

**“RELIGIOUS HUMILIATION” AND VIOLENCE: IDENTITY, POLITICS AND SIKH SEPARATISM IN INDIA**

AFRO EURASIAN STUDIES - VOLUME: 11 / ISSUE: 2 pp. 24-39

**Umair Gul**, Post-doctoral Fellow at Ankara Social Science University (ASBU), Political Science and International Relations Department

E-mail: [umademess@gmail.com](mailto:umademess@gmail.com)

Orcid ID: 0000-0002-1265-5237

**Resul Yalçın**, Assistant Prof. Dr., Ankara Social Sciences University, Political Science and International Relations Department

E-mail: [resul.yalcin@asbu.edu.tr](mailto:resul.yalcin@asbu.edu.tr)

Orcid ID: 0000-0003-2580-0226

**Received:** 24.01.2023

**Accepted:** 17.03.2023

**Cite as:** Gul, U., Yalçın, R. (2022). “Religious Humiliation” and Violence: Identity, Politics and Sikh separatism in India, *Afro Eurasian Studies*, 11 (2), 17-39, DOI: 10.33722/afes.1241624

**Plagiarism:** This article has been reviewed by at least two referees and confirmed to include no plagiarism.

**Copyright:** © Published by MUSIAD- Atakoy 7-8-9-10 Mah, Cobancesme E5 Yan-yol Cad. No:4, 34158 Bakirkoy

**Phone:** +90 – 212 395 0000 Fax: +90 – 212 – 395 0001 E-mail: [aes@musiad.org.tr](mailto:aes@musiad.org.tr)

**License:** This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License

**“Dini Değerlere Yönelik Değersizleştirme” ve Şiddet: Hindistan’da Kimlik, Politika ve Sih Ayrılıkçılığı**  
**Öz**

Sih dini, Hindistan’da Hinduizm ve İslam’ın gölgesinde ortaya çıktı. Kendisini “Hinduizm”den uzak ayrı bir kategori olarak şekillendirdi. O dönemin Müslüman Hükümdarları Sihizm’in etkisini kontrol altına almaya çalışırken, 19. ve 20. yüzyıllarda Hindu seçkinleri Sihleri asimile etmeye çalışmıştır ve onlara Hinduizm içinde bir mezhep muamelesi yapmıştır. Bu makale, Sihizm’in kendine özgü kimliğini koruma ve asimilasyon girişimlerine direnme arayışının haritasını çıkarmaya çalışmaktadır. Hindistan’daki Khalistan hareketi veya Sih ayrılıkçılığı da ayrı bir kimliği koruma ve asimilasyona direnme girişimidir. Aşağılama genellikle şiddetin doğrudan nedeni olarak tanımlanmıştır. Ancak bu makale, şiddetin bir nedeni olarak “Dini Değerleri Değersizleştirme” kavramını ve ayrıca onun “döngüsel doğasını” incelemeye çalışacaktır. Makale, dini değerleri değersizleştirme ve şiddeti birbirinin hem öncülü hem de emsali olarak sunacak ve böylece birbirini besleyecektir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Dini Değersizleştirme, Şiddet, Sihizm, Kimlik ve Politika

**“Religious Humiliation” and Violence: Identity, Politics and Sikh separatism in India**  
**Abstract**

Sikh religion originated under the shade of Hinduism and Islam in India. It shaped itself as a distinct category away from “Hinduism”. While the Muslim Rulers of that era tried to contain the influence of Sikhism, the Hindu elites in the 19th and 20th centuries tried to assimilate Sikhs and treated them as a sect within Hinduism. This paper tries to map the quest of Sikhism for maintaining its distinct identity and resisting attempts of assimilation. The Khalistan movement or the Sikh separatism in India is also an attempt to maintain a distinct identity and resist assimilation. Humiliation has been often identified as the immediate cause of violence. This paper will however try to probe the specific notion of “Religious Humiliation” as a cause of violence and also its “cyclic nature”. The paper would present humiliation and violence as both antecedents as well as precedents of each other, thereby feeding into each other.

