



KUKA MOVEMENT: HISTORY

NEWS: What is the history of the Kuka martyrs' day?

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

The **Kuka Movement**, also known as the **Namdhari Movement**, was a prominent socio-religious reform and anti-colonial uprising that emerged in Punjab in the mid-nineteenth century. It sought to restore Sikh practices to their original purity, promote social justice, and resist British colonial dominance.

Background of the Kuka Movement

1. Annexation of Punjab (1849):

- The British annexation of Punjab following the fall of the Sikh Empire caused widespread dissatisfaction among Sikhs.
- The loss of Sikh sovereignty and the imposition of British rule led to a decline in traditional values and identity.

2. Decline in Sikh Religious Practices:

- Western influences and perceived moral degradation among Sikhs alarmed reformists.
- There was a need to revive Sikhism's founding principles and cultural heritage.

3. Socio-Political Context:

- The Kuka Movement arose as a response to British dominance and societal changes, intertwining religion with political aspirations.

Founding and Leadership

1. **Establishment:** The Namdhari sect, the foundation of the Kuka Movement, was established by **Baba Ram Singh** at **Bhaini Sahib** on **April 12, 1857**.
2. **Influences:** Inspired by **Baba Balak Singh** and **Bhagat Jawar Mal**, who advocated for religious purity.
3. **Nomenclature:** The followers of the movement were called **Kukas**, derived from the high-pitched recitation of **Gurbani** in a style called "kook" in Punjabi.

Objectives of the Kuka Movement

1. Religious Objectives

- Restore Sikhism to its original form as envisioned by **Guru Gobind Singh**.



- Oppose practices like cow slaughter, promoting cultural and religious values.

2. Social Objectives

- Abolish caste discrimination and promote equality.
- Advocate for widow remarriage, inter-caste marriages, and women's rights.
- Discourage the use of intoxicants like alcohol and drugs.
- Promote vegetarianism and a simple lifestyle.

3. Political Objectives

- Overthrow British rule and restore Sikh sovereignty in Punjab.
- Encourage **Swadeshi** by boycotting British goods, education, and laws.
- Promote self-reliance by supporting indigenous crafts and industries.

Key Features of the Kuka Movement

1. **Unique Appearance:** Followers wore white, hand-spun clothing and saffron turbans, symbolizing simplicity and purity.
2. **Military Training:** Baba Ram Singh emphasized physical and military training for the youth to prepare for resistance.
3. **Boycott of British Institutions:** The movement discouraged reliance on British systems, including schools and judicial structures.
4. **Emphasis on Discipline:** The Kukas lived strictly by the principles of Sikhism and adhered to discipline in daily life.

Course of the Kuka Movement

1. **Preaching Tours:** Baba Ram Singh and other leaders traveled across Punjab, spreading their message of reform and resistance.
2. **Organizational Structure:** Governors and Deputy Governors were appointed to organize Kukas in various districts.
3. **Key Actions:**
 - Kukas boycotted British goods, promoted handwoven clothing, and opposed the use of foreign products.
 - They protested cow slaughter and British policies undermining Sikh traditions.



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4. **Conflict with British Authorities:** The movement escalated in 1871–72, culminating in the **Malerkotla raid** on **January 15, 1872**, where Kukas attacked a British-aligned princely state.
5. **Retaliation by British:**
 - The British responded with severe repression:
 - Many Kukas were publicly executed by cannons.
 - Baba Ram Singh and other leaders were exiled to **Rangoon** (present-day Yangon, Myanmar).



Post-Movement Contributions

1. **Publications:** The Kukas launched the newspaper **Satyug** in 1920 and the daily **Kuka** in 1922 to spread their ideology.
2. **Support for Indian National Movements:** Namdharis supported **Mahatma Gandhi's Non-Cooperation Movement**, contributing to the broader freedom struggle.
3. **Preservation of Ideals:** Despite suppression, the movement continued to inspire self-reliance, social reform, and resistance against colonial rule.

Significance of the Kuka Movement

1. **Religious Revival:** Revived Sikh identity by emphasizing purity and adherence to traditional values.



2. **Social Reform:** Promoted progressive ideals, such as the abolition of caste discrimination and the empowerment of women.
3. **Political Awareness:** The movement was one of the earliest organized efforts to challenge British colonial rule in India.
4. **Inspiration for Future Movements:** Concepts of **Swadeshi**, **self-reliance**, and **non-cooperation** became central to the Indian freedom struggle in the 20th century.
5. **Women's Empowerment:** Encouraged women to step out of seclusion and actively participate in social life.

Key Events in Chronology

- **1857:** Founding of the Namdhari sect by Baba Ram Singh at Bhaini Sahib.
- **1871:** Start of violent confrontations with British authorities.
- **1872:** Malerkotla raid and subsequent execution of Kukas.
- **1920:** Launch of the newspaper **Satyug**.
- **1922:** Publication of the daily **Kuka**.

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