

THE NATION-BUILDING PROCESS AND THE STATE'S HANDLING OF SIKH ASSERTIONS

Dr. Manjubala Saxena¹

Research Guide, Department of Political Science, Sri Satya Sai University of Technology and Medical Sciences, Bhopal, M.P, India,

Uttam Sarkar²

Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, Sri Satya Sai University of Technology and Medical Sciences, Bhopal, M.P, India,

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the dynamic relationship between the state and Sikh assertions within the context of nation-building. It explores how the state responds to Sikh expressions of identity and analyzes the implications of these responses on the broader process of nation-building. Through a multifaceted examination, this study sheds light on the intricate interplay between state policies and Sikh identity in the nation-building context.

KEYWORDS: Sikh Assertions, State Response, Nation-Building, Identity, Policy Dynamics

INTRODUCTION

The process of nation-building is a complex and multifaceted endeavor, shaped by the interplay of various social, political, and cultural forces. Central to this process is the recognition and accommodation of diverse identities within the framework of the nation-state. One such identity, deeply embedded in the historical and cultural tapestry of India, is Sikhism. Sikh assertions, encompassing a rich amalgamation of religious, cultural, and political facets, have played a significant role in shaping the discourse of nation-building in India.

This paper delves into the intricate relationship between the state and Sikh assertions within the broader context of nation-building. It seeks to unravel the dynamics of how the state responds to Sikh expressions of identity and how these responses, in turn, influence the trajectory of nation-building. The Sikh community, with its distinctive religious beliefs, historical experiences, and political aspirations, poses a unique case study through which to examine the complexities of identity politics within the Indian nation-state.

The study acknowledges that the state's handling of Sikh assertions has evolved over time, reflecting shifting political landscapes, societal changes, and policy developments. It aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the state's approaches, ranging from accommodation and recognition to contention and conflict management, and their consequences on the broader process of nation-building.

Through a multidimensional analysis, encompassing historical contexts, policy dynamics, and socio-political implications, this paper seeks to shed light on the intricate interplay between state policies and Sikh identity in the context of nation-building. By doing so, it contributes to a deeper comprehension of the challenges and opportunities presented by diversity and identity in the ongoing project of building a cohesive and inclusive Indian nation.

FACTORS OF SUCCESSFUL NATION-BUILDING

Democracy and Nationalism

A democratically elected government is a prerequisite for a nation's development, as stated at the opening of this paper. Nationalist ideology does not necessitate a certain type of

government, but there is always an element of at least implicit popular sovereignty in each nation-building effort. Since democracy is the natural form of government for nations, it may be claimed that nationalism and democracy are intertwined and mutually dependent. A nondemocratic system might be presented as a reflection of national character if an authoritarian rule is viewed as the ultimate expression of the people's desire. In order to justify non-democratic systems of governance, even those nationalisms must rely on the concept of popular sovereignty. In authoritarian regimes, public praise and acceptance are often stage-managed and used as a replacement for true democracy. 30Even so, the seeds of democratic development can be found in the rituals used to give the impression of democracy to a dictatorship. One of the main issues in a non-democratic process of nation-building is a particular nationalism's exclusive reliance on state powers, military might, and the figure of a "leader," and the exclusion of civil society from both the institutional structure and the matrix of national identity—as is the case in Russia, for example. Although the rise of democracy and civic society in Russia would be beneficial to the country's overall development, the elitist and authoritarian nature of Russian nationalism makes this a non-starter. How can we influence nation-building from the outside in order to promote democracy as a precondition for greater internal stability? This question is relevant to foreign policy. Of course, there is a hope that international relations will become more stable as a result of this approach.

The Elite Have Reached an Agreement

Consensus is particularly important when it comes to constructing a nation because of the significant role elites play. A small and well-educated group of people may appear to be simpler to persuade than a whole population of millions. However, this does not necessarily have to be the case. The majority in an elite group have vested interests, areas, or professions to represent, so reaching consensus is far from a given.

