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Abstract

While the Sikh presence in France is fairly new, the second generation of Sikh immigrants from India has started to take roots in France. Not to mention, most of the Sikhs first arrived as refugees in continental Europe. France was not their preferred destination, however, the tightening of immigration policies in the UK contributed to the increasing strength of Sikhs in France. Apart from the linguistic challenge, France, known for its principle of laicité: a constitutional requirement for the separation of State and religion, makes it difficult for the turban clad immigrants from India to practise Sikhism. After all, a diaspora, aware of the constraints in the practice of its religious identity in a new place, needs to select what is essential in the religion and what is not to adapt and sustain the religion as per the new environment (Vertovec, 1997). On one hand, while the quest is to make place in the host society, at the same time, "the racial and cultural differences and the difficulties of integration or assimilation in the host society pave the way for the longing or excessive concern for the motherland" (Judge Paramjit S. in N.Jayaram, 2011: 45). The question that arises is: Does living in France mean redefining the Sikh identity?By carrying out qualitative research, the researcher attempts to shed light on the following questions: What are the specificities of the Sikh diaspora in France? How does the Sikh diaspora in France organize itself to maintain and actively practise its identity? How does it impact their relationship with their host country, France, as well as with their homeland, India?

Keywords: Sikh diaspora, Turbans in France, Politics of recognition, Transnationalism

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Sikhism in France: challenges and innovative practices

Shubhra Kukreti

1. Introduction:

Indian diaspora in France is a topic that has received less attention in comparison to the plethora of other diasporas present in France because of its relatively small population. Although France collects no census or other data on the race (or ethnicity) of its citizens, it is possible to put the number of Indians in France at about 80 000 - 100,000 (Williams, 2013: 7)[1]. A sizable population of what is called the Indian diaspora (according to the terminology of the Indian government) consists of twice migrants, i.e. people of Indian origin from Madagascar, Mauritius, Vietnam, etc. who are now settled in France. This diaspora which constitutes migrants from pre-independence, undivided India, who were taken to French colonies as indentured labourers, is called the old diaspora.

What is termed as the new diaspora is composed of Indian immigrants who migrated to France 1950s onwards. People from former French colonies in India who migrated to France are grouped under the umbrella term, *Pondicherians*, because Pondicherry was the largest of French territories in India, otherwise, populations from other French territories, namely, Chandernagore, Mahe, Karaikal and Yanam, migrated to France too. It should be made clear that *Pondicherians*already possessed French nationality before they moved to France since they were its colonial subjects.

The first group of people who can be factually termed immigrants from independent India trace their origins in northern India, especially Punjab. Because of the colonial ties, the United Kingdom used to be the first choice for Indians looking to move to a high wage economy in Europe. However, as a consequence of the tightening of the UK's immigration policy in the 1970s, Indians who wanted to migrate to the UK had to look for an alternative, and so, France became a "destination of substitution" (Moliner, 2012: 2)[2]. Soon after, Sikhs from India fled to France for asylum because of political turbulence in the state of Punjab caused due to their demands for a separate state. The situation worsened in the 1980s as the anti-Sikh riots of 1984 led to increased support for the *Khalistan* movement. During this period of turmoil, a large number of Sikhs left the country definitively. Those who were even remotely related to the Khalistan movement risked spending their lives in prison if they continued to live in India. As a result, there was an upsurge in Sikh immigration to France.

Unlike Pondicherians, since this population was largely non-francophone, government services were not an option for them. Christine Moliner, who is one of the leading French scholars to study the Sikh community in France, states in her research that a lot of first-generation, legal Sikh migrants are small-scale entrepreneurs engaged in ethnic business: Indian restaurants, shops (either selling Indian grocery items or women's clothing), textile warehouses, plumbing and building enterprises. She addresses the aspect of clandestinity in Sikh migration to France and writes that because of the lack of documents, Sikhs have been particularly mobile in Europe and are not necessarily tied to one country, often maintaining links with diaspora Sikhs in the UK, Germany, the Netherlands and elsewhere (Moliner, 2007: 134)[3]. In France, some of them greatly benefitted from the general legalisation programs in the 1990s. Once legalized, they continue to employ illegal migrants from their region of origin (Moliner, 2009)[4]. Her study also reports that since the asylum seekers were mostly men, benefitting from the family reunification law, they managed to bring over their wives and children to France in the 1990s. At present, the Sikh population is estimated around 25,000 (Moliner, 202**0)**[5]. Although a "destination of substitution" in the beginning, France has now become home to the children of Sikh immigrants. These immigrants had left India partly for economic reasons, but mostly due to the political turmoil in their homeland where they thought the religious and linguistic rights guaranteed to them under the Constitution of India were insufficient for their community to thrive. In that moment of crisis, they may have felt they rightly chose France, a country which is popular world over as the land of "liberty, equality and fraternity". However, only a few years later, to be precise, in 2004, they experienced a rather harsh encounter with another binding principle of the French Republic: *laicit*é.

