

Relationship between Maharaja Duleep Singh and Namdhari

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Namdhari movement has an important place among the revolts against British Empire in the second half of 19th century. It has a glorious history from political, social and religious perspectives because this movement was very important in political and social spheres. It brought awareness among the of Punjab people when they were on the verge of forgetting the teachings of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh.

The founder of Namdhari sect was Baba Ram Singh. He was born on February 3, 1816 in the village Rayian of Ludhiana district.¹ The name of his mother was Sada Kaur and his father's name was Baba Jassa Singh. After the birth of Baba Ram Singh, Baba Jassa Singh shifted to village Bhaini near Rayian. He was enrolled in the regiment of Kunwar Naunihal as a soldier in 1837 when he was 22 years old and served the *Khalsa* Army for approximately 8 years.² In 1845, before Anglo-Sikh war, he left army and came back to his village Bhaini Sahib. He spent some time peacefully and religiously in the village. On 12 April, 1857 i.e. *Baisakhi* Day, he baptised five Sikhs in Bhaini Sahib and established *Sant Khalsa*.³ Gradually, this revolt became renowned among the people of Punjab but it also became cause of trouble for British government.

British Administration was looking for an opportunity to hinder the impact of Namdhari movement, which they got in 1872. People had severe anger against the British policy about cow slaughtering, but they were not able to do anything about it. In 1871, Namdhari Sikhs took action against people who were responsible for cow slaughtering in Amritsar and Raikot.⁴ As a result of which, many butchers were killed. Namdhari Sikhs were hanged to death for this action. In January 1872, around 200

Namdhari attacked a slaughter house in Malerkotla which was considered as an attack on British Empire by the government and 65 Kuka Sikhs were blown with cannons on 17-18 January in response.⁵ Baba Ram Singh had no connection with the Malerkotla incident and in fact he had informed the government about it in prior. Even then, he was arrested and imprisoned in Allahabad fort along with his followers. The action against him was taken in accordance with section III of Bengal Regulation Act, 1818. After sometime, he was sent to Rangoon with his prominent disciple Naanu Singh.⁶ In January 1872, after deportation of Baba Ram Singh, the authority of Namdhari movement went into the hands of his younger brother Baba Budh Singh who later became famous by the name of Baba Hari Singh.⁷

Maharaja Ranjit Singh died in the year 1839. There followed a period of disunity, lawlessness, confusion, insecurity and violence around the throne of Lahore State. Taking advantage of the prevailing situation, the British had already made inroads in Punjab but the Company annexed it in March 1849. Maharaja Duleep Singh was the youngest son of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and last of the most eligible successor of the throne. He was born on 5th September, 1838 and was crowned on 15th September, 1843 at the age of five. He was the only surviving son of Maharaja Ranjit Singh at the time of the annexation of Punjab which was just about a decade after the great Maharaja's death in 1839. After the Second Anglo Sikh war Punjab was finally annexed and Maharaja Duleep Singh was deposed. He was of the age of majority when he was removed from Punjab to England.

Maharaja Duleep Singh was dethroned and handed over to Dr. Lagan. It was the wish of the British government that Maharaja Duleep Singh should be painted in a completely British colour.

Duleep Singh was not yet an adult. He was taught English. His friendship and studies were all under English influence. On March 8, 1853, Duleep Singh renounced his sacred religion and got converted to Christianity. Obviously he had become a complete slave of British. Maharaja Duleep Singh expressed his desire to travel with Mr. Lagan. So he went on a tour of Italy where he got the news that Nawab Wajid Ali of Lakhnow gets an annual pension of 50 lakhs. So he thinks why only five lakhs to the maharaja of such a big a empire like Punjab? He wrote several letters to the Board of Directors but government did not meet his demands. Duleep Singh was very angry with the attitude of the British government. At this critical time, he expressed his desire to meet his mother, Maharani Jindan. He asked to Governor General for permission to return to his country but he was not allowed to go to Punjab. Maharani Jindan was brought to Calcutta the by regime. British government were made arrangements for Maharaja Duleep Singh and Maharani Jindan to stay at hotel Spence's. When people found out that their exiled Maharaja was staying in a hotel in Calcutta, they were overjoyed and surrounded the hotel and saluted the Maharaja with *Jaikara*. When Governor General received this news, he became very nervous. He wrote a letter to Duleep Singh asking him to come to England with his mother as soon as possible. Duleep Singh had no choice and he was with heavy heart returned to England with his mother. Only at the behest of his mother, Duleep Singh was ready to re-adopt his Sikh faith. Maharaja's feeling of hatred for the British and the love for their country and the desire to go his homeland increased day by day. Maharani Jindan passed away in 1863. The last wish of the Maharani was that she be cremated near the *Smadh* of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Duleep Singh tried many times to get permission from the government but he got only permission from the government was that he could take his mother's body to India and perform the cremation rites in Bombay. He was not allowed to go to Punjab or even close to Punjab. Due to these policies of British regime, hatred toward the government increased in Duleep Singh he desired to go to Punjab and liberate their country if possible.

