CHAPTER-III

The Sikh Diaspora and Trauma of 1984: Brian Keith Axel’s

*Nation’s Tortured Body: Violence, Representation and the Formulation of a Sikh “Diaspora”*

The events of 1984 and its representation had tremendous effects on Sikhs throughout the world and the mention of the events can still be found not only in oral interviews but in posters and calendars in Sikh homes and Gurudwaras of the diaspora. The trauma of 1984 lives in the Sikh collective memory of the Sikhs around the world, when the entire diaspora came together because of the trauma of 1984. Before 1984, Sikhs residing in foreign countries did prefer to identify themselves as part of Punjabi, Indian or South Asian diaspora. But the traumatic events of 1984 helped crystallization of the notion of Sikh diaspora among them. Sikhs residing abroad had begun identifying themselves first as Sikhs and then as Punjabis, Indians, or South Asians.

The current moot observation presented in this chapter is whether thirty four years after the 1984 incidents, the notion of the Punjabi diaspora overshadowed the meaning of Sikh diaspora. Now three decades later, the question remains that is it still the way in which people are identifying themselves or they are now beginning to identify with the Punjabi Diaspora. The value system and the nationalist perspective among the diaspora changed following Operation Bluestar and the pogrom that followed after the assassination of Mrs. Indira Gandhi. Both memory and the representation of the 1984 narrative have contributed to the upheaval that seismically affected the Sikh Diaspora. (Barrier Vol ii 44).

However, the Sikh diaspora and the call for Khalistan are two different movements that transformed the socio-political landscape of the north Indian state of Punjab in the late twentieth century. Sikh diaspora began identifying themselves more with their community rather than region and country after 1984. As the tragedies unfolded they resulted in the killing of thousands of
Sikhs following the Operation Bluestar in Amritsar and then the assassination of Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the then prime minister of India. Nonetheless, the idea of Khalistan has been revitalized and transformed by Sikhs living in India and around the world since its first emergence in the 1980s. Encounters between Sikh militants and the Indian government have to date left at least 100,000 people dead. These developments have had an indelible effect on the lives of Sikhs living around the world-numbering approximately 20 million- who are articulating the idea of Khalistan into a new transnational area of knowledge production. However, the Sikh diaspora and the call for Khalistan are two different movements that transformed the socio-political landscape of the north Indian state of Punjab in the late twentieth century. Sikh men have been routinely and indiscriminately rounded up by the policed. They have even been refused access to lawyers and have been known to be held in unacknowledged detention. Torture is commonly afflicted and some are even killed or have disappeared yet the information and knowledge about such practices remain ambiguous, secretive, and concealed.

The present literary and virtual commemorative sites like “Remembering 1984” foster the individual narratives and their tale of woes in the present times. There are other remarkable examples of visual media and memorials that have immortalized events of mass violence such as the Vietnam War, 9/11 attack, 26/11 attack in Mumbai and Gujarat riots. Photographs, sometimes, take precedence over written words because they gain legitimacy from the informational and representative dimensions associated with such clicks. They re-present and represent the event to viewers around the world. The visual presentation of these historical events carries a proof of being present in the field of action. When we study the photographic record of the 1984 tragedy, we do not limit ourselves to a graphing of what happened there and was seen and experienced. It puts forth the question of how and why, and in what way these pictures of ‘martyrs’ (though select ones) have been remembered. The photograph speaks the effect of the tragedy. This action of recording is testament through the lens of ‘subjective camera’ and helps us to assume
Creating a memorial space is not only an expression of power, of those in the government or an expansive religion organization, but digital memorialization has also reversed the approach to memorialization. The question arises whether the central museum and the memorial ‘sites’ created by Sikh diaspora succeed to evoke liberal and democratic portraits of loss and remembrance. If we see this museum and ‘site’ (Sikh Diaspora) as a counter museum then it can be approached from many different angles. The physicality of a museum encourages the idea of emotion and touch yet it remains inconsequential to those who may not ever visit it. However, sometimes these shrines become an inspiration for creating digital spaces of quiet dissent. As the digital age begins, these new methods of memorialization can fulfill the need of the mourners if they can ever be used at all. The rapid pace of technology has already put the future readability of several mediums into question. Jan Assmann sums up the power and failings of writing as a memorial tool eloquently. Moreover, writing is not only a means of immortalization it is also an aid to memory. The process of writing on something, or inscribing into something, is the oldest and despite the long history of all media is still the most salient metaphor of memory. However, although writing is both a metaphor and a medium for memory, it has also been seen as its enemy and destroyer, for the very act of writing creates the danger of eroding memory by handing over responsibility to the external medium (Assmann Cultural Memory 137).

But the concrete form of memorialization comes into being in the form of literature and films after three decades. These memorial sites, visual or verbal, zoom into our memory and make it easier to decipher the past as it becomes meaningful for the generations to come. These collective memories are those documents of the Sikh history that are preserved in different modes for future references. The media induced memory holds the key to delve into the depths of past. Even when it celebrates a liberating possibility for the observer,
it holds a challenge and the spectator or the observer feels liberated through an enriching experience. Through experiencing the vivid details of the past, one can touch the chord of history and confront the past that may have appeared as a threat to an individual until then. Moreover, such a gruesome experience worries the observer but memories induced by images or visual media releases us from the anxiety surrounding this past and gives us an urge to prevent any such future accidents. As David Williams observes in his essay “Imagined Nations: Reflections on Media in Canadian Fiction,” “would it not be possible to be enriched and challenged by the plural forms of memory, much as we are enriched and challenged by plural forms of identity?” (224).

The present chapter which is a critical analysis of Nation’s Tortured Body: Violence, Representation and the Formulation of a Sikh”Diaspora” (2001), has been divided into two segments: first, the narratives and anecdotes about the formation of Sikh diaspora after 1984; second, the analysis has been made to reflect on how a community/group/individuals and the sense of “Place”/“Site” construct and recollect narratives about the trauma of personal and collective memories. The narratives that have been encoded in the book present a tale of the Sikh diaspora and the way they have written about and experienced the state-sponsored terror, martyrdom and the formation of their experience have been put forth through communication media in the age of information. Axel relies on strong academic resources to find the facts and trace the chronology of the events that led to the partition of India into two dominions: India and Pakistan. India gained independence but Punjab had to lose more than had of the state which resulted in the loss of both life and material wealth. Documenting the 1984 tragedy, Axel hails it the new Sikh Surrender, a repeat of the history that unfolded during the partition. The study is done with the insights of Pierre Nora’s concept lieu de memoire which defines the impact of ‘place’ and ‘site’ in the construction of a particular kind of memory.

On the basis of a reading of this book, Hugh Johnston also collates the Sikh diaspora and the call for an independent Sikh State. The memory of the Maharaja is used in cartography to manifest the strong impulse of the imagined
Khalistan. Apart from this, there are pictures of the tortured bodies of Khalistani militants, and attacks on the publications of Western-educated Sikh Studies scholars which are widely shared among Sikhs and show how rampant the idea of Khalistan is among the Sikh diaspora.

