhi appeared to be very tired and faltered several times while answering questions, for instance, she called Mrs. Thatcher ‘head of state’ instead of ‘head of the government.’ Her answer about the Akal Takhat was also not convincing. They were also not convinced with her statement that the sanctity of the Golden Temple had been maintained during the Army action and the troops had gone there to weed out the terrorists and terrorism, not to kill the innocent Sikh people. The community leaders also criticized Mrs. Gandhi over the argument that Pakistan was involved in the Sikh affairs. The argument was not convincing and just gave an impression that she was trying to implicate the

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ B. K. Tiwari, “Sikh Leaders Seek to Meet Thatcher,” *Indian Express*, June 22, 1984.

³⁶ Ibid.

General Zia-ul-Haq Government in Pakistan unnecessarily. All moderate Sikh leaders appealed to the Sikhs and Hindus in India and Britain to live as brothers. Giani Amolak Singh and Sampuran Singh Chima said that the Sikhs and Hindus would always remain brothers. And, moreover, a true Sikh will never hurt his Hindu brother.³⁷

The Sikh Diaspora in Britain had made a clear ‘Oust Indira’ plan and determined, simultaneously, to work for an independent and sovereign Sikh state, for which Diaspora members called various meetings and passed resolution on diverse issues. On June 23-24, 1984, Sikh leaders, along with hundreds of their supporters, met in Southall and Kent. In Southall, the moderate Sikh congregation passed a resolution saying that the Sikhs’ ultimate goal would be to create a separate state.³⁸ To this end, they formed a five-member committee. At the Kent Gurdwara, they passed a resolution asking all the Sikhs in Britain and other parts of the world:

- ? To boycott Air India;
- ? To withdraw all the savings from Indian banks and;
- ? To stop remitting funds for their relatives in India through any of the Indian banks.

Despite regular appeals by Sikh leaders to community members to follow the Kent resolution, many Sikhs continued to travel to India by Air India. However, some started withdrawing their savings from the Indian banks and an insignificant number of them stopped their standing orders to banks regarding the monthly remittances to their relations in Punjab. However, finally, young Sikhs who took over the leadership of the Sikh community from the elder leaders, became more active in persuading the others to act seriously on these resolutions.³⁹

Nevertheless, Sikh Diaspora organizations lacked unity on the various issues despite their common agenda for the establishment of a separate homeland state called ‘Khalistan’. The calls for ‘Khalistan’, in fact, created further confusion among the disorganized members of the Sikh Diaspora community.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Tiwari, “Sikhs in UK Having Second Thoughts,” *Indian Express*, June 28, 1984.

Immediately, after the military operation in June 1984, Sikhs in Britain were confused over the announcement of two separate 'Khalistan' governments in exile. A committee of five members belonging to the Dal Khalsa declared that it had established a Sikh government in exile and released the names of its 'Cabinet Ministers', which included Harjinder Singh Dilgir as 'Foreign Minister' and Jaswant Singh Thekedar as 'Minister for Home Affairs'. However, on June 14, 1984, Jagjit Singh Chauhan, the self-styled President of 'Khalistan', also announced the existence of his own government-in-exile and inaugurated his 'embassy building' with a purpose to issue 'passports' to 'Khalistan citizens.'⁴⁰ Two governments-in-exile in one city (London) not only angered the 'sober-minded' elderly Sikhs, but also some young elements, who made it known that this kind of 'gimmick' would not serve the cause of the Sikh community. According to them, some 'ambitious' Sikhs were making a mockery of their own cause and religion. Sampuran Singh Cheema, President of the Presidium of the UK Akali Dal, Gurnam Singh, Chief Advisor to the International Council of Sikhs, and Harnam Singh, another Sikh leader, were upset over the Sikh ethnic uprising being exploited by the 'opportunists', as they obliquely described these elements.

On the other hand, the extremists were also unhappy. They were upset with General Arora's television interview on June 13, 1984, in which he had not condemned the role of the Indian armed forces strongly. He merely said that it was true that the military action had hurt his co-religionists and created more problems than solutions. Sikh leaders, especially the militants, had expected him to call for 'revenge.'⁴¹

Like the British Sikhs, the Sikhs in Canada and America showed their disapproval over the stand on their 'Vatican'. By the evening of June 3, 1984, when the news of the Army action in the Golden Temple spread, many Sikhs converged on their neighbourhood Gurdwaras and extraordinary gatherings took place. They interpreted the assault as an act of sacrilege, a premeditated brutality, a gesture of contempt and the beginning of

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ *Indian Express*, June 28, 1984.

a process to destroy the Sikh traditions. Tejinder Singh Kahlon, President of the Sikh Cultural Society in New York, called it 'outrageous immoral'. According to him, "by doing so Mrs. Gandhi was laying the foundation of a separate Sikh state."⁴² Various Gurdwaras arranged prayers for those who fought for the sanctity of the Golden Temple Complex. On June 8, 1984, 250 Sikhs held a demonstration at Massachusetts Avenue in Washington, D.C., a few blocks from the Indian Embassy. The very next day, 400 Sikhs protested outside the Indian Consulate in Chicago.⁴³ On June 10, 1984, processions were held in New York, San Francisco, Edmonton, Calgary, Toronto and Los Angeles. Over 25,000 Sikhs, a majority of whom were moderates, marched on the streets of Vancouver wearing black arms bands in protest against the military operation, chanting 'Death to Indira'. At a major Gurdwara in Vancouver, an emotional appeal for funds saw many Sikh women taking off their gold bangles for donations while barely concealing their tears.⁴⁴ Some of the anguished Canadian Sikhs burnt the Indian National flag and raided the Indian consulates. They also dishonoured Mahatma Gandhi's portrait in the Toronto Consulate.⁴⁵ On July 28, 1984, Didar Singh Bains led 3,000 Sikhs in a rally in Madison Square Garden, New York City, which resolved to establish Khalistan, an independent sovereign country of the Sikh nation encompassing the present Punjab and the Sikh majority areas of India.⁴⁶ On June 24, 1984, representatives of the Federation of Canadian Sikh Societies asked the Canadian Government to stop deporting Sikhs who had applied for refugee status until 'the internal political strife' in Punjab was over. Federation representatives and their lawyer met immigration department officials in Ottawa in an effort to seek special consideration of their demand. They said that the Sikhs constituted the largest ethnic group applying for refugee status in Canada. Between 1980 and January 1984, Ottawa had rejected the refugee claims of 2,470 Sikhs who came

⁴² *New York Times*, June 7, 1984.

⁴³ Aseem Chhabra, "Thousands of Sikhs Protest," *India Abroad*, Vol. 14, No. 37, pp. 1 and 14.

⁴⁴ Tatla, *The Sikh Diaspora*, p. 113.

⁴⁵ J. N. Parimoo, "Canadian Government Funds for Sikh Extremists," *The Times of India*, Delhi, September 16, 1984.

⁴⁶ Helweg, "Sikh Politics is India," p.322.

to Canada and staked their claim for permanent residence, and had ordered them deported. Further, another 300 to 400 non-immigrant Sikhs still living in Canada, who applied for refugee status, had been ordered to return to India. Under a new order issued by the Canadian Federal Cabinet in February 1984, the immigration officials had been granted wide powers to refuse visas to those people who were married to Canadian citizens or landed immigrants in an effort to stop 'marriages of convenience'.⁴⁷ Prior to *Operation Blue Star*, for most of the Sikhs in Canada, Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale was a 'potent source of terrorism on Canadian soil'. However, after his death while fighting against the Indian Army, he emerged as a great martyr of the community. In Vancouver, bumper stickers announced, 'I love Bhindranwale'.⁴⁸

After the events of June 3, 1984, in a communally surcharged atmosphere, Akali leaders in India and abroad were questioned within the Gurdwaras and through the Press. They were asked to resign for they had 'betrayed the Panth'. The Akali Dal was paralysed, as its members were denounced as 'collaborators', 'agents' or 'stooges' of the Indian state.⁴⁹ Henceforth, in the given circumstances and political vacuum, the new leadership came forward and formed numerous new organizations to struggle for the communal cause. United Kingdom saw the emergence of new Sikh organizations like the Khalistan Council (in 1984 in London), International Sikh Youth Federation (in 1984 in London and Midlands) Dal Khalsa (in 1984 in Midlands) and Punjab Unity Forum (in 1986 in London). In the United States, Sikh leaders formed certain important organizations including California Sikh Youth (1984), Sikh Youth of America (1986), Council of Khalistan (1986), World Sikh Organization (1984), International Sikh Organization (1986), Anti-47 Front (1985) and Babbar Khalsa International (BKI).⁵⁰ Similarly, International Sikh Youth Federation (ISYF, 1984), World Sikh Organizations (1984), National Council of Khalistan (1986) and BKI, came into

⁴⁷ *Indian Express*, June 25, 1984.

⁴⁸ John Barber, "A Troubled Community," *Macleans*, Vol. ICIX, No. 25, 1986, pp.19-23.

⁴⁹ Tatla, *The Sikh Diaspora*.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 116-7.

being in Canada with centres in important cities like Vancouver, Toronto and Edmonton.⁵¹ These new organizations played a crucial role to mobilize the Sikh community and further, to internationalize and propagate the issue of Sikh homeland, while raising funds and lobbying in the host states to put pressure on Indian state to stop alleged human rights violations and suppression of the Sikhs. Propaganda was disseminated in a number of ways by these organizations, including electronic mail, the Internet, telephones, hot lines, community libraries, mailings, television programmes and radio broadcasts, as well as political, cultural and social gatherings. They arranged various rallies, seminars, discussions and publications and highlighted the plight of the Sikh community under the “Brahmin Hindu rule” of the Indian state.

