

Grade: 8

Course: Virṣā (ਵਿਰਸਾ)

Lesson Number: 8 - 9

Unit Name: Singh Sabhā (ਸਿੰਘ ਸਭਾ) Movement

Title: Pre-Singh Sabhā Movement

Standards

Standard 3: The Singh Sabhā Movement

- Students identify the social situation when the Singh Sabhā began to re-assert the values of the *Gurū* (ਗੁਰੂ).
- Students identify the various Sikh offshoots and the differences in their ideology with that of the *Khālsā* (ਖਾਲਸਾ). This section should include present-day groups that have diverted from the path. Linkages should be drawn between this period and present day.

Objectives

1. Students will compare and contrast the different groups that have diverted from the *Khālsā* path.

Prerequisites

- This lesson may take two class periods because of the amount of reading.

Materials

- A copy of the readings (in Teacher Resources)
- Journals
- Pencils
- Graphic organizer

Advanced Preparation

- Teachers should look over readings and should be able to clearly identify how these groups have a different ideology from the Sikh path.

Engagement (15 to 20 minutes)

- Ask students what they think it means to follow or commit to the *Khālsā* path? Students should say taking Amrit (ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ), considering Gurū Granth Sāhib (ਗੁਰੂ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ) and Gurū Panth (ਗੁਰੂ ਪੰਥ) as *Gurū* (ਗੁਰੂ), believing in Saṅgat (ਸੰਗਤ) and Paṅgat (ਪੰਗਤ), reading and understanding Gurbāṇī (ਗੁਰਬਾਣੀ), living the lifestyle of a Gursikh (ਗੁਰਸਿਖ), etc.
- Now ask students if they know of groups that either exist, or have existed, that may not have been in line with Sikh thought?
- They may address *Bābā-Derās* (ਬਾਬਾ-ਡੇਰਾ) or some historical groups such as Nirmalās (ਨਿਰਮਲਾ), Niraṅkāris (ਨਿਰੰਕਾਰੀ), etc.
- Tell them that in fact there have been such groups that have veered from the path.

Exploration (35 minutes)

- Now hand out the graphic organizer with the two columns to the students (In teacher resources).
- Let students choose if they would like to partner up with someone or if they would like to read silently on their own.

- After reading the write-ups ask students to write in the first column the name of the group and characteristics of the group that are not in line with Sikh principles. Then ask students to write down in the other column what would be the correct Sikh principles or thinking (See example in Teacher Resources).
- You may discuss answers as a whole group when the class is done or after each paragraph is read and the organizer is done.
- Try to make sure that students are able to clearly explain how these groups have diverted from the Khālsā path and what the more accurate Khālsā thinking is.

Explanation/ Extension (5 to 10 minutes)

- The teacher can take the time at this point to discuss how the increase in *Bābā Derās* are currently also taking many Sikhs away from the correct path of Sikhī (ਸਿੱਖੀ).
- Discuss how this is happening. For example, some *Bābās* want Sikhs to worship them instead of the Gurū Granth Sāhib which is completely against Sikhī. Some *Bābās* say that they have magical powers and can give their disciples anything, which is also completely against Sikh principles. The Sikh *Gurūs* were all-capable, but they never used their capabilities to boost their own egos, but rather to teach life-lessons.

Evaluation (On-Going)

- Teachers may collect graphic organizers to see if students were able to clearly distinguish between authentic Sikh principles and that of the groups/sects.

Teacher Resources

The Udāsīs (ਉਦਾਸੀ) and Nirmalās (ਨਿਰਮਲਾ)

