



# Sikh Community Between Integration and Assimilation: A Case Study of Belgium

► Araştırma makalesi / Research article

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### Abstract

This study investigates the Sikh community in Belgium, emphasizing their endeavors to achieve a balance between integration and assimilation while preserving their cultural and religious identity. Using a case study approach, it analyzes the Sikh diaspora's interaction with Belgian norms and institutions through the lenses of assimilation, multiculturalism, and transnationalism. The research identifies various challenges, including the preservation of identity, experiences of discrimination, and the effects of Belgium's integration policies on the community. Since the 1970s, approximately 10,000 Sikhs from India have settled in Belgium, initially finding limited opportunities and working in labor, military, and agriculture. Over time, the second and third generations have transitioned towards business and social integration. Nevertheless, the community continues to experience political marginalization and remains disconnected from the Khalistan movement due to its limited political clout. While certain groups, such as the Sikh Youth of Belgium and Babbar Khalsa International (BKI), continue to support Khalistan, their influence is relatively minor. Grounded in diaspora theory and aided by the interview data, this research provides significant insights into immigrant integration, cultural preservation, and the intricate dynamics between assimilation and multicultural coexistence within the Belgian context.

**Keywords:** History of Religion, Sikh Diaspora, Sikhism in Belgium, Migrants, Khalistan Movement, Integration, Assimilation.

## Entegrasyon ve Asimilasyon Arasında Sih Topluluğu: Belçika'dan Örnek Bir Olay İncelemesi

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### Öz

Bu çalışma, Belçika'daki Sih toplumunu incelemekte ve onların kültürel ve dini kimliklerini korurken entegrasyon ve asimilasyon arasında bir denge kurma çabalarını vurgulamaktadır. Bir vaka çalışması yaklaşımı kullanılarak, Sih diasporasının Belçika normları ve kurumlarıyla etkileşimini asimilasyon, çok kültürlülük ve ulusöteslilik mercikleri üzerinden analiz etmektedir. Araştırma, kimliğin korunması, ayrımcılık deneyimleri ve Belçika'nın entegrasyon politikalarının topluluk üzerindeki etkileri de dahil olmak üzere çeşitli zorlukları tanımlamaktadır. 1970'lerden bu yana, Hindistan'dan gelen yaklaşık 10.000 Sih Belçika'ya yerleşmiş, başlangıçta sınırlı fırsatlar bulmuş ve işçilik, askerlik ve tarımda çalışmıştır. İkinci ve üçüncü nesiller zamanla iş hayatına ve sosyal entegrasyona geçiş yapmıştır. Bununla birlikte, topluluk siyasi olarak marjinalleşmeye devam etmekte ve sınırlı siyasi gücü nedeniyle Khalistan hareketinden kopuk kalmaktadır. Belçika Sih Gençliği ve Babbar Khalsa International (BKI) gibi bazı gruplar Khalistan'ı desteklemeye devam etse de etkileri nispeten azdır. Diaspora teorisine dayanan ve mülakat verileriyle desteklenen bu araştırma, Belçika bağlamında göçmen entegrasyonu, kültürel koruma ve asimilasyon ile çok kültürlü bir arada yaşam arasındaki karmaşık dinamikler hakkında önemli bir bakış açısı sunmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Dinler Tarihi, Sih Diasporası, Belçika'da Sihizm, Göçmenler, Khalistan hareketi, Entegrasyon, Asimilasyon.

## Introduction

Sikhism, established in the late 15th century by Guru Nanak in the Punjab province of the Indian subcontinent, is fundamentally based on the teachings of a lineage of ten human Gurus. The Granth Sahib, the holy scripture of Sikhism, is honored as the ultimate and everlasting Guru, serving as a source of spiritual and moral direction for Sikhs worldwide.<sup>1</sup> With an estimated 26 million adherents globally, the Sikh community is primarily found in India, although substantial populations have developed in numerous countries worldwide as a result of historical migrations.<sup>2</sup> Most of modern Sikh writers think that the inception of Sikhism was essentially a reaction to the socio-political and religious oppression experienced by the community, particularly under the Mughal rulers.<sup>3</sup> They mostly did not give much attention to the fact that Mughals had good relationships with Sikh Gurus until they adopted the title of *Patsbah* (king), founded their army, and started intervening in affairs directly related to the state.<sup>4</sup> Leaving aside these facts, they think that Mughal oppression ultimately led to the creation of the Khalsa in 1699 by the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh. The Khalsa embodies a military brotherhood of both men and women who are devoted to protecting and promoting the Sikh faith in the face of adversity.<sup>5</sup> Members of the Khalsa embrace a unique identity defined by the Five K's—Kesh (uncut hair), Kara (a steel bracelet), Kanga (a wooden comb), Kaccha (cotton undergarments), and Kirpan (a ceremonial sword). These emblems not only represent their dedication to Sikh values but also enhance a sense of unity and community among Sikhs.<sup>6</sup>

The rise of Banda Singh Bahadur (1670-1716), a Sikh commander, helped Sikhs to establish a *misel*<sup>7</sup> system, which ultimately guided them to find the first Sikh empire in 1801 by Ranjit Singh (1780-1839). It is reported by historians that Banda Singh adopted the title of Guru.<sup>8</sup> Many Sikhs started following him, and a separate group of his followers came into existence called “Bandai Khalsa.” He also changed the Sikh slogan to “fath-I darshan.”<sup>9</sup> After the demise of Ranjit Singh, many Sikhs joined the British army. During the partition of India, Sikhs grew extremely hostile to Muslims. They were not in favor of the partition as it will be going to divide Punjab, their sacred homeland. When partition culminated, they accepted their faith. However, the oppression of Sikhs by the newly founded Indian

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Davey Cunningham, *A History of the Sikhs: From the Origin of the Nation to the Battles of Sutlej*, ed. H. Milford (1918), 98.

<sup>2</sup> Gurharpal Singh and Giorgio Shani, *Sikh Nationalism: From a Dominant Minority to an Ethno-Religious Diaspora* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 1.

<sup>3</sup> The Empire of Mughals (1526–1857) arose in modern-day Pakistan and northern India. It was founded by Sultan Babur (1483–1530) in 1526. The Mughal Empire ruled over a large portion of South Asia between the 16th and 19th centuries.