For example, elites in Russia have never had a shared sense of belonging to a shared past. In the discussion between "Westerners" and "Slavophiles," the divisive nature of this argument originates from opposing views of the Russian historical experience. Essentially, the dilemma for Russian elites was whether the modernization of the country under Peter the Great did not lead to a denial of earlier values and customs, which damaged the sense of uniqueness and antiquity among Russians. Russia's elite was split into two camps by the early 19th century, with the government's supporters in a shaky and unstable middle position. 31Before 1917, the Russian elite was never strong enough to significantly alter the country's power structure and hence never effectively challenged the monarchy's decision-making monopoly. A further justification for the requirement of elite consensus is provided by sociological study. Without it, it is doubtful that elite ideals will be broadly distributed throughout the population. The term "framing" was first used to describe the phenomenon of new social movements, but it may be used to refer to nation-building efforts in general, not only to the original initiating organisation. An essential requirement for the widening diffusion of nationalist sentiment is the idea of popular sovereignty and fundamental equality, which is a central principle in nationalism itself. Any elite who took on a national identity would have had to talk about the nation as a whole at the same time in order to further their own goals.

Institutes with Deep Meaning

Developing a new national narrative may place a high value on existing institutions and traditions, so nation-builders must take this into consideration when creating a new one.

Since any institutional structure could support or transform the national identity in one direction or another, this is an open-ended process. It could also be reformed or destroyed as a result of the process it started. As a result of this, the country's political stability could be threatened, as well as social cohesion and even fundamental disagreements regarding the nation's identity.

Remember that all public institutions have a symbolic value in the context of a national context: not only are they expected to execute particular political, social, or economic duties, but they also create the nation's visible surface. History suggests that symbolic institutions can benefit from being removed from the political arena to keep their meaning outside of political polarisation. The United Kingdom's political system is perhaps the best example of a successful separation of the symbolic from the political arena. Historically, the monarchy has played a far smaller role in British politics than it did before 1688. But the monarchy didn't stop being a symbol of national unity after losing the American War of Independence and the French Revolution. In fact, as it slowly lost political power and influence in the country, it became even more visible as a symbol of national unity.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Understatements abound, and so does the history curriculum, according to historians Kello and Wagner (2014a, 2014b, and 2014c). While it can be seen from the outside as encouraging tolerance and multi-perspectivity, it can also be seen as a form of discrimination. Then again, it could be seen as encouraging ethnocentrism. A new study shows that instructors in Estonia are expected to act as agents of the state, give students an Estonian view of history, and foster patriotism amongst them. There is widespread suspicion that history professors in Estonian Russian schools (those serving the country's Russian minority and teaching in the language of their native speakers) are traitors who lead their students in an "incorrect" or even hostile view of Russian history.

Democracy nation-building, as defined by Somit and Peterson (2005), is "a process by which outside countries seek to develop democracy in formerly undemocratic societies or to retain democracy in those countries now democratic, however at risk of losing democracy" (p. 37). The Freedom House rankings of the former USSR countries are cited by Somit and Peterson (2005), who state that "there is little indication that democratic nation-building has taken root in the ruins of the Soviet empire despite international efforts to nurture more liberal political systems and strengthen its economy."

Iqbal Ardiansyah (2017) discusses the role of national identity and cultural values in political regimes, highlighting the global presence of exceptional art and architecture. This international influence contributes to the formation of national identity, shaped by subnational, personal, and supranational factors. Indonesia, during its transition from the Netherlands-East Indies to the Republic of Indonesia, embarked on ambitious projects to express its national character, driven by the Old-Order government's commitment to nation-building and character-building principles.