The Udāsīs were founded by Srī Cand (ਸ੍ਰੀ ਚੰਦ) (1494-1629), the eldest son of Gurū Nānak Sāhib (ਗੁਰੂ ਨਾਨਕ ਸਾਹਿਬ). Udāsī, comes from the root Udās (ਉਦਾਸ), meaning detachment or withdrawal from the worldly life. Srī Cand opposed his father's decision to make Gurū Aṅgad Sāhib (ਗੁਰੂ ਅੰਗਦ ਸਾਹਿਬ) the next Gurū (ਗੁਰੂ) so eventually he started his own order. Srī Cand lived a life of celibacy (did not marry) and asceticism (very simple, like a monk). During the seventeenth century, the Udāsīs grew in number and were respected by the early Panth (ਪੰਥ). However, this changed when Anand Ghan (ਅਨੰਦ ਘਨ), an Udāsī scholar of the late 18th century and 19th centuries, wrote commentaries on the Ādi Granth (ਆਦਿ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ) from a largely Hindu-Vedantic perspective. Although they believe in the Ādi Granth and pay it great respect, they do not believe in the life of a householder (Grihast - ਗ੍ਰਿਹਸਤ) nor in the principles of the Gurū Panth (ਗੁਰੂ ਪੰਥ) and Gurū Granth Sāhib (ਗੁਰੂ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ). Currently, there are no official contemporary numbers of how many Udāsīs there are.

The Nirmalās (ਨਿਰਮਲਾ) are very similar to the Udāsīs in the sense that they too were celibates. “The Nirmalās, with the Udāsīs, form part of the Sanātān (ਸਨਾਤਨ) Sikh world-view and share many of its beliefs; along with belief in yogic/ meditative and scriptural recitation and study. They reflect, in addition to the Ādi Granth, on the Veds (ਵੇਦ), Shāstra (ਸ਼ਾਸਤਰ), Purān (ਪੁਰਾਨ), and Epic literature.” Most of them today also wear saffron robes and all of them are *Kesdhārīs* (ਕੇਸਧਾਰੀ).

‘Nirmalā’ means spotless or pure ones. The most famous Nirmalā was Paṇḍit Tārā Singh Narottam (ਪੰਡਿਤ ਤਾਰਾ ਸਿੰਘ ਨਰੋਤਮ) (1822-1891), who devoted his entire life to the explication of Sikh theology/ philosophy. He wrote over ten books and reference materials. Paṇḍit Tārā Singh also taught the influential Giānī Giān Singh (ਗਿਆਨੀ ਗਿਆਨ ਸਿੰਘ) (1822-1921). Sant Atar Singh (ਸੰਤ ਅਤਰ ਸਿੰਘ) (1867-1927) one of the most influential Sikh saints also had his formal training at a Nirmalā establishment. Today, they form a well-respected and highly disciplined organization, with many establishments. However, there are no official numbers on how many there are.

Adapted from:

The Encyclopedia of Sikhism by Singh, Harbans

<http://philtar.ucsm.ac.uk/encyclopedia/sikhism/nirmal.html>

<http://philtar.ucsm.ac.uk/encyclopedia/sikhism/udasis/html>

The Nirāṅkāri (ਨਿਰੰਕਾਰੀ) Movement (1850s)

After the fall of the rule of Raṅjīt Singh (ਰਣਜੀਤ ਸਿੰਘ) there were several attempts to raise the splendor of the Khālsā (ਖਾਲਸਾ). Harbans Singh in *Heritage of the Sikhs* says “The Sikhs were deeply galled at the fall of their kingdom, but not unduly dismayed. They attributed the outcome of their contest with the English to the chances of war. They were also aware that, despite the deceitfulness of courtiers such as Lāl Singh (ਲਾਲ ਸਿੰਘ) and Tej Singh (ਤੇਜ ਸਿੰਘ), they had fought the *Phiraṅgī* (ਫਿਰੰਗੀ) or foreigners squarely, and maintained their manly demeanor even in defeat. In this mood, it was easier for them to be reconciled to their lot after normalcy was restored. The peaceful spell which followed, however, produced an attitude of unwariness. Conventional and superstitious ritual which, forbidden by the *Gurūs* (ਗੁਰੂ), had become acceptable as an adjunct of regal pomp and ceremony during the days of Sikh power, now gained an increasing hold over the Sikh mind. The true teachings of the *Gurūs*

which had supplied Sikhī (ਸਿਖੀ) its potent principle of development and regeneration were obscured by this rising tide of conservatism. The Sikh religion was losing its characteristic vigor and its followers were relapsing into beliefs and dogmas from which the *Gurūs*' teaching had extricated them. Absorption into ceremonial Hindūism seemed the course inevitably set for them."

