

# Broadening The Boundaries Of Namdhari Mission: Insights From The Evolution Of Namdhari Sect In 19<sup>th</sup> -20<sup>th</sup> Century In India

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DOI: 10.47750/pnr.2022.13.509.1000

## Abstract

Any established religion has to face new challenges posed by political, social and cultural changes taking place in society from time to time. All these factors contribute to the emergence of a new sect as a consequence of the kinds of internal and external challenges in society. Though Sikh religion is an established religion yet many sects have emerged out of it such as Udasi, Meena, Seva Panthi, Nirmala, Ram Raya, Hindaliya, Gulabdasi, Nirankari, Namdhari, Nildhari, Hoti Mardan, Damdami Taksal and Nanaksari etc. Their origins can be traced back to the early seventeenth century. The scope of this article has been kept limited to Namdhari sect only. It examines the origin of this sect, changes in the structure of beliefs and practices, its role in the national struggle and administrative hierarchy since its inception.

**Keywords:** Namdhari, Sikhs, Religion, Society, Sect, Independence

## Introduction:

The Namdhari sect is a part of Sikh religion. The term 'sect' has been used to refer to a group of people that share similar opinions under a common leadership. (Singh, 2002, p. 75)The word 'sect' can denote any faction or group, especially a small one strongly devoted to a certain belief. In mainstream sociology, a sect is considered as a religious "withdrawal group," which is a group of people who withdraw from the mainstream religion in order to follow a pure or true religious belief. As a general rule, sect followers lead cult-controlled lives in many important areas, from clothing to diet and business; this certainly sets them apart from the rest of society. (Ellwood & Alles, 2006, p.109) However, some sociologists view the sects as movements of religious protest, appears as a fortuitous event that at the same time acts as a catalyst in history and sometimes re-integrates society.(Wilson,1970, p.7)

Therefore, most of historians generalize Namdharis as a sect in terms of its social and religious outlook. For this generalization, W.H. MacLeod describes the sect's parameters that sects can be classified under a normative pattern of various rituals and themes that is not matched with cultural patterns of mainstream. (Mcleod, 1977, p.183-192)

Most historians were primarily interested in writing the history of the main Sikh religion, the Sikh Gurus and the establishment of the Khalsa Raj and the Sikh struggle during the 18th century. Thus, they have not paid due attention to the study of Sikhism and the various sectarian developments found within the mainstream of the Sikh community throughout history. Sikhism split during the 16th and 17th centuries because of their conflict with the Sikh gurus over the issue of succession. They, at different time, claimed to the throne of Guru Nanak. (Virk, 2007)

Apart from these early dissidents, several other sects developed over time in Punjab. The most notable of these are Udasi, Niranjani or Handali, Gangushahi, Sevapanthi, Nirmal, Heera Dasis and Gulab Dasis. In the middle of the 19th century, two Sikh sects developed; the Nirankaris and the Namdharis<sup>7</sup>. Significantly, the founders of each of these sects initially represented the Naam-Simran Sikh tradition and emphasized a simple way of life by renouncing costly and cumbersome rituals. The "Guru Granth" was their scripture and it followed Sikh customs with some modifications. However, over time, the spiritual leaders of these sects similarly departed from Sikh traditions and developed their respective religious systems and customs. (Virk, 2007 p.4)

### Satguru Balak Singh Ji (1799-1862) and Origin of the Namdhari Sect

The origin of the Namdhari sect is believed to be from Guru Nanak. The faith accepted by Namdharis and other Sikhs from Guru Nanak Dev to Guru Gobind Singh is the same. Namdharis believe in the continuity of living gurus after Guru Gobind Singh while others consider the Sikh Granth Sahib as their guru. Although the Namdharis respect the Granth Sahib, they say that according to Sikh scriptures and true Sikh history, Gurutva cannot be contained in an inanimate thing. According to Namdhari tradition, Guru Balak Singh is the eleventh Guru and Ram Singh is considered to be the 12th Guru in the line of succession. (Gazetteers of India, 1970, p. 172)

The Namdhari sect is about one and a half century old. The followers of this sect are called by names like Namdhari, Sant Khalsa and Kuka etc. The first two names Namdhari and Sant Khalsa give a glimpse of their spiritual nature. Because of 'Naam-Simran' all the time, they started being called Namdhari. Sant Khalsa, means a Sikh saint or group of people who are devoted to God. But the term Sant Khalsa was used by Satguru Ram Singh in his Hukmnama for his followers. Namdhari Sikhs in religious functions would become so mesmerized while chanting the name of their Guru that they would start shouting, due to which they were called Kukas. (Bajwa, 1965, p. 21) According to Khushwant Singh, his disciples chanted hymns and like dancing dervishes worked themselves into a state of frenzy and emitted loud shrieks; they came to be known therefore, Kukas. (Singh, 1999, p. 128-129) However, the epithet for Namdhari community was also used by the contemporary Nirmala scholar Gyani Gyan Singh in his work Panth Parkash in 1886. Often the word, Kuka was used by the British officers, for the Namdhari Sikhs. The modern followers of this sect prefer the title 'Namdhari'. Recently Namdhari scholars define the word 'Namdhari Sikh' as "one who has the name of God (name-simran) in his or her heart".

Namdhari Movement was initiated by Baba Balak Singh at Hazro, in the Rawalpindi District, West Punjab. The name of his sect was Jagiasi or Abhiasi. He made large numbers of converts in the villages nearby during his time. Baba Balak Singh was born in 1785 AD at village Chhoi in Attock in District Rawalpindi. His father was Dial Singh and mother was Mata Bhag Bhari. ("Namdharis- A Sikh Movement," 2002, p. 118) After sometimes, he shifted to Hazro. Satguru Balak Singh was the follower of Jawahar Mal of Rawalpindi. (Singh, 1966, p. 265) Like his master (Jawahar Mal), Balak Singh used to preach the name of God.

Satguru Balak Singh taught morality and monotheism. He stressed upon the Sikhs to follow the simple path shown by Sikh Gurus and attain salvation by chanting the name of God. (McLeod, 1979, p. 164) It was forbidden to use leather buckets for drinking water. To keep a small sword in the turban, his Sikh had to pay one and a half rupees every month for Prasad. Followers were forbidden to eat food prepared by anyone outside Sikhism. Honesty and truth were important qualities. In addition, they should help their fellow-religionists in every possible way. (Jolly, 2000,

p. 39-40) In a way, Satguru Balak Singh wanted to keep his Sikhs away from the customs that the Mahants had taken over the historical Sikh religious places and began to imitate Hindu beliefs and practices. It was his successor Ram Singh who adopted the Khalsa traditions and encouraged his followers to follow the teachings of the Sikh scripture. (Singh, 2010, p. 33-34)

### **Satguru Ram Singh (1816- 1885) and Flourishing of the Sect.**

Satguru Ram Singh was born on 3<sup>rd</sup> February, 1816 in village Ariya Bhaini Sahib, district Ludhiana, Punjab. He was Baba Jassa Singh's son. Ram Singh who, like Shivaji in the beginning, was strongly influenced by his mother Sada Kaur, who exposed him to the best traditions of Sikhism and history. (Bajwa, 2017, p. 4) His mother taught him to read and write Punjabi language. She taught him the life stories of Gurus, which left an indelible impression on his minds. He became regular in daily religious activities like his mother. At the age of 21, he joined Maharaja Ranjit Singh's army (Singh, 2010, p.4).

Satguru Ram Singh was a devout adherent to Sikhism and trusted the Sikh Gurus. Ram Singh maintained unwavering faith in the Sikh Gurus' ability to provide spiritual guidance. (Singh, 1973 p. 151) His co-workers were pleased with his commitment and sterling character and began referring to him as Bhai. According to Sikh tradition, a person with a holy nature is given the title of "Bhai." Sant Sipahian Di Regiment was the name given to his regiment (Bali, 1995, p.1). When his troop went to Hazro, he came in contact with Satguru Balak Singh and was affected by Satguru's religious personality. After that Satguru Ram Singh became a devout Sikh. The Khalsa Raj swiftly fell apart after Maharaja Ranjit Singh's passing because his replacement was an inept leader. Ram Singh quit his regiment in 1845 and went back to his ancestral village because of an abhorrent circumstance that occurred before the Lahore court. As he would rise early in the morning, take a bath, and recite Gurbani nonstop for several hours at a time, he gradually started to attract the attention of residents of the nearby villages.

