

# Sikh Movement for the Liberation of Indian Punjab Accelerates

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*Participation of almost 208,000 Sikhs in the Khalistan referendums held in four countries to demand the liberation of Indian Punjab show that Sikhs have accelerated their movement.*

So far, four referendums have been held in UK, Geneva, Italy and Canada in which the Sikh community actively participated in a huge number and favoured an independent Khalistan.

The first Khalistan referendum was held on October 31, 2021 in the UK, in which 30,000 Sikhs participated. On December 10, last year, over 6,000 people took part in referendum in Geneva and in Italy 62,000 Sikhs participated on July 4, 2022 in referendum. But, the huge turnout for the Sikh referendum, organised by the pro-Khalistani advocacy group Sikhs For Justice (SFJ) was held on September 18, this year in Brampton city-in the Canadian province of Ontario, which depicted that the issue of the Sikh independence movement is becoming a mainstream movement, as it was an unprecedented show of power, in which more than 110,000 Canadian Sikhs participated.

During the referendum, the Sikh community raised anti-India and pro-Khalistan slogans, while more than 2,000 cars took part in the pro-Khalistan rally.

Organisers of the SFJ, and Canada's Member of Parliament for Niagra West for the Conservative party said: "Amazing turnout at Gore Meadows community centre in Brampton...attendance in Ontario for Khalistan voting has broken all previous records of voting in UK, Italy and Geneva."

In interaction with media entities, Sikh leader Gurpatwant Singh Pannun-General Counsel to SFJ displayed a proposed Khalistan Map with Shimla as its capital. He elaborated that referendum in Canada was organised in a peaceful and democratic way.

Gurpatwant Singh added: "Today, Canadians voted in the independence referendum to reclaim Shimla as the capital once Punjab is liberated from the Indian occupation. The voting in Punjab for the Khalistan referendum will start from January 26, 2023, coinciding with

India's 74th Republic Day."

Undoubtedly, the referendum campaign by the SFJ has raised awareness in a global community regarding atrocities committed against Sikhs by New Delhi. It will also further pressurise India to hold an official referendum.

Notably, Sikhs' referendum campaign is in accordance with the UN article which gives people the right to self-determination—stating that a referendum for independence in a peaceful and democratic way is the right of everyone.

Using its typical shrewd diplomatic tactics, India issued multiple requests to the Canadian government to stop the Khalistan referendum.

But, the Canadian government refused to stop the SFJ from holding a referendum and categorically informed the Indian rulers that it was held in a peaceful and democratic way within the legal parameters of Canadian Law.

And the Indian Ministry of External Affairs strongly objected to the referendum, terming it as a "farfetched exercise held and supported by politically motivated extremist elements."

Even, the Indian leading media outlets did not cover the peaceful demonstration of Sikh community and instead negatively covered the entire event.

In fact, India which, apparently, claims to be the largest democracy, acting upon the principles of liberalism and secularism has broken all the records of mistreatment of religious and ethnic minorities by acceleration of violence, genocide and massacre, perpetrated on them.

Since Narendra Modi, the leader of the fanatic ruling party BJP became the Indian Prime Minister, he started implementing ideology of Hindutva ((Hindu Nationalism). Under his regime, persecution of religious minorities such as Christians and particularly Muslims and Sikhs, including even of lower cast-Hindus have been intensified by the extremist Hindus.

In this respect, in its annual report of 2017, Human Rights Watch which conducted investigative work in 2016 pointed out Indian government's failure to control growing attacks on Dalits and religious minorities—Sikh community.

The report explained: "Authorities continue to use sedition and criminal defamation laws to prosecute citizens who criticise government officials or oppose state policies. In rare cases in 2016, police were held accountable for abuses. In April, 47 policemen were sentenced to life in prison for involvement in the killing of 11 Sikhs in 1991 in the Pilibhit district of Uttar Pradesh state. Despite calls for repeal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, soldiers continue to have immunity from prosecution when deployed in areas of internal conflict."

