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Kuka Movement: A Historical Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The present research will examine the different aspects of the Namdhari movement, which is also known as Kuka Movement. The history of the freedom struggle of India is incomplete without mentioning this movement. This socio-religious and anti-British movement was established by Satguru Ram Singh Ji. It contributed to Indian freedom struggle and contributed to the upliftment of society in the 19th and 20th centuries. Under the leadership of Satguru Ram Singh Ji, Kuka Sikhs fought bravely against the British and sacrificed their lives for the sake of the country. They worked for the welfare of women and gave them a respectable place in society. Social evils like Sati practice, female feticide, and the dowry system were prohibited. Namdhari Guru Ram Singh and his successors addressed the socio-economic problems of his followers. The essence of the social, economic, and political education of Satguru Ram Singh Ji was to get rid of foreign rule by implementing life activities according to the Guru tradition and establish a socio-economic system based on equality and division in which no one should be unhappy.

Keywords: Kuka, Independence, Society, Sikh, Non-Cooperation, Women

I. INTRODUCTION

This paper analyzes the historical background of the Namdhari Sikhs. The Namdhari sect is a one hundred and fifty years old Sikh sect. The legend of Kuka Lahar was Satguru Ram Singh Ji, a man of great personal charm and fascination, whose life, character, and teachings are such an impressionable that the common person can be influenced even today. He was the successor of Guru Balak Singh. Followers of this sect are known by various names like Sant Khalsa, Namdhari, and Kukas. Sant Khalsa means the body of a Sikh saint or such people, whereas Namdhari means the body of followers. The third Name, Kuka, sometimes preferred to both names, was a nickname given by the public due to their enthusiastic behavior of shouting (kook) at their religious functions. But Namdhari Guru Ram Singh had used the word Sant Khalsa in his Hukumnama mainly for his followers. On the other hand, in British correspondence, the term Kuka was used primarily for Namdhari Sikhs. More recently, Namdhari scholars have defined the term "Namdhari Sikh" as "one who has the name of God (Naam-Simran) in his heart". The Namdhari Sikhs strictly follow the teachings of the holy

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Guru Baba Ram Singh in the late 19th century.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

KOOKIAN DI VITHIA- (Punjabi University, Patiala, 2000) by Dr. Ganda Singh. According to this great author, Namdhari movement was a purely religious movement, and its main aim was to make reform in Sikh religion. The author throws light on the origin and development of the Namdhari Lehar. The author tells us that Baba Ram Singh did not do such activity that could be against the British government. Baba Ram Singh wished to rejuvenate the Sikh religion, but he was not a rebellious person. And there was not any political interest him. The postal system of Namdharis was also their personal need. The attack on slaughterhouse was a religious enthusiasm because they were staunch opposite to cow-killing. Interestingly he tells us about the activities of the Mahants and the British against the Namdharis.

GOOROO RAM SINGH AND THE KUKA SIKHS- (Amrit Book Co. New Delhi, 1965) by Nahar Singh. This book contains the documents relating to Guru Ram Singh and the Namdhari Sikhs from 1863 to 1871. The British administrators called them; "Rebels against the British power in India." The documents in this book give us the story up to these developments in the closing months of 1871. Gradually the clash became more open more violent and, thus leading to the Malerkotla executions and deportation of Baba Ram Singh to Rangoon and other leading Namdharis to Moulmein or Aden. The author presents the documents about Baba Balak Singh and Baba Ram Singh, all the activities of Namdharis, and British policy against Namdharis. The author collected these documents from various sources such as government archives, libraries, district records, and police records.

KUKAS, THE FREEDOM FIGHTERS OF THE PUNJAB- (Allied Publishers, Bombay, 1965) by M.M Ahluwalia. It is an interesting book that is based on the Namdhari movement. It tells us about its founder Baba Ram Singh. The author assumes this movement was only a religious movement, but instead of this, it was also a political movement. The Namdharis tried to make them politically strong by maintaining contact with Kashmir and Nepal. Ahluwalia describes the British policies toward the Namdhari movement. He discusses Malerkotla's barbaric incidence in 1871, in which sixty-two Namdharis were blown by cannons by Britishers. The author studies the Namdhari literature very carefully. Because after the British rule, he got the privilege to go through the secret and confidential files of the government of India, in the home, foreign and political departments, which were related to this movement.