**Key words:** Religious Humiliation, Violence, Sikhism, Identity and Politics

## **Religious Humiliation**

A core functionalist perspective of Religion is that of Emile Durkheim. Durkheim (2001) introduced the concept of “Sacred”. He considers sacredness as a central theme in the definition of religion. Sacred symbols as long as they are considered so are religious objects according to Durkheim. Hence any breach of sacredness is considered sacrilege, blasphemy, and desecration and evokes a strong reaction. For Emmanuel Levinas (1976) violence is the other of discourse. Levinas expands the term discourse to mean almost everything other than violence. Levinas attributes discourse as a halt in violence. Hence for him, violence takes place in a situation that prohibits discourse. Religion is a discourse and if halted by power it would lead to -violence. Strong correlations have been found between shame, humiliation, and violence (Gilligan, 1996). The collective memory of shame and humiliation is the key evocation of the oppressed in the near and far past, which in turn evokes streaks of violence. Thus a religious community in order to defend its present failure or disintegration evokes a mythical past of military superiority and present disempowerment, and the need to relive the glorious past. Humiliation is mostly linked to anger towards the perpetrator of humiliation (Torres & Bergner, 2012). Quantitative studies have concluded that humiliation and anger are related to each other (Harter, 2003). It is also argued that revenge is a direct consequence of humiliation (Walker & Knauer, 2011). The psychology of a religious commune is primarily constructed around shame and humiliation, thus justifying violence (Posman, 2006). The induction of humiliation is not plainly psycho-pathogenesis of an individual, but extraordinary acts of violence are committed by ordinary people exhibiting no particular disorder or hyperactivity of the brain but shame, guilt, and burden (Waller, 2012). Religious Humiliation is categorized by intolerance, impediments to practice and preaching, and desecration of religious symbols and sacredness. This paper would try to use the notion of actual or perceived “Religious Humiliation” as a trigger and cause of violence. This paper would also present the view that “Religious Humiliation” and violence are components of a cyclic process that feed into each other. The history of the Sikh religion was explored through functionalism and a phenomenological approach. Several unstructured interviews were carried out with ex-militants and other activists in Punjab. The themes of humiliation, shame, anger, and violence were analyzed using content analysis-conceptual analysis as well as relational analysis.

## **Sikhism**

The foundations of Sikhism were laid in Northern India in the fifteenth century by Guru Nanak. Guru Nanak was born in Punjab in 1469. He gave his followers instructions that were known as Sikhyaas. The followers and disciples of Guru Nanak came to be known as Sikhs. The political power in North and North-West India was consolidated by the Sultanate of Delhi under Lodi’s for the first fifty years of the life of Guru Nanak. The Lodi dynasty was a self-proclaimed extension

of the Abbasid caliphate. Sikander Lodi who ruled during the time of Guru Nanak invoked Sunni Islam in order to seek legitimacy for his rule. Guru Nanak thus aware of the politico-social situation criticized the ruling Sultans describing them as “Butchers” (Grewal, 2008). He advised people not to submit their loyalty to these rulers but to God. Nanak’s call was thus a protest against the ruling Muslim elite who imposed Jaziya as well as the caste-practicing Hindu Brahmins. Nanak increasingly began to identify himself with lower caste Hindus and poor peasantry, this popularized him and his ideas. People who were victims of the ruling Muslim elite or Brahmin hegemony sought refuge in Nanak. In his rejection of Hindu deities and gods, he conceived his monotheism. The Mughal takeover of the Delhi Sultanate during the lifetime of Guru Nanak had a marked impact on the Sikh movement. While the Sikh movement was in its infancy it could ill afford confrontation with the Delhi Sultanate. However, with Mughal and Lodi’s attention focused on battles with each other, an opposite environment was available for the growth of the Sikh movement. When the third Mughal emperor Akbar acceded to the throne in Delhi, it gave a significant push to the spread of Sikhism. Akbar abolished the practice of Jaziya and gave state patronage to non-Muslim religious institutions as well. This gave Sikh Gurus a religious space to establish institutions and aided in an increase in the number of followers. While Guru Amar das composed hymns of Nanak, Guru Ramdas got a tank dug in Amritsar, establishing the holy city of Amritsar as a new Sikh center (Grewal, 2008). Guru Arjan the youngest son of Guru Ramdas was chosen as the fifth Guru. Guru Arjan composed the first Sikh book Adigranth. The township of Guru Ramdas became an autonomous township under the Mughal emperor Akbar. At the time of Akbar’s death in 1605, the Sikh identity had shaped up quite distinct from the Muslim and Hindu. With the succession of Jahangir to the throne, the shadow of protection enjoyed by Sikhs disappeared. Guru Arjan was charged with helping a rival prince and summoned to the court of the emperor and punished. The Persian texts Madkhiz-i-Tawdrikh-i-Sikhdnan and Dabistan Mazhab state that Guru Arjan Singh’s property was confiscated and tortured to death. In response to this, Guru Hargobind the sixth Guru advocated belligerent and martial activity. He also constructed a military fort. (Grewal, 2008). Meanwhile, Shah Jahan who had ascended the throne after Jahangir entered into a confrontation with Guru Hargobind and ordered a military charge against him. The next in succession was Har Rai. However, his tenure remained largely peaceful, with no confrontations. Aurangzeb ascended to the throne and immediately brought radical changes in taxation, society, politics, and land revenue. The land grants given to non-Muslim subjects were withdrawn immediately and more so with immediate effect in Punjab (Habib, 1963). In 1679 Jaziya was re-imposed. Aurangzeb had to fight his way through to climb the ascendancy of the Mughal throne with his brothers, his haughty rival remained Dara Shikoh. A mere rumor that Guru Har Rai had aided his brother

