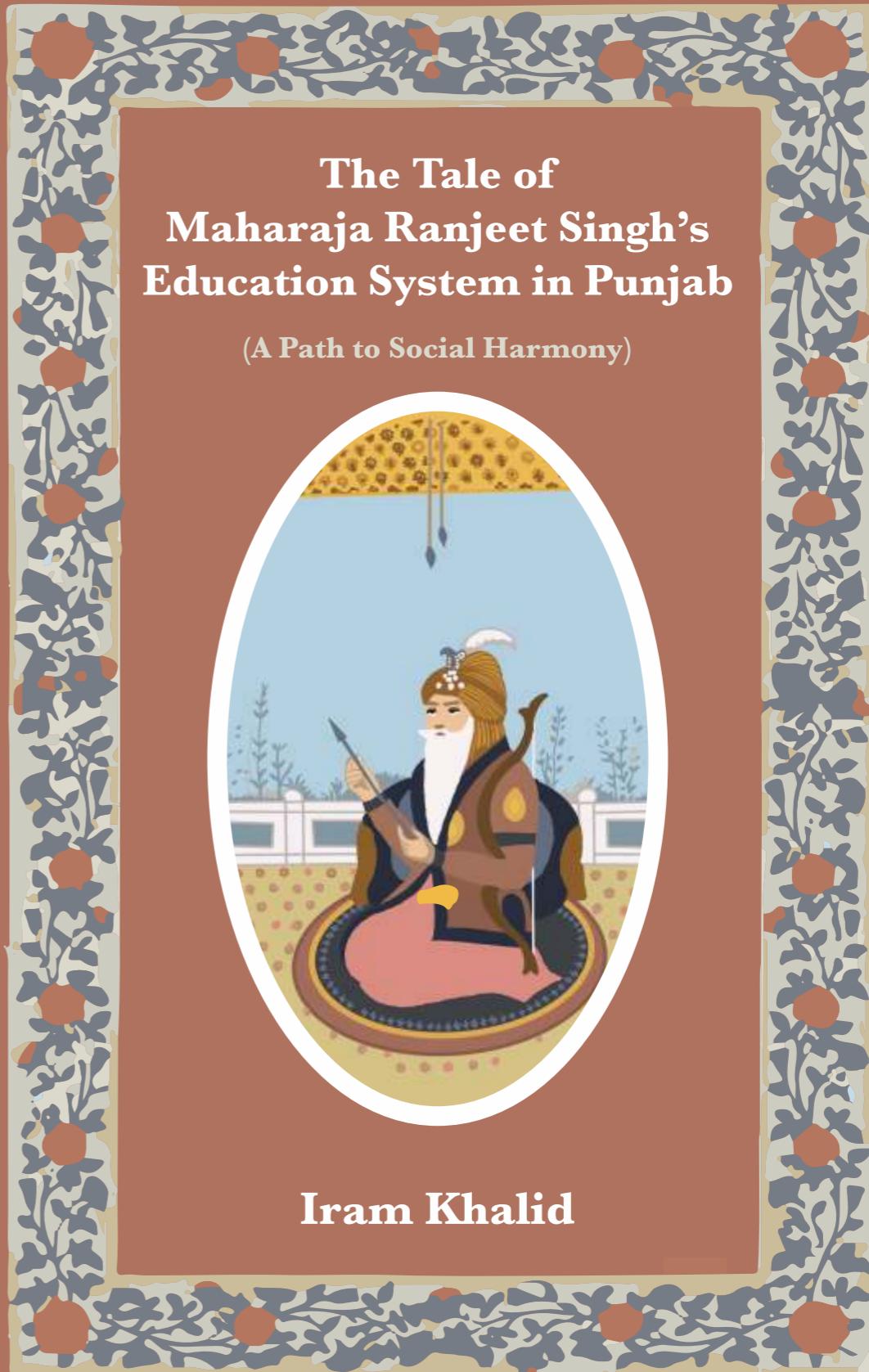




The Tale of Maharaja Ranjeet Singh's
Education System in Punjab

Iram Khalid



The Tale of
Maharaja Ranjeet Singh's
Education System in Punjab
(A Path to Social Harmony)

Iram Khalid

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Dr. Prof. Iram Khalid



Sikh Heritage Education & Cultural organization of America

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Dedication

**To all those wants to follow the path of Justice
and Harmony**

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Preface

Punjab, one of the largest provinces famous as "Land of Five Rivers", possess a long history of civilizations and cultures. This book seeks to explore the rich and complex history of Punjab, focusing on a transformative period when the Sikh community rose to power and established a dominant state. This book discussed the evolution of Punjab from ancient civilizations to the height of Sikh sovereignty under Maharaja Ranjit Singh, offering a lens into the socio-political transformations that shaped the region's identity.

Chapter 1 outlines the historical importance of Punjab province, tracing the rise of Sikh rule during the 18th and 19th centuries. It delves into the religious, socio-political, and historical developments that paved the way for the establishment of a powerful Sikh state. Key events that empowered the Sikh community, transforming it from a persecuted minority into rulers of a significant portion of northern India, are highlighted. The chapter introduces the Misl system, detailing the prominent Misls and their leaders, while examining territorial expansion and governance under these confederacies. A significant section is dedicated to Maharaja Ranjit Singh's reign, focusing on his administrative reforms and modernization efforts, which cemented his role as a nation-builder. The chapter concludes by reflecting on society and culture under Sikh rule, particularly during Ranjit Singh's time, discussing the patronage of the arts and the broader impact of Sikh governance on language, literature, and architecture.

Chapter two explored the past history of Punjab starting from Harappan civilization and followed by the influence of Greeks, Persians and Mughals. These interactions introduced new governance models, architectural styles, and cultural practices, all of

which merged with indigenous traditions to create the unique cultural tapestry that defines Punjab. The rise of Sikhism, rooted in the teachings of Guru Nanak, marked a significant shift in the region's religious and social fabric. Sikhism's evolution from a spiritual movement to a political and military force, culminating in the formation of the Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh, is thoroughly examined. The chapter connects these historical currents to the rise of Sikh power, leading to the eventual establishment of a unified Sikh state under the leadership of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh, also known as "Lion of Punjab", remained one of the most formidable leaders of Punjab. Chapter 3 elaborated the life and governance strategies of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The regime of Maharaja Ranjit Singh is characterized as inclusive administration as Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs were incorporated in influencing positions to value the diversity of religions. Singh's policies for agriculture, military and taxation were very progressive with a forward-thinking approach to enhance the financial stability and sustained prosperity in the region. In order to maintain the independence of Punjab during imperial expansion, Singh's approach of inviting European military advisors to modernize the Sikh army was pragmatic. Overall, this chapter reveals how the governance system of Ranjit Singh left a lasting legacy in Punjab, and discusses the Singh's diplomacy highlighting the balancing act with British Empire as well as his patronage of arts, culture, and education, which helped shape Punjab's cultural landscape during and after his reign.

Next this book highlights the education system of Punjab during the Singh's rule as Singh's decentralized governance approach fostered a diverse and inclusive educational environment. The chapter explains the various types of educational institutions such as Gurmukhi schools, Persian and Arabic institutions, and Mahajani schools, each serving different communities with a wide range of

subjects including religious teachings and practical skills like arithmetic and bookkeeping. The challenges and limitations related to educational systems are also highlighted including the informal settings where women received religious education, yet it also discussed the crucial role education played in fostering a sense of identity among Punjab's diverse population. Under Maharaja Ranjit Singh's patronage, scholars, teachers, and institutions received substantial support, leading to a flourishing of educational and intellectual life in Punjab. However, with British annexation, many of these institutions lost the financial support that sustained them, leading to their decline. This shift from locally managed schools to British colonial education brought changes to the cultural and intellectual environment in Punjab. This chapter offers a reflection on how these changes not only impacted the educational infrastructure but also altered the cultural and intellectual fabric of the region, with long-lasting effects on future generations.

The last chapter provides the conclusion discussing the overall insights based on the previous four chapters. It revisits the themes such as evolution of Punjab from ancient civilizations, Sikh sovereignty, social-political, cultural, and religious transformations. The conclusion also highlights the enduring legacy of Sikh rule on the region's language, literature, and architecture. The chapter offers a holistic view of Punjab's rich historical journey and its cultural resilience, leaving readers with a comprehensive understanding of the region's past and its lasting influence on present-day Punjab.

Through these chapters, this book strives to offer readers a deep and multifaceted understanding of Punjab's history. By weaving together, the political, religious, and social strands that shaped the region, it provides a comprehensive narrative that pays homage to the resilience, adaptability, and creativity of its people. The legacy of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, in particular, stands out as a testament to what visionary leadership can achieve in the face of external

pressures and internal complexities. His contributions to governance, military strategy, culture, and education continue to resonate in the Punjab of today, making his reign a pivotal chapter in the broader story of South Asia.

The rulers periodically revise, distort, and even destroy historical evidence to appropriate narratives that sustain empires. The 19th century ruler Maharaja Ranjit Singh's rule on being replaced by the British in 1849 suffered a historical amnesia under the manipulative maneuvers of the imperial designs. When in 2020, "BBC World Histories Magazine" surveyed the learned opinions of its 5000 readers and voted Maharaja Ranjit Singh as the "Greatest Leader of All Time" the focus shifted to the underlying factors of his greatness. But for the common readers, it was not easy to reconstruct the real narrative as history books glossed over what was not placative to the foundational structure of the British Empire.

Iram Khalid

Chapter 1: Origin of Sikh Rule in Punjab

Introduction

Historical Significance of Punjab

Punjab, with its mighty rivers, has always been a land of vibrant life and culture in the Indian subcontinent. From generation to generation, its waters have nourished not just the land but the people who lived there. Its name, derived from the Persian words “Punj” (five) and “Ab” (water), reflects the five rivers – Jehlum, Chenab, Ravi, Beas, and Sutlej – that flow through its fertile plains. The geographical position of the region made it an agricultural heartland as well as a crossroads of cultures and civilizations (Gosal, 2004). Punjab stands as the gateway to India. It is situated in the path of conquerors and traders who left their marks on its soil.

The early history of Punjab is closely tied to the ancient Harappan Civilization that developed around 2600 BCE. This early urban culture formed the basis for the long history of settlement and cultivation in the region (Grewal, 2004). Over the centuries, Punjab was influenced by a succession of empires and invaders. These included the Persians, who incorporated it into their empire during the reign of Darius I in the 6th century BCE, and the Greeks under Alexander the Great, who marched through Punjab in 326 BCE (Gandhi, 2013). These invaders brought new ideas and practices that added to the cultural diversity in this area.

During the Mauryan period (322 BCE to 185 BCE), Punjab became a center for the spread of Buddhism under Emperor Ashoka. Taxila,

which was known as Takshashila, emerged as a renowned seat of learning during this time (Ejaz, 2020). The following empires, including the Indo-Greeks, Kushans, and Guptas, each had a unique on the cultural heritage of Punjab. The Indo-Greeks who arrived around the 2nd century BCE, brought with them Hellenistic ideas. These ideas blended with local traditions, especially in art and architecture (Grewal, 2004). The Kushans, who ruled from the 1st to the 3rd century CE, embraced and promoted Buddhism. They established trade routes that connected Punjab to Central Asia and beyond. Gandhara art, which combined Greco-Roman and Indian styles, flourished in this era (Grewal, 2004). The Gupta empire, widely regarded as a golden age of Indian civilization. brought advancements in science, mathematics, and literature in this area during the 4th to 6th centuries CE.

After the decline of the Gupta Empire, Punjab came under the influence of the Huns in the 6th century CE. Their rule, however, was short-lived and they were eventually absorbed into the local population (Grewal, 2004). Muhammad bin Qasim arrived in the Indian subcontinent in 712 CE. He initially conquered Sindh and later extended his conquest into southern Punjab, including the important city of Multan. His conquests introduced Islam to the subcontinent. However, his influence did not extend to all of Punjab. Much of the area remained under local rulers. The Rajput dynasties held sway in parts of Punjab during the following centuries. During this time, the Ghaznavid Empire, led by Mahmud of Ghazni, launched repeated invasions. He eventually captured Lahore and integrated parts of Punjab into the Ghaznavid Empire.

Punjab continued to hold strategic importance through the medieval period. It was especially vital under the Delhi Sultanate and later the Mughal Empire, where it played a critical role in the administration and economy of the empire. Lahore, in particular, grew into a vibrant center of trade, culture, and political activity (Mir, 2020). Mughal era was a period of prosperity for the Punjab. Its cities like Lahore, Multan, and Sialkot, became manufacturing centers that produced textiles, weapons, and other goods (Mir, 2020). The prosperity of Punjab attracted people from different parts of subcontinent. However, the decline of the Mughal Empire in the early 18th century caused political instability and division. This created a power vacuum that paved the way for the emergence of new regional powers, including the Sikhs.

Significance of Sikh Rule in the Context of Indian History

The rise of Sikh rule in Punjab during the 18th and early 19th centuries is one of the most outstanding chapters in Indian history. Punjab fell into chaos after the decline of Mughal authority, with different factions competing for control. The factions included local chieftains, remnants of the Mughal administration, Afghan invaders, and emerging Sikh groups. During this turmoil, the Sikhs, guided by the teachings of their Gurus and later by the establishment of the Khalsa, began to emerge as a strong force.

The Sikh rule in Punjab is important not only for its military achievements but also for its impact on governance and society. The establishment of the Sikh Empire under Ranjit Singh was the first time since the Mughal period that Punjab was united under a single,

strong political entity. This unification was achieved through a combination of military strength, strategic alliances, and administrative reforms that strengthened the state.

Secular governance and religious tolerance are notable features of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's rule (Duggal, 1989). Despite being a Sikh ruler, Ranjit Singh did not marginalize people belonging to other faiths. He appointed people from different religious backgrounds to key positions in his administration (Duggal, 1989). Besides maintaining internal stability, this approach also facilitated the economic and cultural progress of Punjab. The Sikh Empire under Ranjit Singh became a model of governance that combined traditional values with modern administrative practices.

The Sikh Empire was instrumental in repelling outside invasions, especially from Afghan forces. The repeated invasions by Ahmad Shah Abdali had devastated Punjab. However, under Sikh rule, it regained its stability and became a bulwark against further invasions (Grewal, 1991). The Sikhs also managed to establish control over territories beyond Punjab, including Kashmir, the regions of Peshawar and Multan, and the northwestern frontier areas (Grewal, 1991). This territorial expansion under Sikh rule strengthened the empire and elevated its importance in the regional politics of the era.

The Sikh Empire represents one of the last indigenous powers to challenge British colonial expansion (Singh, 2014). The British annexation of Punjab in 1849 brought an end to the Sikh Empire and initiated full British control over the Indian subcontinent. The legacy of Sikh rule in Punjab remained a defining factor in the social,

cultural, and political identity of Punjab long after the empire fell. The institutions, reforms, and cultural contributions from the Sikh period left a lasting imprint on Punjab.

Structure of the Chapter

The primary aim of this chapter is to explore the origins and rise of Sikh rule in Punjab and to trace the historical, religious, and socio-political developments that led to the establishment of a powerful Sikh state. This chapter seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how a religious movement, which began as a quest for spiritual renewal, evolved into a formidable political and military force capable of challenging the might of the Mughal Empire and later the British East India Company.

This chapter also aims to highlight the key figures and events that were instrumental in the rise of Sikh power. From the teachings of Guru Nanak and the later Sikh Gurus, through the establishment of the Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh, to the unification of the Sikh Misl under Maharaja Ranjit Singh, this chapter examines the transformation of the Sikh community from a minority to rulers of a larger portion of northern India.

The chapter began with an introduction that offered a brief overview of the historical importance of Punjab and the importance of Sikh rule in Indian history. Introduction is followed by the historical background section, which provides context by exploring the political and social structure of Punjab before the rise of Sikh rule. It introduces the key dynasties and rulers who influenced Punjab and discusses the emergence of Sikhism as a remarkable religious and

social movement. The influence of Guru Nanak and later Sikh Gurus is examined.

The chapter then moves on to discuss the rise of Sikh power, beginning with the establishment of the Khalsa in 1699. It covers the military and social reforms introduced by the Sikh leadership, as well as the early military campaigns and conquests that set the stage for the establishment of the first Sikh state. Following this, the formation of Sikh confederacies, or Misl, is explored. The chapter explains the Misl system, introduces key Misl and their leaders, and discusses the territorial expansion and governance practices under these confederacies. The next section focuses on the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. It discusses his efforts to unify the Sikh Misl and establish a centralized state, along with the administrative reforms and modernization efforts that solidified his legacy as a nation-builder. The chapter concludes with an exploration of society and culture under Sikh rulers, particularly Ranjit Singh. It reflects on the patronage of arts and culture and considers the impact of Sikh rule on language, literature, and architecture.

Historical Background

Political and Social Structure of Punjab Before Sikh Rule

Punjab has always been a prominent region in the processes of state formation in South Asia due to its strategic location between the states of Afghanistan and the Gangetic plains of North India. This positioning meant that Punjab was both enriched by and often bore the brunt of invasions and influences from both sides.

By the medieval period, Punjab had already established itself as a key region with major urban centers that were connected to important trade routes (Grewal, 2004). These routes linked the Arabian Sea, Persia, and Central Asia in the west to Kashmir, Rajputana, the Gangetic plains, and the Deccan in India. Lahore and Multan became hubs of commerce and culture, attracted a diverse population, and had a vibrant urban life (Mir, 2020). The economic importance of Punjab was amplified by its fertile lands and the development of agriculture. It was achieved largely with the transformation of the bars (upland forested and uncultivated areas) of the five doabs (land between two rivers) during the Mughal period (Habib, 1963).

Before the Mughal period, Punjab was a region where various religious and cultural traditions coexisted, including practices associated with different spiritual paths. Numerous shrines and religious centers were found across both rural and urban areas (Singh, 2020). By the fifteenth century, a major network of Sufi shrines had emerged along the trade routes. These routes had been developed earlier under the Ghurid and Ghaznavid rulers and were later expanded under the Tughluq dynasty (Singh, 2020). The Sufi tradition greatly influenced the religious and cultural life of the region. These Sufi shrines also contributed to the transformation of the Jats from an agro-pastoral lifestyle to settled agriculture (Eaton, 2002).

The Tughluq dynasty, which ruled during the Sultanate period, contributed to the political and economic development of Punjab. They founded new cities such as Hissar, expanded canal networks

to support agriculture around Multan and Hissar, and established marital relationships with local Rajput clans, particularly the Bhattis (Ali et al., 2023). However, the Tughluq's state formation efforts faced many challenges, especially after the devastation caused by Timur's invasion in 1398. The decline of the Sultanate under the Lodhi dynasty further weakened the region and made it vulnerable to external threats and internal chaos.

By the time of Babur's conquest in 1526, Punjab was already in a state of transformation. The collapse of Lodhi dynasty and advent of Mughal rule brought about more changes. The construction of the Grand Trunk Road by Sher Shah Suri, which connected Peshawar and Multan to Delhi via Lahore, Sirhind, and Thanesar, enhanced the connectivity and economic integration of Punjab with the rest of the subcontinent. The emergence of this road network also facilitated the rise of new urban centers and the growth of Punjabi castes such as the Jats, who became important players in the economic and social life.

Punjab experienced a period of agrarian expansion and increased centralization under Mughal rule. The introduction of well irrigation systems, including the Persian Wheel, transformed agriculture, particularly in the Chaj, Rachna, and Bari doabs (Habib, 1963). During this period the Jats rose as major agrarian producers and zamindars, who became key contributors to the Mughal land revenue system (Habib, 1963). However, the centralizing tendencies of the Mughal state often clashed with the traditional autonomy claimed by local chiefs. This led to tensions and rebellions by local

chiefs, who resisted Mughal authority in the latter half of the sixteenth century.

Key Rulers and Dynasties

The foundation of Muslim rule in Punjab was laid by Muhammad Bin Qasim in 712 CE, who, under the Umayyad Dynasty, became the first Muslim commander to establish a lasting foothold in the subcontinent. However, it was not until the invasions of Mahmud of Ghazni (997-1030 CE) that the Muslim influence in Punjab was solidified. Mahmud's seventeen invasions into Punjab, particularly his defeat of Raja Jaipal in 1001 CE, signaled the beginning of a more entrenched Islamic rule in the region.

Following Mahmud, the Ghurids, under Muhammad Ghori, expanded Muslim rule in Punjab. He capturing Punjab in 1186 CE after defeating Prithvi Raj of Ajmer. After his death in 1206, his general, Qutubuddin Aibak, declared himself the sovereign ruler of India. This was the beginning of the Delhi Sultanate. During the period from 1206 to 1526 CE, known as the Sultanate period, Punjab was governed by a succession of five dynasties: the Mamluks (1206-1290 CE), the Khiljis (1290-1320 CE), the Tughlaqs (1320-1414 CE), the Sayyids (1414-1451 CE), and the Lodhis (1451-1526 CE).

Under the Delhi Sultanate, Punjab served as both a military stronghold and an important administrative division. The Sultans relied heavily on local chieftains and landholders to maintain control over the region (Awan, 2016). They integrated them into the administrative framework through the grant of jagirs (land grants). These landholders, in return, provided military support and

maintained order in their respective territories, thus creating a feudal system that became deeply entrenched in the social fabric of Punjab (Awan, 2016).

Under the Mughals, Punjab enjoyed a long period of stability. Good governance, religious tolerance, and economic prosperity were some of the attributes of this period. The Mughal emperors, particularly Akbar (1542-1605), implemented administrative reforms, including the Mansabdari system, which further strengthened the feudal structure of Punjab (Awan, 2016). This system integrated local chieftains into the Mughal administration by granting them ranks (mansabs) and responsibilities, which helped consolidate Mughal control over the region. Cities like Lahore became centers of learning, art, and architecture, with the construction of Mughal forts, mosques, mausoleums, serais (inns), and gardens. The social structure remained largely feudal, with local landholders wielding considerable power and influence over the rural population.

As the Mughal Empire began to decline following the death of Aurangzeb in 1707, Punjab once again became a center of political turmoil. The weakening of central authority led to the rise of local chieftains who asserted their independence. This period also saw the penetration of foreign powers, particularly Ahmad Shah Abdali (1722-1772 A.D.), whose repeated invasions caused major disruptions. Abdali's invasions, along with those of Nadir Shah (1688-1747), exacerbated the decline of Mughal power in Punjab. This created a power vacuum that would eventually be filled by the Sikhs.

Emergence of Sikhism

The emergence of Sikhism in the late 15th century was an important religious and social development in Punjab. Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, was born in 1469 in the village of Talwandi (now Nankana Sahib in Pakistan). His teachings included the oneness of God, the equality of all human beings, and the rejection of the caste system and ritualistic practices that were prevalent at that time (Dhillon, 1988). The message of Guru Nanak resonated with the people of Punjab, especially the marginalized sections of society, and attracted a growing number of followers who became known as Sikhs, or disciples (Dhillon, 1988).

Guru Nanak's approach to social and religious issues was revolutionary. He rejected the authority of Brahmins and rituals prescribed by the Vedas. He advocated instead for a direct and personal relationship with God through devotion, meditation, and ethical living (Dhillon, 1988). His message of universal brotherhood and his critique of social inequalities found a receptive audience among the diverse population of Punjab, which included Hindus, Muslims, and people from various castes and tribes.

After Guru Nanak, the leadership of the Sikh community passed on to a succession of nine Gurus. Each of these Gurus contributed to the development and consolidation of the Sikh faith. The Gurus not only provided spiritual guidance but also played an active role in addressing the social and political challenges faced by their followers. Several important Sikh institutions, such as the langar (community kitchen) and the sangat (congregation), were

established in this period (Dhillon, 1988). These institutions reinforced the principles of equality and community service.

The influence of Guru Nanak extended beyond his immediate followers. His teachings such as compassion, humility, and service to humanity cut across religious and social boundaries. His hymns, composed in the Punjabi language, became a source of spiritual inspiration and were later compiled into the Guru Granth Sahib, the holy scripture of the Sikhs (Dhillon, 1988).

Influence of Guru Nanak and Subsequent Sikh Gurus

The Sikh Gurus continued to build on the teachings of Guru Nanak. They institutionalized the Sikh faith and its practices. Guru Angad, the second Guru, introduced the Gurmukhi script, which became the script for writing the Punjabi language and the Sikh scriptures (Dhillon, 1988). This development was important for preserving the teachings of Gurus and promoting literacy among the Sikh community.

Guru Amar Das, the third Guru, strengthened the social and religious institutions of Sikhism. He introduced the concept of Manji, a system of decentralized administration that helped in organizing the growing Sikh community. He also stressed the importance of women's participation in religious and social life, challenging the patriarchal norms of the time (Dhillon, 1988).

Guru Ram Das, the fourth Guru, laid the foundation for the city of Amritsar, which would later become the spiritual and cultural center of Sikhism. He also established the Harmandir Sahib, known as the Golden Temple, which became the holiest shrine of the Sikhs

(Dhillon, 1988). Guru Arjan, the fifth Guru, consolidated the Sikh community by compiling the Adi Granth, the first version of the Sikh scriptures, and by completing the construction of the Harmandir Sahib (Dhillon, 1988).

The next Gurus, particularly Guru Hargobind, the sixth Guru, introduced the concept of Miri-Piri to represent the dual responsibility of temporal and spiritual authority (Dhillon, 1988). This concept led to the militarization of the Sikh community in response to the increasing persecution by the Mughal authorities. The creation of the Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru, in 1699 was the culmination of this process. It transforming the Sikh community into a distinct and self-reliant group with a strong martial tradition.

Rise of Sikh Power

Establishment of the Khalsa in 1699

The establishment of the Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh in 1699 was a watershed moment in Sikh history. On April 13, 1699, during the Baisakhi festival at Anandpur Sahib, Guru Gobind Singh called upon his followers to come forward and sacrifice their lives for the faith (Dhavan, 2011). Five brave men answered his call, and they were initiated into a new order through the Amrit Sanchar ceremony. These five Sikhs, known as the Panj Pyare, became the first members of the Khalsa, a community of saint-soldiers committed to upholding justice and defending the oppressed (Dhavan, 2011).

The Khalsa was more than a religious order; it was a revolutionary social and political force (Dhavan, 2011). Guru Gobind Singh mandated that members of the Khalsa adopt the five Ks: Kesh (uncut hair), Kangha (a wooden comb), Kara (a steel bracelet), Kachera (cotton undergarments), and Kirpan (a ceremonial sword). These symbols represented the commitment of the Khalsa to both spiritual purity and martial readiness. The formation of the Khalsa was also meant to abolish of caste distinctions within the Sikh community and promote the ideals of equality and brotherhood (Dhavan, 2011). This new identity transformed the Sikhs into a formidable force that was prepared to challenge the Mughal Empire. The Khalsa became a symbol of resistance and a beacon of hope for the oppressed. It was an important step in the rise of Sikh power in Punjab.

Military and Social Reforms

After the creation of the Khalsa, Guru Gobind Singh implemented extensive military and social reforms to strengthen the Sikh community. These reforms were essential in preparing the Sikhs for the challenges they would face against the Mughal rulers.

Militarily, the Khalsa was organized into a disciplined force that was trained to fight with both traditional weapons and modern techniques. The adoption of the Kirpan as one of the five Ks symbolized the commitment of the Khalsa to defending the weak and maintain justice. Guru Gobind Singh also stressed unity and collective decision-making within the Khalsa. The principle of Sarbat Khalsa, where the entire community gathered to make decisions,

was established. This reinforced the idea that the Khalsa was a sovereign entity that was accountable only to God (Dhavan, 2011).

Socially, the Khalsa represented a radical departure from the established norms of Indian society. The caste system, which had long dominated social relations in the subcontinent, was explicitly rejected within the Khalsa. The reforms introduced by Guru Gobind Singh ensured that all members of the Khalsa were treated as equals, regardless of their social background (Dhavan, 2011). This egalitarian approach not only unified the Sikh community but also attracted a diverse following, including many from the lower castes who sought refuge from the oppressive social order of the time.

Early Military Campaigns and Conquests

The rise of Sikh power in Punjab started with a series of early military campaigns led by Banda Singh Bahadur, who was one of Guru Gobind Singh's most trusted disciples. Banda Singh Bahadur, originally known as Lachhman Dev, was transformed from an ascetic into a warrior under the guidance of Guru Gobind Singh (Jain, 2003). After receiving the Guru's blessings and a mission to avenge the atrocities committed by the Mughals, Banda Singh Bahadur set out for Punjab in 1708 with a small band of Sikhs (Grewal, 1991).

His first significant military success came in 1709 with the capture of Samana. Samana was known for its association with the executioners of Guru Tegh Bahadur and the young sons of Guru Gobind Singh (Grewal, 1991). The victory at Samana was not just a military triumph but also an act of retribution. It avenged the injustices

inflicted upon the Sikh Gurus. This victory was followed by the conquest of several other towns, including Ghuram, Thaska, and Sadhaura (Grewal, 1991). Each of these towns had been strongholds of Mughal power and sites of oppression against Sikhs and Hindus.

Another important military achievement of Banda Singh Bahadur was the capture of Sirhind in 1710, after the Battle of Chappar Chiri. Wazir Khan, the governor of Sirhind, had been directly responsible for the brutal execution of Guru Gobind Singh's sons (Chhabra, 1960a). His defeat was a major blow to Punjab's Mughal authorities. The capture of Sirhind was a turning point in the struggle between Sikhs and Mughals. It demonstrated the ability of Sikhs to challenge and defeat powerful Mughal stronghold.

Banda Singh Bahadur's military campaigns were swift and strategically brilliant. He employed guerrilla tactics, striking at the Mughal forces with speed and precision, and then retreating before the Mughals could regroup (Chhabra, 1960a). This approach not only allowed the Sikhs to achieve victories but also spread fear and confusion among the Mughal ranks. Banda Singh Bahadur's successes inspired many in Punjab to join the Sikh cause, swelling the ranks of his army and further strengthening Sikh power in the region.