It is also crucial to note that if it were not for the Sikh Diaspora after 1984, then the conflict between Indian government and Sikh militants would not have become evident to the world at large. The month following the June 1984 witnessed several tragedies. The Sikh men were seen as a threat to the state. Sikh men and militants who have been killed or made to disappear as a result of these conflicts are now valorized as martyrs in commemoration following the events. The images of these men circulated widely on the internet with historical narratives of the Sikh Quom (nation). Darshan Singh Tatla summarizes the change in Sikh diaspora community leaders post 1984 a being a “painful transition from a self-confident community with haughty discourse, to the self-defensive strategies of a vulnerable minority” (The Sikh15). Tatla privileges “the effects of Punjab upon the diaspora and the desire of those in diaspora to retain a holistic relationship with the Punjab, which he considers to be the “center” of the Sikh identity production” (The Sikh15).

The sites of memory and amnesia dedicated to a past, especially an exceedingly violent past, are of immense importance. These sites not only infuse the present with a significant meaning but also influence identity as marked in a present social condition. The triad of memory, history, and commemoration dominates not just the personal narrative but the nation narrative whose meaning is constantly changed and affected by the active confrontation with the past. This this cross-temporal significance and existence of memory through the act of remembrance and commemoration is the beginning of Nora’s argument and obliges every nation to look into their commemorated histories.

Nora’s premise does not only engage the present with the past but also points to a memorial struggle that is inevitable to the appropriation of the past into the present. As Nora’s lieux de mémoire are also a writing of history, they participate in the memorial struggles between different groups or social actors.
who are attempting to appropriate a doubtful past. And because of their immense political and cultural weightage, the meanings of these sites depicting recent turmoil seem to resurrect the past more predominantly than other memorial sites of a distant past. Also, the memory of the recent past together with the memorial sites and their social implication become effective sites of identity too.

It is to be noted that memory does not apprehend the past directly rather it recomposes it with different presents. Moreover, the creation of memory narratives in the present has to do with the fact that “we have no knowledge of past people except through present people; we have no way of knowing others except through ourselves” (Butler 471). In this sense, the past and therefore memory is always a present construction, the very ground on which, in which, with which we stand, move and otherwise interact; out of which we continually regenerate ourselves in relations with others (472). This phenomenon relates to the concept of 'intergenerational transmission' of memory: the process of communication, dialogue and appropriation of memory from one generation to another (Hite 39).

One of the mediums through which a transmission of memory from one generation to the other is made possible is that of the photographs. The study of photographs shows that photographs of “Saka Neela Tara” play as a facilitator for memory’s endurance and we realize that the past is inherent in the present through media-induced memory. The chapter has also analyzed the phenomenon of confusing fiction and reality in remembrances of Operation Bluestar and its aftermath. Even people who witnessed the events first-hand conflate actual memory with images, pictures and even fictional depictions of the event. This mass confusion over facts and actual turn of events increases as very few people now exist who possess first hand knowledge of the circumstances that unfolded back then, to the point where young people only know the fiction depicted in films, or else the clips that have been used again and again by the media. Technology has become even more pervasive. Can ephemeral memorialization
exist in an age when the most fleeting moment can be captured on camera and permanently stored in the digital realm?

The digital space of memorialization and the concept of counter-museums do not evoke the triumphalism of traditional museums, but rather take ambivalent physical forms which encourage the projection of meaning. They purposefully occupy the space of non-order between collective presentation and individual expression. Shruti Devgun’s research based on digital narratives of 1984 defines the narratives of the Punjab violence of 1984 is caught between the prevailing narrative of the Indian state, the mass media, and the counter-narrative of the militant movement for a separate state of Khalistan. Sikhs in the diaspora are doing memory work by using spaces on the internet to articulate new interpretations of 1984. As Radhika Chopra puts in “In the process, Sikh diaspora are creating “crevices,” or fractures, in dominant accounts”. She discusses how Sikhs are constructing a narrative of the events of 1984 while doing the work of emotion, communicating feelings of loss, sadness and shame. Her research shows how the digital story of 1984 constructed by members of the community is challenging “feeling rules” or breaking down “feeling walls”.

The collected cultural memories of/around 1984 are mostly dichotomous. The Sikh diaspora and their formation in foreign lands work as a counter discourse to those chords that have been constructed by the Indian government. Axel claims that the Khalistan became a generalized type of social practice and representation central to the post-1984 re-constitution of the Sikh diaspora (Axel The Diasporic 4). The reformulation of the past and the retelling of stories are alternate ways not to arrive at a definite conclusion but rather to create what may be called collected cultural memory. Sikh diaspora plays an important role in mediating and representing traumatic experiences and creating a community of descendants hinging on cultural trauma. There are emerging trends, images, and information on the internet as a space for fostering transnational social interactions. Shruti Devgun calls it “virtual web of activism”:
Here again, the role of the diaspora in evoking and perpetuating commemoration is important. Holocaust is a master ‘frame’ for genocide across the world but not everyone may be able to identify with it easily or immediately. Sikh and non-Sikh producers of websites located in Western contexts such as the US, UK, and Canada evoke the Holocaust because they are placed in a unique position of geographic and cultural proximity to the memories of Holocaust (Devgun 225).

Cultural trauma is an important resource on the internet just as it is at other sites of commemoration. Jeffrey Alexander defines cultural trauma as a recognition of an event by a collective as horrific and which leaves an indelible mark on their collective psyche thereby impacting the collective and the cultural identity in irrevocable ways (1). Trauma can become a resource for identity and a collective conscience even when individuals have not experienced the trauma directly. There is a “trauma process” or the gap between an event and its representation that is a necessary precursor for recognising and memorialising trauma. This intergenerational transmission can be understood in terms of a “postmemory” signifying a certain distance from the event and identity formation through “indirect and multiple mediation’s” (Hirsch *The Generation*

The concept of post-memory is a very important analytical contribution proposed by Marianne Hirsch in the field of Holocaust studies. The concept describes specifically the bridging of a generational gap between the “generation before”, those who experienced cultural or collective trauma, and the “generation after” or “the second generation”, who “remember only by means of the stories, images, and behaviour among which they grew up” (107).

The book, *Nation’s Tortured Body* begins with a focus on the ritual of remembrance that commemorates Operation Bluestar and how the memory of it served to ensure that it did not disappear into oblivion. However, through the book we are notified how the troubled memory was also “anticipated” in families in order to prevent young men from becoming involved with militance and be the subjects of state violence. The book encompasses the political, the
biographical, and the familial ways of commemorating and uses the historical migration of Sikhs and the advent of militancy within the community to scope the impact of history and memory on Punjab.