Thereafter, several movements to reform Sikhī were started. One of the first movements was the Nirāṅkāri movement, which was started by Dyāl Dās (ਦਯਾਲ ਦਾਸ) (1783-1855), a Sahajdhārī (ਸਹਜਧਾਰੀ) Sikh. He began to preach against the rites and rituals that were creeping into Sikhī, especially the worship of images or idols. He felt that Sikhī was being assimilated into Hindūism. He emphasized the Sikh belief in Nirāṅkār (ਨਿਰੰਕਾਰ) the 'Formless One'. From this, the movement originating from his message came to be known as the Nirāṅkāri movement. The word 'Nirāṅkāri' means 'the worshipper of Nirāṅkār' stands for that God who is existent but has no shape or form, who is free from the material form.

Dyāl Dās soon acquired from his followers the status of 'gurū' and gathered around him disciples who, like him, started calling themselves Nirāṅkāris. He purchased a piece of land on December 3, 1851 where he set up a Gurduārā, known as the Nirāṅkāri Darbār (ਦਰਬਾਰ). With this, the Nirāṅkāri movement gained a permanent footing. The followers and admirers of Dyāl began their work of reform with great enthusiasm. He came to have hundreds of followers before he died in 1853. His eldest son, Darbārā Singh (ਦਰਬਾਰਾ ਸਿੰਘ), took over after him and established many centers in towns and villages outside of Rāvalpiṇḍī (ਰਾਵਲਪਿੰਡੀ) (this is where Dyāl was from). Within the first six weeks, Darbārā Singh called for a conference in which he explained the Sikh Maryādā (ਮਰਯਾਦਾ) and gave a practical live demonstration of the Anand (ਅਨੰਦ) marriage ceremony.

Rām Singh Nāmdhārī (ਰਾਮ ਸਿੰਘ ਨਾਮਧਾਰੀ) of Bhānī (ਭਾਨੀ), decided to visit Darbārā Singh and explained to him the various Sikh ceremonies and how they should be performed in accordance with the teachings of the *Gurūs*. Darbārā Singh however only adopted parts of the Gurmat marriage ceremony. He decided to include the Brahmanical Vēdi, the fire worship of Haven etc.

In spite of all the changes to the movement, Darbārā Singh succeeded and greatly strengthened the movement. The opposition to the movement also increased as it began to move further away from the true ideals of Sikhī. Nevertheless, the numbers to join the movement kept on increasing.

Sardar Harbans Singh ji further quotes, "What an unambiguous, crucial development the Nirāṅkāri movement was in Sikh life will be borne out by this excerpt from the annual report of the Ludhiāṇā (ਲੁਧਿਆਣਾ) Christian Mission for 1853: "Sometime in the summer we heard of a movement . . . which from the representations we received, seemed to indicate a state of mind favorable to the reception of Truth. It was deemed expedient to visit them, to ascertain the true nature of the movement and, if possible, to give it a proper direction. On investigation, however, it was found that the whole movement was the result of the efforts of an individual to establish a new panth (religious sect) of which he should be the instructor.... They professedly reject idolatry, and all reverence and respect for whatever is held sacred by Sikhs or Hindūs, except Nānak and his Granth...They are called Nirāṅkāris from their belief in God, as a spirit without bodily form. The next great fundamental principle of their religion is that salvation is to be obtained by meditation of God. They regard Nānak as their savior, in as much as he taught them the way of salvation. Of their peculiar practices only two things are learned. First, they assemble every morning for worship, which consists of bowing the head to the ground before the Granth, making offerings and in hearing the Granth read by one of their numbers,

and explained also, if their leader be present. Secondly, they do not bury their dead, because that would make them too much like Christians and Musalmāns, but throw them into the river.”