Establishment of the First Sikh State

The conquests led by Banda Singh Bahadur culminated in the establishment of the first Sikh state in Punjab. After the fall of Sirhind, Banda Singh Bahadur set up his capital at Mukhlispur (Chhabra, 1960a). He renamed it Lohgarh, which became the first

Sikh capital. Lohgarh was located in the Shivalik hills. Its strategic location provided a natural defense against potential Mughal counterattacks. It also served as the center of Sikh administration and governance.

Banda Singh Bahadur introduced several revolutionary reforms in the territories under his control. One of his most remarkable achievements was the abolition of the zamindari system, which had reduced the peasants to mere serfs under the Mughal landlords (Chhabra, 1960a). Banda Singh Bahadur redistributed the land to the tillers, making them the owners of the land they cultivated. This move not only won him the support of the rural population but also struck a severe blow to the traditional power structures that had upheld Mughal rule in the region.

In addition to land reforms, Banda Singh Bahadur issued new currency and introduced a new calendar which signified the sovereignty of the Sikh state (Chhabra, 1960a). The coins bore the names of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh, symbolizing the spiritual authority under which Banda Singh Bahadur governed. His administration was committed to justice and equality and reflected the principles of the Khalsa. His government held regular durbars where grievances were heard, and justice was administered impartially (Chhabra, 1960a).

Despite the eventual fall of Lohgarh and the capture of Banda Singh Bahadur in 1715, his establishment of the first Sikh state had a lasting impact on Punjab. It demonstrated the viability of Sikh rule and laid the foundation for the later expansion of Sikh power under the Misls

and Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The legacy of Banda Singh Bahadur as the first Sikh ruler and the revolutionary reforms introduced by him continued to inspire the Sikh struggle for sovereignty in the decades that followed.

Formation of Sikh Confederacies

Explanation of the Misl System

The Misl system, which emerged in the 18th century, was a landmark development in the political and military organization of the Sikh community. The term "Misl" refers to a confederacy or group of warriors bound together by shared allegiance and purpose. These confederacies were not centralized states in the traditional sense. They were loosely organized groups, each having its own chief (Grewal, 1991). The word "Misl" itself is derived from the Persian term "Misaal," meaning "alike" or "equal". This points out to the egalitarian ethos of these groups. Each Misl operated independently, yet they shared common religious and cultural ties based on Sikh traditions. The formation of Misls enabled the Sikhs to consolidate their power in a fragmented Punjab after the decline of Mughal authority (Jain, 2003). The Sikhs had been under constant pressure from both Mughal and Afghan forces. They found in the Misl system a means to organize their military efforts and protect their communities.

The structure of a Misl was inherently flexible. Unlike the rigid hierarchical structures of contemporary empires, the Misls were more democratic. Chiefs were chosen based on their leadership abilities, military prowess, and contributions to the community

(Chhabra, 1960a). This decentralized form of governance allowed for adaptability and quick decision-making. While each Misl operated autonomously, they would occasionally unite under a common cause, such as defense against external threats (Grewal, 1991).

Key Misls and Their Leaders

Among these Misls, some were more prominent due to their size, influence, and the leadership qualities of their chiefs. Each Misl controlled specific territories. One of the most prominent Misls was the Ahluwalia Misl, which was led by Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. Jassa Singh was known for his bravery, diplomatic acumen, and leadership skills. Under his guidance, the Ahluwalia Misl became one of the most powerful Sikh confederacies (Chhabra, 1960a). It played a key role in the territorial expansion and consolidation of Sikh power in Punjab.

Another influential Misl was the Bhangi Misl. It derived its name from the use of cannabis (bhang) by its soldiers for their supposed invincibility in battle (Chhabra, 1960a). The Bhangi Misl was one of the largest and most powerful Misls. It controlled vast territories, including the important city of Lahore at various times. Its leaders, like Hari Singh Bhangi, were known for their military capabilities.

The Kanheya Misl was led by Jai Singh Kanheya, who was known for his strategic alliances and territorial ambitions. The Kanheya Misl controlled areas in the Amritsar and Gurdaspur districts. Jai Singh formed alliances with other Misls and therefore was able to expand his territories (Chhabra, 1960a).

The Phulkian Misls held the states of Patiala, Nabha, and Jind. These Misls, led by chiefs like Ala Singh of Patiala, were known for balancing relations with the Mughals, Afghans, and later the British (Chhabra, 1960a). The Phulkian chiefs established Sikh rule in the Malwa region of Punjab and their legacy continued well into the British colonial period.

The Ramarghia Misl was another notable confederacy. It was led by Jassa Singh Ramarghia. He was a strong military leader who played a key role in the defense of Amritsar and the construction of fortifications, including the Ramarghia Bunga near the Golden Temple (Chhabra, 1960a). The Ramarghia Misl controlled territories in central Punjab.

Territorial Expansion under the Misls

Different Misls strived to expand their control over the fertile and strategically important regions of Punjab through continuous campaigns. These ambitions were driven by both the need to secure resources and the desire to establish Sikh sovereignty in a region historically dominated by foreign powers. These expansions were achieved most of the time through military conquests. At times, marriages and alliances also worked. The territorial expansion of Misls can be divided into two main phases: the consolidation of power within Punjab and the expansion into neighboring regions.

During the first phase, the Misls focused on consolidating their control over Punjab. This involved wresting control of key cities and areas from the Mughal and Afghan rulers who had dominated them. The capture of Lahore by the Bhangi Misl was an important

milestone in this process. Lahore, being the traditional capital of Punjab, held immense symbolic and strategic importance. Control over Lahore enabled the Bhangi Misl to assert its dominance over the central regions of Punjab (Chhabra, 1960a).

In the second phase of expansion, the Misls extended their influence beyond Punjab into areas like Kashmir, Multan, and the North-West Frontier. This expansion was not uniform. Some Misls like the Ahluwalia and Kanheya Misls, were more successful in extending their territories than others (Chhabra, 1960a). The expansion into these areas was met with fierce resistance from local rulers. However, the Misls maintained a flexible and decentralized command structure and thus were able to adapt to the challenges of governing these newly acquired territories. The territorial ambitions of the Misls were not without conflict. They often came into conflict with each other over control of strategic territories (Chhabra, 1960a). These internal conflicts were detrimental in the short term. However, they played a role in the eventual unification of Sikh territories under Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who emerged as the most powerful leader from the Sukerchakia Misl.

Governance and Administrative Practices

The governance and administrative practices of the Misls were meant to manage the diverse and volatile territories they controlled. In the Misls, power was distributed among various chiefs and local leaders. Each Misl had its own administrative apparatus, which was responsible for the collection of revenue, maintenance of law and order, and administration of justice (Chhabra, 1960a). The chiefs of

the Misls acted as the supreme authority in their territories. They delegated administrative responsibilities to trusted lieutenants and local leaders.

Revenue collection was a critical aspect of Misl governance. The Misls relied on a combination of agricultural taxes, customs duties and tributes from subordinate chieftains to fund their military campaigns and administrative activities (Chhabra, 1960a). The chiefs of the Misls were also responsible for distribution of land to their followers. This served as both a reward for loyalty and a means of ensuring control over the territories (Dhavan, 2014).

The administration of justice within the Misls was based on the principles of fairness and the protection of the weak. The Misls established courts to adjudicated disputes and ensure that justice was administered impartially. These courts were presided over by the Misl chiefs or their deputies, and they were guided by both Sikh teachings and customary law. The efficient justice system was a key factor in the ability of the Misls to maintain the loyalty if their followers and the support of the local population. The governance practices of the Misls also included maintaining law and order. The Misls maintained their own militias. These militias were responsible for enforcing the law and defending the territories form external threats. The militias were composed of Sikh warriors who were bound by the code of Khalsa, which consisted of discipline, courage, and loyalty.

The Misls were also instrumental in the promotion of Sikh culture and religion. The chiefs of the Misls were patrons of Sikh religious

institutions. They constructed and maintained gurdwaras (Sikh temples) and other religious buildings. They also supported the dissemination of Sikh teachings and the preservation of Sikh traditions.

The governance and administrative practices of the Misls laid the foundation for the later unification of Punjab under Maharaja Ranjit Singh. While the Misls were initially independent and competed with each other, their shared cultural and religious ties, along with their common governance tactics, facilitated the unification of the different Misls. The legacy of the Misl system continued to influence the governance of Punjab even after the establishment of the Sikh empire. It remains an important chapter in the history of Sikh rule in the region.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh: The Consolidation of Sikh Rule

Background and Early Achievements of Ranjit Singh

Maharaja Ranjit Singh, also called the “Lion of Punjab,” emerged as a formidable leader from humble beginnings. Born in 1780 in Gujranwala, the young Ranjit Singh was thrust into leadership early in life due to the untimely death of his father, Maha Singh. Maha Singh was the leader of the Sukerchakia Misl. Despite being struck by smallpox at a young age, which left him blind in one eye, Ranjit Singh demonstrated remarkable resilience and leadership qualities that would define his rule (Gandhi, 2013).

Ranjit Singh inherited a relatively small and fragmented territory from his father. Punjab was dominated by various Sikh Misls. These Misls often engaged in internecine warfare, resulting in a

fragmented and unstable region. Singh had a vision of uniting Punjab under a single, strong leadership. His early achievements reflect this ambition.

One of Ranjit Singh's first and significant military successes was the capture of Lahore in 1799. It was a strategic victory that laid the foundation for his future empire. Lahore, which had been under the control of the Bhangi Misl, was of immense strategic and symbolic importance. By taking Lahore, Singh not only secured a vital urban center but also established his authority over one of the most important cities in Punjab (Gandhi, 2013). This victory was followed by the conquest of Amritsar in 1802, where Ranjit Singh took control of the city that held the Golden Temple, the holiest site in Sikhism. This victory was important as it solidified his position as the leader of the Sikh community.

Ranjit Singh's early achievements were not limited to military conquests. He also demonstrated astute political acumen by forging alliances with other powerful Misls through marriage and diplomacy. For instance, his marriage to Mehtab Kaur, the daughter of the Kanheya Misl's leader, was a strategic move that helped to consolidate his power base (Jain, 2013). These early achievements set the stage for Ranjit Singh's consolidation of power and the expansion of his empire.

Consolidation of Power

After securing Lahore and Amritsar, Ranjit Singh embarked on a campaign to unify the various Sikh Misls under his leadership. This process of consolidation consisted of both military conquests and

strategic alliances. The Misls, which had traditionally operated with considerable autonomy, were gradually brought under Ranjit Singh's control. This unification was not without resistance. Several Misl leaders opposed Ranjit Singh's efforts, leading to conflicts such as the Battle of Bhasin in 1800, where Ranjit Singh successfully defeated a coalition of the Kasur chief and leaders of the Bhangi and Ramgarhia Misls (Chhabra, 1960b).

Ranjit Singh's ability to consolidate power was not solely based on military might. He was also a shrewd diplomat who understood the importance of maintaining stability within his realm (Chhabra, 1960b). For instance, he allowed defeated rivals to retain their territories as vassals, a policy that helped to minimize resistance and encourage loyalty among the defeated chieftains. This approach is exemplified by his treatment of Nizamuddin Khan, the ruler of Kasur, whom Ranjit Singh defeated but later reinstated as a vassal (Chhabra, 1960b).

By 1809, Ranjit Singh had effectively brought most of the Sikh Misls under his control. This was the ending of the Misl system and the beginning of a centralized Sikh state (Grewal, 1991). This centralization of power was crucial in transforming Punjab from a collection of autonomous regions into a unified kingdom. Ranjit Singh's consolidation of power also involved administrative reforms, which were crucial for the efficient governance of his expanding empire.

Major Military Campaigns and Territorial Expansions

Ranjit Singh undertook many military campaigns that expanded the boundaries of the Sikh Empire and secured its position as a major power in the region. One of his earliest and most significant military campaigns was the conquest of Multan in 1818. Multan, a city of great historical and strategic importance, had long been under Afghan control. The capture of Multan was a key victory for Ranjit Singh, as it not only expanded his territory but also secured his southern flank (Grewal, 1991).

Following the conquest of Multan, Ranjit Singh turned his attention to Kashmir, another region of strategic importance. In 1819, after a series of failed attempts, Ranjit Singh's forces successfully captured Srinagar, the capital of Kashmir. The conquest of Kashmir was a major achievement, as it brought a region of immense economic and strategic value under Sikh control. The rich resources in Kashmir, particularly its famous shawl industry, became a valuable asset for the Sikh Empire (Chhabra, 1960b).

The military campaigns of Ranjit Singh were not limited to the south and the north. He also expanded his empire to the west, into the frontier regions of Peshawar and the North-West Frontier Province. These regions, which were inhabited by fiercely independent Pashtun tribes, posed a tough challenge to Ranjit Singh's forces. Despite facing stiff resistance, Ranjit Singh's army managed to secure Peshawar in 1823. Peshawar was formally annexed in 1834 (Grewal, 1991).

In addition to these major campaigns, Ranjit Singh also undertook several smaller military expeditions to consolidate his control over

the hill states of Punjab. These campaigns, though less grand in scale, were crucial in securing the empire's borders and ensuring the loyalty of the hill chieftains (Chhabra, 1960b). By the mid-1820s, Ranjit Singh had successfully expanded his empire to include not only the plains of Punjab but also the mountainous regions to the north and west, making the Sikh Empire one of the largest and most powerful states in the Indian subcontinent.

The military successes of Ranjit Singh were not merely the result of his own leadership but also the effectiveness of his army. His army was one of the most modern and disciplined forces in India at the time. Ranjit Singh placed great emphasis on modernizing his military, incorporating European military techniques and technologies into his army (Grewal, 1991). He employed several European officers, including French and Italian generals, to train his troops and introduce modern artillery and infantry tactics. This modernization of the Sikh military was the core factor in Ranjit Singh's ability to expand and defend his empire (S. Singh, 2014).

Administrative Reforms and Modernization Efforts

Ranjit Singh's success in building and maintaining the Sikh Empire was not solely due to his military prowess. His administrative reforms and modernization efforts were equally important in ensuring the stability and prosperity of his kingdom (Kaur, 2019). One of Ranjit Singh's most important administrative reforms was the centralization of revenue collection and the establishment of an

efficient tax system (Singha, 1990). Under his rule, revenue collection was standardized across the empire, with a focus on agricultural taxes, which were the main source of income for the state. This reform not only increased the state's revenue but also helped to reduce corruption and inefficiency in the administration (Singh, 1990).

Ranjit Singh also took steps to modernize the administration of justice in his empire. He established a system of courts to adjudicate disputes and ensure that justice was administered fairly. These courts were presided over by judges who were appointed by the Maharaja and were guided by both Sikh principles and customary law (Chhabra, 1960b). The emphasis on justice and fairness in the administration helped maintain social order within the empire.

In addition to his administrative reforms, Ranjit Singh was also a patron of infrastructure development. He invested in the construction of roads, forts, and irrigation systems, which facilitated trade and agriculture in the empire (Ahluwalia & Singh, 2001). The construction of the Grand Trunk Road, which connected Lahore with other major cities in India, is one of the most notable infrastructure projects undertaken during his reign. This road not only improved communication and trade within the empire but also enhanced its strategic defense capabilities.

His modernization efforts extended to the cultural and educational spheres as well. He was a patron of the arts and supported the development of Punjabi literature, music, and architecture. The construction of the Darbar Sahib, or Golden Temple, in Amritsar,

which was completed under his patronage, is one of the most enduring legacies of his reign (Ahluwalia & Singh, 2001). The Golden Temple, with its unique blend of Sikh and Mughal architectural styles, became a symbol of Sikh identity and spirituality.

Ranjit Singh also recognized the importance of education in the development of his empire. He established several schools and educational institutions, where subjects such as Persian, Arabic, and Punjabi were taught (Chhabra, 1960b). These institutions helped to promote literacy and learning among the people of Punjab and contributed to the cultural and intellectual development of Punjab.

Ranjit Singh adopted a policy of religious tolerance and inclusivity. Despite being a devout Sikh, Ranjit Singh did not impose his religion on his subjects. Instead, he allowed people of different faiths, including Muslims and Hindus, to practice their religion freely and participate in the administration of the empire (Kaur, 2019). This policy of inclusivity helped to create a sense of unity and loyalty among the diverse population of the Sikh Empire and contributed to its stability.

The ability of Ranjit Singh to combine military might with effective governance and modernization made him one of the most successful rulers in Indian history. The legacy of his reign continues to be remembered and celebrated in Punjab.

Society and Culture under Sikh Rule

Social Hierarchy and Caste Dynamics during Ranjit Singh's rule

During the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the social hierarchy in Punjab was reflective of the traditional caste system. However, it allowed for greater social mobility within certain contexts (Judge, 2002). The Jats, a dominant agrarian community, continued to hold more power, particularly within the Sikh society. They formed the backbone of the Khalsa army, and many of them held prominent positions in the administration (Judge, 2002). The caste system, while prevalent, did not dictate the course of governance or societal interactions as rigidly as it did in other parts of India. Ranjit Singh's approach to governance was pragmatic, and he valued loyalty and competence over caste identity.

The Maharaja's administration consisted of a diverse group of individuals from various castes and religious backgrounds. Hindus and Muslims were integrated into the ruling class and played essential roles in the administration. For instance, prominent Hindu and Muslim families were granted key positions and were entrusted with substantial responsibilities. The Sikh aristocracy itself was not homogenous; it included individuals from various castes. It reflected a certain fluidity in social mobility that was facilitated by service to the state.

This inclusivity extended to religious minorities as well. Ranjit Singh's court included Muslims, Hindus, and Europeans, each contributing to the administration, military, and cultural life. This created a society where merit and loyalty to the state could elevate an individual's status, sometimes superseding the traditional caste hierarchies (Kaur, 2019). The Maharaja's secular approach in

governance allowed different communities to coexist and contribute to the prosperity of the Sikh Empire.

However, the caste system was not entirely dismantled. It continued to influence social relations and interactions within the society. Marriages, for instance, largely followed caste lines, and caste-based occupations continued (Judge, 2002). Despite the inclusivity in the upper echelons of society, the lower castes, particularly those involved in manual labor, continued to face social discrimination (Judge, 2002). Nevertheless, the relatively flexible caste dynamics under Ranjit Singh provided a contrast to the more rigid structures observed in other regions of India.

Patronage of Arts and Culture

Maharaja Ranjit Singh's rule was a golden era for the arts and culture in Punjab (Cheema & Ahmad, 2021). As a patron of the arts, Ranjit Singh created an environment where culture and creativity flourished. His court at Lahore became a hub of cultural activities, attracting poets, musicians, artists, and scholars from different regions (Kapuria, 2023; Cheema & Ahmad, 2021).

Ranjit Singh supported Sikh religious music, particularly through the development of the tradition of Gurbani Kirtan (devotional singing). This musical form, which involved the singing of hymns from the Guru Granth Sahib, became an integral part of Sikh worship and cultural expression (Aujla, 2017). The Maharaja's patronage ensured that Gurbani Kirtan flourished during his reign, with skilled musicians being appointed to perform at the Golden Temple and other gurdwaras across the region (Aujla, 2017).

In addition to music, Ranjit Singh encouraged the development of painting and literature. The court painters at Lahore produced works that depicted scenes from Sikh history, religious themes, and portraits of the Maharaja and his courtiers (Cheema & Ahmad, 2021). A distinct style of Sikh painting emerged, which combined elements of Mughal and Rajput art with local influences (Cheema & Ahmad, 2021). These artworks not only served as a means of documenting history but also played a role in reinforcing the cultural identity of the Sikh community.

Literature also thrived under Ranjit Singh's patronage. The Maharaja supported the production of historical texts, religious commentaries, and poetic works in Punjabi, Persian, and Urdu (Gogia, 2017). This multilingual literary output reflected the diverse cultural milieu of the Sikh Empire. Prominent scholars and poets were encouraged to write on various subjects, ranging from Sikh theology to history.

Ranjit Singh's patronage extended to the construction and renovation of religious and cultural sites. Ranjit Singh undertook an extensive renovation of the Harmandir Sahib temple and adorned it with gold, which gave the temple its iconic appearance and earned it the name 'Golden Temple'. Beyond the Golden Temple, Ranjit Singh funded the construction of numerous gurdwaras, mosques, and temples across his empire (Chhabra, 1960b). His support for religious institutions was not limited to Sikhism; he also patronized Hindu and Muslim places of worship.

Impact on Language, Literature, and Architecture

The reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh had a profound impact on the language, literature, and architecture of Punjab. Punjabi, which was the language of the common people, gained prominence as the medium of administration and cultural expression. The Maharaja encouraged literary works in Punjabi. Both religious and secular works were produced. Sikh religious literature, including commentaries on the Guru Granth Sahib and historical narratives was produced during this period (Gogia, 2017). Secular literature, including poetry, prose, and historical chronicles was also produced. The Maharaja's support for poets and scholars ensured that the literary heritage of Punjab was enriched and preserved for future generations.

In architecture, Ranjit Singh's contributions were significant and enduring. His rule saw the construction of numerous forts, palaces, and religious buildings that combined traditional Sikh architectural elements with influences from Mughal and Rajput styles (Bhatti, 2023). The architectural style that emerged during this period included red sandstone, marble, and gold, with intricate carvings and decorative elements that reflected the artistic sensibilities of the time (Bhatti, 2023). The architectural legacy of Ranjit Singh's reign extended beyond the borders of Punjab. The forts and palaces he constructed in regions such as Multan, Peshawar, and Jammu served as symbols of Sikh power and influence. These structures not only fulfilled defensive and administrative functions but also represented the aesthetic and cultural values of the Sikh state.

Conclusion

The history of Punjab, particularly the rise of Sikh rule, shows how spiritual, social, and political changes came together to impact the region. At the heart of this was the emergence of a new social order, created by the teachings of Guru Nanak and the efforts of later Sikh Gurus, which challenged the prevailing norms of caste and religious orthodoxy. The Sikh movement, initially based on spiritual reform, evolved into a powerful socio-political force that redefined the contours of governance in Punjab.

The establishment of the Khalsa in 1699 was an important moment that signified a shift from spiritual leadership to a more organized and militarized community capable of defending its values and territory. This transformation was not merely about survival but about asserting a distinct identity that was both inclusive and egalitarian, in stark contrast to the rigid hierarchies that had long dominated the subcontinent. The Khalsa embodied the principles of justice, equality, and collective responsibility.

As the Sikh confederacies, or Misls, began to consolidate power, they operated in a fragmented Punjab. They strived to maintain their autonomy and to expand their territory. The Misl system, with its inherent flexibility and decentralized governance, enabled the Sikhs to maintain control over a volatile region. This period of confederation ultimately led to the emergence of a central authority under Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

Ranjit Singh's rise to power and the unification of Punjab under his rule was a culmination of the social, military, and political efforts

that had been in motion for over a century. His leadership not only solidified Sikh rule but also brought about reforms that made Punjab into a stable and prosperous state. Ranjit Singh's ability to integrate various religious and ethnic groups into his administration was a testament to his pragmatic and inclusive approach to governance. He maintained a balance between traditional values and modern administrative practices that ensured the longevity of his empire.

The Sikh rule made significant contributions to arts, literature, and architecture. The patronage of arts and culture under Ranjit Singh created a vibrant and diverse society that celebrated its heritage. This period of cultural renaissance left a lasting legacy that continues to influence the identity of Punjab to this day.

However, the legacy of Sikh rule in Punjab is not without its complexities. While the Sikh Empire under Ranjit Singh represented a period of relative peace and prosperity, it also faced significant challenges, both internal and external. The eventual decline of the empire and its annexation by the British in 1849 marked the end of an era. However, the impact of Sikh rule on social, cultural, and political fabric of Punjab endured long after.

Reflecting on these developments, it is evident that the rise of Sikh rule in Punjab was more than a mere sequence of military conquests and territorial expansions. It was a profound reordering of society, based on spiritual ideals that transcended the boundaries of caste and ethnicity. The Sikh rulers, particularly Ranjit Singh, demonstrated that governance could be both just and effective, blending traditional wisdom with modern statecraft. Their legacy

offers valuable lessons on leadership, inclusivity, and the importance of cultural patronage in building a cohesive and resilient society.

The next chapter will focus on exploring governance and administration practices during the rule of Ranjit Singh. The reforms introduced during this era will be examined in the context of how these principles were translated into the everyday functioning of the Sikh state. The challenges and successes of Sikh administration under Ranjit Singh will offer lessons regarding the influence of Sikh rule on the governance of Punjab and its legacy in the history of India.

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Chapter 2: Ranjit Singh as an Administrator

Introduction

Maharaja Ranjit Singh, widely known as the "Lion of Punjab," was not only a military genius but also a visionary ruler who significantly impacted the political, social, and economic arena in Punjab. His leadership extended far beyond military victories and embodied a deep commitment to unity, peace, and governance. His reign, starting with his coronation in 1801, was the beginning of a new era of prosperity and stability in Punjab after years of internal strife and foreign dominance.

Ranjit Singh's coronation on Baisakhi was not only a religious ceremony but also a political turning point that symbolized the consolidation of Sikh power under a single leader. Unlike previous rulers, he viewed his role as a custodian of all people in his dominion, including Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs, and his administration was democratic in essence. His vision for the Sikh Empire was not limited to military supremacy but focused on creating a just and prosperous society.

The unification of Punjab under his leadership brought an end to the fragmented rule of the Sikh Misls and integrating the region into a powerful and centralized empire. Ranjit Singh's success lay in his ability to balance military strength with diplomatic acumen. His diplomatic skills helped him forge alliances, such as the notable alliance with Fateh Singh Ahluwalia in 1802, which bolstered his influence in the region. Over years, he expanded his empire and

incorporated regions like Amritsar, Kasur, Kangra, and Multan by securing the loyalty of diverse populations through his policy of inclusivity.

A significant aspect of Ranjit Singh's administration was his modernization of the military. Recognizing the importance of a disciplined and well-trained army, he employed European officers to train his forces, particularly the elite Fauj-I-Khas. This modernization helped him maintain internal stability while securing the borders of his empire. His military reforms, combined with efficient governance, created a stable and peaceful environment for his subjects which allowed trade and agriculture to flourish.

However, Ranjit Singh's true genius lay in his administrative reforms. He reorganized the governance system, streamlined revenue collection, and established a fair tax system. His policies were aimed at improving the lives of his people and to ensure that resources were used efficiently for the state's growth. His establishment of Panchayats for local governance and the inclusion of diverse communities in his administration reflected his commitment to justice and inclusivity. This made him a ruler admired not just for his conquests but also for his fairness and wisdom.

Chapter Overview

This chapter explores the administrative genius of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, focusing on how he governed a vast and diverse empire with fairness and inclusivity. The chapter begins by discussing his efforts to centralize governance, moving away from the fragmented Misl

system to establish a unified and stable state. The role of key officials and Ranjit Singh's delegation of power to trusted governors is discussed. Next, the chapter discusses his revenue and tax reforms, which were designed to create a fair and efficient system of taxation, particularly focusing on agricultural revenues. These reforms ensured the economic stability of the empire. The discussion then moves to legal reforms. Ranjit Singh established an impartial justice system based on Sikh principles, but inclusive of people from all religious communities. His efforts to promote religious tolerance and inclusivity are highlighted.

The chapter also examines the military administration and how Ranjit Singh built a modern army. The diplomatic acumen of Ranjit Singh is discussed with a special focus on his relations with the British. Ranjit Singh's support for the arts, culture, and education is also explored, particularly his patronage of learning in Persian, Punjabi, and other regional languages. Finally, the chapter concludes with an assessment of the administrative legacy of Ranjit Singh and discusses how his policies and governance laid the groundwork for a prosperous and united Punjab. His ability to blend military prowess with administrative efficiency, coupled with his inclusive approach to governance, made him one of the most remarkable rulers in Indian history.

Civil Administration

The civil administration of Maharaja Ranjit Singh was a significant achievement, particularly in the context of unifying a fractured and diverse Punjab under a centralized rule. Before his rise to power,

Punjab was a disunited region, with independent principalities, chiefdoms, and Sikh confederacies known as Misls. These Misldars, who ruled areas like Lahore, Amritsar, Patiala, and Gujranwala, operated independently and frequently engaged in conflicts with one another. This internal fragmentation left the region vulnerable to external threats, especially from neighboring states and the expanding influence of the British.

Recognizing the danger posed by this disunity, Ranjit Singh embarked on a mission to consolidate these territories into a unified state. He understood that the Misl system, which had outlived its purpose, was inadequate for ensuring the security and prosperity of the Khalsa or the people of Punjab. Through a combination of diplomacy, military campaigns, and strategic alliances, Ranjit Singh brought these independent entities under his control. He abolished the Misldari system and laid the foundations for a strong, centralized Sikh Empire.

Ranjit Singh's vision of governance extended beyond the mere consolidation of Sikh power. His aim was to create a stable and prosperous state where all communities—Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims, and others—could coexist peacefully. His unification of Punjab was not just about territorial expansion but about creating a cohesive and centralized state capable of resisting external aggression and maintaining internal order. By the early 19th century, he had successfully achieved this goal and established himself as the undisputed ruler of a powerful empire.

One of the key features of his governance was the establishment of a stable and consolidated government structure. He replaced the fragmented rule of the Misls with a more structured and efficient administrative system that allowed him to maintain effective control over his vast and diverse empire. The empire was divided into eight provinces: Lahore, Jalandhar, Kangra Hills, Jammu, Kashmir, Peshawar, Gujrat (or Wazirabad), and Multan. Each of these provinces was further subdivided into *parganahs* and *taluqas*, creating a hierarchical system of governance that extended from the provincial level to the village level.