New communications technologies are not simply tools used by diasporas to communicate across distances. A number of Sikh groups in the diaspora declared themselves to constituting the Khalistan government in exile following the attack on the Golden Temple. There was a proliferation of Khalistani militant outfits throughout the 1980s and 1990s, including the Babbar Khalsa, the Khalistan Commando Force, the Khalistan Liberation Force, Bhindranwale Tiger Force of Khalistan, the Khalistan Liberation Organization, and the International Sikh Youth Federation (11). There are several functional Sikh groups (e.g., the Khalistan Council) which provide organization, guidance, and representation for the globalized Sikh community. There have also been numerous Sikh militant groups (e.g., Babar Khalsa, Khalistan Commando Force) that are internationally organized and attempt to coordinate military efforts in the pursuit of Khalistan. The salience of these militant groups has receded, as they were more active during the height of the militancy in the 1980s and early 1990s. While these groups are largely defunct in India, they still have a political presence throughout the diaspora, particularly where they are not proscribed by law, such as in Pakistan. Sikhs in diaspora have also mobilized print and electronic capital to propagate the notion of a Sikh homeland as Khalistan. Sikhs have also been quick to find ways of controlling knowledge produced about their faith, culture, and language to ensure knowledge production that is sympathetic to the Khalistan movement.

Sikhs have sought to reproduce many of their social norms, culture and religious values in their new homes and social networks in various cities of Britain and North America. This process has been facilitated by a strong attachment to Punjab, cheaper travel, and the increasing availability of media and communication channels, resulting in many kinds of contacts and flows of information to and from Punjab. The net result is a collective identity that, despite the local and national influences of each country, has strong Sikh and
Punjabi elements embedded in it. While globalization has enabled communities throughout the world to maintain considerable linkages with India and Punjab, it has also permitted varied and dispersed communities beyond India to establish and maintain high degrees of inter-connectedness with each other with or without reference to the Sikh homeland, however, construed. There are now multiple centers of Sikh identity production that vie for legitimacy and authenticity. Further, globalization and its attendant processes and practices increasingly subject Sikhs in the “homeland” to the hybrid culture of their family, friends, and other associates who live abroad.

Sikhs in the diaspora, especially the Sikh communities of Canada, the United States, and Britain, as mentioned in this book, have played a considerable role in the political, economic, and social life of Punjab, as well as being affected by events in the Punjab and India. Through remittances, exchange of ideas and ideology, visits, and pilgrimages to ancestral homes and kin, the Sikh diaspora communities have kept a lively cultural exchange. They have also nurtured political associations. Their richer sections have invested in a range of projects from the economic assistance to considerable donation for religious, educational, and charitable works. While the overseas Sikh communities do not meet sufficient conditions to be described as a diaspora, they do seem to have acquired certain necessary elements of a psychological and sociological nature which are essential to its consciousness. First-generation overseas migrants are obviously related to the homeland in many ways, but the events of June 1984 had a “traumatic” effect and generated considerable response and solidarity among the second and third generations. In the aftermath of the army action in the Golden Temple, the role of British and North American Sikh communities has been significant in popularizing the idea of a Sikh homeland. Support for or organizations campaigning for the Sikh state has been substantial, both material and moral. It has internationalized the issue of a Sikh homeland. Reaction to the Punjabi crisis has led to a sustained campaign for Khalistan among a section of the Sikh leadership abroad.
Brian Keith Axel, an associate professor of anthropology at Swarthmore College, has made a valiant attempt to do a psycho-analysis and a post-mortem of the thinking, motives and psychosis of the Sikh Diaspora in the western hemisphere in relation to the formation of the Sikh homeland called Khalistan by using portraits of Maharaja Duleep Singh, cartography, torture of Sikhs by the Indian government, the ‘pub’ culture in the UK, and finally some of the politics of pushing the agenda of Khalistan in the West. Based on the ethnographic and archival research conducted by Axel at several sites in India, England, and the United States, the book delineates a theoretical trajectory for thinking about the proliferation of diaspora studies and area studies in America and England. After discussing this trajectory in relation to the colonial and postcolonial movement of Sikhs, Axel analyzes the production and circulation of images of Sikhs around the world, beginning with visual representations of Maharaja Duleep Singh, the last Sikh ruler of Punjab, who died in 1893. The imagery of that particular male Sikh body situated at different times and in different ways of mediation between various populations of Sikhs around the world.

Axel’s book focuses on three aspects of the histories of displacement that constitute the Sikh diaspora: the position of Sikhs just prior to colonial rule with a unique territory, the specific manner of mobility within and after the colonial period, and the emergence of the transnational struggle to create a separate, sovereign Sikh state called Khalistan. The starting point of the diaspora is commonly accepted to have begun after the fall of the Sikh Empire in 1849 and the Empire's subsequent annexation into the British Raj. The most famous personification of the Sikh diaspora was Maharajah Duleep Singh, the last Emperor of the Sikhs who was coerced into a lifetime exile by the British Raj. Since Duleep Singh's exile, the rate of Sikh migration from Punjab has remained high; however, the destination for Punjabi Sikh migrants has changed during the ensuing 150 years. Since the annexation of Sikh state by the Britishers in 1849, many new geopolitical realities came to pass locally and around the globe.
Maharajah Duleep Singh was the first and the most famous member of the Sikh diaspora. Sikh migration from Punjab began in the second half of the 19th century when the British Raj had successfully completed its annexation of Punjab. The pivotal action in the British annexation was the lifetime exile of the then eleven-year-old Maharaja, Duleep Singh, thus making Duleep Singh the first (although unwilling) member of the Sikh diaspora. Although he was a largely secular figure who did little for the Sikh body politic, Axel (7) argues that Duleep Singh's exile has had a major impact on the Sikh diaspora psyche. Axel (8) says that Duleep Singh is the archetypal “tragic hero” figure in Sikh culture, “a King without a Kingdom, a Sikh separated from his people”; the contrast between Duleep Singh and his strong ruler father, Maharaja Ranjit Singh, makes Duleep's exile even more 'galling' for the Sikhs and results in a strong sense of communal injustice, which is a later trait in the diaspora's development. Having annexed the Sikh Kingdom, the British Raj preferentially recruited Sikhs in the Indian Civil Service and, in particular, the British Indian Army, which led to the migration of Sikhs to different parts of British India and the British Empire (9). Semi-skilled artisans were transported from Punjab to British East Africa to help in the building of railways, while many Sikhs found themselves in Australia working as Ghans, or cameleers and as laborers on cane plantations.

The book is divided into five chapters, but the main issues can be classified into three parts, perhaps the different narratives of the Sikh diaspora may provide sufficient detail of its intricacies to get an idea of the relevant issues. Sikh memory, Sikh body, and the Sikh “Sites” are three different political regimes but these regimes became connected in the aftermath of 1984 and through the violent decades of the militancy period via the circulation of political ideologies, violent deaths, financial supports a sense of disaffection and the migration of men. The book is a historical as well as an anthropological enquiry of the violence between 1849 and 1998 in the emergence of a transnational fight for Khalistan. It has been the diaspora, or histories of displacement that have created particular kind places, homeland, and commemorations.