<sup>4</sup> Giani Gian Singh, *Tawarikh Guru Khalsa* (Wazir-i-Hind Press, 1923), see sections on the fifth, ninth, and tenth gurus.

<sup>5</sup> Giorgio Shani, *Sikh Nationalism and Identity in a Global Age* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 28–52.

<sup>6</sup> Amardeep S. Dahiya, *Founder of the Khalsa: The Life and Times of Guru Gobind Singh* (Haryana, India: Hay House Publishers, 2014), 183.

<sup>7</sup> Misel (also called Misals or Mislās) were the twelve sovereign states of the Sikh alliance, which emerged in the Punjab region of the northern Indian subcontinent in the eighteenth century. Their combined army was called the Dal Khalsa (Grand Army).

<sup>8</sup> Hashim Ali Khan, *Muntakhib al-Lubab*, trans. Mehmood Ahmad Farooqi (Karachi: Nafees Academy), 4:203.

<sup>9</sup> Ganda Singh, *Life of Banda Singh Bahadur Based on Contemporary and Original Records* (Patiala: Publication Bureau, Punjabi University), 58.

government resulted in the creation of the Khalistan movement.<sup>10</sup> This movement sought to create an independent Sikh homeland in the Punjab region, spanning both India and Pakistan. This movement gained considerable momentum during the 1970s and 1980s, particularly following Operation Blue Star, a military operation conducted by the Indian government aimed at expelling Sikh militants from the Golden Temple complex in Amritsar and the subsequent violence directed at Sikhs across India. The resulting political repression and social turmoil prompted many Sikhs to leave Punjab in search of safety, with Belgium, one of the prominent locations in Europe, emerging as a significant destination for Sikh migrants, which already had a small diaspora before 1984. Comprehending Belgium's geographical and political landscape is crucial for appreciating the importance of the Sikh diaspora in the nation and its changing involvement in the more significant Khalistan movement. Belgium, a compact but strategically positioned nation in Western Europe, is segmented into three linguistic regions: Dutch-speaking Flanders, French-speaking Wallonia, and a German-speaking area in the east. This linguistic diversity impacts numerous facets of Belgian society; including politics, education, and cultural traditions, while also fostering a climate of multiculturalism and inclusivity that makes Belgium a refuge for immigrants seeking safety and opportunities.

The Sikh community in Belgium represents an important segment of the nation's diverse religious and cultural landscape, encountering a distinct array of challenges and opportunities in its engagement with the Belgian government. As Belgium grapples with the intricacies of multiculturalism, the dynamics of the Sikh community's relationship with the state have transformed over the years. Factors such as religious liberty, political involvement, integration strategies, and the preservation of cultural practices have significantly influenced this relationship.

### **Statement of the Problem**

This study aims to investigate the Sikh community in Belgium, emphasizing its efforts to maintain its heritage while achieving integration. It addresses the challenges of discrimination and political marginalization, employing diaspora theory to analyze the community's identity and changing perspectives on movements such as Khalistan.

To investigate the dynamics of Sikh integration and assimilation in Belgium, researchers utilized ethnographic techniques, which included visits to Gurdwaras and interviews with community members. These approaches are designed to illuminate the present condition of the Sikh community, its developing identity, and its methods for managing the intricacies of life in Belgium. This analysis of the Sikh diaspora in Belgium highlights the interplay of cultural identity, community strength, and the obstacles associated with integration in a multicultural environment. To cover the theoretical aspect of the research, the Diaspora Theory has been applied, which is most relevant in this case study.

### **Diaspora Theory and its Application on Sikh Diaspora in Belgium**

Diaspora theory, which originated from the examination of Jewish exile, has broadened to include the global movements of diverse communities. Initially, the term "diaspora" was specifically associated with the involuntary displacement of Jews from their native land.

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<sup>10</sup> Sangat Singh, *The Sikhs in History* (Amritsar: Singh Brothers, 2010), 176.

However, it has since been extended to encompass other displaced populations, such as those from Africa and Armenia, who have been affected by various factors including colonization, slavery, and political oppression.<sup>11</sup> In the 20th century, the notion of diaspora gained significant traction within academic discussions. It came to represent communities that sustain strong connections to their homeland while living in foreign territories. This transformation was propelled by the emergence of postcolonial studies, globalization, and migration studies, which highlighted the themes of identity, belonging, and cultural preservation within host nations.<sup>12</sup> A prominent aspect of diaspora theory is the focus on homeland orientation, wherein diaspora communities sustain emotional, cultural, and occasionally political ties to their country of origin.<sup>13</sup> These connections frequently endure through generations and encompass a collective memory of the homeland along with a shared identity linked to the place of origin. Displacement, whether it occurs involuntarily or by choice, constitutes the fundamental experience of a diaspora. Communities are often uprooted as a result of conflict, colonization, persecution, or economic difficulties, prompting them to establish new social and cultural frameworks in their adopted countries.<sup>14</sup>

Cultural retention and hybridization are other salient features of diaspora theory. Diasporic communities actively preserve their cultural heritage, language, and traditions within host societies while simultaneously engaging in cultural hybridization. This blending of cultures often results in new identities that reflect both the homeland and the host country's influences.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, transnationalism marks modern diasporas, which maintain cross-border relationships through trade, communication, and travel, significantly facilitated by globalization and technology.<sup>16</sup> Lastly, diasporas frequently exercise political and social agency, advocating for homeland issues and rights while influencing political structures in their host countries, thereby exerting influence on both local and global scales.<sup>17</sup> Diaspora theory examines the migration, settlement, and cultural adaptation of ethnic groups that have relocated from their original homelands. This theory investigates the intricate dynamics involved in sustaining cultural identity while integrating into new societies. Fundamental aspects of diaspora theory encompass displacement, cultural preservation, transnationalism, and the negotiation of identity within a different socio-cultural environment.<sup>18</sup> Notable scholars, including William Safran and Robin Cohen, have made substantial contributions to the field of diaspora studies by elucidating how diaspora communities manage to assimilate into host countries while maintaining ties to their places of origin.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1997), 2–3.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 7–9.