Dara Shikoh, led to his summoning in the court of Aurungzeb. He however sent his son Ram Rai, who was kept hostage in Delhi while Guru Har Krishan was nominated as Guru. However, Guru Har Krishan was too summoned up to Delhi court. Guru Har Krishan died of smallpox in Delhi and nominated his grandfather –Guru Tegbahadur as the Guru. Tegbahadur traveled extensively in the Gagnetie plains and encouraged the building of temples. When it came to the knowledge of Aurungzeb that the number of temples had increased rapidly and Tegbahadur's offerings had increased manifold, he ordered complete destruction of temples (Grewal,1982). By the last quarter of the seventeenth century, Tegbahadur had become a symbol of resistance against the practices of toil and discretion levied on non-Muslim subjects by Aurangzeb. In 1675, he was arrested, kept in prison, asked to perform miracles<sup>6</sup>, motivated to convert to Islam, and failing which he was beheaded. Guru Gobind, the youngest son of Tegbahadur was nominated as the Guru and stressed on military training. In 1688 the first battle was fought by Gobind's forces against the invading Mughal armies. The battle inferred heavy losses on invading armies, forcing them to retreat. This battle was not only a military victory but a moral victory for Guru Gobind that not only demonstrated the skills of his forces but the ability of Sikhs to transform themselves from preachers of mere victimhood to warriors. Guru Gobind despite the assassination attempt remained defiant and aided chieftains opposed to Aurungzeb. This was also the time when Guru Gobind Singh introduced the concept of Khalsa -baptism or purification to establish a soulful connection between people and Guru. The conditions of unshorn hair, wearing of arms, and the epithet of "Singh" were symbols of baptized individuals.

From the above discussion, it is clear that the militarization in Sikhism happened because of the actual or perceived "Religious Humiliation". The killing of Sikh Gurus and the desecration of sacred symbols encouraged militarism in Sikhs, which in return led to their further persecution. The Sikh Baptism was also a response to counter attempts of assimilation.

### **Sikh Identity and politics in British India**

The British colonial project in the Indian subcontinent viewed Indian society as fragmented, with each religious cult representing its own interests. The politicization of these groups and cults led to the emergence of communal identities. This replacement of communalism as an alternative to nationalism can be seen as a colonial state project in the public arena (Freitag, 1989). The British government in India started patronizing the Khalsa and Keshdar Sikh with the sole aim of giving them preference both in services and the army. The educational reforms brought about by the British yielded "identity consciousness". Sikhs who had no issues being considered as a sect or mutation of Hinduism began to increasingly make identity assertions. Thus the symbolic outward appearance of an individual became an important identity construct, and there was an increase in the number

of keshdari Sikhs. Another important characteristic of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was the emergence of Singh Sabha. The mushrooming of Sabhas could be attributed to the fear of conversions. The first and immediate threat appeared from Christian missionaries but a deep sense of identity insecurity was from the Hindu puritan movement-AryaSamaj. Arya-Samaj a Hindu revivalist and puritan movement considered Sikhs as a sect of Hinduism and tried to assimilate them. The confrontation sharpened as the Sikh leaders demanded a separate Sikh marriage act to assert their identity. This hectic lobbying finally culminated in the Anand Marriage Act of 1909. Sikhs also increased the print propaganda tempo by comprehensively publishing. Most of these printed propaganda materials were comparative, confrontational, and reactionary pamphlets (Singh, K,2004)<sup>12</sup>. Sikh politics entered a completely new phase of reservation and representation after assertion and recognition. Sikh leaders began to hold regular parleys with the then Governor General of British India- Chelmsford to plead for separate electorates (Grewal,1998).In response to the growing demands, the British finally lent them a little more than twelve percent reservation as against the ambitious thirty percent that was sought.

In 1925, Sikhs were again agitating for “reclaiming the religious space”. This movement was launched by the Akalis, who by now had grown in political stature, to get rid of Mahants– the custodians of Gurudwaras, who didn’t subscribe to orthodox Sikh practices and abstained from practices and rituals of Khalsa but claimed to be direct followers of Guru Nanak (Fazal, 2014). Since at that point in time, Sikh identity assertion was dominated by Khalsa discourse of appearance and identity and Mahants were still caught in the Hindu appearance and outlook, it was considered impure and hegemonic to lend the control of religious spaces to a sect that chose to refrain from Khalsa rituals. The Sikh Gurudwara Act was passed and enforced in 1925, which excluded the syncretic sects such as the Udasis, the Nanakpanthis, and Sahajdaris from the very realm of Sikhism and control of sacred spaces. Thus the control of Gurudwaras was now wrested by Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC)(Fazal, 2014).