Ranjit Singh carefully selected provincial governors, known as *Nazims*, to manage the administration of each province. These governors were responsible for overseeing civil, financial, judicial, and military matters within their regions. They were expected to collect revenue, maintain order, and remit a fixed sum to the central treasury. Although the Nazims were given significant autonomy in managing their provinces, they were ultimately accountable to Ranjit Singh, who maintained strict oversight through regular inspections and surprise visits.

At the district level, *Kardars* were appointed to oversee local administration. The Kardars wielded significant power, acting as revenue collectors, magistrates, and judges within their districts. They were responsible for maintaining law and order, collecting taxes, and ensuring that justice was administered fairly. Although some Kardars were accused of corruption and favoritism, Ranjit Singh employed a system of checks and balances to prevent the abuse of power. A network of newswriters, known as *Waqanawis*,

was established to report regularly on the activities of provincial and district officials, ensuring accountability.

In addition to the Nazims and Kardars, local governance was overseen by *Chaudharys* and *Muqaddams* at the village level. These officials were responsible for managing local disputes, overseeing agricultural production, and maintaining peace within their communities. This decentralized system of governance allowed Ranjit Singh to maintain control over the most remote areas of his empire while ensuring that local concerns were addressed effectively.

The governance system of Ranjit Singh was further strengthened by his personal involvement in the administration of the state. He remained deeply involved in the day-to-day affairs of the empire, frequently traveling to different regions to inspect the work of his officials and ensure that his policies were being implemented effectively. His active participation in governance, combined with his keen understanding of the needs of his subjects, helped maintain a high standard of administration throughout the empire.

Ranjit Singh placed a strong emphasis on inclusivity and merit. He appointed individuals from diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds to key positions within his government. This promoted a sense of shared responsibility among all subjects of the empire. Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, and even Europeans were appointed to key roles, with their appointments based on merit rather than religion or caste. This approach contributed to the overall stability of the state

and helped ensure that all communities felt included in the governance of the empire.

The role of financial administration was another critical aspect of Ranjit Singh's governance. Early in his reign, he appointed Diwan Lakhpat Rae, who managed both civil and military matters, to oversee revenue collection, expenditure management, and account maintenance. This early system of administration was rudimentary, with little emphasis on record-keeping, but it laid the groundwork for more formal structures in the years to come.

The conquest of Lahore in 1799 marked a turning point in the development of the empire's financial administration. Ranjit Singh appointed Missar Basti Ram, a physician from Lahore, to manage the *Toshakhana* (treasury), which had begun to accumulate significant wealth in the form of coins, bullion, and other valuables. As the state's wealth grew, the administration of revenue and expenditure became more complex. This required the appointment of skilled officials like Rama Nand Sahu, a banker from Amritsar, who managed the finances of the empire. Over time, the treasury was split into two parts: *Toshakhana Khas* for Amritsar and *Toshakhana Bahia* for Lahore, each serving distinct functions but collectively managing the wealth of the empire.

In 1808, Ranjit Singh formalized the financial administration further by appointing Bhawani Das, who introduced systematic record-keeping for income and expenditure across districts. His reforms transformed the loosely controlled financial system into a more

centrally administered unit. Bhawani Das also introduced five major administrative departments, which were later expanded to twelve.

After Bhawani Das, Ganga Ram and Dina Nath took over financial administration. Ganga Ram simplified the financial system by replacing Turkish terms with Indian ones and organizing the excise department. Dina Nath, who joined the revenue department in 1811, became Finance Minister after Ganga Ram's death and introduced further reforms to streamline financial management. Under the supervision of Dina Nath, departments such as the *Daftar-e-Maliyat* meticulously tracked land revenue, customs, excise, tributes, and other forms of income, ensuring transparency and accountability.

Military and financial systems were closely linked. Military accounts were managed meticulously, with separate accounts kept for the army to ensure that resources were allocated efficiently for defense. The role of *Tahwildars* (cash-keepers) and *Zakhirajat* (storekeepers) was crucial in ensuring that military supplies were properly accounted for, with detailed records of provisions stored in forts and military outposts.

One of the most striking features of Ranjit Singh's administration was his accessibility to the common people. He held daily *darbars* where citizens could present their grievances directly to him, and he personally reviewed complaints to ensure that justice was served. A special petition box was placed near his palace to allow individuals to submit grievances, which the Maharaja took seriously. This approach to governance helped to create a sense of fairness and

justice within the empire, as the people had direct access to their ruler.

Ranjit Singh also employed a variety of methods to ensure that his officials remained accountable and that corruption was kept in check. In addition to the *Waqanenawis* reporting system, he conducted surprise inspections of his provinces and personally reviewed the decisions made by provincial and district officials. His system of confiscating the property of corrupt officials upon their death, while providing for their heirs, acted as a deterrent against malfeasance.

Financial Administration

Maharaja Ranjit Singh adopted a pragmatic approach towards financial administration that was based on the agrarian economy of his empire. The financial health of the state depended primarily on land revenue, which formed the backbone of government income. Out of the total annual revenue of three crores, two crores came from land revenue alone. The agricultural foundation of the empire was critical, and the peasant class was regarded as the pillar of the state treasury. The system of land revenue collection, while innovative and adaptive, also reflected the complexities of governance in an agrarian society.

Land revenue in the empire was collected based on different methods, which evolved over time. In the earlier part of his reign, the *Batai* system was predominantly used. This method involved sharing the produce between the state and the cultivator, with the state typically taking one-third to one-half of the gross produce. However, the system had inherent flaws, requiring constant

vigilance by state officials to prevent misappropriation by the cultivators. This required a large workforce to monitor the crops from sowing to harvesting which made it both resource-intensive and prone to inefficiencies.

As the empire expanded and matured, the *Kankut* system was introduced. This method was an improvement over the *Batai* system, as it involved government officials estimating the gross produce of the land while the crop was still standing. Based on these estimates, the state's share was determined and collected after the harvest. However, despite being more efficient, this system could sometimes yield less than expected if the estimates were inaccurate or if the harvest fell short of projections.

In the later years of Ranjit Singh's reign, around 1835, the system of auctioning land revenue collection was implemented. Under this method, the right to collect revenue from a specific area was auctioned to the highest bidder for a period of three to six years. The contractor was responsible for collecting the produce or its monetary equivalent from the cultivators and submitting it to the state. The auction system reduced direct involvement of state in the collection process and was generally beneficial to cultivators, as it allowed more flexibility in the payment of revenue, either in cash or in kind.

Another aspect of land revenue collection in the empire was the option for *zamindars* to pay either in kind or cash. This flexibility was crucial for crops where it was difficult to estimate the yield, such as sugarcane, cotton, tobacco, and indigo. In such cases, the state levied a fixed monetary charge based on the land area under cultivation,

such as one rupee per *kachcha* bigha, or took a specific portion of the produce, as in the case of mango orchards, where the produce of one tree out of ten went to the state.

Land was also assessed based on the plough or well system. In regions where irrigation was dependent on wells, revenue was calculated on the amount of land that could be irrigated by a single well. Similarly, in regions with fertile soil, a unit of land was determined by how much a team of bullocks could plough, and revenue was calculated accordingly. The system reflected Ranjit Singh's attention to the diversity of agricultural practices across his empire, ensuring that revenue collection was equitable and adaptable to local conditions.

The government collected revenue twice a year, after the spring harvest (Rabi) and the autumn harvest (Kharif). Revenue collectors, known as *Kardars*, were responsible for ensuring that land revenue was collected promptly and deposited into the state treasury. Failure to collect revenue on time often led to severe consequences for the *Kardars*, who were expected to manage their districts efficiently and report directly to the provincial governors.

In addition to land revenue, the Maharaja's administration provided *Taqavi* loans to peasants during times of distress, such as famine, floods, or locust infestations. These loans were intended to help peasants purchase seeds, cattle, and implements to continue farming. In extreme cases, such as the famine in Kashmir in 1833, Ranjit Singh took direct action by sending donkeys laden with grain

to the famine-stricken region for free distribution. This shows his concern for the welfare of his subjects.

Another significant feature of the financial administration was the farming system. In order to focus his attention on military matters and maintaining law and order, the Maharaja introduced a system where specific regions were farmed out to contractors for a fixed annual payment. These contractors, often local moneylenders or officials, were responsible for collecting revenue from the cultivators and ensuring the prosperity of their assigned areas. The system was profitable for the state, as it ensured a steady flow of revenue, but it also opened the door to corruption and exploitation, as contractors could charge more than the fixed rate without fear of reprisal, provided no complaints reached the Maharaja.

While the farming system allowed for more efficient revenue collection, it also had its drawbacks. Reports of abuse by contractors were not uncommon, with some regions, such as Kashmir under Sirdar Hari Singh Nalwa, facing excessive taxation and exploitation. Similarly, in the Jalandhar Doab, revenue officers were notorious for their heavy-handed methods of collection, which often left the peasants impoverished and their lands barren.

Ranjit Singh's administration also implemented a *Jagirdari* system, granting lands or *jagirs* to loyal courtiers, military commanders, and nobles in return for their services. The *Jagirdars* were responsible for maintaining a contingent of troops proportional to the size of their *jagir*. They were also tasked with managing the lands under their control, collecting revenue, and ensuring the prosperity of the area.

However, this system, like the farming system, was not free from corruption and inefficiency, as many *Jagirdars* neglected their duties, exploiting the peasants under their charge for personal gain.

Taxation was another critical aspect of the financial administration. Besides land revenue, the state earned income through customs, excise duties, monopolies, and the sale of salt. The monopoly on salt was particularly lucrative. It brought in approximately eight lakhs of rupees annually. Additionally, customs duties on goods like shawls, opium, indigo, and sugar contributed significantly to the state's income. Ranjit Singh also implemented various other taxes, including professional taxes on artisans, lapsed *jagirs*, and *nazarana* (tributes) from defeated princes or vassals.

The system of currency was built around three key coins: the gold *mohar*, the Nanakshahi silver rupee, and the Mansuri paisa. The *mohar* was worth fifteen Nanakshahi rupees, which were widely circulated throughout the empire. The Mansuri paisa, a crude copper coin, was initially imported from outside the empire, but production was later brought under the Maharaja's control.

Despite the innovative and efficient nature of Ranjit Singh's financial administration, there were notable defects in the system. The income of the state was not fixed and varied from year to year which made long-term financial planning difficult. Furthermore, the system of revenue collection, particularly under the farming and *Jagirdari* systems, was prone to corruption. The heavy burden of taxation in some regions led to widespread dissatisfaction, with some areas being "squeezed dry" by revenue officers.

In the latter part of his reign, Ranjit Singh recognized the need for more structured financial management and invited Bhawani Das, an experienced administrator, to formalize the financial administration. Bhawani Das introduced systematic record-keeping at major district headquarters like Lahore, Amritsar, Jalandhar, and Gujrat, ensuring that a regular account of all income and expenditure was maintained.

The economy of Punjab under Maharaja Ranjit Singh was robust and diversified, driven by agriculture, industry, trade, and commerce. Agriculture remained the foundation of the economy, with land revenue being the primary source of income for the state. However, industry and trade flourished under Ranjit Singh's rule, creating a dynamic and prosperous environment.

Industry played a crucial role in supporting both the military and the civilian population. The production of arms was vital to meet the demands of Ranjit Singh's large army, with state-run foundries manufacturing swords, guns, bullets, and cannons. The leather industry also thrived, supplying equipment for the cavalry, while textiles and luxury goods, such as the famous Kashmir shawls, were highly valued. Ranjit Singh took personal interest in promoting industries that benefited both the military and the people. Industries like textiles were dominated by women, who produced khaddar, blankets, and intricate phulkari embroidery.

The textiles sector was particularly prominent, with the production of cotton, silk, and woolen fabrics forming a significant part of the economy. Towns like Multan, Jalandhar, and Amritsar were known

for their cloth production, while Kashmir continued to produce world-renowned shawls, which were exported to Europe. The woolen goods from regions like Kashmir, Peshawar, and Multan also contributed to the economy, with blankets, rugs, and carpets being in high demand both within and outside the kingdom.

Trade and commerce flourished during Ranjit Singh's reign, both internally and externally. The Grand Trunk Road, though in disrepair in parts, remained a vital artery for trade, connecting the Punjab to the rest of India. Additionally, trade routes extending into Afghanistan, Iran, and Central Asia facilitated the exchange of goods such as horses, shawls, woolen fabrics, spices, and luxury items. Goods were transported via camel caravans, particularly by the Pawindahs, a community of traders who moved between Punjab and Central Asia.

Despite the challenges posed by poor infrastructure and political instability in surrounding regions, the administration succeeded in creating a stable and secure environment for trade. The establishment of mints in cities like Lahore, Amritsar, and Multan further strengthened the economy, as did the introduction of the Nanakshahi currency. Taxes on goods and customs duties provided additional revenue, although Ranjit Singh ensured that they were reasonable to encourage trade.

Ranjit Singh's focus on trade routes, industry, and agriculture allowed Punjab to become a thriving economic hub during his reign. The peaceful conditions he maintained within his borders, combined

with his policies of encouraging commerce, industry, and fair taxation, laid the foundation for economic prosperity in Punjab.

Judicial Administration

The judicial system, while not adhering to any formal or codified legal framework, was based the prevailing socio-political fabric of early 19th-century Punjab. To modern observers, his administration of justice might appear rudimentary, but for the people of that time, it was both efficient and effective. His system provided a sense of justice, peace, and order that had not been seen in the region for many years. The absence of written laws did not hinder the dispensation of justice, as cases were often settled swiftly, with an emphasis on practical outcomes rather than lengthy legal procedures.

The judicial system under Maharaja Ranjit Singh reflected the values and customs of the time. There was no distinction between civil and criminal cases; disputes of all kinds were handled using a combination of local traditions, religious laws, and the wisdom of community elders. The Maharaja placed a great deal of trust in the community-based Panchayat system, which served as the primary forum for resolving disputes at the village level. These village councils consisted of respected elders, and their decisions were almost universally accepted as fair and just.

There was a strong emphasis on oral testimony. Witnesses were often asked to swear on religious scriptures, and their sworn statements were given significant weight in court decisions. In this context, the honesty of individuals was paramount, as it was

believed that few people would dare to lie under oath. This reliance on oral testimony made the judicial process swift, as cases were often settled on the spot, with punishments administered immediately.

In rural areas, most disputes were resolved at the village level, where the Panchayat played a central role. The Panchayat was a court of five respected men, chosen for their reputation and integrity. The head of the Panchayat, known as the Sirpanch, was responsible for presiding over the proceedings and ensuring that both parties were heard. Cases typically involved land disputes, family matters, and minor crimes, and the decisions made by the Panchayat were accepted by the community as final. In the rare event that a party was dissatisfied with the Panchayat's decision, they could appeal to the local Kardar, though such appeals were uncommon.

The Panchayat system operated on a principle of consensus. Decisions were often reached through lengthy discussions, and while these debates could be loud and passionate, the ultimate goal was always to achieve a unanimous verdict. The sense of communal justice was so strong that even the most obstinate offenders would accept the Panchayat's ruling. For those who refused to comply, the threat of excommunication from the community served as a powerful deterrent.

In addition to village Panchayats, there were caste-based Panchayats that dealt with disputes within specific social groups. These caste Panchayats operated across multiple villages, with representatives from each community coming together to settle disputes. This system of arbitration allowed for a high degree of self-regulation

within the caste structure and reducing the need for state intervention in local matters.

In urban areas, the judicial system was more formalized, with appointed officials known as Adaltis responsible for administering justice. These officers handled both civil and criminal cases, relying on local customs and religious laws to guide their judgments. For example, Muslim Qazis decided cases in accordance with Islamic law, while Hindu Pandits used the Manusmriti to resolve disputes among Hindus. This religious pluralism in the legal system showed Maharaja Ranjit Singh's inclusive approach to governance, as he sought to ensure that all communities felt represented and respected.

The judicial system was further divided into several levels of courts, each with its own jurisdiction and responsibilities. At the provincial level, the Nazims acted as the chief judicial officers, handling serious cases and appeals from lower courts. The Nazims were responsible for ensuring that justice was administered fairly within their regions, and they often consulted local Panchayats or other community leaders to assist in their decisions.

For the most serious cases, such as those involving theft, robbery, or murder, the Maharaja himself would sometimes preside over the proceedings. Ranjit Singh was known for his accessibility, and it was not uncommon for ordinary citizens to bring their grievances directly to him. In such cases, he would act as the final arbiter, often rendering swift judgments. His personal involvement in the administration of justice helped to maintain a sense of fairness and

accountability, as corrupt officials knew that they could be removed or punished at any time if found guilty of wrongdoing.

Despite the lack of formal legal training among many of the judicial officers, the system was remarkably effective in maintaining law and order. Punishments were typically swift and harsh, particularly for crimes such as theft or robbery. Mutilation, such as the cutting off of hands, noses, or ears, was a common punishment for thieves, as it served as both a deterrent and a means of public humiliation. Fines were also a common form of punishment, with the amount determined by the severity of the crime and the financial status of the offender.

One of the unique aspects of Ranjit Singh's judicial system was the emphasis on fines and compensation rather than imprisonment. Criminals were given the opportunity to pay a fine in lieu of a more severe punishment, and in some cases, their property would be confiscated to cover the cost of the crime. This approach was not only pragmatic, as it avoided the need for large prisons, but also allowed the state to recover some of the financial losses caused by criminal activity.

Capital punishment was rare, and Ranjit Singh was known for his reluctance to impose the death penalty. In cases where execution was deemed necessary, it was typically reserved for the most egregious crimes, such as murder or treason. Even then, Ranjit Singh would personally review the case before making a final decision. His preference for leniency was evident in his interactions with his officials; for instance, when a group of thieves was hanged by one of

his governors without his explicit approval, Ranjit Singh expressed his disapproval.

The judicial system also included mechanisms for checking the abuse of power by local officials. Officials were keenly aware that their positions were dependent on the favor of the Maharaja, and any misuse of authority could result in their dismissal or the confiscation of their property. To ensure accountability, Ranjit Singh frequently conducted surprise inspections of his provinces. Most of the times, he traveled incognito to observe the behavior of his officials and to hear complaints from the local population.

While the judicial system was generally effective, there were instances of corruption and miscarriage of justice. The combination of executive and judicial powers in the hands of local officials sometimes led to abuses, particularly in remote areas where communication with the central government was limited. Wealthy individuals could sometimes bribe their way out of punishment, and there were cases where innocent people were held responsible for the crimes of others. However, the system as a whole functioned well enough to maintain a high degree of social stability and public order.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh's judicial administration was a product of its time, shaped by the social, cultural, and political realities of early 19th-century Punjab. While it may appear unsophisticated by modern standards, it was highly effective in meeting the needs of the people and ensuring justice in a vast and diverse empire. Through a combination of local autonomy, religious pluralism, and personal oversight, Ranjit Singh succeeded in creating a judicial system that

was both efficient and fair, and that contributed significantly to the peace and prosperity of his reign.

Religious Tolerance and Inclusivity

The Maharaja's rule in Punjab stands as a beacon of religious tolerance and inclusivity. It exemplified a model of governance that was ahead of its time. In an era when the Indian subcontinent had seen centuries of religious conflict and division, Ranjit Singh, though a devout Sikh, adopted a distinctly secular approach to administration. His policies promoted harmony among Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims, and Christians alike, and created a peaceful and cohesive society under his reign. This inclusivity, based on his personal beliefs and the Sikh tradition, became one of the defining characteristics of his leadership.

One of the first points to note about the religious policy of Ranjit Singh is that it was far from being a theocracy. While he himself was a Sikh and greatly respected his own religion, his government did not impose Sikhism as the state religion. He followed a secular policy where merit, rather than religious affiliation, determined appointments to key positions in his administration. His ability to create an environment where individuals of different faiths could coexist peacefully set him apart from many rulers of the time.

Ranjit Singh's personal respect for all religions was a cornerstone of his governance. He showed great reverence for the holy books and places of all faiths, issuing orders to his soldiers and officers to treat these with respect, regardless of the religion. This attitude of respect extended not only to the majority religious groups in his kingdom

but also to the smaller ones, such as Christians. His Christian officers, such as Ventura, Allard, Court, and Avitabile, held important military and administrative positions, and their faith was never a hindrance to their advancement in his court.

Ranjit Singh's inner circle of advisors and administrators was a reflection of his policy of inclusivity. His most trusted minister, Faqir Aziz-ud-din, a Muslim, served as both his advisor and personal physician. His brother, Faqir Nur-ud-din, was appointed as the governor of Lahore. At the same time, his finance department was managed by Hindu officers, such as Bhawani Das, Ganga Ram, and Dina Nath. This multi-religious composition of his court ensured that policies were crafted with input from various religious perspectives.

One of the most telling examples of Ranjit Singh's religious tolerance is his magnanimity towards his Muslim adversaries. After defeating Muslim rulers in battles, Ranjit Singh allowed them to retain their lands and titles, and in many cases, he awarded them generous jagirs (land grants). For instance, after conquering Kasur, he granted a jagir worth two lakhs annually to the deposed chief. Similarly, after the conquest of Multan, he awarded jagirs to the sons of the defeated Nawab Muzaffar Khan. This compassionate treatment stood in stark contrast to the fate of deposed rulers in Delhi and Kabul, who lived in poverty after losing their thrones.

His commitment to inclusivity is also evident in the substantial grants he made to both Hindu and Muslim religious shrines. He restored and funded Muslim mosques and tombs that had fallen into

disrepair. For example, upon his occupation of Lahore in 1799, he returned the Sunahri Masjid, which had been taken over by the Sikhs, to the Muslims. Similarly, he repaired the grand tombs of Mughal emperors Jahangir and Shah Jahan, ensuring their historical and religious significance was preserved. The Maharaja also made annual grants to Muslim shrines, including the famous tombs of Data Ganj Bakhsh and Mauj Darya at Lahore, and he made offerings on the occasion of their annual urs (death anniversaries).

Not only did Ranjit Singh support Muslim institutions, but he was also deeply respectful of Hindu temples and religious practices. His pilgrimage to the Jawalamukhi temple is well-documented, where he made lavish offerings of gold and cash, and stood for hours in prayer before the goddess. In 1826, he sent a sum of Rs. 25,000 to fund the golden roof of the Jawalamukhi temple. His contributions to the Vishwa Nath temple in Banaras, which had been converted into a mosque during Aurangzeb's reign, further emphasized his support for Hindu religious sites. Ranjit Singh's final days also reflected his devotion to Hindu beliefs, as he requested that Ganga water be placed on his chest and distributed goblets of the sacred water among Brahmans.

Although some European writers questioned Ranjit Singh's commitment to Sikhism due to his broad-minded approach to religion, his actions demonstrated a profound respect for the faith of his forebears. His coins bore the name of Guru Nanak, and he consistently referred to himself as a humble servant of the Khalsa, the collective body of the Sikh faith. When it came to decisions about public works, he often chose to honor Sikh traditions, as seen when

he named a garden after Guru Ram Das instead of accepting the suggestion to name it after himself.

Furthermore, Ranjit Singh held the Sikh holy book, the Guru Granth Sahib, in the highest regard. He listened to its recitations daily, even during military expeditions. His humility in the presence of the scripture is exemplified by an incident in 1838, when, after being seated on a chair while listening to the Granth Sahib, he suddenly realized the inappropriateness of the gesture and immediately stood up to seek forgiveness.

Despite his devotion to Sikhism, Ranjit Singh never imposed his faith on others. There were no forced conversions to Sikhism under his rule. Those who did convert, did so of their own volition, out of admiration for Ranjit Singh or the Sikh way of life. The Maharaja personally welcomed these converts, rewarding them generously for their new commitment, but he never pressured anyone to change their faith.

One of the distinctive features of Ranjit Singh's religious tolerance was his acceptance of criticism and his submission to Sikh institutions when he himself violated social norms. A notable instance of this was his marriage to Moran, a Muslim dancing girl. This action brought him before the Akal Takht, the highest Sikh temporal authority, where he was publicly chastised by Akali Phula Singh for breaking the rules of the Khalsa. Instead of resisting, Ranjit Singh humbly accepted the reprimand and submitted himself to the punishment decreed by the Panth, thus reinforcing his belief in the

authority of Sikh institutions and his dedication to the principles of humility and equality.

Ranjit Singh's legacy of religious tolerance had far-reaching effects in Punjab. His fair and impartial treatment of all religious communities won him the loyalty and admiration of his subjects. When Sayyid Ahmad Shaheed launched a jihad against the Sikh state, he found little support among the Muslims of Punjab, who had come to respect Ranjit Singh as a just and benevolent ruler. His inclusive policies ensured that religious tensions were minimized, and the region enjoyed a period of unprecedented peace and stability during his reign.

Military Administration

Ranjit Singh was a visionary leader not only in statecraft but also in military administration. His military reforms transformed the Sikh army into one of the most disciplined and formidable forces in Asia, rivaling contemporary European armies in both structure and effectiveness. Under his leadership, the military played a key role in consolidating the Sikh empire, maintaining internal stability, and defending the kingdom from external threats.

Ranjit Singh inherited a respectable military force from his father, Mahan Singh, which included both cavalry and infantry. However, this force was largely irregular and lacked the discipline and organizational structure of a modern army. The early Sikh military tradition, developed in the misls (confederacies), relied heavily on voluntary soldiers, primarily Sikhs, who fought in a somewhat disorganized manner. Ranjit Singh recognized the limitations of this

approach and sought to modernize his army to meet the challenges posed by external powers, particularly the British and Afghans, as well as internal dissent.

One of the key factors that motivated Ranjit Singh's military reforms was the proximity of the British East India Company on his eastern border. The British had demonstrated their military superiority through their disciplined infantry, artillery, and the use of European military tactics. Ranjit Singh, a shrewd observer of military trends, recognized the need for a standing army trained in the European style to counterbalance the British threat. Additionally, the constant threat of Afghan invasions from the northwest, combined with internal unrest and banditry, called for a strong, organized military force.

Ranjit Singh's military reforms were far-reaching and transformative. He created a new model army that blended traditional Sikh valor with European military discipline. This army, referred to as the "Fauj-e-Ain" (Regular Army), became one of the most formidable military forces in the region. Ranjit Singh's reforms touched every aspect of military organization, from recruitment and training to the use of modern weapons and artillery.

Unlike the misls, which primarily recruited Sikhs, Ranjit Singh's new army was more inclusive, drawing soldiers from various castes, creeds, and religions. This diversity was a departure from the traditional Sikh military structure, which had been more homogenous. Ranjit Singh's decision to recruit soldiers from all backgrounds was both practical and strategic. It allowed him to

build a larger, more diverse army, while also creating a sense of unity and loyalty among his troops, regardless of their religious or ethnic background.

One of the most significant changes Ranjit Singh introduced was the shift from guerilla warfare to more formalized, steady fire tactics, primarily using guns and muskets. This was a departure from the traditional hit-and-run tactics that had characterized Sikh warfare under the misls. The use of modern artillery and firearms became a cornerstone of Ranjit Singh's military strategy, and he invested heavily in the development and maintenance of artillery units.

In 1809, Ranjit Singh established a separate Military Department, known as the "Daftar-e-Fauj," to oversee the administration of the army. This department was responsible for maintaining detailed records of the army, including pay rolls, credit and debit accounts, and descriptive rolls of military personnel. The meticulous record-keeping ensured that the army operated efficiently and that soldiers were held accountable for their conduct and performance.

The Military Department was divided into two main sections: the Fauj-e-Ain (Regular Army) and the irregular cavalry. The regular army was organized into infantry battalions, cavalry regiments, and artillery units, all of which were trained and disciplined in the European style. Each battalion consisted of approximately 900 men, divided into companies, with a clear chain of command. The regular infantry wore scarlet uniforms, a distinctive feature that set them apart from the irregular troops. The introduction of a regular standing army, paid by the state on a monthly basis, was a significant

departure from the irregular, unpaid forces that had characterized the misls.

Ranjit Singh's approach to recruitment was both rigorous and inclusive. Soldiers were carefully selected based on their physical and mental attributes, with an emphasis on loyalty, discipline, and endurance. Ranjit Singh personally oversaw the recruitment process, ensuring that only the most capable and reliable men were admitted into his army. Soldiers were expected to demonstrate courage, coolness under pressure, and a strong sense of duty.

In terms of training, Ranjit Singh placed great emphasis on drill and discipline, particularly in the infantry and artillery units. He employed European officers, including French and Italian veterans of the Napoleonic wars, to train his troops in modern military tactics. Notable figures such as General Jean-François Allard and General Jean-Baptiste Ventura played key roles in shaping the Sikh army's training regimen. They introduced European-style drill, weaponry, and battlefield tactics. The introduction of bayonet exercises and the use of artillery were particularly significant, as they brought the Sikh army in line with contemporary European military practices.

Artillery became a cornerstone of Ranjit Singh's military strategy. Before his reforms, the Sikh army had relied primarily on cavalry, with artillery playing a secondary role. However, under Ranjit Singh's leadership, artillery was elevated to a position of prominence. He established a dedicated artillery department, known as the "Topkhana Khas," which oversaw the production and maintenance of cannons, guns, and other artillery pieces. Ranjit

Singh's foundries, located in Lahore and other key cities, produced a range of artillery pieces, from heavy cannons to lighter, more mobile field guns.

The cavalry, traditionally the pride of the Sikh army, was also restructured under Ranjit Singh. The regular cavalry, known as the "Fauj-e-Baquaid," was organized into regiments, with state-provided horses and modern equipment. However, Ranjit Singh also maintained an irregular cavalry force, known as the "Ghorcharha Sowars," who provided their own horses and equipment. These irregular troops, often drawn from the aristocratic families of Punjab, were known for their bravery and reckless courage. They played a crucial role in many of Ranjit Singh's early conquests, including the annexation of Multan and Kashmir.

Discipline was a central tenet of Ranjit Singh's military administration. Soldiers were expected to adhere to strict codes of conduct, and insubordination was punished severely. European officers such as Ventura and Allard were instrumental in enforcing discipline, introducing a range of punishments for offenses such as desertion, disobedience, and cowardice. Soldiers who demonstrated exceptional courage or loyalty were rewarded with promotions, land grants, or cash bonuses.