The term *laicit*é stands for secularism and implies a separation of state and religious activities. After the tumultuous episodes of religious discrimination in France against minorities like

the protestants and the jews, the law of 1905[6] was brought into effect to retain the freedom of public institutions, especially educational institutions, from the influence of the Catholic Church. The separation of the Church and the State is the basic premise of *laïcité*. In 21st century France, when it is one of the most preferred destinations of immigration and hosts people of all faiths, *laïcité* applies not only to the separation of the State and the Church but is also a conceptual tool to deter the interference of other non-catholic religions in public life. As an expansion of the principle of *laïcité,* the law on secularity and conspicuous religious symbols in schools[7] bans wearing religious symbols in French government-operated primary and secondary schools. As per the law, schools directly operated by the national or local governments must not endorse or promote any religion and should be neutral spaces where children can learn freely, away from political or religious pressures. Promoted in the media as the "French headscarf ban", the law applies equally to all religious signs including the Christian cross and the Jewish kippah. Notwithstanding its conceptual merits, the law seems to have gone against the very French grain of "liberty and equality". Intending to encourage integration amongst different ethnic/ religious communities by prohibiting any signs that accentuate the differences, the law has actually impeded the integration of minority communities in a multicultural France. Receiving little media coverage, Sikhs in France have been hit badly by the law banning religious symbols in schools.

Sikhs have to maintain uncut hair because in their religion, allowing one's hair to grow naturally is a symbol of respect for the perfection of God's creation. As a part of their custom, they wear a headgear called a *dastar* or *pagri*. Their turban is a symbol of honour, self-respect, courage, spirituality, and piety. It is one of the five articles of faith (*Kesh, Kangha ,Kara, Kachera, Kirpan*)[8] that the tenth and the last Guru, Guru Gobind Singh asked his disciples, *Khalsa Sikhs* (warrior Sikhs) to wear at all times. Therefore, renouncing the headgear, for a Sikh, is seen as a blasphemous act. For this reason, the ban on turbans in schools has become a serious issue for the Sikhs in France as the situation gives an impression of making a choice between being French and being Sikh. The question therefore arises :

Does living in France mean redefining the Sikh identity?

Based on a qualitative research conducted with a Sikh immigrants' association called *Sikhs de France*, this article attempts to shed light on the following questions:

- What are the specificities of the Sikh diaspora in France?
- How does the Sikh diaspora in France organize itself to maintain and actively practise their religious identity?
- How does it impact their relationship with their host country, France as well as their homeland, India?

To answer these questions, it is first important to understand the concept of diaspora.

2. Meanings of Diaspora:

In his essay, *Three meanings of 'diaspora', exemplified among South Asian religions*, Steven Vertovec proposes that a diaspora should be analyzed both in terms of its origins (reasons of dispersal) and behaviour (agency, how it operates)[9]. By drawing upon a number of works on diaspora, Vertovec encapsulates the meaning of diaspora in terms of:

1. a social form
2. a type of consciousness
3. a mode of cultural production

2.a. Diaspora as a social form :

As a social form, a diaspora is a result of migration to at least two countries. It retains a negative experience of exile from the homeland, yet it maintains a "relationship-despite-dispersal" (Vertovec, ibid.). Diaspora members create new contacts with the members of the host country but form closer ties with people of their own religion, culture and homeland. They recognise collective responsibilities, not only to the home country but to co-ethnics in far- flung places " (Werbner, 2004: 896)[10]. This process by which diaspora members create durable ties across countries is also referred to as "globalisation from below" (Ed.Baubock, Faist, 2010: 15).[11] A diaspora's impact in finance and commerce is transnational too. They send remittances to family, extended kin, or co-ethnic members in different parts of the world.