Namdharis claim that after Satguru Balak Singh passed away in 1862, all of his devotees gathered in Hazro, where Bhai Ram Singh was chosen to lead the Namdhari sect. However, it is unknown under what conditions and how Satguru Balak Singh and his disciples chose Bhai Ram Singh to succeed him (Singh, 1979, p.190). The guru-gaddi custom, which was later linked to Guru Gobind Singh's succession, was upheld by the Namdhari sect's founders (Singh, 1973). As Guru Gobind Singh's successors, Satguru Balak Singh and Ram Singh are granted the titles of 11th and 12th Guru, respectively (Gazetteers of India, 1970, p. 172).

### **Formation of the Sant Khalsa :-**

The political and socio-religious conditions of that time were worrying. The establishment of British rule was having a negative impact on farmers, artisans, retired soldiers and businessmen who made their living at the court of Lahore. Satguru ji was also a small businessman, so he could understand their situation. British officials did not hesitate to ridicule Sikh religious beliefs. The last Sikh king Duleep Singh was expelled from the country (virk, 2017). The great teachings of the Sikh Gurus were either been forgotten or were being neglected. No attention was paid to the code of conduct laid down by Guru Gobind Singh. There may be some exceptions. But the people were misled by Sodhi and the Bedis, who were seriously engaged in setting up their gurudoms. According to Ganda Singh, Sodhis and Bedis had established themselves as Gurus at their respective places. Several others were doing the same day after day whose only aim was to get themselves worshipped by more and more followers. All this was contrary to the religion of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh and was gradually undermining it" (Singh, 1944, p.36).

The priestly class of the Hindus insisted on the observance of costly and meaningless rituals. The Sikh Gurdwaras were converted into their family property by their patron Mahants. With the vast wealth and income of the temples, they easily fell prey to the evils that usually flowed from abundant wealth. The natural result of all this was that people indulged in superstitions (Singh, 2017, p.10). In addition to political upheaval and religious decline; bad practices like child marriage, alcohol, opium and prostitution were also prevalent in the society which became the

basis of moral degradation of the people. The condition of women was very pathetic, thus it became a matter of concern for Ram Singh (Ahluwalia, 1999, p. 259). He wanted to create individuals who were of strong character and strong convictions and were fearless. He desired the Sikhs to receive the baptism of Guru Gobind Singh and challenged Amrit Parchar's vigorous plans (Singh, 2017, p.19). Khalsa Panth was established by Guru Gobind Singh ji in 1699. Likewise, in 1857, Satguru Ram Singh launched sant kahlsa in order to restore the teachings of Sikhism. He formally launched his socio-religious movement against the environment. He organized a congregation on Baisakhi in 1857, established the Khalsa-Panth and baptized five Sikhs and also hoisted the flag of Sant Khalsa which was triangular in shape and white in colour. This flag was a symbol of peace, patriotism and truth. Satguru ji adopted the path of peace as told by Guru Nanak Dev ji. The Sikhs who had strayed from the path of Guru Gobind Singh Ji were brought back to the same path.

Satguru Ram Singh gave a new name, form and discipline to his followers. He expanded the scope of the Namdhari Mission. His thoughts were related to religion, life, simplicity and restoration of ancient purity. He wanted to develop in a Sikh having qualities like strong character, unwavering and steadfast faith, fearlessness, an ideal human being, love, truthfulness and self-sacrifice. Therefore, Satguru recognized the importance of developing a strict code. He revived the Khalsa tradition, which was prescribed for members of a new organization called Sant Khalsa, separating it from mainstream Sikhism (Arora, 1986). They were told to keep the five K's (kakarass) and worship the one God. The purpose of the (Singh, 2005 p.107) Sant Khalsa was to reaffirm people's faith in the Akal Purakh. According to Namdhari literature, Satguru Ram Singh appointed Rai Singh, a resident of Mudhiyar village in Firozpur district of Punjab, with instructions to bring details of Sikh rites and ceremonies to Nanded (Sanehi, 2007, p. 7-21).

The Inspector General of Police, Punjab, remarked in his report how the Kukas 'appear to be eager to revive Sikhism to its original sanctity (Oberoi, 1992, p. 157-197). Satguru Ram Singh departed from Sahajdhari to Khalsa tradition. He tried to simplify the system of baptism which was considered the right of the priests. But at the same time continuing the old practice, the secret word was whispered in the ear of the newcomer. After initiation, a baptized person received a rosary and the Guru-Mantar or the mystic word i.e.Wahe-Guru. This Guru-Mantar was to be repeated continuously while doing daily routine work. The recipient was supposed not to disclose that Guru-Mantar to others. The followers of Satguru Ram Singh were distinguished from the rest by wearing a white dress, a distinct style of turban called 'Siddi Pag', a rosary of knots made in white woolen (Singh, 2017, p.20). These external symbols were essential for establishing discipline and strength of organization (Singh, 2017 p.20-34). Similarly women were instructed to make knot in their hair and no ear or nose piercing, jewellery, nail polish and lip sticking or makeup was not allowed (Satjug: Basant Ank, n.d., p. 142).

## Social Reforms:-

Satguru Ram Singh Ji worked for the welfare of the society. Many evils were prevalent in the society. Long before he was deported, he launched a campaign against these practices. In those days, the birth of a girl child was considered inauspicious. Girls were killed. Even if some girls survived, they were not educated properly. They were often subjected to mental and physical torture and were married off at an early age. Taking away the enormity of this problem, Satguru advised his followers to stop buying and selling daughter in marriage. To him, these practices were a far greater crime and sin than cow slaughter. He took measures to stop these practices. Satguru Ram Singh told his Khalsa that those who indulged in such practices should not be allowed to participate in the congregation. Nothing should be accepted from their hands and the Khalsa would not visit their homes. To root out these practices the Guru came up with a solution: Girls should be taught the skills of reading and writing; they should be well versed in Gurbani which would make them spiritually strong (Singh, 2016, p. 58). The condition of the widows was most pitiable as they were neither accepted by their parents nor in-laws. They were considered a burden on the family. He said, "If a widow of a Kuka wants to marry, she can remarry a Kuka. The official accounts of Namdharis state that their Guru had given permission for the marriage of widows (Singh, 1966, p. 9). Satguru Ram Singh Ji sent orders from time to time to his followers while in exile. He opposed child marriage. He fixed the age of marriage for a girl at 18 years and for a boy

at 20 years and ordered the girl child to be saved (Singh, 1996). At that time, Sikh marriages were solemnized according to the ancient Hindu system. Getting married was considered the responsibility of only Brahmins and pundits. Dowry system and extravagance were prevalent in marriages. A new system of marriage was introduced by Satguru Ram Singh ji which was called Anand Karaj. In this marriage system, many couples used the same fire-altar for marriage and the taking and giving of dowry was banned. Inter-caste marriages were allowed. For the first time three inter-caste marriages took place on June 3, 1863 in District Moga, Punjab. Later, on the basis of this Anand Karaj system, the Marriage Act was passed by the government on 22 October 1909. For the equality of women, on 1<sup>st</sup> June 1863, Amrit was offered to women in village Siad, District Ludhiana (Sanehi, 1982, p. 154).

This revolutionary step of Satguru Ram Singh was opposed by Brahmins and Mahants. Several fake complaints were lodged in the police station of Baghapurana, a village in district Ferozepur. On June 4, a report was filed in village Bagha Purana that "For two to three days, Ram Singh had gathered in his village with five hundred followers, and was behaving in a very extraordinary manner. He spoke of treason, said that the country would soon be his, and that he would rapidly have 1, 25,000 armed men to support him, and absolutely himself very extravagant (Singh, n.d., p. 1). They started the investigation and the information was sent to the Deputy Commissioner of Ferozepur. Brahmins and Mahants were protesting against Satguru Ram Singh as their business was hampered due to commencement of simple Anand marriage ceremony. Satguru Ram Singh was arrested by the British Government and taken from one police station to another. Finally he was brought to Bhaini Sahib (the tribune, 1950, p. 11).