<sup>13</sup> William Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 1, no. 1 (1991), 83.

<sup>14</sup> Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London: Routledge, 1996), 17–19.

<sup>15</sup> Steven Vertovec, *Transnationalism* (London: Routledge, 2009), 12–14.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 12–14.

<sup>17</sup> Khachig Tölölyan, "The Nation-State and Its Others: In Lieu of a Preface," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 1, no. 1 (1991), 5–6.

<sup>18</sup> Gabriel Sheffer, *Diaspora Politics: At Home Abroad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 32–34.

<sup>19</sup> William Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 1/1 (1991), 83–99.

The Sikh community in Belgium, primarily established by migrants from India and Uganda during the 1970s, serves as a significant example for the study of diaspora theory. This diaspora illustrates the delicate equilibrium between assimilation and the preservation of cultural identity. Although the community has somehow integrated into Belgian society on both economic and social levels after initial challenges and issues over the years, particularly in fields such as business and technology, they remain deeply connected to their Sikh heritage, notably through the support of institutions like Gurdwaras.<sup>20</sup> Many Sikhs in Belgium have effectively integrated by establishing businesses, acquiring Belgian citizenship, and contributing to the local economy.<sup>21</sup> However, this integration has not resulted in complete assimilation, as the Sikh community continues to be distinctly recognizable through their religious practices and cultural traditions, exemplified by the Five K's (Kesh, Kara, Kanga, Kaccha, Kirpan) and their active involvement in Sikh festivals.<sup>22</sup> This suggests that although the Sikh diaspora in Belgium has adapted to the socio-economic landscape of their host country, they have not entirely merged into the prevailing cultural framework. The distinction between integration and assimilation is a fundamental issue in diaspora studies, especially pertinent to the Sikh community in Belgium. Integration involves the process of joining the host society while preserving one's cultural identity, whereas assimilation suggests a relinquishment of that identity in favor of embracing the host culture.

Diaspora theory highlights the importance of maintaining cultural identity within a new country, frequently through transnational relationships.<sup>23</sup> The Sikh community in Belgium exemplifies this by successfully preserving their cultural heritage, primarily through religious institutions that function as vital centers for spiritual and cultural activities. The Gurdwaras in Belgium serve as focal points for the community, providing religious services, language instruction, and social events that contribute to the continuity of Sikh values and traditions.<sup>24</sup> The Sikh diaspora in Belgium still encounters some challenges, including discrimination and sporadic social exclusion, which are prevalent issues faced by diaspora communities worldwide.<sup>25</sup> These experiences of exclusion reinforce the community's commitment to preserving its identity rather than pursuing complete assimilation. Furthermore, as the Sikh community distances itself from political movements such as the Khalistan movement,<sup>26</sup> their identity negotiation extends beyond the maintenance of religious and cultural connections; it also encompasses a political disengagement from separatist ideologies that may further hinder their acceptance within Belgian society.

The utilization of diaspora theory in examining the Sikh community in Belgium illustrates a complex interplay between integration and the preservation of cultural identity. Although the community engages in economic and social integration, it simultaneously upholds its unique cultural and religious characteristics, thereby avoiding total assimilation.

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<sup>20</sup> Ashwin Manekar, "Cultural Identity in Diaspora: Sikhism and the Transnational Community", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 35/9 (2009), 1210.

<sup>21</sup> Gunter De Vylder and Wim Naudé, "Entrepreneurship and Migration: A Case Study of the Sikh Community in Belgium", *European Journal of Entrepreneurship* 15/3 (2012), 45.

<sup>22</sup> Louis E. Fenech, *The Five K's of Sikhism: Symbols of Faith and Identity* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013), 33–36.

<sup>23</sup> Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1997), 42–45.

<sup>24</sup> Manekar, "Cultural Identity in Diaspora", 1214.

<sup>25</sup> "Europe", *Diaspora Studies* 11/2 (2018), 85–89.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

This case study highlights essential aspects of diaspora theory, including transnationalism, cultural preservation, and identity negotiation, set against the particular socio-political backdrop of Belgium.

### **Migration Perspective of Sikhs in Belgium**

The recent decades have witnessed a multifaceted migration of Sikhs to Belgium, shaped by a variety of economic, social, and political factors. The quest for improved economic opportunities and a better quality of life has significantly driven Indian Sikhs to relocate to Belgium. Historical connections between Europe and the Punjabi community can be traced back to World War I when Sikhs served in the British Army. The partnership between Britain and Belgium during this conflict enabled direct engagement between Sikh soldiers and Belgian military personnel. Sikhs played a crucial role in supporting the British war effort, particularly in key battles such as Neuve Chapelle, Ypres, the Somme, and Passchendaele in 1915. Their loyalty to the British Empire further inspired Sikhs to protect Belgium, and their contributions are commemorated in the historical narratives of both British and Belgian accounts of World War I.<sup>27</sup> The initial group of Punjabi settlers arrived in Belgium in 1972, having been expelled from Uganda by Idi Amin rather than coming directly from India. This group consisted of eight Sikh families who laid the groundwork for the Sikh community in Belgium. Although stricter immigration regulations were enacted in 1974, Sikhs managed to exploit certain loopholes to facilitate the arrival of new migrants from Punjab. A significant surge of Sikh immigrants to Belgium took place in the mid-1980s, coinciding with the violent tensions between the Indian government and the Sikh community, particularly in the aftermath of the Khalistan movement. Many of these newcomers, fleeing political persecution, frequently faced rejection of their asylum applications, which left them in a vulnerable legal position. They primarily found work in manual labor industries, including factories, mines, and agriculture, particularly in the Saint-Trond region, where there was a high demand for seasonal labor.<sup>28</sup>

The economic expansion experienced in Belgium during the 1990s prompted a new influx of Sikh migrants, a significant number of whom secured employment in the textile and diamond sectors. These individuals primarily originated from Punjab, where challenging economic circumstances compelled them to pursue improved prospects overseas. The legal status of these Sikhs was ambiguous until the year 2000, when a regularization program enabled many to establish their residency and citizenship formally. This advancement fostered additional migration, especially via family reunification, resulting in a growing presence of women and children within the Sikh community, which notably altered the community's dynamics and viewpoints.<sup>29</sup> The movement of Sikhs to Belgium is influenced by various push and pull factors, such as the scarcity of economic prospects in Punjab, inadequate governance, and the prevailing law and order issues in India, as well as communal strife between Sikhs and the Indian authorities. The military actions undertaken by the Indian government during the 1980s, coupled with the assassination of Prime Minister

<sup>27</sup> Tim Cook, *At the Sharp End: Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1914–1916* (Toronto: Viking Canada, 2007), 282.