Then the Nirāṅkāṛī movement took an even more dramatic shift in the late 20th century when it was hijacked by the Ārya Samāj (ਆਰਯ ਸਮਾਜ) and other new Hindū fanatics who wanted Sikhs to drop all of their symbols and assimilate into their religion. The Nirāṅkāṛīs were excommunicated from Sikhī in 1978. These new, Neo-Nirāṅkāṛīs, who also believed in the living *Gurū*, confronted the Sikhs at Amritsar (ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤਸਰ) in 1979 on Vaisākhī (ਵੈਸਾਖੀ) day. Their living *Gurū* at the time “Gurbacan” (ਗੁਰਬਚਨ), was trying to create the ‘Seven Stars’ (sat sitāre - ਸੱਤ ਸਿਤਾਰੇ) just like *Gurū Gobind Singh Sāhib* created the Pañj Piārās (ਪੰਜ ਪਿਆਰੇ), in an attempt to prove that he was more or less like *Gurū Gobind Singh Sāhib*. This was a serious violation of the Sikh traditions and was irreverence for the Sikhs.

In response to this blasphemy, Sikhs under the Akhaṇḍ Kīrtanī Jathā (ਅਖੰਡ ਕੀਰਤਨੀ ਜਥਾ) started their march from Akāl Takht (ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖਤ) to stop Gurbachan but they were met with bullets. This incident was what brought the turmoil to Pañjāb (ਪੰਜਾਬ) in the 1980’s.

Adapted from:

The Encyclopedia of Sikhism by Singh, Harbans

<http://www.sikhhistory.com/sikhhist/events/nirankari.html>

Nāmdhārī (ਨਾਮਧਾਰੀ) Movement

Like the Nirāṅkāṛī, another reform movement known as the Nāmdhārī, or Kūkā (ਕੂਕਾ), movement also had its origin in the north-west corner of the Sikh kingdom, away from the places of royal pomp and grandeur. The word Nāmdhārī, means *the devotee of Nām*. It went back to a way of life more in keeping with the spiritual tradition of the community. Its principal objective was to spread the true spirit of Sikhī, shorn of flashy customs and mannerism, which had been growing on it since the beginning of Sikh monarchy. In the midst of national pride born of military glory and political power, this movement celebrated the religious obligation for a pious and simple living. They were called Kūkās because of their peculiar style of reciting Gurbāṇī (ਗੁਰਬਾਣੀ). They would work themselves up to such ecstatic frenzy that they began dancing and shouting. This style was in a high pitched voice, called Kūk (shout or scream) in Pañjābī, and thus Nāmdhārīs were named Kūkās.

Still, today they form a group and two things immediately mark them off; the style of their headgear and their adherence to the personality of their leader. Appareled in distinctively white homespun, they wind round their heads a long cloth without any embellishment and without any sharp, emphatic lines. The founder, Bālak Singh (ਬਾਲਕ ਸਿੰਘ) (1799-1862) of Hāzro (ਹਾਜ਼ਰੋ), had a sweet persuasive manner which won him a number of followers. The most prominent among them was Rām Singh (ਰਾਮ ਸਿੰਘ), who undertook the direction of the movement after Bālak Singh, giving it a more positive orientation.

Rām Singh, born at Bhainī (ਭੈਨੀ), in Ludhiāṇā district in 1816, was a soldier in the Sikh army. With his regiment he once happened to visit Hāzro where he fell under the influence of Bālak Singh. He became his disciple and dedicated himself to his mission. For his religious pursuits he had ample time in the army which, towards the end of Ranjīt Singh’s day, was comparatively free from its more difficult tasks. In the 1845 Jaṅg Hind-Pañjāb (ਜੰਗ ਹਿੰਦ-ਪੰਜਾਬ) (commonly known as the Anglo-Sikh war), Rām Singh fought against the English at Mudkī (ਮੁਦਕੀ).

He gave up service after the occupation of Lāhaur (ਲਾਹੌਰ) and returned to his village Bhainī, which became another important center of the Nāmdhārīs. Upon Bālak Singh's death, in 1862, the chief responsibility passed on to Rām Singh, whose growing influence helped in the extension of the movement in central and eastern Pañjāb. An elaborate agency for missionary work was set up. The name of the head in a district, *Sūbā* (ਸੂਬਾ) meaning governor, had a significant, though remote political implication. There were altogether twenty-two such *Sūbās*, then deputy *Sūbās*, besides two *Jathedārs* (ਜਥੇਦਾਰ) for each *tahsīl* (ਤਹਸੀਲ), and a *Granthī* (ਗ੍ਰੰਥੀ), Scripture-reader or priest, for each village.