Sikh participation in the anti-colonial movement led by Congress was also subject to their demands for recognition. In 1930 the Sikh leadership announced that it would participate in the civil disobedience movement launched only if their color was incorporated into the Indian national flag. Similarly, in 1931, Master Tara Singh submitted a proposal to Gandhi advocating for more representation for Sikhs on the occasion of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact. This was followed by a jolt to popular Sikh leadership with the announcement of the Ramsay-Macdonald communal award that reserved eighty-eight seats for Muslims, forty-four for Hindus, and only thirty-three for Sikhs (Grewal, 1991). Meanwhile, the Pakistan Resolution was passed in 1940 and this resulted in chaos in the Sikh leadership. On the other hand, SAD was compelled

to support British war machinery as a policy to appease them for dismissal of the Pakistan Resolution and the creation of Azad Punjab. More importantly, a fringe group led by Dr. V.S. Bhatti came up with the thought of “Khalistan as a buffer state between India and Pakistan” (Deol, 2000) (Grewal1991). Akalis, however, were persistent with the demand for a Sikh homeland almost till partition as is evident from the following resolution adopted in March 1946:

“Whereas the Sikhs being attached to the Punjab by intimate bonds of holy shrines, property, language, traditions, and history claim it as their homeland and holy land and which the British took as a ‘trust’ from the last Sikh ruler during his minority and whereas the entity of the Sikhs is being threatened on account of the persistent demand for Pakistan by the Muslims on the one hand and of the danger of absorption by the Hindus on the other, the Executive Committee of the Shiromani Akali Dal demands, for the preservation and protection of the religious, cultural and economic rights of the Sikh nation, the creation of a Sikh state.”

Similar posturing was evident in the representation made to the Cabinet Mission by Sikh leadership. Master Tara Singh demanded a separate state for Sikhs that would then decide on federation with India or Pakistan. This approach, however, raked up the tensions between the communities with riots engulfing the cities of Lahore, Amritsar, Jalandhar, Sialkot, and Multan (Grewal, 1991). Lord Mountbatten in March 1947 saw the hostilities between the communities as the potential preparation for a civil war and proposed the division of the state along religious lines. Besides, Congress invoked the historicity and sacredness of towns, places, and sites of worship, but those in British administration, who were drawing lines of division, preliminarily adopted the policy of volumetric measurements of population and in a few cases appeasement.

### **Politics and protest after 1947**

After the end of colonial rule in 1947 and the subsequent partition, the major issue was the rehabilitation of refugees from West Pakistan and the allotment of land holdings. For the first decade, Sikh politics too remained entrenched in post-partition issues. In 1948, the state of Punjab was formally shaped by coalescing the small princely states of Patiala, Nabha, Jind, Faridkot, Kapurthala, Kalsia, Malerkotla, and Nalgarh with East Punjab and naming this union as PEPSU (Patiala and East Punjab States Union). The 1951 census enumerated 62 percent of the population in Punjab as Hindu and 35 percent as Sikh. In the 1952 general elections, Congress was allowed to form a government despite not having the stated majority but to be replaced by the United Front government backed by the Akalis. However, after a year, the government was dismissed and Akalis felt alienated by this perceived sense of misuse of power. In 1949, both Punjabi and Hindi were promoted as school languages but the University controlling authorities, which had become the bastions of Arya Samaj refused to entertain the use of Punjabi. Though many formulas were present-



ed to resolve this dispute, Arya Samaj did not accept any of these and in this Jan Sangh and Hindu Maha Sabha were supporting it. Thus the association of religion and language became inalienable in the politics of Punjab, further alienating Akalis and Sikhs in general. In 1953, when the demand for the reorganization of states on a linguistic basis reached its peak, the state reorganization committee was formulated, giving rise to fear and skepticism of creating a Sikh majority state in the garb of a Punjabi-speaking state.

Master Tara Singh, the main proponent of Punjabi speaking state, was arrested in 1955 as the movement for and against Punjabi statehood was increasingly turning into Hindu–Sikh confrontation at least in terms of the abusive rhetoric employed. This invited a clampdown on the Akalis and raiding of Golden Temple premises. The commission on the reorganization of states too saw the Punjabi language movement with sacred religious overtones and thus reorganized the state structure by unifying Punjab, the PEPSU states and the Hindu-dominated Himachal region into a single unit. However, the Akalis rejected any such measure and opposed it tooth and nail. In 1956, delegations of the Punjabi state movement led by Master Tara Singh made representations to Prime Minister Nehru, and a compromise formula was agreed upon to merge PEPSU and not Himachal with Punjab, and Punjabi was introduced in Gurumukhi script as the state language. After the formation of the new Punjabi state, the Arya Samaj again launched a Pro-Hindi campaign. Master Tara Singh who by now had been heading SGPC was being continuously seen as a threat by Congress and attempts were being made to dislodge him from SGPC. In 1960, Tara Singh invoked the Punjabi province movement and won the SGPC elections. The movement gained momentum with the demand for bifurcation echoing all over, resulting in the arrest of Tara Singh and thousands of Akalis. However, Sant Fatah Singh continued the movement by going on fast until the demand was conceded.<sup>14</sup> (Chima, J. S, 2010).