Secondly, like in finance and commerce, a diaspora's impact in politics also is transnational. In many cases, migrants make use of the greater freedoms of expression and assembly in the receiving country, support democratic values and become an alternative voice to challenge political conditions back home (Funk in Cohen and Fischer, 2018: 252)[12].The consolidation of a diaspora's powers manifests as:

1. their political clout in the host state
2. their influence in its homeland's domestic political arena
3. their engagement with third-party states and international organizations, in effect bypassing its homeland and host state governments.

It is to be noted that a diaspora's political involvement is not always welcome. There is a camp of scholars which considers diaspora's involvement in homeland politics as

participation without responsibility as the diaspora activists while involved in activities outside the country of origin are not subject to the consequences of their activities (Anderson, 1992: 11).[13]

2.b. Diaspora as Type of Consciousness:

While diaspora as a social form is defined by connections to multiple sites, but as a consciousness, a diaspora signifies a realization of not belonging completely to any of these places. Referring to the works of Arjun Appadurai, Vertovec states that the diaspora consciousness is marked by 'fractured memories' (Vertovec, 1997: 285)[14]. This multiplicity of memories is rarely presented as a 'schizophrenic deficit' (ibid.) but is rather considered a positive source of a diaspora's malleability. A diaspora consciousness is manifested, as Vertovec illustrates, in many forms including in the self questioning of religious practices. Aware of the constraints in the practice of its religious identity in the new place, a diaspora needs to select what is essential in the religion and what is not to adapt the religion as per the new environment in order to sustain it. If diaspora as a social form involves bridge building, diaspora consciousness may involve abandoning those elements which impede integration and performance in the new culture.

Again, in socio-political life, this diasporic consciousness may drive a group's politics of recognition. By recognition, I refer to the term as described in Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth'sdialogical work, *Redistribution or recognition ? A political- philosophical exchange* where recognition is explained as "positively valorizing cultural diversity; or transforming wholesale societal patterns of representation, interpretation and communication in ways that would change everyone's social identity." (Fraser, Honneth, 2003: 13)[15]. By a simple act of engagement with public spaces, a diaspora group can bring attention to their precarious situation and also work against the mainstream policies that ignore its existence.

2.c. Diaspora as a mode of cultural production:

The third meaning of diaspora as a mode of cultural production involves transnational activity not only for people but also for material items. A diaspora as a mode of cultural production, is closely linked here with the current notions of globalization, which implies, amongst other things, a worldwide flow of cultural objects such as language, images, and meanings resulting in creolizations and hybridizations as well as cultural and linguistic transformations. Diaspora as a mode of cultural production banishes the notion of cultural supremacy and becomes the source of newness. Technology plays a major role in packaging culture for transnational consumption. For example, electronic media allows for the creation of symbolic ties between the viewers of the same films in homeland and diaspora. It can also help construct a sense of religious belonging in diaspora where all traditions are difficult to follow, by allowing participation on religion based issues via online discussion groups.

Vertovec remarks that the hybridity of cultural features amongst diasporic youth can be a self conscious selection made according to the situations they encounter. This generates the question of agency in the diaspora. A diaspora is largely evoked as a victim of political circumstances, the hybridity in diaspora consciousness and social forms is seen as something that ensues as a result of geographical relocation of a group. But the notion of cultural production in diaspora suggests a deliberate cultural mixing or crossing. Vertovec evokes Pierre Bourdieu's notion of *habitus*. A *habitus* refers to a system of embodied dispositions, tendencies that people gain through experience which organize the ways in which individuals perceive the social world around them and react to it. Habitus is something structured yet open to adjustment in relation to the changing conditions of the social field. Approaching the subject of agency in diasporic cultural practice and reproduction, Vertovec stresses that a diaspora can turn to its advantage the social constraints that come with displacement.