Ranjit Singh's personal charisma and leadership style also played a crucial role in maintaining the loyalty of his troops. He took a personal interest in the welfare of his soldiers, often visiting them during training exercises, rewarding their efforts with gifts and honors. His ability to inspire loyalty and devotion among his men

was one of the key factors behind the success of his military administration.

Relations with the British

Maharaja Ranjit Singh adopted diplomacy, caution, and pragmatism. From his earliest interactions with the British Empire to the critical moments of the Treaty of Amritsar and beyond, Ranjit Singh dealt with the British expansion in India with remarkable foresight. While his ambitions for territorial expansion were curbed by British influence, his ability to adapt and preserve his kingdom in the face of British dominance stands as a testament to his political acumen.

The first significant encounter between Ranjit Singh and the British took place after the Second Maratha War (1802-1803), during which the British had emerged victorious over the Maratha Confederacy. At this time, Jaswant Rao Holkar, a Maratha leader, sought refuge in Punjab, hoping to garner support from Ranjit Singh. Holkar, having faced defeat at the hands of the British under Lord Lake, fled to the northern regions of India. His arrival in Punjab raised concerns for both the British and Ranjit Singh.

Ranjit Singh, then still consolidating his power in Lahore, understood the delicate position he was in. Though Holkar attempted to forge an alliance with him against the British, Ranjit Singh carefully avoided direct involvement. He recognized the strength of the British forces and the futility of opposing them at such an early stage in his reign. Instead of aligning with Holkar, Ranjit Singh maintained a friendly yet non-committal stance. He placated

Holkar with polite gestures but refrained from providing any military assistance. This cautious approach signaled his pragmatic understanding of the political environment.

The British, recognizing the importance of keeping Ranjit Singh from allying with Holkar, acted swiftly. Lord Lake advanced to the Beas River, putting pressure on both Holkar and Ranjit Singh. Eventually, Holkar was forced to negotiate with the British, leading to the Treaty of December 1805. This marked the first official interaction between Ranjit Singh and the British, as he agreed to prevent Holkar from seeking refuge in Punjab and promised to avoid future communication with him. In return, the British assured Ranjit Singh that they would not interfere in his territories north of the Sutlej River. This agreement, though modest in its scope, laid the foundation for the future relationship between Ranjit Singh and the British Empire.

Following this initial contact, Ranjit Singh's ambitions grew. His desire to unite the Sikh territories under his rule led him to expand his influence into the Cis-Sutlej region, an area populated by various Sikh and non-Sikh chiefs. Between 1806 and 1809, Ranjit Singh launched several expeditions into this region, subduing local chiefs and demanding tribute. His actions alarmed the Cis-Sutlej chiefs, who, fearing for their autonomy, sought the protection of the British. This led to the British sending Sir Charles Metcalfe as an envoy to negotiate with Ranjit Singh.

The British, facing threats from Napoleonic France and Russia, were eager to prevent Ranjit Singh from expanding his influence into the

Cis-Sutlej region. At the same time, they sought to secure his cooperation as a buffer against any potential European invasions from the northwest. The British needed Ranjit Singh to play a key role in defending India's northern frontiers, but they also needed to curtail his expansionist tendencies.

The negotiations between Metcalfe and Ranjit Singh culminated in the Treaty of Amritsar, signed on March 25, 1809. This treaty was a turning point in Ranjit Singh's relations with the British. Under the terms of the treaty, Ranjit Singh agreed to respect the sovereignty of the Cis-Sutlej chiefs and to refrain from further military campaigns in that region. In return, the British formally recognized Ranjit Singh's control over the territories north of the Sutlej River and agreed to maintain friendly relations with him.

While the Treaty of Amritsar limited Ranjit Singh's ambitions in the Cis-Sutlej region, it also provided him with a sense of security on his eastern front. With the British guaranteeing the protection of the Cis-Sutlej chiefs, Ranjit Singh could now focus his military efforts on expanding his kingdom to the west and south. This allowed him to conquer Multan, Kashmir, and Peshawar. The treaty, though a compromise, gave Ranjit Singh the breathing room he needed to consolidate his power and pursue his conquests without fear of British interference.

However, the treaty also marked the beginning of a more cautious phase in Ranjit Singh's relations with the British. He was well aware of the growing power of the British Empire and the limitations it imposed on his own expansionist ambitions. Although he had

succeeded in securing his eastern frontier, he knew that the British would not tolerate any further encroachment into territories they considered strategically important, such as Sindh or the Cis-Sutlej region.

Singh's diplomatic skill was further tested during the British campaigns in Nepal (1816-1818) and Burma (1824-1826). During these wars, the British suffered significant losses, raising hopes among many Indian rulers that the British Empire was vulnerable. Ranjit Singh, however, remained cautious. Although he was pleased to hear of British difficulties, he did not take advantage of the situation. Instead, he maintained his policy of non-interference, recognizing that the British were still a formidable force. His decision to refrain from confronting the British during their moments of weakness demonstrated his long-term strategic thinking.

In the years that followed, his attempts to extend his influence into Sindh and Shikarpur were thwarted by British diplomacy. In 1832, the British signed a treaty with the rulers of Sindh, opening the Indus River to British commerce and effectively bringing Sindh under British influence. This was a blow to Ranjit Singh's ambitions, as he had hoped to incorporate Sindh into his empire. Once again, he found himself outmaneuvered by British diplomacy, but he chose not to confront them directly.

The question of Shikarpur further strained relations between Ranjit Singh and the British. Shikarpur was a key trading hub, and its control was of great strategic importance. Ranjit Singh had long coveted the city, but the British made it clear that they would not

allow him to extend his power along the Indus River. Despite his frustration, Ranjit Singh ultimately yielded to British pressure, recognizing that a military confrontation over Shikarpur would be futile.

The final chapter in Singh's relationship with the British came with the Tripartite Treaty of 1838, signed between the British, Ranjit Singh, and Shah Shuja, the exiled ruler of Afghanistan. This treaty aimed to restore Shah Shuja to the throne of Kabul, with the support of British and Sikh forces. Although Ranjit Singh was reluctant to become involved in Afghan affairs, he eventually agreed to the treaty, recognizing that British influence in the region was inevitable. The Tripartite Treaty marked the culmination of Ranjit Singh's pragmatic approach to British relations. By joining forces with the British, he ensured that kingdom would remain secure, even as British power continued to grow.

Patronage of Arts and Education

Maharaja Ranjit Singh was a great patron of arts and education. Despite being illiterate himself, Ranjit Singh held a deep reverence for knowledge, culture, and artistic expression. His reign witnessed the flowering of art and the rise of education in the Punjab region, which were crucial to the legacy of the Sikh Empire.

One of the most remarkable aspects of Ranjit Singh's patronage was his interest in promoting various forms of art. His appreciation for art was deeply influenced by his conquests, particularly in the Kangra region. In Kangra, he came into contact with the rich tradition of Pahari painting, known for its lyrical themes and vibrant

depictions of Hindu gods, goddesses, and mythical scenes. The annexation of Kangra in 1809 brought Ranjit Singh into close contact with the Rajput artists of the region, who soon began working for the Sikh court. These artists contributed to the flourishing of art under Ranjit Singh by blending the local Pahari style with the emerging Sikh aesthetic.

The rejection of idol worship by Sikhism did not impede the development of visual arts, as Ranjit Singh and his court embraced artistic expression in the form of portraiture and religious scenes. Portrait painting became a notable feature of Ranjit Singh's reign, and though he was initially reluctant to have his likeness captured, he eventually came to appreciate the role of portraiture in diplomacy and political relations. By allowing artists to depict him, even with his physical imperfections, such as his blind left eye, Ranjit Singh demonstrated a remarkable openness to artistic interpretation. Foreign artists like Emily Eden, sister of Governor-General Lord Auckland, captured his likeness, and his court became a hub for local and foreign painters.

This era saw the emergence of a distinct Sikh school of painting, influenced by Kangra art but also incorporating elements from other regions. Painters in Ranjit Singh's court, such as Kehar Singh and Mohammed Baksh, created works that reflected the social and religious life of the Sikh Empire. These artists not only produced portraits of Ranjit Singh and his courtiers but also depicted scenes from daily life, including farmers, jugglers, and *nihangs* (Sikh warriors). Their work extended beyond the confines of the court, with murals adorning temples, *gurdwaras*, and palaces across the

Punjab. The murals, featuring religious themes or battle scenes, were a reflection of the rich cultural and artistic milieu that Ranjit Singh promoted.

His secular approach to patronage was evident in his support for Muslim, Hindu, and Sikh artists alike. He appointed a Muslim craftsman to build a fortification around Amritsar and enjoyed the music of a Muslim sitarist, Attar Khan. His court was a melting pot of artistic traditions, blending Islamic, Hindu, and Sikh influences, and it attracted artists from various backgrounds. The cultural exchange between the hills and plains of Punjab, initiated through Ranjit Singh's conquests, led to a fusion of artistic styles, which enriched the cultural life of his empire.

In addition to visual arts, literature and education flourished under Ranjit Singh's rule. The Maharaja had a deep respect for the written word, despite his own lack of formal education. He played a significant role in promoting Punjabi literature and ensuring that the Gurmukhi script was used to propagate Sikh teachings. During his reign, Amritsar grew into a center of Sikh learning and philosophy, while Lahore became the political and administrative capital of the empire. Under his influence, Punjabi began to gain prominence alongside Persian, which remained the official language of administration.

Ranjit Singh's court was home to notable scholars and poets who produced works of lasting significance. Persian and Urdu literature continued to flourish, with genres such as the *ghazal* and *masnavi* making their way into Punjabi culture. Pandit Ram Lekhari, for

instance, compiled a version of the Ramayana in Gurmukhi script, contributing to the growing body of Sikh literature. Similarly, the works of Muslim scholars, such as Mirza Goulam Mehdi Mujrim's "Diwan-i-Mujrim," discussed beautifully the social conditions of the time. This era of literary production reflected the open-minded approach of Ranjit Singh to culture, where religious and linguistic boundaries were transcended in favor of a more inclusive intellectual environment.

His reign also witnessed innovations in other forms of art, such as the creation of medals and decorations. One of the most notable examples of this was the establishment of the Order of Merit, known as the Star of the Prosperity of the Punjab, which he introduced on the occasion of his grandson Nau Nihal Singh's marriage in 1837. This medal, awarded in three classes, was a reflection of Ranjit Singh's desire to honor those who served the empire with distinction, including courtiers, army generals, and civil servants. The star-shaped medal, adorned with precious stones, was a symbol of prestige and recognition, and its design was innovative for its time.

Education was supported during his reign. The Maharaja's government was largely military in nature, and as such, the primary emphasis was on military training and organization. However, Ranjit Singh's patronage extended to the support of traditional educational institutions, particularly those associated with religious instruction. Sikh institutions such as the Akal Bunga in Amritsar and Damdama Sahib played a crucial role in imparting education in

Gurmukhi, while madrassas and pathshalas provided instruction in Arabic, Persian, and Sanskrit.

Despite the lack of a formal system or state-sponsored education, Ranjit Singh's reign saw a proliferation of indigenous schools across Punjab. These schools were attached to religious institutions and provided basic instruction in language, arithmetic, and religious texts. The village schoolhouse, often a mosque, dharamshala, or temple, was a vital part of the educational fabric of Punjab, and the Maharaja's support for these institutions helped preserve traditional forms of learning.

Higher education, though limited, was not neglected. Schools in places like Amritsar and Lahore offered instruction in subjects such as philosophy, astronomy, and medicine. Fakirs and scholars were central to the dissemination of knowledge, and their influence extended across religious lines. Bhai Juna Singh, for example, ran a school that provided free instruction in religious and secular subjects, attracting students from across the region. Similarly, scholars like Bhai Budha and Bhai Santokh Singh made significant contributions to the translation of Sanskrit texts into Gurmukhi that enriched Sikh literature. Although Ranjit Singh's government did not prioritize the establishment of a formal educational system, his patronage of religious institutions and his support for scholars of all backgrounds helped sustain a vibrant intellectual culture in Punjab. His recognition of the importance of education, particularly in preserving religious and cultural traditions, was a key aspect of his legacy as a ruler.

Conclusion

The importance of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in history rests not only on his military prowess but on his ability to unify a fractured region and establish a stable and prosperous kingdom in the Punjab. In a time where there was political chaos and the Mughal Empire was collapsing, Ranjit Singh emerged as a leader who could rise above the divisive forces that had weakened the subcontinent. His remarkable ability to bring together diverse groups under his rule, including the Sikhs, Hindus, and Muslims, set him apart as a ruler who understood the need for inclusivity and harmony in governance.

The context in which Ranjit Singh came to power was one of disunity and fragmentation, where rival princes and regional powers were more focused on personal gain than the collective needs of their territories. The East India Company steadily gained control, playing off various factions against each other. However, Punjab, under Ranjit Singh's leadership, was able to halt the British advance, at least temporarily. His capture of Lahore in 1799 was the beginning of a new era in the region, as he consolidated his power and built an empire that stretched across 14,000 square miles.

His ability to harness the energies of the disparate misls and bring them under one banner was a remarkable feat. His diplomatic acumen was evident in how he dealt with both internal and external challenges. While he fought numerous battles to subdue Pathan, Afghan, and Rajput resistance, he also understood the importance of maintaining a balance with the British, avoiding direct conflict

where possible and focusing on strengthening his own territories. The Treaty of Amritsar in 1809 was a turning point, as it allowed him to focus inward, building the military, economic, and social foundations of his kingdom while keeping British forces at bay.

One of Ranjit Singh's most notable achievements was his modernization of the military. Understanding that the British forces were well-equipped and disciplined, he sought to reform his own army by incorporating Western military tactics and technology. He employed European officers, such as Generals Allard, Ventura, and Court, who trained his forces in modern warfare. Under his leadership, the Punjabi army grew from a modest force to a formidable one, with 75,000 soldiers and a well-equipped artillery. This modernization not only ensured the defense of Punjab from external threats but also created economic opportunities for the region's artisans and laborers, as industries catering to the military's needs flourished.

Beyond his military achievements, Ranjit Singh was a visionary administrator who understood the importance of peace and stability for prosperity. Unlike many rulers of the time, he did not make radical changes or introduce complex administrative innovations. Instead, he focused on continuity, ensuring that life for his subjects continued smoothly. His reign was known for law and order, and he was known for his fairness in justice. High-way robberies, armed conflicts, and communal strife were rare under his rule. His vigilance and personal involvement in governance—often conducting surprise inspections and redressing grievances on the spot—set him apart from other rulers. Ranjit Singh's sense of responsibility toward

his people was due to his belief that the legitimacy of a ruler came from serving the people and protecting their well-being.

Economically, Punjab thrived under Ranjit Singh's rule. The kingdom was self-sufficient, with no external drain on its resources. The peasantry was well-treated, and unemployment and beggary were almost non-existent. Taxes were fair, and whatever was collected was reinvested into the state, ensuring that the people directly benefited from the kingdom's wealth. Prices remained low, and the economy was stable, providing a strong foundation for the prosperity that Punjab enjoyed during this period.

Ranjit Singh's approach to kingship was unique. Unlike many rulers who sought grand titles and symbols of power, he remained humble, referring to himself as a servant of the Sikh Gurus. His government, Sarkar-i-Khalsa, reflected his deep connection to his faith and his commitment to the principles of equality and justice. However, his rule was secular in practice, with individuals from various religious and ethnic backgrounds holding key positions in his administration. He gave generously to religious institutions of all faiths, ensuring that mosques, temples, and gurdwaras flourished under his patronage.

Ranjit Singh's had an inclusive and meritocratic approach to governance. His court included individuals from all walks of life, from Dogras and Brahmins to Europeans, and each person had the opportunity to rise to the highest levels of power based on merit. This inclusivity extended to his military as well, where officers were recruited based on their abilities rather than their backgrounds. This

cosmopolitan character of his court and administration was one of the key reasons for the stability and prosperity of his kingdom.

While Ranjit Singh wielded considerable power, he was not a despot. He was a moderate ruler. He governed with the participation of his nobles and advisors. He did not engage in vindictive actions against his rivals and was known for his clemency, often providing for those he had defeated rather than punishing them. This sense of fairness and humanity extended to his own officials, whom he held accountable for their actions. Corruption and abuse of power were not tolerated, and even his most trusted generals, like Hari Singh Nalwa, were reprimanded when necessary.

He abolished capital punishment, a progressive step that even modern democracies have not fully embraced. His sense of justice, compassion for the poor, and ability to maintain peace in a turbulent time earned him a place among the great rulers of history. Comparing him to figures like Akbar or Ashoka is tempting, but Ranjit Singh was unique in his approach. He did not seek to impose Sikhism as a state religion, nor did he attempt to build a religious or political empire beyond the capacity of his kingdom. Instead, he focused on building a strong, just, and prosperous Punjab.

After all this discussion, it becomes clear that his vision extended beyond military conquests and governance. His emphasis on stability, justice, and prosperity laid the groundwork for the intellectual and cultural growth that would follow. In the next chapter, we will explore the education system in Punjab during Ranjit Singh's era, a period that saw the promotion of learning and

the growth of institutions that promoted knowledge and enlightenment across the region. Ranjit Singh's reign, while primarily focused on military and administrative strength, also paved the way for a flourishing of education and culture that would leave a lasting impact on the people of Punjab.

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Chapter 3: Education System in Punjab During the Reign of Ranjit Singh

Introduction

During the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1780–1839), Punjab underwent significant changes in many areas, including governance, military organization, and cultural life. One often overlooked aspect of his reign, however, is the state of education during this period. While Ranjit Singh is primarily remembered for his military conquests and the unification of Punjab under Sikh rule, his time as a ruler also allowed traditional education systems to thrive.

At that time, education in Punjab was largely informal, driven by religious and local institutions. Schools were found in mosques, temples, and *gurdwaras*, where religious leaders served as teachers. These schools focused on imparting religious and moral teachings, and their influence on the social order was immense. Educational institutions in Punjab were supported by local patrons, including wealthy individuals and religious organizations, as they believed that supporting education was both a moral obligation and a means of gaining spiritual merit.

In this traditional setting, religious education was at the forefront. Depending on their faith, students were taught by Maulvis (Muslim scholars), Pandits (Hindu scholars), or Sikh *Gurus*, learning the holy texts of their respective religions. However, education extended beyond religious texts; subjects such as Persian, the administrative language of the time, and basic arithmetic were also taught. Persian

was particularly important, as it was the official language of governance and commerce in Punjab and much of northern India. Therefore, proficiency in Persian provided access to social mobility and political influence, making it an essential part of secular education.

Sikhism, the dominant faith during Ranjit Singh's reign, placed a special emphasis on learning. The Sikh Gurus, particularly Guru Nanak, encouraged literacy and intellectual growth as key virtues. Education in the Sikh tradition involved not only religious instruction but also learning the Gurmukhi script, which was developed by Guru Angad to document Sikh teachings. The widespread use of Gurmukhi in the region became a symbol of Sikh identity and was closely tied to the religious and cultural life of the Sikh community.

Despite the prominence of Gurmukhi within the Sikh community, Persian remained the lingua franca for most administrative and official purposes. As such, students of all faiths – Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs – learned Persian to improve their chances of securing employment in government offices or trade. While religious institutions were the backbone of education, there were secular schools where subjects such as astronomy, mathematics, medicine, and philosophy were taught, although such schools were fewer in number and largely catered to the elite.

Ranjit Singh himself was known to be illiterate, yet he was a patron of education. He understood the importance of learning and ensured that various educational institutions were supported under his

reign. However, his approach to education was indirect; he did not impose any formal educational policy or centralized system. Instead, he allowed local communities to manage educational institutions on their own. This decentralized system flourished under state and private patronage, particularly through the donations and support of the wealthy.

After the annexation of Punjab in 1849, the British sought to replace the traditional systems of learning with Western-style education, which prioritized English and modern subjects like mathematics and science. This shift not only disrupted the religiously driven educational system but also signaled the decline of Persian and the traditional schools attached to religious institutions. The educational reforms introduced by the British fundamentally altered the purpose of education in Punjab, moving it from a tool of moral and spiritual development to a mechanism for producing a class of administrators loyal to the colonial state.

This chapter explores the evolution of indigenous education in the subcontinent, with a particular focus on Punjab during the rule of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. It begins by providing historical context and traces the roots of traditional education systems that existed before colonial influence. The chapter then examines the unique features of the education system in Punjab under Ranjit Singh. Various types of educational institutions, including Gurmukhi, Sanskrit, Persian, and commercial schools, are discussed. The state of female education during this period is also explored, showing how women's access to learning, though limited, was influenced by religious and societal norms. Finally, the chapter looks at the impact of British annexation

on the educational system of Punjab, which marked a shift from indigenous systems to colonial structures. This analysis provides a comprehensive view of how education in Punjab evolved during this transformative period.

Historical Background of Indigenous Education in the subcontinent

The educational heritage of the subcontinent is closely tied to its religious and cultural history. It is influenced by Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Sikhism. Besides promoting religious practice, these traditions helped build an educational system that reflected the social structures and beliefs of the region. Education in the subcontinent was not just about gaining knowledge but also about promoting moral development, social harmony, and spiritual understanding. This system was based on centuries of tradition.

In early Hindu society, education was largely the responsibility of the Brahmins, who occupied a high position in the caste hierarchy. While the Kshatriyas were focused on governance and warfare, legislative and educational duties were assigned to the Brahmins. Their lives were divided into four stages: studentship, teaching the Vedas, asceticism, and meditation. This was a strict and obligatory framework that was accompanied by a rigorous moral and ceremonial code.

The Brahmins established themselves as the intellectual leaders, and education became a tool to secure their dominance. Education was deliberately made neither too cheap nor too easily accessible in order to maintain the exclusivity of sacred knowledge. While Shudars (the

lowest caste) were excluded from religious instruction, they were sometimes allowed to receive secular education if they approached it with humility. Brahmins occasionally expanded their circle of disciples beyond their caste and allowed individuals from any caste to elevate themselves spiritually through education and virtuous living.

The intellectual monopoly of the Brahmins faced challenges from religious reform movements led by figures like Buddha and Guru Nanak. These movements sought to promote equality across all classes and make education more accessible to the masses. A key aspect of their reforms was the translation of sacred Sanskrit texts into vernacular languages which allowed common people to access religious and moral teachings. For instance, the Sikhs rendered many works into dialects combining Punjabi and Hindi. This expanded the reach of previously exclusive knowledge. These efforts aimed to break the Brahmin-dominated barriers to knowledge.

Education also served as a path to social mobility. People who wanted to improve their social status pursued education in the languages of the ruling powers – Persian during earlier periods and English under British rule. By mastering these languages, they secured positions in government and gained political influence and social prestige over higher castes. Educational qualifications became a valued asset. It enhanced social status and sometimes even affected marriage prospects. Education allowed people to rise in stature, both politically and socially. This reinforced the idea that knowledge could provide a means to transcend traditional caste boundaries.

The indigenous educational system was supported by community efforts. Members of various castes contributed to the endowment of Sanskrit learning, mostly through grants of land. These endowments were given independently or in association with temples, in order to sustain educational institutions. In many cases, families would dedicate their property to temples or schools to prevent the fragmentation of ancestral assets. The eldest son was often appointed the hereditary custodian of these assets to ensure continuity in the family's support of education. Similarly, village communities allocated portions of communal land to priests and teachers to recognize their essential roles in society.

Indigenous education was based on personal relationships between teachers and students. This connection created respect and affection. Most of the times, schools were located in the homes of generous patrons, temples, or communal spaces such as village halls. Teachers, especially religious ones, were typically freed from financial concerns which allowed them to focus entirely on educating their students. It was common for Brahmin teachers to educate members of their own caste without charge, sometimes even providing for the basic needs of their students.

Instructional methods in indigenous schools were both practical and idealistic. Teachers paid close attention to discipline and respect. They enforced dress codes, schedules, and forms of address to cultivate the right environment for learning. The instruction was designed to suit the moral and mental development of students based on their societal roles.

Education was not just an intellectual pursuit but was deeply connected with moral and spiritual growth. Sacred texts from Hinduism, Sikhism, and Islam stressed the importance of learning as a transformative tool for personal and societal development. For instance, Islamic teachings emphasized the importance of knowledge. The Quran states, "The learned and the ignorant are never equal in rank" (Surah 39:9). A well-known Hadith echoes this sentiment, stating, "One hour's teaching and learning is more righteous than a whole night's prayer."

In Hinduism, the *Hitopadesa* declares, "Knowledge is the best among all things, for it can neither be lost, nor sold, nor destroyed." Similarly, the *Niti Mala* states, "Knowledge gives humility; from humility one obtains ability, from ability wealth, from wealth virtue, and from virtue happiness." The *Manu Smriti* outlined a structured approach to education: "Those who have read books are superior to the illiterate; those who have committed to memory what they have read are superior to mere readers; those who understand the meaning are superior to those who merely memorize; and those who follow the precepts are superior to those who merely know them".

In Sikhism, education was also viewed as a spiritual journey. The *Adi Granth* states, "After completing his education, he feels his interest to be in doing good to others". Another passage explains, "As he studies deeply, so shall he find precisely what truth is, and shall thereafter meditate and pray to the true God". These teachings stress that education is not only a personal duty but also a religious obligation that benefits society.

The educational heritage of the subcontinent, grounded in the sacred teachings of various religions, created a respect for learning across all levels of society. This respect extended even to the humblest occupations, inspiring individuals like Kabir, a weaver, and Ravidas, a leather worker, to become revered figures.

Indigenous education in the subcontinent emphasized individualized instruction, group recitations, and personal study. These methods encouraged independent thought and reflection and promoted a deeper understanding of the material. As students advanced, they often traveled to learn from different scholars, creating a collaborative and progressive academic environment. The educational system in the subcontinent offered a holistic approach that prepared individuals not just for practical life but also for spiritual enlightenment and moral development.

Education system in Punjab under Ranjit Singh

During the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1780–1839), education in Punjab flourished under the progressive and inclusive governance of Ranjit Singh. He actively supported education across different communities. His active support created a fertile environment for both religious and secular learning. Education during this era was accessible to Sikhs, Hindus, and Muslims alike. This promoting a diverse intellectual environment that enabled growth and scholarship across various disciplines.

The commitment of Maharaja Ranjit Singh to education was evident through his generous patronage, particularly in the form of *jagirs* (land endowments) to schools and scholars. These land grants

provided the financial resources necessary for educational institutions to operate independently, allowing them to offer free education to students. This patronage ensured that schools flourished, and scholars could focus on teaching without financial concerns. In return, many teachers, often religious figures such as *granthis*, *pandits*, and *maulvis*, saw education as a religious and social duty and imparted knowledge with a sense of devotion. The relationship between teacher and student during this period was one of mutual respect, and many students went on to become scholars themselves. This created a perpetual cycle of learning.

The Maharaja's patronage extended beyond just financial support. He was known to respect and honor scholars by inviting them to his court and seeking their counsel on various matters. This royal recognition of intellectuals elevated the status of teachers and scholars and made education an esteemed profession in the region. The atmosphere of respect for knowledge and learning created a thriving intellectual culture where scholars felt valued and supported.

The educational framework under Ranjit Singh was decentralized, with numerous institutions operating independently under the guidance of learned scholars and religious figures. In Sikh communities, education in Gurmukhi was widespread, even among carpenters and artisans. This emphasis on literacy in Gurmukhi allowed the working class to participate in religious and cultural life more fully, as literacy was a key component of Sikh identity and practice. Despite the decentralized nature of education, Ranjit Singh's government maintained a level of oversight. He ensured that

scholars and institutions received the support they needed to continue their work.

In Sikh community, the widespread use of Gurmukhi script played an important role in literacy and education. Gurmukhi schools were prominent, teaching religious texts like the *Granth Sahib* alongside secular subjects such as arithmetic, astronomy, and poetry. Examples include Bhai Juna Singh's school in Amritsar that provided free education and food and made learning accessible to both the elite and the working class. Bhai Lakhun Singh's institution focused on religious education, while Bhai Ram Singh's school was renowned for its advanced curriculum. These institutions attracted students from distant regions to study literature, ethics, and astronomy. These schools showed the vision of Ranjit Singh to make education accessible to all, regardless of social standing. In higher education, Sikh centers of learning, such as the Akal Bunga in Amritsar and Damdama Sahib, played a significant role in imparting advanced knowledge. Damdama Sahib was known as the "rural university of the Sikhs," where subjects like philosophy, astrology, and religious scriptures were taught. These institutions helped ensure that students were well-rounded and capable of contributing to both the intellectual and administrative needs of the state.

In addition to Gurmukhi schools, Persian and Arabic institutions thrived under Ranjit Singh's rule, especially in Muslim communities. Persian was the administrative language of the kingdom, and its study was widespread among both Muslims and Hindus who sought practical knowledge for careers in administration and diplomacy. The school of Mian Sahib in Batala and Maulvi Sheikh

Ahmed in Sialkot became renowned centers of learning that offered instruction in literature, poetry, mathematics, astronomy, and medicine. These institutions were highly respected and attracted students from as far as Iran and Khorasan. Mian Faiz's school in Gujranwala, for example, was celebrated for its exceptional Persian instruction, supported by a *muafi* (stipend) that allowed it to provide education free of charge. Khwaja Suleman's institution in Saingrosa, located in the Dera Ghazi District, attracted students from regions like Khorasan and Hindustan. Mian Abdul Hakim's school in the Gujranwala District, known as Miran-Wali, was highly respected for its Persian instruction and provided sustenance to students

Education among Muslims was not confined to religious instruction. Persian institutions were well-integrated into the broader intellectual landscape of Punjab, with scholars teaching a wide range of subjects, including logic, mechanics, and philosophy. A school run by Bara Mian in Lahore, known for its high-level education, functioned almost like a college. Khalifa Sahib's school at Moran's Mosque attracted students from Persia and Arabia. These schools, generously funded during Ranjit Singh's reign, offered an inclusive and advanced curriculum that contributed to the intellectual life of Punjab.