### **Satguru Ram Singh and Freedom Struggle of India:-**

The contribution of Kuka Sikhs in the Indian freedom movement is invaluable. The experiments of boycott, non-cooperation and swadeshi which were the main tools of Mahatma Gandhi's ideology were initiated by Satguru Ram Singh ji many years back. In the freedom struggle of 1857, which was started with great enthusiasm by the countrymen to free the country from the shackles of slavery, Satguru Ram Singh challenged the British and started building Sikh unity. Seeing the attitude of Britannia Government, Satguru Ji ordered his Sikhs to boycott government goods and services in a peaceful manner. Satguru Ram Singh did not accept the British rule and its institutions. He instructed his followers to neither join the service of the British government nor send their children to government schools nor use the courts, foreign goods and government postal services. He suggested that they should have their own system for all these things. There was a massive boycott of government services. Satguru Ram Singh realized that he needed a team of dedicated and local leaders to carry out his missionary work. First, he established a council of six members. Later, Punjab was divided into 22 parts and a head was appointed for each part, which was called 'Suba'. The word Suba in Punjabi literally means just a province but in the nomenclature, it was a political and administrative set-up. The Suba system had several objectives. It was responsible for propagating the doctrine of the Kuka movement as well as administering their religious, spiritual, social affairs (Bali & Bali, 1995, p. 54). The Suba system was established mainly in the districts of Amritsar, Lahore, Selkot, Gurdaspur, Jalandhar, Ferozpur, Ludhiana, Ambala and Karnal. Malerkotla, Nabha and Patiala were also under the control of Suba system among Namdharis. These Subas were instructed to approach Satguru Ram Singh secretly. Trusted messengers carried coded messages to the suba, to the Namdhari headquarters at Bhaini Sahib or where Satguru Ram Singh often visited. The Naib-Suba, the Jathedar and the local Sangat were working under the Suba. They were given small areas to work in and were required to organize and supervise the missionary work of their respective places. According to historian Joginder Singh, these subas were assigned different functions by Satguru Ram Singh; one was to propagate the Namdhari mission, to administer bhajans and nectar and to arrange for guidance, the other to settle local disputes with complete impartiality, the third to collect Dasavands and the fourth to ensure peace in their respective areas and the fifth to fight against disobedient and self-styled persons and bringing matters to the notice of the master (Singh, 2010, p.70).

Namdharis had their own postal system which carried letters and messages. Messengers hurried to a certain platform to convey messages and they were under strict orders to keep the messages confidential. Relations were made with Kashmir, Nepal, Afghanistan and Kabul provinces. Initially, the districts of Sialkot, Amritsar, Hoshiarpur, and

Ludhiana formed the major centers of Namdhari activities to intensify the freedom movement, but later the movement spread to Ferozepur, Lahore and Gujranwala also. Not only Sikhs participated in this movement in large numbers, but Hindus also numbered one million, of whom only one-third were Keshdhari, rest all were Sahajdhari. Satguru Ram Singh's influence spread widely among the people of Punjab. The British Government felt compelled to act against him. After a few days, the Gurdwara of Bhaini Sahib was searched. The Lieutenant Governor of Punjab, Sir Henry Dowles himself was present with the police during the search. The British government was suspicious of the manufacture of cannons. When the search gave them no clue, Sir Henry Dowles asked Satguru Ram Singh where he made the weapons; He showed Whitman his white roasary of one hundred and eight balls and said, "This is our factory gun. There are one hundred and eight cannonballs in it and they never miss fire (The tribune, 1950, p. 11). The police were dismayed. Satguru Ram Singh was not allowed to leave Bhaini Sahib. But he broke this restriction and tried to go to Amritsar and Anandpur. Every time he was arrested and brought back to Bhaini Sahib. The surveillance of Satguru Ram Singh was lifted in 1866. During the period from 1866 to 1872, he visited various places to propagate his philosophy and convened many meetings and assemblies in various Sikh Gurdwaras and other religious places. He was opposed by Christian missionaries for a long time. The Mahants of the Gurdwaras of Amritsar and Anandpur Sahib also strongly opposed him.

Under his leadership, Namdharis took the initiative of non-cooperation against the Britishers and started the Swadeshi campaign. They adopted indigenous goods, completely boycotting British services. Satguru Ram Singh advised his followers to boycott British goods, education, postal system, courts, railways, hospitals and especially foreign clothes imported by British merchants. ("Rebels Against the British Raj," 1971, p. 8)

Satguru Ram Singh not only launched a movement of civil disobedience against the British regime but he also set up a parallel government against the British administration (Sobti, 1944, p. 188). The British government needed only one concrete reason to completely suppress the Namdhari movement as they were afraid of Satguru Ram Singh's growing popularity. In the year 1872, unfortunate incident that happened in Raikot, Amritsar and Malerkotla gave Britishers a chance against Namdharis. In 1849, after the annexation of the Punjab, the Governor General had changed the former orders and declared that for the future "no one should be allowed to interfere with the practice, by his neighbour; of customs which that neighbour's religion permits" (Singh, n.d). In 1849, the Board of Administration issued the bylaws. First, the cow will be slaughtered at a particular place outside the town and secondly, no shop will be opened in the town for open sale of beef. But the Governing Board decided that the restriction which was earlier imposed should be removed and space should be earmarked for a butcher shop in all major cities, but special care should be taken that this shop should not be established in the vicinity of any Hindu religious building (Singh, n.d).

The Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar allowed opening of slaughter house outside the city in accordance with the above bye-laws. The opening of a cow slaughter house in Amritsar signaled the opening of many more such slaughterhouses in different cities across Punjab. Muslim butchers started selling beef openly in the streets of the city. The religious sentiments of Sikhs and Hindus were badly hurt by the new policy of lifting the ban on cow slaughter. By the year 1871, the tension gave rise to communal riots and open squabbles. The Divisional Commissioner intervened and tried to pacify the Hindus and Sikhs of the city, who were outraged by the cow-slaughter. Meanwhile, Muslims spread rumors that out of the four new butcher shops, one of them would be adjacent to the Golden Temple complex. Hindus and Sikhs were emotionally disturbed to hear this. Some Namdhari Sikhs held a meeting in which they decided to risk their own lives to stop cow slaughter in the holy city. On the night of 14<sup>th</sup> June, eight Namdharis attacked the butchers inside the slaughterhouse. When Satguru Ram Singh came to know that innocent persons were arrested, he ordered the real culprits to confess their crime before the magistrate. Four Namdharis were hanged on their own confession on 15<sup>th</sup> September 1871. After some time, another clash took place between Namdharis and butchers on 15<sup>th</sup> July at Raikot in Ludhiana district (Singh, 1973, p. 151). Here four butchers were killed and seven got injuries. Seven Kuka Sikhs were captured by police in Patiala territory; they were traced from Raikot (Singh, n.d). The most sorrowful incident happened at Malerkotla in January 1872. On the 13th January, 1872, there was a meeting of Kukas at Bhaini Sahib on the fair of Maghi. The group of 150 of these Namdhari Sikhs after working themselves

