

Diplomatic Tension between India and Canada: Impacts on Migration and Diaspora Politics

Instead of pursuing truth or justice, Canada holds on to politically driven accusations, designed to distract from its own failures.

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Abstract: *The ongoing diplomatic tensions between India and Canada, triggered by allegations of India's involvement in the assassination of Khalistani activist Hardeep Singh Nijjar, underscore the increasing influence of migration and diaspora politics on foreign policy. The Sikh diaspora in Canada, one of the largest outside India, has played a significant role in shaping Canada's internal and external policies, particularly concerning India. Rooted in historical migration waves during political unrest in India, the Sikh community has achieved political and economic prominence in Canada, influencing its political discourse and foreign relations. While the Khalistan movement has diminished in India, it retains support among certain groups in Canada, leading to referendums and protests that challenge India's sovereignty and fuel diplomatic rifts. Canada's liberal stance on freedom of expression and the Trudeau government's reliance on Sikh support further complicate matters, reflecting a broader global trend where migration politics impact policy-making. This tension serves as a warning for multicultural societies globally, emphasizing the need for balanced immigration policies and adherence to international norms to foster global harmony, as advocated by former UN Secretary - General Kofi Annan.*

Keywords: Sikh diaspora, Canada - India relations, migration politics, Khalistan movement, diplomatic tensions



(Photo Source: AP)

The current diplomatic tensions between India and Canada following India's alleged involvement in the assassination of Hardeep Singh Nijjar - a notorious Khalistani terrorist - highlight how the phenomenon of migration and ethnic diasporas are increasingly determining the foreign policies of host countries. The contemporary scenario is marked with acclaimed migration as one of the topmost highly - debated political issues around the globe. People of liberal states are sharply divided among themselves in their ideologies over the issue of migration (Daniel 2024). The proponents tilt towards the idea of providing refuge to them for humanitarian considerations and global equality awareness. In contrast, the opponents argue against the same by claiming that the influx of migrants poses a serious threat to the job opportunities and survival of native groups (Constatnt 2014). The current scenario in Canada, where the Sikh diaspora has exerted tremendous influence on foreign policy, highlights this tension in the context of global migrations. The mere fact that the Sikh community has played a significant role in shaping Canada's internal and external policies (Gayer 2000), especially with respect to its ties with India, is again bringing

this conflict into focus regarding whether migration among the countries should be encouraged or not.

Currently, Canada is under a coalition government, where the Liberal Party of Canada (LPC), led by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau governs along with the New Democratic Party (NDP) led by Jagmeet Singh (Moscrop 2023). That role is particularly important for Canada - India relations as the transborder migration of the Sikh community has continued to shape the foreign policy of the host country. The Sikh presence in Canada dates back to the late 19th century. Today, they have prospered and emerged as one of the most important minority groups in the country, known for their active participation in politics and economic success. The Canadian Sikh diaspora, today with more than 700,000 Sikhs is one of the largest Sikh populations outside India, with strong concentrations in provinces such as British Columbia, Ontario and Alberta (Mohan 2024).

There are stages of Sikh migration to Canada, but a large number of Sikhs in Canada primarily came from families who immigrated during times of political turmoil in India,

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especially in the 1980s when tensions between the Indian government and Sikh separatist movements were at their height (Soutik 2024).

Though Sikh diaspora makes up a prominent part of Canadian political life, with leaders like Jagmeet Singh, chief of the New Democratic Party, and many other Sikh members of Canadian parliament as well as cabinet ministers.

This has, in turn, influenced Canadian politicians to address the Sikh community's concerns, related to human rights and religious liberty as well as India's internal politics, which in turn continues to affect Canada's foreign policy stance toward India

While the Khalistan movement has decreased significantly in India, it still holds significant support among certain radical Sikh groups within Canada. Khalistani activists in Canada, where they have been able to hold referendums and protests among other events in support of the separatist movement that India sees as a serious threat to its sovereignty, territorial integrity and national security (Das 2024). The Indian government is continuously expressing concerns about the pro - Khalistani groups being active in Canada, accusing the so - called "liberal" Canadian government of supporting extremism and terrorism. It has been urged time and again by the Government of India to crack down on such groups, but Ottawa under domestic political pressure is quite ignorant and soft on them. This attitude of the Canadian government continues to fuel the diplomatic row between India and Canada in recent times.

Canada, for its part, defends these activities on the grounds of freedom of speech and expression, enshrined in its constitution. Prime Minister Trudeau has repeatedly emphasised that Canada does not agree with the Khalistan movement but strongly believes in allowing its citizens to express their political views peacefully (Bhaumik 2024).

That view of the Trudeau government is interpreted by many as a bid to win the support of Canada's Sikh community – more than 2.1% of its population and thus a sizable voting bloc. Therefore, even if Prime Minister Trudeau wishes to strengthen relations with India and respect its territorial integrity by cracking down on Sikh separatists living in Canada, he (Trudeau) would face substantial domestic pressure from the Sikh population, resulting in a significant decline in his electoral performance.

Trudeau's reliance on the NDP, which has a very strong Sikh base, further complicates matters. Having recently survived two no - confidence motions, Trudeau cannot afford to alienate his coalition partner, Jagmeet Singh, or risk losing Sikh support ahead of the general election expected to be held next year in October. This is exacerbated by the fact that Trudeau's government highly depends on the New Democratic Party (NDP) — a party with strong Sikh support, probably playing the role of King - Maker (Agarwal 2024).

The recent diplomatic tension between Canada and India is a microcosm of a wider trend in global politics — where migration and diaspora politics are shaping home - grown policy more than ever before. Across the European continent,

concerns about immigration—often framed in terms of national security, cultural preservation, and economic impact—are unilaterally driving political discourse in society. The negative impact of the Sikh Diaspora within Canada which impacts its foreign policy is perhaps a warning or wake - up call for multicultural societies such as European states. This seems to be possibly fuelling a further backlash against immigration. This may potentially lead to stricter policies on immigration and deportation of migrants globally, disproportionately affecting African and Asian communities who often come from disadvantaged backgrounds in search of better lives.

Mr Kofi Annan, former UN Secretary - General, was a strong supporter of state sovereignty, once said in his speech that interfering in another country's internal affairs has the potential to undermine international cooperation and peace. He also said that supporting separatist groups for political benefits, generally results in "an endless cycle of retaliation" that harms the existing global multilateral cooperations for the greater good and undermines the idea of diplomacy in International Relations. Therefore, to promote the idea of *Vashudaiv Kutumbakam* and prevent any such confrontations, countries, today, must follow the directions provided by the former UN Secretary - General, Kofi Annan.

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