

Khalistan and the Sikh Diaspora

Why in news?

A tableau celebrating the assassination of late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards went around the city of Brampton in Canada.

What is the background of the issue?

- The 39th anniversary of Operation Bluestar, the controversial Army action to flush out Khalistani militants from the Golden Temple in Amritsar, was observed on June 6.
- In the lead up to it, on June 4, a parade was organised in Brampton, Ontario, in Canada.
- The tableau drew strong reactions from India, with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar registering his disapproval.

What was the course of the Khalistan Movement?

- The [Khalistan movement](#) is a Sikh nationalist movement that wants to create an independent state for Sikh people, via armed struggle.
- The movement aims to carve out the North-Western Republic of India as existed from 1709 to 1849 as a separate country.
- The idea of Khalistan was first created in 1940s, remained idle but was revived by an NRI seeking a separate homeland for Sikhs.
- In early 1980s, the movement had emerged as a major separatist movement, fed mostly by bias of Indian Government against Punjab in the case of Chandigarh and sharing of Ravi-Beas waters.
- Demands for separate nation-hood for Punjab was carried out through violent protests and killings of high profile persons in Indian government.

What are the historical events responsible for Khalistan?

- **1947 Partition of India** - Independence of India was not a joyful event for Sikhs, partition left Sikhs in a lot of discontentment with regard to their traditional lands being lost to Pakistan.
- **Punjabi Suba movement** - A movement was initiated in 1955 under Akali Dal a Sikh dominated political party.
- It seeks the re-organisation of Punjab along linguist lines, seeking division of the state into Punjabi and non-Punjabi speaking areas.
- The [movement](#) resulted in trifurcation of Punjab into Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh.
- **Water sharing** - The disputes of sharing of waters of Ravi-Beas and Sutlej between the two states, Punjab and Haryana were the foundation on which the Khalistan dispute was created.

How Khalistan and Canada are connected?

- As per the 2021 Canadian census, Sikhs account for 2.1 per cent of Canada's population, and are the country's fastest growing religious group.
- After India, Canada is home to the largest population of Sikhs in the world.
- Sikhs lawmakers and officials serve at all levels of Canada's government.
- The first declaration for a separate Sikh state was made in the United States: on October 12, 1971, an advertisement in The New York Times proclaimed the birth of Khalistan.
- Today, the movement finds little resonance in the Sikh population within India.
- However, it survives in parts of the Sikh diaspora in countries like Canada, the US, and the UK.
- However, not all Canadian Sikhs are Khalistan supporters.

What is the relationship between Khalistan and the Sikh diaspora?

- The support for Khalistan within the Sikh diaspora is in its lack of connection to the ground realities of Punjab.
- For most in the Sikh diaspora, Khalistan is not a hot issue.
- The diaspora comprises people who chose to leave, including those who left during the 1980s, when the movement was at its peak.
- The Indian state was extremely hard on Khalistani separatists, with a lot of extra-judicial arrests and killings.
- The memories of those times have kept the movement alive among these people, even though the ground realities of Punjab are very different today.
- However, even within the diaspora, support has dwindled over the years.
- There is a small minority that is clinging to the past, and that small minority remains significant not because of popular support.

What is the way forward?

- The Khalistan movement is not about popular support rather it is about geo-politics.
- Countries like China and Pakistan tolerate, subsidise and assist in various ways the Khalistan movement on the basis that it is making trouble for their enemies in India.

Reference

1. [The Indian Express | Khalistan and the Sikh Diaspora](#)