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HISTORY OF PUNJAB

CHAPTER 7

Maharaja Ranjit Singh

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CHAPTER 7

Maharaja Ranjit Singh

The Lion of Punjab

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Early life, lineage and challenges
- Strategic marriages and Misl consolidation
- Coronation and territorial conquests
- Currency, administration and revenue
- Judicial system and the Khalsa Army
- Treaties, religious contributions and legacy

Early Life and Background

Born	13 November 1780 at Gujranwala
Parents	Sardar Maha Singh and Sardarni Raj Kaur
Clan	Sandhawalia (Jatt Sikh)
Misl	Sukerchakia

Family Lineage

The leadership of the Sukerchakia Misl passed through:

Budh Singh → **Naudh Singh** → **Charat Singh** → **Maha Singh** → **Maharaja Ranjit Singh**

Early Challenges

- **Original name:** Budh Singh – later changed to Ranjit Singh to celebrate his father's victory over the Chattha chief **Pir Muhammad**
- **Childhood illness:** Lost the sight of his **left eye** due to smallpox
- **Early leadership:** Inherited the Misl at the age of **12** after his father's death
- **First battle:** Battle of **Sodhran** at the age of 10
- **Assassination attempt:** Survived an attempt by **Hashmat Khan** at the age of 13

Strategic Marriages and Alliances

Ranjit Singh showed his political wisdom through the marriages he made:

Wife	Details
Mehtab Kaur	Daughter of Gurbakhsh Singh of the Kanhaiya Misl
Datar Kaur (born Raj Kaur)	Daughter of Ran Singh Nakai; she became his favourite wife
Jind Kaur	Mother of Duleep Singh, the last Maharaja

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Wife	Details
Moran Sarkar	A Muslim dancer whom he married in **1802**. This upset the strict Sikhs, including the Nihangs. Their leader **Akali Phula Singh**, Jathedar of the Akal Takht, made Ranjit Singh apologise for this act.

Misl Consolidation Strategy

Ranjit Singh used different strategies to unite the Misls:

- **Kanhaiya Misl:** Alliance through marriage to Mehtab Kaur
- **Nakai Misl:** Marriage to Raj Kaur (Datar Kaur)
- **Ahluwalia Misl:** Exchange of turbans with Fateh Singh Ahluwalia
- **Other Misls:** Military conquest
- **Phulkian Misl:** Remained independent under British protection

Coronation

After uniting the Sikh Misls of Punjab, Ranjit Singh proclaimed himself Maharaja of Punjab. On **12 April 1801** he was crowned Maharaja of Punjab in a formal ceremony conducted by **Baba Sahib Singh Bedi**, a descendant of Guru Nanak Dev Ji. He made **Lahore** his capital, called his government **"Sarkar Khalsa"** and his court **"Darbar Khalsa"**.

Major Territorial Conquests

Territory	Year	Previous ruler
Lahore	1799	Bhangi Sardars
Amritsar	1802	Mai Sukhan (widow of Gulab Singh Bhangi)
Kasur	1807	Qutb-ud-Din
Jhang	1807	Ahmad Khan
Sialkot	1808	Jiwan Singh
Kangra	1809	Raja Sansar Chand Katoch
Attock	1813	Jahandad Khan
Multan	1818	Muzaffar Khan
Kashmir	1819	Jabbar Khan
Peshawar	1834	Sultan Muhammad Khan (Barakzai)

At its peak, the Sikh Empire extended from **Ladakh** in the north to **Shikarpur** in the south, and from **Jamrud** in the north-west to the **Sutlej** in the east. **Raj Kaur** (mother of Ranjit Singh), **Sada Kaur** (mother-in-law of Ranjit Singh) and **Lakhpat Rai** played an important role in the expansion of the Sikh Empire.

EXAM TIP

First major conquest: **Lahore (1799)** · last major conquest: **Peshawar (1834)**.

Economic Policies and Administration

Currency System

Ranjit Singh introduced the **Nanakshahi** currency in **1801** at Lahore. Regional variations included:

- **Hari Singhi** coins in Kashmir (named after Governor Hari Singh Nalwa)
- **Moran Shahi** coins in Amritsar
- **Peshawari–Naunihal Singhi** coins in Peshawar

Administrative Structure

The empire was divided into four provinces (Subas): **Lahore** (capital province), **Multan**, **Kashmir** and **Peshawar**. Each province was headed by a **Nazim** (governor), assisted by **Kardars** (district collectors). The administrative levels below were:

Suba (Nazim) → **Pargana (district)** → **Taaluqa (sub-district)** → **Mauza (village; 50–100 per Taaluqa)**

Key Administrative Officials

Post	Official
Prime Minister	**Dhian Singh Dogra**
Foreign Minister	**Fakir Aziz-ud-Din**
Finance Minister	**Dina Nath**
Head of Customs	**Misr Ralia Ram**
Industrial (Ordnance) Department	**Lehna Singh Majithia**

Revenue System

- **Main source:** Land revenue (about **70%** of state income)
- **Assessment methods:**
  - **Batai system:** Traditional crop-sharing between the cultivator and the government
  - **Kankut system:** Assessment based on the standing crop (introduced in 1824)
- **Collection:** Twice a year, at harvest time
- **Village administration:** Panchayat system with the help of the **Muqaddam**
- The government gave **Taccavi loans** to farmers to help them dig wells.
- Ranjit Singh instituted the **Order of the Propitious Star of Punjab** in **1837**.

