

**Gurharpal Singh and Giorgio Shani, *Sikh Nationalism: From a Dominant Minority to an Ethno-Religious Diaspora***

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Gurharpal Singh and Giorgio Shani aspire to present a “comprehensive analytical appraisal of Sikh nationalism,” arguing that earlier studies have not adequately employed “frameworks of ethnicity and nationalism” (2) to understand the development of Sikhism. Covering the time of the Sikh gurus to the present, Singh and Shani summarize theories of nationalism and their applicability to the study of Sikhism, contending that the Sikh religious minority in India and the Sikh ethnoreligious diaspora community have in interaction created a “deterritorialized nationalism” (1).

Singh and Shani assess how theories of ethnicity, nationalism, ethno-symbolism, and various postcolonial approaches have been applied to the Sikh case, highlighting what they view as the limitations of existing narratives of Sikh identity (e.g., Sikhs as solely a religious community). Using Anthony D. Smith’s “ethno-symbolic approach,” they delineate what they term the Khalsa “ethnie” and the forces in India and the diaspora that have shaped Sikh nationalism.

In chapter 2, Singh and Shani quickly sketch the early development of Sikhism from the fifteenth century to the 1890s, critiquing existing approaches to Sikh historiography. Sikh studies scholars may find this discussion somewhat oversimplified, but the analysis strengthens as Singh and Shani begin to assess Sikhism in the colonial period. Chapter 3 charts the rise of modern Sikh nationalism from the 1890s to the 1930s. Singh and Shani argue that Sikh nationalism is unique in that it arose at the same time as both Hindu and Muslim religious nationalisms were developing, with each group deeming the Punjab a strategic region and thereby relegating the Sikhs to minority “other” status. They contend that previous studies have overstated the role of elites in shaping Sikh identity and emphasize the importance of addressing caste, views on gender and patriarchy, and sectarian groups to understand the evolution of Sikh nationalism. Chapter 4 focuses on the crucial pre-partition period from 1940 to 1947, when the Congress Party and the Muslim League maneuvered to define what British India would become at the end of British colonial rule. Marginalized in their Punjab homeland, some Sikhs began to call for Khalistan, a separate state for the Sikhs. Ultimately the partition of British India into India and Pakistan divided the Punjab, amid horrific suffering and violence.

Chapter 5 covers the period from India’s independence in 1947 until 1984, presenting various ways that Sikh groups sought greater representation and autonomy within the Indian state. Singh and Shani note that India’s constitutional definition of Sikhs as a religious community delegitimized Sikh political demands as “communal.” They further chart the complex developments among different political parties and factions, and the 1966 redrawing of state boundaries on the basis of language that created the Sikh-majority state of Punjab. This linguistic reorganization of the state did not adequately address Sikhs’ calls for greater autonomy, leading to protracted political negotiations as well as the rise of militant movements. Singh and Shani argue that as law and order collapsed in the Punjab, Indira Gandhi and the Congress Party were constrained by both national and state politics that left them no room to make any meaningful concessions, setting the stage for the Indian army attack on the Golden Temple in 1984.

The attack on the Golden Temple and Indira Gandhi's assassination by her Sikh bodyguards and subsequent riots targeting Sikhs in Delhi and other areas led to thousands of deaths. In the period that followed, thousands of young Sikhs were detained on suspicion of terrorism. In chapter 6, Singh and Shani cover the tragedy and violence of this period from 1984 to 1997 and how it affected Sikh nationalism, detailing the shifting political alliances and accords among Sikh groups and the national government, as well as calls for an independent Sikh state of Khalistan. They make the case that the Indian state's strategy marginalized moderate Sikh leadership and emboldened Sikh militants, who had the support of the diaspora. They show that in the 1990s, once counterinsurgency efforts had quashed Sikh militancy, the Indian state shifted from "violent control" to "hegemonic control" through ethnic management policies designed to quell challenges. Singh and Shani argue that existing accounts of the decline of Sikh ethnonationalism are insufficient and must be seen in light of the Indian state's ethnic conflict strategies and structural fault lines within Sikh nationalism that dated to the 1920s.

Chapter 7 examines Sikh nationalism from 1997 to the present. The rise of Hindu nationalism as the legitimizing ideology of the state continues to challenge Sikh autonomy, and its assimilationist inclusivism threatens Sikhism's distinct identity. Ever-shifting coalition governments, economic mismanagement, and corruption further erode the Sikh cause. Singh and Shani see the possibility of Sikhism relapsing into Hinduism. Chapter 8 highlights the role of the Sikh diaspora in shaping the deterritorialized nationalism of Sikhism. Singh and Shani evaluate immigration patterns and demographics, as well as diaspora support for Khalistan from 1984 until the end of militancy in the Punjab in the 1990s. They note that diaspora groups have sought to preserve and protect Sikh culture and have shifted from a "politics of homeland" to a "politics of recognition" in nations such as the United Kingdom and United States since 9/11. In their conclusion, Singh and Shani call for a move away from the dominant emphasis on critical theory in Sikh studies to an approach with greater emphasis on Sikh nationalism, arguing that the Sikh case offers much for comparative studies of ethnicity, nations, and nationalism.

Each chapter is clearly structured, with useful tables, maps, and concluding summaries, though the many misspelled words from Indian and other languages throughout are an unfortunate distraction. Select chapters could be useful for advanced undergraduate courses studying ethnic and religious nationalism, though the detail and complexity of the ever-shifting landscape of political parties, factions, and coalitions in the Punjab's politics might be daunting for readers without some prior knowledge. Singh and Shani provide substantial evidence for their argument for the significance of Sikh nationalist visions in understanding Sikhism. This richly detailed study is a must-read for scholars in Sikh studies and anyone with interest in South Asian nationalism.

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