

Rām Singh passed away on 29 November 1885. Many of his followers did not believe that he was dead. They continued to hope that he would one day come to the Pañjāb and free Hindostān from the shackles of the English.

The Kūkā movement marked a significant stage in the development of national consciousness in the country. In the 1870s, when the English were reinstalling themselves in India after the revolt of 1857, it gave them another rude jolt.

They number around 1,000,000 today. The Nāmdhārīs are known for their simple living and rigid code of conduct. However, they have also drifted away from mainstream Sikhī because of some of the strict rules adopted outside the Panthic Rahit Maryādā (ਸਿਖ ਰਹਿਤ ਮਰਯਾਦਾ), giving their sect a cult like appearance:

- They all wear white clothes with a white turban and a turquoise band on their waists.
- Their marriages are performed usually in groups on special occasion such as Holā Mahallā (ਹੋਲਾ ਮਹੱਲਾ).
- They believe in living *Gurūs*.
- They have their own *Gurduārās* and their own organizational structure (as discussed above) within their headquarters.
- Dasam Granth (ਦਸਮ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ) is given an equal status along with Gurū Granth Sāhib (ਗੁਰੂ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ).

The most significant of the divergences concerns the doctrine of the *Gurū*. Whereas the line of personal *Gurūs* ended in 1708, Nāmdhārī doctrine maintains that the succession still continues. This is the cause they are not regarded as the part of the Sikh Panth.

Adapted from: Heritage of the Sikhs by Harbans Singh

Non- Sikh Ideology	Sikh Ideology
The Udāsī <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not believe in householder (grihast ਗ੍ਰਿਹਸਤ) lifestyle. (Example) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The householder (grihast) lifestyle is considered an integral lifestyle and highly recommended of all Sikhs.
The Nirmalā	
The Nirāṅkāṛī	
The Nāmdhārī	

Singh Sabhā (ਸਿੰਘ ਸਭਾ) Movement (early 1900s)

The Singh Sabhā movement was a response to the many factions that were dividing the Sikhs and was an attempt to reinstall the values of the Sikh *Gurū's* (ਸਿਖ ਗੁਰੂ). Following closely upon the two successive movements, Nirankari and Namdhari, it was an expression of the impulse of the Sikh community to rid itself of the base adulterations and accretions which had been draining away its energy, and to rediscover the sources of its original inspiration. It was, however, quite different from its precursors in source, content and outcome. The Nirankari and Namdhari movements were inspired by individual holy men who, unhappy at the dilution of Sikh principles and practice, desired to set right some of the aberrations purely religious in nature, and who ended up in founding their separate sects. The Singh Sabhās, on the other hand, arose out of a common awareness of the danger to the very existence of the Sikhs as a separate religious community. It was led by men deeply religious but with no claims to divine knowledge and no ambitions for exalted priesthood. In contrast with the earlier, exclusively sectarian cults, the Singh Sabhā movement possessed a mass appeal and base. It influenced the entire community and reorientated its outlook and spirit. The stimulus it provided has shaped the Sikhs' attitude and aspiration over the past more than one hundred years.

To quote Harbans Singh (ਹਰਬੰਸ ਸਿੰਘ) in *The Heritage of the Sikhs* "The Singh Sabhā (ਸਿੰਘ ਸਭਾ) which followed them (the other movements) had a much deeper impact. It influenced the entire Sikh community and reoriented its outlook and spirit. Since the days of the *Gūrūs* nothing so vital had transpired to fertilize the consciousness of the Sikhs. The Singh Sabhā, by leavening the intellectual and cultural processes, brought a new dimension to the inner life of the community and enlarged its heritage. Starting in the seventies of the 19th century, it marked a turning-point in Sikh history. It touched Sikhī (ਸਿਖੀ) to its very roots, and made it a living force once again. The stimulus it provided has shaped the Sikhs' attitude and aspiration over the past one hundred years."

