



Khalistan Issue

For Prelims: Anandpur Sahib Resolution, India's independence, Partition, Maharaja Ranjit Singh's, Nankana Sahib.

For Mains: Khalistan Issue.

Why in News?

Amritpal Singh, a follower of the Sikh militant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale who has been preaching the Idea of Khalistan Separatist Movement in Punjab for a few months, has managed to escape.

What is the Khalistan Movement?

- The Khalistan movement is a fight for a separate, sovereign **Sikh state in present day Punjab (both India and Pakistan).**
- The movement was crushed in India following [Operation Blue Star \(1984\)](#) and **Operation Black Thunder (1986 and 1988)**, but it continues to evoke sympathy and support among sections of the Sikh population, especially in the Sikh diaspora in countries such as Canada, the UK, and Australia.

What is the Timeline of the Khalistan Movement?

- **India's Independence and Partition:**
 - The origins of the movement have been traced back to [India's independence](#) and subsequent [Partition along religious lines](#).
 - The Punjab province, which was divided between **India and Pakistan**, saw some of the **worst communal violence and generated millions of refugees**.
 - Lahore, the capital of [Maharaja Ranjit Singh's](#) great Sikh Empire, went to Pakistan, as did holy Sikh sites including [Nankana Sahib](#), the birthplace of **Guru Nanak**, the founder of [Sikhism](#).
- **Demand for Autonomous Punjabi Suba:**
 - The political struggle for greater autonomy began around the time of Independence, with the **Punjabi Suba Movement** for the creation of a Punjabi-speaking state.
 - In 1966, after years of protest, **Punjab was reorganized to reflect the Punjabi Suba demand**.
 - The erstwhile Punjab state was trifurcated into the Hindi-speaking, Hindu-majority states of Himachal Pradesh and Haryana, and the **Punjabi-speaking, Sikh-majority Punjab**.
- **Anandpur Sahib Resolution:**
 - In 1973, Akali Dal, the major force in the new Sikh-majority Punjab, released a list of demands that would guide the political path among other things, the **Anandpur Sahib Resolution demanded autonomy** for the state of Punjab, identified **regions that would be part of a separate state**, and sought the right to frame its own internal constitution.
 - While the Akalis themselves repeatedly made it clear that they were not demanding secession from India, for the Indian state, the **Anandpur Sahib Resolution** was of grave

concern.

▪ **Bhindranwala:**

- Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, a charismatic preacher, soon positioned himself as **“the authentic voice of the Sikhs**, in contrast to the Akali Dal’s leadership.
- It is believed that Bhindranwale was propped up by Sanjay Gandhi to stand against the **Akalis for Congress’s political benefit**. However, by the 1980s, Bhindranwale had grown so much that he **started to become a problem for the government**.

▪ **Dharam Yudh Morcha:**

- In 1982, Bhindranwale, with support from the Akali Dal’s leadership, launched a civil disobedience movement called the **Dharam Yudh Morcha**. He took up **residence inside the Golden Temple**, directing demonstrations and clashes with the police.
- The movement was geared towards the **demands first articulated in the Anandpur Sahib Resolution**, which addressed concerns of the **state’s rural Sikh population**. However, amidst growing religious polarization, sectarian violence, and Bhindranwale’s own harsh rhetoric against Hindus, **Indira Gandhi’s government declared the movement tantamount to secession**.

▪ **Operation Bluestar:**

- Operation Blue Star began on 1st June 1984, but due to fierce resistance from Bhindranwale and his heavily armed supporters, the Army’s operation became larger and more violent than had been originally intended, with the use of tanks and air support.
- **Bhindranwale was killed and the Golden Temple was freed of militants**, however it gravely wounded the Sikh community around the world.
- It **also galvanised the demand** for Khalistan.

▪ **Aftermath of Operation Bluestar:**

- In October 1984, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was assassinated by two Sikh bodyguards, triggering the **worst communal violence since Partition**, where **over 8,000 Sikhs were massacred** in massive anti-Sikh violence.
- A year later, Sikh nationalists based in Canada blew up an Air India flight killing 329 people. They claimed that the **attack was to “avenge Bhindranwale’s killing”**.
- Punjab saw the worst violence, becoming the hub of a long-drawn-out insurgency that lasted till 1995.
- The bulk of the population turned against the militants, and **India headed towards economic liberalisation**.

What is the Status of the Khalistan movement today?

- Punjab has long been peaceful, but the movement lives among some Sikh communities overseas.
- The diaspora is composed **predominantly of people who don’t want to live in India**.
- These people include **many who remember the bad old days of the 1980s**, and thus the support for Khalistan remains stronger there.
- The deep-rooted anger over Operation Blue Star and the desecration of the Golden Temple continues to **resonate with some in the newer generations of Sikhs**. However, even as Bhindranwale is viewed as a martyr by many and the 1980s remembered as dark times, this has not **manifested into tangible political support for the Khalistan cause**.
- There is a small minority that is clinging to the past, and that small minority remains significant not because of popular support, but rather because **they are trying to keep up their political influence with various political parties** both from the left and the right.

[Source: IE](#)