In the decade from 1955-65, Punjab had prospered considerably from the Green Revolution as the agricultural produce had gone up by 42 percent (Grewal, 1991). After the death of Nehru, Akalis again began to rake up the issue of a “Sikh Homeland”, but this was not a demand for a sovereign state but an autonomous one. With Indira Gandhi as Prime Minister, in an effort to sideline the Akalis, a resolution for Punjab Province was raked up within Congress and deliberations were being made to grant the Punjab province. This was followed by violent clashes and demonstrations by Jan Sangh against Congress and the Sikhs. Finally, the new state of Punjab was reorganized with Haryana and Chandigarh being allotted status of state and union territory respectively<sup>15</sup>. The years to come were dominated by a series of unstable governments and political formations. The Akalis were increasingly becoming skeptical about the center-state relations in terms of the development of Punjab, its status visage in the preservation of its identity, and the perceived or actual



threat of dissolution by virtue of assimilation. This called for a resolution on the eve of Baisakhi in 1973 known as the Anandpur Sahib Resolution by the Akali Working Committee. The resolution raked up controversy later, probably due to the occasion and place deliberately chosen for it than its content as such, which was also reiterated by the Akali leadership a decade later, with many rival factions using its modified versions.

### **Eruption of Militancy**

The tradition of Sikhism had evolved under the leadership of ten gurus and assumed finality in the shape of the holy book, the Guru Granth Sahib. The holy book thus takes up the function of a living guru. Unlike Abrahamic religions where the holy book is believed to be revealed by a Prophet and treated as a word of God, Granth sahib is prefixed with the title Guru emphasizing its prophetic character. This philosophical doctrine was however challenged by the Nirankaris who believed in a personified guru. The leader of Sant Nirankaris -Baba Avatar composed religious hymns, a characteristic, and domain of Sikh Gurus, this made Nirankaris unorthodox and their practices were viewed as syncretism. This coincided with the surfeit of political changes taking place in Punjab and the increasing alienation of Akalis with the government in centre and the subsequent agitations in Punjab. These developments were also part of Sikh identity consciousness, motivated by the threat perception of assimilation in larger Hindu society. The rise of Nirankaris, as perceived by people interviewed for this research was thus largely viewed with suspicion and as some described it as the “final nail in the coffin” for the Sikh identity.

On the eve of Baisakhi in 1978, as the Nirankaris led by Baba Gurbachan organized a congregation, Jarnail Singh Bhindrawale the then head of Damdami Taksal vehemently opposed it. Many Sikhs joined Bhindrawale and marched to stop the Nirankari congregation, but had to face bullets. Subsequently, the Akal Takht issued a diktat of boycott against Nirankaris and their practices were viewed as sorcery and corruption of Sikh panth. In August 1978, to conserve and distinctly mark the Sikh identity against what was perceived as religious aggression and onslaught, a small political council was formed known as Dal Khalsa. The AISSF (All India Sikh Students Federation) was founded in the 1940s was revived by Amreek Singh –son of Sant Kartar Singh Bhindrawale and a close associate of Jarnail Singh Bhindrawale. Secessionist and militant ideas were slowly cropping up with the slogan of Khalistan achieving popularity. The idea of Khalistan coupled with the identification of the Sikh nation began to achieve territorial imagination as did vengeance against Nirankaris. Lala Jagat Narain, a newspaper owner who had deposed in favor of Nirankaris in court, was killed for his vehement writings in the chain of newspapers that he owned against puritanical Sikhs. The key suspect in this killing was Jarnail Singh Bhindrawale; he was arrested but only to be released a month later. The Akalis opined that the rising militancy and violence were mainly

due to the failure of the central government to address the demands advocated in Anandpur Sahib Resolution and thus started Dharmyudh—an agitation for meeting their demands stated in earlier resolutions. Akalis soon were joined by Bhindrawale, which increased the mass base of the movement (Jagtar, 2011).