<sup>28</sup> Gurharpal Singh and Darshan Singh Tatla, *Sikhs in Britain: The Making of a Community* (London: Zed Books, 2006), 193.

<sup>29</sup> Jonathan D. James, *Migration and Integration of Indian Sikhs in Belgium* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2012), 89–91.

Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards, incited anti-Sikh riots in New Delhi, compelling numerous Punjabis to seek refuge abroad. Belgium emerged as a favorable destination, alongside countries like Canada and Lebanon, due to its comparatively lenient asylum policies and available economic opportunities.<sup>30</sup>

The Sikh migration to Belgium represents a multifaceted phenomenon shaped by various historical, economic, and political influences. The combination of individual, familial, and societal motivations propels numerous Punjabi youths to seek opportunities overseas. They aim to enhance their economic conditions and social standing while fleeing communal violence and the scarcity of opportunities in India.

### Religious Perspective of the Sikh Community in Belgium

The Sikh community in Belgium, while relatively small in number, plays a crucial role in preserving cultural and spiritual traditions among its members. At the heart of this religious practice are the Gurdwaras, or Sikh temples, with seven located throughout Belgium. These Gurdwaras function not only as places of worship but also as vital community centers where Sikhs come together for religious services, ceremonies, and various social events. Notable Gurdwaras include *Gurdwara Sangat Sahib* in Sint-Truiden, *Gurdwara Guru Nanak Sahib Cultureel Centrum* in Vilvoorde, *Gurdwara Guru Ram Dass Sikh Study & Cultural Center* in Borgloon, *Gurdwara Sahib Luik* in Liege, another *Gurdwara Nanak Sahib* in Sint-Truiden, *Gurdwara Mata Sahib Kaur* in Ghent, and *Gurdwara Singh Sabha* in Alken, Limburg.<sup>31</sup> These locations represent the dedication of Sikhs to their religious practices and the unity of their community, serving as cultural foundations for the diaspora.

The Granthi, serving as the religious scholar and custodian of the *Guru Granth Sahib*—the sacred scripture of Sikhism—plays an essential role within the Sikh community in Belgium. This individual is responsible for leading religious services, conducting life cycle ceremonies such as weddings and funerals, and providing spiritual counsel. The duties of a Granthi underscore the importance of the *Guru Granth Sahib*, which is regarded not merely as a religious text but as the living embodiment of the eternal Guru for Sikhs. These scholars are instrumental in imparting religious knowledge and nurturing a bond between the local diaspora and their ancestral homeland, India. A significant number of *Granthis* in Belgium have undergone religious education in India, thereby strengthening connections with Sikh institutions, spiritual mentors, and the rich cultural and spiritual legacy of Punjab.<sup>32</sup>

Diaspora theory, with its focus on the preservation of homeland connections and cultural identity in a foreign setting, helps explain the significance of these religious roles. Sikh Granthis in Belgium often maintain transnational links with their homeland, exemplifying a core feature of diaspora theory: the maintenance of emotional and practical ties with the place of origin, even across borders. This connection serves multiple purposes. It enables the transmission of traditional religious practices and helps keep the diaspora linked to broader Sikh religious discourses. However, the extent of these connections varies. While some *Granthis* remain heavily involved with religious communities and institutions

<sup>30</sup> Veena Kukreja, *Contemporary India and Its Neighbours* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2008), 132–135.

<sup>31</sup> Jonathan D. James, *Migration and Integration of Indian Sikhs in Belgium* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2012), 54–55.

<sup>32</sup> Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity, and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 112.

in India, others are more focused on serving the local Belgian Sikh community.<sup>33</sup> The transnational aspect of the Sikh diaspora in Belgium can also be viewed through the lens of cultural retention and hybridization, another salient feature of diaspora theory. As Sikh *Granthis* work to preserve religious traditions in a European context, they must navigate the dual challenge of maintaining authenticity while engaging with Belgian societal norms. This often involves a degree of cultural hybridization, where elements of the homeland's religious practices are adapted to fit the host country's environment. For example, Gurdwaras in Belgium might host events that not only cater to religious needs but also serve as cultural integration points, reflecting the intersection of Belgian and Sikh identities.<sup>34</sup>

In conclusion, the religious life of the Sikh diaspora in Belgium is characterized by a combination of transnational ties to their homeland and adaptation to the local context, with Gurdwaras and *Granthis* playing central roles in this dynamic. The application of diaspora theory sheds light on how this community maintains its religious and cultural identity while navigating the challenges and opportunities of life in Belgium. The Sikh community in Belgium is afforded a constitutionally protected right to religious freedom, which is consistent with Belgium's broader obligations under international human rights agreements, including the European Convention on Human Rights. This legal framework allows Sikhs to openly practice their faith, participate in congregational worship at gurdwaras (Sikh temples), and celebrate significant religious events such as Vaisakhi. However, they continue to face practical obstacles, particularly regarding the acknowledgment of specific Sikh customs that set them apart from other religious groups. For instance, the wearing of turbans, a crucial religious requirement for Sikh men, has occasionally conflicted with Belgium's secular regulations, including those governing dress codes in educational institutions, workplaces, and public sectors. Belgian authorities have initiated measures to assist minority religious communities, such as providing certain subsidies to recognized religious organizations and engaging in dialogue with Sikh representatives through minority advisory councils. Nonetheless, these initiatives are sometimes viewed as inadequate in addressing systemic biases. Instances of discrimination against Sikhs, especially concerning their turbans in professional settings or during identity verification, reveal persistent societal prejudices. These occurrences illustrate the tension between secularism and multiculturalism in Belgium, where secularism is often interpreted in ways that unintentionally marginalize visible religious minorities.<sup>35</sup>

Moreover, Sikhs in Belgium have encountered difficulties in obtaining official recognition for their religious institutions and leadership, which impacts their access to state funding and other advantages available to recognized religions. While the government acknowledges the Sikh community's role in enhancing Belgium's cultural diversity, activists within the Sikh diaspora contend that more inclusive policies are essential to combat discrimination and promote a sense of belonging.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Kim Knott and Sean McLoughlin, *Diasporas: Concepts, Intersections, Identities* (London: Zed Books, 2010), 75–78.