However, the Sikhs are fighting for a separate homeland since 1947, but the movement attained impetus by the efforts of Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, which in 1984 resulted in most brutal operation against a highly sacred Sikh religious place—the Golden Temple complex (Harmandir Sahib) in Amritsar, Punjab, which resulted in killings of thousands of Sikhs.

In this connection, Indian Army led by General Kuldeep Singh Brar, supported by troops and

armoured vehicles had broken all records of the state terrorism and extra-judicial killings through the barbaric Operation Blue Star which occurred between 3-8 June 1984, ordered by the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi to control over the Harmandir Sahib complex.

In this context, in their book, "The Sikh Struggle", Ramnarain Kumar and George Sieberer writes, "The army killed every Sikh who could be found inside the temple-complex. They were hauled out of rooms, brought to corridors on the circumference of the temple and with their hands tied behind their back, were shot in cold blood. Among the victims were many old men, women and children...However, all visitors were locked up in rooms for two days without any food, water, or electricity and were starved to death. Besides, the Harmandir Sahib remained under the army control for many months".

The brutality of the Operation was not confined to the Harmandir Sahib. Indian armed forces simultaneously attacked 40 other historical gurdwaras all over East Punjab. When Sikhs in other states came to know about the desecration of the Harmandir Sahib and massacre of their brethren, they quickly left for Punjab. New Delhi tried to stop them before they could reach Punjab. Many Sikhs were assassinated on the way and many others were arrested.

In the same year of November, two dedicated Sikhs named Beant Singh and Satwant Singh who were posted at Premier Indira Gandhi's residence in New Delhi, assassinated her. Then Hindu riots erupted in the capital and other cities in which more than 15,000 Sikhs were murdered in broad daylight by the supporters of Indira Gandhi, while police watched silently so as to provide the Hindus with free hand to massacre Sikhs.

Nevertheless, the attack on the Harmandir Sahib and genocide of Sikhs accelerated the liberation movement for Khalistan, as Bhindrenwale became a folk hero.

To maintain its control over the Harmandir Sahib, another attack was launched on the Temple in 1987, called 'Operation Black Thunder'. That time only Sikh resistance which was natural outcome of the tragedy was the main target. Afterwards, 'Operation Woodrose' and 'Operation Black Thunder-II' were conducted against the Sikh community, which also killed them extra-judicially.

After these barbaric operations, Sikhs organised themselves into an armed power in order to fight the Indian state terrorism. Many Sikhs left India to escape religious persecution. Sikhs have spread out all over the world to keep the struggle for Khalistan alive.

It is of particular attention that New Delhi and Indian intelligence agency RAW is trying to create division between the Sikh community-platforms in the USA, UK, Canada, Australia and Pakistan etc. In this context, a deliberate campaign has been launched to ban or disallow Indian diplomats or officials' entry to gurdawaras for misusing them for their ulterior motives so as to divide the Sikh community.

In a statement, Gopal Singh Chawla leader of the Khalistan movement for independence had announced that "Peace for Sikhs" has stepped up registration process for the Khalistan referendum. He has asked the other Sikhs to resign and join the movement and revealed that 11000 to 13000 Sikh have already left Indian Army without any benefits and joined Khalistan movement—have reiterated that from now onward Sikhs will not fight for India. He pointed out that the Sikhs leaders have realised that Indian military leadership always post Sikh outfits on borders to meet any operation confrontation and it is either Sikhs or low caste Hindus who lay their lives for India, from now onwards Sikhs will only lay their lives for

Khalistan.

Referring to the promise of Gandhi made with Sikhs in 1947 for Khalistan, which was never fulfilled by cunning Hindu rulers; Gopal Singh claimed that “Khalistan is the basic right if Sikh nation and Sikhs will now create Khalistan at any cost.”

Nonetheless, the timeline of various Khalistan referendums and rapid increase in the number of Sikhs who voted in favour of Independent Khalistan reflect that Sikhs have accelerated the movement for the liberation of Indian Punjab.

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