While analyzing the community’s pain, in his essay “The Third Ghallughara”, Tatla illustrates how the community’s psyche was shattered by
the resulting trauma, how it reacted initially in anger and eventually with remorse and extended mourning which for many continues unabated. At the same time, Tatla reminds us that the community also cocooned itself with myths and memories of the genocide survival from past traumatic events which at the same time accentuated its bitterness and at times removed it from a sense of political reality, the depiction of “Third Ghallughara” being a case in point. In the first two decades following 1984, Sikhs have been deprived of any honorable means of remembering and forgetting the “critical event” as the discourse about 1984 has been heavily censored by the Indian state. The only recourse as Tatla states is “perhaps a cry in the wilderness over the lost ideals of a faith” (8). Tatla has strictly mentioned in his study “The Sikh Diaspora: The Search for Statehood” that Sikhs abroad did not constitute a diaspora until June 1984, when Indian troops attacked their most important shrine, The Golden Temple in Amritsar in Punjab. It was at that point that the Sikhs lost their sense of a secret homeland in India and became psychological exiles (209).

Commenting on Axel’s anthropological study, Hugh Johnston asserts that his research underlines themes such as globalisation and localization, transnational identities, challenges to their integrity now faced by nation-states. Within the notion of a diaspora are elements of threat and practice. The threat is perceived by the nation-state (both the home and receiving countries) (165). While giving emphasis on the idea of representation/images are vital in the contemporary existence of the Sikh diaspora, Axel’s study highlights as Johnston states:

Axel identifies four elements that figure in the present identity of the Sikh diaspora: the Sikh Maharaja who ruled Punjab before the British came, and whose image contains hope for the future; the colonial legacy with its conflicting recognition of the Sikh community and India’s territorial integrity; images circulating among Sikhs of the victims of Indian police torture, which feed a Sikh sense of persecution; and the creation of Sikh Studies centres at several North American universities, partially funded by members of the diaspora community but controversial because a vocal element in the community has judged their programs to be anti-Sikh (165).
Axel firmly insists that there are limitations to questioning the concepts of diaspora and homeland. In this way, Axel attempts to distance his work from scholars who have argued that homelands and diasporas are “imaginary”. He informs us of the odd spatiotemporal duality, wherein the homeland is understood to be a lost relic of a past time, and the diaspora a present configuration while also disputing the utility of constructing such firm distinctions. Just as boundaries are inscribed on the homeland, Axel asserts, so they are on the body. Beginning with his title, which nicely juxtaposes nation and body, Axel beautifully weaves the two together throughout the book. Through both archival and ethnographic analysis, he demonstrates how the body not only carries the markings of a socio-political and cultural change but also acts as an agent of these transformations. The politics of place, he suggests, meets the politics of body in a dialectical relation to the total body, which he identifies as the *amritdhari* man’s body, whose images were first circulated in colonial portraiture, and the tortured body, images of which began circulating on the internet as violent actions taken against Sikhs in India became common practice. The body thus signifies more than Sikh subjectivity; changes in representations of the Sikh body, Axel asserts, reflect the formation of the diaspora itself. His consideration of the relationship between the body, the diaspora, and the nation could have been enhanced by drawing more closely upon the richness of his fieldwork.

Most of the well-known stories of Indian diasporas begin with the colonial system of indenture, which is the primary factor in the mobilization and dispersal of particular groups of people from India. In this book, however, the author focuses on three aspects of the histories of displacement that constitute the Sikh diaspora: the position of Sikhs just prior to colonial rule within a unique territory, the specific manner of mobility within and after the colonial period, and the emergence of transnational struggle to create a separate, sovereign Sikh State called Khalistan. Axel beautifully summarizes these points of emergence in the introduction and develops them at length in the subsequent chapters of his book. In his analysis of the post-independence history, Axel gives innumerable examples of antagonism, hostility, and oppression not only against the Sikhs but also against other minorities of India. He argues how Sikhs
failed to get their most legitimate right from the British, who considered them as the protectors of their empire, as well as from the Hindu rulers of the postcolonial India, who promised “an area and a set up in the North wherein the Sikhs can also experience the glow of freedom.

Demonstrating a new direction for historical anthropology, he focuses on the position of violence between 1849 and 1998 in the emergence of a transnational fight for Khalistan (an independent Sikh state). Axel argues that, rather than the homeland creating the diaspora, it has been the diaspora, or histories of displacement, that have created particular kinds of places or homelands. Axel’s book evocatively charts the ways in which the crossing and marking of boundaries have shaped the foundational identities of a diasporic community, providing a graphic illustration of the multiple meanings of the idea of ‘homeland’ in our contemporary postcolonial world. It is also a brilliant ethnography of violence and loss. Tacking deftly between the politics of images and the imagination, Axel shows how the iconic social categories produced in the colonial encounter shape the struggle over the politics of place, person and body in contemporary India. Axel has also explored the pre and post history of the critical event, the storming of the Golden Temple complex by the Indian army in 1984, widely referred to as Operation Bluestar. The focus throughout is on the links between militancy and migration, two movements that transformed the socio-political landscape of the north Indian state of Punjab in the late twentieth-century, suggested by the subtitle of the book. The sacred centre at Amritsar, the transnational settlement of Southall in the U.K. and a village of the agriculturally prosperous Doaba region of Punjab: three sites that are viewed as metonymic spaces of identity transcending geographic boundaries form terrain for the argument and the structure of this book.

In a review, Anjali Gera Roy contends that Axel’s book explores new identity spaces of the post-national world: “Combining ethnographic study with archival research conducted in major Sikh sites in India, the UK and the US. His contention that diasporas and homelands are mutually constitutive completely reconfigures diaspora homeland relations” (Imperialism 1).
According to Roy, Axel’s study draws heavily on the staples of postmodern theory such as the image and the imagination, the body and displacement, in explaining the mysterious process of community formation. Through an examination of the visual representation of the Sikhs in colonial and post-colonial portraiture, Axel traces a connection between corporeality, violence, displacement, and image to unveil the process whereby the body becomes a major site of signification of the Sikh identity. Sikh difference is essentially grounded in bodily inscriptions: “the 5 Ks [kes (hair), kada(bangle), kangha (comb), kirpan (sword), kachcha (shorts)] -- that the tenth Guru Gobind Singh enjoined upon the followers of the Sikh panth” . Axel's argument is that the body of the amritdhari Sikh male that he names 'the total body,' along with the widely circulated images of the militant's tortured bodies, have together been integral to the negotiation of who is a Sikh from pre-colonial to post-colonial times. Though a series of practices might have existed for the representation of the amritdhari body as in Sikh painting, Axel locates the production of knowledge about the Sikh nation and the body in a colonial archive,

Winterhalter's portrait of the last Sikh Maharaja, Duleep Singh, commissioned by Queen Victoria. Axel maintains that portraits of Maharaja Duleep Singh reconstituted the masculinized Sikh body and transformed it into an icon of the Sikh nation, itself subject to the Crown. He juxtaposes the amritdhari Sikh male body that came to be created gradually in the image of the Maharaja's 'glorious body', with computer-generated images of tortured Sikh bodies in order to establish the body, whole and violated, as inseparable from the Sikh self-fashioning. In the struggle for Khalistan, the tortured body created a desire for the total body that becomes identified with the homeland.