<sup>34</sup> Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 395–396.

<sup>35</sup> Christophe Jaffrelot and Darshan Tatla, *Sikhs in Europe: Migration, Identities, and Representations* (London: Routledge, 2012), 138–142.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*



## Social Perspective of the Sikh Community in Belgium

The Sikh community in Belgium, as part of the diaspora, confronts a variety of social challenges that can be analyzed through the framework of diaspora theory. This theory examines how displaced groups preserve their cultural identity while engaging with the society in which they reside. With a history of migration that extends over several decades, this community has faced difficulties concerning integration, discrimination, language obstacles, and preserving cultural practices while adapting to a different social context. A fundamental element of diaspora theory is the conflict between preserving a unique cultural identity and assimilation demands within a host society. Sikhs residing in Belgium have encountered considerable discrimination rooted in their religious and ethnic identities, especially due to prominent symbols such as the Turban and the Kirpan, which is a ceremonial dagger worn by Sikhs. An illustrative example of this is the incident in 2017 where a Sikh man was denied entry to a courtroom in Belgium because he refused to remove his turban. This situation underscores the difficulties Sikhs experience in openly demonstrating their religious identity in a society that may perceive such symbols as incompatible with Belgian identity.<sup>37</sup> This represents a common challenge faced by diasporic communities: the need to reconcile the preservation of cultural and religious traditions with the expectations and regulations of the host nation. The Sikh turban, for instance, has ignited public discussions and instances of discrimination, highlighting the ways in which diasporic identities may be misinterpreted or sidelined within host societies. Diaspora theory highlights the importance of maintaining cultural heritage and connections to one's homeland. For Sikhs residing in Belgium, the challenge of adhering to Belgian societal norms, particularly regarding debates over religious symbols, can lead to a conflict between preserving their cultural identity and achieving acceptance within the broader community. Furthermore, the Belgian authorities' closure of Gurdwaras, based on suspicions that undocumented migrants were seeking refuge in these religious spaces, exacerbates the sense of alienation and mistrust experienced by the Sikh community.<sup>38</sup>

A notable challenge faced by the Sikh diaspora in Belgium pertains to language acquisition and educational integration. Numerous Sikhs who have relocated to Belgium primarily communicate in Punjabi, which complicates their assimilation into the broader Belgian society, where French and Dutch are the official languages. This language barrier has impacted adult Sikhs regarding employment opportunities and access to services, as well as the younger generation, who frequently encounter difficulties within the Belgian educational system.<sup>39</sup> Children of Sikh immigrants have encountered challenges in maintaining parity with their peers, primarily due to language barriers and cultural disparities. This situation can result in a feeling of alienation from both their country of origin and their new environment.

From a *diaspora theory* perspective, language plays a critical role in the social integration of diasporic communities. While maintaining their native language, which connects them to their cultural heritage, Sikh migrants are also expected to learn the language of the host

<sup>37</sup> Thomas M. Wilson and Hastings Donnan, *The Anthropology of Space and Place: Locating Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 93.

<sup>38</sup> Rinku Lamba, "Gurdwaras as Sites of Refuge for Undocumented Migrants: A Diasporic Dilemma" *Religion and Society in Diaspora* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 120–22.

<sup>39</sup> Jonathan D. James, *Migration and Integration of Indian Sikhs in Belgium* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2012), 63–65.

country to access social, economic, and educational opportunities. For the Sikh community in Belgium, this has been a difficult balancing act. However, recent generations have made strides in language acquisition and have begun shifting from traditional agricultural work to modern sectors, including politics, showing a level of socio-economic integration. Diaspora theory further explores the representation and perception of minority communities within media and political contexts. In Belgium, Sikhs have faced challenges related to their underrepresentation in both political and social arenas, which can intensify feelings of exclusion. The Belgian media, for example, has offered minimal coverage of the Indian diaspora, frequently depicting them through skewed and negative perspectives, linking them to illicit activities such as human trafficking or unauthorized residency.<sup>40</sup> The absence of representation in media and other public platforms silences the Sikh community, hindering their ability to influence their own narrative within Belgian society. Public debates surrounding religious symbols such as the Kirpan and the Turban, along with police actions targeting Gurdwaras, exacerbate the stigma faced by the community, portraying them as a challenge rather than as valuable members of Belgian society. According to diaspora theory, this negative portrayal can deepen the rift between the host society and the migrant community, obstructing authentic integration. The Sikh population in Belgium has actively sought to integrate into Belgian society by engaging in local organizations, participating in intercultural events, and enrolling in language and job training initiatives.<sup>41</sup> However, there is a growing concern within the community, particularly among elders, that the push for integration may lead to the loss of Sikh traditions. For example, some younger Sikhs have begun to adopt Western clothing and shave their beards, which has caused concern among older community members who fear that these changes represent a departure from traditional Sikh values.<sup>42</sup>

The absence of representation in media and other public platforms effectively silences the Sikh community, preventing them from influencing their own narrative within Belgian society. The social experiences of Sikhs in Belgium illuminate several fundamental issues addressed in diaspora theory, including the challenge of preserving cultural identity amidst discrimination, the conflict between integration and assimilation, and the critical role of language and education in achieving social mobility. Although the Sikh community has made considerable strides toward integrating into Belgian society, the obstacles they encounter—especially regarding religious expression, media portrayal, and cultural preservation—highlight the intricate realities of life in the diaspora. Diaspora theory serves as a valuable lens for comprehending these experiences, as it underscores the significance of maintaining ties to one’s homeland while simultaneously managing the challenges of existence in a host nation.