The militant recruitment in its initial years relied on a close group mostly from Akhand Kirtani Jatha. Almost all militants interviewed during the course of this research reiterated that by joining militant groups they were merely responding to the call for saving the Sikh faith. Thus with Nirankaris being allowed to propagate their “syncretism” and the government is perceived as hand in glove with Nirankaris—a threat perception was generated and more so amplified by Bhindrawale with ‘Faith under threat’ becoming the popular slogan. Sikhs- no doubt were a majority in Punjab and were prominent in the politics of this state but within India were a minuscule minority that viewed every step by the central government with suspicion. The stringent policies of then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi added to the perception that the majority community was pursuing the policy of assimilation and that Sikh identity was at stake.

In 1982 as Miss Gandhi was gearing up for hosting the Asian Games in Delhi, there were apprehensions that Akalis and Sikh separatists were going to disrupt the games. Thus all roads leading to Delhi, particularly the bordering districts of Haryana were turned into a military zone. Frisking and checking on roads leading to Delhi became a routine. All Sikhs were suspects as elected parliamentarians and senior defense persons were not spared. Many were forced to return to their homes. Sikh sacred symbols—Turban, beard, and sword were thus used by government forces to isolate and identify them. This was highly humiliating and was equated with the reign of the Mughals. The shame and humiliation contributed to the perception that Sikhs and Sikh religion was under threat. The idea of the Sikh nation as an “imagined community”<sup>15</sup> bound by the bonds of religion and language now began to be replaced by the “ties of perceived collective shame and humiliation”. This pushed Sikhs away from peaceful organized protests to violent means, with religion as a key motivation and revenge of collective shame as key motives. The aftermath of the 1982 Asian games was thus a trigger for extremist armed groups like Babbar Khalsa, and Khalistan commando Forces to cash in. Many ex-servicemen sided with Bhindrawale and became his military advisors. Major General Shubegh Singh—a war hero of the 1971 Indo-Pak war, became a military advisor to Bhindrawale. In 1983 President’s rule was imposed in Punjab with violence up surging and political tensions escalating. Soon Punjab was declared a “Disturbed area” and Golden Temple became a rallying place for Sikh Separatists with Bhindranewale camping on its premises. In the first week of June 1984, the Golden temple was surrounded and on 6th June the premises were stormed in by the Indian army. A volley of bullets

that followed resulted in hundreds of deaths including that of Bhindrawale and some of his followers. This army operation named “Blue star” resulted in outrage among the Sikh populace, many went on to the extent of comparing this with the reign of the Mughals, this led to further alienation and led militant extremism that culminated in the assassination of the Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards and anti-Sikh riots in Delhi. The magnitude of Anti-Sikh riots and the events that had unfolded in the last decade led to the formation of several militant groups that were determined to achieve “Khalistan” and were carrying actions almost at will, prominent among them were Babbar Khalsa, Khalistan Liberation Force, Bhindrawale Tiger Force and Khalistan Commando Force (Grewal, 1991).

The existence of the Sikhs in India as a distinct identity and fear of assimilating and disappearing resulted in not only motivating but making recruits more extremist and fundamental in their pursuit. The feeling of being second-class citizens among the Sikhs was getting further reinforced (Jagtar, 2011). This coupled with the history of Sikhism which had thrived on the idea of sacrifice and martyrdom by Gurus and their followers, the imagery of Guru as not only a messenger but as a warrior who defended faith would not only engage in polemical debates and build on intellectual engagements but militarily challenge enemies, proved detrimental and brought religion and its overemphasized military history into the forefront.

The notions of martyrdom in the Sikh faith were sown by Guru Arjan Singh, the fifth Guru of the Sikh faith, as he himself became the first martyr when he was tortured to death. Thus the seeds of militant Sikhism were sown as the successor of Guru Arjan Singh –Guru Hargobind Singh clearly intertwined religion and politics. The militarization and politicization of the Sikh faith are widely believed to be a direct response to the Islamization of Mughal polity under Aurungzeb (Deol, 2010). It was the tenth and final Guru of Sikhs –Guru Gobind Singh who actually inculcated religious nationalism and martyrdom. Thus many commentators on Sikh History agree that while the first four Gurus remained largely aloof from politics and martyrdom, the later Gurus inculcated these values as a defense against the Islamization of Mughal polity and later organized and maintain a distinct identity. The rejuvenation of the Idea of Martyrdom post-Nirankari episode had its roots clearly in Sikh history. The khalistan movement deliberately invoked religion as means and end in itself, with martyrdom and militant religion gaining more foothold, as it was widely perceived that the Indian state was hand in glove with Nirankaris and that the secular, unbiased nature of the Indian state was a myth and that religion was under threat and Hindu assimilation project was underway. There was thus a *déjà vu*, that the Mughal state and Indian state were comparables, that both were enemies of Sikh religion, to counter the Islamization of the Mughal empire, the notions of martyrdom were sown in Sikh faith, and to counter the perceived assimilation project of Indian state martyrdom was rejuvenated as an idea.