The relation of Maharaja Duleep Singh and Namdharis were mentioned in nineteenth century. At

this time, both of them had a strong desire to liberate the country. The efforts of Namdhari leaders started long ago about this. In connection with it was the Namdharis belief that Baba Ram Singh's spirit had entered into Duleep Singh.⁸ The British government was already afraid so they made every effort to crush the movement. The activities that time were so strict that many British officers feel bad for Namdharis. One Britisher Sir Hanery Cotton had written in his autobiography "I have never seen such a crime in my entire life."⁹ But even after all this the Namdhari movement could not be suppressed. It got resumed after few years through Maharaja Duleep Singh was still under the influence of the British.

He slowly hated the British Government. But he was completely hated when the Landon parliament passed the law that after his death his child will not get property. After this Duleep Singh decided in his mind that he would not stay in England. He will go to India to spend his whole life. The British started threatening Maharaja Duleep Singh so that he abandons the thought of going to India. All these things had the opposite effects on Maharaja and his desire to go to India became more intense. Namdharis were very happy to see that he wanted to liberate the country. Namdharis started thinking that the freedom struggle will be easier with the arrival of Maharaja Duleep Singh. Because both had the same motive and both needed each other. The British government was very clever. The Maharaja had just started saying that he wanted to visit India so the government of Punjab and India started announced that the return of Duleep Singh should be stopped under any circumstances. Otherwise, Maharaja and Namdharis may mess up together. The Lieutenant Governor Aitchison of Punjab had written to India government in his letter dated 7 August 1873:

You must have come to know from letters of intelligence of the police that this year there is a unique flaw in the Namdharis, their religious books shows that there will definitely be something wrong this year, because they are to organize the meeting which during the time period of Guru Gobind Singh were held against the rule of Muslims. Due to these reasons, I don't like

that Maharaja Duleep Singh set foot on the soil of Punjab.¹⁰

Aitchison sent two more letters to Indian government. One of them was sent to Commissioner of Jalandhar Colonel Yung. With the opinion of Colonel Yung, the permission to send Duleep Singh to Punjab was equal to the stupidity of top ranking. He cited the biggest reason for this as the Kukas were filled with hope. Sardar Atar Singh Bhadhuar's letters also described the predictions in the *Sakhis* prevalent in Namdharis. In which it was said that the Duleep Singh will liberate the country by removing the British rule.¹¹

On 15 August 1883, Viceroy Lord Ripon wrote a letter from Shimla to the Secretary of State for India, Landon, stating that after taking advice of the Punjab government:

*We consider Maharaja cannot be allowed to visit Punjab or to go north of Allahabad. A large number of Ranjit Singh's devoted adherents still survive, and appearance among them of Ranjit Singh's son would probably have most disquieting effect among Hindus, Particularly Kukas and Mohamedans.*¹²

This enthusiasm in Namdharis remained for many years after 1883. The journey of Maharaja Duleep Singh to India started before walking he had announced that he would adopt the first *Khalsa* religion of his country. This created a new enthusiasm in the whole of Punjab but not only for those who have those people who were stood with the English government for their some personal interests. The people of India were engaged in lavish preparations for the reception of their departed maharaja for many years. Hearing this news of Maharaja arrival a group of Namdharis started toward the Mumbai because Maharaja had to reach there by ship. But this was neither to happen nor could happen. The government was afraid that there would not be any disturbance.¹³ There were special reasons which make the Maharaja's visit to India particularly undesirable at that time. Prophecies and rumours among Hindu and Muslims alike point to the current year as a season of trouble both in politics and religion. Among the Kukas especially there exists much uneasiness and an unusual movement. The prediction in their religious book lead them to

expect civil commotion that year and they were reported to be performing the same ceremonies as were observed by Guru Gobind Singh before his protest against the Mugal Power. Probably nothing like this would happen but they did not want any quarrel, so Duleep Singh was stopped on the way to Aden. He was surrounded by the police. Seeing this treatment of the British government, the wounds of Duleep Singh were salted. He tried to inform to Queen Victoria and the Governor General of his current situation. But there did not come any hopeful answer and after some time Duleep Singh went back from there.

Maharaja Duleep Singh went back from Aden in June 1886. In this miserable condition, he began to say to the common people in clear and unequivocal words 'I have been forcibly taken away from the state of Punjab only at the age of eleven. I do not accept that condition at all.'¹⁴ Dalip Singh was in very pitiable condition. He was suffering from heartburn. He was so much hatred against the British regime in his heart that one day when he saw the Kohinoor diamond in the possession of Queen Victoria, he happily presented to her. But after worse behaviour of British government he once said to Queen Victoria, "this Kohinoor Diamond belongs to my father Maharaja Ranjit Singh, you have no right to it." The Queen Victoria remained silent, but after this incident the treatment of the British toward Mahraja Duleep Singh became even worse. So he stopped taking allowance and left England and went to France. So now he openly said that he will not go back to England. The Maharaja announced that he would not spread his hand to the British government for pension. He had first gone to France. He tried to reach the Indian colony with the help of the French government.¹⁵ Where, he would launch a movement against the British. But he could not succeed in it because France did not want to further annoy England.¹⁶ After some time in France, Duleep Singh reached Moscow with the help of some Russians General as early 1887.¹⁷ He thought that Russia was an enemy of England and would help him. He would attack on Punjab with the help of Russia and he will remove the British government. The Maharaja had not yet reached Russia that *Chandi Path* had begun by Namdharis. It senses was the preparations for an impending crisis. There was a strong belief in

Namdharis that our country will definitely be free by this time.