up into a state of religious frenzy, started off under the leadership Heera Singh of territory of Patiala (Maclagan, 1892, p. 169). Satguru Ram Singh apprehended their intentions and informed the police that he had no control over them. Some Namdharis planned to an attack on the Haveli of Baden Singh, Sirdar of Maludh to procure arms from his fort. In the battle, two Namdharis were killed and four were wounded and from the other side, two were killed and two injured. On the morning of 15th January, 1872, about one hundred Namdharis and two women entered Malerkotla. Obviously their main objective was collect guns from Nawab of Malerkotla. But the police force of Ludhiana and Patiala had already reached at Malerkotla (Singh, 1927, p. 56). Both sides suffered heavy loss in the battle. The Naib Nazim of Amargarh in Patiala State controlled over Namdharis on the way, where sixty-eight of them surrendered to the Patiala authorities. In Maludh and Malerkotla ten people were killed and seventeen were wounded, while their own were nine killed and thirty-eight wounded (Gazetteers of India, 1970, p. 103). Mr. Cowan, Deputy Commissioner of Ludhiana reached Malerkotla and without any formal trial, he ordered forty nine Namdharis to be blown up with guns in the afternoon of 17th. Jan (Singh, 1973, p. 152). This barbaric incident took place at the Parade Ground of Malerkotla in the presence of the soldiers of Patiala, Nabha and Malerkotla. Seven guns were used for the martyred Namdhari Sikhs and Saved two guns so that it can be useful when the Namdharis attack. The government realised that the followers of Satguru Ram Singh were getting stronger. So by using Malerkotla riots as an excuse, Satguru Ram Singh along with his seventeen Subas was sent into exile under Rule III of 1818 to Allahabad (Home Judicial Proceedings, 1872, p. 7). They were put under house arrest in the Allahabad Fort for two months. From there Satguru Ram Singh was transferred to Burma. Seventeen of his Subas were sent to different places. Almost the entire Gurdwara property was confiscated. A police picket was put up at the Gurudwara gate, which continued for fifty years. Satguru Ram Singh never returned to India. Meanwhile, Namdhari sources stated that "Satguru Ram Singh miraculously disappeared from British captivity at Mughrai on 29 November 1885. After that, the government was unable to track him down. The only thing left for the government was "Satguru Ram Singh ji must be declared dead." May be I will come back in the same way. Don't believe I'm dead, come true. Guru Gobind Singh Ji had predicted in Sau Sakhi that Satguru Ram Singh Ji would live for 250 years"(Kaur & Singh, 2010, p. 32). Thereafter, Namdhari followers refused to believe in the death of Ram Singh and still believe in his reappearance. The District Magistrate of Ludhiana announced on behalf of the government that Satguru Ram Singh died in 1885 (The Tribune, 1950, p. 11)

Some letters written in Punjabi by Satguru Ram Singh from Rangoon are still preserved in Satguru Partap Singh library, Sri Bahini Sahib, while many were confiscated by the British government. Satguru Ram Singh in his letters exhorted his followers to maintain non-violence. One of the letters states:

"All Sikhs should practice non-violence to such an extent that even if someone accuses them, they ignore it. Even if one of them is killed, they should remain calm. With patient and forgiving people, God is always there. Forgiveness is an important principle of life." (The tribune, 1950, p. 11)

### **Satguru Hari Singh (1819-1906)**

After the deportation of Satguru Ram Sangh, Satguru Hari Singh ascended the throne as his successor. He was born in September 1819 A.D. in village Rayian. He was brother of Satguru Ram Singh. His childhood name was Buddha Singh. Later his name was changed to Hari Singh by Satguru Ram Singh Ji. In a Hukumnama, Satguru Ram Singh ji declared, "From now onwards Buddha Singh should be called Hari Singh. I bestow him with all the spiritual powers to deal with any situation. All Namdhari Sikhs should obey his orders. I will also respect his decisions. He will continue to light the flame of freedom and propagate the ideals of Sikhism".

Unfortunately, the authority of the Akal Takhat was in the opposition of Namdharis. The attitude of the Sikhs towards Kuka Movement was unsympathetic. On the behalf of the Sikh Sardars, Sardar Dayal Singh Majithia presented this address which stated:

"We the undersigned Sikhs of all classes of Amritsar, beg unanimously to submit that we have no connection or sympathy whatever with the Kuka sect, which has recently become notorious. On the contrary we greatly differ from

them or most religious principles. We are happy that the Government has adopted most appropriate and excellent measures for controlling this wicked and misguided sect, especially as the measures in question are calculated to deter ill-disposed people from committing mis-chief in future, and in the event of any member of this depraved sect community crime to prevent suspicion falling on people of other sect, as happened in the case of murder of butchers of Amritsar. Moreover, the Kukas do not differ from us in religious principles only, but they may be said to our mortal enemies. Since by their misconduct and evil designs, they injured our honour in the estimation of the Government, and well-high leveled with the dust, the services performed in 1857, through which we were regarded as well-wishers and loyal subjects by the Government. But as the proverb say, "Truth is invulnerable, the government has found out that we had no share in the preceding of the sect. And regarding the sect, as our enemies, we are thankful to the government for the measures which have been adopted whereby the desires of our hearts have been fulfilled" (Singh, n.d., p. 50-51).

Apart from this, statement, some newspapers including *The English Man*, *The Hindu*, *The Patriot* and *Indian Statesman* also opposed Namdhari Sikhs for their anti-state activities. Under these circumstances, Satguru Hari Singh faced many difficulties and worked hard to preserve the religious and cultural heritage of the Namdhari Sikhs for thirty- four years. To look after and develop the Headquarters at Sri Bhaini Sahib, to keep the langar running efficiently and to encourage his Sikhs to remain optimistic about the reappearance of SarSatguru Ram Singh Ji, meditating on the name of God (naam simran), inculcating moral values and reviving the old Sikh heritage to face the evil designs of British imperialism, to intensify the love of freedom among the people and to develop the spirit of freedom and to continue the movement against cow slaughter were his main tasks. Till 1922, the Kukas were considered as member of an illegal organization and its headquarters at Bhaini Sahib was kept under police surveillance.

Satguru Hari Singh composed Sakhis against the British and propagated that "his Guru will return from exile and he will oppose British rule with the help of Dalip Singh and Russia". The Namdhari Sikhs were also active in the campaign for the restoration of Maharaja Dalip Singh, the last Sikh-sovereign of Punjab. In this context the Namdharis calculated some prophecies and raised his hopes regarding the Khalsa Raj (Singh, 2010, p.17). Also the Afghan War in 1877–78 gave impetus to the Kuka activists. Kuka Gurcharan Singh carried out activities in Russia and Turkistan on behalf of his Satguru Ram Singh. A Hindi letter, purporting to be from Ram Singh, mentions that Satguru Ram Singh was shown the spirit of 3, 15,000 Kukas, all of whom were brave soldiers. According to Fauja Singh, Satguru Hari Singh was the main force behind the activities of the Kuka Sikhs. But due to the support of the Sikh literate elite to the British and the alertness of the government, the movement again did not achieve any appreciable success (Singh, 2017, p.188). Satguru Hari Singh gradually increased his missionary activities during this period. Despite many difficulties, he strengthened the Namdhari organization, and carried on the movement in the absence of Satguru Ram Singh. Simultaneously, the government also intensified police force on the Namdhari Sikhs to curb their anti-establishment activities. A Police post was established at the main gate of Bhaini Sahib. According to Namdhari sources, the number of Namdharis living in the premises was reduced to five at a time as Pilgrims were not allowed to enter the premises. Police brutality was at its peak. The meeting of more than five Namdhari Sikhs was banned. They could neither hold their religious gatherings in public nor communicate with each other. Satguru Hari Singh had to take prior permission before leaving the station for a specific occasion even for a short period of time. Gurdwara Bhaini Sahib was raided thrice by the government to ensure that there was no illegal object. After the death of Satguru Ram Singh, the British authorities in India decided to ease the surveillance on him (Ahluwalia, 1999, p. 257).

The government decided in 1895 to completely withdraw the police post, which had been there from 1867-68. Satguru Hari Singh tried to eradicate the allegation made by Singh Sabha that Namdhari was not a true Sikh (Singh, 2010, p. 106-112).

Satguru Hari Singh made Bhaini Sahib the proper seat for his followers. He constructed a building called Gaddi Sahib for his own meditation purposes. In the memory of his brother, Satguru Ram Singh, he constructed a water pool which is said to be dug on the suggestion of Satguru Ram Singh himself. It is believed that during the third

epoch, Shri Ram Chandra, the Lord of Hindus, used to perform havan here. It is said, while its construction was in progress, a triangular shaped havan pit was found here along with the burnt coals. The place was named Ramdaspur and pool was called Ramsar (Singh, 2002). Satguru Ram Singh Mandir was constructed and all efforts were made to keep the langar running efficiently without a break. While narrating the importance of langar at Bhaini Sahib, Satguru Hari Singh Ji once went to the extent of saying that "he would not mind burning his bones in lieu of wood for the langar as it is permanent symbol of the Gurus".