A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF FREEDOM MOVEMENT IN PUNJAB- (Punjabi University, Patiala, 1972) edited by Fauja Singh. In this book, the author discusses the origin of the Namdhari

movement. This book attempts to provide a clear insight into several other movements. The author focuses on the origin and development of all the movements in Punjab. He also maintains that all movements might be started with the Anglo-Sikh wars 1846-48. The book is about the concerned subject, but it contains only brief information about the Namdhari movement. Other features related to Namdharis are absolutely ignored. The author described all the movements briefly.

RAJAS OF THE PUNJAB-(New Delhi,1986) by Lepel Griffin. This book was published in two volumes. The author discussed the history of Sikh Native States. The author's main aim has been to give a connected account of the political relation of the British Government with the independent states of Punjab. The author threw light on the detail of all the Phulkian Sikh Sates. In this book, the policies adopted by the British Government towards the Sikh Native States have been discussed. The facts, which have been recorded in this book, bear their own witness. There is no prejudice toward his personal opinion. The policy of the British Government, so far as the Sikh States are concerned, has been uniformly liberal, enlightened, we are informed.

RE EXPLORING BABA RAM SINGH AND NAMDHARI MOVEMENT - (Punjabi University, Patiala, 2010) by Dr.Navtej Singh. The author made an attempt to collect the work of scholars and historians on the Namdhari movement. In this book, 25 articles have been published. The scholars and historians who presented their papers include:- Dr. Jaswinder Singh, Historian, Dr. Kirpal Singh Kasel, Dr. G.S. Nayyar, Dr. Nazer Singh, Dr. Navtej Singh, and Dr. K.S. Bajwa and many others. They throw Baba Ram Singh and Namdhari beliefs and practices. This book also gives us important information about the British attitude towards the Namdharies and the relationship between Namdharies, Patiala Maharaja, and the British, and the impact of the Namdhari movement. It conveys the role of different princely states which were loyalists to the British and against the Namdharies

THE NAMDHARI SIKHS THEIR CHANGING SOCIAL AND CULTUREL LANDSCAPE-(Manohar Publication, New Delhi, 2013) by Joginder Singh. In this book, Joginder Singh analyzed the work on demographic, occupational, social, and cultural changes among the contemporary Namdhari Sikhs of Punjab in 2008. The author collected the data of 1545 Namdhari families of 18 districts of Punjab. He examined the social order of the Namdhari Sikhs of contemporary Punjab in terms of their occupational castes and their caste-wise status in the community. It was noted that a large section of the Namdhari artisan migration of west Punjab settled in the urban centers of Amritsar, Gurdaspur, Jalandhar, Goraya, and Phagwara and Ludhiana. He discussed the beliefs and practices of the Namdharies.

Among the political, religious, and social movements that arose in Punjab in the 19th century, Namdhari movement is particularly known for its different merits. It is also called the ‘Kuka movement’. Kuka Sikhs are an integral part of the Sikh religion. They keep their distinct identity with the white kurta, chudidar pajamas and the white turban on their head. Because of the ‘naam-Simran’ all the time, they started being called Namdhari. Namdhari Sikhs used to be so mesmerized while reciting and chanting the name of their guru that they started shouting, due to which they were called Kuka. Baba Balak Singh was the founder of the Kuka movement. He was a resident of Sarwala village in Attock¹ district. Balak Singh was impressed by Jawahar Mall 'Sen', another teacher from village Sarai Saleh near Haripur². There were many followers of Jawahar Mall who were practicing Naam. Baba Balak Singh was one of them. Baba Balak Singh was sent there to supervise the Sikh community. He spent most of his time reading the Adi Granth. By the time of his death in 1862, the influence of Balak Singh's personality had been clearly considered.