Major organizations, e.g., the World Sikh Organization, Council of Khalistan, ISYF, Khalistan Council and Babbar Khalsa, started a number of daily, weekly, fortnightly and monthly newspapers, journals and magazines in English as well as Punjabi languages. The name of certain prominent dailies, weeklies and monthlies such as *World Sikh News*, *The Sword*, *Awaz-e-Quam*, *Chardi Kala*, *The Sikh Herald*, *Shamsheer-e-Dast*, *Sikh Messenger*, *Wangar*, *Sangharsh*, *Jago*, *Watan*, *Hamdard* and *Itihas* are mentioned in this context.⁵²

Apart from the print media, Sikh organizations established a prominent presence on the Internet, with many of their websites fully documented and indexed on popular search engines such as Yahoo, Google, Altavista and Alltheweb. Leading pro-Khalistani Websites included: www.khalistan.com, www.khalistan-affairs.org, www.dalkhalsa.org, www.worldsikh.org, www.burningpunjab.com, www.panthkhalsa.org, and www.khalistan.net.⁵³ On these Websites, Khalistani organizations advertised Khalistan, their workers’ achievements and biographies of their leaders. Through print and electronic sources, the Sikh Diaspora propagated the discrimination, atrocities and oppression – real and imagined – of the Government of India

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

against the Sikhs in India. Sikh Diaspora organizations argued that Sikhs were slaves in India and that nobody was defending their interests; their homeland had always been treated as a colony and that they had been discriminated against and exploited on the socio-economic, political and cultural fronts; everything produced by Sikh farmers was bought at a discounted price by the Indian establishment; Sikhs had contributed disproportionately (26 per cent) to the Indian Government's budget, but only 2 per cent of the budget was spent on their homeland, Punjab. In the literature, it was also propagated that the Sikhs were least favoured in Governmental jobs and that they had only one per cent of jobs within the Central sector.

The Diaspora also highlighted certain 'factual' information of military oppression of the Sikhs by the Indian Government.⁵⁴ For example, the Council of Khalistan claimed that the "Indian state had murdered 250,000 Sikhs since 1984 and had held 52,268 Sikhs as political prisoners" without charge or trial. It was also asserted that the kind of treatment that had been meted out to the minorities, especially the Sikhs, by the Indian state confirmed that India is a 'fundamentalist Hindu theocracy' and not a secular or democratic state at all. In 1997, Narinder Singh, a spokesman for the Golden Temple, told America's National Public Radio:

The Indian Government ... always boasting that they are democratic, ... [and] secular. They have nothing to do with secularism, nothing to with a democracy. They just kill Sikhs just to please the [Hindu] majority.⁵⁵

The Sikh Diaspora argued forcefully that the Guru had granted the sovereignty to the Sikh nation saying, '*In grieb Sikhin ko deon Patshahi*' [(Give these poor Sikhs dominance (kingship)]. The Sikh community, according to the Diaspora organizations, always remembers this dictum, reciting, 'Raj kare ga Khalsa' [the Khalsa (meaning the Sikhs, but also the 'pure') shall rule] every morning and evening. It was then put forth that the Sikh nation must achieve its independence to fulfil the

⁵⁴ Sue Gunawardena, "Constructing Cyber Nationalism: Sikh Solidarity via The Internet," *International Journal of Punjab Studies*, Vol.7, No.2, 2000, pp. 263-322.

⁵⁵ Council of Khalistan, "An Open Letter to Sikh Organizations and Institutions," February 11, 2004.

mandate of the Guru. The Sikhs should unite and start a 'Shantmai Morcha' to liberate their homeland from 'Indian occupation'. The main objective of this propaganda was to mobilize the Sikh community and galvanize international support for the Sikh cause, while discrediting New Delhi by disseminating a consistent message of oppression and suppression of the Sikh minority. The experience reflects that Sikh organizations were far ahead of the Indian Government in the propaganda war. This shortcoming, occasionally, has allowed the groups to embarrass New Delhi and gain political capital at its expense.⁵⁶

To propagate the ideology and generate common support, Sikh Diaspora organizations used the Sikh religious institutions. *Operation Blue Star* changed the opinion of a majority of Sikhs residing in the West, especially in the UK, USA and Canada. Now, a majority of the Sikhs started looking for an independent Sikh state to protect their faith and identity from further persecution by the 'Hindu Indian state'. Sensing a change in the public sentiment, Sikh Diaspora organizations and sympathizers implemented a strategy to consolidate their support in the Sikh Diaspora. The strategy invoked taking control of the central institutions in the Sikh faith, the Gurdwaras. Sikh organizations and sympathizers understood that if they were able to control the functioning of Gurdwaras, they would have access to a large congregation to whom they could preach the virtues of establishing Khalistan and who could provide them with access to the financial resources of these institutions to support the Khalistan movement. During this period, there was a dramatic shift in the composition of democratically elected committees of Gurdwaras, with moderate committees being removed and militant organizations being elected into power. Many of these Sikh Gurdwaras were controlled by or had links to Sikh militant organizations like the Dal Khalsa, World Sikh Organization (WSO), BKI, ISYF, Khalistan Commando Force (KCF) and Khalistan Liberation Force (KLF), as well as other small organizations which were operating in Punjab from the foreign

⁵⁶ V. Siddhardh, "New Indo-British Treaty: What is the Purpose?" *Economic and Political Weekly*, Mumbai, Vol. 27, No. 47, November 21, 1992, p. 2531.

soil. Between 1984 and 1993, these Sikh organizations controlled the religious institutions and entrenched their ideology in the Western Sikh consciousness.

As the Khalistani lobby consolidated its power in Gurdwaras, it began to expose the Sikh congregations to the extremist ideology. Executive committee members, *granthis* (Sikh preachers) and *dhadis* (religious hymn singers) gave fiery sermons condemning the actions of the Indian state. The Sikh masses were exposed to stories of Sikhs being persecuted in Punjab and were shown images of 'Sikh martyrs' who had sacrificed their lives for the communal cause. They spoke to their public about the need for an independent Sikh state based on religious doctrine, in order to protect the Sikh population from further persecution. They justified the use of violence in this pursuit as it was a 'last resort' thrust upon the Sikh population. Thus, the Gurdwaras emerged as a new platform from where the Khalistani lobby justified and legitimately propagated the ideological underpinnings of the Sikh ethno-national movement in India.⁵⁷

Alongside propaganda, a significant amount of money used to support and fight for Khalistan was raised from the Sikh Diaspora. In fact, after the Indian Army's attack on the Golden Temple complex, support and money for the revolutionary cause had increased dramatically among Sikh emigrants. Britain emerged as the biggest centre for financing the Sikh militants in India. Funds were being illegally funnelled out of Britain to Pakistan and other countries where the Sikh militant leadership was located.⁵⁸ Gurdwaras in the United States, England and Canada gave thousands of dollars a week to support the 'revolutionary movement' in Punjab. Manbir Singh Chaheru, Chief of the Khalistan Commando Force in Punjab, had confessed that he had received more than 60,000 dollars from Sikh organizations in Britain and Canada.⁵⁹ In Canada, the ISYF,

⁵⁷ C. Christine Fair, "Diaspora Involvement in Insurgencies: Insights from the Khalistan and Tamil Eelam Movements," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, Vol. 11, No. 2 2005, pp. 125-156 and Charanjit Singh Kang, *Counterterrorism: Punjab A Case Study*, Canada: Simon Fraser University, 2001, pp.168-170.

⁵⁸ Helweg, "Sikh Politics in India: The Emigrant Factor," p. 322.

⁵⁹ South Asia Terrorism Portal, www.satp.org.

which controlled Gurdwaras in Abbots Fort, New Westminster, Surrey, near Vancouver and on Ross Street, Vancouver, had raised huge amounts of funds from the Sikh Diaspora. In 1984, it had launched a membership drive in Canada and charged five dollars as fees. Those who did not enrol were branded as agents of Government agencies. To avoid suspicion, most Sikhs became members. The ISYF also established a 'human rights organization' known as the Khalsa Human Rights Group, which subsequently emerged as a powerful fundraising unit of pro-Khalistani Sikh militants located in foreign countries. In 1991, the ISYF launched the 'Bhai Amrik Singh Shaheed Fund' in UK, reportedly to assist the families of Sikh militants killed in security forces' operations in Punjab. It also promised to send more money in the future.⁶⁰ The World Sikh Organization, another Sikh Diaspora organization, had financed and arranged the visit of Canadian parliamentarians Barbara Greene, Derek Lee and Svend Robinson to Punjab from January 15 to January 22, 1992.⁶¹

The overseas Sikh organizations had also received funds from the Government in Canada. According to Indian diplomatic circles in Canada, the Federation of Sikh Societies, many of whose members were advocating a separate Sikh state, was receiving funds estimated to be 9,000 dollars yearly from the Canadian Government since 1982 when the Sikh Federation had been started. However, the Government funds were not being given to the Sikh organization to preach and promote secession in India, but were being wrongly used for that purpose. The money so given was part of a budgetary fund that was earmarked every year for the promotion of Canada as a multi-cultural society. Representative groups emanating from different countries of the world that had settled in Canada received the funds from Government to enable them to maintain their ethnic identity. Thus, the Indian community as a whole received part of this funding every year. But the Sikhs who were part of the Indian community received special treatment and received large sum of money, much of which was used to promote militant activities

⁶⁰ Parimoo, *Times of India*, September 16, 1984.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

against the Indian state.⁶² India and Canada are both members of the Commonwealth and, as such, are tied by such bonds of friendship and are expected to discharge certain political and diplomatic obligations towards each other. Thus, when funds provided by one Commonwealth country were going to finance militant ethnic secessionism in the other Commonwealth country, this surprised many.⁶³

Sikh Diaspora organizations sent money to militant organizations in Punjab to buy arms and ammunition and to fulfil other requirements in the field. In 1981, the Babbar Khalsa reportedly raised 60,000 Canadian dollars in the UK and Canada and this was sent to Babbar Khalsa militants active in Punjab. In 1982, Talwinder Singh Parmar received 35,000 US dollars from Canada, which was later used to sponsor Babbar Khalsa attacks against the Nirankaris and Indian authorities. Besides the militant organizations, in the post-1984 period, funds were sent for humanitarian causes as well as legal expenditure to defend the militants and other people put on trial before the Indian judiciary.