The Nation-Building Process and the State's Handling of Sikh Assertions

Punjab was a major battlefield in India-Pakistan's three wars, and partition and sectarian carnage shaped the Indian government's view of Sikhs. Every nation's political destiny hinges on its general safety and existence. Punjab becomes the most significant player. The federal government accused the Punjab government of failing to deal with Sikh terrorism, failing to give enough information to its police, and having its civil services and police be biased toward different organizations as late as the 1980s. 116 The Sikh movement attracted the poor, destitute, and marginalized Punjabi society. Thus, the Punjab crisis touched Sikh economics, culture, and religious issues. Paradoxically, radicals tested India's survival in Punjab. A well-prepared and coordinated group had arrived to create a Sikh country, provisionally called Khalistan (the land of the pure). Sikhs in India say the government wants to prevent the wealthy Sikh community from gaining political influence. India has harmed and discriminated against them, they say. Failure by the state government to find a political solution prevented resolution. Thus, the disturbance was a furious reaction to the government's discriminatory and unfair

policies, which caused the state's economic collapse and Sikh identity to erode. The Indian government deemed the Anandpur Sahib Resolution (1973) and the Khalistan claim invalid political papers of an unlawful entity, whatever the consequences for the "genuine" country. Many have called Khalistan advocates fundamentalist Sikhs. The Akali agitation opposed the regime at this time. Thus, the Akali Dal sought a Sikh nation. Terrorism transcends South Asia. Globalization, open borders, unfettered information flow, improved communication, and migration have enabled terrorist organizations fighting insurgent groups to create cross-border linkages.

The Indian government realized that Sikh militancy in North India was different in quality and quantity from that in the North-East and Kashmir. Punjab has many minorities, thus punitive acts would have caused anxiety. Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, a small-time Sikh preacher, led a squad of gun-toting young men as they killed everyone in their path between 1977 and 1979. His henchmen killed innocents and politicians in the state. Diaspora Sikhs have used Punjab's instability to position themselves as "leaders" of the Sikh community despite their unfamiliarity with the state's situation. Terrorism murdered tens of thousands. In the 1980s, violent retribution for grievances became possible due to the de-democratization of politics and contempt for democracy, as well as the decline of democratic institutions.

This period rendered democratic institutions, moderate leadership, and political parties useless. The emergence of terrorism jeopardized Punjabi democracy. Politically, "terrorism" is irrational, uncivil violence. Calling someone a "terrorist" is now slander and social isolation. "Outsiders," "foreign agents," and "terrorists" disrupt a tranquil neighborhood. Terrorists operate because humans need and fear security. Indian leaders saw Punjab's upheaval as an ethnic conflict between Sikh separatists and India's territorial country, not a class war. This movement posed one of the greatest challenges to the nation's security, stability, and integrity. Terrorist organizations used gurudwaras to split Sikhs from the government. In addition to leading religious groups, they made them safe havens for themselves, afraid security forces would attack Sikhs. No attempt was made to stir public opinion against the murders or restore communal peace. " Terrorist attacks on civilians, assassinations of prominent political officials, and other types of extremist violence typified the Punjab agitation, which eventually evolved into an organised terrorist movement. The security forces in Punjab were able to eliminate terrorism as a result of the counterterrorist measures they implemented throughout the province. The use of such coercive action was not only a necessary expedient, but also a fundamental obligation and duty of constitutional government, and its absence causes enormous and avoidable suffering to the innocent and law-abiding citizens it is supposed to protect. Realistically speaking, militants' activities in Punjab were aimed at demonstrating the Indian state's inability to rule the region and therefore making it possible for the region to break away from the Indian Union. In addition, the Akali leadership's agitation for the creation of a Punjabi-speaking state was fueled by the Centre's refusal to reorganise Punjab on a linguistic basis following its recognition of the notion of linguistic states.

After two coalitions with the Congress in Punjab failed, the Akali leadership's sense of alienation increased, and the Hindus claimed that the Punjabi Suba would be dominated by Sikhs, making them a minority and subject to them. The administration also cited the fact that the Punjabi Suba would be on the border and a minor state should not be created there.

Next, the Akali Dal's working committee adopted the Anandpur Sahib Resolution on October 16 and 17, 1973, which led to more than 20,000 deaths in the early 1990s sectarian violence. To some extent, the Resolution is a manifestation of Sikh ethno-nationalism and an early catalyst for separatism in Sikh-dominated areas of India.

On November 19, 1982, the Asian Games were scheduled to begin, and a number of mediators

were delivering messages between the Indian government and the Akalis to end the unrest. Amrik Singh, the AISSF president, and Thara Singh, two close associates of Bhindranwale, were detained by Amritsar police.