Satguru Ram Singh was born on the night of 3rd february on the day of Basant Panchami in 1816 at village Araian Bhaini Sahib, Distt. Ludhiana. He was the son of Baba Jassa Singh, who had three children. Ram Singh, the eldest of three children, grew up under the care of his friendly and simple parents in the typical rural environment. Ram Singh, like Shivaji at the start, was deeply influenced by his mother Sada Kaur, who exposed him to the best traditions of Sikhism and history³. His mother taught him to read and write Punjabi in Gurumukhi characters. She taught him the life stories of the Gurus and Bhagats which left an indelible impression on his mind. He became regular in daily religious activities like his mother. When he attained the age of 21, Kabul Singh, the Subedar of Khalsa army took Ram Singh in the military of Maharaja Ranjeet Singh. After the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the Khalsa Raj quickly collapsed as his successor was an incompetent administrator. It was a disgusting situation at the Lahore court, which forced Ram Singh to leave his regiment in 1845. He returned to his own village. He slowly began to gain the attention of the people of the surrounding villages, as he would get up early in the morning, take a bath and recite Gurbani continuously many hours together. He organized a congregation on the day of Baisakhi of 1857, founded the Khalsa-Panth and administrated baptism to five Sikhs and also unfurled the flag of Sant Khalsa which was triangular in shape and white in color⁴. This flag was the symbol of peace, patriotism and truth. He inspired his followers to speak truth. Kahn Singh of village chak, Labh Singh of Amritsar, atma singh of village alo Muhar, Naina singh Wariyah of Amritsar and Sudh Singh of village Durgapur were the first Sikhs to take ‘Amrit’⁵. Satguru ji adopted the path of peace as told by Guru Nanak Dev ji. The Sikhs who had gone away from the path of Guru

Gobind Singh ji, were brought back to that path. These Sikhs were asked to wear white clothes, white turbans on the head. This dress is the identity of living a life free of lies. Satguru Ram Singh gave instruction to his followers to work hard and earn their livelihood .He wished that each follower should become self dependent. He asked them to help the poor and needy in the society.

The contribution of Kuka Sikhs in freedom movement is precious. The use of boycott, non-cooperation and swadeshi which had been the major tools of Mahatma Gandhi's movements, that were used by Satguru Ram Singh ji many years ago. According to Encyclopedia Britannica "Baba Ram Singh was Sikh philosopher and reformer and the first Indian to use non-cooperation and boycott of British merchandise and services as a political weapon"⁶.

In the freedom struggle of 1857, which was started with great enthusiasm by the countrymen to free the country from the chains of slavery, Satguru Ram Singh ji challenged the British and started building Sikh cohesion. Seeing the attitude of the Britannia Government Satguru Ji ordered his Sikhs to boycott government goods and services in a peaceful manner against the English government. Namdhari Guru Ram Singh did not accept the British rule and its institutions. He instructed his followers neither to join the service of the British government nor send their children to government schools nor use courts of law, foreign goods and the government postal services. He suggested them to have their own arrangements for all these things. Government services were largely boycotted. Satguru Ram Singh realized that he needed a team of deputations and local leaders to carry out his missionary work. First, he established a council of six members. Later on Punjab was divided into 22 parts and a head was appointed on each part who was called 'Suba'. Relations were made with Kashmir, Nepal, Afghanistan and Kabul provinces to intensify the independence movement. Initially, Sialkot, Amritsar, Hoshiarpur, Ludhiana districts formed the major centers of Namdhari activities, but later the movement spread to Ferozepur, Lahore Gujranwala as well. Not only Sikhs joined in large numbers in this movement, but Hindus were also attracted to it. By 1871, as revealed by Giani Ratan Singh in the court of Mr. Cowan, the number of kukas was one million, of whom only a third were keshadharis, the rest all sahajdhari⁷. Kukas were found in all occupations. Seeing all this, the British government started its tricks. Irreligious works were done by the British Government to hurt the religious sentiments of the Sikhs. A slaughter house was opened near the Golden Temple, the religious heritage of Sikhs in Amritsar and elsewhere abattoirs were opened. On June 13, 1871, when the ten Sikhs reached Amritsar, they were enraged after seeing all this. They destroyed the abattoir, and killed some slaughterers. The government arrested some innocent people. Guru ji ordered his Sikhs to confess and release innocent

people. Four Namdhari Sikhs were hanged, three were sentenced to cellular jail and three were convicted for sedition. Similarly, there were clashes between police and Sikhs in Raikot and Malerkotla. The harsher punishments urged the Kukas to engage in greater activity, as confirmed by official reports on 13 January. In 1872, a gathering of Kukas took place at Bhaini Sahib and a gang of 150 of these, working in a state of religious frenzy, started in the Patiala region under the leadership of two Jats, Sakrondi. Ram Singh informed the police about his intention to do some mischief saying that he had no control over him. They were armed only with axes, sticks, etc., and are said to have declared that the city of Malerkotla would be the object of their attack. They went around the Patiala region without disturbance, and the next day the cult of Sardar Badan Singh reappeared near Maloudh, upon which he suddenly began with the idea of acquiring weapons and wealth. It is said that he wanted the Sardar to lead him. Two people from both sides were killed and some were injured in this attack.