In the government papers of that period, Rām Singh's mission is described thus: "He abolishes all distinction of caste among Sikhs; Advocates indiscriminate marriage of all classes; Enjoins the marriage of widows; Enjoins abstinence from liquor and drugs; exhorts his disciples to be clean and truth-telling."

Other points include reverence of the cow, simpler wedding ceremonies, and abolition of infanticide which received equal emphasis. Rām Singh never reconciled to the rule of the British. His prediction about its early recession was implicitly believed by his followers, who were forbidden to join government service, to go to courts of law or learn the English language. The movement thus acquired a strong political bias. Its chief inspiration was, in fact, derived from opposition to the foreign rule and everything tending to remind one of it was shunned. English education, mill-made cloth and other imported goods were boycotted.

Kūkās even avoided use of the post of fives established by the British and depended upon their own system of postal communication. Messages from their leaders were conveyed with special dispatch and enthusiasm. A fast-riding follower would carry the letter to the next village where another devotee, setting all other work aside, would at once speed on with it. People left off their meals unfinished to send forward a message.

A spirit of fanatical national fervor and religious enthusiasm grew among the Kūkās and the personality of Rām Singh became the main point of a close and well-organized order. The prospect was not looked upon with equanimity by the government, who, after the incidents of 1857, had become extra watchful. When, in 1863, Rām Singh wanted to go to Ammritsar for Vaisākhī celebrations to which he had invited his followers from all over the Pañjāb, the civil authority became alarmed. The Lieutenant-Governor put in charge the Deputy Inspector-General of Police and the Deputy Commissioner of Ammritsar to determine the real intentions of Rām Singh and his companions. The officials were not in favor of imposing any restrictions, especially on the occasion of a religious fair. Two months later though, when the Kūkās announced a meeting to be held at Khote (ਖੋਤੇ), a village in Firozpur (ਫਿਰੋਜ਼ਪੁਰ) district, prohibitory orders were issued banning all Kūkā meetings.

The Kūkā organization was subjected to strict secret vigilance, and intelligence officers in the districts sent in alarming reports about its aims and activities. It was said that Rām Singh was raising an army to fight the English. Bhainī and Hāzro were kept under continued surveillance. Rām Singh was sent to Andaman Islands under life imprisonment for treason. He then wrote letters to his disciples in Pañjāb and other places. A selection of letters was published by Dr. Gaṇḍā Singh (ਡਾ. ਗੰਡਾ ਸਿੰਘ) a few years ago. The letters reveal Rām Singh's undying faith, his strength of character and his love for his followers.

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	

Even with the end of the Empire, the Anglo-Sikh connection continued. In fact, Sikhs were encouraged to settle in the United Kingdom and become a part of their society. Today, an estimated 450,000 Sikhs live in the United Kingdom.

Adapted from: Warrior Saints by Amandīp S. Madrā and Paramjīt Singh and Anglo Sikh Heritage Trail, www.asht.info.

Other Resources

- Amandīp S. Madrā and Paramjīt Singh. Warrior Saints: Three Centuries of the Sikh Military Tradition. 180 pages, 110 duo-tint images, I.B. Tauris Publishers in association with the Sikh Foundation ISBN: 1-86064-490-2.
- [http://www.sikhnet.com/Sikhnet/Register.nsf/Files/Poster/\\$file/SikhsTrueFace.pdf](http://www.sikhnet.com/Sikhnet/Register.nsf/Files/Poster/$file/SikhsTrueFace.pdf)
- http://www.sikhspectrum.com/122002/soldiers_ww.htm
- <http://www.allaboutsikhs.com/sikh-history/historical-sikh-events-sikhs-in-world-war-i.html>
- <http://www.allaboutsikhs.com/sikh-history/world-war-i-sikh-cavalry-in-france.html>
- <http://www.firstworldwar.com/features/lionsofthegreatwar.htm>
- http://www.sikhspectrum.com/122002/soldiers_ww.htm
- <http://www.bhagatsinghind.com/index01.html>

The Udāsīs (ਉਦਾਸੀ) and Nirmalās (ਨਿਰਮਲਾ)

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The Nirañkāri (ਨਿਰੰਕਾਰੀ) Movement (1850s)