Continuing his missionary activities Satguru Hari Singh took an active part during the famine of 1899 (Singh, 2010, p. 106-112). In 1899 when Punjab and Bikaner were badly famine stricken, he not only fed the hungry people but their cattle also. More than 6000 famine stricken people were fed daily. It is said that the British Commissioner appreciated this act of generosity and wanted to donate 2500 acres of land to Gurudwara Bhaini Sahib for langar. But Satguru refused this offer, and firmly said "You want to give me only 2500 acres of land and keep the rest of the country for yourself, whole land belongs to us, you better leave our country for good" (Kaur & Singh, 2010, p. 36). He continued the practice of donations in terms of money and food grains. The reason was to unite the sangat and give equal participation for the proliferation of the Namdhari community. Besides, he made every possible effort to build up rapport with the contemporary Saints and Satgurus. To overcome the severe hardship, Satguru initiated the series of one hundred and one Akhand Paths of Adi Granth Sahib in 1875 and 1876 subsequently. The chain of Paths has become the regular feature among the Namdhari Sikhs. Moreover, the Paths organized for reappearance of Namdhari Satguru Ram Singh is the novel development of his period (Kaur & Singh, 2010, p. 35-36).

### Satguru Partap Singh (1890-1959) and Continuity of Freedom Struggle

Satguru Pratap Singh succeeded Satguru Hari Singh Ji in 1906, who worked hard to maintain religious fervor and the distinctive identity of Namdharis, who describe him as a messenger of peace for humanity, a symbol of justice, truth and courage. He believed that the flame of struggle for freedom ignited by Satguru Ram Singh would continue to burn through him till the country got freedom (Kaur & Singh, 2010, p. 37). Till then the relations between the British and the Namdharis were dubious and conflicted. Satguru Pratap Singh and his companions were unhappy with the establishment of this police post at Bhaini Sahib. He wanted this police post to be removed at the earliest. He launched a campaign for its removal and organized several meetings against it. In these meetings, the Namdharis were made aware of the futility of such government monitoring (Kuka, 1922).

With the turn of the century, Satguru Pratap Singh carried forward his earlier policy of non-cooperation with the British. After the start of World War I, the British sought help in the war from political parties, their allied countries and traditional socio-religious leaders of India. According to some famous writers, the British also sought the help of Satguru Pratap Singh and assured him of jagirs and various concessions in return. But Satguru Pratap Singh did not want to compromise, so this time the exploitation of the British towards the Namdharis increased further. About ninety thousand Sikhs were recruited in Punjab during the First World War. Unlike other Sikhs, Satguru Pratap Singh did not compromise on his ideology and did not give any financial assistance to the British Government. In 1914, when the British government pulled down the wall of Gurudwara Rakab Ganj Delhi, Namdhari leader Sant Mangal Singh Fatuhi Chak protested against it (Anjan, 2007, p. 106-112). The Namdhari scholars claim that they too stood with the Akalis during the Gurudwara reform movement. Mahtab Singh, Dharam Singh and Sant Buddha Singh Namdhari of village Sanohwal participated in the Jaito movement. Also Sant Udham Singh Meergind prepared his batch for this. Similarly, the Namdhari Darbar passed a resolution in favor of the Gurudwara reform movement (Anjan, 2007, p. 106-112).

Jallianwala Bagh incident took place in 1919. Satguru Pratap Singh's brother Maharaj Nihal Singh and Gurudayal Singh were the eyewitnesses of that incident. Both of them came in contact with Congress leader Dr. Kitchlew, Satya Prakash, who played an active role in the non-cooperation movement. Sant Nidhan Singh Alam, a

close friend of Satguru Pratap Singh, started enrollment in the Congress party to support the non-cooperation movement. To carry out political and organizational activities, Satguru Pratap Singh formed the Namdhari Darbar in 1921, consisting of 33 members. The Durbar was formed to help and support other parties involved in the independence of the country. Its objective was to respond to all socio-political developments in Punjab. Besides this, a weekly magazine called Satjug was also started on 26 May, 1920 at Muktsar on the occasion of Varni Hola. To make people aware of the activities of the court, Satguru Ram Hari Press was established in 1925 to publish Satjug and promote Punjabi.

The Namdhari leadership claims that across the country, the success of Mahatma Gandhi's Satyagraha movement was directly inspired by Satguru Ram Singh's concept of Swadeshi and non-cooperation, which he initiated long before Gandhi. This was the reason why Congress and the Kuka movement had to meet as close allies and sign up as Congress volunteers to carry forward the non-cooperation movement. Satguru Pratap Singh encouraged nationalist leaders by holding political conferences at Bhaini Sahib, the headquarters of Namdhari, and he also provided shelter for nationalists and revolutionaries. The relationship between the Namdharis and the Congress was strengthened by the determination of Satguru Pratap's younger brother, Maharaj Nihal Singh to attend the Lahore session of the Congress. He attended the Samagam Congress along with about one hundred Namdharis. Satguru Pratap Singh's mother Jiwan Kaur also attended this conference. She was in charge of the langar served to the delegates. At Satjug, it is said that it served all the Congress delegates (Satjug, 2011, p. 5).

Under the patronage of Satguru Pratap Singh, nationalists and revolutionaries were also given shelter in the premises of Namdharis. Communist leaders Teja Singh and Sohan Singh Josh visited this place frequently. The Namdharis also had good relations with Baba Gurdit Singh of Kamagatamaru. Namdharis had good relation with Gadar Party too. There were ideological similarities between the Gadarites and the Kuka Sikhs, they both stood against the oppression of the state and fought for independence and had the same socio-cultural and economic background (Satjug (W), 2001). Obviously, this can be better understood by their association with Namdhari and Gadar literature, which gave space to the poets/writers in their journals and praised the patriotism and sacrifice of the Kuka/Gadar heroes. A three-day convention was organized by the Namdharis to pay homage to the martyrs of Malerkotla. Many famous Hindu and Muslim leaders participated in this conference. Presiding over the conference, Pratap Singh reiterated the commitment of the Namdharis to their contribution and participation in the freedom struggle under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi.

The Namdhari people actively participated in the freedom struggle and in the socio-economic programs and demonstrations run by Kirti Kisan Party, State People's Congress and Indian National Congress. Satguru Pratap Singh expressed concern about the absence of textile industry in India when good quality cotton was being produced in India and especially in Punjab. Therefore, he urged the British government to set up more number of textile industries in India. Along with this, he also expressed concern over the increasing unemployment. He highlighted the problems of farmers, who were unable to pay tax due to lack of yield in agriculture and urged the government to reduce the tax of farmers whose fields are unirrigated.

In 1930, Maharaj Nihal Singh, the younger brother of Satguru Pratap Singh, was appointed as the in-charge of the Civil Disobedience Movement in Punjab. Maharaj Nihal Singh was arrested along with some cooks in the Disobedience Movement. They formed the Kuka Congress Party to participate in the programs and policies of the Congress against the British Government (Vahimi, 1974, p. 225). After the martyrdom of Bhagat Singh in 1931, the feeling of nationalism prevailed among the Namdharis. The wickedness and double-mindedness of the British officials were propagated in Namdhari newspaper Satjug. Reacting emotionally to this incident, Namdharis predicted the destruction of the British state in Satjug in the near future.