Hindu educational institutions, such as *pathshalas*, were also active during this period, teaching Sanskrit and other classical subjects. These schools were led by respected scholars who provided education in both religious texts and secular disciplines like grammar and mathematics. Notable Hindu scholars included Pandit Bullo Mai from Kapurthala, who taught astronomy and geography.

The Maharaja's patronage ensured that these schools could continue to thrive, promoting intellectual diversity across religious and cultural lines.

Ranjit Singh's approach to education was influenced by his respect for all religions and his desire to raise the intellectual status fabric of his kingdom. He ensured that educational grants and stipends were distributed fairly across Sikh, Hindu, and Muslim communities, so that an environment where scholars of different backgrounds could flourish. This inclusive attitude extended to the curriculum, with schools offering instruction in multiple languages—Gurmukhi, Persian, Sanskrit, and Arabic—allowing students to engage with a wide range of scholarly traditions.

The Udasis, a sect of ascetic Sikhs tracing their lineage to Baba Sri Chand, Guru Nanak's son, were instrumental in preserving and promoting education during Ranjit Singh's reign. The Udasis managed a vast network of educational institutions, including *deras*, *akharas*, and *gurdwaras*. These centers offered religious education alongside secular subjects like arithmetic and basic sciences. Udasi institutions received significant financial support from the state in the form of *dharmarths*—revenue-free land grants—which allowed them to provide free education. By the mid-19th century, the Udasis managed around 250 centers of learning, many attached to significant religious sites associated with the Sikh Gurus. Notable Udasi institutions included the Akhara Brahmbuta of Mahant Santokh Das in Amritsar and the *dharmasalas* at Dera Baba Nanak, Bhai Pheroo, and Phuman Shah.

Medical education also thrived during Ranjit Singh's reign. Practitioners of *Yunani* and Ayurvedic medicine made significant contributions to medical knowledge. Notable figures included Hakim Abdul Aziz of Kot Udho, whose works, *Aksir Azim* and *Zamurrad Akhzar*, were widely regarded in *Yunani* medicine. Similarly, Ayurvedic practitioners such as Pandit Madhusudan and Pandit Bhairav Nath were celebrated for their knowledge and practice. These medical experts contributed to Punjab's healthcare system and passed their knowledge on to apprentices.

In Sikh aristocratic families like the Sindhanvalias, private tutors provided high-level education in subjects such as Arabic, Persian, and the sciences. Sirdars such as Lehna Singh Majithia, known for his mastery of mathematics and engineering, translated works like Euclid's geometry from Arabic into Punjabi. He also invented new technologies, including a leather gun, which earned him recognition from his European contemporaries. These achievements reflect the advanced level of education available to the Sikh elite during this period.

Science and literature also thrived in the Maharaja's rule, with scholars from different religious backgrounds making important contributions. Karam Singh Nihang was known for his expertise in languages like Arabic and Sanskrit. Akhund Ahmad Shah was invited to the Maharaja's court from the north-west frontier. He taught mathematics and astronomy. Poets like Hashim Shah were highly regarded. His works in Arabic and Persian earned him land grants from the Maharaja. Ranjit Singh also promoted Gurmukhi literature and encouraged scholars like Baba Amir Das and Bhai

Budh Singh to translate classical texts into Gurmukhi, making learning more accessible to the people. Bhai Bishan Singh was offered a *jagir* for his scholarly services which he refused. Bhai Santokh Singh's *Suraj Parkash* becoming a major work of Sikh literature. This period saw a rich intellectual environment where scholars were celebrated, and education was encouraged for all communities.

The Maharaja's wife, Moran Sarkar, played an active role in promoting education and established two *madrasas* in Lahore—one attached to her mansion in Papad Mandi and the other near the shrine of the Sufi saint Madho Lal Hussain. These *madrasas* catered to both boys and girls.

Despite the vibrant educational environment during Ranjit Singh's reign, the British annexation of Punjab in 1849 caused a decline in the educational institutions. The Punjab Administration Report for 1849-51 indicated that there were 3,372 indigenous schools in Punjab, serving hundreds of thousands of students. In the most advanced areas, there was one school for every 1,141 inhabitants. However, under British administration, the ratio declined to one school for every 9,028 inhabitants which shows the decrease in access to education after the British resumed rent-free lands and educational grants.

The decline was not limited to the number of schools but also affected the quality and diversity of education. The resumption of financial support and *jagirs* under the British led to the closure of many institutions, particularly those that had thrived under Ranjit

Singh's patronage. This decline had a lasting impact on the intellectual and cultural life of Punjab.

Types of educational institutions in Punjab during Ranjit Singh's rule

Indigenous education in Punjab evolved with the religious, cultural, and social changes taking place in the region. Vernacular education played a crucial role in shaping the lives of the masses. During Ranjit Singh's rule, Punjab region boasted a rich and diverse educational system that catered to various communities and social needs. Each type of school served a specific purpose. Gurmukhi schools promoted literacy and spiritual education among Sikhs while Sanskrit Pathshalas preserved Hindu teachings. Commercial communities relied on Mahajani and Landā schools for business education, while Persian and Arabic schools offered training for administrative and religious roles. Together, these schools played an important role in sustaining the cultural and intellectual heritage of Punjab.

A. The Gurmukhi Schools

Sikhism emerged as a challenge to the rigid caste system of Hinduism. Along with rectifying other social ills, it sought to democratize knowledge. Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, stressed that education should be accessible to everyone, not just the privileged few. By promoting the Gurmukhi script, Sikh leaders aimed to break the Brahminical monopoly on learning and make knowledge available to the common people. Sacred texts like the *Granth Sahib* were written in Gurmukhi which allowed Sikhs to

access spiritual and intellectual knowledge in their own language. This move removed the barriers posed by elite languages such as Sanskrit and Persian. It also reinforced the idea that education was a communal asset open to all who sought it.

In Gurmukhi schools, education typically began when children were around five or six years old, with both boys and girls included. It shows the progressive stance of Sikh society on gender equality. Students started by learning to form letters and words, using simple materials like soot-covered wooden slates known as *pati*. Pens made from reeds, which were readily available in Punjab, made the tools of learning accessible to children from all backgrounds. This emphasis on using practical materials ensured that education was not limited to the wealthy.

The foundation of Gurmukhi education was moral and religious instruction. Early on, students were introduced to proverbs and moral sayings that highlighted core values such as honesty, truthfulness, and humility. For example, the common lesson "*Juth mat bolna*" (do not lie) stressed the importance of integrity. As students progressed, they learned to read and understand sacred Sikh texts, including the *Rai Bhas* and *Sidh Gosht*, which taught lessons on humility and spiritual wisdom. Daily readings or recitations from the *Granth Sahib* were an integral part of their routine, encouraging spiritual growth and discipline.

In addition to religious education, Gurmukhi schools also taught practical skills that could be applied to everyday life. Subjects such as arithmetic, history, and prosody were part of the curriculum.

Advanced students could study logic, Vedanta, and the teachings of Patanjali, often adapted from Sanskrit into Gurmukhi. Those who mastered these subjects could become *Gyani*, or scholars, who were capable of explaining complex religious and philosophical ideas to the community. Family involvement was another key aspect of Gurmukhi education. Parents, particularly those who were literate in Gurmukhi, reinforced lessons at home and ensured that education was not confined to the classroom. This connection between home and school fostered a deeper understanding of Sikh culture and religious practices.

Gurmukhi education emphasized both intellectual and physical development. Alongside academic learning, physical education was prioritized, with practical skills such as horse riding and military training included in the curriculum. The teachings of the *Granth Sahib* stressed that true scholarship was measured by one's ability to live according to spiritual principles, rather than by social status or birth.

Despite its strengths, Gurmukhi education faced challenges during the British colonial era. The introduction of English and Urdu-based education systems, combined with pressures to replace Gurmukhi with Hindi or Nagri scripts, weakened the traditional schools. However, there remained strong support for Gurmukhi education within the Sikh community. Religious institutions like *Dharmshalas* continued to serve as centers of learning. Community leaders, such as *numberdars* and *patwaris*, also played a role in preserving Gurmukhi education and ensured that its legacy endured.

B. The Mahajani and Landā schools (*Chatshalas*)

The Mahajani and Landā schools in Punjab were indigenous institutions that educated children from commercial and trading backgrounds. These schools focused on practical skills essential for business, such as bookkeeping and mental arithmetic, and their methods of instruction were tailored to the needs of the trading community. The Mahajani and Landā systems were particularly important for merchants and traders who needed to keep accurate records of transactions and manage business operations efficiently.

The Mahajani and Landā systems of writing were prevalent in the commercial life of Punjab and spread to trading communities across India. The Landā script, also known as "Mundā" or "tail-less," was a practical shorthand used for business purposes. While some viewed Landā as a mere trade cipher, it was, in fact, a sophisticated system that allowed for elementary education in commercial skills. Children attending these schools learned how to manage accounts and conduct trade-related calculations, skills that were vital for the smooth functioning of businesses. These schools provided a form of education that was practical and directly applicable to the everyday lives of their students.

The curriculum in these schools placed a strong emphasis on mental arithmetic. Students were taught multiplication tables, including advanced methods like "*bara gyāra*" (multiplication tables from 11 to 30) and fractional multiplications. This training was essential for children who would later manage grain market fluctuations and other trade-related tasks. What stood out in these schools was the ability of the students to perform complex calculations mentally and

orally, faster than those educated in more formal systems who relied on written materials or tools.

Teachers, known as *Padahs*, taught in the Mahajani and Landā schools. Many of these educators came from hereditary lines, belonging to the Brahmin, Kayasth, or even Muslim communities. These teachers provided flexible instruction, traveling from town to town, teaching bookkeeping, ciphering, and arithmetic. This adaptability meant that schools operated according to the rhythms of rural life, opening when agricultural work slowed and closing when children were needed in the fields.

The relationship between teachers and students in these schools was highly personal. *Padahs* would visit the homes of students who were absent or send senior students to fetch them to ensure regular attendance. This close connection extended beyond the classroom. Parents would trust the *Padah* to discipline their children both in school and at home. The collaboration between teachers, students, and families created a strong educational environment where learning was seen as both practical and moral.

Teachers were also compensated in unique ways. In addition to receiving fees, *Padahs* were given gifts of food and other necessities during religious festivals and significant occasions. This practice reflected the respect and social standing that these teachers enjoyed. Their success was tied to the future achievements of their students in the business world which further increased their value within the community.

A distinctive feature of the Mahajani and Landā schools was their focus on specific trade-related knowledge. The Landā script was not only used for writing but also for preserving secret trade practices. The ability to keep business transactions confidential made the script valuable for traders and merchants. Students learned how to manage trade efficiently, ensuring the prosperity of their family businesses.

C. Persian schools (*Maktabas*)

Persian schools in Punjab were a cornerstone of the educational and intellectual life in Punjab, during the pre-British era. These schools played a significant role in shaping the minds of students, not just through linguistic and literary education but also by instilling moral values and social manners. Persian, being the language of administration, culture, and scholarship, held a prestigious position in Punjab, similar to the role French played in Europe as the language of diplomacy. As a result, Persian was highly sought after and attracted students from diverse backgrounds, including Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs.

The structure of education in Persian schools was systematic. It began with teaching students the fundamentals of reading and writing. Children were first introduced to the Persian alphabet, which they learned to read, write, and pronounce correctly. From the outset, writing was given special importance, with a focus on mastering penmanship. Students were taught to form Persian characters according to precise artistic rules, which emphasized proportions and the aesthetic beauty of the script. This skill in calligraphy was particularly valued, as it was necessary for clerical

roles in courts and offices where well-written documents were highly prized.

Instruction in Persian schools was mainly imparted with the help of classical texts. Early on, students were introduced to basic moral and ethical teachings through works like the *Pandnama* by Saadi, which conveyed lessons about virtues such as honesty and humility, and warned against vices like greed and deceit. These texts, written in verse, were easy to memorize and provided students with a strong moral foundation. As students progressed, they moved on to more advanced literary works like *Gulistan* and *Bostan* of Saadi, which offered a combination of prose and poetry. These texts taught not only language but also life lessons about human behavior, ethics, and governance. The reading of these texts was done without translation at first. This was meant for allowing the students to familiarize themselves with the language before understanding the full meaning of the content.

Another important element of Persian education was the study of practical skills, particularly writing. Students were trained in various forms of writing, including drafting letters, petitions, and official documents. This practical application of writing skills was essential for students aiming for administrative roles. Letter writing, in particular, was a critical skill, as the ability to communicate clearly and effectively in Persian was necessary for any form of government service. As students advanced, they were also encouraged to compose verses and develop their own writing styles, which were critiqued by their teachers.

In addition to these classical texts and practical skills, Persian schools incorporated other important texts into their curriculum. One of the foundational texts was the *Khalīq Bārī*, a trilingual vocabulary list that introduced students to Persian, Arabic, and Hindi words. This book, attributed to the poet Amir Khusro, helped students build a strong vocabulary in multiple languages and served as a key tool in their linguistic development. The *Khalīq Bārī* was taught in stages, first without translation, and later with explanations, helping students deepen their understanding of both language and meaning.

Persian schools also placed a strong emphasis on discipline and moral instruction. The relationship between teachers and students was one of mutual respect. Teachers were referred to as *Mianji* or *Maulvi Sahib*. They acted as both educators and moral guides. Teachers not only provided academic instruction but also modeled proper behavior and social etiquette for their students. This comprehensive approach to education ensured that students were not just learning facts and figures but were also being molded into well-rounded individuals with a strong sense of morality and social responsibility. The daily schedule in Persian schools was rigorous. Lessons started early in the morning and continued late into the evening. Students engaged in both rote memorization and practical exercises.

Persian schools were not only centers of learning for Muslims but also attracted a significant number of Hindu and Sikh students. These students enrolled in Persian schools to acquire the skills necessary for government service, as Persian was the language of administration under both the Mughals and the Sikh rulers. Hindu

and Sikh students were welcomed into these schools, and there was no pressure to convert to Islam. Teachers respected the religious beliefs of their students and ensured that the education provided was inclusive and focused on the practical and intellectual benefits of learning Persian.

Despite their rigorous curriculum, Persian schools were also places where students learned the social graces required for success in public life. In wealthier families, students were often assigned an *Ataliq*, a tutor responsible for teaching them how to behave in society. The *Ataliq* ensured that students learned the proper ways to address superiors, interact with their peers, and conduct themselves in social settings. This focus on manners and social behavior was an important aspect of Persian education, as it prepared students not just for academic success but also for their roles in society.

D. Quran schools and Arabic schools (Madrassas)

In Punjab, Quran schools and Arabic schools were vital institutions within the classical indigenous education system. These schools served the religious, intellectual, and moral needs of the Muslim population. These schools were integrated into the daily lives of communities. They provided foundational education in the Quran and Arabic language, which were essential for religious practice and scholarship.

Quran schools, often attached to mosques, were the first point of formal education for Muslim children. Education typically began with a special initiation ceremony when the child was around four years old. This ceremony marked the start of the child's journey into

religious learning and was a significant cultural and spiritual event, attended by family and community members. The child would begin with the Arabic alphabet and short, easy-to-memorize verses from the Quran, such as those from the 96th Sura, the first revelation to the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). This initial exposure to the Quranic text was intended to impress upon the child the sacred nature of their studies.

The primary focus of Quran schools was on teaching the recitation of the Quran. Students were trained to read the Quran with proper pronunciation, known as *tajweed*, which was a vital part of their religious education. Memorization played a central role in this process, with students committing large portions of the Quran to memory. This emphasis on memorization was seen as a way to develop not just religious knowledge, but also intellectual discipline. It sharpened the student's ability to retain and recall information. In some larger Quran schools, students aimed to become Hafiz, those who memorized the entire Quran. This accomplishment was highly revered and brought great respect within the community.

Teachers in Quran schools, known as *Qari Sahib*, *Moulvi Sahib* or *Maulana*, were responsible for guiding students through the recitation and understanding of the Quran. While many teachers were not formally trained in advanced Arabic grammar or exegesis, they were proficient in guiding students through the correct recitation and basic understanding of Quranic text. Their role extended beyond instruction; they performed other religious duties such as leading prayers and officiating at weddings and funerals.

Students in Quran schools were taught in a disciplined environment. Older students assisted in managing younger ones, which created a system of mutual responsibility and learning. The curriculum also included other religious texts in vernacular languages like Urdu and Persian. These texts, such as *Kanz-ul-Musalli* and *Rah-i-Nijat*, provided instruction on prayers and Islamic moral teachings. Stories of the prophets, contained in books like *Qissas-ul-Anbia*, introduced students to the lives and virtues of key Islamic figures. This created a deeper understanding of Islamic history and moral lessons.

Arabic schools, on the other hand, provided more advanced education and were focused not only on religious instruction but also on other intellectual pursuits. Arabic was the language of Islamic scholarship and science, and the study of Arabic grammar and literature was essential for anyone aspiring to become a scholar, religious leader, or jurist. The curriculum in Arabic schools was comprehensive, beginning with the basics of Arabic grammar, known as *Sarf* (morphology) and *Nahw* (syntax). Texts like *Mizan-us-Sarf* and *Nahw Mir* were standard which provided students with a solid foundation in the mechanics of the language.

Once students had mastered the fundamentals of Arabic grammar, they progressed to more advanced studies in Arabic literature, philosophy, law, and science. Classical texts, both religious and secular, were part of the curriculum. Works by famous Islamic scholars and philosophers like Avicenna (Ibn Sina) were studied, especially in subjects such as medicine and astronomy. These subjects were considered critical to a well-rounded education, with

Arabic schools serving as centers for the study of the sciences as well as the humanities.

Arabic schools were also a place where students learned the religious law (*Fiqh*) and theology necessary for becoming *Maulvis* or Islamic scholars. The study of Arabic was essential for understanding the Quran, Hadith (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad SAW), and other foundational Islamic texts. Thus, these schools played a critical role in training future religious leaders and ensuring that Islamic knowledge was passed down accurately through the generations.

In addition to grammar and religious texts, Arabic schools integrated other subjects such as history, geography, and arithmetic, offering a more comprehensive education than Quran schools. The focus on Arabic as a language of both science and religion meant that students were not only learning to read religious texts but were also exposed to a broad spectrum of knowledge that included medicine, logic, and philosophy. This multidisciplinary approach was a hallmark of classical Islamic education.

Teaching in both Quran and Arabic schools was typically conducted in small groups, often in the home of the teacher or within the mosque. The environment was informal, but structured around a deep respect for the teacher. Discipline was maintained through traditional methods, and students were expected to be attentive and respectful. The teacher-student relationship was one of reverence, and teachers were highly respected figures in the community. While formal tuition fees were not always required, families often compensated the teacher through gifts or small tokens of gratitude,

particularly during religious festivals or upon the completion of the Quran.

These schools not only educated students in religious knowledge but also shaped their moral character and social behavior. The teachers were seen as moral guides who instilled virtues like humility, piety, and respect for elders. The completion of Quranic education was celebrated by a community celebration which symbolized the importance of religious education in the social and spiritual life of the Muslim community.

E. Sanskrit Schools (*Pathshalas*)

Sanskrit schools in Punjab played an important role in the education of Hindu disciples. These schools were primarily connected to religious instruction and focused on teaching Sanskrit, the classical language of Hinduism. The primary objective of these schools was to preserve and transmit religious, philosophical, and literary knowledge through the study of sacred texts, rituals, and other traditional subjects.

Sanskrit schools in Punjab were mostly small and often operated out of the homes of teachers, known as *Pandits*. These teachers were usually Brahmins, a caste considered the custodians of sacred knowledge. The schools were not formal institutions in the modern sense; rather, they were informal centers of learning where students of different ages and levels of understanding would come to study under a teacher. There was no fixed curriculum or examination system. Instead, education was personalized, and students

progressed at their own pace depending on their abilities and the subjects they chose.

The schools operated in a highly traditional manner. The education was mostly oral, relying on rote memorization and recitation of texts. The role of the teacher was not just to impart knowledge but also to cultivate a respect for learning and a religious duty toward education.

The curriculum in these Sanskrit schools covered a wide range of subjects. Students would typically begin their education by learning the Sanskrit alphabet and basic reading and writing. After mastering the basics, they would progress to more complex subjects. One of the first and most important subjects taught in these schools was grammar, using comprehensive texts like the *Kaumudi* or *Paniniya Vyakarana*, the latter being a foundational text for understanding classical Sanskrit grammar. Advanced students might study *Siddhanta Kaumudi* and *Manorama*, both critical texts in the field of Sanskrit grammar. Students would study classical Sanskrit poetry and literature, including famous works like *Raghuvamsa* by Kalidasa, *Meghaduta*, and other epics. These texts were not just literary works but also tools for reinforcing grammar and teaching moral and ethical lessons.

Another core area of study was Indian philosophy, particularly the *Vedanta* system, which focuses on metaphysics and the nature of reality. Students also studied logic (*Nyaya*) and rhetoric, subjects that helped them engage in intellectual debates and develop critical thinking skills. A significant portion of the curriculum focused on

the study of religious scriptures such as the *Puranas*, *Itihasas* (historical epics), and other sacred texts that formed the basis of Hindu religious education. These texts were essential for students preparing to become priests or religious scholars. Many schools also offered instruction in astrology and astronomy. Texts like *Jyotisha* were commonly studied, helping students understand both the religious and practical applications of astrology. Some schools offered instruction in the Vedic system of medicine, focusing on classical medical texts such as *Charaka Samhita* and *Sushruta Samhita*, which are foundational works in Ayurveda, the ancient system of Indian medicine.

Learning was largely oral, with students memorizing vast amounts of text. The teacher would explain the meaning of the texts and their philosophical or grammatical nuances. Students were expected to internalize this knowledge and demonstrate their understanding through recitation and discussions. In some schools, Sanskrit was treated as a living language, and students were encouraged to converse and discuss philosophical ideas in Sanskrit itself. The aim was not just to impart knowledge but also to cultivate a disciplined mind capable of deep reflection and rigorous intellectual debate.

One notable feature of Sanskrit schools was the system of *Shastrartha* (intellectual debates), where students and teachers would engage in formal discussions on various topics related to philosophy, law, or religious doctrine. These debates were an essential part of the learning process, helping students sharpen their reasoning and analytical skills. As students advanced in their studies, they would seek specialized instruction from different Pandits, each of whom

might be an expert in a particular field, such as grammar, logic, or philosophy. It was common for a student to study one subject under one Pandit and then move to another teacher for further instruction in a different field.

Some of the most learned Pandits in Punjab, such as Pandit Kaka Ram of Ludhiana and Pandit Ram Lal of Amritsar, were known to teach a wide range of subjects, including all the major *Shastras* (scriptural texts) of Hinduism. However, it was rare for a single teacher to cover all subjects in one school. Instead, students would travel to learn from different Pandits, each specializing in a particular discipline.

The Pandits who ran these schools were typically Brahmins and saw their work as a religious duty. Many of them taught for free or for very little compensation, relying on the support of the community or gifts from students' families. These gifts were given during festivals or milestones in student's education, such as on completion of major text.

Despite the reverence for Pandits and their important role in society, many faced financial difficulties. The British annexation of Punjab and the resumption of rent-free lands that had previously supported these schools worsened their financial situation. In some cases, Pandits maintained their schools through personal sacrifices, relying on donations from wealthy patrons or religious endowments. However, these resources were limited, and many Pandits struggled to continue their teaching activities.

Female education in Punjab under Ranjit Singh's rule

In the times of Ranjit Singh, women's education in Punjab existed in a more traditional and informal structure. Though not widely formalized like men's education, female literacy and learning were prevalent in higher social classes and among certain communities. The education of women was home-based, with the primary aim of providing religious and moral instruction.

In many families, particularly among the higher castes of Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs, girls were taught basic literacy and religious knowledge by their mothers, fathers, or sometimes even by brothers. The emphasis was on religious education, which was seen as the most important preparation for a woman's role in the household. For instance, Muslim girls learned to recite and read the Quran, under the instruction of their mothers or other female relatives, such as widows who took it upon themselves to pass on this sacred knowledge. Hindu girls were educated in reading religious texts in the Nagri script, and Sikh girls were expected to learn to read the Granth Sahib.

The education of women was centered around their religious duties and household responsibilities. In Sikh households, women were expected to be able to read the sacred Granth Sahib, a key marker of their spiritual role within the family. Similarly, Muslim girls were taught not only to recite the Quran but also to understand and observe their religious obligations. This religious education encompassed a moral framework that women were expected to uphold and pass on to their children.

The structure of female education was informal and largely dependent on the family resources and commitment to religious teachings. The focus was less on academic subjects and more on preparing women for their domestic and spiritual roles. Women from more affluent families, particularly in cities like Lahore, had access to better resources, sometimes even having private tutors or small neighborhood schools led by educated women. In some cases, educated women from these families also took on the role of teachers within their communities and helped to educate other girls in basic literacy and religious texts.

Among the higher classes, especially in Muslim and Sikh families, literacy in Persian and Arabic also held value. Some women from these communities, particularly those from the frontier regions, were known to be proficient in Persian poetry and calligraphy, reflecting a certain level of intellectual engagement that extended beyond mere religious instruction. However, societal norms often dictated that these skills were kept private, especially for respectable women.

Despite the informal nature of education for women, there was an unspoken expectation that they would be literate enough to fulfill their religious duties and manage household affairs. Women were taught practical skills alongside literacy, such as cooking, sewing, and basic accounting, which were necessary for running a household efficiently. These skills were considered just as important as religious instruction, as they prepared women to manage family life and pass on knowledge to their children.

In Sikh tradition, education was inclusive, with women playing a vital role in the overall educational framework. The Amritsar Gyani Singh Sabha ensured that women had the right to participate in meetings and voice their opinions. This reflects the progressive nature of Sikh society in terms of gender equality. Literacy was not just encouraged but considered essential for all Sikhs, regardless of gender.

Women were expected to be educated in Gurmukhi, and this expectation extended across various social classes. Many Sikh carpenters, both men and women, were proficient in reading and writing in Gurmukhi, illustrating that education was not exclusive to the elite. The ability to read and write was considered a fundamental skill, ensuring that even those from working-class backgrounds had access to education and religious knowledge.

Sikh society also placed great importance on the safety and moral conduct of women, with a strong emphasis on their protection. A saying from the period of Sikh governance highlights this: "virgins could walk alone by day and night," showing the sense of security and moral integrity that prevailed during this time. This environment of safety and respect further supported the participation of women in education, reinforcing their role in both religious and social life.

Interestingly, the Punjab Administration Report for 1849-51 mentioned that female education was found in all parts of Punjab, and educated female students and teachers could be observed among Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims. Although the numbers were not

vast, the report considered it encouraging, as such a level of female education was not common in other parts of India at that time. This suggests that Punjab was ahead in promoting literacy for women across different communities and areas.

Impact of annexation on the education system of the Punjab

The annexation of Punjab by the British in 1849 led to a rapid decline in the indigenous education system of the region, which had flourished for centuries. Before British rule, Punjab had a vibrant network of schools that were integral to local communities and provided education in languages like Persian, Arabic, Sanskrit, and Gurmukhi. These schools were largely sustained by grants of rent-free land, which supported teachers and school operations. However, British policies severely disrupted this system. These policies stripped the indigenous schools of their financial foundations and contributed to their gradual disappearance.

A major turning point came with the British decision to resume these rent-free lands. The British colonial administration, in an effort to increase revenue and establish a more centralized governance structure, took back much of the land that had previously been granted to schools and religious institutions. This policy, known as the resumption of rent-free lands, had devastating effects on indigenous education. These lands had been a crucial source of income. It allowed schools to operate without charging fees and provided sustenance to teachers, many of whom were religious figures within their communities. Once these lands were reclaimed

by the British, schools lost their financial lifeline, leading to closures or drastic reductions in their capacity to function.

The British approach to education further compounded the decline of indigenous schools. The colonial government sought to impose a Western-style education system that prioritized subjects like English, arithmetic, and history, while sidelining traditional curricula. This was not just a shift in subject matter but a complete restructuring of how education was delivered. In indigenous schools, learning was often conducted on a one-to-one basis, and the curriculum was deeply tied to religious instruction or practical skills like account-keeping, especially in the case of Mahajani schools that served local traders. The new British system introduced standardized classes, modern subjects, and a stricter disciplinary framework, which alienated students and teachers who were accustomed to the more flexible and locally relevant education offered by indigenous schools.

In addition, the British administration offered little support to help indigenous schools adapt to these changes. While government-run and missionary schools received financial aid and grants, most indigenous schools were excluded from this support. Even those that tried to modernize by incorporating subjects like arithmetic or history into their curriculum found it difficult to compete with the better-funded government schools. The few indigenous schools that received aid were seen as inferior by the British, and their teachers lacked the formal training required to meet the standards of government inspections and examinations.

Another issue was the lack of formal training and support for teachers in indigenous schools. Many teachers were hereditary, often Brahmins or Mullahs, and their qualifications were typically based on their experience or religious standing rather than formal education. This was in stark contrast to the British system, where teacher training and qualifications were more systematically organized. Indigenous teachers, who had traditionally commanded respect in their communities, saw their influence and standing erode as their schools were sidelined by the government system.

The British annexation also brought about significant cultural and political changes that affected indigenous education. Many British officials, unfamiliar with or dismissive of local traditions, viewed indigenous education systems as outdated and irrelevant in the modern world. For instance, the Mahajani script, used in *Pathshalas* for account-keeping, was seen as archaic, and Persian, once the language of administration, lost its prominence as the British replaced it with English and Urdu. The British Educational Department, rather than integrating or improving the indigenous schools, worked to absorb or suppress them, thereby consolidating control over education and reducing the role of local, traditional institutions.