After the fall of the rule of Raṅjīt Singh (ਰਣਜੀਤ ਸਿੰਘ) there were several attempts to raise the splendor of the Khālsā (ਖਾਲਸਾ). Harbans Singh in *Heritage of the Sikhs* says “The Sikhs were deeply galled at the fall of their kingdom, but not unduly dismayed. They attributed the outcome of their contest with the English to the chances of war. They were also aware that, despite the deceitfulness of courtiers such as Lāl Singh (ਲਾਲ ਸਿੰਘ) and Tej Singh (ਤੇਜ ਸਿੰਘ), they had fought the *Phiraṅgī* (ਫਿਰੰਗੀ) or foreigners squarely, and maintained their manly demeanor even in defeat. In this mood, it was easier for them to be reconciled to their lot after normalcy was restored. The peaceful spell which followed, however, produced an attitude of unwariness. Conventional and superstitious ritual which, forbidden by the *Gurūs* (ਗੁਰੂ), had become acceptable as an adjunct of regal pomp and ceremony during the days of Sikh power, now gained an increasing hold over the Sikh mind. The true teachings of the *Gurūs*

which had supplied Sikhī (ਸਿਖੀ) its potent principle of development and regeneration were obscured by this rising tide of conservatism. The Sikh religion was losing its characteristic vigor and its followers were relapsing into beliefs and dogmas from which the *Gurūs*' teaching had extricated them. Absorption into ceremonial Hindūism seemed the course inevitably set for them."

Thereafter, several movements to reform Sikhī were started. One of the first movements was the Nirāṅkāṛī movement, which was started by Dyāl Dās (ਦਯਾਲ ਦਾਸ) (1783-1855), a Sahajdhārī (ਸਹਜਧਾਰੀ) Sikh. He began to preach against the rites and rituals that were creeping into Sikhī, especially the worship of images or idols. He felt that Sikhī was being assimilated into Hindūism. He emphasized the Sikh belief in Nirāṅkāṛ (ਨਿਰੰਕਾਰ) the 'Formless One'. From this, the movement originating from his message came to be known as the Nirāṅkāṛī movement. The word 'Nirāṅkāṛī' means 'the worshipper of Nirāṅkāṛ' stands for that God who is existent but has no shape or form, who is free from the material form.

Dyāl Dās soon acquired from his followers the status of 'gurū' and gathered around him disciples who, like him, started calling themselves Nirāṅkāṛīs. He purchased a piece of land on December 3, 1851 where he set up a Gurduārā, known as the Nirāṅkāṛī Darbār (ਦਰਬਾਰ). With this, the Nirāṅkāṛī movement gained a permanent footing. The followers and admirers of Dyāl began their work of reform with great enthusiasm. He came to have hundreds of followers before he died in 1853. His eldest son, Darbārā Singh (ਦਰਬਾਰਾ ਸਿੰਘ), took over after him and established many centers in towns and villages outside of Rāvalpiṇḍī (ਰਾਵਲਪਿੰਡੀ) (this is where Dyāl was from). Within the first six weeks, Darbārā Singh called for a conference in which he explained the Sikh Maryādā (ਮਰਯਾਦਾ) and gave a practical live demonstration of the Anand (ਅਨੰਦ) marriage ceremony.

Rām Singh Nāmdhārī (ਰਾਮ ਸਿੰਘ ਨਾਮਧਾਰੀ) of Bhānī (ਭਾਨੀ), decided to visit Darbārā Singh and explained to him the various Sikh ceremonies and how they should be performed in accordance with the teachings of the *Gurūs*. Darbārā Singh however only adopted parts of the Gurmat marriage ceremony. He decided to include the Brahmanical Vēdī, the fire worship of Haven etc.

In spite of all the changes to the movement, Darbārā Singh succeeded and greatly strengthened the movement. The opposition to the movement also increased as it began to move further away from the true ideals of Sikhī. Nevertheless, the numbers to join the movement kept on increasing.