In April 1936, Maharaj Nihal Singh presided over the Namdhari Durbar and denounced the policies of the British as a threat to Indian unity and independence. Perhaps he was referring to the Communal Award and the 1935

Act. Satguru Pratap Singh tried to end his discontent with the Sikhs. The Sikh leadership opposed the Communal Award and decided to protest against it. In such a situation, Satguru Pratap Singh urged the Sikh leaders to forget their differences and come together on a common platform to celebrate the birthday of Guru Nanak Dev Ji together. In 1934 a conference was organized in Bhaini Sahib in the name of Guru Nanak Dev Ji. Extensive preparations were made for this. Around 20000 people participated. Namdhari, Akali, Nirmala, Udasi, Seva Panthi, Nihang, Sahajdari, Adanshahi and almost all sects and people who believed in the teachings of Adi Granth accepted the invitation. Prominent Khalsa Diwan, Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Shiromani Akali Dal, Udasi Mahamandal, Nirmal Mahamandal etc. organizations were specially invited. On behalf of Satguru Pratap Singh, the Chairman of the reception committee, Sant Inder Singh Chakraborty told the audience that Satguru ji wanted the religious differences between various Sikh sects to be resolved. The following resolutions were passed in this meeting:

1. It was urged that all the Sikh communities should consider it their main duty to spread Gurbani through their throne.
2. All preachers, musicians, editors and leaders must understand their responsibility and do constructive work and not destructive spiritual work.
3. The SGPC, the local Gurdwara Management Committees and other religious institutions were urged to select suitable persons from any community for Granthi, preacher and official responsibility, especially for those Gurdwaras which had already been taken over by the SGPC.
4. Withdrawal of legal cases filed under Gurdwara Act 7 except historical Gurdwaras to avoid legal entanglements and to maintain unity in the name of Guru. At the end of the program many prominent persons were honored by the Namdhari Darbar (Singh & Singh, 1991, p. 104).

In the late 1930s, the Namdhari Sikhs expressed serious concern over the growing communal power of the All India Muslim League under the leadership of Muhammad Ali Jinnah. Jinnah turned to Indian politics determined to make the Muslim League the true and only voice of Muslims in India. He was also determined to place Hindu communalism on the congressional agenda. Satjug analyzed speeches made by Jinnah on several occasions and came to the conclusion that he was determined to destroy the Indian Congress. The magazine noted that chanting Vande Mataram in states governed by Congress could in no way endanger Islam as claimed by the Muslim League. At the same time, Satjug, through an ideology, fractured the Muslim League as a threat to Indian unity. The magazine was not happy with the Congress' policy of appeasing Jinnah and his League in 1938. (Satjug, 1938, p. 3)

Nidan Singh Alam, President of the Namdhari Darbar, reacted against the Muslim League's "two-nation theory", saying it was a fraud, designed to disintegrate Indian regional unity. Satjug analyzed that the policies of the Muslim League proved to be a serious threat to national unity and integration. At the same time, he also opposed the Akali separatists' demand for 'Azad Punjab', which was seen as a serious threat to Indian unity (Francine & Frankel, 2006, p. 697-98).

Under the leadership of Satguru Pratap Singh, Namdhari Sikhs saluted Hindu thinkers and their sacrifices to free the country from British rule. Veer Savarkar was also among them who was a great patriot. Satjug requested the Namdhari Sikhs to warmly welcome Savarkar on his arrival in Punjab on 12 May, 1938. Here Savarkar addressed the Sikh meeting in Rambagh, Amritsar on 12 May, 1938 and said that the Sikhs were the sons of Guru Gobind Singh and he himself was the son of Shivaji. Hindus and Sikhs were inseparable cousins. Referring to the case of Shaheed Ganj Gurdwara, he said that he was a strong supporter of the Maratha movement. He promised all assistance if needed. Joginder Singh, A Short History of the Namdhari Sikhs, p.86

Jawaharlal Nehru visited Bhaini Sahib on 17 February 1939, where he was received with great enthusiasm. Addressing 4,000 people, Nehru paid homage to Satguru Ram Singh ji, praised the Namdharis and thanked Satguru Pratap Singh (The tribune, 1939, p.15).

For some time, the Namdhari Sikhs' relations with the Akalis remained normal and peaceful. But in 1941, a change was witnessed in the Maryada of reciting Path. This year, some Namdhari Sikhs and followers found a new

way of reciting the Akhand Path. Patra-Path was Adi Granth's unlimited page reading process. This issue was highlighted by SGPC and Sikh newspapers like Khalsa Samachar and Sher-e-Punjab strongly condemned it. On this issue, Sarab Hind Akali Conference was organized in Ludhiana on 21-23 February 1941. The conference resolved that Patra-path was an act of religious sacrilege committed by Namdhari Sikhs. This issue was later resolved when the Namdhari leaders gave assurances to stop this mode of recitation in the future. Joginder Singh, *A Short History of the Namdhari Sikhs*, p. 82-83 Again, Satguru Pratap Singh organized the Guru Nanak Sarab Sampark Sammelan (or Guru Nanak Naam Leva Conference) in Amritsar on 7 November, 1942 to resolve community differences. The purpose of this conference was to promote communal unity. Namdhari activists believed that communal unity among Sikhs could only be achieved when the Sikh Religious Committees (SAD, SGPC) gave up their claims to modify or replace any custom that Sikhs had maintained for centuries. Namdharis claimed that the decision of the SGPC in 1942 to close the Akhand Path of Dasam Granth in Bhaini Sahib was unfortunate since Namdhari Sikhs considered Dasam Granth as Holy Scripture and read some of its compositions daily. Therefore, he found that such a resolution of the SGPC was intended to interfere with the dignity of the Namdharis, who wanted the Akali Sikhs and their organizations to respect their beliefs and practices, while the Shiromani Akali Dal and the SGPC could not oblige them especially in the matter of Dehdhari Guru (Satjug(W), 2001, p. 5).

Nevertheless, Namdhari Sikhs felt more insecure about their identity as the circumstances of the pre-independence period were against them. The policies of the government indirectly affected the community interests badly. At such a critical juncture, it was agreed that consolidation of resources and leadership was necessary. The Namdhari Darbar attempted to consolidate the cultural identity of the Namdhari Sikhs at all-India level.

In the wake of the divisive policies of the Muslim League, Namdhari Sikhs stood for Hindu-Sikh unity and condemned the territorial division of India. Like Mahatma Gandhi, the Namdhari leadership also demanded that India should not be divided on communal lines (Singh, 2010, p. 89). In the wake of World War II, Satguru Pratap Singh ordered all Namdhari Sikhs neither to join the army nor to help the government (Kharal, 2011, p. 75). The Namdhari leadership supported the Congress to initiate complete independence campaign during the Second World War. He justified the Congress for launching the Quit India Movement. In addition, in May 1946, on the recommendation of the Cabinet Mission, the Akalis formed the Board of Religious Representatives. The objective of this Board was to organize conferences in cities and villages to mobilize the Sikh masses and force the Britishers to withdraw the decision of the Cabinet Mission. Satguru Pratap Singh and Nidhan Singh Alam became the members of this board. The Board of Religious Representatives declined the Viceroy's offer to participate in the interim government (Singh, 2012, p. 150-151).

However, the increase in violent activities in Punjab forced both Sikhs and Hindus to accept the division of Punjab. The Namdhari Sikhs were also not exceptional in this respect. During the 1947 partition, the Namdharis played an important role under the leadership of Satguru Pratap Singh. No Namdhari was involved in killing Muslims, looting them, destroying their property or kidnapping women etc. as they were forbidden by Satguru Pratap Singh. He had already warned that there would be a partition. On the request of Satguru Pratap Singh, Namdhari Sikhs from West Punjab migrated to East Punjab. They were advised to be transferred to Amritsar and Gurdaspur districts (Singh, 2020, p. 101). In addition, Satguru Pratap Singh also made efforts to build infrastructure and administrative facilities. The Namdhari Mission was at its peak during the lifetime of Guru Pratap Singh. He established a second headquarter called Jiwan Nagar in Haryana in memory of his mother (Jiwan Kaur) and resettled his expatriate followers there. Similarly, he constructed many buildings in Bhaini Sahib. Namdhari Sangeet Vidyalaya was founded in Bhaini Sahib in 1928. To promote closer cooperation and understanding of different sects, he organized Gurmat Sangeet Sammelan in 1933. Furthermore, Satguru Pratap Singh established Satguru Hari Singh Vidyalaya in Jiwan Nagar.

At the socio-cultural level, he introduced institutional reforms. He abolished the dowry system and pioneered the concept of mass marriage, which was initiated by Satguru Ram Singh. He also revived local panchayats to resolve disputes. He toured different parts of the country as well as foreign countries like Singapore, Africa and Thailand to

campaign for Sikhism. In 1940, he established a one-hour group meditation tradition. During his tenure, he completed 6 lakh recitations of Adi Granth Sahib, ten thousand unbroken recitations of Adi Granth Sahib, one thousand unbroken recitations of Dasam Granth Sahib, two and a half million recitations of Chandi-di-Var. More importantly, he started the continuous practice of Naam Simran, which is called Varni, in Bhaini Sahib in 1933 and Jiwan Nagar in 1947. These practices continue without any interruption till date.