As Gera Roy recapitulates Axel’s inclination towards cartography, particularly Maharaja Duleep Singh’s portraits, as a thread which weaves together a fascinating narrative around the tropes of surrender, displacement, and loss that finds an iconic representation in the last Maharaja’s portrait, which creates a longing a ‘a new space of habitation’(3). A historical anthropology of the Sikhs, after the transformation of the fight for Khalistan turns into a transnational struggle, becomes a historical anthropology of violence. Axel admits that violence is the thread that constitutes the Sikh diaspora as a
community today, converging on the notion of Khalistan. The tortured body acquires a centrality as the new construction of a diasporic imaginary “designating a fundamental and historically specific aspect of not just Sikh subjectification but the formation of diaspora itself” (122). Axel dwells on state torture to show how manifold forms of violence, wounding, and cultural representation have come together in the transnational production of Sikhs as the persecuted people.

In terms of the production of Khalistan and images of the tortured bodies of shahids, the appropriation of the Internet cannot be separated from a history of violence and sexuality that constitutes not only bodies as Sikh but also an imperative of the Sikh subject: the incitement of visuality, the incitement to build specific relations of proximity between different kinds of bodies, and the incitement to build a community within an era of globalization (Imagining Punjab 146).

The masculinized amritdhari Sikh embodies a threat to the unity of the nation-state. Axel's investigation into the machinery of state torture establishes torture as a category through which the Sikh subject is pathologized and criminalized. It is a "private scene of perverse intimacy, seduction and eroticism" that betrays not the state's power relation but “an ity and desire” (136). The amritdhari body, rather a part of the body, becomes a 'sexualized sign' of the limit of territoriarity and sovereignty of the Indian state. The transformation of violence into promise occurs in a trans-local virtual space of the internet, as computer-generated images of the tortured body are circulated through Khalistani sites across the world.

Axel deftly integrates the call for Khalistan, inseparable from any discussion of the Sikh diaspora today, into his dialectic of the nation-state and diaspora constituting one another. Khalistan is a particular effect of the relation between the nation-state and the diaspora. While Khalistan is portrayed in nationalistic discourse as a threat, the diasporic imagination converts it into a promise. Axel avers that the production of knowledge about the Sikh subject has
centered on the category demand articulated through an antagonistic relation to the Indian nation-state's celebrated national integration slogan.

But the globalization of the demand begins with Jagjit Singh Chauhan's advertisement\(^1\) in *The New York Times*, which lifts it out of India's domestic politics to a global battleground. This is the first time the Sikhs come to be represented as a world community, a dispossessed nation. From temporality, Axel moves to the production of spatiality through Khalistani practices of signification and knowledge production that threaten the Indian national boundaries. Cartography, the symbol of colonial domination, comes to be reconstituted as a tool of the 'nation'-state's power that overwrites places of the Indian past with a singular national space.

This space that the Sikh diaspora converges to, real or imaginary, crystallizes into the idea of Khalistan, the land of the pure, that all Sikhs might return to at some future date. Colonialism enters the Sikh diasporic narrative not only through the Victorian portraiture of Maharaja Ranjeet Singh but also through the displacement of Sikhs, which begins with Sikh soldiers leaving home to serve the empire and settling down wherever they moved to fight imperialist wars. Axel's focus on the Sikh surrender to the British army as the inaugural moment in the formation of the Sikh subject ejects Sikh history from the master narrative of the Indian nation. The imagining of the Sikh Diaspora cannot be contained within the imagined community of the nation, as it is both prior and anterior to the nation.

Diasporas challenge national boundaries to constitute a transnational space across various national localities. The uneasy relations between the Sikh ethnic group and the Indian nation, culminating in the Sikh separatist movement post-1984, enable Axel to point out the cracks in the Indian nation-state. But he also places the Sikh diaspora against another national narrative in which the Sikh subject represents a threat generated not through national integration but with immigration and multiculturalism.
Axel examines the first Sikh pub in Southall, The Glassy Junction, as a new iconic site to explore the changing Sikh identity spaces. He marks that The Glassy Junction “appropriates and transforms familiar and powerful signs of Englishness; the pub and the pint” *(Nation’s Torture* 104) to construct “a new sense of place” orienting the locals “toward the production of different localities, different histories (occurring elsewhere) and different forms of belonging” *(Nation’s Torture* 181). The visual iconography of The Glassy Junction inducts the Punjabi village into the English club; it might be seen as a celebration of multiculturalism or as setting up a more agonistic relation that speaks to the complexity of the constitution of the British Sikh citizen in the 1990s (184). Thus, in the virtual Punjabi space and time of The Glassy Junction, generalized forms of identity are constructed and positioned within a national frame that project into a transnational domain. The Glassy Junction is the point of convergence of the particular forms of difference ‘productive of the nation’ but also “desires and pleasure constitutive of a transnational Sikh qaum” (186). Axel is right in observing that the threat of the British Sikh subject emerges not only when the Sikhs enter the domain of consumption but also when they wrest the right for self-representation. He uses the Big City coverage of the pub to illustrate how the British alacrity to admit Southall into a domain of national consumption of multiculturalism elides The Glassy Junction’s troubling difference. The Glassy Junction scenario of representation provides a public space ‘here and elsewhere’ that complicates the character of the diasporic imaginary. It is a point upholding multiple histories of placement and displacement.

Axel’s inversion of the place-of-origin thesis makes diasporas constitute the homeland. He adds that the homeland not only means different things to different people but also creates a specificity that gives a locus to its generality. The centrality of the homeland to the formation of the Sikh subject is neither a single place nor real. The place-of-origin thesis established the Sikh subject’s anteriority that comes into tension with the fictive foundation of the nation-state. Axel proposes a different interpretation of imaginary homelands than Rushdie
and others. The social constructivist argument, Axel argues, does not account for the homeland “as a relational phenomenon inflected by historical, social and material conditions”. He disagrees with the ‘imaginary homeland’ theory by contending that the homeland does exist in the present, not in the past. His conclusion is that the problem is not so much the real or imagined nature of the homeland but the anteriority of the subject.