Sardar Harbans Singh ji further quotes, "What an unambiguous, crucial development the Nirāṅkāṛī movement was in Sikh life will be borne out by this excerpt from the annual report of the Ludhiāṇā (ਲੁਧਿਆਣਾ) Christian Mission for 1853: "Sometime in the summer we heard of a movement . . . which from the representations we received, seemed to indicate a state of mind favorable to the reception of Truth. It was deemed expedient to visit them, to ascertain the true nature of the movement and, if possible, to give it a proper direction. On investigation, however, it was found that the whole movement was the result of the efforts of an individual to establish a new panth (religious sect) of which he should be the instructor.... They professedly reject idolatry, and all reverence and respect for whatever is held sacred by Sikhs or Hindūs, except Nānak and his Granth...They are called Nirāṅkāṛīs from their belief in God, as a spirit without bodily form. The next great fundamental principle of their religion is that salvation is to be obtained by meditation of God. They regard Nānak as their savior, in as much as he taught them the way of salvation. Of their peculiar practices only two things are learned. First, they assemble every morning for worship, which consists of bowing the head to the ground before the Granth, making offerings and in hearing the Granth read by one of their numbers,

and explained also, if their leader be present. Secondly, they do not bury their dead, because that would make them too much like Christians and Musalmāns, but throw them into the river.”

Then the Nirāṅkāṛī movement took an even more dramatic shift in the late 20th century when it was hijacked by the Ārya Samāj (ਆਰਯ ਸਮਾਜ) and other new Hindū fanatics who wanted Sikhs to drop all of their symbols and assimilate into their religion. The Nirāṅkāṛīs were excommunicated from Sikhī in 1978. These new, Neo-Nirāṅkāṛīs, who also believed in the living *Gurū*, confronted the Sikhs at Amritsar (ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤਸਰ) in 1979 on Vaisākhī (ਵੈਸਾਖੀ) day. Their living *Gurū* at the time “Gurbacan” (ਗੁਰਬਚਨ), was trying to create the ‘Seven Stars’ (sat sitāre - ਸੱਤ ਸਿਤਾਰੇ) just like *Gurū Gobind Singh Sāhib* created the Pañj Piārās (ਪੰਜ ਪਿਆਰੇ), in an attempt to prove that he was more or less like *Gurū Gobind Singh Sāhib*. This was a serious violation of the Sikh traditions and was irreverence for the Sikhs.

In response to this blasphemy, Sikhs under the Akhaṇḍ Kīrtanī Jathā (ਅਖੰਡ ਕੀਰਤਨੀ ਜਥਾ) started their march from Akāl Takht (ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖਤ) to stop Gurbachan but they were met with bullets. This incident was what brought the turmoil to Pañjāb (ਪੰਜਾਬ) in the 1980’s.

Adapted from:

The Encyclopedia of Sikhism by Singh, Harbans

<http://www.sikhhistory.com/sikhhist/events/nirankari.html>

Nāmdhārī (ਨਾਮਧਾਰੀ) Movement

Like the Nirāṅkāṛī, another reform movement known as the Nāmdhārī, or Kūkā (ਕੂਕਾ), movement also had its origin in the north-west corner of the Sikh kingdom, away from the places of royal pomp and grandeur. The word Nāmdhārī, means *the devotee of Nām*. It went back to a way of life more in keeping with the spiritual tradition of the community. Its principal objective was to spread the true spirit of Sikhī, shorn of flashy customs and mannerism, which had been growing on it since the beginning of Sikh monarchy. In the midst of national pride born of military glory and political power, this movement celebrated the religious obligation for a pious and simple living. They were called Kūkās because of their peculiar style of reciting Gurbāṇī (ਗੁਰਬਾਣੀ). They would work themselves up to such ecstatic frenzy that they began dancing and shouting. This style was in a high pitched voice, called Kūk (shout or scream) in Pañjābī, and thus Nāmdhārīs were named Kūkās.

Still, today they form a group and two things immediately mark them off; the style of their headgear and their adherence to the personality of their leader. Appareled in distinctively white homespun, they wind round their heads a long cloth without any embellishment and without any sharp, emphatic lines. The founder, Bālak Singh (ਬਾਲਕ ਸਿੰਘ) (1799-1862) of Hāzro (ਹਾਜ਼ਰੋ), had a sweet persuasive manner which won him a number of followers. The most prominent among them was Rām Singh (ਰਾਮ ਸਿੰਘ), who undertook the direction of the movement after Bālak Singh, giving it a more positive orientation.