The decline of indigenous schools in Punjab was not just the result of economic policies like the resumption of rent-free lands, but also the cultural and political shifts imposed by British rule. The new education system, while offering some benefits in terms of modernization, failed to accommodate the local needs, traditions, and structures that had sustained education in Punjab for centuries.

The exclusion of indigenous schools from government aid, the undermining of traditional curricula, and the lack of support for local teachers all contributed to the gradual erosion of these schools. Without a more inclusive and flexible approach that respected local educational practices, the British system effectively marginalized and replaced a once-thriving network of indigenous schools, leaving many communities in rural Punjab without access to education tailored to their needs and traditions.

Conclusion

The education system in Punjab during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh offers lessons in indigenous learning, inclusivity, and the preservation of cultural identity through education. This chapter has explored the varied and decentralized educational practices that were prevalent under his rule. The chapter highlighted the close relationship between education, religion, and community. The key outcomes of this era include the importance of maintaining and nurturing local traditions, languages, and personalized systems of learning, which allowed education to be both accessible and relevant to the people of Punjab.

One of the most important takeaways from the education system under Ranjit Singh is the value of indigenous education. These schools—whether based in gurdwaras, mosques, or temples—were integral to the communities they served. They were not just places of learning but also centers of cultural preservation and moral instruction. The schools offered a broad range of subjects that went beyond religious education, including Persian, arithmetic,

astronomy, and philosophy, ensuring that students were equipped with both spiritual and practical knowledge. This system demonstrates how indigenous education, grounded in local customs and languages, can be highly effective in promoting intellectual and moral growth.

Ranjit Singh's approach to education highlights the benefits of a personalized learning system. Unlike the centralized, standardized models introduced by the British later on, the educational framework under Ranjit Singh allowed for flexibility. Schools operated independently and adapted their teaching to the needs and traditions of their communities. Teachers had close, personal relationships with their students, guiding them in both academic and moral matters. This personalization of education meant that students were not just recipients of knowledge but active participants in their intellectual and spiritual development. The connection between teacher and student cultivated mutual respect and responsibility which ensured a strong foundation for learning.

Inclusivity in education was another hallmark of Ranjit Singh's era. His reign created an environment where education was available to people of different faiths and social backgrounds. Schools were not restricted to any single religious group; Sikh, Hindu, and Muslim communities all had access to education. In particular, the role of female education, though informal, cannot be overlooked. While societal norms limited formal schooling for women, many girls were taught basic literacy and religious knowledge at home, especially within wealthier families. In Sikh communities, both boys and girls were educated in Gurmukhi, to show a progressive stance on gender

equality. This inclusivity ensured that education remained a communal asset rather than an elite privilege.

A critical factor contributing to the success of education during Ranjit Singh's rule was the respect for local traditions. Schools were strongly connected to the religious and cultural practices of their communities. Whether it was the Gurmukhi script for Sikhs, Persian for Muslims and Hindus aspiring to administrative roles, or Sanskrit for Hindu religious scholars, each educational institution preserved its unique linguistic and cultural heritage. This respect for tradition not only ensured the preservation of cultural identity but also made education more accessible and meaningful to the students. Education in the mother tongue played an essential role in this system, as it allowed students to engage with their learning in a language they were comfortable with, further enhancing comprehension and retention.

The introduction of British colonial education marked a shift from this personalized and inclusive system. By prioritizing English, modern subjects, and a centralized, Western-style curriculum, the British disregarded the local context in which education had thrived for centuries. Indigenous schools, which had relied on local support and endowments, were gradually replaced by missionary and government-run institutions that failed to accommodate the needs of the local population. The British system also imposed a more rigid structure, which stifled the flexibility and creativity that had characterized education under Singh's rule. This shift highlights the importance of understanding and integrating local educational

practices before introducing new systems, as a failure to do so can disrupt the existing cultural and intellectual fabric of a society.

The education system under Ranjit Singh's reign also reflects the interconnection between education and social mobility. Proficiency in languages like Persian, which was the administrative language, provided opportunities for individuals from various religious backgrounds to secure positions in government and commerce. Education was not just a tool for personal development but a means of improving one's social standing and gaining political influence. These dynamics underscore the role of education as a vehicle for social progress, which was later undermined by the British emphasis on producing a class of administrators loyal to the colonial state.

In the next chapter, we will explore the impact of education on the social life of Punjab during and after Ranjit Singh's reign. The educational institutions of this period influenced not only intellectual development but also social relations, gender roles, and community cohesion. Understanding how education shaped social life in Punjab provides key insights into the transformative power of learning and highlights the long-term effects of both indigenous and colonial education systems on social life in Punjab.

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Chapter 4: Features of Education System of Ranjit Singh

Introduction

Maharaja Ranjit Singh is remembered in many contexts in history, he remembered as the first local ruler in the history of Punjab. Many aspects of his style of governance are discussed. An important aspect of them is their education system. Before Maharaja Ranjit, attention was never given to making the common people literate, no one thought that there should be a curriculum that would make the common people able to read and write. It is considered an amazing achievement of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's reign that he focused on the literacy of the common people.

During the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Punjab became one of the most literate regions in the world. Another notable thing was that the literacy rate among women was much higher than that of men. It gradually increased during the reign of this Maharaja. The second thing was that special attention was paid to the education of common people. A center of basic education was established adjacent to every temple, mosque and Gurdwara and separate basic education centers were established for girls of Punjab and Punjab far surpassed other regions of the subcontinent in terms of basic education. Special attention was paid to girls' education in Punjab and separate secondary for girls Secondary and higher education institutions were opened. Unfortunately, this incident could not be investigated in this way in Pakistan. However, it is believed that

there must be evidence in the Punjab archives that can further verify this claim.

Among the evidences, the greatest testimony is the famous educationist G. D. B. Lanter's book, *Local Education System of Punjab*, in which he has given a detailed overview of the education system of Punjab. Gee, Dubelo. Lantern is believed to be the founder of two major institutions of Lahore, Punjab University and Government College Lahore. Apart from this, there are reports compiled about the educational situation of various districts of Punjab after the British occupation.

Some other books, interviews and some oral testimonies have been used to understand the educational situation in Punjab. This research provides a brief overview of the education and literacy system of Punjab during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh with the help of these available sources. However, one thing must be mentioned here that the educational policies of Maharaja Ranjit Singh can only be compared with other regions of the subcontinent. Industrial revolution was coming in Europe at that time, new inventions were being made. There, education became a necessity that led to employment opportunities, so comparisons with the agrarian and artisanal economy of Punjab would not be correct.

Political background of the Maharaja's period

Before the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Punjab had gone through a period of severe civil war. Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb Alamgir died at the beginning of the 18th century. After this death, the farmers of Punjab started a rebellion. This revolt was led by a Sikh

leader, Banda Bahadur Singh. After that till the beginning of the 19th century there was an atmosphere of severe civil war in Punjab. On the other hand, due to the attacks of Ahmad Shah Abdali from the north, there was also a severe test. The reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh was a period of political stability in Punjab. It is true that Maharaja Ranjit Singh was not able to read and write in any language. But he had the ability to speak and understand different languages, he had deep knowledge of different arts and cultures through oral tradition. He had a deep ability to understand the subtleties of people. He had a great understanding of state affairs and management, he was capable of making timely decisions on important economic, political issues, military strategy and the affairs of the empire. After consolidating his position, Ranjit Singh implemented administrative reforms. He did not discriminate on the basis of ethnic and religious affiliations in selecting El people in his administration.

Courtiers of Raja Ranjit Singh

Maharaja Ranjit Singh had not only done such a great work in the field of education in Punjab, but he had gathered a team of great advisors around him. Maharaja Ranjit Singh's court was full of talented people. There were not only local people in the court, but the European advisors of Maharaja Ranjit Singh also held an important position in the court. These Europeans were called to train his army. But he also advised the Maharaja on foreign affairs, judicial system and educational system. They included people like Jean-François Allard, Baptiste Ventura, Paolo d'Eutebelle and Claude August Court. Many of them had worked with Napoleon, the king

of France. No religious or linguistic affiliation was given preference for a place in the Maharajah's court, rather the individual's abilities and experience were taken into account. Muslims were also present in this court, in which three members of the Fakir family, Faqir Azizuddin, Faqir Nooruddin and Faqir Imamuddin are considered to be very close associates of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Hakeem Ghulam Mohiuddin, father of Faqir Syed Nooruddin, was an eminent physician and educationist of his time. His son Faqir Azizuddin was summoned to the Maharaja's court as a physician where the Maharaja was impressed by his proficiency in Persian, Arabic and English languages. The Maharaja gave him his first assignment as his diplomat. Due to Faqir Azizuddin's diplomacy, Maharaja Anjit Singh and Great Britain signed the Treaty of Amritsar in 1809. After that Faqir Azizuddin became the foreign minister of Amla Maharaja. On some occasions he also had to work as the Prime Minister. His elder brothers Faqir Syed Imam Din and Faqir Nuruddin were also given important responsibilities by the Maharaja. Faqir Syed Imamuddin was also in charge of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's treasury.

Apart from this, Ghous Khan and Elahi Bakhsh were important military commanders while Dhyan Singh Dogra was the Prime Minister. Gulab Singh Dogra was the Governor of Jammu and Kashmir. Sachit Singh and Hira Singh had important responsibilities. Dina Nath, Khushal Singh, Ganga Ram, Tej Singh, and Lal Singh were Hindu Brahmins in charge of the Punjab administration. Apart from them, Dewan Mukhak Chand, Moti Ram, Ram Dayal, Dewan Bhavanidas, Dewan Devi Das, and Dewan

Karamchan belonged to other caste Hindus. There were also Sikh chieftains like Lehna Singh, Hari Singh Nalwa and Sham Singh. Persian script was used in his court but Punjabi was spoken. Traditional Bikrami calendar of Punjab and Islamic Hijri calendar were used.

Economy of the Punjabi Empire

This amazing literacy drive for Maharaja Ranjit Singh was possible because during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the economy of Punjab was built on a very strong foundation. During the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the Punjabi Empire was a wealthy empire with a stable and strong revenue system. There was a big city like Lahore in Punjab. Punjab was a region with an agricultural economy and Punjabi handicrafts were highly prized. Punjab was a very prosperous region due to agricultural economy and handicrafts. Punjab was a big center of textile. After the establishment of the Punjabi Empire, special attention was paid to the economy of Punjab. The fertile lands of Punjab were extensively cultivated and this led to an increase in agricultural production. The empire also encouraged the expansion of industries such as metalworking, textiles and handicrafts, which added value to its economy.

Punjab production included a wide range of goods - among them fine cotton cloth, metalwork in iron and brass, copper, gold and silver. Swords and weapons made in the Punjab were very valuable; Copper and brass utensils and gold and silver ornaments made in Punjab were famous. But the most important industry was textile. The centers of the indigenous textile industry in Punjab were

Jalandhar, Ludhiana, Anbala, Hoshiarpur, Amritsar, Sialkot, Lahore, Gujarat and Rawalpindi - among these cities were Ghaza, Langi, Sasi/Sosi. Khes, salu kharva, chador, chauthi, dhoti, dasuti, chosi, pansi, a cotton, quilt, mattress, dari, turban, khadar and many other types were woven.

In the case of producing good cloth, the cost of preparation and labor was high. There were lakhs of khadis in different cities of Punjab. Due to which there was prosperity in Punjab. A major source of income for the Punjabi Empire was its location. Punjab was located on an important trade route. Other regions of the Indian subcontinent were connected to Afghanistan and the Middle East through the Punjabi Empire. This location enabled the empire to engage in lucrative trade as well as maintain good relations with its neighbors. The revenue of the Punjabi kingdom exceeded that of the established kingdom of the East India Company (1838-39), which collected about £1.85 million in revenue. While the English managed to collect 1.45 million pounds this year.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh's empire had more revenue than any other kingdom in the subcontinent. The Maharaja earmarked a certain portion of these revenues for education. The Maharaja was spending more money on education than the East India Company. This is said to be due to the instruction given by the Fifth Guru to the Sikhs that the Sikhs were to spend *dasundha* or tenth part of their income for charitable works. Because of this instruction from his Guru, Maharaja Ranjit Singh allocated one-tenth of the income of his kingdom to charitable works, most of which was spent on education.

Method of teaching common people before Maharaja's time

Punjab was an agrarian society where people connected with agricultural economy lived apart from artisans. Reading and writing had no special importance in the lives of these people. Therefore, there was no concept of common people reading and writing in Punjab. Before the Maharaja, common people had limited education, with every mosque, temple, gurdwara, boys were given religious education but they did not need to read and write, they only received oral education, and that was enough for them.

The pre-Maharaja Ranjit Singh education system in Punjab was highly decentralized, community-based, and deeply intertwined with religious practices. It was not a state-sponsored system but rather an organic network of traditional institutions catering to the educational needs of different religious and social communities.

Background to Maharaja's concept of education system

Maharaja Ranjit Singh wished that any person of the Sultanate could convey his complaint to him. There should be a system whereby every person in his kingdom could convey his message to the Maharaja in one way or another. Maharaja Ranjit Singh consulted his courtiers as to what strategy could be adopted that would make it possible for everyone in his kingdom to approach Maharaja Ranjit Singh directly with regard to any of their grievances. . This desire of the king was a strange desire for the courtiers. There was no concept of reading and writing for the common people in the subcontinent, so there was no answer to this question in the understanding of these

courtiers, but there were European advisers in the court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Where the process of industrial revolution was going on, reading and writing had become a necessity of the people. Also, he worked with Napoleon. Napoleon's educational reforms were known. Napoleon believed that through education, people's loyalty to the empire could be increased. These advisers suggested to Maharaja Ranjit Singh that if every person in his kingdom was literate, he could directly communicate with Maharaja Ranjit Singh through letters and convey his message not only to the Maharaja of the kingdom. A direct contact can be made with each individual, but also the love and loyalty of the people towards their Maharaja and the kingdom will increase. Ranjit Singh liked this proposal.

There was no common or formal form of teaching. Education was given on a need's basis. For instance, Persian was the official language and the language of literature and was essential to obtain an executive job that's why there were many schools in which Persian was taught on regular basis, 37.0 per cent learn Persian and Urdu, 41 percent Arabic, 8 per cent learn Nagri, 6.7 per cent learn Gurmukhi and 7 per cent learn Hindi or Nagri.¹¹ All these languages like Sanskrit, Arabic and Gurmukhi were keys to religious education and employment. These schools were open to all regardless of caste or creed.

It was a seemingly impossible task as the Maharaja had to build an education system from the ground up. Moreover, Maharaja Ranjit Singh himself had received little formal education as he chose the path of a warrior and a leader while still in his teens. The empire he founded lacked a tradition in learning and education was limited to

the royal class and the wealthy. The most prominent among the institutions that catered to these classes was the **Mian Wadde da Madrasa**, a traditional school attached to the Muslim of religious leader Mian Wadda in Lahore. Opened centuries before Sikh rule began, it was meant only for the sons of royals, aristocrats and the wealthy, and imparted a Quranic education.

Much of what we know of the Maharaja's educational reforms comes from the work of British scholar and traveler, Gottlieb Wilhelm Leitner, author of *History of Indigenous Education in the Punjab: Since Annexation and in 1882*. In his work, Leitner says there was no dearth of money to set up schools and other institutions of learning in Punjab. Leitner writes,

"Punjab has this tradition whereby the most unscrupulous chief, the avaricious money-lender, and even the freebooter, vied with the small land-owner in making peace with his conscience by founding schools and rewarding the learned. There is not a mosque, a temple, a dharmshala that had not a school attached to it."

Funding came even from royal families and the Maharaja's treasure. These grants were distributed to educational centres affiliated to various faiths across the empire. The Sikh rule was preceded by the centuries of Mughal rule in Punjab when the most famous schools set in the region were madrassas, where students of all faiths attained education. Thus, Ranjit Singh, despite being the Sikh ruler, didn't change the popular setting, and many of the early schools set up by him were madrassas, which already had been quite a popular

form of educational institutions in his reign. Ranjit Singh not only gave those generous donations, he even commissioned a few in Lahore.

Beginnings of a Secular Education

While the early institutions were largely religious, the Maharaja recognized the need to expose the people of Punjab to secular education and contemporary trends in the field learning. Leitner in his work says that along with languages and religion, the study of grammar, literature, philosophy, rhetoric, astronomy, law, logic, philosophy, arithmetic and geometry, all which could be termed as the secular education in the existing religious schools of the kingdom. However, he fails to provide the exact timeline of these developments.

At the end of his rule in the 1830s, Ranjit Singh took another leap forward and started to encourage the learning of English in the schools of Lahore, including the royal Mian Wadde da Madrasa, for which he hired a Christian teacher. Unlike the religious freedom enjoyed by Hindus and Muslims in schools run by their respective communities, the Christian teacher, whose faith was alien to the majority of masses was barred from promoting Christianity in any way.

Not only was education promoted in a big way in the Sikh Empire, but it also fired the imagination of the people, who were hungry to learn. The *Lahore District Report (1860)* says that on the eve of the colonial control of Punjab (1849-50), the capital city Lahore alone had 576 schools with 4,225 students on their rolls. It adds that in all of

Punjab, there were at least 3.3 lakh students “learning high-standard Oriental literature, Oriental law, logic, philosophy and medicine in Persian, Arabic and Sanskrit in various institutions”. Moreover, Lahore had 18 formal schools for girls besides specialist schools for technical training, languages, mathematics and logic affiliated to Hindu, Muslim and Sikh institutions.

Curriculum preparation

Ranjit Singh asked his advisors what is the best way to make all the people of his kingdom learn to read and write. These advisers advised Maharaja Ranjit Singh that a curriculum was needed for this. If an effective curriculum is developed that can be understood by common people, they can learn to read and write. And may be able to write to the Maharaja to inform him that he has learned to read and write. The Maharaja liked this advice and asked the advisers how such a curriculum could be prepared and what kind of person was needed for it. The Maharaja was told that a man who had mastered languages and had experience in teaching children would be successful for the job.

Source of education

During the reign of the Maharajas, the official language was Persian. During this period, there were Persian teaching institutes where those who aspired to government jobs could learn the language. It used to be a limited number. Majority of the people spoke Punjabi. Punjabi was written in two different scripts, Shahmukhi script and Gurmukhi script. Garmkhi was taught in Sikh gurdwaras while

Muslim scholars taught Punjabi in the Shahmukhi script. Maharaja Ranjit Singh was advised by his advisers not to bind the people to a single language or script. Rather, they should be given the option that people can learn to read and write in one of the languages either Persian or Punjabi as per their wish. They should be allowed to read and write in any of Garmkhi or Shahmukhi scripts. Maharaja Ranjit Singh liked this proposal and decided to implement it.

Faqir Nooruddin

The problem now was to develop a rule that would achieve all these objectives. In this regard, the services of a person who not only had full command of Persian and Punjabi but also mastered both the Punjabi scripts were required. Apart from this, he should also have teaching experience. Fortunately, there was such a person in the Maharaja's court, who was his closest associate and the younger brother of Foreign Minister Faqir Azizuddin, who was the Governor of Lahore at that time. Maharaja Ranjit Singh charged Faqir Noor-ud-Din with the task of preparing a rule that would fulfill all these objectives. Faqir Syed Nooruddin was chosen because he had deep experience in teaching and his family was running a Madrasa at Takiya Ghulam Shah near Bhati Door. Faqir Syed Nooruddin was working as a teacher in this seminary. Apart from Persian, he was equally proficient in both the Punjabi scripts, Shah Mukhi and Garmkhi.

Qaida Noor

Faqir Syed Nooruddin laid down a rule for the literacy of the common people. This rule was named Qaida Noor. Noor was used in the sense of light. The purpose of which was to spread light in Punjab. This Qaida Noor originally consisted of four parts. In one part, the Persian alphabet was taught and simple sentences were taught. The second part introduced the identification of the Garmikhi alphabet and taught how to make simple sentences in the Garmikhi script. In the third part, the alphabet of the Shahmukhi script was identified and simple sentences were taught. It was up to the reader to learn to read and write in one of these three scripts. The fourth part consisted of a basic course in day-to-day accounting. By this rule one would acquire the skill of reading and writing in either Punjabi or Persian along with daily arithmetic. He became so proficient in writing in any language and in any script that he could write to Maharaja Ranjit Singh and inform him. That he has learned to read and write.

Literacy method

Maharaja Ranjit Singh, after establishing the Qaida Noor for Literacy, asked his advisors to prepare a program through which the people of Punjab could be educated and written through this rule. Maharaja Ranjit Singh's advisors were of the opinion that the literacy program could not succeed unless the administrative force of the Sultanate was effectively involved at the grassroots level. At that time, a numberdar was considered an important post at the lower level. Without the effective and active involvement of these

numberers, the literacy program cannot be made successful. These consultants also opined that the effective and active participation of numberdars is only possible if their employment is made conditional on this achievement. The Maharaja found these suggestions feasible. Maharaja Ranjit Singh decided to conduct a literacy campaign among the people through these numberdars. An elaborate program was drawn up in this regard to make full use of the influence of Numdar.

The biggest thing was that Maharaja Ranjit Singh made it a mandatory law that to become a new numberdar it is necessary that the desired person can read and write. Along with this, Maharaja Ranjit Singh also made it a law that already serving Numdars could continue in their post only if they learned to read and write within a given period. In addition, it will be mandatory for each numberdar to arrange for reading and writing of five people from his area. Those who fail to do so will be removed from office. So about 5000 copies of the booklet were produced and distributed to numberdars all over Punjab.

Every Numdar was required to learn to read and write in one of the languages of Persian or Punjabi in three months from a teacher in the village according to his convenience, along with basic arithmetic. When the Numberdar had learned to read and write and calculate, he should prepare five copies of this Qaida Noor and he should select five people from his area and distribute these five copies among them so that they also learn to read and write. Every numberdar was required to personally write a letter to Maharaja Ranjit Singh, in which he wrote to the Raja that he had learned to

read and write in Shahmukhi or Garmkhi script of Persian or Punjabi through this rule and that he has distributed five copies of Qaida Noor to five selected people of the village. The names of these five people have also been given in this letter, there was no distinction between women and men or any religion or race. Those who receive this Qaida from the Numberdar should also learn it within three months and they should also write a personal letter to the Maharaja and tell them that they had received this Qaida Noor from the Numberdar through which they had learned Persian or Shah Mukhi from such and such a servant. He has learned to read and write and calculate in one of the garmkhis, now he has prepared five more copies of it from the numberdar and has given these copies to such and such five servants. Through this rule, such and such servants will teach these servants to read and write in that language or script and do basic calculations.

Thus, the people of Punjab began to read and write through this rule and in this way a chain process started to inform Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Initially, many numberdars did not take the exercise seriously and failed to send letters to the Maharaja. These people violated the mandatory law made by Maharaja Ranjit Singh that it is necessary to read, write and calculate according to Qaida Noor in order to maintain numeracy, so these numeracies were removed from their posts to set an example for others.

Table 4.1 Qaida Noor Educational method

Step	Details
1. Initiation	Maharaja Ranjit Singh initiates a literacy campaign for rural Punjab.
2. Design of Qaida Noor	Fakir Syed Nur-ud-Din creates the Qaida Noor booklet with basic alphabets (Gurmukhi, Shahmukhi, Urdu, Persian) and elementary math.
3. Initial Distribution	Around 5,000 copies of Qaida Noor are printed and distributed to numberdars (village heads).
4. Numberdars Learning	Each numberdar is instructed to learn the Qaida Noor within three months .
5. Numberdars Distribution	Each numberdar distributes 5 copies of the Qaida Noor to five villagers in their area.
6. Reporting to Maharaja	Numberdars write a letter to Maharaja Ranjit Singh, confirming their learning and distribution.
7. Villagers' Learning	The five villagers who receive the booklet learn its contents and further distribute 5 copies each.

<p>8. Multiplicative Spread</p>	<p>The process continues in a chain reaction, spreading literacy exponentially across the region.</p>
<p>9. Enforcement</p>	<p>Numberdars who fail to comply are removed from their positions as a deterrent to others.</p>

Sources: Mufti Ghulam Server, *Tarikh e Makhzan e Punjab*.(n.p: Munshi Nok Shor Man, 1859),

Singh, K., & Singh, K. (2009). *Ranjit Singh*. Penguin Books India.

Griffin, L. H. (1892). *Ranjit Singh* (Vol. 18). Clarendon Press.

Participation of women in literacy campaign

Maharaja Ranjit Singh's personal interest and constant supervision had brought this practice to every village in the Punjab. But the campaign was more successful when women joined it. This method of literacy became more popular among women than men and a large number of women in Punjab became literate through this process. A major reason for the success of this method among women was that there was a traditional system of education for women. During this period, girls were not sent to any educational institution for education. In every village and neighborhood, there was a woman who made arrangements for the education and training of girls on her own. She used to arrange as much education as she could within her circumstances and resources. Before Qaida Noor, this education was given orally. No regular payment was taken from the girls for this education, but it was all done free of charge, along with this education, the children were also taught all

the household chores. But the girls used to do many of these women's jobs willingly in exchange for this education. Girls used to come to study at two times. These girls also learned to clean the house and do all the work. . These girls used to knead the dough and cook vegetables. She used to learn to cook. These girls also learned to wash clothes. They were also trained in sewing and embroidery, this was the tradition of that time. These women used to teach their own religious book but it was all taught orally.

The literacy campaign gained momentum when these women joined the campaign. After Qaida Noor, when the numberdars became stricter, one of the numberdars started teaching a woman of her house. After reading and writing, this woman chose these five women. Who used to teach girls in her home. It was possible for them to teach their home-schooled girls to read and write in addition to their oral religious education. This experiment was successful. Not only was it easy for these women to teach five girls to write, it was also easy for them That they take this series to the second stage. And involve more women and girls in the literacy process. When the news of this success reached the neighboring villages, this model was adopted in other villages and a wave of literacy was created among the women. When Maharaja Ranjit Singh was informed of this success, he declared Qaida Noor as a must for every woman. Maharaja Ranjit Singh made it a law that women who educate girls in their areas must learn to read and write through Qaida Noor and then through this rule all girls who come to their homes are taught to read and write. give This process led to an amazing increase in women's literacy in Punjab

Primary Education Centers

These literacy efforts during the Maharaja's era led to the concept of imparting elementary education to common boys and girls. It was an ancient custom in Punjab that children were given oral religious education in every mosque, temple and gurdwara. When the literacy of girls increased, during this time an idea arose in the mind of a numberdar to involve religious education in mosques, temples and gurdwaras in this campaign. The experiment was successful. Every numberdar was worried about saving his job so when he heard about this experience, every numberdar adopted this method and the temple in his own area. The mosque and started teaching Qaida Noor to the religious figure associated with the Gurdwara. It was possible for these religious teachers to continue this line. When he started teaching children through Qaida Noor, a system of basic literacy education for children was established with every temple, gurdwara and mosque in Punjab. At that time, no such system of primary schooling existed in any part of the subcontinent. There was no such concept here but in Europe this concept was there. When Maharaja Ranjit Singh was informed of this success, Maharaja Ranjit Singh consulted his European advisers as to how this method could be successfully carried out by these advisers. Opined that all these centers can be termed as primary education centers. As centers for girls are already functioning, legal ban can be imposed on all these centers This advice was accepted by Maharaja Ranjit Singh and made it a law that every mosque, temple, monastery, dharamshala and gurdwara should teach children to read, write and calculate through Qaida Noor.

With the implementation of this law, every temple, mosque, gurdwara became a formal center of primary education. It was the first time in Punjab that in every neighborhood, village or area where there was a mosque, temple or gurdwara, there was a formal arrangement for children to learn reading, writing and arithmetic in addition to basic religious education. In this way, separate primary education centers for girls and boys were established all over Punjab and it became possible for every boy and girl in Punjab to get primary education.

On the one hand, temporary adult education centers were functioning in Punjab where adults were being taught to read and write. So on the other hand, a center of elementary education was established with every mosque, temple and gurdwara. Maharaja Ranjit Singh fully supported these educational institutions and created an efficient system for their maintenance.

In this way, four thousand educational institutions had been established in Punjab. Where millions of students were studying. All these schools were attached to Gurdwaras, Masjids and Temples and provided free primary education to children in these institutions. The great center of all these educational activities was Lahore where there were a large number of schools, students and teachers which is mentioned in the administrative report of Punjab. During 1849-50 and 1850-51, there were 576 schools in Lahore alone. 4,225 students were studying in these institutions. Apart from Lahore, schools were also established in other cities and areas of Punjab. A certain proportion of students were admitted in a school. Leitner mentioned in the Settlement Report of 1852. that there was one school for every 1,965 students in Hoshiarpur district. Education was almost free throughout the Punjab.

Table 4.2 Categories of Schools

Category	School Type	Primary Language	Primary Students	Purpose
Maktab	Persian Schools	Persian	Muslims	General education, open to all sects
Madrasah	Arabic Schools	Arabic	Muslims	Religious and secular education from primary to higher levels
Patshala	Sanskrit Schools	Sanskrit	Hindus	Religious and cultural education, open to all sects
Gurmukhi Schools	Gurmukhi Schools	Gurmukhi	Sikhs	Language and

				cultural education specific to Sikhism
Mahajani	Trading Schools	Local dialects	Trading community	Commerce and trade education, focusing on business skills

Sources: Lafont, Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Lord of the Five Rivers, 76.

Moulana Iltaf Hussain Hali, Hayat e Javaid, (n.p: National Book House, 1986),38

Mufti Ghulam Server, Tarikh e Makhzan e Punjab.(n.p: Munshi Nok Shor Man, 1859), 216.

H.R. Mehta, History of the Growth of the Western education in Punjab (n.p: Vintage Books,1996),6. Server,218.