### **Satguru Jagjit Singh (1959-2012)**

When Satguru Pratap Singh Ji merged into Prakash in 1959, Satguru Jagjit Singh Ji assumed the responsibility as the supreme spiritual head of Namdhari Sikhs (Satjug Basant Ank, 2009, p. 8). Satguru Jagjit Singh Ji was born on 22 November, 1920 in Sri Bhaini Sahib Village as the eldest son of Satguru Partap Singh. At the time of his birth, Bhaini Sahib was under police surveillance. The imperialists had imposed strict restrictions on the movement and activities of Namdhari Sikhs and reduced their religious freedom as they adopted a policy of non-cooperation against the British Empire. The effects of colonial oppression were felt in all aspects of life in Satguru Jagjit Singh's childhood and youth (Jayagovind, 2017, p.26).

After attaining independence in August 1947, India moved towards fundamental development, which aimed at building a socialist character through economic growth, self-reliance, social justice and poverty alleviation. India needed change from the socio-cultural and economic point of view. Ideally, Satguru Jagjit Singh Ji contributed to the development of India in the form of social, cultural and economic upliftment of Namdharis. He resolved to shift the Namdhari headquarters from Jiwannagar to Bhaini Sahib in 1978, which was a significant beginning for the reconstruction of the existing important sites located in this headquarters. His father Satguru Pratap Singh had already established the modern form of construction in village Jiwan Nagar.

Satguru Jagjit Singh had rich administrative insight and diplomatic skills in mobilizing resources. In addition, he had connections in political circles and bureaucracy, which strengthened his position as the head of the Namdhari mission. Satguru Jagjit Singh Ji gave due respect to members of other religions and social organizations working for welfare of humanity without discrimination on the basis of caste, creed, color or political affiliation. He encouraged simple marriage system and inter-caste marriages. All traditional marriage ceremonies were banned. Dowry system was also banned. He did this for the upliftment of women. Some women were appointed as 'subas'. Satguru Jagjit Singh Ji emphasized the need of education for the all round development of the personality of the youth. To achieve this objective, he established schools at Sri Bhaini Sahib, New Delhi, Sri Jiwan Nagar, Mandi and Bangkok (Kaur & Singh, 2010, p.140). Satguru Jagjit Singh's skill in political affairs and human relations came to the fore during the partition of India. Under the guidance of his father, he worked tirelessly to resettle refugees from West Punjab in different parts of India, mainly at Sri Jiwan Nagar, Haryana and Mandi, Himachal Pradesh. While Satguru Pratap Singh Ji played a major role in uniting and holding together the Namdhari community during the turbulent years of the Indian freedom struggle, Satguru Jagjit Singh Ji paved the way for the economic, cultural and spiritual progress of the community in independent India.

Satguru Jagjit Singh Ji was very fond of sports and encouraged the youth to play various sports like badminton, hockey, kabaddi, volleyball, foot ball, roller skating etc. He established the Namdhari Hockey Academy for the youngsters to participate in sports. The Namdhari hockey team was recognized at the national and international level. Its players have also represented India in the Olympics (Singh, 1996, p. 64). Music festivals were organized in India and abroad to spread Indian art worldwide. He was a great lover of Indian classical vocal as well as instrumental music. A music academy was established at Sri Bhaini Sahib to promote vocal and instrumental music under the supervision of eminent musicians. Apart from this, he took keen interest in the development of agriculture and introduced new techniques of increasing production from the fields.

Overall, the Namdhari Mission which started as a protest against meaningless rituals and customs has flourished. Satguru Ram Singh contributed significantly to the progress of Namdhari beliefs and practices. He

developed new concepts in this context and changed his mission from Sahajdhari to Khalsa tradition. Namdharis carried forward the practices under Sikh ideals and institutions in terms of decorum, Sangat and Langar. He developed the organizational structure and shifted its Headquarters at Bhaini Sahib in Punjab, which was known as Ramdaspora. He appointed his confidants as well as administrative personnel to propagate his mission. This administrative system continues till today with some modifications. He built dharamshalas and a separate postal system.

Another important development under Satguru Satguru Ram Singh was the change in the social background of Namdhari followers. Most of Guru Balak Singh's followers were from the urban Khatri and Arora castes of the Rawalpindi Division, where Sikhs constituted only 1.7 percent of the total population and 68 percent of these were trading castes, while Satguru Ram Singh's followers were from the lower castes, artisans and marginal Jat Sikh peasantry of East Punjab. Mentioning the classes, Major Pakins said that "the conversions are made mainly from Jats, Tirkhanas, Chumars and Maujbis." As MacLeod discussed the social discontent among the peasant and artisan classes due to the recurrence of famines, and the exploitation of the peasants by the moneylanders were the major reasons for these classes to respond to the Kuka movement. According to Namdhari sources, Malwa, Doaba, Majha and Pothar Kuka were the affected areas in Punjab. It is estimated that the number of kukas during 1871 was about 300,000 (Sanehi, 1982, p. 40-52).

Under Satguru Pratap Singh, the Namdhari Mission as well as its administrative structure underwent another change. Unlike traditional Sikhs, Namdharis integrated into the Hindu social system. Namdhari beliefs and practices were similar to those of Hindus. Varniya and Havan rituals also became prevalent among the Namdhari Sikhs. In the mid-20th century, the Namdhari sect was led by an incarnate Guru. He was known as 'Satguru' who possessed all the qualities of reincarnation of the Lord. Namdhari scholars created the theory of succession and addressed Guru Balak Singh and Satguru Ram Singh as the eleventh and twelfth Guru respectively.

## Organisational Structure of Namdharis

The Satguru is the head of the spiritual and temporal affairs of the Namdhari Sikhs. More than thirty three Subas are handling community affairs in Punjab. However, the representation of Subas and other local leaders is determined by historical, administrative and demographic needs. Subas are appointed in Haryana also as Jiwan Nagar (village in district Sirsa) is the another headquarters of Namdhari Sikhs. There are many villages in this district with a large number of Namdhari Sikhs. Most of them are agriculturists who immigrated from Pakistan in 1946-47. (Singh, 2014, p. 286)

New Delhi has emerged as an important center of political-religious activities of the Namdhari Sikhs. Many well-known leaders and incumbents come from Delhi alone. Namdhari Sangat from Jammu-Kashmir and town Mandi of Himachal Pradesh have also received representation. Most of these Namdhari Sikhs are expatriates from Pakistan. A large number of Namdhari Sikhs reside in the towns and cities of Uttar Pradesh. In addition, several subas represent Namdhari-Sikhs from Thailand, Kenya, Canada and England. The Satgurus used to visit these countries frequently. Most of these Namdhari Sikhs belong to the Khatri, Arora and Ramgharia castes.

However, since the establishment of the Namdhari Darbar in 1935, the position, duties and responsibilities of the Subedars, including local functionaries have changed. The latter has emerged as the apex body for experience sharing and decision making. This includes Subas, local leaders and prominent Namdhari personnel. All its members and office bearers enjoy their tenure and position according to the will and belief of the Satguru. The Namdhari Darbar in its periodic meetings takes decisions regarding social, religious, financial, political, administrative and judicial matters. However, all its decisions are effective only when the Satguru gives his consent. Technically, the Satguru's confidants, subas and administrative personnel are helpful in implementing his decisions. Whenever needed, circulars and advisories are issued to the Namdhari community from the Darbar. Oral instructions are also issued on urgent or sensitive matters. In the wake of new concerns and challenges, the Namdhari leadership has developed several administrative departments and institutions in recent times. In order to maintain the financial transactions, the

Accounts Department Managers' Committee has been constituted. Income mainly comes from voluntary offerings, revenue from land property, agricultural farms and donations, while expenditure items include purchase of land assets, construction of various buildings including health and educational institutions and monuments, maintenance of infrastructure, religious meetings, salaries to administrative personnel and transportation/communication etc.