Maharaja Duleep Singh stayed in Russia till November 1888. From Paris he then tried to make contact with the Sikhs of Punjab and issued an appeal to the Indians to donate one anna per person living in the Punjab and one paisa per month living outside the Punjab. So that we can collect the army with that money and liberate India from British occupation. According to Dr. Fauja Singh, "all the efforts of Maharaja Duleep Singh could not be fulfilled. But one thing that cannot be denied in this regard is that out of the total Sikh population of the Punjab, there were only Namdharis who openly associated themselves with the interests of Maharaja Duleep Singh and only for the success of this mission. Not only wished but also made strenuous efforts."¹⁸

Further an important note is found in government documents:¹⁹

The Kukas to have thrown their lot with Dalip Singh. They openly say that the prophecy about the appearance of a just and great king from the west, who will emancipate them from the tyranny from of the English, will be fulfilled through Dalip Singh under whom they will be all powerful and will supposes kine-killing in India. Besides this they believe that Ram Singh has miraculously gave over to Russia from the person at Morgue and will lead Russia and Dalip Singh advance on India.....

They are neither on the increase not on the decrease but are in a state of activity, ready to size up on the slightest sign of trouble to the British government.

Thus Namdhari Sikhs was fully prepared to help Maharaja Duleep Singh against the British administration. According to police intelligence report dated September 4, 1886:²⁰

20,000 Kukas in Punjab are reckoned on to rise at critical moments. The Kukas's are also said to be in direct communication with the Russians in central Asia.

Suba Bishan Singh had already reached Russia.²¹ The news of his activities used to arrive from time to time. They thought that now Duleep Singh and Bishan Singh will work together and soon

India will be free. Many Namdharis were also saying that the soul of Baba Ram Singh is working in Maharaja Duleep Singh. At that time when Duleep Singh was in Moscow, nothing can be said about how much success he had achieved by Namdharis to make direct connect with him.

Gurcharan Singh was a famous Kuka Suba, who made many successful attempts to form alliance with the Russian government.²² Many times it has been said that he met with Duleep Singh, but there is no strong evidence of this. The information about two more efforts were made by Namdharis. One is found from Melcom letters. He was an English Military General appointed in a city of Iran. In his first telegram sent to the government of India, he recorded about three Kukas Sikhs who stayed in the city of Masaud. According to him, "I have received the news that the Sikhs who had just come in search of Duleep Singh have sent their letter to Maharaja from Moscow by Russian agent. They have said that they have letters of Kashmir and Nepal."²³

Mr. Jaswinder Singh Historian writes in his article 'The Namdhari movement and Maharaja Duleep Singh' that the letters of Thakur Singh Sandhanwalia to Maharaja Duleep Singh in May 1889, correspondence to each other. One may find these from the India Office Library London. In these letters, Thakur Singh Sandhanwalia had written a letter to Maharaja Duleep Singh mentioned that:²⁴

We have received a deputation from a very influential and religious person who can gather about 80,000 or 90,000 brave men in our aid. He has sent present to your majesty,

In second letter:

We most humbly beg to inform your Majesty that we have this day ported the presents to your Majesty. They were received from the head of Kuka community.....this man offered the services of his disciples to your Majesty and they are really much devoted to your cause. He can muster brave and fighting person of from 80,000 to 90,000 strong.....he has gone back with a promise to return in October with a large amount of money.

But no one except the Namdharis supported Duleep Singh in his struggle. Neither the Indian people nor the other government offered any military

assistance. So keeping in mind the desire to take back his country, Duleep Singh returned to France. Arriving in France, he fell ill and his son Victor Duleep Singh took him in England for the last time. Later he returned to Paris and here he spent the most difficult and depressing day of his life. Finally, the last Maharaja of Punjab passed away in 1893 A.D.

Such strictness of the government had created fear among the people for a short time but soon the Namdhari Sikhs under the leadership of Baba Hari Singh contacts with the Kashmir, Kabul and Russia were re-established and it was during these efforts that the Namdharis came contacts with Maharaja Duleep Singh. This revived the people of Punjab, especially the Namdhari Sikh community. But how could the British tolerate it. At that time, all the people should have supported the new rising movement and encouraged the movement fighting against the British government. It could not have happened that independence would not have been achieved. But while these British loyalists vehemently opposed the Namdhari movement, they also destroyed Duleep Singh's desire to come to Punjab and re-establish the *Khalsa* State and at the same time provided information and full support to the government. On other hand, Namdhari Sikhs helped the selflessly Maharaja Duleep Singh.

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