On 17 and 18 January 1872 AD., 66 Kuka Sikhs were martyred with cannon at Malerkotla to suppress the movement. The states of Punjab stood with British government and played an important role in suppressing the movement. Patiala state was against the Namdhari movement. The policy of the state of Patiala was to suppress the movement. The states were truly loyal to the British government; they were united by their loyalty to the government. Guru Ram Singh and his chiefs (Subas) were arrested in 1872 AD., under the Bengal Regulation 3 of 1818. They were held as state prisoners indefinitely in various prisons in Rangoon, Moulamein, Mergui etc. in Burma. Subhash Chandra Bose said that our countrymen will always be proud of the sacrifices made by the Namdhari Sikhs under the flag of independence established by Guru Ram Singh Ji, now the love of the countrymen is going to be tested again. Namdhari Sikhs, who have experienced the non-cooperation movement in the peace of later half of 19 the century, are expected to raise the flag of independence and continue to be seen in front of the whole country and they will continue to inspire us to sacrifice⁸.

.Satguru Ram Singh ji worked for the welfare of the society. There were many evils in the society which forced the women to live painful life. Long before he was deported he undertook a campaign against these practices. In those days, the birth of a girl was considered a bad omen. The girls were killed. If some girls survived, they were not properly educated. She was often subjected to mental and physical tortures and was married at a young age, addressing the horrors of this problem, the Namdhari Guru advised her followers to prevent them from selling and buying the daughter in marriage. For him, these practices were a far greater crime and sin than cow slaughter. He took measures to stop these practices. Namdhari Guru told his khalsa that those who indulged in such practices must not be allowed to participate in the congregation.

Nothing should be accepted from their hands and the khalsa should not visit their houses. For uprooting these practices the Guru came up with the solutions: girls should be taught skills of reading and writing, they should be well versed in Gurbani which would make them spiritually stronger. Widow's condition was most pitiable as she was neither accepted by her parents nor in laws. She was considered to be a burden on the family. He said "if a widow of kuka wanted to marry she could marry again a kuka. The official account tells that guru ji enjoined the marriage of widows"⁹ Satguru Ram Singh ji, while living in exile, kept sending orders to his followers from there from time to time. He opposed child marriage. His decrees fixed the age of marriage for a girl at 18 years and for a boy at 20 years¹⁰.

At that time there was no method for Sikhs to get married. Marriages were carried out in the old Hindu system. Solemnizing marriage was considered only the responsibility of the Brahmins and the Pandits. The practice of dowry and extravagance in marriage was prevalent. The new method of marriage was introduced which was called Anand Karaj. In this marriage system, many couples use the same '*Hawan-Vedi*' for marriage and were forbidden to take and give dowry. Inter-racial marriages were allowed. For the first time three inter-caste marriages were held on 3 June, 1863 in district Moga, Punjab. Later on the basis of this Anand karaj system, 22 October 1909 Marriage Act was passed by the Govt. Nectar was given to the women on 1 June 1863 in village Siad, District Ludhiana for equality of women¹¹.

After the expulsion of Ram Singh ji by the British, Kukas started hating the British more. Namdhari Literature filled with anti-British sentiments. Many writers had the effect of nationalist historiography while producing their works. Among them are Tara Singh Anjan, HS Hanspal, Dalip Singh, Surinder Kaur Kharal, Swaran Singh Virk, Savran Singh Snehi and Jagdish Singh Waryam. Their literary work praises the role of Namdhari Gurus and Sikhs in the national movement of India.

After him, his successor Budh Singh took over the reins of the movement. In a decree sent from Rangoon, Satguru Ram Singh ji named him Hari Singh and instructed his followers to follow him. This was a difficult time for the kuka Sikhs. At this time more than five Kuka Sikhs were prohibited from gathering. A police post was deployed in front of the gate of Gurudwara Bhaini Sahib. Satguru Hari Singh ji was also not allowed to go out of Bhaini Sahib.

