

Nihang sect

October 16, 2021

In news– Nihang Sikhs were in spotlight for the brutal lynching of a man they accused of disrespecting holy scripture at Singhu protest site.

About Nihang sect

- Nihang is **an order of Sikh warriors, characterised by blue robes**, antiquated arms such as swords and spears, and decorated turbans surmounted by steel quotations.
- The 19th century historian Rattan Singh Bhangu describes Nihangs as “**unaffected by pain or comfort**”, “given to meditation, penance and charity” and “complete warriors”.
- **Nihang are believed to have originated either from Fateh Singh and the attire he wore or from the “Akali” (lit. Army of the Immortal) started by Guru Hargobind.**
- **Fateh Singh was the fourth and youngest son of Guru Gobind Singh.**
- Early Sikh military history was dominated by the Nihang, known for their victories where they were heavily outnumbered.
- Traditionally known for their bravery and ruthlessness in the battlefield, the Nihang once formed the irregular guerrilla squads of the armed forces of the Sikh Empire, the Sikh Khalsa Army.
- **The term Nihang owes its origin to Mughal historians, who compared the ferocity of the Akali** with that of crocodiles.
- The meaning of Akali in Sikhism however, is the **immortal army of Akal (god)**.
- According to historians, the **word Nihang, also occurs in**

a hymn in the Guru Granth Sahib, where it alludes to a fearless and unrestrained person.

- The Nihang order can be traced back to the creation of the Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh in 1699.

Difference between Nihangs and other Sikh warriors

- As per an account by the East India Company's Colonel James Skinner (1778-1841), **Khalsa Sikhs were divided into two groups:**
 - **Those who put on blue attire which Guru Gobind Singh used to wear** at the time of battle.
 - **Those who do not follow any restrictions on the colour of their dress** though both of them follow the profession of soldiery and are brave without peer in the art of musketry and chakarbazi, and the use of quoits.
- **Nihangs observe the Khalsa code of conduct in its strictest sense.** They do not profess any allegiance to an earthly master.
- Instead of saffron they **hoist a blue Nishan Sahib (flag)** atop their shrines.
- **Nihangs use the slogans 'chhardi kala' (forever in high spirits)** and 'tiar bar tiar' (state of ever preparedness) for unforeseen events.
- **The Nihangs are fond of a popular drink called shardai or sharbati deg** (sacrament drink) which contains grounded almonds, cardamom seeds, poppy seeds, black pepper, rose petals and melon seeds.
- When a small measure of cannabis is added to it, it is termed sukhnidhan (treasure of comfort). A higher dose of cannabis in it was known as shaheedi deg, sacrament of martyrdom.
- It was taken (while) battling enemies.

Role of Nihangs in the history of Sikhism

- Nihangs had a major role in **defending the Sikh panth**

after the fall of the first Sikh rule (1710-15) when Mughal governors were killing Sikhs, and during the onslaught of Afghan invader Ahmed Shah Durrani (1748-65).

- When the Khalsa army was divided into five battalions in 1734, one Nihang or Akali battalion was led by Baba Deep Singh Shahid.
- Nihangs also took control of the religious affairs of the Sikhs at Akal Bunga (now known as Akal Takht) in Amritsar.
- They did not consider themselves subordinate to any Sikh chief and thus maintained their independent existence.
- At Akal Takht, they held the grand council (Sarbat Khalsa) of Sikhs and pronounced the resolution (Gurmata) passed.
- Their clout came to an end after the fall of Sikh Empire in 1849 when the British authorities of Punjab appointed a manager (sarbrah) for the administration of the Golden Temple in 1859.

Can anyone become a Nihang?

- As per a top Nihang Sikh leader, irrespective of caste, creed or religion having unshorn hair and following Sikh traditions and who remembers five banis, performs daily ablutions by waking up at 1 am and performs morning and evening prayers can be included in the sect.
- The baptized Sikh willing to become a Nihang and fulfilling conditions is given robes and weapons similar to the ones carried by Guru Gobind Singh when he founded the Khalsa.

Their Arms and attire

- Traditional Nihang dress is known as *Khalsa Swarupa*.
- This comprises full attire of superelectric blue selected by Guru Gobind Singh after conflicts with Vazir Khan, the Mughal Governor of Sirhind,

Current status of Nihangs

- Nihangs today constitute a small community.
- About a dozen bands, each headed by a jathedar (leader), are still carrying on with the traditional order.
- Prominent among these are **Budha Dal, Taruna Dal and their factions.**
- In the absence of a centralised command, the Nihangs are loosely organised.
- For the whole year they remain stationed at their respective deras (centres) but set out on their annual pilgrimage of Anandpur Sahib, Damdama Sahib Talwandi Sabo and Amritsar, take part in religious events and exhibit their martial skills and horsemanship.
- In the ongoing farm protest, groups of Nihangs went to Singhu to express solidarity with the protesting farmers.