Belgian authorities have implemented measures aimed at fostering an inclusive atmosphere for religious minorities, including the Sikh community. The government’s approach prioritizes secularism, guaranteeing the freedom of religion and belief for all

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<sup>40</sup> Jaipal Singh, “The Sikh Diaspora and Media Representation in Belgium: A Content Analysis of News Reports”, *Journal of South Asian Studies* 21/2 (2018), 210-212.

<sup>41</sup> Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity, and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 145.

<sup>42</sup> Kim Knott and Sean McLoughlin, *Diasporas: Concepts, Intersections, Identities* (London: Zed Books, 2010), 85-87.

citizens while upholding a neutral public space. Although this neutrality has allowed Sikhs to observe their faith without direct persecution, it has also resulted in difficulties in fully accommodating specific religious practices, such as the wearing of turbans and kirpans (ceremonial daggers).<sup>43</sup> Belgian authorities have actively participated in advisory councils and interfaith dialogues with Sikh representatives to gain a deeper understanding of their needs, despite facing various challenges.<sup>44</sup> From a societal standpoint, the Sikh community in Belgium has endeavored to preserve its cultural identity while assimilating into Belgian society. A considerable number of Sikhs are engaged in sectors such as logistics, agriculture, and commerce, thereby making substantial contributions to the local economy.<sup>45</sup> Sikh gurdwaras function not only as religious sites but also as hubs for social and cultural interactions, nurturing a sense of community and offering assistance to new migrants. Nevertheless, Sikhs in Belgium encounter sporadic discrimination, especially concerning their physical appearance, which may result in their marginalization within educational and employment opportunities. The Sikh diaspora is actively engaged in initiatives to raise awareness about their religious identity and societal contributions, underscoring the necessity for enhanced public comprehension and institutional backing.<sup>46</sup>

### **Economic Perspective of the Sikh community in Belgium**

The Sikh community in Belgium exemplifies key aspects of diaspora theory by preserving connections to their country of origin while simultaneously adjusting to and influencing their new surroundings, such as a collective sense of history and culture, economic resilience, and a dedication to enhancing the economy and cultural landscape of their host society. The Sikh diaspora in Belgium, primarily hailing from Punjab, India, exemplifies how diaspora communities can influence the economies of their host countries through skilled labor and entrepreneurial activities. Individuals migrating from Punjab have brought their specialized knowledge in areas such as textiles, metalworking, and construction, effectively integrating their expertise into Belgium's production and manufacturing sectors. The diaspora theory posits that the migration of individuals contributes not only labor but also cultural and economic resources that can rejuvenate particular areas of the host economy.<sup>47</sup> The Sikh community's proficiency in textiles, a sector of significant historical relevance in Punjab, facilitated their swift integration and enabled them to respond effectively to labor shortages within Belgium's industrial production sectors.

Diasporic communities frequently demonstrate a significant capacity for adaptability and upward mobility within the economies of their host countries. This is exemplified by the Sikh community's transition towards entrepreneurship and engagement in various

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<sup>43</sup> Christophe Jaffrelot and Darshan Tatla, *Sikhs in Europe: Migration, Identities, and Representations* (London: Routledge, 2012), 138-142.

<sup>44</sup> Open Society Foundations, "Ensuring Religious Freedom in Europe: Sikh Perspectives" (Accessed December 9, 2024), <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org>.

<sup>45</sup> European Network Against Racism (ENAR), *Forgotten in the Shadows: The Situation of Sikh Communities in Europe* (Brussels: ENAR, 2018), 12-15.

<sup>46</sup> Jasjit Singh, "The Role of Sikh Institutions in the Diaspora: A Case Study of Belgium", *Diaspora Studies* 10/1 (2017), 52-70,

<sup>47</sup> For example, Sikh immigrants from Punjab bring extensive knowledge from a textile-based economy, which has allowed them to thrive in Belgium's industrial sectors.

sectors, including food processing, hospitality, healthcare, and information technology.<sup>48</sup> Their participation in food processing, especially in halal meat production, illustrates how diasporic entrepreneurs tailor their products to cater to specific niche markets within the host nation.<sup>49</sup> Adaptability is a fundamental aspect of diaspora theory, enabling migrant communities to engage in economic activities that correspond with their skills and the demands of the host economy.<sup>50</sup> In Belgium, Sikh entrepreneurs have not only created job opportunities for fellow community members but have also made substantial contributions to local economies and promoted cross-cultural interactions through Indian cuisine and Sikh-owned enterprises.

Diaspora theory suggests that migrant populations exhibit a “dual orientation,” where they navigate their allegiance to their country of origin while also adapting to the culture of their host nation.<sup>51</sup> In the case of Belgian Sikhs, especially those from the second and third generations, there is a notable retention of cultural ties, exemplified by their ongoing participation in agriculture, a sector deeply rooted in Punjabi traditions. Despite being raised in Belgium, these younger individuals carry forward the agricultural knowledge inherited from their forebears, often manifesting this through small, family-operated farms that prioritize sustainable methods.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, regular meetings at Gurdwaras in Belgium provide a venue for community members to strengthen their cultural identity and partake in religious activities, thereby promoting continuity across generations within the diaspora. A significant element of diaspora theory is the involvement of migrant communities in the civic frameworks of their host countries to advocate for rights and enhance working conditions. In Belgium, Sikh laborers have mobilized to secure better labor standards through union activities and have participated in organizations such as the Belgian-Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BICCI) and the Punjab Farmers Association of Europe (PFAE). These efforts bolster the community’s economic and political connections between Belgium and India.<sup>53</sup> This level of engagement illustrates how diasporic groups frequently champion the cause of improved social status and labor rights, benefiting not only their own community but also all workers within the host nation.<sup>54</sup>

Younger Belgian Sikhs are actively engaging with their Sikh identity and exploring opportunities in sports and martial arts, which exemplifies a contemporary understanding of diaspora theory. As they assimilate into Belgian society, their career aspirations broaden to include sectors such as information technology, healthcare, and education, thereby enriching the economic presence of the Sikh diaspora in Belgium.<sup>55</sup> Their participation in professions

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<sup>48</sup> Scholars argue that diaspora communities adapt quickly to fill gaps in the economy, showing resilience and economic flexibility.