In November and December 1982, thousands of Sikhs from all backgrounds were humiliated on Haryana's roads and railway stations. Air Chief Marshal Arjun Singh and Lt. Gen. Jagjit Singh Arora, two of the most senior former military men, were detained, but their identities did not affect the thorough inspection of every car's luggage. The government showed no remorse, and no members of the ruling party made a statement.

In the same year, as a "gesture of goodwill to assist talks," the government ordered the release of all arrested Akali Dal agitators. On April 4, 1983, during the rasta roko (block the roads) protest, twenty-one people were killed by police firings that were termed by independent observers as "unprovoked" and "indiscriminate" by the government. During the rasta roko agitation, the Akali Dal and the government were only in a position of physical conflict once before. At the same time, criminals and anti-social elements robbed banks and other businesses. Public criticism of the Centre government's handling of the crisis intensified as the situation worsened. After a bus was hijacked and six Hindu passengers were slain on October 5, 1983, it was forced to remove the Darbara Singh government. Rather than dissolving the Darbara Singh government, the federal government could have provided more funding to reinforce the state's police and sent more paramilitary forces. The government's view was that Bhindranwale and his supporters constituted a synthesis of religious fundamentalism and religious nationalism. Their ultimate goal was to establish a religious state. Negotiations were fruitless, and terrorism intensified to the point that drastic actions were necessary.

The venomous speech of Bhindranwale and his shooters outraged everyone save a tiny number of Sikhs. Violence in Panipat and Jagadhari, Hindi-speaking Haryana, increased at this time. On February 19th, 1984, nine Sikhs were killed as a result of this attack, and three gurudwaras were destroyed. Since 1981, the mafia and criminal groups have chosen to disguise their activities as a part of the political process. Terrorists' illicit actions were shrouded in secrecy, and the public was afraid to speak out. The Akalis and the opposition parties, especially the BJP and the CPI, were openly critical of the administration for failing to take action against the "culprits" at the time (M). He reportedly ordered the Sikh masses to buy motorcycles and revolvers so that they might massacre Hindus in Punjab. Terrorist violence claimed the lives of 75 people in 1983. On May 11, 1984, the security forces searched a 'kar sewa' truck and found weapons and ammo. In a series of talks, the Indian government and the Akali Dal exchanged positions. At each step of the negotiations, there was an upsurge in the violent activities of extremist elements in Punjab because of the lack of progress. Sikhs were alarmed by the subsequent large-scale presence of central army forces in Punjab; however, it is unclear if this was due to an attack on the Golden Temple in Amritsar (the holiest of all holy Sikh shrines) or if it was necessary as a result of the problem's initial mishandling. Finally, in June of that year, the Pakistani government realised that deceptive politics couldn't work and began to seriously consider a full-scale military response, which was finally implemented in July of that year. To the state, Longowal's leadership of the Akali Morcha was a source of encouragement for the terrorists. Between March 20th, 1981, and June 2nd, 1984, there were 561 major acts of violence, resulting in 386 deaths. On June 3, 1984, Longowal proclaimed a non-cooperation programme, which included non-payment of land loans and electricity bills as well as a ban on food grain exports from Punjab. On June 3rd, the entire province of Punjab was paralysed by a bandh. In the aftermath of the attack, the Golden Temple complex was transformed into an arsenal with advanced weapons and an abundance of ammunition. This was the period when Bhindranwale became a parallel administration and then the only government in Punjab. His

troops could get away with killing anyone he wanted them to.

The Akali Dal protested the indiscriminate killings of young people by claiming that the Punjab police's daily encounter deaths were untrue and that many of the dead were unarmed Sikh youth. Militants began using the Golden Temple as a base for their attacks.