The phenomenon of state-in-person carries the contradiction of the Sikh society and the Punjabi culture. Some aspects of Maharaja Ranjit Singh approach towards the languages or texts.

Lafont, Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Lord of the Five Rivers,76.

School management: When these centers of basic education were established in every village and every neighborhood of the city of Punjab, it was necessary to create a series of management and system to run them. Maharaja created a whole system for these schools. Local people were fully involved in the management of these

schools. The landowners and moneylenders of the area used to contribute to expenses of school.

Institute teachers: In these schools' teachers were paid in different forms, the most common being in kind. Some teachers also received a "daily" ration. In this context, special mention is made of Sialkot where the local landlords also provided them with daily rations which included meat, fruits and vegetables etc.

The classroom: Special attention was paid to the number of students in these centers of basic education. The number of students in each class was not more than 50. To ensure the implementation of this restriction, the responsibility was given to the area numberdar. That he should regularly monitor these centers of basic education established in his area and it was his responsibility to take special care of the number of children.

Baked bread rule: Because of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's literacy efforts, others also tried to make rules in Punjabi. Among them, a unique effort was that of Maulvi Ghulam Rasool, he prepared Pucci Rotti Qaida in simple Punjabi for the religious education of Muslims.

Maulvi Ghulam Rasool: The story of Maulvi Ghulam Rasool is interesting. Maulvi Ghulam Rasool was born in Qila Mihan Singh, a village in Sheikhpura district. Maulvi Ghulam Rasool was a famous Punjabi poet, writer and religious scholar. Maulvi Ghulam Rasool had pledged allegiance to Syed Ahmad Bareilvi against Maharaja Ranjit Singh and participated in the regular war, but after the defeat of Syed Ahmad Bareilvi, he came to Lahore, where Maharaja Ranjit Singh left no stone unturned in honoring him.

Preparation of Baked Roti Qaida

The success of Qaida Noor gave Maulvi Ghulam Rasool the idea of developing a simple Qaida for religious education. For this he compiled a rule in the Punjabi language called Pakki Roti which proved to be very successful. It provided religious information in very simple Punjabi. The cooked bread rule has been included in the curriculum in all primary education centers for Muslim boys and girls in Punjab. It was written in Shahmukhi script of Punjabi.

Popularity of Punjabi language and Shahmukhi script

Before this stream of literacy, there was no program to teach Punjabi writing among the common people. In Gurdwaras only those Sikhs who wanted to become religious scholars were taught Gurmakhi. But this literacy program on the one hand strengthened Punjabi as a language of reading and writing, on the other hand, in this campaign, Muslims had the option to read and write Punjabi in the Shahmukhi script, which not only the drive to read and write the Shahmukhi script among the Muslims gained strength, but Hindus and Sikhs also became interested in learning the Shahmukhi script.

Because even before that, Sikhs and Hindus who had to take government jobs used to learn Persian language. There used to be some Hindu or Sikh elder in the family or region who had learned a little Persian language. The script of Persian language was similar to Shahmukhi, so this script was not completely alien to Hindus and Sikhs. Another reason was that most of the words of Punjabi poets were written in Shahmukhi script. People who learned to read and

write Punjabi tried to read Punjabi poets. Hence Shahmukhi script gained more popularity

The most literate region of the subcontinent

Due to this literacy campaign, Punjab became one of the most literate regions not only in the subcontinent but also in the world. This was amazing for the time. In Europe, the industrial revolution was coming, literacy and education had become a necessity, so the spread of literacy and education was a necessity. But on the contrary, Punjab was an agricultural society where industrial work was being done at the craft level, so, literacy and education were not needed. There was no such tradition regarding literacy and education of the common people in the subcontinent. For this he wanted to build his empire on such strong foundations that could stop the advance of the British. For this, Maharaja Ranjit Singh had prepared a strong army, in the preparation of this army he took help from the experts of the French army who had worked with Napoleon. Although we do not have direct evidence to confirm our claim, it seems that it was these European experts who gave suggestions to Maharaja Ranjit Singh to increase literacy and improve the quality of education in the empire. So that his state can be built on a strong foundation. A close bond and loyalty to Maharaja Ranjit Singh developed among the common people. From Maharaja Ranjit Singh's educational reforms, one often thinks of Napoleon's educational reforms. Perhaps Maharaja Ranjit Singh also wanted to strengthen and strengthen the connection between the ruler and the common people through education.

Table 4.3 Social and Religious Impact of Education System in Punjab

Aspect	Social Impact	Religious Impact
Cultural Preservation	Education in <i>pathshalas, madrasas,</i> and <i>gurdwaras</i> preserved cultural traditions and values of each community. Sanskrit, Persian, and Arabic languages were preserved.	Religious literature and teachings reinforced religious beliefs and practices among Sikhs, Hindus, and Muslims. Encouraged the study of Sikh, Hindu, and Islamic scriptures to ensure religious continuity.
Social Harmony	Maharaja Ranjit Singh's secular policy promoted intercommunal respect and minimized religious tensions. Cross-cultural respect grew as education	Institutions were allowed to operate freely, fostering a tolerant religious environment. Different religious communities could educate their members without interference,

	promoted moral principles among different communities.	leading to a pluralistic society.
Access to Knowledge	Education was for all communities of Punjab. Knowledge was primarily accessible to males and female.	Religious education strengthened religious identities, with each group deepening its understanding of faith. Encouraged loyalty to religious communities and their teachings.
Moral and Ethical Values	Education systems emphasized ethical conduct, promoting honest and moral behavior aligned with cultural norms. Teachers (gurus, maulvis, pandits)	Religious teachings established values such as compassion, respect, and charity, which influenced moral behavior.

	were respected figures in society.	
Administrative Preparation	Knowledge of Persian and mathematics prepared individuals for roles in administration and trade, supporting societal stability.	Islamic law (taught in madrasas) and Hindu ethics (from pathshalas) reinforced community-specific norms. Strengthened the role of religious institutions in governance and community life.
Encouragement of Secularism	Maharaja Ranjit Singh's sponsorship of all religious organizations promoted secularism and cultural harmony. Education promoted unity among religious groups.	The state's secular approach allowed religious teachings to flourish, fostering a society where diverse religious traditions were respected and preserved.

Sources: Lafont, Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Lord of the Five Rivers,
 Moulana Iltaf Hussain Hali, Hayat e Javaid, (n.p: National Book
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Conclusion

After analyzing the whole education system ,the important features
 were the social harmony through the methodology of education. This
 harmony was a unique outcome of education. Another important
 feature was the response and reaction by the Britishers. The coming
 years experienced the introduction of new methodology of education
 for the people of sub-continent. Punjab was not the exemption.

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Chapter 5: An Assessment of Ranjit Singh

Education System

Introduction

In the 38 years of his rule, Maharaja Ranjit Singh created a robust education system in Punjab but after his death in 1839, the fate of Punjab changed forever. Ranjit Singh's successors were deposed and killed in quick succession due to several assassination plots carried out by the ambitious ministers, and also due to the internal dissatisfaction by the members of the royal family with each other. This led to a period of great instability. It was the chance the British East India Company was waiting for and it took control of the empire's territories, assimilating them with the colonial territories after winning the two decisive Anglo-Sikh Wars concluded in 1849.

It was a death blow to the fabulous system of learning founded by Ranjit Singh. The new British government wanted to focus on a secular and modern system of education and did not allow classic languages: Persian and Sanskrit to be taught in Punjab's schools. These were replaced with Urdu and English as the medium of instruction. The new political dispensation also halted all funding to traditional, religious schools. They called their teachings unscientific and claimed they were spreading old and outdated ways of thinking. Grants-in-aid was henceforth given only to schools and colleges run by European managements.

The quaint but effective *Qaida* system was also crushed. Government officials confiscated the few *Qaidas* they could find;

most of them had been hidden away by the people of Punjab in their homes, in memory of their late king and lost kingdom. The rest was brutally wrenched from families during the Revolt of 1857, and burnt by the government, thus bringing the golden era of educational growth in Punjab to an end. In the following decades of the 19th century, a new model of education was introduced in Punjab under the British. Critics say that although it produced many educated geniuses, education among the masses declined because the new system was out of the common man's reach. Even as regions like the Bengal Presidency were making strides in education, Punjab was mourning its rich but forgotten legacy.

The first English school in Punjab was established in Lahore only a few months after the British took control of the Sikh Empire in March 1849. They allowed two American Presbyterian missionaries, Reverends John Newton and Charles Forman, to set it up in Lahore in December of the same year.

Decision to ban Qaida Noor

After the War of Independence in 1857, the East India Company was replaced by British rule. In the War of Independence, there was great resistance in Punjab. When the strong resistance of the people of Punjab was analyzed, it was concluded that the increased literacy in Punjab by the Qaida Noor had bound the Punjabis to a center over which they loved their empire and were loyal to it. Therefore, it is necessary to ban Qaida Noor. The literacy program should be abolished. Basic education centers should be abolished. The new British also stopped all funding for traditional schools and literacy

programs. The East India Company and later the British government banned Qaida Noor During the War of Independence in 1857, British soldiers announced the submission of Qaida Noor to people throughout Punjab. For this, on the one hand, the British government created an atmosphere of fear and on the other hand, they also gave financial incentives. Those who did not submit, on being informed, Qaida Noor was taken away from these families. All copies of it were burned, Wilhelm Leitner, formerly Professor of Arabic and Islamic Law at King's College, London, was also instrumental in founding the Government College and Punjab University.

In 1882, Leitner published his detailed report titled History of Native Education in the Punjab: In which he lamented the death of traditional, native education in the Punjab. He told how great literacy system was established in Punjab and how this work was ended.

The tradition of Punjabi literacy

This literacy system of Maharaja Ranjit Singh was a very effective system. Despite the decision to ban Qaida Noor, Punjabi literacy continued in Punjab. Evidence of this can be found from the Punjabi books printed in Punjab. Tales and stories in Punjabi language were prepared almost daily which were sold by hawkers in cities and villages. Common people, especially women, used to read these stories with great interest. This series continued for several decades even after the establishment of Pakistan. It was the tradition established by Qaida Noor that maintained the tradition of Punjabi literacy for a century even after Qaida Noor. Despite the ban on

Qaida Noor, teaching of Punjabi literacy continued in mosques through baked bread, while women continued to teach girls through baked bread at home.

The tradition of Punjabi literacy in Punjab is evidenced by many things. An important thing among them is the continuity of Punjabi poets and storytellers. After the advent of the press, the publication of books by Punjabi poets began and in the late nineteenth century, a poet like Mian Muhammad Bakhsh was born, who gained unprecedented popularity in Punjab. . The birth of such a great poet and gaining so much popularity is proof that Punjabi literacy continued Mr. Javed Iqbal has also written in Zinda Rood that newspapers were not so common in those times. Stories were published in Punjabi and women read them with great interest. These stories were sold by hawkers in the main squares of the city. Allama Iqbal used to buy these stories in his boyhood and would go home and read them with great pleasure.

Secondary and Higher Education System

Secondary education and higher education existed in Punjab before the reign of the Maharaja, but this education was confined to a few large cities, where only a limited number could get education. Apart from this, elite families used to arrange home teachers for their children. Secondary and higher education in Punjab was restricted to certain sections of the elite. Even among the aristocracy, many people were not interested in it.

Curriculum of Institutions

The traditional purpose of these institutions was to train scholars of their respective religions or Mahajani schools were to train the children of their community in accounting and prepare them for trade. Therefore, the curriculum of these institutions was limited to the books of their respective religions and their religious languages. However, during the reign of Akbar in the subcontinent, the curriculum of these institutions was reviewed and some sciences were added to it.

Educational reforms of Akbar's time

Before Maharaja Ranjit Singh, secondary and higher education in Punjab was reserved for the elite and rich people, so there were limited educational institutions in the big cities, mostly Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian were taught. Books were read or recited. However, it used to be a religious curriculum. During the reign of Akbar, an educationist Fathullah Shirazi came to India. Fathullah Shirazi advised Akbar to include other sciences in the curriculum of educational institutions besides religious books So that not only religious scholars are prepared from these institutions, but experts in other sciences are also available. Therefore, he assigned the duty to Fathullah Shirazi to identify the sciences that should be taught in these institutions. On the advice of Fathullah Shirazi, these educational institutions were reformed during the reign of Akbar. In Ayin Akbari, Abul Fazl has given a list of topics and subjects of this curriculum Which was given to these educational institutions to arrange education and teaching on these topics as well. Books and

religious languages of their respective religions were already being taught in these institutions along with ethics, history, politics, and accounting. Some higher studies in mathematics, agriculture, engineering, astronomy, home affairs, logic, philosophy and medicine were part of the curriculum. Fathullah Shirazi was an expert in mechanics. During the reign of Akbar, mechanical sciences were specially made a part of the curriculum. Geometry, economics, grammar, law, physics and geography were included in the curriculum.

Educational Institutions of Punjab

During the time of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, there were several institutions of secondary and higher education in Punjab, which were run by Hindu, Muslim and Sikh religious institutions. Some of these institutions were so famous that boys from other areas also came to study there. Lahore was a great center of these educational activities. Here the best educational institutions of the subcontinent were doing their work. Many educational institutions of Hindus and Muslims maintained their reputation here while many famous educational institutions of Sikhs were located in Amritsar.

Before Maharaja Ranjit Singh, there was a system of secondary and higher education in Punjab in which educational institutions were run on religious basis. But ethnic and religious hatred did not grow because of these separate institutions, rather it was a general part of Punjab's culture, which was normal. Even when the modern schooling system came after the British, the Muslims formed their own institutions like Anjuman Sahak Islam, Arya Samaj among the

Hindus and Bhai Singh Sabha among the Sikhs who made efforts to promote education among their co-religionists. When Maharaja Ranjit Singh advised his advisors in this regard, his European advisors believed that for the strength and stability of the empire, it was necessary that all members of the elite of the empire and their children should have secondary and higher education. All officials of the Sultanate must have at least some secondary educations. For the stability and strength of the empire, the administrative machinery must be literate. Maharaja Ranjit Singh encouraged Punjabi elites of all religions to give secondary and higher education to their children. For this many new schools were established in Lahore and Amritsar.

During this period common people did not have access to secondary and higher education. They did not feel the need for this kind of education in their work and employment, but the Maharaja provided maximum opportunities for the children of the elite to get secondary and higher education. Maharaja Ranjit Singh's empire had more revenue than any other kingdom in the subcontinent. The Maharaja earmarked a certain portion of these revenues for education. The Maharaja was spending more money on education than the East India Company.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh made generous donations to Madrasas and Pathshalas. Apart from the Maharaja, other members of his family and other nobles associated with the court also participated in the patronage of secondary and higher schools. Thus, various educational works were started in Punjab for secondary and higher education which were fulfilling the requirements of different

educational needs. During the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the following educational centers were established in Punjab for secondary and higher education.

Table 5.1 Comparison of education system in Punjab

Aspect	Under Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1801-1839)	Under British East India Company (Post-1849)
Educational Philosophy	Emphasis on grassroots learning and practical literacy for all.	Focus on secular, Western-style education prioritizing English.
Medium of Instruction	Multilingual: Gurmukhi, Shahmukhi, Urdu, and Persian.	Replaced with Urdu and English as the primary languages.
Key Educational Initiative	Qaida Noor system for basic literacy distributed to village heads and villagers.	Western-style schools focusing on English language and subjects like science, mathematics, and Western literature
Scope and Reach	Widespread, accessible to common	Limited access, mostly urban-based; higher education out

	people, including rural areas.	of reach for rural masses.
Funding and Support	Government-funded traditional schools, religious institutions (pathshalas, maktabas).	Funding stopped for traditional schools; grants-in-aid only to European-managed institutions.
Languages Taught	Persian, Sanskrit, Punjabi, and Urdu.	Persian and Sanskrit banned; focus shifted to English and Urdu.
Impact on Indigenous Systems	Indigenous knowledge systems were preserved and promoted.	Traditional schools and the Qaida system were suppressed; materials confiscated and destroyed.
Establishment of English Schools	No formal Western-style English schools; focus on local learning systems.	First English school established in Lahore (December 1849) by American missionaries, John Newton and Charles Forman.
Educational Access	Broad access due to community-based	Education became more exclusive,

	learning models like Qaida Noor.	focusing on creating an English-educated elite.
Criticism of Educational Change	N/A (System was homegrown and adapted to local needs).	New system seen as alien and out of reach for common people, causing a decline in mass literacy.
Overall Impact	Widespread literacy and cultural education throughout Punjab.	Decline in traditional learning; growth of an elite, English-educated class, but reduced educational access for the rural population.

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Educational Institutions of Punjab

During the time of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, there were several institutions of secondary and higher education in Punjab, which were run by Hindu, Muslim and Sikh religious institutions. Some of these institutions were so famous that boys from other areas also came to study there. Lahore was a great center of these educational activities. Here the best educational institutions of the subcontinent were doing their work. Many educational institutions of Hindus and Muslims maintained their reputation and reputation here while many famous educational institutions of Sikhs were located in Amritsar. Even before Maharaja Ranjit Singh, there was a system of secondary and higher education in Punjab in which educational institutions were run on religious basis. But ethnic and religious hatred did not grow because of these separate institutions; rather it was a general part of Punjab's culture. And this was considered normal. Even when the modern schooling system came after the British, the Muslims formed their own institutions like Anjuman Sahak Islam, Arya Samaj among the Hindus and Bhai Singh Sabha among the Sikhs who made efforts to promote education among their co-religionists. When Maharaja Ranjit Singh advised his

advisors in this regard, his European advisors believed that for the strength and stability of the empire, it was necessary that all members of the elite of the empire and their children should have secondary and higher education. All officials of the Sultanate must have at least secondary education. For the stability and strength of the empire, the administrative machinery must be literate. Maharaja Ranjit Singh encouraged Punjabi elites of all religions to give secondary and higher education to their children. For this many new schools were established in Lahore and Amritsar.

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Maharaja Ranjit Singh made generous donations to Madrasas and Pathshalas. Apart from the Maharaja, other members of his family and other nobles associated with the court also participated in the patronage of secondary and higher schools. Thus, various educational works were started in Punjab for secondary and higher education which were fulfilling the requirements of different educational needs. During the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the following educational centers were established in Punjab for secondary and higher education.

Ranking of local schools

At the time of the Maharaja, separate schools of each religion were established in Punjab, these schools were divided into the following categories. School was the official language in the subcontinent from the time of the Muslim Sultans. To get any official job in the empire, it was necessary to know Persian language, that is why there were many schools in Lahore and other big cities where Persian was taught regularly, they were called maktab. A person belonging to any religion could study Persian in these institutions. 37.0% students were learning Persian during Maharaja's era. . Although the Maktab schools were run by Muslims, not only Muslims studied in these institutions, but Hindus and Sikhs also studied in these institutions. Religious education was not imparted in these institutions, but people were trained to master the Persian language. Mostly boys studied here but no age was prohibited. One could enroll in a school for Persian language.

Madrasas

With the arrival of the Muslims in the subcontinent, a system of Islamic and Arabic Madrasas was formed. Where Muslims were given advanced education in Arabic language and Islamic studies. Arabic was the religious language of Muslims and proficiency in Arabic was necessary to obtain employment in Muslim religious institutions. During the era of Maharaja, there was no prejudice against Muslims, this can be proved by the number of Muslim students in these institutions. During the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, 41 percent of students were learning Arabic. There were good

madrassas along with some mosques and monasteries in big cities in many of these madrasas, the Dars Nizami curriculum compiled by Mulla Nizamuddin was applied, which was organized during the reign of Emperor Aurangzeb Alamgir. Farangi Mahal was an Islamic seminary established in Lucknow where this curriculum was taught for the first time. Farangi Mahal was five buildings built by Dutch or French traders that were confiscated by Emperor Aurangzeb and given to Mulla Nizam's father. A great seminary of Islamic studies was built here for which Mullanazam prepared a complete curriculum. It was modeled on the Madrasa Nizamiyyah of Baghdad and its curriculum was also modeled on the Madrasa Nizamiyyah. Although Islamic studies were taught in the madrassa, which was attended only by Muslim students, the madrassa also had Arabic language classes in which people of any religion could enroll to learn Arabic.

Famous Muslim Schools of Lahore:

There were many madrassas established in Punjab and they were very famous for their academic reputation. Mufti Ghulam Sarwar has recorded the details of some famous Muslim institutions among these institutions in his book Makhzan Punjab. Some of these important institutions are detailed below.

Madrasah of Mianwade

The most prominent was the Madrasa of Mian Wade, a traditional school attached to the shrine of the religious saint Mian Wade in Lahore. This madrasa was established centuries before the beginning of the Sikh rule, till the time of the Maharaja it was reserved only for

the noble families and the sons of the rich and the Quranic education was given in this madrasa. Wade Mian's school in Lahore was as big as the college and this seminary was very famous. A very high standard of education was imparted here and Maharaja Ranjit's government fully supported it. Students from Iran, Afghanistan and Arabia used to come here for higher education. This magnificent house is situated one mile south of Bagh Shalamar. This magnificent seminary was built by Sheikh Muhammad Ismail, the famous Mian Wada, in the Akbar era, and he continued to teach the Holy Qur'an in it. However, Sheikh Muhammad Ismail is different from other scholars of religion because he did not come from outside. Pothu was born in the house of Fathullah, a respected man of the Khokhar tribe, in a village Tadgaran in the Har area.

Moran Wali Government Madrasas

Moran Wali Sarkar was the beloved wife of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The Moran Wali government had great interest in the promotion of education and other welfare works. Maharaja's wife Moran Wali Sarkar established two madrasas in Lahore. The first madrasa was adjacent to her mansion, this mansion was located in the Papar Mandi area next to Fasail Shahr. Along with her mansion, Moranwali Rani had not only built a mosque but also established a madrasa attached to it. This seminary was run by a famous religious scholar of that time Maulvi Ghulam Rasool. Although his mansion no longer exists, a modest girls' training school still runs on the mosque's premises. The second madrasa built by her was attached to the shrine of the 16th century Sufi saint Madhav Lal Hussain in Baghbanpura, Lahore.

Madrasah of Maulvi Jan Muhammad

Maulana Jan Muhammad was born in 1779 in the city of Sialkot. Maulana Jan Muhammad left Sialkot and came to Lahore. Maulana Jan Muhammad became engaged in lecturing in a mosque (Noor Muhammad Imanwala) in Kashmiri Bazaar in Lahore. He had established a madrassa with this mosque. It was known as an excellent Madrasah during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit.

Madrasa of Masjid Khorasian

In Lohari Darwaza of Lahore there was a mosque on the south side which was called Masjid Khorasian. The original name of this mosque was Masjid Sadr Jahan, which was built by Sadr Jahan in 1015 AH (1606 CE), during the reign of Jahangir. During the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, a large Madrasah was established here

Faqir Family Madrasa

The Fakir family was the Sadat family who came to Chunian Tehsil of Kasur District from Uch Sharif in the 18th century and then settled in Lahore. During this period, he established a Madrasah outside Bhati Darwaza, where religious and secular education was imparted. This pillow was known as Ghulam Shah.

Kashmiri Bazaar Madrasa

This mosque in Kashmiri Bazaar was built in 1750 with three beautiful golden domes. In the Kashmiri Bazar Masjid School, there was a teacher by the name of Allah Jiva who taught Quran and all subjects in Arabic

Chabak Swaran Madrasa

After the Kocha Takiya Sadhu in the cobblestone door comes the Kocha Chabak Swaran. Where the Chinese mosque was built in 1671. The founder of this mosque was Sarfraz Khan, also known as Afraz Khan, Nawab of Shah Jahan Badshah's criminal province of Lahore. At the time of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, there was a Madrasah next to this mosque. The Kacha Chabakswaran school had a teacher named Muhammad Abdul Aziz who taught in Persian and Arabic.

Madrasah of Faizullah

In the nearby mosque of Faizullah, Ustad Mahmood Khawajsara was running a madrassa, Ustad Mahmood was proficient in Persian and Arabic, he taught secondary and advanced education in Arabic and Persian to students.

Madrasah of Anarkali Masjid

An advanced Arabic madrassa was established next to the Anarkali Masjid. This seminary was taught by Maulvi Noor Ahmed, who taught grammar, logic, Muslim law and mathematics.

Sutra Mundi School

There was an educational institution in Sutra Mandi inside Lohari Gate, taught by Pandit Gauri Shankar, who was well versed in mathematics, logic, medicine and literature.

Madrasah of the Qadri chain

The Qadri family used to run their own educational institution in Lahore. He also used to give scholarships to students.

Madrasa of Batala city

Some madrassas were very famous even outside Lahore. A very standard school was established at Batala where students from Iran and Afghanistan also attended, a large jagir (large estate) was donated by the Maharaja for the maintenance of this institution.

Madrasa of Sialkot

During the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Sialkot was also famous for higher education and there was a very famous madrassa here too. Maulvi Sheikh Ahmed, who was very famous for his knowledge and teaching methods, used to teach in this seminary.

Madrasah of Khwaja Sulaiman

Khawaja Sulaiman also ran a famous school in Sangrosa area of Dera Ghazi. Where students from Khorasan and other parts of India used to study. It was the responsibility of the government to arrange free books and free food for the students who came from far away to study in these madrasas.

Table 5.2 Summary of Muslim Madrasas

No	Madrasa Name	Location	Established By	Key Features
1	Madrasa of Mian Wade	Near the Shrine of Mian Wade, Lahore	Sheikh Muhammad Ismail	Prestigious institution known for high standards; students came from Iran, Afghanistan, and Arabia.
2	Moran Wali Madrassas	Papar Mandi and Baghbanpura, Lahore	Moran Wali Sarkar	Two madrasas established by Maharaja's wife, focusing on Quranic studies and attached to mosques.

4	Madrasa of Masjid Khorasian	Lohari Darwaza, Lahore	Sadr Jahan (Masjid Founder)	Large madrasa established during Jahangir's reign; expanded as a key learning center during Sikh rule.
5	Faqir Family Madrasa	Outside Bhati Darwaza, Lahore	Faqir Family	Provided both religious and secular education; part of the Sadat family's educational initiatives.
6	Kashmiri Bazaar Madrasa	Kashmiri Bazaar, Lahore	Local Muslim Scholars	Featured a renowned teacher named Allah

				Jiva; focused on Quranic and Arabic education.
7	Chabak Swaran Madrasa	Kocha Chabak Swaran, Lahore	Sarfraz Khan	Featured Persian and Arabic teaching; known for its high academic standards during Ranjit Singh's rule.
8	Madrasa of Faizullah	Faizullah Mosque, Lahore	Ustad Mahmood Khawajsara	Specialized in advanced education in Persian and Arabic.
9	Madrasa of Anarkali Masjid	Anarkali, Lahore	Maulvi Noor Ahmed	Offered advanced studies in grammar, logic, law,

				and mathematics .
10	Sutra Mundi School	Sutra Mandi, inside Lohari Gate, Lahore	Pandit Gauri Shankar	Taught a variety of subjects including mathematics , logic, medicine, and literature.
11	Madrasa of the Qadri Chain	Various Locations in Lahore	Qadri Family	Provided scholarships to students; focused on religious education.
12	Madrasa of Batala City	Batala (outside Lahore)	Supported by Maharaja Ranjit Singh	High standard of education with students from Iran and

				Afghanistan; funded by a large estate.
13	Madrassa of Sialkot	Sialkot (Punjab)	Maulvi Sheikh Ahmed	Known for higher education; attracted students from across the region.
14	Madrassa of Khwaja Sulaiman	Sangrosa, Dera Ghazi	Khwaja Sulaiman	Supported by the government with free books and food; attended by students from Khorasan and India.

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Hindus Pathshala School

While the Muslims had established madrasahs for the higher education of Arabic and Islamic studies, the Hindus had established Pathshalas for the teaching of Sanskrit and Hindu religious studies for Hindu scholars and Sanskrit for employment in Hindu institutions. Expertise was essential. However, jobs in Sanskrit and Hindu studies were limited, so 8 percent of students learned Sanskrit and Devanagari script. Some large cities had a large Pathshala with one or two large temples where secondary and higher education was imparted to Hindus. Many Pathshalas of Lahore and Punjab were very ancient. However, the caste division among Hindus was deep for the caste the temple belonged to. There Madrasah was also reserved for the people of this caste. There were some Pathshalas where people of other religions could also learn Sanskrit. A huge donation was made to the Pathshala attached to the temples in Lahore.

Garmkhi School

The Sikhs also had a Padi Pathshala in the big cities with their big Gurdwaras where Sikh students were taught Garmikhi and secondary and advanced education in Sikhism. Learning the Gurmakhi script was mandatory for employment in Sikh religious institutions. Maharaja Ranjit Singh was keen that the Sikh chieftains and their children should be attracted to secondary and higher education as much as possible, so he made large donations to these

institutions. As far as the students learning Gurmukhi are concerned, jobs were limited for them so 6.7% students were learning Gurmukhi. Many bungalows were once built on the road to Darbar Sahib of Amritsar. The purpose of these bungalows was to secure the way to Darbar Sahib.

During the reign of Ranjit Singh, the road to Darbar Sahib was secured, so these bungalows were converted into schools of secondary and higher education run by Sikhs. These schools were fully subsidized. Many institutions of secondary and higher education were functioning under the auspices of the Sikhs throughout the Punjab. The following three institutions were more famous among them, "Bhai Jona Singh School, Bhai Lakhan Singh School, Bhai Ram Singh School". These three institutions were considered as quality institutions of secondary and higher education. These were attached to Babe Beri's gurdwara in Sialkot was heavily donated by the Maharaja.

Buddhist and Jain educational institutions

Buddhist and Jain scholars had also established their own institutions in Punjab. Buddhist and Jain institutions were limited but were among the oldest educational institutions in Punjab. Children belonging to Buddhism and Jainism were educated here.