The next Guru Partap Singh(1906-1959) was active in freedom struggle. During the time of Satguru Partap Singh Ji, there was a great increase in the campaign tours, due to which the Namdhari Panth expanded in Punjab, India and abroad. He founded the Namdhari Darbar in 1921 to get the support of various sections on the political platform for the independence of the

country and started the publication of a weekly newspaper called ‘Satjug’ on behalf of this sect. The contribution made by his brothers Maharaj Nihal Singh and Maharaj Gurdial Singh ji in the independence of the country from the platform of Punjab Congress is memorable. About a hundred Namdhari Sikhs under the leadership of Maharaja Nihal Singh participated in the Lahore session of the Congress. Jeevan Kaur, mother of Satguru Partap Singh ji, attended as the in-charge of the ‘langar’. Satguru Partap Singh ji supported the anti-British fighters like Ghadar Lehar, Akali Congress, Babbar Akali, Congress and Communist Party etc. At the time of partition of Punjab in 1947 thousands of peasants and artisans were forced to migrate from Pakistan to India. They were victims of community violence, economic and physical difficulties. Namdhari Guru Partap Singh played an important role in the rehabilitation of migrants. He bought land for rehabilitation of Namdhari Sikh at Sirsa (Haryana), a headquarter known as Jiwan Nagar and distributed ownership of the land to the migrants.

In the post-independence era, Namdhari Guru Jagjit Singh Ji(1959-2012) and his followers were committed to carry forward the legacy of the national movement. He supported political and economic freedom, contributed unforgettably in modern economic development. Using new techniques, he contributed towards modern economic development. Satguru Jagjit Singh ji, like his father, took the work of taking forward the Namdhari Sect, carried forward the work of rehabilitation. The barren and forest land of the Jiwan Nagar place of Sirsa district was made cultivable. Satguru Jagjit Singh Ji was very interested in innovation in seed technology, which was important and necessary for the second of the green revolution. Namdhari Seeds includes fresh vegetable production, export and domestic retail. He established schools and college to promote education. His contribution in the field of music is commendable. He received India's best Music Award. From 1973 to 1980, satguru Jagjit Singh ji organized national Gurmat Sangeet Sammelans in Delhi, Mumbai, Lucknow and Aurangabad. He established many centers for learning music in India and in foreign countries. Satguru Pratap Singh Academy is one of the best institutions which has produced many renowned teachers of national renown. He has made a significant contribution in preparing Namdhari boys and girls in devotional music. Satguru Jagjit Singh took the services of an eminent teacher to train his students in Shastri Sangeet. He earned the distinction of being a connoisseur of classical music. Furthermore, the Namdhari Gurus have made a distinctive contribution to sports. He was also interested in sports especially in hockey and wanted to make an astro turf ground. With the efforts of Guru Jagjit Singh a Namdhari Hockey Team was prepared. Some of the players of namdhari Hockey team secured their position in Indian National Hockey Team and well played for our country. Sardara Singh, the former captain of Indian national Hockey Team was one of

the Namdhari players¹². Memorials were erected in the names of Kuka martyrs in Malerkotla, Amritsar, Raikot, Ludhiana etc. Satguru Jagjit Singh ji strived for the upliftment of the society, and at the same time retained the Guru Maryada also.

Presently (from 2012) Satguru Uday Singh Ji is the chief head of Namdhari sect. He has mingled the modesty with modernity. Satguru Uday Singh ji is leading the Namdhari sect following the ideals laid down by Satguru Jagjit Singh ji. In the field of education, he has further expanded the schools and college built by Satguru Jagjit Singh ji. He emphasizes on developing mutual love and harmony in different religions.

II. CONCLUSION

Summing up it can be submitted that kuka movement contributed a lot in the national movement of India. Society and the foreign rule made the Indians the center of squad and exploitation, the Namdhari sect took the lead to throw away this inertia and slavery. The Kuka wave thus guided the countrymen to independence. Their sacrifices became a source of inspiration for the other Indians. The Namdhari Sikhs was committed to the upliftment and giving a new direction to the society. The Namdhari leaders have founded educational, cultural and religious institutions which are contributing towards the betterment of society from the origin of the sect till date.

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