<sup>49</sup> Dirk Jacobs, “Diaspora Entrepreneurship: Case Studies of Belgian Indian Entrepreneurs in the Food Processing Industry”, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 34/7 (2008), 1087-1108.

<sup>50</sup> Steven Vertovec, *Transnationalism* (London: Routledge, 2009).

<sup>51</sup> Kim Knott and Seán McLoughlin, *Diasporas: Concepts, Intersections, Identities* (London: Zed Books, 2010).

<sup>52</sup> Amy Chua, “Sikh Diaspora and Agriculture: Cross-Cultural Adaptation of Farming Practices in Belgium”, *Globalization Studies* 13/1 (2012), 29–43.

<sup>53</sup> J. Singh and Sandra Ponzanesi, *The Role of Diaspora in Transnational Relations* (New York: Springer, 2016).

<sup>54</sup> David Ley, “Transnational Ties and Civic Engagement: The Sikh Diaspora in Global Perspective”, *Transnational Studies* 17/2 (2015), 112–130.

<sup>55</sup> Megan Carpentier, “IT and Health Sector Engagement of Young Sikhs in Belgium”, *Journal of Diaspora Studies* 8/4 (2020), 444–458.

that have significant social implications resonates with the core tenets of diaspora theory, highlighting the generational adaptation to local cultures while preserving connections to their cultural heritage and values.<sup>56</sup>

The Sikh community in Belgium serves as a prime illustration of the Theory of Diaspora through their significant labor contributions, economic resilience, and commitment to cultural preservation. Their involvement across diverse sectors highlights the ways in which diasporic communities enhance the fabric of their host societies while simultaneously safeguarding distinctive cultural traits that link them to their homeland. In accordance with diaspora theory, the Sikh population in Belgium exemplifies how migrant groups can act as conduits between different cultures, promoting economic, cultural, and social ties that are advantageous to both the host nation and their country of origin. The Sikh diaspora in Belgium mirrors many themes found in diaspora theory: economic contribution, occupational diversification, and the challenges of preserving cultural identity while integrating into the host society. The community's role in key sectors like textiles, agriculture, and entrepreneurship highlights their economic importance, while the tension between cultural preservation and integration continues to shape their diasporic experience.

Belgian authorities have established initiatives designed to promote the economic integration of immigrant communities, including those of Sikh descent. The Sikh population, which started to migrate to Belgium in substantial numbers in the 1970s, has been instrumental in various economic sectors, including logistics, transportation, agriculture, and retail.<sup>57</sup> Acknowledging the economic impact of migrant communities, Belgian officials have facilitated access to vocational training initiatives and resources aimed at small business development, thereby empowering Sikhs to create successful enterprises.<sup>58</sup> Challenges persist despite these initiatives. Discriminatory hiring practices and insufficient acknowledgment of qualifications earned overseas can obstruct Sikhs from obtaining higher-paying and skilled employment opportunities.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, challenges such as insufficient cultural sensitivity within workplace settings, particularly concerning Sikh religious garments, persist in impacting their economic opportunities.<sup>60</sup>

### **Political Perspective of the Sikh Community in Belgium**

The political involvement of the Sikh community in Belgium is significant when viewed through the lens of diaspora theory. Diaspora theory provides insights into how migrant communities navigate identity, integration, and political engagement in host societies. Diaspora theory often examines themes of transnational identity, cultural preservation, and integration, as well as connections to a homeland, all of which influence the political dynamics of the Sikh community in Belgium. In Belgium, Sikhs face minimal legal barriers to political participation, but social challenges persist, as evidenced by discrimination and

<sup>56</sup> Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>57</sup> Christophe Jaffrelot and Darshan Tatla, *Sikhs in Europe: Migration, Identities, and Representations* (London: Routledge, 2012), 140-145.

<sup>58</sup> European Network Against Racism (ENAR), *Forgotten in the Shadows: The Situation of Sikh Communities in Europe* (Brussels: ENAR, 2018), 18-20.

<sup>59</sup> Katharina Pistor, "Barriers to Economic Integration for Sikh Communities in Europe", *Journal of European Migration Studies* 12/2 (2019), 123-145,

<sup>60</sup> Open Society Foundations, "Economic Integration Challenges for Minority Communities: A Focus on Sikhs in Belgium" (Accessed, December 9, 2024), <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org>.

prejudice, particularly after the 2016 Brussels attacks. The theory of diaspora explains that, while integration is a key goal, diasporic communities often encounter periods of heightened scrutiny, which can hinder political engagement and heighten the need for community solidarity.<sup>61</sup> Belgian Sikhs have nonetheless made strides in mainstream politics, with individuals like Manu Beersaerts running as a candidate for the Green Party in Mechelen in 2018, and Jasbir Singh serving as a council member for the N-VA in Vilvoorde in 2012. Such engagements reflect the integration aspect of diaspora theory, where diasporic communities actively participate in host-country politics, asserting their presence and addressing community interests.<sup>62</sup>

The establishment of the Belgian Sikh Association (BSA) exemplifies the concept of maintaining a diasporic identity while adapting to the host country's cultural context. Founded in 2013, the BSA seeks to represent Sikhs in Belgium, advocating for the recognition of Sikhism and promoting integration into Belgian society. According to diaspora theory, such organizations are critical for collective identity formation and for fostering political activism, particularly when legal and social acceptance of cultural identities may be lacking in the host nation.<sup>63</sup> The BSA's advocacy work and its demonstrations in 2019 for minority rights reflect a broader commitment to social justice, as diaspora communities often engage in activism that resonates with their cultural and ethical values. This is particularly important for the Sikh community, whose values include social justice and equality, motivating political and social activism within Belgium.<sup>64</sup>

In line with diaspora theory, which addresses the complex ties between migrant communities and their homelands, some members of the Belgian Sikh community maintain connections to the political and social issues of Punjab. The Khalistan movement, which seeks a separate Sikh state, has received varied support among Sikhs in Belgium. While certain Belgian Sikhs have engaged in pro-Khalistan activism, including protests following incidents like the 2017 arrest of Jagtar Singh Johal, the diaspora remains heterogeneous in its political alignments. Diaspora theory asserts that the degree of attachment to a homeland cause often varies between generations, as younger Sikhs may feel a stronger connection to Belgian society than to the Khalistan cause. This is supported by anecdotal statements from Belgian Sikh leaders, who emphasize that while they value religious preservation, active support for the Khalistan cause could jeopardize their position in Belgian society.<sup>65</sup>

Diaspora theory also emphasizes the shifting political perspectives of subsequent generations within a migrant community. Belgian Sikhs of the second and third generations, who are more socially integrated in Belgium, tend to prioritize Belgian social and political engagement over transnational political movements like the Khalistan cause. This reflects diaspora theory's understanding that successive generations often adapt to the host country's social norms and political structures. For example, a young Belgian Sikh businessman

<sup>61</sup> Emmanuel Ma Mung, "Diaspora, Diversity, and Political Engagement", *Global Diaspora Studies* 5/1 (2015), 37–39.