In this way the book is a study of the transformations in Punjab created by biotechnological revolutions, economic restructuring, persistent migrations, and political upheaval in the late 20th century. The sacred centre at Amritsar, the transnational settlement of Southall and a Doaba village become the plot centers from where stories emerge and are interlinked. Relations between the rural, the sacred and the transnational, fostered through migration, marriage, and material exchange, existed well before 1984. After 1984, however, and through the violent decades of the militancy period, these three locations became connected via the circulation of political ideologies, the migration of men, violent deaths, financial aid, and a sense of disaffection. Analysis of the linkages between transnational migration and religious revival is a key theme of this study. Conversely, the enhanced engagements of the diaspora with homeland and politics became a source of support and created sanctuary spaces for political asylum seekers and transnational migrant labour. Re-analyzing existing material and drawing on fieldwork-based interviews, as well as local history archives, the book presents a different framework to analyze the politics and social history of Punjab.

By generating and visualizing constitutive relations of people and places, cartography has not merely made possible a certain scopic recognition of the formative moment of the “new order” of territorial allegiance that is, the sight, both pleasurable and violent, of subjectification. It has also constituted the anterior difference from which, in the fantasy of the people as one, the nation-state must emerge. In national cartography, the production of particular places, thus, also facilitates a displacement dramatized in the nation-state’s fantasy as an abolishing a place in order to create a general place: the Dominion of India.
It is not uncommon for Sikhs to have maps of Panjab albeit whether it is the current Panjab in India or the old Panjab of the long gone adorning their walls somewhere in their homes and sometimes even the Gurdwaras.

The author also presents the inaccuracies of the “Restricted Zone” created by India and discusses the prohibition imposed upon the publishers of International Journal of Punjab Studies in regard to their proposed cover page with a pre–1947 Punjab map. He shows how the Sikh diaspora in the United States gave a head start to the fight for a Sikh homeland through their advertisement in *The New York Times* on October 12, 1971. Now, this homeland is being fought for by the overseas Sikh diaspora. Southhall of England is one of the many places that have changed from a little India or an Amritsar-on-Brent the past to a center for Khalistan struggle. The author correctly points out that the Sikhs started to differentiate themselves from other general categories of identity, such as Black and Asian only after the attack on the Golden Temple complex in June 1984.

After discussing the pre-colonial independent sovereign Punjab and the struggle for Indian independence, the author goes through a series of events detailing the violent discrimination practiced against the Sikh people and culminates with a call for the creation of Khalistan. This chapter on “The Homeland” is mostly devoted to what the author calls a conflict over the production of the Sikh Homeland: between Khalistanis and the Sikh studies scholars. Axel has conducted extensive research and got to the bottom of things and thus created an important piece of academic literature on the subject. Axel (*Nation’s Torture* 7) argues that the history of the Sikh diaspora, its psyche of grievance and the violence inflicted on it, means that the notion of the Sikh diaspora as a community today inevitably converges on the notion of Khalistan. Since the formation of the Khalsa, the Sikhs have defined themselves through their “separateness and have differentiated themselves philosophically and physically” from other Indian religious communities (*Nation’s Torture* 7).
This ambitious work of historical anthropology sets itself to the task of “interrogating precisely how colonialism, the nation-state, and the diaspora are related” (22). To advance our understanding and to challenge our received notions of the convoluted connections between the Sikh diaspora and Sikh nationalisms, Axel employs an array of contemporary theories; post-structuralist thinkers and body theoreticians will find much to savor here. Axel’s study may be usefully characterized as a critical (but sympathetic) etiology of the struggle for "Khalistan" that locates the origins of that struggle in the Sikh diasporic experience. Axel argues that the Khalistani movement arises not so much from an attachment to an empirical place of origin as from conceptions of an “imagined homeland” that are produced by the social construction he calls “the diasporic imaginary”:

The diasporic imaginary . . . indicates a precise and powerful kind of identification that is very ‘real,’ and specifies processes by which formations of temporality and corporeality have become integral to the relations of recognition and alienation forming the Sikh subject and the Sikh homeland (The Diasporic 154).

“Temporality and corporeality” are important here, because Axel is very concerned to analyze (a) how different cultural productions have affected the formations of the Sikh diaspora and the call for Khalistani movement, and (b) the various figurations of the (male) Sikh body as the Sikh community, and the Sikh community as the (male) Sikh body in the aftermath of 1984. Both these points are connected through the regime of the Internet as it is already mentioned that the formation of Sikh diaspora and the construction of Sikh memory, the collective memory, is primarily based on the Internet.

Examining the role of websites of 1984 and the Sikh diaspora, Shruti Devgan highlights the role of “temporal fixities and spatially rooted” memories which get highlighted through web space. The official discourse and counter narratives to the June and October-November violence of 1984 excludes “fragments, fissures or… crevices in the dominant memory” that … “currently
a search of Sikhs in the diaspora are appropriating virtual spaces as a site for a more differentiated, nuanced and diffuse commemoration than the framings that gained currency in the post-1984 period” (From the Crevices 208). The year 1984 constitutes a group trauma and trauma itself involves an inability to speak about a terrible experience immediately. Only the passage of time might yield the possibility of creating an outlet for speaking about trauma. So, crevices in the dominant memory also lie at the confluence of the flexibility and mobility associated with transnational networks virtually and the ‘time-delayed and negotiated’, assimilation and articulation of traumatic memories by second and succeeding generation of the Sikhs (209). Cyberspaces appropriated mostly by diasporic Sikhs also emerge as ‘set apart’ or sacred spaces for remembering and consolidating non-institutionalized rather than well-entrenched forms of official and separatist commemoration (209). Devgan comments on how certain spaces of memory are only created virtually rather than through museums, memorials or other physical forms. In a way, the Sikh diaspora plays a mediating role in articulating differentiated narratives through non-conventional modes of commemoration.

The first chapter of the book, “The Maharaja’s Glorious Body”, Axel examines "the ways in which the Sikh body was reconstituted and gendered by colonial violence, through a study of the production and consumption of visual representations of the last ruler of the Sikh Empire, Maharaja Duleep Singh (who was deposed by the British in 1849)” (46). "The Restricted Zone, “the second chapter is "organized around the story of Khalistan between the 1930s and the 1990s,focuses on the dialectics of the diaspora and the Indian nation-state, considering most closely formations of space and temporality” (83). “The Tortured Body”, the fourth chapter analyzes how “a political artifact of state violence the tortured body has become a central element in processes of a diasporic imaginary, designating a fundamental, and historically specific, an aspect of not just Sikh subjectification but the formation of diaspora itself (122). The chapter deals with the repercussions of the June 1984 massacre at the Golden Temple in Amritsar, and the anti-Sikh pogroms that "spontaneously"
broke out after Indira Gandhi’s October 1984 assassination at the hands of her Sikh bodyguards. The last chapter "Glassy Junction, examines the creation of a specific kind of dialectic (of membership, consumption, and production) between the Sikh diaspora and the British nation-state" by scrutinizing the experiences of the Sikh community in the Southall section of London (161).