Mahajani School

These were the institutions where commerce and economics were taught, in these institutions the children of the trading communities studied. It was an old tradition of Punjab that communities who were engaged in trade and market used to educate their children in

these institutions. These institutions did not provide any kind of religious education, they only taught about accounting and business affairs.

Famous scholars and teachers

During the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh there is a long list of very learned and able teachers and academicians. These people were given rewards, honors and lands by the government. During the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, no distinction was ever made between the scholars and the nobles on the basis of religion. Scholars and nobles of every religion were given special respect. Therefore, among these scholars we see people of every religion. There are also Hindu scholars among them. There are Sikhs and a large number of Muslims too. During the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, we also find a large number of Punjabi poets. Many of the ruling class were famous for their literary status and services in Lahore and other areas. Among them, the Fakir brothers are specially mentioned, many educational institutions and other welfare institutions were being run under the auspices of the Fakir family. Apart from these people, Fariduddin, Elahi Bakhsh, Mufti Imam Bakhsh and Syed Israr Shah Geelani were included. During the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Ustad Pir Baksh and Mian Fazaluddin were very famous for their poetry and calligraphy. Eminent people like Ahmad Yar, Qadir Yar Shah, Ghulam Rasool and Imam Bakhsh were included. Many have written about the Maharaja's conquests, although Maharaja Ranjit Singh kept Persian as his official language, Punjabi had a strong status as a literary language in his court. Maharaja Ranjit Singh patronized Punjabi poets and writers. Hashim

Shah was a famous poet of Punjabi language. Maharaja Ranjit Singh had given him special respect and honor and given him a jagir as a reward for his academic services. Punjabi poets and various writers wrote a lot for the Raja out of their interest. The famous Punjabi poet Qadir Yar belonged to the Maharaja's court

He described many of the Maharaja's battles in Punjabi poetry. Maulvi Ghulam Rasool had pledged allegiance to Syed Ahmad Barelvi against Maharaja Ranjit in his youth and also participated in the battle, but after the defeat of Syed Ahmad Barelvi, he came to Lahore where he was given special respect by the Maharaja, Munshi Sohan. Lal was asked to write Umdat al-Tawarikh and Maulvi Ahmed Yar Khan wrote Shahnama in Persian while Dewan Amarnath wrote Zafarnama in Persian. Dewan Amarnath was the son of Dewan Deenath, a courtier of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Ratan Singh Bhangu was a famous historian during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh who wrote Prachen Panth Prakash Di Rachna in 1841. It was a history book in which Sikh history was written.

Skill Education

The Maharaja also realized the need for skill education. During this period, people lived in the traditional occupations of their families. In Punjab there was a system of communities based on professions. Under this system, people were learning the skills related to their professions from back-to-back. In this period there was no concept of formal institutions where formal education of any skill was imparted. Because there was no tradition of establishing institutions for skill education in the subcontinent. Therefore, the establishment

of these skill institutions may be the result of their consultation. Maharaja Ranjit Singh also established vocational craft schools throughout the empire, and these institutions taught miniature painting, sketching, drafting, architecture and calligraphy. Maharaja Ranjit Singh to increase the subjects and scope of these schools

Education of women

Before the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, only a limited section of the aristocracy gave secondary and higher education to their girls. This education was arranged in homes. There was no concept of reading and writing for common women. On the one hand, during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, there was an extraordinary increase in the literacy rate of women. On the other hand, Maharaja Ranjit Singh was urging the Punjabi elite to make their women secondary and attract towards higher education. There were no separate schools for girls in Punjab, now the need was felt to establish separate secondary and higher education centers for girls. It was a progressive step for that time. Eighteen schools were established for the education of girls in Lahore alone. However, this should not be taken to mean that it created educational opportunities for ordinary girls. This created opportunities for elite and upper-class girls whose homes were not provided with education.

English education

Maharaja Ranjit Singh was a far-sighted and mature ruler. He had realized that learning English was necessary for modern education. English education had started in many areas of the subcontinent,

even in other states of Punjab, English educational institutions had been established in Patiala, Nabha, Kapurthala, Faridkot, and Orjand. But all these institutions were started by Christian missionaries. While Maharaja Ranjit Singh realized the importance of English language teaching, he also felt the need to separate English language teaching from Christian religious preaching and Bible teaching. For this purpose, he hired John C. of American Presbyterian Machinery. It was Maharajah's effort to contact Lori to arrange English language education in Lahore That the people of the Punjabi elite should learn the English language was Maharaja Ranjit Singh's effort to appoint English language teachers to teach people English in the institutions that are providing secondary and higher education in the kingdom, but Maharaja Ranjit Singh in his life. It didn't work. But it could have been a revolutionary step to appoint a Christian teacher to teach the English language to the children in institutions run by religious scholars of Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs. In this regard, he had also selected some schools in Lahore. If it had happened, English language would have been taught in schools here in Lahore even before the occupation of the East India Company. It was Maharajah's effort to start English language teaching for his courtiers and their children and gradually other classes of aristocracy also got the facility of English education. But he tried not to preach Christian teachings and the Bible in his kingdom. He banned the preaching of Christianity and the teaching of the Bible in his kingdom

Teaching Mathematics and Astronomy

Although Maharaja Ranjit Singh was illiterate, he was fully aware of the importance of secondary and higher education. Maharaja Ranjit Singh realized in the last days of his reign that the curriculum of the secondary and higher educational institutions prevailing in his kingdom was not in keeping with the needs of the times. Therefore, he was thinking of establishing such institutions which can provide higher education according to modern requirements. There were many Europeans in his army and court and he learned from them that the concept of education had changed. It was Maharaja's effort that his courtiers and their children should get modern education. In this regard, Maharaja Ranjit Singh was aware of the need to establish a higher educational institution. In this regard, Maharaja Ranjit Singh established an institution in Lahore to impart knowledge about mathematics and modern science. Not only modern teaching of astronomy should be given but there should be an observatory for students where they can observe astronomy. In this regard, he called a well-known teacher, Akhund Ali, to teach mathematics and astronomy. Maharaja Ranjit Singh ordered the educated people of his court to participate in the teachings of Akhund Ali and create awareness about modern education. Therefore, many of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's courtiers were directly educated by Akhund Ali. The purpose of this initiative was that the Maharaja wanted to create awareness among his courtiers about the importance of modern education. So that his close associates give modern education to their children. This was a limited step. This step of the Maharaja was not fully fruitful. Akhund Ali was not so successful in establishing a

modern school. However, it should be remembered here that this institution was established only for the courtiers and their children. Other people did not have access to it. In some places, the name of this institution has been written as Lahore Darbar School, where courtiers and their children were educated.

Importance of new trade requirements

From the way the East India Company had progressed during Maharaja Ranjit Singh's reign, Maharaja Ranjit Singh realized that his people needed to learn the modern requirements of trade and economy. There were lakhs of taxil mills in Punjab and huge profits were being made. And there were large traders of other agricultural commodities, many handicrafts were produced. Maharaja Ranjit Singh used to get information about the modern world from his European advisors. He realized that new markets could be found for Punjabi products and handicrafts if the elite of Punjab established a trading body. By which the income of the Punjab Empire can be very high and the employment and prosperity of the common people can also increase. He wished to have a personality who could teach the elites of Punjab about modern economic requirements. Establish elite modern trading institutions of Punjab and trade according to modern principles. At that time, Amin-ul-Mulk Khwaja Farid had received the title of Debir-ud-Daula from the Delhi court. Apart from the court, he also had experience of working with East India and was considered an expert on East Indian affairs. He resigned from the Delhi Darbar job. When Maharaja Ranjit Singh heard about him, he invited him for his employment. They wanted him to come and

guide the elite in Punjab about modern trade and economy. Maharaja Ranjit Singh had sent a huge sum of thirty thousand to Debir-ud-Daula for his travel expenses. Debir-ud-Daulah consulted his friends in this regard, all of whom advised him to accept the job. Dabir al-Dawlah consulted his daughter Aziz al-Nisa. Aziz-e-Nisa said that we live under the rule of English and you will do Ranjit Singh's job no matter what happens tomorrow, it is not appropriate to do your job. You are old anyway.

Dabir-ud-Daula accepted his daughter's advice and resigned from Maharaja Ranjit Singh's job due to ill health and returned the money sent by the Maharaja. It is worth mentioning here that Dabir-ud-Daula was the paternal grandfather of the famous Muslim leader Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and Aziz-ul-Nisa was his mother. However, the Maharaja's aim here was to strengthen the elite of Punjab, especially the big businessmen. He believed that when the income of the big businessmen would increase, the financial position of the state would be more stable. It could also provide better employment to common people

Higher medical education

When Maharaja Ranjit Singh came in contact with Hakims and Ayurveda for his treatment, he realized that in those days people learned medicine only from their family. The Maharaja tried to provide higher education in medicine in Muslim Madrasahs. Students should be taught wisdom and wisdom. While in Hindu and Sikh institutions also higher education in Ayurvedic medicine should be given. After medical education, students examine patients

with physicians, surgeons and Ayurved and get practical training in treating them. During the reign of the Maharaja, a German homeopathic doctor, JM Honigberger, had started his practice in Punjab. The Maharaja had also treated him, which convinced him of the efficacy of homeopathy. The Maharaja ordered his minister Faqir Azizuddin to select some children of doctors in the kingdom who would also learn the method of homeopathic treatment. This is how homeopathy started in Punjab

A critical review of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's system of education

The steps taken by Maharaja Ranjit Singh for the promotion of education in Punjab can be divided into three parts. One is the steps he took for the literacy of the common people. This program of Maharaja Ranjit was a great success. Due to this program, the literacy rate of people in Punjab, especially women, has increased dramatically. It was a remarkable phenomenon that literacy increased so much in an agricultural economy and a craft society. Here the Maharaja made a curriculum. A whole system was created and the local people were included in it. Local landlords and moneylenders were added to his expenses. This was the most successful step in Maharaja's educational promotion works on the other hand, the Maharaja took measures for the education of the elite. These were measures for secondary and higher education in that it did not change the traditional system but tried to provide opportunities for secondary and higher education to every section of the elite. For this he supported institutions under the auspices of scholars of every religion. Encouraged to open new institutions. And

tried to make the elite of Punjab more and more inclined towards secondary and higher education. However, in this regard, the Maharaja fully depended on the traditional system. He did not make any changes in the curriculum or system. Mission institutions were opening up during this period but the Maharaja did not allow any mission institution to function in his kingdom, he continued and strengthened his traditional system of education.

In addition, Maharaja Ranjit Singh encouraged the elite class to give secondary and higher education to their girls as well. For the first time during the reign of the Maharaja, separate schools were opened for secondary and higher education of girls. But this too was education under the traditional system. And it was limited only to elite girls. Some of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's educational reforms were limited to the Maharaja's courtiers and the Khawas class. It was Maharaja Ranjit Singh's effort to make his subjects aware of the requirements of modern education. He also arranged English language education for him. Maharaja Ranjit Singh's effort was to establish a mission-style school in Lahore Darbar, where Christianity and Bible teaching would not be taught, but English language and modern curriculum would be taught. For this, the Maharaja had also contacted a missionary organization. In addition, he specially invited a well-known educationist, Akhund Ali, to Lahore and taught him especially to the courtiers and their children. This educational institution of the Maharaja is remembered by the name of Lahore Darbar School. But this educational effort of Maharaja is considered as the most unsuccessful effort. This was because such an educational endeavor required an expert who understood the

demands of modern education. Which was not possible for the local academics. Just as the Maharaja had sought the help of European experts for his army and administrative structure, there was also a need for a European expert, Maharaja Ranjit Singh was aware of this and for this he contacted a mission in the subcontinent. But Maharaja Ranjit Singh was not ready to preach Christianity and teach the Bible in his area, so he could not get any kind of support from the mission. It was not possible. There is no doubt that the Maharaja was far ahead of any other ruler of his time in promoting education in his region, but Maharaja Ranjit Singh's system of secondary and higher education was limited to the traditional curriculum and traditional style. But while criticizing Maharaja Ranit Singh in this regard, one should keep in mind that education and learning of other sciences is a cultural process in the society.

When Europe was developing scientifically and intellectually, its social, cultural and intellectual foundations were different from Punjab. In the subcontinent, the East India Company was ruling in Calcutta. The East India Company also did not establish any modern educational institutions. English educational institutions were established by Christian missionaries. The Maharaja did not allow Christian missionaries to work in his area. He wanted Christian teachers to be employed in Hindu, Muslim and Sikh religious institutions in schools in the traditional education system of Punjab where they could not preach any religion. All English language teachers at that time were Christian preachers and they did not approve of it. Therefore, this attempt of Maharaja Ranjit Singh was unsuccessful. The Sikh Empire in Punjab lasted from 1799 to 1849.

This period is recognized as the period of development of knowledge in Europe. The modern industrial revolution had arrived there. Modern education had started there. It is also interesting to compare here that the industrial revolution was progressing in Europe where literacy and education created employment opportunities for the common people but Punjab was an agrarian economy where there was prosperity due to handicrafts and textiles but these jobs There was no need for literacy or education. There was no scope for such education in the society of Punjab based on traditional economic structures. The Maharaja wanted this kind of education only for Khawas, but he could not arrange such education for Khawas as well

Educational institutions were established in Punjab on religious basis. Religious identity was a reality in Punjab. Sikhism played a major role in the rise and development of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's empire but to conclude from this that Punjab was a victim of religious and ethnic prejudice is actually an expression of ignorance of the religious and social structure of Punjab society. Even during the British era, the institutions that played an important role in the spread of modern education were built on religious foundations. Among them, Arya Samaj among Hindus, Bhai Sangh Sabha among Sikhs and Anjuman Sahak Islam among Muslims played an important role. These institutions realized the need for modern education and curriculum due to the missionary institutions after the British occupation, the traditional education system during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh did not face this kind of challenge. Secondly, it should be noted that during the Maharaja's era, the

facilities of higher education and secondary education were only for the elite and the upper class. Because it was not their financial or economic need. No industrial or scientific revolution was coming in Punjab that there would have been such a great need for secondary and higher education.

Printing press

One thing that even a far-sighted ruler like the Maharaja could not foresee was the use of the printing press for educational purposes. Important role of printing press in European education Our local rulers, including Maharaja Ranjit Singh, could not understand the role of printing press. In the subcontinent in the 16th century, the Paringalis established some printing presses in Goa and started printing books in local languages. However, the local ruling class of the subcontinent did not accept the new technology. Punjab was dominated by orthodox and traditional forces who feared that the printing press would diminish their influence. Maharaja Ranjit Singh could not take any step in this regard because till that time the printing press was being used in the subcontinent for the promotion of Christian teachings and the publication of the Bible. However, neglecting to use the printing press was a fatal error that could not be ignored.

British period

In the next decades of the 19th century, a new model of education was introduced in Punjab under the British rule. The first English school in the Punjab was established in Lahore in March 1849, a few

months after the conquest of the Sultanate. After the British occupation, two American Presbyterian missionaries Reverend John Newton and Charles Forman were allowed to establish an educational institution in Lahore in December. In the early 1860s, the British established several colleges, including the Government College, Lahore; Glancy Medical College and Forman Christian College; Lawrence College, Murree; and King Edward Medical University were included. It is true that during the British period, although Maharaja Ranjit Singh's tradition of literacy among the common people, especially women, ended and the access of the common people to basic education became very different. But it is also true that opportunities for secondary and higher education for the general public and for girls increased tremendously which was not possible in the traditional education system of Punjab.

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ہمارے پاس اس سلسلے میں جو شواہد ہے ان میں سب سے بڑی شہادت مشہور ماہر تعلیم جی۔ ڈیلیو۔ لیٹنر کی مرتب کردہ کتاب؛ پنجاب کا مقامی نظام تعلیم ہے جس میں اس نے پنجاب کے نظام تعلیم کا ایک تفصیلی جائزہ پیش کیا ہے۔ جی ڈیلیو۔ لیٹنر لاہور کے دو بڑے اداروں پنجاب یونیورسٹی اور گورنمنٹ کالج لاہور کے بانی خیال کئے جاتے ہیں۔

Letiner's report from 1882 can be downloaded here: https://www.dropbox.com/s/mlldo3q4m95hg7w/History_of_Indigenous_Education_In_The_Punjab.pdf?dl=0

اس کے علاوہ انگریزوں کے قبضے کے بعد پنجاب کے مختلف اضلاع کی تعلیمی صورت حال کے بارے میں مرتب کردہ رپورٹیں ہیں۔

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اس سلسلے میں مندرجہ ذیل آرٹیکل اور کتابوں سے استفادہ کیا گیا۔

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Chapter 6: Conclusion

The land of five rivers is Punjab has a rich and complex cultural and civilization's history shaping its identity over the years. This book specifically discussed the transformation history of Punjab during the Ranjit Singh's regime. The Sikh community established a flourishing state under the dynamic leadership of Ranjit Singh. This book is mainly divided into four chapters, each chapter discussing a different set of activities that took place during Singh's rule. These chapters uncover the developments, policies and changes that happened during the Singh's rule and will also discuss the lasting impact of Singhs legacy.

Chater 1:

The chapter starts with the historical background of Punjab, stating that Punjab was the hub for trade and culture and had a significant value due to its location between Afghanistan and Gangetic plains. During Mughal regime, agricultural developments remained crucial for economy. Therefore, under Mughal rule, Punjab was a prosperous state. After the decline of Mughal emperor, Punjab experiences internal invasions which created a vacuum, and Sikh took the rule to fill that power vacuums. In the late 15th century, Sikhism emerged with the teaching of guru Nanak, and Guru Gobind Singh. Later in 1699, Guru Gobind Singh established the Khalsa, which was a transformation in Sikh history as it promoted equality and refused the caste distinctions which was proved a resistance against Mughal empire.

The book starts with the discussion on different religious, social, political and historical events that became a reason for making a minority the ruler of Punjab. The chapter further highlighted that in 1715, the establishment of the Sikh state laid the foundation for further Sikh expansion under the Misl and Maharaja Ranjit Singh,

and his legacy continued to inspire the Sikh struggle for sovereignty. The Misls system, followed by the administrative policies of Ranjit Singh. Singh became a nation builder after his modernization efforts united various religious and caste-based communities.

Under the leadership of Singh, Punjab became one of the stable and established state where there was a balance in tradition and modernization. Ranjit Singh made such inclusive policies that refused to facilitate any specific caste or religion making sure that every religious and ethnic group is equally treated. Singh put an emphasize on loyalty and competence and merit instead of caste or religion, still the caste system remained influential. Such inclusive policies ensure the longevity of his empire and creating a model of governance rooted in justice and pragmatism.

Singh was a patron of arts, architecture and culture; thus, he provided funds for the renovations of religious sites such as Golden temple, and he also supported the construction of forts, palaces and religious building with the combination of Sikh, Mughal and Rajput styles. Before Singh's rule, Persian was the official language though majority spoke Punjabi. Singh supported Punjabi and then it became the major language for administrative communications including religious and secular literature in Punjabi. It is worth mentioning that Punjab enjoyed a flourished period under Singh's regime, internal and external challenges ultimately led to the British annexation of Punjab in 1849. Yet, the social, cultural, and political impacts of Sikh rule remain ingrained in the history.

In conclusion, the rise of Sikh rule transcended mere territorial conquest – it was a profound reordering of society based on spiritual ideals that defied caste and ethnic divisions. Ranjit Singh's governance exemplified a model of justice and inclusivity that merged traditional wisdom with innovative statecraft. His legacy

offers enduring lessons in leadership and cultural patronage, and continues to resonate within the resilient society he helped forge. In continuity to this, chapter two discusses the Singh's governance and administration while exploring the policies that left a lasting impression on Punjab and Indian History.

Chapter 2:

This chapter put emphasize on the civil, financial, judicial, military, and religious administration of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The civil administration of Singh ensured the unification of Punjab by establishing a centralized state. Before Singh, the Punjab was divided in to conflicts, therefore, Singh used diplomacy, military strengths and strategic alliances to consolidate a single and strong empire. The old Misl system was replaced by a centralized governance to ensure stability and security of the region. Sigh divided the empire into eight provinces, each managed by a Nazim, who were directly accountable to Singh. Kardars were responsible for managing tax, law and judiciary. Singh appointed people from different religious and ethnic groups based on their abilities and merits to show the stability and unity. Singh showed his personal interest in governance and remained accessible to common people to listen their grievances. This holistic approach to governance allowed Ranjit Singh to maintain a powerful, centralized Sikh Empire.

The chapter then discussed the financial administration of maharaja Ranjit Singh. Mainly, the finances relied upon the agrarian economy with land revenues as a main source of income. Singh proposed various land revenue collection methods such as Batai system, Kankut system, auctioning land revenues collection to contractors etc. Another source of revenue was the taxes, industries like arms production, textiles, and leather etc. The currency included the gold mohar, Nanakshahi rupee, and Mansuri paisa. Despite the system's

innovation, it faced challenges such as fluctuating income and corruption. Ranjit Singh promoted trade by improving security and infrastructure, and facilitating trade routes into Central Asia for creating a stable environment, fostering economic prosperity in Punjab.

Thirdly, the judicial system under Singh 's rule was effective though there was no formal or legal framework for maintaining peace. Local traditions, religious laws and community-based systems were some of the ways to impart justice. Panchayats played a vital role in solving land disputes, family matters and minor crimes, with oral testimony often sworn on religious scriptures, was a key element, making the system swift and efficient. Overall, Ranjit Singh's system was shaped by the social and cultural context of the time, balancing local autonomy, religious inclusivity, and personal oversight, contributing to stability and prosperity during his reign.

Religious tolerance and inclusivity set a foundation for the progress of the governance. Singh maintained a powerful administration through merit and respect to all religions. For him, all religions were equal, and he made appointments based on merits and capabilities, including the members from Hindu, Sikh and Muslim religions. He himself was committed to Sikh religion, but he never imposed it to anyone to accept the Sikh religion or follow the rules.

Singh was a visionary leader, and his military reforms made the Sikh army most disciplined army of Asia. He modernized the army to deal with the internal and external unrest. His reforms introduced modern tactics, including steady fire and artillery use, moving away from guerrilla warfare. The chapter also discussed the relationship of Singh with British empire. He had a careful avoiding behaviour for the sake of his state. Through his strategic adaptability he prioritized the stability of his kingdom while acknowledging the

British influence. The chapter concluded with the discussion on the patronage of Singh for arts and education. He supported the religious and secular education through different educational institutions including the religious institutes. Through his patronage, Ranjit Singh fostered a vibrant intellectual culture in Punjab, bridging cultural and religious divides, and preserving the region's traditions of learning.

Chapter 3:

This chapter highlighted the details of education system, policies and procedure that took place during the regime of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. This chapter summarized the significant changes experienced by Punjab during Ranjit Singh's reign (1780–1839). Military achievements and unification of Punjab were not the only memorable in relation of Singh, the support he showed to education system will remain impactful. Ranjit himself was illiterate but understand the importance of education thus supported the literacy campaign in the Punjab forcing people to learn reading, writing and arithmetic skills. However, his death was a hallmark, and British shifted the education to a completely opposite western model which cause the decline of Persian and Religiously affiliated schools in Punjab.

The chapter has brought attention to the early history of education, where Brahmins controlled the access to education and it was kept inaccessible for lower casts. The reforms suggested by Buddha and Guru Nank ensured that the education is for all without any distinction of caste or religion. The educational system of Punjab not only supported religious education but also the practical education for the sake of employments.

During the Singh reign (1780–1839), educational landscape faces a major progressive yet inclusive changes. The support provided by

Singh for education led the foundations for an intellectual environment in Punjab. Singh used to invite scholars to his court for their suggestion's and advices on different matters. He allocated land for schools and ensured free education. There was no discrimination for caste or religion or language. Multiple languages were being taught at schools including Persian, Punjabi and Arabic. Along with the religious education, secular education was also prioritized. The medical education including Yunani and Ayurvedic medicine make a significant contribution. Hakim Abdul Aziz and Ayurvedic practitioners like Pandit Madhusudan were highlighted. The Maharaja's wife, Moran Sarkar, supported education, establishing madrasas for boys and girls in Lahore. This vibrant, community-centered model starkly contrasts with the rigid, standardized British colonial education system introduced later. The British model disrupted the existing framework by sidelining local traditions, prioritizing English, and centralizing education, undermining the flexibility and inclusivity that had defined Ranjit Singh's era.

Education during Ranjit Singh's reign was not just about learning but also about strengthening social cohesion and enabling upward mobility. As we explore the next chapter on the social impact of education during and after his reign, the interplay between learning, community relations, and cultural identity becomes clear. Ranjit Singh's educational legacy reminds us of the enduring value of systems that prioritize local relevance, inclusivity, and the preservation of cultural heritage.

Chapter 4:

This chapter has a detailed discussion about the education system of Punjab During Maharaja Ranjit Singh's rule. Before Singh, Punjab endured a prolonged period of civil war and instability following the death of Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb in the early 18th century. The

key issues include; rebellion led by Sikh leader Banda Bahadur Singh and continued unrest until the early 19th century; Ahmad Shah Abdali's invasions from the north added further turmoil; Political Stability under Ranjit Singh marking a period of peace and political consolidation in Punjab. Despite being illiterate, Ranjit Singh possessed exceptional skills in languages, arts, and culture through oral traditions. His understanding of statecraft enabled him to address critical political, economic, and military matters effectively.

This chapter highlighted that Singh built a diverse and capable team of advisors and officials, reflecting his inclusive and merit-based approach to governance. His court included local talent and European advisors like Jean-François Allard and Claude August Court, many of whom had served Napoleon. Europeans trained the army and advised on foreign affairs, judiciary, and education. He chose his team members based on merit and expertise, thus included prominent Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, and Europeans on key positions in his administration.

This chapter shed light upon the educational reforms made by Maharaja Ranjit Singh, and also elaborates the impact of these educational reforms. Before Maharaja Ranjit Singh's time, education in Punjab was decentralized and oral, focused on religious teachings in mosques, temples, and gurdwaras, with little emphasis on literacy or formal state-sponsored systems. Punjab emerged as the most literate region due to the educational reforms of Singh, the major highlights of educational policies include; the literacy of common people to make them enable to read and write; focus on women's literacy and separate facilities for girls; accessible center for basic education established near temples, mosques and Gurdwaras.

Singh was inspired by European advisors; thus, he recognized literacy as a means to enhance direct communication, loyalty, and

unity in his kingdom. Multiple languages such as Persian, Urdu, Arabic, Nagri, Gurmukhi, and Hindi, were taught in schools for religious and practical education. Ranjit Singh expanded upon the Mughal-era madrasa model, establishing schools for various faiths and generously funding them from royal resources.

By the 1830s, Ranjit Singh had expanded education in the Sikh Empire, he promoted the learning of English language and ensured a developed educational landscape in Punjab. It is worth mentioning that Lahore had 18 formal schools for girls besides specialist schools for technical training, languages, mathematics and logic. Curriculum development was one of the foremost steps towards literacy, Singh asked for advice on curriculum development and hired an expert for this task. During this time, the Persian was official language however, majority spoke Punjabi, Singh was advised to allow people to choose language for learning and communication. Maharaja Ranjit Singh entrusted Faqir Noor-ud-Din, a skilled linguist and educator, to develop an inclusive rule for achieving educational objectives.

Qaida Noor was developed as a literacy standard for teaching Persian and Punjabi. This Qaida has four parts allowing people to learn read, write and basic arithmetic skills. Singh made it compulsory for Numberdars to learn Qaida Noor and teach it to five other people creating a chain process to strictly execute the literacy. This campaign also gained popularity among women of Punjab, as Singh made a compulsion for females to learn Qaida Noor. Under Singh's rule, Qaida Noor was integrated with religious education in mosques, temples and gurdwaras and these became primary education centers for boys and girls. This initiative expanded literacy, with over 4,000 free educational institutions serving millions, making Punjab a model of widespread basic education in the region. There were maktab, madrasah, Patshala, Gurmukhi

Schools, and Mahajani as some of the categories of schools. Local people were involved for managing these schools. Teachers were paid in the form of daily grocery. There was maximum fifty students in each class, Numberdars were responsible to keep a check and balance in these terms.

Chapter 5:

This chapter covered the fall of education system after the death of Singh in 1839. The education system in Punjab crumbled due to political instability and British colonization. The languages were replaced with Urdu and English, and Qaida Noor was banned. A new British-led education model was introduced which was not even accessible to majority. Yet the people of Punjab managed to learn through their own efforts.

The chapter has mentioned all the madrasas, and educational institutions details which were present during and after Singh's rule. These educational institutions including schools, madrasas and higher educational institutions not only contributed to the intellectual and cultural development of the region but also laid the foundation for a more literate and informed society. Despite the challenges faced after Ranjit Singh's death, the legacy of these educational systems remains an important chapter in Punjab's history, reflecting the profound impact of the Maharaja's vision for education.

Last but not least, this book has comprehensively studied the governance, military achievements, cultural patronage and educational reforms that took place during Maharaja Ranjit Singh's rule in Punjab. His policies and leadership bring a transformation in the Punjab leading the foundations of an established and stable society. During his power, he brought the diverse religions and communities under one umbrella ensuring the inclusivity and a

strong sociopolitical identification. This book has also shed light upon the educational reforms and policies of Singh that enhanced the literacy among people for their intellectual growth. The decentralization of education system, introduction of Qaida Noor, financial and moral support to schools, scholars and communities were some of the most highlighted events under his rule. Despite the decline of Singh's empire after his death and the imposition of British colonial education, the legacy of Ranjit Singh's progressive policies continues to resonate in the cultural and educational fabric of the region.

The purpose of this book is to illuminate the lasting contributions of Ranjit Singh's rule, providing valuable insights into the strengths of inclusive leadership and the transformative power of education. By presenting these historical dynamics, the book offers both historical scholars and contemporary readers a deeper understanding of how Ranjit Singh's reign shaped the region and provides enduring lessons in governance, cultural preservation, and societal development.

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