Rām Singh, born at Bhainī (ਭੈਨੀ), in Ludhiāṇā district in 1816, was a soldier in the Sikh army. With his regiment he once happened to visit Hāzro where he fell under the influence of Bālak Singh. He became his disciple and dedicated himself to his mission. For his religious pursuits he had ample time in the army which, towards the end of Ranjīt Singh’s day, was comparatively free from its more difficult tasks. In the 1845 Jaṅg Hind-Pañjāb (ਜੰਗ ਹਿੰਦ-ਪੰਜਾਬ) (commonly known as the Anglo-Sikh war), Rām Singh fought against the English at Mudkī (ਮੁਦਕੀ).

He gave up service after the occupation of Lāhaur (ਲਾਹੌਰ) and returned to his village Bhainī, which became another important center of the Nāmdhārīs. Upon Bālak Singh's death, in 1862, the chief responsibility passed on to Rām Singh, whose growing influence helped in the extension of the movement in central and eastern Pañjāb. An elaborate agency for missionary work was set up. The name of the head in a district, *Sūbā* (ਸੂਬਾ) meaning governor, had a significant, though remote political implication. There were altogether twenty-two such *Sūbās*, then deputy *Sūbās*, besides two *Jathedārs* (ਜਥੇਦਾਰ) for each *tahsīl* (ਤਹਸੀਲ), and a *Granthī* (ਗ੍ਰੰਥੀ), Scripture-reader or priest, for each village.

In the government papers of that period, Rām Singh's mission is described thus: "He abolishes all distinction of caste among Sikhs; Advocates indiscriminate marriage of all classes; Enjoins the marriage of widows; Enjoins abstinence from liquor and drugs; exhorts his disciples to be clean and truth-telling."

Other points include reverence of the cow, simpler wedding ceremonies, and abolition of infanticide which received equal emphasis. Rām Singh never reconciled to the rule of the British. His prediction about its early recession was implicitly believed by his followers, who were forbidden to join government service, to go to courts of law or learn the English language. The movement thus acquired a strong political bias. Its chief inspiration was, in fact, derived from opposition to the foreign rule and everything tending to remind one of it was shunned. English education, mill-made cloth and other imported goods were boycotted.

Kūkās even avoided use of the post of fives established by the British and depended upon their own system of postal communication. Messages from their leaders were conveyed with special dispatch and enthusiasm. A fast-riding follower would carry the letter to the next village where another devotee, setting all other work aside, would at once speed on with it. People left off their meals unfinished to send forward a message.

A spirit of fanatical national fervor and religious enthusiasm grew among the Kūkās and the personality of Rām Singh became the main point of a close and well-organized order. The prospect was not looked upon with equanimity by the government, who, after the incidents of 1857, had become extra watchful. When, in 1863, Rām Singh wanted to go to Ammritsar for Vaisākhī celebrations to which he had invited his followers from all over the Pañjāb, the civil authority became alarmed. The Lieutenant-Governor put in charge the Deputy Inspector-General of Police and the Deputy Commissioner of Ammritsar to determine the real intentions of Rām Singh and his companions. The officials were not in favor of imposing any restrictions, especially on the occasion of a religious fair. Two months later though, when the Kūkās announced a meeting to be held at Khote (ਖੋਤੇ), a village in Firozpur (ਫਿਰੋਜ਼ਪੁਰ) district, prohibitory orders were issued banning all Kūkā meetings.

The Kūkā organization was subjected to strict secret vigilance, and intelligence officers in the districts sent in alarming reports about its aims and activities. It was said that Rām Singh was raising an army to fight the English. Bhainī and Hāzro were kept under continued surveillance. Rām Singh was sent to Andaman Islands under life imprisonment for treason. He then wrote letters to his disciples in Pañjāb and other places. A selection of letters was published by Dr. Gaṇḍā Singh (ਡਾ. ਗੰਡਾ ਸਿੰਘ) a few years ago. The letters reveal Rām Singh's undying faith, his strength of character and his love for his followers.