Judicial System

Panchayat courts delivered justice in the villages, while the **Adalat-i-Ala** at Lahore heard appeals from different regions. Other courts included the Adalati courts, the Nazims' courts and the Kardars' courts. The **Maharaja** was the final source of justice – the highest court of appeal against decisions of Kardars, Nazims, Adalatis and ministers.

The Sikh Khalsa Army

The army was very diverse, with soldiers of different religions – Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims and Europeans. It was organised into different wings, each with a specific role:

1. Fauj-i-Khas (Elite Force)

- Top unit of the army
- Strictly trained in the French style
- Had its own emblem and flag
- Best weapons and equipment

2. Fauj-i-Ain (Regular Force)

- The main army, with two divisions:
- **Kampu-i-Mualla** (state troops)
- **Fauj-i-Khas** (special force)

3. Fauj-i-Be-Qawaid (Irregular Force)

- About **52,000** professional but irregular soldiers
- Also called **Jagirdari Fauj**
- Weakest part of the army

- **Fauj-i-Qiladari:** The garrison army that guarded the forts and also worked as police.
- **Ghorcharas:** Another part of the army – horsemen who were relatives of the nobles of the Sikh Empire and also served as fort police.

European Officers

Ranjit Singh modernised his army by employing European officers:

Officer	Role
Price (British)	First European to join the Sikh army
Jean-Baptiste Ventura (Italian)	Appointed General in 1822; organised the Fauj-i-Khas
Jean-François Allard (French)	Commanded the cavalry; modernised combat techniques
Gen. Auguste Court and **Gardner**	Artillery commanders
Foulkes (British)	Hired in 1835 as relations with Britain improved

Major Generals

Notable Sikh and foreign generals included:

- Hari Singh Nalwa
- Diwan Mokham Chand
- Sardar Sham Singh Attariwala
- Zorawar Singh
- Akali Phula Singh
- Jean-François Allard (French)
- Jean-Baptiste Ventura (Italian)

Treaties with the British

Treaty of Amritsar (1809)

Also called the **Minto–Metcalfe Treaty** (signed with Charles Metcalfe in the time of Lord Minto):

- Sikh forces agreed not to expand south of the **Sutlej**
- The British pledged not to enter Sikh territory
- Fixed the boundary between British and Sikh territories

Tripartite Treaty (1838)

Signed with **Lord Auckland** and the former ruler of Afghanistan **Shah Shuja**:

- Plan to make Shah Shuja the King of Kabul
- British and Sikh armies would help him together

Religious and Cultural Contributions

Sites	Contributions
Sikh sites	Gold plating for the walls of Harmandir Sahib · Built Takht Sri Patna Sahib and Takht Sri Hazur Sahib · Nine-storey tower of Gurdwara Baba Atal
Hindu temples	Gold donations to the Vishwanath Temple, Jwalamukhi and Kangra temples
Muslim sites	Mai Moran Masjid (built for his Muslim wife Moran Sarkar)
Sects	Supported the Udasi and Nirmala sects in Sikh religious affairs

KOH-I-NOOR

Ranjit Singh got the **Koh-i-Noor** diamond from **Shah Shuja** – it had been promised to him by Shah Shuja's wife **Wafa Begum** – and he wore it on his arm. In 1839 he wished to donate it to the **Jagannath Temple at Puri** (Odisha), but the wish was never carried out; the diamond later went to the British.

Death and Legacy

Maharaja Ranjit Singh died of paralysis on **27 June 1839** at Lahore. His funeral was conducted by both Sikh and Hindu priests. Tragically, his wife **Maharani Mahtab Devi** committed sati along with four queens and seven slave girls. The **Samadhi of Ranjit Singh** in Lahore (Pakistan) marks his cremation site and stands as a testament to his legacy.

The Empire's Demographic Composition

Community	Share of population
Muslims	~70%
Hindus	~24%
Sikhs	~6–7%

QUICK REVISION

- Born **13 Nov 1780**, Gujranwala · Sukerchakia Misl · lost left eye to smallpox
- Coronation **12 April 1801** by Baba Sahib Singh Bedi · Lahore captured **1799** · Peshawar **1834** (last)
- Nanakshahi coins **1801** · 4 provinces · PM **Dhian Singh Dogra** · Foreign Minister **Fakir Aziz-ud-Din**
- Treaty of Amritsar **1809** (Sutlej boundary) · Tripartite Treaty **1838** · died **27 June 1839**