The Namdhari leadership is concerned with the growing apostasy among Namdhari boys and girls on the one hand and their alienation from their cultural heritage on the other. To overcome this challenge, Visva-Vidyarthi Jatha was established in 1965 and its subsequent wing Vishwa-Namdhari Vidyarthi Jatha in 1981. The Namdhari leadership also confronted another serious problem of commercialization and cultural vulgarization of the marriage institution. To keep marriage ceremony simple and dowry free, Satguru Partap Singh made obligatory for his followers to solemnize it only at Bhaini Sahib Headquarters. He established the Anand Karaj committee to conduct these marriages as per Namdhari maryada.

## Stature of Guru

The Namdhari Guru, ("Encyclopedia Britannica," 1962, p. 1046) known as the 'Satguru' by Namdharis, is the supreme spiritual power of the community. The Namdharis believe that the existence of the Lord is in the form of a Guru in whose presence all ceremonies like naming, Dastar Bandi, marriage and death ceremonies are executed.

From the very beginning of the Namdhari movement, spiritual masters, scholars have insisted on the idea that Satguru Ram Singh was not just a person, but was an incarnation of Guru Gobind Singh. Namdharis regard him as the image of God and an absolute authority. In fact, in the early 20th century, Namdhari writers distinguished the identity of the Guru in such a way that they used the words God and Guru interchangeably. For Namdhari Sikhs, God and Guru are two sides of the same coin.

## Namdhari Beliefs and Practices

Beliefs and practices themselves can be regarded as empirical realities and social facts of a particular society and community. Under the sociological view, all knowledge is socially constructed and all kinds of beliefs are at the center of that construction. A belief in a cultural system is any statement or part of a statement meant to describe some aspect of a collective reality. What is generally accepted as "truth" or "fact" in the social system has no bearing on whether it qualifies as a belief (Johnso, 2005, p. 27).

Many articles have been published pertaining to Rahit Maryada so far. The Namdhari Darbar published Namdhari Nit-nem in the year of 2000, in which details of Banis to be recited daily is given. It includes modes of initiation, Havan under the Rahitnama Patshahi Barhvi and Ardasa Patshahi Barhvi. The discourses of the Satgurus become Hukamnamas for the followers. The origin of these practices is considered to the letters written by Satguru Ram Singh from his exile. He prescribed the code of conduct for his disciples as; the supreme goal of human life is the attainment of the Almighty and the attainment of salvation. This is possible only by the grace of Satguru, wake up at three and a half hours before sunrise, take a bath along with hair wash. Always chant the name of God, recite Chandi-di-var before sunrise, perform Havan on all auspicious occasions, have full faith in God and Satguru, give highest respect to the Gurbani of Adi Granth Sahib and Dasam Granth Sahib and consider the scriptures to be eternal truth, not only for worship but also for teachings to follow. Wear a Rosary made of wool (Kaur & Singh, 2010, p. 79-80).

Namdhari Sikhs consider only their Satguru to be the judge of all their actions and believe in living life according to the orders of the Satguru. They consider his spiritual master to be the protector of sufferings and sorrows. Furthermore, they believe that their Satguru is the the forgiver and the savior who atones for their sins (Kaur & Singh, 2010, p. 79-80).

Namdhari Sikhs follow code of conduct which comprises daily reciting the name of God, earning livelihood by honest means and to help the needy people. Early in the morning they take bath and start meditating the name of God. They recite nam shabad(hymns) with rosary in hands whenever they want during the whole day. Most of the Namdhari Sikhs only meditate in the early morning. They also participate in the collective congregations called Jap Paryog in villages and cities, Namdhari Sikhs organize congregation in the month of Sep.-Oct. in the memory of Satguru Ram Singh because they believe that their Satguru will come back one day, Varni (rituals of meditation) and Havan are arranged at local level on particular days. The socio-religious festivals are also organised at Bhaini Sahib Headquarters in which thousands of Namdhari Sikhs from distant villages and towns participate. Particularly asu da mela and Hola Mohlla are main festives.

The Namdhari Sikhs arrange path of the Adi-Granth on the occasions of joys and sorrows. If it is simple path, the pathis perform it within seven days. The Adi-Granth is placed in the clean room. The family-members attentively listen to the path. At the end, ardas (supplication) is performed. Then sacramental food (karah parsad) is distributed. More arrangements are required to perform Akhand Path. The Sodhis perform this job. Most of the Sodhis stay at Bhaini Sahib. The date for performing path or Akhand- Path is arranged according to the availability of these Sodhis. The well-water is required in a big quantity for drinking and washing because the tap-water is prohibited in Maryada. Apart from this, other things like samagari (ration) is arranged in advance. However, utmost attention is paid to the way of cooking and serving.

Namdhari Sikhs perform ceremonies related to birth, marriage and death in accordance with their own maryada. Mother of the newborn can enter in the kitchen after thirteen days. A ceremony is performed known as Amrit shakna, in which Amrit is beptised to mother and child both and gurumtra is whispered in their ears. Sometimes, relatives are invited on this occasion. Langar is served in the end. They happily carry out the marriage ceremony according to Maryada. The parents, in consultation with local leaders or near and dear ones, propose the boy or girl and seek the approval of the Satguru. They fill a form which is designed by Vishwa Namdhari Sangat, Bhaini Sahib. The form records the name, occupation, gotra (marriage caste group) of their paternal and maternal domicile; Date of birth, height and qualification of girl and boy. The parents give undertaking that they have not given or received dowry and commit no violation of commands of Sri Satguru.

Vishwa Namdhari Sangat certifies that both the boy and the girl are of the prescribed age, are Gurmukh in appearance and can perform Ardas. Two responsible persons along with Suba attest to the above antecedents. Before performing this ritual, parents perform Path (reading the Adi-Granth) in their respective homes or at Bhaini Sahib. However, it is not mandatory. This ceremony is done both individually and collectively. Mass marriages are organized from time to time. Specially, these mass marriages are organized in Assu da Mela and Hola Mohlla. Satguru advises his followers to avoid crying and chest-beating on the death of a person as death is the will of God. However, in practice, the closest to the deceased often cry emotionally. According to the Namdhari maryada, the deceased person is given full bath and administered amrit. After the cremation, ashes are collected and thrown into flowing water. They perform a path either at local place or Bhaini Sahib (Singh, 2013, p. 167-168).

As mentioned earlier, the Namdhari Sikhs follow the strict code of discipline. Their eating taboos can be explained in terms of Sodh which obliges every Namdhari Sikh to observe eating taboos in true spirit. Sodh is two types: Vaddi Sodh (big discipline) and Chhoti Sodh (small discipline). For observing Chhoti Sodh, The Namdhari Sikhs can take some liberty in the cooking food and eating norms whereas for observing Vaddi Sodh each Namdhari Sikh is expected to cook his food himself and eat it in the utensils untouched by others. For the obvious reasons, majority of the Namdhari Sikhs observe Chhoti Sodh. Only a few Namdhari Sikhs observe Vaddi Sodh. However the Namdhari Sikhs are strictly vegetarians and tea-totallers (Pravachan Satguru Jagjit Singh Ji, n.d., p. 181). They avoid eating food cooked by the non-Namdhari Sikhs. They also avoid eating food-stuff, soft drinks, tea and coffee available in the market (Pravachan Satguru Jagjit Singh Ji, n.d., p.181).

Under the guidance of Satguru Jagjit Singh, Namdhari youth avoid all types of consumption of-alcohol, tobacco and other intoxicants ( Pravachan Satguru Jagjit Singh Ji, n.d., p.181). Nevertheless an affluent section of the Namdhari community often visits Vaisnav hotels or Dhabas. Similarly, substantial numbers of Namdhari Sikhs attends social function and eat vegetarian food. But they don't eat food where non-veg is served. Taking serious attention towards the health of the Namdhari Sangat, Satjug makes aware Sangat about the things which are unsafe to their health and also prohibit it according to the Namdhari Maryada. The Namdhari diet is generally made from the clarified butter. Other vegetable oils are less used in their food. Nevertheless, on the occasion of joy, they generally distribute the home made sweetmeats and offer Chahtta (herbal tea) to the neighbourhood and gatherings. Nevertheless, Namdhari eating taboos are broadly inspired from the Ayurveda.

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