The Diaspora organizations transferred money to militant groups in Punjab primarily through three methods: First, money was deposited or transferred directly into Indian bank accounts controlled by the Sikh militant group or individual members sympathetic to the communal cause, with funds later withdrawn for organizational use. Second, money was sent through third parties, mainly unregistered foreign money exchanges. These foreign exchanges transferred money through agents to specific locations within India and all over the world. This method of money transfer was effective because the money could not be traced and senders remained anonymous. Third, human 'mules' who were the members or supporters of the Sikh militant organizations based abroad were used to transfer the money to the Sikh militants in Punjab. Many times, these individuals travelled to India or Pakistan with huge amounts of money in their possession. Once individuals arrived in India or Pakistan, they

⁶² Bhabani Sen Gupta, "Internationalization of Ethnic Conflict: The Punjab Crisis of the 1980s," in K. M. De Silva and R. J. May, eds., *Internationalization of Ethnic Conflict*, London: Pinter Publisher, 1991, p. 56.

⁶³ *World Sikh News*, October 31, 1986.

made contact with the specific organizations and distributed the money through their organizational structures. It is well established that members of the BKI, ISYF, KCF and WSO travelled to India and Pakistan to provide funds, raised abroad, to their militant organizations.⁶⁴

The Diaspora leadership lobbied with various Government officials, parliamentarians and international human rights agencies. The strategies of the Sikh Diaspora were determined by their perceptions, resources and also by the lobbying system of each host state. In the United States, ethnic diplomacy is well established and is a part of Congressional proceedings. Consequently, the Sikh Diaspora gained considerable support from US Congressmen for the cause of Khalistan and on the issue of human rights violations by the Indian state. In fact, the Sikh lobby led by Gurmit Singh Aulakh of the Council of Khalistan in the United States made extensive contacts with US Congressmen. To get their support, the Sikh lobby exploited the poor history of India-US relations. With Pakistan as a stable ally since 1959, India had been relatively peripheral to the US strategic and political interests in South Asia. The United States was not satisfied with several aspects of India's domestic and foreign policy, such as its Afghan policy, rejection of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and its refusal to discuss the nuclear restraints with Pakistan; its missile and space programmes, trade frictions with the United States and the sharp deterioration of its relations with Nepal and Sri Lanka.⁶⁵ The Sikh lobby exploited the situation to get the support of US Congressmen. Sikh Diaspora leaders, especially Aulakh, highlighted anti-US activities by the Indian state, focusing on the anti-US stand at the United Nations and India's help to Iran to build up its military arsenal. The Sikh lobbyists honoured the Congressmen and contributed to their campaign funds. The Sikhs had established early links with the US Congressmen from California, Norman Shumway, Wally Herger and Vic Fazio. In October 1986, Herger was given \$ 10,000 for a fundraising dinner.⁶⁶ Later on, in August 1988, Dan

⁶⁴ Kang, *Counterterrorism: Punjab a Case Study*, pp.172-3.

⁶⁵ *World Sikh News*, August 5, 1988.

⁶⁶ *World Sikh News*, February 26, 1993.

Burton was presented with a Sikh Heritage Award.⁶⁷ Again, in February 1993, he was presented with a plaque in recognition of his solidarity and support to the Sikh nation.⁶⁸ Fizio was honoured at the National Press Club in February 1993, while Pete Geren was honoured in a Gurdwara.⁶⁹ When meeting with these Congressmen, Sikh leaders discussed the issue of the alleged large-scale violation of human rights against the Sikhs in India.

These Congressmen heard the Sikhs' pleas with sympathy and they emerged gradually as consistent supporters of the Sikh cause. From time to time, these US Congressmen introduced resolutions in the House of Representatives in support of the Sikh cause and ultimately to pressurize the Indian Government. Thus, in August 1988, Shumway introduced a Congressional resolution concerning human rights of the Sikhs in India. The debate was usually initiated as an amendment to the House Foreign Aid Bill. In 1989, Wally Herger moved a resolution proposing that United States not only freeze its bilateral aid to India but also prevent international financial institutions like the World Bank from extending economic assistance to the Indian state until it stopped the human rights violation in Punjab and abandoned its missile development programme. The US bilateral aid to India, at that time, was a mere 25 million dollars, but India's dependence on World Bank and IMF aid was considerable. Therefore, the Herger move was not easy to ignore for India. It was hotly debated in the House and was defeated by 212 to 204 votes, a margin of a mere eight votes. Of course, the Herger amendment, to be sure, had little chance of being passed into law, even if the House of Representatives had adopted it.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, the considerable support that it received was a sufficient booster for the Khalistani lobby. Consequently, they moved many other resolutions against India. In 1991, Dan Burton sponsored a more stringent resolution to stop the US development assistance programmes for India unless international agencies were allowed to monitor human rights. In 1992, a similar resolution was passed, which led to a

⁶⁷ *Dallas Morning News*, January 10, 1994.

⁶⁸ Gupta, "Internationalization of Ethnic Conflict: The Punjab Crisis of the 1980s," p. 57.

⁶⁹ *The Tribune*, Chandigarh, June 18, 1993.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

small reduction in development assistance to India. Burton reintroduced a bill to the Committee on Foreign Affairs in the House of Representatives in June 1993. In the bill, Burton had sought to cut off aid if India failed within 60 days to repeal five preventive detention laws, which included the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (TADA) of 1987, National Security Act (NSA) of 1980, Jammu and Kashmir Public Safety Act of 1978, and Armed Forces (Punjab and Chandigarh) Special Power Act of 1990. It took 10-hours to debate the bill before it was defeated by 233 to 201 votes. Despite the defeat of the Burton Amendment, 1993, the Sikh lobby succeeded in convincing a large number of US Congressmen about human rights violation in India. Even the members who had voted against the Bill shared Burton's concern for human rights. Further, pro-Sikh Congressmen succeeded in the House when, on the same day, the House adopted another amendment, by voice vote and without discussion, seeking to deny India USD 345,000, allocated in the bill under the International Military Education and Training (IMET) Programme.⁷¹

The American Overseas Interests Act stipulates the cut of 70.4 million in US development aid to any country that did not vote with US at the UN at least 25 percent of the time. India's record of voting against the United States at the United Nations, consequently, became an issue due to which, on May 24, 1995, the US Congress passed the Burton Amendment effectively cutting USD 364,000 from the IMET Programme.⁷² On May 25, 1995, Dan Burton stated in the House of Representatives:

...the House approved my amendment to deny development aid to any nation that votes against the United States more than 75 percent of the time at the United Nations. One of the countries that votes against us at the U.N. 80 to 90 percent of the time every year is India... India is also one of the world's worst human rights abusers. For years, I have criticized the atrocities committed by Indian security forces against Sikhs in

⁷¹ *World Sikh News*, June 11, 1995.

⁷² Dan Burton, "No Respect for Human Rights In India," *Congressional Record*, May 25, 1995, p. E1140.

Punjab, Muslims in Kashmir and Christians in Nagaland... this issue is one of the main reasons I offered my Amendment. Any country that consistently votes against us at the U.N. and systematically violates the human rights of innocent civilians should not receive foreign aid from us. Indian security forces in Punjab and Kashmir routinely torture political prisoners, gang rape women, and abduct innocent people to demand, ransoms from their families... In Punjab, torture and murder victims are thrown into canals, usually with their hands and feet still tied. Dozens of bodies are found every time a canal is drained for repairs... we must demand that India respect the human rights of all people, and grant them freedom, democracy and basic human rights. Until India stops the abuses and begins to vote with us even occasionally, at the United Nations, we should not give that country our foreign aid.⁷³

Obviously, Congressmen and House of Representatives emerged as a big platform for the Sikh Diaspora. Through it, the Diaspora succeeded to pressurize the Indian state on the issue of human rights, by introduction of Foreign Aid Bills in the House. On numerous occasions, they succeeded in passing the bill to cut off US aid to India. Furthermore, pro-Sikh Congressmen challenged India's democratic status and argued in favour of designating India as a 'terrorist state'. For instance, Congressman Edolphus Towns, contended, on October 6, 1998:

...the Government of India has murdered more than 250,000 Sikhs since 1947, almost 60,000 Kashmiri Muslims since 1988, and tens of thousands of Assamese, Tamils, Manipuris, Dalits and others... between 1992 and 1994 the Indian Government paid over 41,000 cash bounties to Police officers for murdering Sikhs. Two Canadian journalists published a book called *Soft Target* in which they proved that the Indian Government blew up its own airliner in 1985 just to blame the Sikhs. In this light, the United States must declare India a terrorist

⁷³ Edolphus Towns, "India should be declared A Terrorist State," *Congressional Record*, October 6, 1998, p. E 1913.

state we must then impose all the sanctions that we impose on any other terrorist state.⁷⁴

In the changing atmosphere of Indo-US relations, the resolution failed to attract the attention of significant numbers of US Congressmen and of public opinion. But, again on the part of Sikh Diaspora, this was another major achievement on the propaganda front as it put the democratic image and reputation of world's largest democracy at stake before the international community.