The Singh Sabhā movement was successful because of its strong message of establishing Sikh identity as **not** being a sect of Hindūism. Earlier, Hindū philosophers had declared Sikhs as "another sect of Hindūism". The primary aim of the movement was to rekindle the spirit of the *Khālsā* (ਖਾਲਸਾ) and reject everything that was against the *Gurūs'* teachings. Rites and customs considered consistent with Sikh principles and tradition were established. For some, legal sanction was secured through government legislation. With this came the reorganization of *Gurduārās* (ਗੁਰਦੁਆਰਾ). Later in 1920's *Gurduārās* like Nankāṇā Sāhib (ਨਨਕਾਣਾ ਸਾਹਿਬ), Pañjā Sāhib (ਪੰਜਾ ਸਾਹਿਬ), Harimandar Sāhib (ਹਰਿਮੰਦਰ ਸਾਹਿਬ), Taran Tāran Sāhib (ਤਰਨ ਤਾਰਨ ਸਾਹਿਬ) and more were freed from the hold of hereditary *Mahants* (ਮਹੰਤ). These *Mahants* were practicing rites and rituals inconsistent with Sikhī, including not letting people of lower caste into *Gurduārās*, publicly smoking, idol worshipping of various gods and goddesses, and other rituals not followed in Sikhī.

The Singh Sabhā movement not only rehabilitated the Sikh institutions; it also helped to get rid of the rituals and rites like caste and also tried to make sure that in the future these rituals would not creep back in. Before Singh Sabhā, the situation was so bad that even Giānī Dī Singh (ਗਿਆਨੀ ਦਿਤ ਸਿੰਘ), a much honored literary giant of the Singh Sabhā movement was refused *Kaṛāh Prashād* (ਕੜਾਹ ਪ੍ਰਸ਼ਾਦ) at a *Gurduārā* since he was said to be from a low caste.

This period also witnessed the modern development and emergence of new cultural and political aspirations. Higher levels of literacy were achieved by Sikhs. The famous *Khālsā* College at Amritsar (ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤਸਰ) and hundreds of *Khālsā* Schools were opened throughout Pāñjāb. Many Sikhs ventured outside India at this period and settled in Malaysia, Canada, UK, Africa and USA.

In Pāñjāb, the Sikhs sought to secure recognition for themselves. A note which appeared in a Sikh newspaper, the *Khālsā Akhbār* (ਖਾਲਸਾ ਅਖਬਾਰ) of Lāhaur, 25 May 1894, from the pen of its editor, Giānī Dīṭ Singh (1853-1901) states: “An English newspaper writes that the Christian faith is making rapid progress and makes the prophecy that within the next twenty-five years, one-third of the Mājāhā (ਮਾਝਾ) area will be Christian. The Malvā (ਮਾਲਵਾ) will follow suit. Just as we do not see any Buddhists in the country except in images, in the same fashion the Sikhs, who are now, here and there, visible in turbans and their other religious forms like wrist bangles and swords, will be seen only in pictures in museums. Their own sons and grandsons turning Christians and clad in coats and trousers and sporting toadstool-like caps will go to see them in the museums and say in their pidgin Punjabi: Look, that is the picture of a Sikh—the tribe that inhabited this country once upon a time. Efforts of those who wish to resist the onslaught of Christianity are feeble and will prove abortive, like a leper without hands and feet trying to save a boy falling off a rooftop.”

The Singh Sabhā movement was also fighting against the large Christian missionary activity that had started in Pāñjāb. Reporting the observance on the first anniversary of the Lāhaur (ਲਾਹੌਰ) Singh Sabhā, in its issue for 22 April 1905, the *Khālsā Advocate* (an English newspaper), referred to the occupant of a Buṅgā (ਬੁੰਗਾ) in the precincts of the Taran Tāran Gurduārā (ਤਰਨ ਤਾਰਨ ਗੁਰਦੁਆਰਾ) who had embraced Christianity and hung a cross on one of its walls to convert it into a Christian chapel.

The *Khālsā Akhbār*, 13 July 1894, carried this letter in its correspondence columns: “In the village of Naṭṭā (ਨੱਟਾ), Nābhā (ਨਾਭਾ) state, a Sikh married off his daughter according to Sikh custom. Most of the population in the village, including Brahmanical Hindūs and some Sikhs, became hostile. They did not let the marriage party stay in the *Dharamsālā* (ਧਰਮਸਾਲਾ). The host, firm in his faith, had to put up the wedding guests in his own house.”