3. Methodology:

The fieldwork for the research was conducted in the months of March- June 2018 in Ile de France. To obtain data for this research, semi structured interviews were conducted with the members of a Sikh cultural association based in Bobigny, a suburb of Paris. The association, called *Sikhs de France*, is composed of second generation Sikh immigrants in France. They focus on making their religion Sikhism better known in France and talk about the problems that Sikhs face in France, especially in educational institutions. They work under the guidance and support of *Gurudwara Singh Sabha* made up of older members in the community. *Gurudwara Singh Sabha* can be considered a religious faction of *Sikhs de France*. (Although the members never mentioned it explicitly during the interviews, it is not difficult to understand that since France has strict laws about religious associations, *Gurudwara Singh Sabha* promotes its religious activity under the banner of *Sikhs de France*, which in turn is promoted as a Sikh cultural association.) *Gurudwara Singh Sabha* is responsible for smooth execution of Sikh religious activities at the Bobigny Gurudwara and elsewhere in Paris. Together, the two associations host a mini library on Sikh literature in the premises of their gurudwara. They offer language classes so as to teach children Punjabi language in Gurmukhi script and enable them to read, understand and live up to the teachings of the Sikh Gurus and their holy book, *SriGuru GranthSahib* . They also organise*Gurbani kirtan*, *Gatka* classes, and carry out charitable work like organising free kitchen, cleaning streets, etc. Since many Indian soldiers during WWI came from the United Punjab Provinces (dominated by Sikhs) of the British India, they consider themselves as the descendants of the Indian soldiers of WWI.

The interviews with the members of *Sikhs de France* were conducted at the *mairie* of Gambetta, where they had organised their *Vaisakhi* celebrations, and on a separate day, at their Gurudwara in Bobigny. The interviews were analysed according to the data analysis methodology prescribed in *Basics of Qualitative Research, Grounded Theory Procedure and Techniques* by Anslem Strauss and Juliet Corbin (1990). It is to be noted that only the method of data analysis is borrowed from the Grounded theory method but otherwise, this research does not follow the method used in Grounded theory of building theory from scratch. Theoretical sensitivity on the topic of research was achieved prior to fieldwork by reading articles on Diaspora studies. The main findings of the research are presented and discussed in three categories which are as follows:

- Specificity of Sikh diaspora in France
- The diaspora's interpretation of Sikhism in France
- A place for India in the diasporic space of Sikhs

4. Findings:

4.a. Specificity of Sikh diaspora in France:

The Sikhs first arrived in France in the late 1970s and their migration gained momentum in the 1980s. So, they are seen as a recent addition to the French nation. However, as per the interviews, it is evident that the Sikhs do not consider themselves as new arrivals in France. According to the members of the association *Sikhs de France*, the Sikh presence in France dates back to more than hundred years. Hundred years ago, when India was a colony of the British crown, Britain and France fought the Great War against Germany. It is now common knowledge that Indian soldiers participated in World War One as a part of the British colonial forces. Since France was the battlefield, the Indian soldiers lived and fought there, at the Western Front. But the Sikhs in France highlight their presence by referring to the colonial soldiers as Sikh soldiers and not Indian soldiers.

Although soldiers from all parts of India had participated in the war, Punjab had been the most fertile ground for the recruitment of soldiers in the British Indian army. To provide an example-

"a small village in the mountains of Punjab – Dulmial in Chakwal (now in Pakistan) – sent 460 men to the First World War, the highest from a single village in South Asia. For four long years there were no young men left in Dulmial. They were all fighting at the front."[16]

This pattern of recruitment was due to the British doctrine of martial races. According to *Martial races* theory, dark complexioned, short-statured, relatively flat-nosed, and thick-lipped people were classified as inferior racial type while the *Indo Aryan*[17]racial group present in the regions of Punjab and Rajasthan which possessed physical features like tall stature; fair complexion; dark eyes; plentiful hair on face; narrow and prominent nose, was considered ideal for recruitment. The colonial soldiers fought valiantly in the war despite no previous knowledge of modern warfare. Soldiers who died during the war were cremated away from their homes as sending back the corpses was not a feasible option. As a result, the cemeteries of Indian soldiers located throughout the battlefields of WWI in France became their memorials. In the case of many Hindu and Sikh soldiers whose remains were cremated and who had no known grave, their details were recorded on collective memorials, like at the Neuve Chapelle memorial.