Sikh lobbyists also sought support for the Sikhs' right to self-determination. On February 22, 1995, Pete Geren along with another 28 Members submitted a resolution in the House of Representatives stating that the Sikh nation should be allowed to exercise the right to self-determination in their homeland, 'Punjab-Khalistan'. The resolution was referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs.⁷⁵ In a separate move, in March 1997, Gary Condit and Dana Rohrabacher introduced a bipartisan resolution, H. Con. Res. 37, which argued:

...the Sikh nation should be allowed to exercise the right of national self-determination in their homeland, Punjab, ...a plebiscite should be held in Punjab, Khalistan, on the question of independence, under the international supervision, so that the Sikhs can determine their political future in a free and fair vote in accordance with international law.⁷⁶

On occasion, under the strong influence of Sikh lobbyists, US Congressmen wrote to the Indian Government to improve their 'human rights record', particularly against the Sikh community. For instance, on January 30, 1995, David E. Bonier wrote to the then Indian Prime Minister, P.V. Narasimha Rao, to review the case of Simranjit Singh Mann, who was arrested under the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities Act. He also urged the Government to amend the 'draconian laws' to conform with international human rights standards.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ *The Sikhs: Past and Present*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 1995, p. 50.

⁷⁵ Congressional Record, March 7, 1997.

⁷⁶ *The Sikhs: Past and Present*, Vol.5, No.1, 1995, p. 50.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 49-50.

The Congressmen also expressed concern at the proposed extradition treaty with India. On February 10, 1995, 43 members of the House of Representatives wrote in a letter that ‘anti-perspective’ provision should be included in the proposed extradition treaty between the Government of India and Government of United States, so that individuals could be protected from persecution on the basis of race, religion, nationality, or political belief in India.⁷⁸ Gurmit Singh Aulakh himself opposed the India-US Extradition Treaty. He decried the treaty’s effect on political asylum seekers by claiming that:

...if Sikh activists are returned to the clutches of the Indian tyrants I fear for their lives. They will almost certainly be tortured and murdered by the world’s largest democracy.⁷⁹

Aulakh wrote many letters to international personalities for which he got some positive response. For instance, on February 5, 1997, the then US Vice President Al Gore wrote a letter to Aulakh in which he described the Sikh uprising in Punjab as ‘the ongoing civil conflict in Khalistan’ and viewed it as a ‘serious situation’. Gore wrote:

Civil conflict in any nation, and the inevitable hardships and bloodshed that inflicts on that nations’ civilian population, offends our sense of human dignity and our humanitarian ideals... A high priority of this nation’s foreign policy agenda is to strengthen efforts to promote democracy and uphold human rights in regions across the globe.⁸⁰

Again, this was a major achievement for the Sikh lobbyists, especially for Gurmit Singh Aulakh. In a Press Release on February 25, 1997, the Council of Khalistan said that, by acknowledging the civil conflict in Khalistan, Al Gore’s letter implied “recognition of Khalistan’s independence.” The letter energized the struggle for Khalistan.⁸¹ It appeared that U.S.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Council of Khalistan, “Vice President Al Gore Letter Acknowledges Civil Conflict in Khalistan,” News Release, Washington. D.C., February 25, 1997.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ House of Commons Parliamentary Debates, *Weekly Hansard*, Vol. 199, No. 22, November 1991, p. 1241.

foreign policy supported human rights including the basic right to self-determination, which underlined the Sikh struggle for an independent Khalistan.

The Khalistani activists were aided by a long history of ethnic diplomacy in the United States and were able to pressurize the Indian Government through US Congressmen. However, the United Kingdom and Canada, with their respective parliamentary systems, did not prove as accommodative of their efforts to influence Indo-British and Indo-Canadian diplomatic relations. Hence, the British and Canadian Khalistan activities, in comparison to their counter-parts in the US, were much more limited in scope. Because of the Sikh concentration in certain areas, however, a few British Members of Parliament, such as Terry Dicks and Lord Avebury, did voice concern in the British Parliament regarding the Sikh issue. They tended to focus almost exclusively on the Indian Government's human rights record in Punjab. Both the ISYF and the Khalistan Council highlighted the cases of the relatives of British Sikhs who were allegedly tortured, killed or who disappeared while in the custody of the Indian security forces. In November 1992, Dicks, a Conservative MP from Hayes and Harlington, opened the debate in the House of Commons by saying:

I want to mention yet again in the House, the persecution of Sikhs in the Punjab. Members of the Sikh community living in my constituency and Sikhs throughout the world have been concerned for the safety of family and friends living in the Punjab. The rape of young women, the beating of old men and the murder of young boys, to say nothing of the imprisonment without trial of many thousands of innocent people, has been going on since 1984 and continues unabated. Indian security forces are killing hundreds of innocent Sikhs in fake encounters and there is evidence that those forces have swept through villages in the Punjab intent on nothing less than widespread slaughter.⁸²

Dicks then referred to the continuous central rule over the 'Sikh homeland', Punjab, the 'unfettered powers' given to the

⁸² Ibid, p. 1242.

Security Forces under 'special legislation relating to national security', the resultant lack of 'legal safeguards for the protection of human rights' and 'a similar campaign of oppression' in Kashmir. Referring to the role of the British Parliament in this regard, he stated that Parliament had refused to condemn atrocities carried out by the Indian Government,

...No matter how well documented they are by Amnesty International. It has happened because of friendship of British Government with India as a Commonwealth country... and due to its close relationship with the Indian Congress Party and the Gandhi family in particular. Actions of this kind, that were condemned elsewhere by the British Government, have been ignored in India (sic).⁸³

While questioning the successive Indian Governments' claims that they rule the world's largest democracy, he castigated the British Government:

How can governments, who went to war to defend the rights of the Kuwaitis, in their own country refuse to bring pressure on the Indian Government to recognize the rights of the Sikhs in Punjab? Are the Kuwaitis more important than the Sikhs? Or, can it be that much of the world's oil comes from the Middle East but only food to feeding millions of hungry mouths is produced in the Punjab?⁸⁴

Further, he added that the abuse of human rights cannot be condoned no matter whether it takes place in a Middle Eastern country or a country that belongs to the Commonwealth. Therefore, the British Government should have a consistent position on human rights.⁸⁵ According to him, the British Government had a unique moral responsibility in this regard, because,

In 1947, when India obtained its independence, it was the British who accepted a guarantee by the Hindus, who make up 84 percent of the population, that the self-

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 1243.

⁸⁵ Ibid, pp. 1242-3.

determination of the Sikhs in the Punjab would be recognized. On that basis the British Government granted India its independence. Unfortunately for the Sikhs the British Government has done nothing to enforce the guarantee and successive Congress Party dominated Indian Governments have been able to ignore the pledge.⁸⁶

Dicks held that both the Indian and British Governments were responsible for the Sikh ethno-secessionist uprising in Punjab. He demanded that the British Government should pursue a policy linking overseas aid to a country's human rights record. He was of the view that the new approach would be brought firmly to the attention of the Indian Government who, at that time, received more than GBP 100 million annually under the British Overseas Aid Programme.⁸⁷ He also pleaded that if the British Government were to take a tough stand on the abuse of human rights in India and persuade the Indian Government to recognize the rights of the Sikhs in the Punjab, the majority of the Sikhs throughout the world would be prepared to renounce violence as a method of achieving their objective of self-determination and would welcome the opportunity to meet with anyone at an international forum in an attempt to come to a peaceful settlement of the problem.⁸⁸

Jacques Arnold, another Conservative MP from Gravesham, supported Dicks on the human rights aspect of the Sikh uprising. Though he refrained from making any comment on the 'self-determination' aspect raised by Dicks, Arnold highlighted the concerns and anxieties of his Sikh constituents who expressed great misery and anxiety about the fate of their families in the Punjab where, according to him, there was a total denial of democratic rights by the state.⁸⁹

In more recent years, Sikh activists have received the support of other Parliamentarians, such as John McDonnell, Gabrielle Farrell, Khalid Mehmood, Rob Morris and Caroline Spelman. The Federation of Sikh Organizations, on various occasions,

⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 1243.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 1244.

⁸⁹ *Khalistan Calling Newsletter*, May 21, 2003.

honoured these MPs and received their support for their cause in the United Kingdom. Among these, Khalid Mahmood, the Labour Party MP from Perry Bar, at a conference organized by the Federation of Sikh Organizations on the occasion of 'Khalistan Day', on April 29, 2003, at Birmingham stated:

...every nation has an inalienable right to self-determination and, as with the case of both Punjab and Kashmir, it was self evident that when people are grossly mistreated by the state, they will take the necessary steps to control their own destiny.⁹⁰

The British Parliamentary Human Rights Group, a cross-party group of the Members of Parliament that shapes the perceptions about human rights in the corridors of power, especially in the UN Commission on Human Rights, viewed Punjab as one of the regions of the contemporary world where a persistent violation of human rights had occurred. The group also organized occasional hearings on the Punjab. Subsequently, in March 2005, another organization known as the Human Rights Advisory Group of the Punjabis in Britain All Party Parliamentary Group recognized the right to self-determination of the Sikhs in Punjab in the following words:

Self-determination is... the bedrock of all human rights in international law; without self-determination all individual human rights can be breached with impunity... self-determination is a key to the resolution (and prevention) of scores of violent conflicts, which invariably have a massive cost in terms of human life and development... The Sikhs, as a nation, have a lawful right to self-determinations. It is hoped that the international community will recognize this in order to take forward the cause of peace and justice and the rule of law in South Asia.⁹¹

⁹⁰ The Human Rights Advisory Group of the Punjabis in Britain All Party Parliamentary Group, *Self-Determination as a Human Rights and its Applicability to the Sikhs: A Report*, Westminster, UK: HRAG Publication, 2005, p. 15.