To exert pressure on the Congress party, violent groups targeted Hindus; similarly, groups targeting Sikhs sought to reduce opposition within their own community. As a result of the military raid on the Golden Temple, Punjab was under President's Rule. In the last few days of May 1984, 70,000 army personnel and paramilitary reinforcements moved into various sections of the state, as well as the Golden Temple area, in preparation for the operation. Rather than wait for a more significant secessionist movement among the Sikhs, the Indian government waged a preemptive attack on them. The movement's strength threatened the country's unity and security. India's military prepared for the operation by conducting a large-scale military operation of this scope. 122The first week of June, 1984, saw the Army enter the Golden Temple and other key sites to expel the fanatics, and military control was installed in the state. "Operation Blue Star" against Sikh fundamentalists was probably inevitable given the escalating situation in Punjab in early 1984. The Akhand Kirtni Jath and the recently formed Akal Force escaped through back alleys in the darkness. Armed service personnel sealed off the Punjab from the rest of the world on June 1, 1984. The entire Sikh community rose in protest as tanks drove into the Golden Temple. An urgent plea to the "Sikh Panth" was made on June 2 by the Akal Takht Jathedar and the Darbar Sahib Head Granthi, Giani Sahib Singh, in a sharply worded statement. At that moment, Indira Gandhi announced in her address to the nation that "the government could no longer remain a mute spectator to the awful developments in Punjab," although she did not mention the mobilisation of the army. Foreign and Indian journalists were banned from leaving their hotels, and the only news that made it to the outside world was based on rumour and official government broadcasts.

After that, the army imposed a statewide curfew and took control of the state's communications infrastructure. Battle tanks, armoured personnel carriers, helicopter gunships, poison gas, sophisticated machine guns, and high-power grenades were all part of the army's arsenal of weapons of war. Furthermore, the press was subjected to censorship. The Golden Temple was left without water and electricity. Amritsar had had a curfew imposed on it as well, and the Golden Temple complex had been blocked off by the army. Around the Darbar Sahib, troops with tanks and heavy armour took strategic positions. As a result of protests from the then Chief Secretary K. D. Vasudeva and Punjab Police I.G. (Intelligence) H S Randhawa, the Army cancelled its "shoot to kill" orders for curfew violations. At that point, army platoons encircling the Golden Temple were fired upon from nearby dwellings, several Sarais (living quarters), and adjacent residential buildings. In one instance, at least six commanders and soldiers from the Bihar and Garhwal regiments were killed when rocket-propelled grenade launchers opened fire on the gathered troops. 123All of the Army's heavy field artillery, main battle tanks, and armoured personnel carriers were stationed around and inside the complex as though they were engaged in a war with an enemy country's army. On the 3rd of June, it placed the Golden Temple Complex under a virtual siege. The Army bombed extremist pillboxes atop the Ramgadia Bungas and the water tank behind Teja Singh Samundri Hall on the morning of June 4th. On June 5th, Darshni Deorhi's wall was blasted apart, and the "Chandni" donated to the temple by Maharaja Ranjit Singh was destroyed in the process. Additionally, Toshakhana was destroyed. The Darshni Deorhi was also engulfed in flames. The commandos were killed by Sikh insurgents who were firing from underground tunnels during the same night. 'The adversary' was attacked with tanks on June 6th in Akal Takht. More than a thousand pilgrims, mostly women and children, perished as a result of cross-firing. The 'prisoners' camp, which

was set up in a chamber of Guru Nanak Niwas, resulted in the deaths of a number of people who were unable to breathe because of the conditions.

