

Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Background, Military Campaign, Religious Policies

July 2, 2026 • vajiramandravi.com



In the early 19th century, **Punjab, the land of five rivers**, was governed by **Maharaja Ranjit Singh**, famously known as '**Sher-e-Punjab**' (Lion of Punjab). His reign was characterized by secular ideals, fostering diversity and equality throughout his empire.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh brought significant reforms, modernization, and infrastructure development, collectively leading to widespread prosperity in his empire. In **1839, Maharaja Ranjit Singh** bequeathed the **Koh-i-Noor diamond** from **Shuja Shah Durrani of Afghanistan** to the **Jagannath Temple in Puri, Odisha**.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh Early Life and Background

Maharaja Ranjit Singh was a transformative leader in Indian history, known for **uniting the Sikh community** and establishing a prosperous Sikh Empire in the **early 19th century**.

- **Early Life: Maharaja Ranjit Singh** hailed from a **Sandhawalia Jat Sikh family** in **Gujranwala, Punjab** (present-day Pakistan). He was born on **November 13, 1780**, to **Maha Singh** and **Raj Kaur**, the daughter of the Sidhu Jat Sikh ruler.

- Ranjit Singh's original name was **Buddh Singh**, which was later changed to **Ranjit Singh** to celebrate his father's victory over **Chattha Chieftain, Pir Muhammad**.
- Maharaja Ranjit Singh is known to have lost vision in his left eye due to a smallpox outbreak while helping those affected.
- After his father died, **Ranjit Singh**, at the age of 12, took over the **Sukerchakia Misl estates**, which were managed by his mother, **Raj Kaur**, and **Lakhpat Rai**.
- When he was 13, he survived an assassination attempt by **Hashmat Khan**. In the confrontation, he ultimately killed the attacker.
- **Maharaja Ranjit Singh** lost his mother, **Raj Kaur**, and **Lakhpat Rai** to assassination at the age of 18
- Following his first marriage, he received support from his mother-in-law.
- **Background:** Following **Aurangzeb's death in 1707**, the Mughal Empire fragmented and struggled to govern or tax much of the Indian subcontinent. In the **Indus River Valley**, **Guru Govind Singh's Khalsa Community** of Sikh warriors helped weaken Mughal authority by resisting Afghan raiders.
 - Following this, the Sikhs appointed their zamindars to replace the previous Muslim revenue collectors.
 - Meanwhile, European traders and the British East India Company started their activities along the eastern and western coasts of India.
- **Fragmented Sikh Territories:** By the second half of the 18th century, the northwestern regions of the Indian subcontinent were divided into fourteen small conflicting territories.
 - Among these, twelve were **Sikh-controlled misls** while the other two were controlled by a **Muslim leader** located in Lahore and by the **Englishman George Thomas**.
 - These Sikh warriors frequently clashed over revenue collection and local issues.
 - However, they typically united to confront external threats from the **Muslim armies of Ahmed Shah Abdali** in Afghanistan.
- **Shifts in Power Among Sikh Misls:** There were five most powerful misls towards the end of the 18th century: **Sukkarchakkia**, Kanhayas, Nakkais, Ahluwalias, and Bhangi Sikhs.
 - Maharaja Ranjit Singh was part of the **Sukkarchakkia misl**.
 - Meanwhile, some smaller misls, like the **Phulkias**, shifted their loyalties to support the Afghan invasion.
 - However, the **Muslim-ruled Kasur region** allied with **Afghan forces** to raid **Sikh misls** during the conflict.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh Military Campaign

Maharaja Ranjit Singh rose to prominence in **1797** at the **age of 17** when **Afghan ruler Shah Zaman** tried to annex **Punjab**. Utilizing his regional knowledge and warrior skills, Maharaj Ranjit Singh successfully resisted the invasion at the **Battle of Amritsar in 1798**.

- Later in 1798, when **Shah Zaman** dispatched another army, Ranjit Singh allowed their entry into Lahore and then encircled them.
- He blocked their supplies and destroyed crops, prompting much of the Afghan army to withdraw back to Afghanistan.

- In **1801**, Maharaja Ranjit Singh declared himself the '**Maharaja of Punjab**' during a ceremonial installation led by **Guru Nanak's descendant, Baba Sahib Singh Bedi**.
- **Maharaja Ranjit Singh** referred to his rule as "**Sarkar Khalsa**" and his court as "**Darbar Khalsa**".
- He then ordered the creation of new coins called "**NanakShahi**" to honor **Guru Nanak**.

Wars and Conquests

At the **age of 22**, Maharaja Ranjit Singh seized **Amritsar** from the **Bhangi Sikh misl** and honored the **Harmandir Sahib temple (Golden Temple)** in **1802**.