<sup>62</sup> Jean Pierre, "Ethnic Minority Representation in Belgian Municipal Politics", *Journal of Belgian Studies* 12/2 (2018), 23–26.

<sup>63</sup> James Clifford, "Diasporas", *Cultural Anthropology* 9/3 (1994), 302–303.

<sup>64</sup> Gurinder Singh Mann, "The Sikh Diaspora: A Perspective", *International Journal of Sikh Studies* 18/4 (2020), 15.

<sup>65</sup> Resham Singh, interview by the author, Vilvoorde, March 2023.

expressed indifference toward supporting Khalistan, highlighting a pragmatic focus on cultural preservation within Belgium and integration into the local community rather than pursuing separatist goals. This attitude demonstrates that diasporic identities and political inclinations can be dynamic, shaped by both the host society's opportunities and the community's generational evolution.<sup>66</sup> The Sikh community in Belgium continues to face challenges in political representation, including struggles for official recognition of Sikhism as a religion, limited resources, and community size. Despite these obstacles, diaspora theory suggests that over time, as migrant communities become more established, they gain greater socio-political visibility and influence within the host country. Currently, the Sikh diaspora in Belgium remains small and in the formative stages of establishing its political presence, but as demonstrated through the BSA and various political candidacies, there is potential for this community to expand its influence in Belgium's political landscape.<sup>67</sup>

Belgian authorities have implemented measures to enhance political involvement and representation of immigrant communities, including Sikhs. Although the Sikh population in Belgium is comparatively modest, their active engagement in local and regional politics reflects their commitment to integrating into the democratic framework of the nation.<sup>68</sup> The government has implemented initiatives aimed at promoting civic engagement among minority communities, which encompass educational programs focused on voting rights and the processes for naturalized citizens.<sup>69</sup> Sikhs continue to encounter obstacles to achieving complete political integration, despite these initiatives. The insufficient acknowledgment of their community as a unique religious and cultural group has at times, impeded their capacity to push for particular policy modifications, including provisions for religious attire within public institutions.<sup>70</sup> The absence of Sikh representation in national politics highlights a more extensive issue of minority underrepresentation within Belgium's political framework. Nevertheless, leaders from the Sikh community have progressively interacted with Belgian officials and taken part in interfaith councils and multicultural discussions to enhance their visibility and impact on policymaking regarding matters such as religious freedom and anti-discrimination initiatives.<sup>71</sup>

In summary, the Belgian Sikh community's political engagement reflects a balancing act central to diaspora theory: the desire to integrate into the host society while preserving a distinct cultural and religious identity. The community's role in local politics, activism for minority rights, and limited but significant engagement with homeland-related causes like the Khalistan movement underscores the complexities of diasporic political participation and identity maintenance in Belgium.

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<sup>66</sup> Palwinder Kaur, "Generational Shifts in Political Identity", *Sikh Diaspora and Cultural Identity* (London: Sage Publications, 2021), 56–58.

<sup>67</sup> Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London: Routledge, 1996), 102.

<sup>68</sup> Christophe Jaffrelot and Darshan Tatla, *Sikhs in Europe: Migration, Identities, and Representations* (London: Routledge, 2012), 148–150.

<sup>69</sup> European Network Against Racism (ENAR), *Forgotten in the Shadows: The Situation of Sikh Communities in Europe* (Brussels: ENAR, 2018), 22-24.

<sup>70</sup> Katharina Pistor, "Political Participation of Religious Minorities in Secular States: A Study on the Sikh Community in Belgium", *Journal of European Political Studies* 14/3 (2020), 105-130.

<sup>71</sup> Open Society Foundations, "Multiculturalism and Political Inclusion in Belgium: Sikh Perspectives" (Accessed December 9, 2024), <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org>.

## Conclusion

This research, grounded in diaspora theory, reveals the nuanced and evolving dynamics of the Sikh community in Belgium as it navigates the balance between integration into Belgian society and the preservation of its distinct cultural and religious identity. Diaspora theory offers a critical lens through which to understand the challenges faced by the Sikh diaspora, particularly in terms of maintaining transnational ties to their homeland while negotiating their place within a multicultural society like Belgium. The study highlights the community's efforts to assimilate economically and socially, especially among the second and third generations, who have increasingly shifted from traditional labor sectors into business and social spheres. However, the community continues to face political marginalization, compounded by discrimination and limited recognition of Sikhism as a formal religion in Belgium. The analysis of the Sikh community's engagement with the *Khalistan movement* underscores the complex nature of diasporic identity, where transnational political movements intersect with local realities. While some groups within the community maintain their advocacy for Khalistan, the majority of Belgian Sikhs prioritize integration into Belgian society over active involvement in separatist causes. This divergence within the diaspora reflects a broader theme in diaspora theory—the diversity of political engagement and identity negotiation within migrant communities, influenced by generational differences and varying levels of attachment to the homeland.

Overall, this case study contributes to the broader understanding of immigrant integration and cultural preservation, illustrating the delicate balance between assimilation and multicultural coexistence that characterizes the Sikh experience in Belgium. The findings emphasize the importance of recognizing the heterogeneity within diaspora communities and how they navigate complex socio-political landscapes, both locally and transnationally. Through this research, we gain valuable insights into the Sikh diaspora's evolving role in Belgian society and the broader implications for immigrant communities worldwide.

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