The next chapter of the book, “The Homeland”, reflects on the fraught relations between the Western academy and Sikh nationalisms: “The conflicts between Sikh studies and Khalistanis suggest another history of the formation of the homeland, situated within a diasporic landscape, moving within and between North America, Europe, and South Asia. The chapter traces one genealogy of these conflicts, demonstrating their relation to procedures of the postwar U.S. nation-state and their implications for the production of knowledge of the Sikh diaspora” (Nation’s Torture 201). While the emphasis will be retained on ethnographic examples in the areas of the Sikh diaspora, commemoration, and cartography throughout the chapter, the argument is arranged around two thematic fields: the framing of the relationship between art and memory (including discourse on trauma) in the contemporary discourse of Sikh diaspora, the conceptualization of diaspora as a social tool with the capacity to produce particular subjectivities and subjective memory. Despite the widely recognized historic specificities and the fluctuating cultural makeup of diverse diaspora formations, scholarly research has for a considerable time prioritized the various cultural, political, and social forces that solidify social imaginations of places of origin (the ancestral home) and the collective destinies binding a people to these places. Acknowledging the possible range of diasporic junctures and the distinct forms of collective social imagination resulting from them, typologies of the diaspora have nonetheless often prioritized the significance of (post)traumatic loss and suffering as one of the key foci for diasporic memories. It is in reference to such notions of collective suffering, loss, and trauma, as Brian Axel notes, that the concept of diaspora has acquired a profoundly homogenizing effect and has been turned into “a totality with a particular kind of aesthetic force that inspires the unification of particular segmented groups (29). This
relates directly to how suffering, as a social experience, is written into the broader public narratives of identity formation.

As per Axel, “Diasporic claims to a definitive form of relation between a globally dispersed Sikh people fall into place the relations of that people, “in the diaspora,” are traced back to the homeland itself” (Nation’s Torture 199). The ongoing struggles in Punjab, the struggles of many to create ‘Khalistan,’ and the propagandist image of torture that Sikh community was facing at the hands of Indian government had a great impact on the diasporic Sikhs. It was believed that “The only chance of survival of the Sikhs as a separate community is to create a state in which they form a compact group, where the teaching of Gurmukhi is compulsory, and where there is an atmosphere of respect for the traditions of their Khalsa forefathers” (Khushwant Singh vol ii 305).

In “Ambivalence of the Khalistan”, Axel writes “It is an ambivalence that may be characterised by a repulsion at the spectacle of the tortured body and a desire to visualise and return to not just the scene of violation but the mise-en-scene of the Khalsa initiation”(421). The relation between the religiously defined amritdhari and the politically defined shahid can be further specified as a relation between a total body and fragmented body. The fragmented body of the shahid has a close connection to the total body of the five K’s but directly inverts the latter’s significance. Recall the image of the total body produced by the Khalsa initiation as a pure body. The significance of the fragmented body of the shahid certainly derives in past from the Five K’s, but it is the marking of the religious body with specific wounds, piercing, and defilements that inflects it with new possibilities for political meaning. The marks of their systemized wounding generate a relationship not only among members of a Sikh community but also between Sikhs and the monstrous practices of the Indian nation-state.

The historical development of India’s counterinsurgency facilitated and encouraged the apprehension, torture, and murder of almost any Sikh man with a beard and turban. Indeed, whether or not he identifies himself as amritdhari.
Even women were tortured during that time. There are several document cases of women who, identified by police as a relative of militants, were apprehended and tortured. Police terror became a strategy of state effectivity that constitutes the tortured cities as Sikh and as evidence of the nation-state’s existence. There are several international human right organizations and documents detailed several categories of torture that can be attributed only to specialist training.

Nevertheless, the commemorative effort has been primarily gendered. “Any knowledge of the amritdhari as terrorists had become well established in police discourse. As one police officer stated “a profile was developed of who was considered to be anti-government and pro-Khalistan” (Nation’s Torture 147). The affectivity of those portraits and images of the obsessive spectacle is created through a process of ‘Substitution’ and ‘Displacement’. The total body of the amritdhari and the fragmented body of the shahid must be examined in terms of the specific process of configurations and dissemination. Police are able to identify and arrest a Sikh man based on the sight of his beard and turban alone (In nation-state’s procedure of torture). On the other hand, in Khalistan practices it is the total body’ of the amritdhari that is related to the tortured shahid: a process of opposition between unifying, or consolidating, religious system of bodily adornments the five Ks- and an irruptive system of wounds and piercings.

This makes us ask the question as to how does the next generation translate the legacies of a violent past (especially the events of 1984) into cultural production and political activism. The four hundred years of history of Sikh religion highlights the significance of martyrs (shahid). The circulation on the internet of images of tortured Sikhs along with the proliferation of discourses on torture began around 1996. The visual and narrative archives of past atrocities against Sikhs generate a unique and different experience for second and third generation of Sikhs. Khalistan.com is one of the most prominent mediating this production and circulation.
Though it is not the only websites that have been attributed to represent and provoke secessionist movement. It is easy to understand how narratives of the trauma by the previous generation might overshadow our own lives. Their stories are so important to remember and do not compare to any transcendental event that may have occurred in our own lives, nothing like what they went through anyway. Hirsch describes this experience of displacement: “Why could I recall particular moments from my parents’ wartime lives in great detail and have only few specific memories of my own childhood, I began to wonder?” (The Generation 4). Hirsch describes being crowded out by her parents’ memories: “To grow up with overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one’s birth or one’s consciousness, is to risk having one’s own life stories displaced, even evacuated, by our ancestors” (5). While describing post-memory, Hirsch privileges photographs, in private and public places, as the affective prop or artifact by which traumatic memory is transmitted across generations within and outside of family boundaries. So, it is the second-hand or the vicarious witnessing of trauma in the museum, via photographic artifacts, which might restore the particularities of the Jewish memory (and identity) where they had been erased by a forgetful and a nationalist narrative. The question remains as to whether vicarious witnessing, “seeing through another’s eyes, of remembering through another’s memories” and might collapse into seeing through one’s own eyes and remembering one’s own memories. Hirsch argues that these lines of relation and identification need to be theorized more closely in order to see how identification can resist appropriation and incorporation, resist annihilating the difference between self and other, the otherness of the other (Hirsch The Generation 11).

According to Hirsch, characteristic of post-memory of remembering is that “these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and effectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right. Post-memory’s connection to the past is thus not actually mediated by a recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation. To grow up with such overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one’s birth or one’s
consciousness, is to risk having one’s own stories and experiences displaced, even evacuated, by those of a previous generation. It is to be shaped, however indirectly, by traumatic events that still defy narrative reconstruction and exceed comprehension. These events happened in the past, but their effects continue into the present. This is the experience of post-memory and the process of its generation (Hirsch *The Generation* 107). The consequence of such a relation between the past and the present is the maintenance and perpetuations of a living connection between a generation which foster group identity and defines relations with an out-group.