A student by the name of Vīr Singh (ਵੀਰ ਸਿੰਘ) contributed a letter to the *Khālsā Akhbār*, 12 February 1897, saying: “Near the Dukhbhañjanī Berī (ਦੁਖਭੰਜਨੀ ਬੇਰੀ) tree in the Harimandar Sāhib precincts there is a room on the front wall of which is painted a picture. The picture depicts a goddess and Gurū Gobind Singh (ਗੁਰੂ ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਸਿੰਘ). The goddess stands on golden sandals and she has many hands—ten or perhaps, twenty. One of the hands is stretched out and in this she holds a Khaṇḍā (ਖੰਡਾ). Gurū Gobind Singh stands barefoot in front of it with his hands folded.”

A letter in the *Khālsā Akhbār*, 8 October 1897, reported: “On Tuesday, Bhādon (ਭਾਦੋਂ) 31, the *Pujārīs* (ਪੁਜਾਰੀ) of the Taran Tāran Gurduārā (ਤਰਨ ਤਾਰਨ ਗੁਰਦੁਆਰਾ) held the Sharādh (ਸ਼ਰਾਧ) ceremony in honor of Gurū Arjan. Those who feasted were from outside the faith and they smoked.”

A correspondent’s letter in the *Khālsā Samācār* (ਖਾਲਸਾ ਸਮਾਚਾਰ) of Ammritsar, edited by Bhāī Vīr Singh (ਭਾਈ ਵੀਰ ਸਿੰਘ), 25 June 1902, said: “Around the village of Singhpur (ਸਿੰਘਪੁਰ), Christians and Muhammadans are becoming very influential. The former have two churches here and the latter two mosques. In this area there is no *Dharamsālā* and the rural *Khālsā* is rather neglectful of its religious duty.”

These newspaper quotations were taken from Herigate of the Sikhs, by Sardār Harbans Singh (ਸਰਦਾਰ ਹਰਬੰਸ ਸਿੰਘ). They reveal the identity crisis that Sikhs faced at the dawn of the new century.

An editorial in the *Khālsā Advocate*, 15 December 1904, summed up the situation which existed before the emergence of the Singh Sabhā thus: “. . . false *Gurūs* grew up in great abundance whose only business was to fleece their flock and pamper their own self-aggrandizement. Properly speaking, there was no Sikhism. Belief in the *Gurūs* was gone. The idea of brotherhood in the Panth was discarded. The title of Bhāī, so much honored by Sikhs of old, fell into disuse and contempt. Sikhs groveled in superstition and idolatry... It [Sikhism] had, thus, lost all that was good and life-giving in the faith.”

“The Singh Sabhā movement was helped by the missionary activities of Mohammedans (Muslims) and Christians. It grew out of nowhere to become a founding father of the current SGPC and Akālī (ਅਕਾਲੀ) party. The Singh Sabhā Movement brought back the old ways of *Khālsā* and restored the pride and dignity of common urban and rural Sikhs”.

Adapted from: Heritage of the Sikhs and Encyclopedia of Sikhism by Harbans Singh.

Questions to ask or discuss with students:

1. How were the Nirāṅkārī (ਨਿਰੰਕਾਰੀ) and Nāmdhārī (ਨਾਮਧਾਰੀ) movements separate from the Singh Sabhā (ਸਿੰਘ ਸਭਾ) movement?
2. How were the Nirāṅkārī and Nāmdhārī movements separate from Sikh thought?
3. Were the Nirāṅkārī and Nāmdhārī movements a threat to Sikhī? If so, specify how?
4. How did the Sikhs at that time respond?
5. Why was the Singh Sabhā movement important at that time?
6. What aspects of the Singh Sabhā movement are in line with Sikh thought?
7. What do you think might have happened to Sikhī were it not for the Singh Sabhā movement?
8. Do you think it would be helpful to have a similar movement now? Why, or why not?

Instructions: KWHL Diagram

If the task involves analyzing and organizing what you know and what you want to learn about a topic, use a KWHL chart. **K** stands for what you already **KNOW** about the subject, **W** for what you **WANT** to learn, **H** for figuring out **HOW** you can learn more about the topic, and **L** for what you **LEARN** as you read. Example: Fill out a KWHL chart before, during, and after you read about a topic or topics.