In the aftermath of operation Blue-star, militant activities began to surge. On July 5, 1984, an airbus from Srinagar to Delhi was hijacked to Lahore. The main demands of the Hijackers were the removal of the army from the Golden temple and the release of all Sikh prisoners (Jagtar, 2011). Operation Blue Star was the second “shame and humiliation” impetus to the Punjab militancy after the 1982 Asian games fiasco. A religious place as sacred as the Golden temple which functioned as a symbol of the Sikh faith was desecrated and a charismatic leader – Bhindrawale had been killed, this had a more collectively humiliating effect. More men began to participate in militancy as the idea of Khalistan began to get religious acceptance. Militant groups began to cheer for the idea of Khalistan. This phase was characterized and distinguished from the previous phase of militancy as the target changed from Nirankaris to the Indian state, its symbols, and “collaborators”. Indira Gandhi the then Prime Minister of India was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards in order to seek revenge for the desecration of the Golden Temple.<sup>17</sup> This had serious repercussions for the Sikh community as riots broke out in retaliation as a thousand Sikhs lost their lives (Smith, 1984). Thus even as the memories of the Golden Temple were afresh, the Sikh community received another humiliating debacle. Many people interviewed in the course of this research described it as a pogrom against Sikhs. The killings, torture, and desecration of Sikh religious symbols triggered further militant recruitment (Chima, 2010). In the summer of 1992, a major counter-insurgency operation was started by the Indian state leading to the killing of top commanders of militant groups. The Indian state managed to execute a counter-insurgency strategy that rattled the Khalistan armed groups. By the end of 1993, as many as 970 militants had been killed and around four hundred had been arrested (Chima, 2010). The remnant militant leadership settled in Canada, Europe, and Pakistan, from where their activities have been reduced to seminars and sporadic gatherings, calling for rejuvenating the Khalistan struggle.

### **Conclusion**

The history of Sikhism has witnessed a continuous quest for maintaining a distinct identity. Sikh politics and militant separatism have also to be seen in continuity to protect their faith and resist assimilation. In its initial years, Sikhism consolidated itself against Muslim Rulers. In the 19th and 20th centuries, it continuously positioned itself against dominant Hindu movements and resisted assimilation. In the latter half of the 20th century, it resisted syncretism. Sikhism mainly via its strong diaspora in Europe and Canada continues to supply propaganda and politics for the territorial ambitions of a Separate-Sikh state, with the sole objective of protecting assimilation in India. From the above discussion, it is clear that the streak of violence is rejuvenated in Sikhism in response to Religious Humiliation. The militarization of the Sikh faith during the Mughal period, The resistance against attempts of assimilation during British Rule, The protest movements after 1947,

The violence against perceived blasphemy and its state patronage in 1978, the desecration of religious symbols during Asian games, operation blue-star and the riots of 1984 –all led to religious humiliation and gave impetus to violence. Also if we look at the process of “religious humiliation” and violence in the above context, they both precede and succeed each other. Religious humiliation leads to violence and violence leads to more “religious humiliation”. The Religious humiliation of Sikhs by Mughal rulers led to their militarization, the militarization led to further “religious humiliation” with the killing of Gurus. The perceived religious humiliation of 1978 by Nirankaris led to violence which led to further humiliation in the 1982 Asian games with the desecration of Sikh symbols, which led to further militant violence till 1984 and further religious humiliation in the form of Operation Blue-star in which the sacred Golden temple was destroyed. This humiliation again led to the assassination of Indira Gandhi, which led to rioting against Sikhs and further humiliation, culminating again in the rejuvenation of militancy.

#### Notes

1. Sikandar Lodhi actually wasn't a pure Afghan, in the sense that his mother was a Hindu and perhaps in order to fulfill the “racial impurity” he invoked Islam and allowed his governors and military strategists to carry on the destruction of temples. He forbade Muslim women to visit the mazaars or graves of saints and imposed a ban on syncretic practices.
2. The kaliyugais a knife; the rajas are butchers; dharma is fast vanishing; in the dark night of falsehood the moon of truth nowhere seems to rise.
3. Tax imposed on non-Muslim subjects
4. The Sikh Gurus, reinforcing the attitude of Guru Nanak, believed in the possibility of miracles but regarded the power to perform miracles as irrelevant to one's spiritual status and beneath the concerns of a devotee of God.
5. In an act of defiance and anger a Sikh in Agra threw two bricks at Aurangzeb in October 1676, when he was returning from the Jamia Masjid.
6. Keshdhari Sikhs generally don't trim or remove their hair.
7. The percentage of Sikhs among the Jats rose from less than fifty-four in 1881 to nearly eighty in 1921, while the percentage of Hindus among the Jats decreased from about forty in 1881 to less than ten in 1921.
8. Singh Sabha Movement was a Sikh movement that began in reaction to Christian Missionary activity. Singh Sabhas were public meetings where calls for a return to puritan Sikhism were made
9. All marriages which may be or may have been duly solemnized according to the Sikh marriage ceremony called Anand (commonly known as Anand Karaj) shall be, and shall be deemed to have been with effect from the date of the solemnization of each respectively, good and valid in law.
10. The account of British Intelligence officer David Petrie comprehensively deals

with the politics of dissatisfaction and representation.