However, in an independent India, this memory was obliterated probably because the newly formed government saw it as a bygone colonial affair. However, Punjab has a strong oral tradition and the memory of World War One survived in the families of soldiers. Quite a few Sikh families in France are descendants of former WWI veterans. So, the memory of WWI recurs in their family memories as the knowledge of the war and the difficulties that Indians faced, the glories they won were passed on from the surviving soldiers themselves to the younger family members. For example, a Sikh man who came to France in the 1990s reported that he grew up listening to the stories of the Great War from his grandfather and his friends. He said:

We were aware of India's contribution in WWI while we were still living in India. Our grandfather used to tell us that he had gone to France to fight in the Great War. We were pretty young at that time...around six years old, we remember the things he used to tell us about France and the battles he fought there. He had a mark here (pointing towards his chest). It was because he was hit by a bullet while fighting at the Western Front. Then he was taken to London for an operation. He would tell us that the bullet was struck close to his heart, it was a close escape, but he had to stay in the hospital for some time. Then he went back to the battlefields in France, he was given a choice if he wanted to go back to India, but he decided to fight again.

For some members of the Sikh community in Paris who first arrived as refugees, their entry was (partially) made possible because their grandfathers had fought for France (and the UK) against Germany at the Western Front in the early years of war. For example, during the interview when asked about his reasons for choosing France over other European countries, the interviewee explained:

I actually first went to Italy. I have some relatives there. There, my people told me that it is relatively easier to get papers in France. In Italy, it would take forever. Then I took a lawyer's guidance. I asked my family in India to send my grandfather's medals to me. You see, I didn't know these things could be useful here. When we first went to the tribunal in France, the judge insisted that our people were a part of the British army, so we should go to Britain. Then I showed him the medals and he became happy. He immediately gave

me a yes.

It is as if for the persons wanting to get in, the memory of their family's contribution in WWI became a representation of their potential value to the French society. France has a long tradition of offering asylum to foreign refugees, and the right of asylum has constitutional value under French law. Heavily influenced by international and European law, the preamble to the French Constitution of 1946, which is incorporated into the current French constitution states that "any person persecuted in virtue of his actions in favor of liberty may claim the right of asylum upon the territories of the Republic."[18] Most certainly, these men too would have obtained asylum in France because they had to leave their homes for reasons of security. But, in their trials for the status of refugee, when they presented the medals of their respective grandfathers who were WWI veterans, it clearlycatalysed the process and rendered their case more fitting.

It is notable that at first, as a dismissal of France's ties with India, the judge had asked one of the Sikh asylum seekers to go to the UK as the Sikhs had come with British army. The reference was to a colonial responsibility of the UK towards India in a post colonial context. However, the evidence in the form of French victory medals which bear the inscription *La Grande Guerre pour la civilisation 1914-1918*[19] probably became a reminder of how the duties of the "civilisation" should not remain limited to its citizens but should be extended to everyone who fought to protect the same civilisation.

At the same time, they acknowledge that while in India, they did not have feelings of pride about their participation in the war. Talking about how he learnt about WWI, an interviewee said: *our people came to a sticky end in the French fields. (...)only the army calls them martyrs. For us, Bhagat Singh is our martyr.*

However, when the Great War is evoked in France, the meaning making of the narrative of India's participation in WWI is done in accordance with the dominant national narratives prevalent here. They proudly say they fought *en France au côté des Français.*[20]Then, Indian soldiers are presented as volunteer forces who came to rescue France. It is evident that the Sikh diaspora in France experiences, what Vertovec calls, 'fractured memories' (Vertovec, 1997: 285)[21]. However, since the diaspora has been able to utilize this multiplicity of memories, it has become a positive source of a diaspora's malleability.

Apart from their contribution in the Great War, there is another thread which the Sikhs believe shows their long standing amity with France. They highlight the friendship that Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the King of Punjab, shared with his French army general, General Allard. General Allard was the in-charge of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's elite Sikh army called *Fauj-i-Khas*. General Allard married an Indian princess from Himachal whose name was Bannou Pan Dei. Pan Dei moved to France after her marriage while General Allard continued to serve in India. The palace of St Tropez whereBannou Pan Dei lived with her children has become like a site of pilgrimage for the Sikhs in France. They make annual visits to St Tropez and organise cultural events to pay homage to the first Sikh-French ancestors.

So, the specificity of Sikh diaspora in France is that despite their recent history of immigration to France, they view and project their association with France as long standing. They make sure that when they circulate these narratives of an old association with France, the highlight of the story should be France-Sikh ties or France-Punjab ties. While doing so, they may not take into account the relationship that France shared with the rest of India outside the kingdom of Punjab.

