**Revival of Khalistan movement**

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Sikhs make up two percent of the Indian population, with the majority residing in the Indian state of Punjab. During the partition of the subcontinent, Sardar Patel, the Indian home minister, ensured that Sikhs were settled in other states so that they would not become the majority in Punjab. Shortly after independence, Sikhs formed the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) to struggle for Sikh rights, which led to the creation of the Akali Dal (army of immortals) to take control of gurdwaras across India. Later, Sikhs started their struggle to create a Punjabi subha, and in 1966, Punjab was divided into Punjab and Haryana, with Chandigarh becoming the capital of both states.

In 1973, at Anandpur Saheb, Sikh leaders demanded autonomy for Punjab, and the Akali Dal became a prominent political force. In 1981, Sikhs in Anandpur formally demanded a separate state, ‘Khalistan.’ In 1982, Sikhs launched a civil disobedience movement called the ‘Dharam Yudh Morcha’ (righteous campaign) for Khalistan under Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, who emerged as a prominent radical Sikh leader. At that time, Bhindranwale was heading the Damdami Taksal (an orthodox Sikh organization) opposed to the Nirankaris Sikhs, a small group that worships a living guru against the conventional majority Sikh belief. Bhindranwale and his followers demanded the revival of Sikh traditions and a separate identity for Sikhs.

[Imran will be voted into power, says Rashid](https://www.nation.com.pk/16-Apr-2023/imran-will-be-voted-into-power-says-rashid)

In 1983, Bhindranwale made the ‘Akal Takhat’ his command post within the premises of the Golden Temple. On the orders of then-prime minister Indra Gandhi, an operation was planned to eliminate Bhindranwale and his followers. Operation Blue Star was planned, and the holiest Sikh shrine was stormed by the Indian army supported by tanks and armed helicopters. Resultantly, thousands of Sikhs were killed in and around the Golden Temple. In retaliation, two Sikh bodyguards of Indira Gandhi assassinated her, leading to the worst Sikh genocide, with thousands of Sikhs massacred in anti-Sikh street violence across India. The Dal Khalsa and Damdami Taksal organizations have kept the Khalistan issue alive. In 2014, the Damdami Taksal built a memorial within the Golden Temple for Bhindranwale and other Sikhs killed during Operation Blue Star. There have been over 100 sacrilege incidents of Guru Granth Sahib in Punjab.

In 2020, the farmers protest was spearheaded by Sikh farmers against Modi’s government’s new agriculture legislation to cut subsidies. The farmers’ protest was taken as a main indicator of the Sikh revival of the Khalistan movement, which earned the support of Sikhs in the diaspora across the globe. An organization, ‘Waris Punjab De’ (heirs of Punjab), founded by actor Deep Sidhu, campaigned and supported the protest against the Modi government. The farmers’ protest, which started in 2020, united Sikhs for a common cause and only ended when the Modi government withdrew the legislation.

[Punjab Assembly elections won't be conducted on May 14, tells Sanaullah](https://www.nation.com.pk/16-Apr-2023/punjab-assembly-elections-won-t-be-conducted-on-may-14-tells-sanaullah)

After the death of Deep Sidhu in a road accident, Amritpal Singh took over the command of the organization. Soon, he rose to prominence and was referred to as ‘Bhindranwale 2.0’ in Punjab. Amritpal Singh revived the Sikhs’ demand for Khalistan. More recently, thousands of his supporters stormed a police station in Ajnala for the release of one of their comrades. After the incident, the Indian security forces have launched a country-wide manhunt to arrest Amritpal Singh, considering him a threat to Modi’s government and the revival of the Khalistan movement.

Amritpal Singh, who draws inspiration from Bhindranwale, has now become a cult figure in Punjab. Addressing a rally before his escape, he said, “We all are still slaves. We have to fight for freedom.” The Sikhs across the globe took to the streets when the Indian security forces launched an operation to arrest Amritpal Singh. The Sikh supporters pulled down the Indian flag from the Indian High Commission in London. Similar protests were also organized in front of Indian consulates in San Francisco, US, and Vancouver, Canada. There are 30 million Sikhs across the globe. A sizable population of Sikhs lives in Canada, the US, Australia, UK, and elsewhere in Europe. There are many Sikh groups internationally working for the rights of Sikhs and Khalistan. These groups include Babbar Khalsa International (BKI), Khalistan Commando Force (KCF), Khalistan Liberation Force (KLF), International Sikh Youth Federation (ISYF), and Sikh For Justice (SFJ).

[PTI Sindh opposes alliance with Jamaat-e-Islami at local level](https://www.nation.com.pk/16-Apr-2023/pti-sindh-opposes-alliance-with-jamaat-e-islami-at-local-level)

SFJ is organizing a referendum across the globe to get the opinion and support of the Sikh diaspora for an independent Sikh state, Khalistan. Recently, a referendum was held in some cities of Canada, the US, UK, and Australia, where the turnout was phenomenal. The Sikh diaspora refers to Indian Punjab as Indian Occupied Khalistan. Last year, on May 29th, famous Punjabi singer Sidhu Moosewala was reportedly murdered by RAW for airing his voice for Sikh rights and propagating for Khalistan. The rise of Hindutva, Sangh Parivar, and atrocities against Sikhs have led to the revival of the Khalistan movement. The current situation can create another 1984-like situation, the consequences of which will be disastrous for the so-called secular India.