Different questions arise when the concept of post-memory is exported from Holocaust studies in other fields, such as post-communism, where the dynamics of memory produce a mode of remembering totally impossible in the original framework: that of nostalgic remembering. Such a conceptual relocation might be risky since “post-memory is not a movement, method, or idea;…but a structure of inter- and trans-generational transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience. It is a consequence of traumatic recall but (unlike post-traumatic stress disorder) at a generational remove (Hirsch 106). Yet, prosthetic memory and post-memory are at odds - cultural encounters with the past become inevitable when designing a museum that recalls a traumatic experience, nostalgic remembering seems to share with post-memory the affectionate register, the imaginative investment, projection, and creation of memories, the multiple mediations that produce affiliation between generations and reinforce a sense of continuity within community’s identity.

Historical violence committed against Sikhs becomes a central theme of Sikh youth’s political claims for social justice in the diasporic context, especially as a response to Canadian multiculturalism, citizenship, and securitization. In particular, they look at how the violence of the ‘homeland’, particularly 1984, and individual and collective experiences of migration and difference are articulated through ambivalent effects and collective grievances. The political collectivities emerging from these affective dislocations and feelings of racial melancholia are charted out on a shifting, self-reflexive terrain.
It demonstrates the idea that both locally and globally speaking, youth are neither affected in quite the same ways nor are their agendas necessarily carried by the same demands. How myths of the past and metaphors of today are interlocked in this specific form of cultural and artistic performance.

Using a narrative approach, Axel argues that the concept of bricolage can help us better understand the ways in which diasporic Sikh youth in London synchronize and harmonize memories of a violent past on the one hand, and the day to day challenges of the present moment. The Sikh youth has found solace through the medium of social media as well as other social organizations around the world to carry out a struggle for Khalistan, the Sikh community in Canada, the US and the UK has been very active in galvanizing support for the cause of an independent state where Sikhs could live with peace and honour. It is interesting that there are hundreds of social network sites/blogs run by Sikhs and their Diaspora in India and the entire globe. The Sikh youth castigated by the Indian government and RAW have migrated online to vent their views on the Khalistan issue. Few examples are the Khalistan.net, Sikhfreedom.com, Sikhlionz.com and the RoadtoKhalistan.net, these nets give a complete history, culture and struggle of this great community, urging the international community and Sikhs all around the globe to rally for their genuine cause. A strategy of the struggle for making Khalistan a reality is also tabulated for the benefit of the youth.

Diasporic sublime after June 1984, Sikhs around the world communicated the traumatic event of Operation Bluestar, June 6 every year. Commemorating this day of genocide evokes significant debates about the status of the Sikh martyrs and by default, it reconstitutes the tensions of the ongoing conflicts between Sikhs and the Indian state. These sorts of transnational struggles in effect attract the attention of a community. Axel calls it ‘diasporic sublime’ which offers a means for addressing this moment of diasporic conflict in relation to intersecting histories of Sikh religious practice, the valorization of martyrs, and the proliferation of images of corpses on Sikh websites.
The diasporic sublime in signifying a fleeting movement of connection between the not-lived and the lived, grounds the potentiality of an emergent yet ‘fictive’ diasporic people to address itself in a way that does not stem unilaterally from an empirical place of origin but, rather, emerges through complex interconnections, negotiations and conflicts that are not merely mediated through but generated by internet technologies (Axel The Diasporic 216).

The digital or virtual spaces represent the life of an individual far better than the physical or the spatial space. But again the items or sentiments presented are restricted to what can be conveyed on a webspace. The potential individualization of such small memorial sites, however, has been hampered by the rise of social networking site such as Facebook, twitter etc. Digital space continues to grow and change. As technological change continues at an ever increasing rate it has become ever difficult to retrieve images digitally stored. If these records are permanent, they must be constantly updated into ever-new media and every time recording occurs the chances of errors and destruction increases and authenticity decreases. The authenticity of the original digital records can even be brought into question.

Once the remembering is out of human minds, it becomes something uncontrollable, open to the interpretation, interference, and scrutiny of others. To return to the basic question of this chapter is ephemeral memorialization different from digital memorialization? If we see it in a postmodern light, the answer to this question that the virtual commemoration has changed the substantiality or physicality of mourning. Even the well-conserved object can still be destroyed, but the most fleeting thoughts can be captured and passed on repeatedly. Indeed the fact that physical memorials exist is because there also exists a record of human feelings. Finally, when significant public moments, like commemorations, are observed, it becomes evident that not all social sectors share the same memories, that the political uses of the past are directly related to the events that took place but also to the present and future sought after by society that nothing should be lost, and that every memory is important
for the future: individuals and societies have undertaken the task of recording everything they do not wish to be forgotten. The debate about cultural memories will then be closely connected to questioning the community in itself, and the group identity. It would imply a negotiation at a societal level of what the community wishes to remember as a quaum: a negotiation to find a collective consensus on forgetfulness or memory. This is why nowadays the analysis of the discourse in the places of memory is fundamental, in order to understand the links between memory, forgetfulness, identity, and the imaginary construction of the group/community/nation, because ultimately, in the writing of all history, an image of the quaum is being restructured.

Consequently, a governmental or societal structure can create a standard. Since it is impossible to know or even construct the illusion of knowing everything, all groups those in power and those who are being forced to choose what to remember and preserve. A group without power chooses the more personal and selective route to memory through ephemeral acts and objects in their interaction with all memory and history. Successful memorialization draws upon specialists from many fields transitional justice experts, historians, museum designers, public artists, trauma specialists, and human rights activists, among others who traditionally have not worked together or are not viewed as having concerns in common. Human Rights and truth commissions share with memorial projects the fact that their work depends in part on collecting documents and other materials used to establish historical truths. Collecting, managing, and deriving value from these materials is especially challenging when the amount of documentary materials is overwhelming yet an indispensable exercise in retrieving a non-biased past. This is why the reliance on non-canonical literature, commemoratives, and texts such as the Nation's Tortured Body, become highly relevant in ensuring that memory as a domain remains inclusive in its perspective and not selective.
Significantly, Bhindranwale is almost always shown alive. Immediately after Operation Blue Star, the Indian government was quick to show photos of what, they claimed, was Bhindranwale’s dead body. For a long time the Khalistan movement denied that the body exhibited was in fact Bhindranwale’s, preferring to believe that he was alive and was leading the resistance to the Indian state in the Pakistan. Dr Jagjit Chauhan alluded to previous ‘misconceptions’ when interviewed by the author on February 17, 2000.

See Axel (2001) and Shani (2007) for accounts of the Sikh nationalist narrative in cyberspace.