- **Treaty of Amritsar:** Maharaja Ranjit Singh signed the **Treaty of Amritsar** with the **British East India Company in 1809**. The Treaty of Amritsar is also known as **the Minto Metcalfe Treaty**.
 - He agreed that his **Sikh forces** would not expand **south of the Sutlej River**, while the Company pledged **not to enter Sikh territory**.
 - He gained from the treaty as it allowed him to **seize territories** such as **Kashmir and Peshawar**.
- **Battle of Kasur:** In the Battle of Kasur (**1807**), Ranjit Singh's army **defeated the Afghan Chief Qutb-ud-Din at Kasur** in expanding the Sikh Empire northwest towards Afghanistan.
- Maharaja Ranjit Singh conquered **Multan in 1818**.
- **Battle of Shopian:** Maharaja Ranjit Singh overcame **Afghan Sunni Muslim rulers in the Battle of Shopian in 1819**, which expanded his rule into **Kashmir and the Jhelum Valley**.
- **In 1813, Ranjit Singh's general Dewan Mokham Chand defeated Afghan forces at Attock, expanding Sikh territory.**
- Darbar forces led by **Kharak Singh and Misr Dewan Chand in 1818** captured Multan resulting in the death of **Muzaffar Khan and his troops**.
 - This event finally marked the **end of Afghan authority in Punjab**.
- **In 1818**, Sikh forces conquered **Kashmir**, appointing a new governor **Dewan Moti Ram**.
- **Coins** were minted during Maharaja Ranjit Singh's reign.
- In **1835**, Afghans and Sikhs faced each other at the Khyber Pass but did not engage in battle.
- **Battle of Jamrud:** In 1837, the **Battle of Jamrud** marked the **final clash between Maharaja Ranjit Singh's Sikhs and the Afghans**, highlighting the western limits of the Sikh Empire.
- In **1838**, Maharaja Ranjit Singh reached an agreement with **British Viceroy Lord Auckland** to reinstate **Shah Shoja** as the Afghan ruler in Kabul.
- Following this, the British army advanced into **Afghanistan from the south**, while **Ranjit Singh's forces** traversed the **Khyber Pass** to celebrate the victory in Kabul.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh Religious Policies

Maharaja Ranjit Singh was a **secular ruler** who followed the Sikh faith. He promoted **religious tolerance** and respected all communities, including Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims.

- He renovated and built significant **Gurdwaras**, particularly the **Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple)** using **gold and marble**.
- He also participated in Hindu temple celebrations.

- Maharaja Ranjit Singh constructed various Gurdwaras, Hindu temples, and mosques, including the **Mai Moran Masjid**.
- **Maharaja Ranjit Singh Court:** His court was composed of various faiths, including a **Hindu prime minister, Dhian Singh**, a **Muslim foreign minister**, Fakir Azizuddin, and a **Hindu finance minister, Dina Nath**.
- During Ranjit Singh's reign, there were no forced conversions.
- Maharaja Ranjit Singh supported the **Udasi and Nirmala sects**, strengthening their role in Sikh religious affairs.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh Administration

Maharaja Ranjit Singh was a **transformative ruler** whose administrative policies fostered a spirit of unity and collaboration among diverse religious and ethnic communities in Punjab. He is renowned for his military conquests and for building a strong, independent Khalsa army to defend the empire.

Khalsa Army

Maharaja Ranjit Singh's army was diverse, comprising not only Sikhs but also Hindus, Muslims, and Europeans. Although his **Khalsa army** initially included various religious groups, it increasingly **became dominated** by **Rajputs and Sikhs** as it expanded.

In the **Doaba region** his army was composed of the **Jat Sikhs**, in **Jammu** and **northern Indian hills it was Hindu Rajputs**. In contrast, a **higher number of Muslims** were part of his forces in the **Jhelum River area**, which is closer to **Afghanistan**.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh Reforms

Maharaja Ranjit Singh improved the training and organization of his army, setting clear standards for efficiency, deployment, and shooting skills. He shifted the focus from cavalry and guerrilla tactics to emphasize **steady fire and improved military equipment** and methods.

- His military system blended **traditional and modern strategies**, strengthening both infantry and artillery units.
- Maharaja Ranjit Singh **funded his army directly from the treasury**, instead of relying on local taxes as was common in the Mughal Empire.
- Maharaja Ranjit Singh focused on **improving his military for expansion** but neglected to reform the taxation system, create uniform laws, or support trade and agriculture.
- However, the failure to reform the **Jagir-based taxation system** led to internal conflicts and power struggles within the Sikh community after Ranjit Singh's death.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh Aftermath

Maharaja Ranjit Singh is admired for making the **Sikhs a powerful political force**. Following the **death of Ranjit Singh on June 27 1838**, the empire lacked a stable government and succession plan, leading to its

decline.

Duleep Singh, the youngest son of Ranjit Singh, was then declared **Maharaja with Rani Jindan serving as regent**. His reign marked the last chapter of the Sikh Empire, during which court factionalism worsened. The **British and the Sikh Empire fought** two **Anglo-Sikh wars**, with the **second** leading to the end of the Sikh Empire's rule. Despite this, Sikhism continued to thrive.

Other Related Posts	
Battle of Plassey	Robert Clive
Battle of Buxar	Anglo Mysore Wars
Dual Government in Bengal	Tipu Sultan
Anglo Maratha Wars	Maratha Empire
Third Battle of Panipat	Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj
Battle of Bhima Koregaon	Anglo Burmese War
Maharaja Ranjit Singh	Anglo Nepal War

Source: <https://vajiramandravi.com/upsc-exam/maharaja-ranjit-singh/>

© Vajiram & Ravi. For personal use only.