4.b. The diaspora's interpretation of Sikhism in France :

The majority of Sikh population in France is concentrated in *Ile de France* (Paris and its surrounding suburbs). They have built five gurudwaras in and around Paris. The general perception about Sikhs in France is that theirs is an orthodox community. Sikhs, due to their appearance, are often mistaken for Arab muslims in France. Those who know that Sikhs are from India, they perceive the turbaned men as Hindus. Therefore, the challenges for Sikhs in France are manifold: to change the popular opinion, to project their religion in such a way that the French society feels happy to include them in their country, to manifest their distinction from both Indian Hindus and Arab Muslims.

In order to fulfil these objectives, the sikh diaspora conducts numerous activities. Although there are five gurudwaras in the Paris region alone, the religious events are conducted in open, public spaces to attract the attention of the French public. As note Fraser and Honneth (2003), by engaging with public spaces, a diaspora group brings attention to its precarious situation and works against the mainstream policies that ignore its existence. We see this phenomenon exemplified in the case of Sikh diaspora. Their religious events are often an opportunity to open their doors to the native public and make them learn about Sikh history. They also include academic discussions as a part of their festive celebrations to debate and discuss their rights in France.

They celebrate their festivals in the traditional manner but also add certain practices/ rituals which would show how their religious values are the same as that of the French nation. For instance, to celebrate Baisakhi, members of the Sikh community clean the streets as a part of its festivities. Through these actions, they help generate empathy, a sense of camaraderie with the French public which in turn aids in community building. *Ça fait une osmose, une union avec la nation*[22] , so said a member of *Sikhs de France*.The festival therefore becomes duty oriented- the duties of the religion are not from the civic duties. The extension of this principle of equating religious duty with civic duty can be

seen when diaspora Sikhs in the Paris region open up their gurudwaras for other immigrants. These gurdwaras are not only places of worship for the Sikh community but they have come to signify spaces of service to the French nation. As the interviewees shared, due to the influx of refugees in Paris, these gurudwaras are offered by the community as shelter homes for the refugees from the Middle East and Africa. Moreover, Gurdwaras in Paris decided to keep their doors open night and day for those stranded due to the Paris attacks in 2015. The Sikh immigrants played an active role by arranging for safe shelter, providing free cab service and blood donation camps as Paris was seized by the multiple terror attacks.

To drive their point home that their religion teaches very much the same things which the French welfare state teaches its citizens, the diaspora Sikhs also commemorate WWI soldiers as a part of their religious celebrations. This practice was started by the Sikhs from France, Belgium and Netherlands together on the occasion of the 300th anniversary of the founding of *Khalsa.* The concept of *Khalsa* originated in the times of religious persecution of the non muslims in India during the Mughal period. So, a *Khalsa* represents a Saint - soldier. Since the 300th anniversary celebrations of *Khalsa*, the Sikh community began to evoke, in every important festival, the martyrdom of the WWI Sikh soldiers. The sacrifice made by Sikh soldiers, who died in Europe far away from their homes and families while serving people of a different culture for the sake of humanity, has come to encapsulate the essence of their religion which the diaspora attempts to project faithfully.

As per a first generation Sikh immigrant at the *Gurudwara Singh Sabha*, Bobigny, their men participated in the war because the British outcried for the help of Sikhs and therefore, as a religious duty, they had to jump in the war. He stated:

Back then, the regiments were formed on the basis of religion. Like the Indian army had Muslim regiment, Sikh regiment...The English had evoked our religion. They said it's a question of your religious duties, you have to fight to save humanity. You can verify in the letters of soldiers or the reports of the British Indian army, you can find such things if you visit WWI related exhibitions. That is why, our people fought to save these people because humanity was at stake... Our people did not pull back from their duties because our religion forbade them from doing so. They continued to fight.

From the interviews, it is easy to see that Sikhs at the Bobigny Gurudwarapresent the narrative of the contribution of Indian soldiers in WWI as a heroic contribution of the Sikh community. Their war heroes are promoted as saints. Equating the soldiers with religious personalities renders them sacred but also ensures the continuation of their memory in larger group memory. Valuing the sacrifices Sikh soldiers made for France is also a way for the Sikh community to show to the French society how even today, the Sikh migrants in France hold on to the same morals which helped liberate France in the past. It also confirms that the traditional Sikh values remain pertinent even outside their original homeland.