11. The award of Cyril Radcliffe brought the larger part of the district of Gurdaspur and a small area of the district of Lahore to East Punjab (Grewal, 1991).
12. Breaking the fast without purpose, after having sworn on the holy book, for which he was punished too later as to perform an Akhand-path, to read barn in excess of the daily norm, to offer kard hparshad worth 125 rupees, to clean utensils of the Guruxs langar and to clean the shoes of the sangat visiting the Gurdwara (Grewal, 1991).
13. Hilarious as it may seem, with Jan Sangh –the right-wing Hindu, the communist party –left and Akalis, diametrically opposed to each other aligning together.
14. The Babbar Akalis were mostly immigrants from Canada , who had returned in the hope of liberating Guruduwaras from the control of Mahants
15. The idea of imagined communities as expressed by Benedict Anderson addressed the formation of nations and nationalism as mutual bonds and ties between people.
16. On every congregation that followed operation Blue- star, youth would often shout in Punjabi –‘Sikh quom de tin gaddar –Badal, Tohra, Longawal’ which would translate as three traitors of the Sikh nation-Badal, Tohra, and Longawal.
17. Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her two bodyguards –Beant Singh and Satwant Singh on 31st October 1984. Beant Singh was killed immediately by other guards however Satwant Singh was arrested in an injured state and later hanged. The assassination followed rioting in which mobs vandalized Sikh property and killed more than a thousand Sikhs, as reported by Time magazine two weeks after the assassination.
18. Saffron flags with Khalistan zindabad slogans engraved upon them were raised atop on Golden temple complex.

## References

- Anderson, B. (1983). *Imagined communities*. London: Verso Books.
- Chima, Jugdep S. *The Sikh Separatist Insurgency in India: Political Leadership and Ethnonationalist Movements*. New Delhi: SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd, 2010. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9788132105381>.
- Fazal, T. (2014). *'Nation-state' and Minority Rights in India: Comparative Perspectives on Muslim and Sikh Identities*. Oxon, New York: Routledge.
- Grewal, J. S. (1998) a. *The Sikhs of the Punjab (Vol. 2)*. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
- Grewal, J. S. (2011) b. *Four Centuries of Sikh Tradition: History, Literature, and Identity*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Grewal, J. S., & Banga, I. (1999). *History and Ideology: The Khalsa Over 300 Years*. New Delhi: Virago Press.
- Guha, R. (2007). *India After Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy*. London: Macmillan
- Harter, S., Low, S. M., & Whitesell, N. R. (2003). What have we learned from Columbine: The impact of the self-system on suicidal and violent ideation among adolescents. *Journal of School Violence*, 2, 3–26. doi:10.1300/J202v02n03\_02
- Mahmood, C. K. (2000) a. *Trials by fire: Dynamics of terror in Punjab and Kashmir*. In (Ed.) *Death squad: The anthropology of state terror*, University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Mahmood, C. K. (2010) b. *Fighting for faith and nation: Dialogues with Sikh militants*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press
- Pettigrew, J. (1995). *The Sikhs of the Punjab: Unheard voices of state and guerilla violence*, The University of Michigan: Zed Books.
- Shaffer, R. (2012). *The Sikh Separatist Insurgency in India: Political Leadership and Ethnonationalist Movements*, Thousand Oak: Sage Publications.
- Singh, J. (2011). *Khalistan struggle: a non-movement*. New Delhi: Aakar Books.
- Singh, K. (2004).a *A History of the Sikhs: 1839-2004 (Vol. 1)*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Singh, K. (2004).b *A History of the Sikhs: 1839-2004 (Vol. 2)*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press.



Smith, D. (2004). Trends and causes of armed conflict. In (Ed.) Transforming Ethnopolitical Conflict, Obersalzberg: Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management, 111-127.

Staniland, P. (2014). Networks of rebellion: Explaining insurgent cohesion and collapse. Cornell: Cornell University Press.

Stewart, F. (2012). Religion versus ethnicity as a source of mobilization: Are there differences? In (Ed.) Understanding Collective Political Violence, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 196-221.

Torres, W. J., & Bergner, R. M. (2012). Severe public humiliation: Its nature, consequences, and clinical treatment. *Psychotherapy*, 49, 492–501.

Walker, J., & Knauer, V. (2011). Humiliation, self-esteem, and violence. *Journal of Forensic Psychiatry and Psychology*, 22, 724– 741.