⁹¹ S.M. Mirza, S.F. Hasnat and S. Mahmood, *The Sikh Question? From Constitutional Demands to Armed Conflict*, Lahore: University of Punjab, 1985, p. 78.

The Sikh Diaspora, in Britain, United States and Canada, through organizations like the Council of Khalistan, Nankana Sahib Foundation and World Sikh Organizations, had tried to get legitimacy for their struggle by attempting to secure membership or get a special status in certain international institutions, such as the UN and the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organizations (UNPO). On May 17, 1984, Jagjit Singh Chauhan, President of the National Council of Khalistan, appealed to the then UN Secretary-General, Perez de Cueller, to call upon the Government of India to desist from activities directed at the violation of human rights in respect of the Sikhs in India.⁹²

The overseas Sikh leadership had also approached the UN and lobbied with various subcommittees of the world body. In the mid-1980s, they made a request for non-governmental organizations (NGO) status to the Sikh nation. The UN Committee, composed by Cyprus, Sri Lanka, France, Bulgaria, Cuba, the Soviet Union, the United States and Malawi, considered the application on February 25, 1987, for the category of consultative status, but it was rejected. In rejecting its application, the Committee felt that an NGO status to 'Khalistan' would undermine the sovereignty of a member state, i.e., India.⁹³ After *Operation Black Thunder* in 1988, Manohar Singh Grewal, President of the World Sikh Organization, wrote a letter on the 'genocide of the Sikhs' in India to the UN Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar. He pleaded:

Your Excellency, the situation in the Punjab is becoming more alarming... again Indian paramilitary forces are holding innocent people in the Golden Temple as hostages... they can't drink water or even go the toilet without being shot at... the Indian Government has been engineering incidents to justify a new wave of oppression. Since Punjab is closed to the foreign press except for the guided official tours, the world does not

⁹² Giorgio Shani, "The Politics of Recognition: Sikh Diasporic Nationality and the International Order," *International Journal of Punjab Studies*, Vol.7, No. 2, 2000, p. 213.

⁹³ A letter to the Secretary General of the United Nations by Dr. Manohar Singh Grewal, President of World Sikh Organizations, USA, Published in *World Sikh News*, June 17, 1988.

know the truth about Punjab. As per the records of Human Rights reports, (there is a situation of) an undeclared, unilateral ruthless war against hundreds of innocent defenceless men and women in far away tiny villages of Punjab from where their voices do not reach the rest of India.

In the letter, Grewal wrote, further:

The bleeding Sikh nation is in agony. Your Excellency, as Secretary General of the World Organization, you represent the conscience of humanity and the UN inspires hope for freedom and justice... Thousands of innocent Sikh orphans, widows and older parents whose loved ones have been lynched, for them freedoms of religion and expression have been reduced to the 'right to cry in the wilderness'... Their voices, though inaudible amidst the media blitz of misinformation and deception, are appealing to the world community and the UN to urge the ruling regime of India to stop the genocide of the Sikhs... In the meantime, the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide should be invoked. India should be asked to lift the occupation of the Sikh homeland... when the normal conditions are restored the people of Punjab should be given the opportunity to determine their own destiny through an independent and impartial referendum...⁹⁴

In 1990, the Sikh delegation made a presentation to the UN on the violation of human rights against the Sikhs in India at the Centre of Human Rights in Geneva. The Sikhs also took part in the UN Human Rights Day ceremony on December 10, 1991, in San Francisco.⁹⁵ Significantly, during June 14-25, 1993, when the UN World Conference on Human Rights was being held in Vienna, the Sikh delegation presented their case carrying placards and documents on India's alleged human rights abuses in Punjab. In this conference, the official delegation of the Indian State, which was led by the then Finance Minister Dr. Manmohan

⁹⁴ *World Sikh News*, December 13, 1991.

⁹⁵ Shani, "The Politics of Recognition," p. 214.

Singh, along with Atal Behari Vajpayee and a Punjabi newspaper editor, Jagjit Singh Anand, and Gurcharan Singh Galib, Member of Parliament, faced strong opposition from the Sikh delegation.⁹⁶

Through their letters or sometimes by sending joint delegations to these organizations, the Sikh Diaspora did not merely attempt to convince these institutions on the issue of Khalistan but also sought to secure some kind of status in these organizations for 'Khalistan', which they demanded should be completely separate and independent from India. In 1993, the extremist element within the Sikh Diaspora achieved a major milestone in this regard. It succeeded to securing the recognition of 'Khalistan' as the newest full member of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO).⁹⁷ The 'Nishan Sahib' (Insignia of Sikh religion) was hoisted at Hague in the Netherlands during the Annual General Assembly of the Organization. The General Assembly of UNPO was attended by renowned dignitaries like Lord Ennals, Member of the British House of Lords; H.S.H. Prince Hans-Adams-II of Liechtenstein; and Ireland's Noble Peace Prize Laureate M. Corrigan Maguire, President of the Peace People, Belfast. The extremist Sikh Diaspora was of the view that UNPO membership for Khalistan would increase the international pressure on the Indian state and would eventually lead to the formation of Khalistan, with its own membership in the United Nations.⁹⁸ Gurmit Singh Aulakh, who headed the Sikh delegation to the UNPO, described it as a big boost to the movement for Sikh freedom, adding that it would increase "international pressure on the Indian state to honour the independence of Khalistan and cease its violation of human rights against the Sikh nation." According to him,

India is not one nation but a conglomerate of nations held together against the will of the people. Like the Soviet Union, India too will disintegrate into its natural parts. We now have behind us an organization recognized by the international community for its integrity. India can no longer malign the Sikhs in the

⁹⁶ "Khalistans Admitted into UNPU: Major Milestone for Independence," *World Sikh News*, Vol. 4, No. 4, January 29, 1993.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

eyes of the world with its disinformation... its tactics of government by oppression will no longer be accepted by the International community... The Sikh nation will have its freedom. India has no other choice.⁹⁹

For the other members of Sikh delegation, including Paramjit Singh Ajrawat and Bhupinder Singh of Holland, it was an occasion of pleasure, as the Sikhs were accepted by the UNPO as 'a nation without state'. According to them,

India had sought to keep the Sikhs isolated from the international community for years, but now, with help of this new platform, they will spread the news of India's oppression of the Sikhs throughout the world community.

Bhupinder Singh opined that, "Now India cannot hide. Its brutality will be exposed."¹⁰⁰

Overseas Sikhs also used militant methods to achieve their desired goals. In Canada, the militants had organised a small segment of the Diaspora Sikh community. They were mostly concentrated in areas like Vancouver, British Columbia, Toronto and Winnipeg. They exploited the weaknesses of the basically liberal political system of Canada.

Such militant action was centered in, but not limited to, Canada. The Babbar Khalsa had reportedly launched an all-out effort to recruit Sikhs abroad for the creation of Khalistan through a Khalistan Liberation Army. In February 1982, the organization hired Johan Vanderhorst, a veteran mercenary who had fought in Rhodesia, to train Sikh recruits in British Columbia. Vanderhorst hired fellow mercenaries by putting advertisements in Canadian papers offering salaries of 1,250 US dollars monthly to train people in the use of weapons and combat techniques. The Indian Government had obtained clandestine pictures of the training camps in British Columbia which had been handed over to the Canadian Government.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ *India Today*, Delhi, September 15, 1985.

¹⁰¹ Helweg, "Sikh Politics is India The Emigrant Factor," in N. Gerald Barrier and Verne A. Dusenbery, eds., *The Sikh Diaspora: Migration and Experience Beyond Punjab*, New Delhi: Chanakya Publications, 1989.

The ISYF and Dal Khalsa also indulged in militant activities. One of the prominent militant leaders was Talwinder Singh Parmar, a Canadian citizen and leader of 50 members of the Babbar Khalsa, a militant Sikh group demanding the creation of Khalistan. They had claimed responsibility for 40 murders in Punjab between 1979 and 1981. Another leader was Lakhbir Singh Rode, a nephew of the late Bhindranwale, who headed the ISYF with 150 members in Canada. His coordinator in the United States was Arjinderpal Singh Khalsa. Violent reactions are seen to have started in Vancouver when the acting Indian High Commissioner in Canada, K.P. Fabian, visited Manitoba on July 18, 1984. He was pelted with eggs and attacked, although, he was not seriously injured.¹⁰² The Indian Independence Day celebrations of 1984 in New York, Toronto, and Vancouver, were disrupted by Sikh secessionist demonstrators, while in Washington, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Ottawa, protests were more peaceful.¹⁰³ In May 1985, when Haryana's Chief Minister Bhajan Lal was in the United States for medical treatment, five Sikhs reportedly plotted to kill him. He was particularly hated because he had worked against the Sikhs as the Chief Minister of the State neighbouring Punjab. One of the Sikhs accused in this case was Gurpartap Singh Virk, who was convicted of violating America's neutrality laws in March 1986. Virk, along with other conspirators from New York and Jatinder Singh Ahluwalia of New Orleans, were also accused, but not convicted, of planning to assassinate Rajiv Gandhi during his visit to the United States. These Sikhs had also selected a site for a guerrilla training camp in New Jersey. Virk and his accomplices had attended the 'Ricondo School' which offered a course in guerrilla warfare for mercenary soldiers. Frank Camper, who was running the school, and his assistant, testified that Sikhs were openly trying to learn about terrorism because they wanted to 'kill thousands with a single blow'.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Ramesh Guru, "Peaceful and Unruly Protests Mar India Day Celebration," *India Abroad*, Vol. 14, No. 47, 1984, p. 19.