Moreover, considering the fact that law of 2004 was first set up to prohibit the veil that Muslim girls wear, and therefore, the ban on religious symbols is often evoked in the discussions on feminism, the Sikhs make a point to demonstrate that their religious practices are not discriminatory against women. In fact, the obligation to wear turbans is only for men, women do wear turbans too, but it is a matter of choice for them.

4.c. A place for India in the diasporic space of Sikhs:

Technically, as the Sikh separatists were fighting for an independent nation and held resentment against the Indian state, they should not be included under the Indian diaspora. However, the term 'Indian diaspora' itself is quite undefined. Western scholars question the viability of the term 'Indian diaspora'. Indian diaspora subsumes such a diverse set of people and migration patterns that it challenges the very application of the term diaspora in the context of overseas Indians. But the term Indian diaspora is still used because, as notes Amba Pande :

"The idea of diversity within a common identity forms the core of India's civilisational consciousness and belonging, of which the Indian diaspora is a part. Indianness continues to exist in different forms among various groups of the Indians abroad and binds them together, irrespective of differences in regions, languages, religions, causes, consequences and period of migration, and host country variations." (Pande, 2013 : 64)[23].

So to answer the question whether Sikhs in France can be considered a part of Indian diaspora, it is necessary to know how diaspora Sikhs place themselves. As mentioned earlier, referring to Pierre Bourdieu's notion of *habitus,* Vertovec stresses that a diaspora can turn to its advantage the social constraints that come with displacement. (Vertovec, op.cit.) A *habitus* refers to a system of socio-cultural capital that people gain through life experiences. Habitus is something structured yet open to adjustment in relation to the changing conditions of the social field. It organizes the ways in which individuals perceive the social world around them and react to it.

In France, the ban on turbans in public places has become a serious issue for the Sikhs as the situation gives an impression of making a choice between being French and being Sikh. The Sikhs consider it a personal attack and a form of racial discrimination against them although the law applies for all the religions. According to one of the respondents:

Despite these regulations, for many years school administrators have accepted that school children wear symbols of various religions, such as a Christian student

wearing a cross. Now when the Christians stopped wearing their symbols, suddenly they imposed a law for other religions.

In addition, French Sikhs feel that although the law prohibits the wearing of turban in public schools, they continue to face discrimination because of their religious identity even in their workplaces. So they frame their agenda in such a way that it attracts the maximum audience. On one hand, they project themselves as Sikh diaspora because it helps them to mobilise the support of Sikhs all over the world. In the context of festive celebrations, they bring up the subject of their contribution in French society and juxtapose it with the discrimination they have had to face in India and in France. On the other hand, they have not even shrugged off their Indianness. They put forward their Indian identity when Indian State dignitaries are on a visit to France and address their grievances to them. It is to be highlighted that the Indian government's revised policies with respect to its diaspora rewards their favorable projection of homeland in the host country, the government too does not aim to abandon its diaspora members. The Sikhs organize their events but they also participate in events organized under the banner of Indian embassy in France.They try to make use of all tools which would aid their politics of recognition. Moreover, not all Sikhs in France are partisans of a separate state, therefore the community tries to strike a balance between their Sikh and Indian identities.

5. Conclusion:

This paper analyses the Sikh community in France as a religious diaspora. The findings of the study suggest that Sikhs, even after three decades of settling in France, continue to toil for their religious freedom. The visibleness of their different identity in the form of turban has been a source of contention between France and the diasporic community. Sikhs in France mobilise the memory of their contribution in WWI to repeal the ban on turbans in schools. Despite their exile from the homeland (Punjab/ India), they maintain a "relationship-despite-dispersal" (Vertovec, 1997: 279)[24]. They need India to garner greater support for their right to cultural/ religious expression in France. At the same time, they hesitate to collaborate with the larger Indian community. They assert their differences vis-a-vis other Indic religions to show that theirs is an egalitarian religion. They modify their religious practices to make their presence felt in public spaces in France.

Vertovec, in his essay, *Three Meanings of Diaspora*, mentions that there may be a self-questioning of religious practices amongst the members of diaspora. Aware of the constraints in the practice of its religious identity in the new place, a diaspora needs to select what is essential in the religion and what is not to adapt the religion as per the new environment to sustain it. It appears too early to comment whether there would be an abandoning of certain elements of the religious identity amongst Sikhs in France. The self-questioning has not happened in the current generation of Sikhs born and brought up in France. It is possibly a question of one more generation when the differences between home culture and host culture will become more stark.