As the storm gathered, Akali leaders such as Sant Harchand Singh Longowal, Gurcharan Singh Tohra, Balwant Singh, and a few others fled the country under various pretexts. Officers and soldiers suffered roughly 700 casualties, while civilians suffered about 5,000. This morning's fire at Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) looks to be an accident, but who was responsible remains unclear. The handwritten copies of the Granth Sahib and hukumnamas, with the signatures of various gurus, were among the library's rare books, archives, and manuscripts. The Akal Takht was nearly demolished and the sacred building suffered extensive damage as a result of the operation, which resulted in the death and destruction of many individuals and their possessions. Some nearby shopping and residential areas have suffered significant damage. After a 72-hour all-out battle against 500 Sant Bhindranwale devotees and 150 armed Babbar Khalsa men who fought to defend the shrine, the highly selected and trained soldiers were finally able to seize control of the site. The conflict erupted on the evening of June 3 and continued into the early hours of June 7 until the army gained possession of the Golden Temple. 124The army's actions were three different levels: the curfew was maintained throughout Punjab; the Golden Temple was assaulted and seized; and tens of thousands of suspected militants were detained and tortured as a result of widespread combing operations. The announcement by Longowal that a state-wide morcha would be launched on June 3, 1984, was the final justification for Army action, which prompted the Centre to make such a harsh decision.⁸⁸ Because of the killings of Bhindranwale and his associates, such as Shabeg and Amrik Singh, and their supporters, moderate Akali leaders were spared. At least 1,000 fanatics and 200 soldiers were killed in the facility during the entire operation. Sikh history's most contentious era came to an end. This began Punjab's darkest period since independence when Bhindranwale was killed in the army assault. Seizing the temple required a long and bloody battle that left many people dead and significant damage to the holy site. As a result of the attack on the Golden Temple, the Sikhs have been cut off from the rest of India.

In addition to resigning from the Congress party, the Patiala royal scion Captain Amarinder Singh also resigned from his seat in Parliament. Khushwant Singh, a seasoned journalist, surrendered his Padma Bhushan and likened the operation to the British army's Jallianwala Bagh massacre. This infuriated and disenchanted Sikhs even more when the Army's "Operation Woodrose" was started in Punjab in the following months to drive out armed fanatics from their rural hideouts. Consequently, many Sikh teenagers fled to Pakistan, where they found safety, and returned as gullible children ready to be radicalised by hard-core extremists. When the curfew in Amritsar was implemented, a considerable number of worshippers were caught unawares at the temple, according to the government's White Paper on the Punjab Agitation, published on July 10th, 1984. Before beginning the operation, not enough was done to persuade the fanatics to allow the believers, including women and children, to leave the compound. 125As a result, the terrorists had selected seventeen buildings in civilian residential areas that were between 500 and 800 metres away from the temple complex, each controlled by around ten men, "it said. Ammo was stored at these lookout and early warning positions alongside heavy machine guns and other automatic weapons. So they could always communicate with their command posts, the posts had conventional communication gear. Its 42 pages are supplemented by 123 pages in the XI annexures. This study focuses on state political and militant events from March 1981 to June 1984. The five Takht high priests took back the Golden Temple complex from the military on September 28, 1984. On October 15, 1984, the Indian Express reported around 8000 missing or arrested persons. All prominent Akali leaders were

wanted, and the All India Sikh Students Federation was suspended. Sikh bodyguards murdered Indira Gandhi on October 31, 1984. The assassination stunned, frightened, angered, and inspired her fans. After the killing was announced, Delhi and other northern Indian cities saw anti-Sikh rioting.

All recognized Sikh groups and parties boycotted the Assembly elections. The Union government created a SIT in 2015 to investigate anti-Sikh riots. The Narendra Modi administration gave the families of riot victims Rs. 5 lakh this month. Together, the extremists established a perilous web of bloodshed and terror that imperiled Punjab and the nation. The state framed the Punjab problem as a law and order issue and made steps to overcome it, including strengthening and modernizing the repressive state apparatus.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Punjab's history in the latter half of the 20th century is a complex tapestry of politics, identity, and violence. The trauma of partition left deep scars, shaping the relationship between the Indian government and the Sikh community.

The 1980s brought Sikh militancy and the demand for Khalistan, driven by socio-economic factors and cultural identity. The government's response sometimes worsened the situation.

The Sikh diaspora also played a role, adding complexity to the crisis. Punjab endured the devastating impact of terrorism, leading to the erosion of social harmony and democratic institutions. In hindsight, the events in Punjab were a significant threat to India's security and integrity, leading to strong government action, notably the Golden Temple operation. Punjab's history underscores the importance of inclusive nation-building, accommodating diverse grievances and aspirations in a pluralistic democracy. The challenges faced in Punjab mirror the broader struggle of unity amidst diversity in India's nation-building process.

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