¹⁰³ L. Zhegalove, "Imperialist Plot against India's Unity," *New Times*, No. 42, 1985, p. 13.

¹⁰⁴ "Canada and Terrorism," www.adl.org, January 2004.

In October 1985, when Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi visited England, a plot by 15 Sikhs and Kashmiris to assassinate him was foiled. It led to the conviction of two Sikhs in December 1986.

In June 1985, Sikh militants bombed an Air India flight, *Kanishka*, killing all 329 people aboard, including 154 Canadians. Canadian authorities believed that the bombing was masterminded and perpetrated by the Sikh militants operating from Canada, including some Canadian citizens. Two Canada-based Sikhs, Ripudaman Singh Malik and Ajaib Singh Bagri, who were eventually released by the Canadian Court, were put on trial in Vancouver for involvement in the aircraft bombing and for another suitcase bombing at the Narita Airport in Tokyo, that killed two baggage handlers.¹⁰⁵ On November 26, 1985, two senior diplomats of the Indian Embassy in the Pakistani capital Islamabad, Councillor B. Jain and First Secretary K. K. Khanna, were attacked by some Canadian Sikhs within the Dehra Sahib Gurdwara Complex at Lahore. Both the officers sustained head injuries and were admitted to a Lahore hospital.¹⁰⁶ In 1991, a British Columbia-based Sikh militant, Inderjit Singh Reyat, was convicted of building the Tokyo bomb and pleaded guilty in February 2003 to aiding in the construction of the Air India bomb. It is believed that the bombings were the part of a conspiracy by British Columbia-based Sikh militants to take revenge against the Indian Government for its 1984-storming of the Golden Temple complex.¹⁰⁷

On May 25, 1986, the Punjab Planning Minister, Malkiat Singh Sidhu, who was visiting Canada to attend his nephew's wedding, was shot four times in the chest at Campbell river, a town on Vancouver Island. Canadian authorities had arrested four suspects at a Police roadblock and they were charged with attempted murder. They were later convicted and sentenced to 20 years in prison.

In the United States, in May 1986, Police arrested five Montreal area Sikhs, who were involved in conspiracy to blow up

¹⁰⁵ *Tribune*, November 27, 1985.

¹⁰⁶ "Canada and Terrorism", www.adl.org, January 2004.

¹⁰⁷ Peter Hadzipetros, "In depth: Air India; Sikh Military," *CBC News*, August 27, 2003.

an Air India jumbo jet out of New York City. Out of the five, two men were tried, convicted and given life sentences for the conspiracy, while the others were jailed for a month and subsequently released.¹⁰⁸

Dilawar Singh, the human bomb who killed Beant Singh, the then Chief Minister of Punjab, on August 31, 1995, was linked to the Babbar Khalsa International. Similarly, in June 1995, Delhi Police arrested a suspected suicide bomber, Rachhpal Singh of the Babbar Khalsa, who was on a mission to kill the former Punjab Police Chief K.P.S. Gill.¹⁰⁹

The Indian Government's reaction and response to the activities of extremist overseas Sikhs started as early as the late 1970's, when Mrs. Indira Gandhi made public statements about problems created by the Sikhs in Vancouver. In 1981, soon after some Sikhs hijacked an Indian Airlines Boeing to Lahore in Pakistan, the Government of India pressured the United States, Canada and Britain to oust Khalistan leaders, or at least counter their activities.¹¹⁰ In April 1981, the Indian passport of Jagjit Singh Chauhan was revoked, and subsequently a case of sedition and promoting hatred among different communities was registered against him in August 1981.¹¹¹ In July 1984, after *Operation Blue Star*, the Indian state assessed the extremist Sikh Diaspora's role in its official report, the 'White Paper on the Punjab Agitation'. Out of 58 pages of this report, nine pages were devoted to the subversive overseas Sikh organizations and how they fostered separatism in the period up to 1984. While referring to the role of external factors in the *White Paper*, the Government of India argued,

The recent occurrences in Punjab cannot be divorced from the wider international context... Powerful forces are at work to undermine India's political and economic strength. A sensitive border state with a dynamic record of agricultural and industrial development would be an obvious target for subversion. In this context the

¹⁰⁸ www.satp.org

¹⁰⁹ Helweg, "Sikh Politics is India: The Emigrant Factor."

¹¹⁰ Government of India, White Paper on Punjab Agitation, New Delhi: Government of India, 1984, p.36.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

activities of groups based abroad acquire special significance. A section of the foreign media is deliberately presenting totally distorted versions of the Punjab situation, which have the effect of encouraging and sustaining separatist activities.¹¹²

In the *White Paper*, the Government of India remarked that it was certain overseas Sikhs who had provided the ideological underpinning for the demand for a separate Sikh state. It was also pointed out that numerous Sikh organizations indulging in secessionist activities were operating from foreign countries. According to the report, the National Council of Khalistan, Dal Khalsa, Babbar Khalsa and Akhand Kirtani Jatha were the main organizations which had raised the slogan of a separate Sikh state called 'Khalistan'. The National Council of Khalistan headed by Jagjit Singh Chauhan was active in the UK, West Germany, Canada and USA. Dal Khalsa activities were primarily in UK and West Germany, while the Babbar Khalsa was operating largely from Vancouver in Canada. The Akhand Kirtani Jatha had units in UK and Canada.¹¹³

The Government of India was of the view that the Sikhs were among the large number of Indians settled or working abroad. Their love and patriotism for the Indian state was not in doubt. Nevertheless, some were misinformed or misled by interested parties. Some others were vulnerable to pressures in their host states. Moreover, it is not always easy for the affluent settled abroad to identify with the basic socio-economic interests of the working masses in India. As a result, for some of them, the troubles in Punjab were a good opportunity to project themselves as leaders of the Sikh community.¹¹⁴

The Government of India took numerous legal, political and diplomatic steps to curb anti-Indian activities among the overseas Sikhs and their radical organizations. In London, the Indian High Commission drew the attention of the British Government to the continuous anti-India activities in Britain that began immediately after *Operation Blue Star*. Jagjit Singh Chauhan had announced

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ *Indian Express*, June 15, 1984.

awards for beheading Indira Gandhi and her family members and is also said to have despatched a 'hit squad' to India to 'take revenge' against the Indian Prime Minister. Through these announcements and statements, Chauhan secured unexpected publicity in the British media.¹¹⁵ In a way, it was helping him to gain popularity among radical elements within the overseas Sikh community and was also instigating the Sikhs to violence against a 'particular community' and against the Indian state, both in India and abroad. Due to such developments, the then High Commissioner, Pushkar Johari, took up the issue with the British Foreign and Home Affairs Ministers, as well as with the *BBC*, in the strongest possible terms.¹¹⁶ In New Delhi, on June 22, 1984, the youth and student wings of the Congress (I) organized separate demonstrations before the British High Commission to protest the anti-India propaganda on the *BBC*. In private correspondence, India's Prime Minister Indira Gandhi wrote to her British counterpart, Margaret Thatcher, about events in Punjab and clarified the position of the Indian state in this regard. She also requested her to prevent the activities of individuals and organizations in UK who were supporting the secessionist movement in India.¹¹⁷

Through diplomatic channels, the Government of India tried to justify its military action in Punjab, and also to persuade the overseas Sikh community, as well as world public opinion, in its favour. For example, in Washington on June 22, 1984, in a talk show "Evening Exchange" on a local TV station, the Deputy Chief of the Indian mission in the United States, Pete Sinai, stated that the Government of India had no option but to enter the Golden Temple Complex and neutralize the Sikh militants. In this talk show, two local Sikhs, including the President of the Guru Gobind Singh Foundation, Ujjagar Singh Bawa, were also present which made it more significant and relevant from the Indian point of view.¹¹⁸ Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi herself told a foreign journalist that "...Army action was not against the Sikhs. It was only to remove some hidden groups of individuals in the

¹¹⁵ *Indian Express*, June 16, 1984.

¹¹⁶ *Indian Express*, June 23, 1984

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Indian Express*, June 16, 1984.

Temple Complex, who were indulging in terrorism and anti-national activities.” She also said that there was “...false propaganda” about killings of children and women during the military action. “Not even a single child or a woman was killed,” she asserted.¹¹⁹ She admitted that there was widespread anger among the Sikhs over the situation but said that they would gradually understand the situation. The Indian Embassy in Washington reportedly distributed video-cassettes to American Television Centres. In these cassettes, the interview of Giani Kirpal Singh, Jathedar of the Akal Takht (Chief Priest of the highest seat of temporal authority for the Sikhs), was recorded, in which he admitted that, during *Operation Blue Star*, Sri Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple) and Kotha Sahib (where the Holy Book, the *Guru Granth Sahib*, is safeguarded each night) had not suffered any damage. The main objective of the distribution of these cassettes was to pacify the anguished Sikh Diaspora by giving them “true information” regarding the military operation and the aftermath.¹²⁰

As a large number of Sikhs from India had acquired citizenship of Commonwealth countries and a section of them was encouraging the ethno-secessionist movement in Punjab, the Government of India reportedly discovered ‘unmistakable’ foreign links with the militants in the Golden Temple Complex, which apparently impelled the state to take certain steps for regulating the visits of foreigners, especially Sikhs of Indian origin that could have been used for undesirable purposes in India.¹²¹ The Government of India also imposed strict visa regulations for overseas visitors. On June 3, 1984, the Government of India prohibited the entry of foreigners into Punjab.¹²² And on June 15, 1984, the Indian Ministry for Home Affairs issued a notification in which citizens of Britain and Canada were brought under the new visa regulations. On the very next day, it was notified that it would be compulsory for citizens

¹¹⁹ *Punjabi Tribune*, Chandigarh, June 24, 1984.