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1. Williams, L.(2013) Indians in France: an increasingly diverse population. CARIM-India RR 2013/30, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, San Domenico di Fiesole (FI): European University Institute

2. Moliner, C. (2012) Indian migrants in France. CARIM-India Research Report 2012/11, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, San Domenico di Fiesole (FI): European University Institute

3. Moliner, C. (2007) L'immigrationsikheen France, Des plaines du Pendjab à la Seine-Saint-Denis. Hommes & Migrations: Diasporas indiennes dans la ville, n. 1268-1269, p. 130-137

4. Moliner, C. (2009) Invisible et modèle ? Première approche de l'immigrationsudasiatiqueen France. Rapport d'étude pour la Direction de l'Accueil, de l'Intégration et de la Citoyennetéhttps://www.immigration.interieur.gouv.fr/Archives/Les-archives-du-site/Archives-Statistiques-etudes-et-publications/Invisible-et-modele-Premiere-approche-de-l-immigration-sud-asiatique-en-France (accessed on 20th June 2018)

5. Moliner, C. (2020) Vulnerable Masculinities? Gender Identity Construction among Young Undocumented Sikh Migrants in Paris. *Religions* 11, no. 12: 680. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11120680

6. *loi du 9 décembre 1905 concernant la séparation des* Églises *et de l'État*

7. *loi n° 2004-228 du 15 mars 2004 encadrant, en application du principe de laïcité, le port de signesou de tenues manifestant uneappartenance religieuse dans les* écoles*, collèges et lycées publics*

8. Kesh (uncut hair, symbol of holiness), Kangha (comb, symbol of order and cleanliness), Kara (iron bracelet, symbol of strength), Kachera (boxer shorts, symbol of self-control and chastity), Kirpan (dagger, symbol of readiness to defend the defenseless)

9. Vertovec, S. (1997) Three Meanings of 'Diaspora', exemplified among South Asian Religions. Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies, Volume 6, Number 3, pp. 277-299

10. Werbner, P. (2004) Theorising complex diasporas:

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11. Baubock, R. &Faist, T. (Eds.) (2010) Diaspora and Transnationalism. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, p.15.

12. Funk Muller, L. (2018) Diaspora politics and politicalremittances : a conceptual reflection. In Cohen, R. & Fischer, C. (Eds.)Routledge Handbook of Diaspora Studies, New York: Taylor and Francis. Kindle Edition, p.252.

13. Anderson, B. (1992) Long distance nationalism : World Capitalism and The Rise of Identity Politics. The Wertheim Lecture 1992, Centre for Asian Studies Amsterdam.

14. Vertovec, S. op.cit.

15. Fraser, N. &Honneth, A. (2003) Redistribution or recognition? A political philosophical exchange. Verso: London, p.13

16. Basu, S. (2015) For King and Another Country: Indian Soldiers on the Western Front, 1914-18. New Delhi: Bloomsbury Publishing. Kindle Edition.

17. By the term Indo Aryan, it was implied that some communities in India were racially closer to the Europeans. Sikhs, Jats, Pathans, Rajputs, Gurkhas and Dogras were identified as the most prominent martial races, having conspicuously Aryan racial traits.

18. http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/xte.000006071193&dateTexte=&categorieLien=cid (accessed on 4th July 2018)

19. Translation:The Great War for the civilisation 1914-1918

20. Translation: (we fought) in France, standing shoulder to shoulder with French soldiers

21. Vertovec, op.cit.

22. Translation: It creates an osmosis, a union with the nation.

23. Pande, A. (2013) Conceptualising Indian Diaspora Diversities within a Common Identity. Economic & Political Weekly EPW, vol xlviII no. 49

24. Vertovec, S.op.cit.

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The GRFDT works as an academic and policy think tank by engaging national and international experts from academics, practitioners and policy makers in a broad range of areas such as migration policies, transnational linkages of development, human rights, culture, gender to mention a few. In the changing global environment of academic research and policy making, the role of GRFDT will be of immense help to the various stakeholders. Many developing countries cannot afford to miss the opportunity to harness the knowledge revolution of the present era. The engagement of diaspora with various platform need to be reassessed in the present context to engagethem in the best possible manner for the development human societies by providing policy in-put at the national and global context.