¹²⁰ *The Times of India*, Delhi, June 17, 1984 and *Punjabi Tribune*, June 18, 1984.

¹²¹ Gupta, “Internationalization of Ethnic Conflict: The Punjab Crisis of the 1980s,” p. 55.

¹²² *Times of India*, June 17, 1984.

of all Commonwealth countries, including Britain and Canada, to obtain visas from Indian missions before visiting India. For those who were already in India, the Government imposed a requirement that they obtain a residential permit within 15 days of the notification, for their continued stay in India.¹²³

Extremist elements of the Sikh Diaspora had gained the sympathy and support of US Congressmen, British Parliamentarians and human rights organizations such as Amnesty International, by claiming widespread repression of and human rights violations against the Sikhs. Consequently, at various national and international platforms, Indian authorities clarified their position before the international community and criticized the biased reports against India in this regard. For example, during a speech at the University of London on September 21, 1992, the Indian Home Minister, S. B. Chavan, stated that reports prepared by human rights groups accusing India of human rights violations against the Sikhs in Punjab were not authenticated. He said “We are proud of our concern for human rights and we feel hurt by unfair, biased, exaggerated and unverified accusations of human rights violations.”¹²⁴ To clear the misunderstanding about the Indian Government’s stand on human rights, Chavan invited Amnesty International to send a delegation to New Delhi to engage in a meaningful discussion.¹²⁵

Further, on various occasions, the question of the involvement of elements within the Sikh Diaspora in the Punjab problem was also discussed and debated in the Indian Parliament. This debate also focused on the soft attitude of host states towards the Sikh militants living and operating from their territories. As the US Congressmen were criticizing India for its poor human rights record against the Sikhs, Indian Parliamentarians, including K.K. Tewary, Saifuddin Chaudhury, Bhagwat Jha Azad, E. Ayyapu Reddy, *et al*, jointly criticized them for interfering in India’s internal affairs. On April 18, 1985, while speaking in the *Lok Sabha* (Lower House of Indian Parliament), Saifuddin Chaudhury stated that the US Congress Annexe had actually

¹²³ *Tribune*, September 22, 1992.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*.

¹²⁵ Lok Sabha Debates, Vol. 14, No. 26, April 18, 1985, Col. 343.

become a platform to spread anti-India feelings, with the vociferous participation of extremist Khalistani leaders like Ganga Singh Dhillon and Jagjit Singh Chauhan.¹²⁶ K.K. Tewary pointed out that America itself had a poor human rights record which had evolved out of the "...genocide and butchery of Red Indians, Negroes and other indigenous populations. All these races were decimated and destroyed by them." They were guilty of exposing humanity to atomic extermination in the Second World War and were also responsible for the "monstrous brutality" in Nicaragua, Chile and a host of other countries. They had, consequently, no moral right to speak about the human rights' situation in India, he opined.¹²⁷ Defending the use of force by the Indian state, Ayyapu Reddy argued that every nation has the right to protect its integrity and to prevent its disunity and disintegration. Therefore, Reddy asserted, "if according to the US Congressmen, trying to prevent secessionist tendencies amounts to suppression of human rights, then Abraham Lincoln should also be considered guilty of suppressing human rights, because he had led the war against the disunity and disintegration of United States."¹²⁸ Another Parliamentarian, G.G. Swell, argued that, as the Americans and the rest of the world considered Abraham Lincoln as the "greatest President", "a man of God" and "a man of prayer", they should also put Indira Gandhi in the same "pantheon", since she had fought and died for the unity and integrity of India.¹²⁹ Further, parliamentarians like Kamal Nath, Bala Saheb Vikhe Patil, S.M. Bhattam, N.G. Ranga and Datta Samant expressed serious concern over certain institutions in the USA and Canada, which were imparting training to Sikh militants. The Indian Government had reportedly traced 25 schools which were providing facilities for such training, including the Ricondo School of Frank Camper at Hueyville in Alabama and the Eagle Combat and Body Guard Training School of Roy Maia in Estminster, British Columbia, which had become the focus of discussion and debate in the Indian Parliament.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ Ibid, Col. 348.

¹²⁷ Ibid, Col. 342.

¹²⁸ Ibid, Cols. 371-372.

¹²⁹ Lok Sabha Debates, Vol. 7, No. 2, 24, July 1985, Col. 311-312.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

The Government of India had drawn the attention of USA and Canada to these developments, while requesting urgent investigation and appropriate corrective action.¹³¹

As pointed out earlier, according to Indian diplomatic sources, the Canadian Government was granting funds to minority groups to strengthen their culture and to expand their cultural activities. These funds were, however, misused by different Sikh organizations. Indian parliamentarians also protested against such financial help being provided by Canada.¹³² They also emphasised the issue of fund raising and misuse by the Sikh extremists in Britain. For example, on December 2, 1985, during a discussion on the issue in *Lok Sabha*, S.M. Bhattam disclosed that,

Large sums of money are being collected regularly in Britain in about 30 to 40 Gurdwaras to buy weapons and pass them on to Sikh extremists in Punjab... about one lakh¹³³ to two lakh Pounds (GBP) are raised every week and this amount is being utilized for the purpose of buying light weapons, sub-machine guns and explosives from illegal European markets to be sent to the subversive elements of the Sikh community in Punjab.¹³⁴

On its part, India maintained its links with the host governments while requesting them to take appropriate measures against the militant activities of the extremist elements within the Sikh Diaspora. On October 15, 1985, for instance, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, during his visit to the United Kingdom, had pressed Margaret Thatcher to do more about the Sikhs who were involved in terrorist activities directed against India. He also requested that a bilateral extradition treaty be established to deal with the issue of Sikh militancy in Britain.¹³⁵ Responding to the politico-diplomatic pressure of the Indian state, the British Government expressed regret for statement Jagjit Singh Chauhan on *BBC Radio*. The British Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Baroness Young, met Pushkar Johari, High Commissioner of India in

¹³¹ Lok Sabha Debates, n. 126, Col. 353.

¹³² Lok Sabha Debates, Vol. 10, No. 10, December 2, 1985, Col. 337.

¹³³ Lakh = 100,000

¹³⁴ Helweg, "Sikh Politics in India: The Emigrant Factor," p. 325.

¹³⁵ *Indian Express*, June 16, 1984.

London, on June 14, 1984, and conveyed regret over the issue and hoped that such statements would not be allowed to affect the traditionally good relations between Britain and India.¹³⁶ Meanwhile, the British Government asked the Sikhs living in Britain to observe restraint and not to resort to any form of violence in reaction to the 'events' in Punjab. Immediately after *Operation Blue Star*, the British Minister for Home Affairs, David Waddington, had urged the Sikhs, in a meeting held in Birmingham, to act like responsible human beings. Besides, David Mellor, a junior Minister in the British Home Office, also called the Sikh representatives and told them to act within the confines of the law.¹³⁷ Clarifying the stand of the British Government, the British authorities explained, on June 25, 1984, that the British Government was fully aware of the sensitivities of the Indian Government over these matters, including the public statements of some of the Sikh leaders and the security of Indian diplomatic missions and personnel.¹³⁸ He disclosed that British authorities had told the Sikh leaders that a serious view would be taken of any unlawful act. According to him, the Government sought and obtained assurances that reactions to the events in Punjab would be peaceful in Britain. At the same time, responding to a question on the formation of the so-called Government of Khalistan-in-exile by some Sikhs, he said that, in Britain, organizations and individuals are allowed to espouse any case so long as they do not break British laws. Therefore, as these organisations had not broken any law, these could exist within the British legal framework. However, the British Government had not accorded any diplomatic status to the Government of Khalistan-in-exile, since Britain recognizes only states and not 'governments'.¹³⁹

At the other end, the Governments of the United States and Canada also assured India that they would not allow Khalistani Diaspora organizations to act against the Indian Government from their territories.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ *Indian Express*, June 26, 1984.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

Due to the huge efforts made by the Indian state, Western analysts, once pessimistic, consciously began to accept that Punjab would gradually stabilize itself.¹⁴⁰ James W. Michael, editor of *Forbes*, strongly defended Indira Gandhi's response to the Sikh ethnic uprising by arguing,

...when traditional societies modernize, they frequently spew up reactionary groups which violently challenge the new society. Thus, we have the bloody and obscurantist Khomeini regime in Iran, the bizarre rule of Gaddafi in Libya and the terror by Sikh fanatics of northern India.

These fanatical groups, Michael argued, can't be negotiated with due to their "irrational and fascist" nature. Thus, Michael viewed Indira Gandhi's "effective" military action as a "triumphant" reassertion of Government with the consent of the governed. According to him, "...to blame Mrs. Gandhi for the violence was a little like blaming Abraham Lincoln for bringing the civil war" in United States to an end.¹⁴¹

The Government of India signed extradition treaties and confiscation agreements with Canada, Britain and the United States. On February 6, 1987, Indian External Affairs Minister N. D. Tiwari and the Canadian Minister of State for External Affairs, Charles Joseph Clark, signed a treaty agreeing to extradite any person who was accused or convicted. The treaty, which came into effect on February 10, 1987, proved a landmark in the history of Indo-Canadian relations. India was able to successfully extradite from Canada certain Sikh militants wanted in India.¹⁴² For instance, in May 1995, Tejinder Singh Pal, a Dal Khalsa member, convicted of hijacking an Air India flight, entered Canada using a fake name and claimed refugee status. Subsequently, he became the subject of a Canadian Security and Intelligence Service (CSIS) investigation. Eventually, on December 22, 1997, the Federal Court of Canada issued an order of deportation against him.¹⁴³ In 1998, a Sikh militant of the

¹⁴⁰ *The Washington Post*, June 17, 1984.

¹⁴¹ *Times of India*, June 19, 1984.

¹⁴² *Tribune*, February 7, 1967.

¹⁴³ Federal Court of Canada, *Tejinder Singh Pal V/s Minister of Citizenship and Immigration*, December 22, 1997.

Babbar Khalsa was deported from Canada.¹⁴⁴ Further, in January 2000, Davinder Pal Singh, a member of the Babbar Khalsa who was involved in non-combat related activities, including fund raising, was ordered to be extradited to India.¹⁴⁵ In December 2000, another active member of the Babbar Khalsa, Harjinder Singh Patwal, who entered Canada without documentation, admitted to his links with the militant organization and consequently, became a subject of immigration proceedings.¹⁴⁶

Encouraged by the Indo-Canadian treaty of 1987, India signed an extradition treaty and an agreement on confiscation of militants' assets on September 22, 1992, in London. The treaty, which was signed by Home Minister S. B. Chavan and British Home Secretary Kenneth Clark, excluded the political factor in crimes of violence as a defence against extradition and provided that any crime carrying the sentence of 12 months or more in either country would be a subject of extradition. The Agreement on Confiscation provided forfeiture of funds and assets of any individual or organizations involved in terrorism or drug trafficking in either country. The assets of the guilty would be confiscated not only in that country, but also in the other country. The Agreement also provided for the orders of the courts in one country to be executable in the other country. Under the authority of this Agreement and Anti-terrorism Act, searches and seizures were also made at the premises of suspect individuals and organizations. The Agreement on confiscation of terrorists' and drug-runner's assets was the first of its kind in the world, where two countries agreed to act together on the subject, and India was the first country with which Britain signed such an agreement. Thus, along with the extradition treaty, the Agreement ensured that Britain would not be the shelter to anti-Indian extremists operating from British territory. It also ensured that Britain-based patrons of Indian militant groups lost their capacities to operate with impunity.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ *Reflex*, No. 108, February 3, 1999.

¹⁴⁵ Federal Court of Canada, *Davinder Pal Bhalrus V/S Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration*, January 12, 2000.

¹⁴⁶ Federal Court of Canada, *Minister of Citizenship and Immigration V/S Harjinder Singh Patwal*, June 3, 2001.

¹⁴⁷ *Tribune*, September 23, 1992.

The extradition treaty between India and Britain was significant for India on the diplomatic front as well. In September 1992, before the extradition treaty, Sikh and Kashmiri extremist groups had launched a campaign against the treaty. A group demonstrated outside the 10-Downing Street residence of the British Prime Minister and urged him not to sign the treaty. They also launched a signature campaign against the treaty and secured the signatures of 130 Members of British Parliament. In a joint appeal, Sikh and Kashmiri militants told British Parliamentarians that “It would appear that Britain is anxious to secure trade contracts with India and was even prepared to swap Sikh and Kashmiri militants.”¹⁴⁸

After prolonged negotiations, an extradition treaty was also signed between India and the United States on June 25, 1997. Saleem Shervani, Minister of State for External Affairs, and Strobe Talbott, Deputy Secretary of State of the United States, signed the treaty. Both parties agreed that, “...extradition shall be granted for an extraditable offence regardless of where the act or acts constituting the offence were committed.” Though the two states unanimously accepted that, “...extradition shall not be granted for a political offence,” they also said that “...murder or other wilful crime against a Head of State or Head of Government or a member of their family, aircraft hijacking offences, aviation sabotage, crimes against internationally protected persons including diplomats, hostage taking, offences related to illegal drugs, or any other offences for which both contracting states have the obligation to extradite the person pursuant to a multilateral international agreement, shall not be considered to be political offences.”¹⁴⁹ Extradition treaties with the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States were a symbol of diplomatic victory of the Indian state against the Sikh Diaspora lobby, since they had actively lobbied against these treaties.

As a result of these extradition treaties, many Sikh militants were extradited to India. For instance, Kulbir Singh alias Bira, a self-styled ‘lieutenant’ of the Khalistan Commando Force (Panjwar faction), was extradited from the US. Kulbir Singh, who

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ *Tribune*, June 26, 1997.

was wanted in over 30 cases of mass murder, including the killing of ex-ministers, political activists and Security Forces' personnel, and also of robbery and extortion, had fled to the United States in 1993 on a fake passport, where he was arrested and imprisoned immediately on landing. The Government of India had sought his extradition in 1993 too, but it did not take place in the absence of an extradition treaty between the two states. However, due to the treaty and a decision of the Federal Appeals Court of the United States to deport Kulbir Singh, Indian authorities were able to secure an expedited extradition process.¹⁵⁰ Again, in May 2006, Indian authorities succeeded in extraditing Harpal Singh Cheema from the United States. Cheema, a militant associated with the Sikh Students' Federation, had been living in the USA for the preceding decade. On March 12, 1992, the Jalandhar Police had arrested him along with explosives and narcotics and had registered a case against him under the TADA.¹⁵¹ He jumped bail in July 1992 and managed to flee to the United States in the same year, using illegal channels. After 1997, he spent nine years in US jails for not possessing valid immigration documents.¹⁵²

In July 2006, Canada deported Gurcharan Singh of the BKI. He was alleged to have plotted to assassinate the former Chief Minister of Punjab, Parkash Singh Badal, and former Police Chief of Punjab, K.P.S Gill. Earlier, his application for asylum was rejected by the Canadian authorities and he was consequently imprisoned. He remained in a Canadian jail for about three years before being deported to India.¹⁵³

These examples make it clear that, to some extent, extradition treaties did prove effective in bringing back Sikh militants living in the West, especially in the UK, USA and Canada. This was a significant achievement of the Indian diplomatic front against the extremist element within the Sikh Diaspora, since it was their leadership that had financed the terrorist elements, and was defending them legally in the host states.

¹⁵⁰ *The Hindustan Times*, Delhi, March 30, 2005.

¹⁵¹ *Tribune*, May 3, 2006.

¹⁵² *Hindustan Times*, May 3, 2006.

¹⁵³ Lalit Mohan, "Police Remand for deported Babbar Khalsa Man," *Tribune*, July 6, 2006.

On the diplomatic front, the Indian state achieved another milestone in 2000, when the United Kingdom outlawed two Sikh militant groups under the Terrorism Act, 2000. Among the 25 proscribed international groups were the Babbar Khalsa International and International Sikh Youth Federation.¹⁵⁴

Furthermore, one of the groups that international security officials believed supported the violent Sikh ethnic uprising in India, was the Babbar Khalsa Society. In Canada, it was registered as a religious group and charitable organization in 1993. However, according to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the group raised money in Canada to buy weapons for the Sikh militants in India. Consequently, the Canadian Government revoked its charitable status in 1996.¹⁵⁵ Canada added the Babbar Khalsa International to its list of banned organizations indulging in militant activities.

In a nutshell, the discourse on the Sikh Diaspora's involvement and support to the Khalistan movement in India establishes that using a combination of peaceful, democratic and, violent methods, the radical element in the Diaspora community, in the post-*Operation Blue Star* period, sponsored and supported the militants struggling for a separate sovereign state of Khalistan. Through various demonstrations, they criticized the 'repressive policies' of the Indian state against the Sikhs. They internationalized the issue of Khalistan, publishing literature in the form of newspapers, magazines and books, and also launched various Websites. While discussing the issue of human rights' violations with the political parties, and legislative and executive bodies of host states such as USA, Canada and UK, radical Sikh Diaspora organizations and protagonists of Khalistan raised various demands to put the pressure on the Indian state to end alleged atrocities and human rights' violations against the Sikh community. They also approached the UN and other international fora on various occasions. In Canada, a few Sikh militant organizations like the BKI, Dal Khalsa and ISYF used violent methods to lodge their protests against the Indian state. Members of these groups also indulged in killings in Punjab and attempted

¹⁵⁴ Hadzipetros, *CBC News*, August 27, 2003.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

to assassinate prominent personalities of the Indian state. The assassination of Beant Singh, Chief Minister of Punjab, and the Kanishka bombing, were results of such attempts made by Sikh militant organizations in the Diaspora.

In other words, through both peaceful and violent methods, the Sikh Diaspora not only supported the ethnic separatist cause but also posed a serious challenge to the Indian state. To deal with this challenge, the Indian state activated its politico-diplomatic channels at the international level and also clarified its position before the world community. The Indian leadership imposed visa restrictions on certain foreigners and put pressure on the host Governments, especially of USA, Canada and UK, to take action against the Sikh militants. Due to such diplomatic efforts, the Indian state succeeded in signing extradition treaties with the US, Canadian and British Governments and also managed to secure the deportation of a few Sikh militants from the host states. Besides, the host Governments also banned certain Sikh militant groups. However, even today, certain sections of the Sikh Diaspora keeps the Khalistan movement alive in host states, though the very ideology has died in the perceived homeland and home-state of the Sikhs.